

Kiss My Aster

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You Are the Plenipotentiary of Plants

Amanda Thomsen



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I've worked in retail for over 450 years now and I've tried on a lot of hats. I've sold ladies clothing, cards, gifts, those throw blankets everyone liked in the '90s, aloe vera products, ceramics, dream catchers, coffee, rain sticks, fabric by the yard, and thousands and thousands of plants. I feel like this is a pretty rounded out portfolio, and at this point, I'm entitled to have opinions about retail (this is where you can start reading this in an Andy Rooney voice). I cannot think of any fields in which free, incredibly specific and personalized advice is called for, under such harsh conditions, for so little respect.

I believe this is true:

1. Our advice is a gift to customers—a gift that is expected and should be given willingly.
2. We have the power in these situations, however, we're usually too overwhelmed to remember that (knowledge = power).
3. Don't sell yourself short. Straighten your crown and keep it there. You are the Plenipotentiary of Plants and don't you forget it.

We know the difference between our team and the big boxes is our wealth of knowledge, but there are some who will abuse this. Most garden center employees deal with some sort of odd encounter with a customer every day and it's not okay.

1. Welcome new customers with "The Speech." Tell them how to get started, teach them about pricing and what services you offer. Giving each new customer a semi-prepared speech helps them feel comfortable and capable.
2. Your business must have boundaries. Create a very clear statement as to what can be offered for free: "Here's what we offer for free, anything more will cost you." In that same document, mention ways to funnel a conversation to your paid opportunities.
3. I have an internal three-minute timer that goes off in my head. After three minutes, you should be getting somewhere with a customer. If you're not, assess the situation. Would another associate be able to do a better job? Is it time to say, "I have another customer to check on—I'll be back in a few minutes to check on you" and then fade away for a bit?

4. Come up with clear statements to recall the respect and boundaries if a customer is rude or demeaning.
5. Employees need to know that their expertise and time is of value so they don't feel like trodden-upon dirt people. There are whole garden centers where the employees are viewed as gurus and their words are pearls to be cherished.

Remind yourself each day that you're providing a service to those that want it and you aren't a punching bag for rude, overly demanding customers. You're not wasting someone's time if you can't figure out their "I bought it here six years ago and it had leaves—what's it called?" request; they're wasting yours (and ultimately taking away from the really great customers that are waiting for you). **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.