

First Impressions

You've heard the saying, "You only have one opportunity to make a first impression." While it may be a cliché, it is true. A positive first impression is an important start to building a relationship with your customers. Whether the interaction is over the phone or in-person, the initial impression can set the tone for the entire customer experience.

Your greeting is a simple step, but it is too often overlooked. It is your first opportunity to make a positive impact on the customer.

As a group, decide on the things that are important or that you need to consider when greeting customers via the telephone and face to face for the first time...

The tone of voice also is important when answering the phone. I am sure you've heard the saying, "It's not what you say, but how you say it." When communicating over the phone, 86 percent of the impact is in your tone, and 14 percent of the impact is based on your words.

When you or your employees are upset and hurried, that comes through over the phone. When you are indifferent and distracted, that also comes across. You don't need to have a great phone voice to show the customer you are engaged, focused, concerned and happy to serve them. Your greeting communicates a lot to the caller.

First impressions delivered in person

View your store as a customer would view it. What type of impression are they taking away? Even before you greet your customers they will have already developed an opinion about your business, simply based on environment. In the assessment of your physical business, consider the following:

- Appearance of your store: Is the floor clean; shelves orderly and maintained; counter free of clutter?
- Condition of your parking lot: Is it free of litter, well landscaped and maintained?
- Signage: Is it easy to read and follow?

Do everything you can to create a welcoming and pleasant experience. Your store's appearance and curb appeal is another way to stand out from your competition. It's all part of the customer's impression.

Once your customer enters the store, they should be greeted immediately - within three seconds. If you or your employee is with another customer, the initial greeting may need to be, "I will be with you in a moment," but you should still immediately acknowledge the customer and make him/her feel welcome. When you enter a store, you probably feel disappointed if you are ignored. Your customers have the same emotions. Make sure your staff immediately engages them.

- Appearance: Shirts should be tucked in, employees should wear the correct uniform, and cleanliness is a must.
- Smile: It shows the customer you are happy they are there and you are ready to help.
- Eye contact: This signals acknowledgement, connection and attention. Without eye contact, people are not encouraged to share their information.
- Body language: Consider your posture and other mannerisms. Does your body language give the message that you are ready and anxious to serve the customer?

Your first impression may seem simple enough, but it does make a difference. It is a great way to stand out from the competition and get a relationship started on the right track. Don't leave the first impression to chance - set your team up for success.