

The importance of BEING NICE

Jared Davis GCF MCPF says that good service is all about communication and going the extra mile for customers. And customers always remember great service more than a great price

How often do you walk into a retail shop and experience no service or, even worse, bad service? It seems to happen more frequently than ever. It also seems to happen more often with larger retailers than with smaller, independent owner-operated businesses.

In today's changing retail environment, consumers are increasingly becoming conditioned to expect no service. Poor service and indifference are becoming more commonplace, and this has created an opportunity for smarter owners to make their businesses stand out even more by focusing on offering great service.

Remember the old days when the

petrol station attendant used to come to your car window, speak to you like a customer, and offer to fill up the tank with petrol for you while you sat in the car? And maybe then, he would even clean your windscreen with a squeegee? Those days are long gone.

As a consumer yourself, you love receiving exceptional service. And it stands out more than ever, especially when you don't expect it. Businesses that offer great service are rewarded by return business and loyalty, which are increasingly hard to achieve in retail. On the other side, it only takes one small experience of bad service to turn someone off forever, even if it means they have to travel further and pay more for something not quite as suitable.





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That's why communication and personal service need to be integral parts of your art and framing business.

For the most part, your customers are unfamiliar with the bespoke framing consultation process or choosing artwork so it is your job to be attentive, and provide a service and consulting experience they will never forget.

No matter how attractive a shop may be, without good, friendly service it just won't provide the great shopping experience that will keep customers coming back. An average looking frame

shop where customers are greeted with a positive attitude and where the staff take genuine interest and time to make sure you feel delighted about your overall experience is far more likely to get your future business.

The attitude projected by the consultant at the front counter will not just make or break the sale but will also determine if you'll get any future business. Bespoke framing and art are emotional purchases. Consumers not only allow their emotions and feelings to dictate how they spend their money but also where they spend it.

Everyone has bad days, and because you may resent being interrupted by customers wanting attention when you are in the middle of something else (and always, it seems, just at the most inconvenient moment) your off-putting attitude can be detrimental. The impression that you create with a customer is always important, and you only get one chance to make a good first impression.

The basics

Great service starts with

communication, and there are some basic rules you need to recognise to get things going in the right direction:

- Listening to your customers and offering pleasant responses lets them know you are sincerely interested in them and their projects. This establishes trust and long-term customer loyalty.
- Look people in the eye when you are listening to them. Hold on to your own thoughts or comments until they have finished telling theirs, and make sure your response confirms what they have told you.
- Take an interest in your customers' concerns and be sensitive to their comfort and feelings.
- Politely acknowledge any waiting customers with eye contact, a polite apology and an explanation.
- Be humble, avoid arrogance, and leave your pride under the counter.
- Learn and use customers' names to help make them feel the whole experience is personal to them.
- Be warm, heartfelt, sincere and make sure all your customers feel they are your one and only focus not 'just another customer' to you.





Going the extra mile

Once you've got the communication basics in place, you can start to implement some ideas to go the extra mile for your customers, taking your service to the next level. Here are some suggestions:

- Offer to carry framed pictures to and from their cars for them.
- Always wrap and protect framed pictures for customers with consideration and care so they are safe to take home.
- Offer a complimentary wrapping service for items that will be gifts.
- Ask customers how they will hang their framed products, and offer advice on appropriate solutions. You could even create a brochure containing useful tips and creative ideas about displaying pictures.
- Offer a hanging service, even if you have to outsource it.
- Provide a waiting area in your store where customers feel comfortable and welcome to sit if they have to wait for a consultation.
- Offer a solution to safely keep young children entertained in your store,



Don't overdo 'niceness' by eagerly attacking customers with a pushy approach as soon as they come through your door. Read their body language and make them comfortable



allowing parents to comfortably focus on their consultation.

- Offer tea and coffee to customers for more comfortable consultations.
- If you have the space in your shop, consider creating a separate 'private consulting area' to help give some extra privacy for special consultations.
- Be willing to offer after-hours consultations if required. Think about your customers' convenience rather than your own.

- Offer a home/field consulting service for specialist customers and corporate requirements.
- Find little ways to create goodwill, such as replacing broken wire on the back of a frame for free or giving away hooks and hangers with each frame as a courtesy.
- Wear a name badge so customers feel comfortable in learning and remembering your name.
- All staff, even if they don't specialise in front counter consulting (and only work in the back), should always be prepared to greet waiting customers kindly and make them feel that their needs will be attended to as soon as possible.
- Thank your customers, and let them know you appreciate the fact that they chose your business over your competitors.

Common turn-offs

Finally, there are some common service turn-offs that you should definitely avoid because they potentially damage customers' experience in your business:

Bad service from harassed retailers is all too common these days. Going the extra mile for customers, and offering service with a smile, makes your business stand out and ensures that customers keep coming back



- Ignoring customers and making them wait while you finish what you are doing.
- Talking on the phone in a leisurely manner while a customer is waiting for your attention.
- Having an unpleasant or lazy demeanor and appearance.
- Showing signs of boredom, lack of focus, or impatience during the consultation.
- Looking at your watch or the clock while your customer is making a decision.
- Answering the phone during a consultation without politely excusing yourself.
- Conversing with other staff about unrelated topics while you are consulting.
- Overdoing 'niceness' by eagerly attacking customers with a pushy approach as soon as they come through your door. Read their body language. If they want to browse, make them feel comfortable doing so; just be ready to listen when they want to ask you questions. At the end of the day, it's simple. Treat your customers the way you would really like to be treated yourself. The person at your front counter can make all the difference and should be your number one, most powerful selling tool. Good service is all about going the extra mile, and customers always remember great service more than a great price. ●

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Based in Brisbane,

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