



Retail Adventures in the Real World™

By RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

What If... Would you, should you, could you have...?

Look back on your last 12 months of business. Ponder your successes and failures. During this time of reflection, think of three “What Ifs” – things you could have done during the year, but didn’t, that would have improved your business. Imagine the positive differences those three little “What Ifs” could have made.

What If... you, the owner or manager of the store, assumed a new title and became the store’s official “Customer Advocate” whose job is to look at everything associated with the store strictly from the customer’s point of view?

What if you walked through the store and actually shopped, pushing a cart as you went. Would you run into clutter in the aisles? Would you determine that a store map on shopping cart seats would be helpful? Would you see the value in having a clean and dry shopping cart when you put your child and merchandise in it?

Oh yeah, and while you’re the customer, how would you feel about the store’s restrooms? A) You’d be proud to have your mother-in-law spend some quality time there; B) Gas Station Chic; or C) Run for your life.

What If... you, the management, had to actually don an apron and work the customer service counter once a week, alone, handling real problems in real time, face to face with real customers? Would you discover policies that need to be updated? Would you find a store associate

giving incorrect product information that necessitated returns, because they had not been properly trained?

What If... you had to keep the apron on and become the cashier. Would you agree that perhaps the most important add-on sales person in the store is the cashier? Do you currently train cashiers on how to add-on? You should.

Would you see that the first and last impressions customers have of your business are the most important, and that what happens to customers at the checkout has an effect on future business?

Would you decide your loyal customers warrant a special checkout area? Or your receipts could show both the regular and sale prices; detailing what the customer saved. Would you find that the policy that proudly states, “We’ll gladly open another checkout lane when three or more customers are on line” isn’t really a working policy – it’s a myth?

What If... you had to spend quality time in your competitors’ stores. What will happen when you compare your experiences in the competition to those in your own store?

What If... you became the store’s training director. What if you made sure that every associate knew what was happening in the store before customers’ knew? What would you have to do to make that a reality? What if you simply wrote daily goals and store information each morning on fluorescent paper and

posted it over the time clock? Would associates see it? Would they read it? That one little piece of paper will make them better equipped to work with customers.

What If... you decided to hold a five-minute training meeting each day to introduce a new product, or discuss new uses for an old one? What if the associates had to train each other on product usage as well? How much more prepared would they be to help customers?

What If... you decided to create a “Brag Sheet” that listed every service and convenience your store offers and had the cashiers hand one to each customer? Wouldn’t it help pull customers closer when they see your dedication to them?

What If... you learned from your time as a customer that your store should offer a loyalty program that lets members check their packages and outerwear while shopping, and then offers them a cold lemonade on hot days or a steaming cup of coffee when it’s freezing outside?

What If... everyday at 2 p.m., gravity went berserk and turned everything upside down? It probably wouldn’t cause as much chaos as you will when you commit to doing the “What Ifs.”

It’s a hyper competitive world out there, and that means you’ve got to get closer to your customers than you’ve ever been before, committed to seeing your business through their eyes, with their emotions. Imagine what will happen when you do. ♦

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