



# You Had Us at “Hello”

By Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender

**C**ustomer service has been a hot topic in our consumer focus groups recently, so we decided to do an experiment of our own. We spent three hours at Woodfield Mall in Schaumburg, Illinois, on a busy Saturday afternoon in February. Our plan was to purchase something in every store where we were greeted or acknowledged by a store associate. To be fair to our wallets, we didn't count the shops that had a greeter stationed at the front door. And we didn't have to be greeted within the first moments inside the store; any associate who approached us equaled a purchase.

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We made just three purchases that day: one at Wilson's Leather and two at Nordstrom. Amazing, but true. In a perfect customer service world, we would have run out of money before we ran out of stores.

During our time at Woodfield Mall, we observed or were treated to the following:

- Associates who acknowledged customers with a brief glance in their direction.
  - Associates who never looked at, nor spoke to, customers as they rang up their purchases; the majority of these associates never even thanked customers or invited them back to shop again.
  - Associates who could only muster “May I help you?” in such a way that the customer knew they really didn't mean it.
  - No greeting or acknowledgement at all.
- We know this isn't a fun topic, and we know

that many of you reading this will be offended because you're certain this could never happen in your store. But can you really be so sure? We know you've personally experienced shoddy customer service in all kinds of establishments. Is it so hard to imagine that it could happen right on your own sales floor?

We also know you probably can't afford to hire enough associates to do all of the things you'd like to do in your store, so here's a three-step, no-cost plan to elevate your customer care:

1. Practice our 7-Tile Rule: Every single time any associate comes within seven floor tiles – that's seven feet – of a customer they **MUST** acknowledge them. That acknowledgement might only be a sincere smile, but trust us, that smile will work wonders. If you come across a customer five times, then she needs to be acknowledged five times.

2. It's better to respond to a customer than it is to react. A reaction is a throw-away answer with no eye contact; a response requires eye contact, a smile and a thoughtful answer to the customer's request. A reaction makes a customer feel like she's an interruption; a response will make that same customer feel like she's the most important person in the store.

3. Engage customers in conversation. Talk about trends, upcoming classes or events, product, even the weather. The goal is to break the ice and make customers feel at home in the store.

We all need to be more diligent about how we care for our customers; we need to reverse the trend from lip service to actual customer service. Consistently good customer service. We need to give our customers the number one spot on our “Things To Do Better” list. And we need to start right now. 🟠

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