



Lessons from the Good Humor Man

BY PHIL SASSO

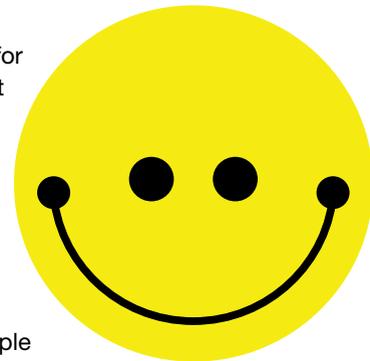
I heard the first ice cream truck of the season last week. It brought back childhood memories of calliope music making me salivate like one of Pavlov's dogs. As a kid, when I heard it I'd search for spare coins in the couch cushions and beg mom for dimes. Usually I'd throw open my screen door in time to catch the truck right in front of my house. The ice cream man would greet me with a smile and ask, "Hey young man, what'll it be?" I'd spend a moment making my decision, then exchange my cold hard cash for his cold sweet treat. He'd thank me and drive off to the next block.

I'm sure you can appreciate the scenario, and there are a few quick lessons to be had. Something like, *Everything You Need To Know About Mobile Distribution, You Can Learn from the Good Humor Man*. OK, maybe not everything, but a lot. Like:

Smile

Smiling may not come easy for you, and a forced smile won't cut it. So at least ensure you are upbeat at each stop. Rather than force it, smile on the inside. Try to be in a good mood. Successful dealers tend to be positive people. Let your attitude shine.

People like to buy from people they like. Be likable.



Treat customers with respect

You don't have to love your customers to respect them. You won't click with every customer, but you can choose to respect each one. You heard it as a kid: Treat others the way you want to be treated. I'm not talking about some stiff formal treatment, handshakes or being overly friendly. Be real. Be sincere. Be yourself. And avoid talking down to a customer or acting inappropriately.

You can joke with customers. Most people know the difference between when you're kidding and when you're being disrespectful. But that can sometimes be a thin line. Be careful not to cross it. It's better to err on the side of caution than to risk offending someone.

Ask for the order

Whether at the ice cream truck or on a tool truck, everybody wants something. Your job is helping them make the leap



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from wanting to owning. You'll rarely get an order you don't ask for.

When a customer picks up a tool, see if they have any questions about it. After answering a few questions, ask if you can write up an order for the tool. If they say "next time," offer them a reason to make it "this time." Consider a price incentive, a bonus or remind them if they buy it today, they can use it today. If they still don't buy, make a note on their file to ask if they're ready to buy it next week.

You can't sell a new customer unless you can get him to look at your tools. Even if you prefer beeping your horn and getting guys out to your truck, it's still worth your time to tote-and-promote in each shop that you call on at least once a month. It's a great way to meet other dealers' customers, build a relationship with them ... and try to get them to come out to your truck.

Share their excitement

People hate being sold, but they love buying. Share in the excitement of their purchase.

Don't disconnect from the customer once the sale is complete. Encourage him that he's made a good

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choice. Tell him he got a good deal, he chose your most popular model, or it's your personal favorite (or whatever is true).

You know about buyer's remorse, when a customer later regrets the decision of buying something or feels guilty for spending too much. It's most common on big-ticket items and usually has nothing to do with the actual



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SALES & MARKETING 101

“When a customer picks up a tool, see if they have any questions about it. ... Ask if you can write up an order for the tool. If they say ‘Next time,’ offer them a reason to make it this time.”

decision. It can lead your customer to feel that you took advantage of him, gouged him or sold him more than he really needed or wanted.

If you don't assure him that he's made a good decision (especially when it's a big purchase), it could create negative feelings about you and affect future sales.

Keep the inventory accessible

If you can't find it, you can't sell it. The ice cream man kept his cooler organized so he could find what I wanted quickly and be on his way. In the same way, having an

organized truck can help you and your customers find what they want quickly, too. An organized truck is a successful truck; the better you maintain your store, the more likely customers are to buy from you.

Rotate inventory. Keep it clean. Avoid clutter

The ice cream man's inventory system also helped him keep his truck fully stocked. If he was out of something, he could mark it on his menu before you got your heart set on a Bomb Pop or a Push-up, only to find he's sold out. Try to do the same for your customers.

Be patient

Sometimes it takes a little more time to make a decision. Be ready to wait. Nudge without being pushy. Pushing won't close a sale, persistence will.

When making a big-ticket decision, many customers want to do their homework. Help them. Pull a flyer from your files or print one from the Internet for them, then try to close the sale using it. If they still don't buy, make sure they know you can have it to them shortly after they pull the trigger, even if they call you midweek instead of waiting for your next regular stop.

Thank your customer

People appreciate being appreciated. Even the smallest sale deserves a thank you.

At one of the most popular restaurants in my town, the owner personally comes to your table to greet you, When you leave he thanks you for coming. He knows there are a lot of other restaurants competing for his customers' business. He's willing to go the extra mile to keep customers coming back. His gratitude has paid off with a loyal following. The same can work for you.



Drive off into the sunset

Don't rush your customers, but don't lolligag making small talk either. Once you're done, get back on the road and get selling again. Your customer wants to get back to earning. Their boss wants them to get back to working. And you need to get on to your next stop. Think of it like being a house guest. Keep each visit short enough that they'll welcome you back next time. ■



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