



## The SMMarT Guy

# Hire the Personality, and Then Train

By Kim Robinson

I waited for the so-called customer service clerk in the store to quit chatting on the phone so he could help me with my purchase. He ignored me until I finally rapped on the counter—twice—to get his attention. When he looked up after the second rap—annoyed that I interrupted his conversation—I asked, loud enough for his phone buddy to hear, to please ring up my purchases. He gave me his best stink-eye while he set the phone down, took my money, and dropped my change along with my receipt onto the counter *next to* my outstretched hand. I thought, as I returned his stink-eye with one of my own (mine was better): *You should get another job, Buster, because you're obviously not right for this one.*

Too often, I come into contact with people in sales and customer service positions who appear to be singularly incapable of polite and efficient human interaction. They either silently go through the motions of taking my money, or sullenly act as if I am bothering them with my presence (and my business).

What's up with that?

Simple. It's all in the hiring. During interviews for sales and customer service positions, companies too often ignore the most fundamental requirement of these types of jobs—the candidate's personality. Basic skills such as typing, computer skills, foreign languages and the like are all examined, measured, and identified during the interviewing and hiring process, but businesses also

need to measure a candidate's personality. A candidate may type up a storm and be a software expert, but the company needs to know how he may respond to day-to-day interactions with customers. Will the candidate clam up, or worse, reply in grunts and monosyllables or even ignore the customer entirely?

No personality type is wrong, but certain types are wrong for certain positions. Put me alone doing repetitious manual labor and I'll go bonkers within a week. Put a shy introvert on a podium in front of a couple of hundred people and they may quickly lose their composure.

Examples of the wrong types of people in sales and customer service positions abound. I have been asked to train salespeople—*salespeople*—who are shy and introverted to the point of blushing when anyone speaks to them. When I ask company managers why these shy people were hired as salespeople, they tell me that they wanted people who already knew their product/service/company.

OK, but all the knowledge in the world isn't worth a politician's promise if the person who owns that knowledge can't convey it in a friendly manner to prospects and customers.

Here's a recent example of how hiring for knowledge instead of personality cost a company a few hundred bucks. My wife and I went shopping for prescription sunglasses one recent Saturday afternoon while our daughters were at home studying for their finals (or so they promised). We went to the optometry department of a local retailer where we each found snappy frames we liked. When our turn came for service, we handed the

salesperson our prescriptions and asked her a couple of questions, only to discover she had all the friendliness, responsiveness, and warmth of a fresh carrot.

My wife and I both feel, that when we spend a lot of money to purchase a product, the buying experience should at least be comfortable. So, when we discovered the salesperson would have been better placed in a garden salad than behind the counter of the optometry department, we left without buying the snappy (and expensive) sunglasses. Not a big monetary loss to the store, but I'll bet we aren't the only ones who were turned off by the unfriendly salesperson.

For all sales and customer service positions, hire the personality, then train the person. Make a written personality profile part of the hiring process. Some tests come with a lot of bells and whistles (and high price tags), but I've found even the simplest and least expensive assessments can provide you with a good, clear picture of the type of behavior you can expect from that person in the future.

After all, carrots belong in salads and not in front of your customers. ■

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