



How to Create a Drama Free Store

By Doug Fleener

Staff drama can have a negative impact on morale, the customer experience, and sales results. Unfortunately, retail is essentially a petri dish for drama. Lots of downtime and working with a small group of people, many the same age and/or sex, can at times result in too much drama.

For our purpose we'll define drama as unresolved conflict among two or more people, over-sharing of personal matters at work, constant sharing of negativity, and/or talking about co-workers who are not present.

That last one, gossip, is the biggest drama maker of all. It's like a smoldering fire that along the way is fanned enough to blow up into a huge staff inferno. (How's that for drama?)

The key to avoiding drama is to create a store environment where it's simply not acceptable. That's why I like to create a Drama Free Store. A Drama Free Store defines and communicates the expected behaviors of all employees, and managers are quick to point out when someone isn't in alignment with those expectations.

Here are seven staff guidelines for a drama free store. I recommend that you share these guidelines with your team, and review them with each new employee who comes onboard.

1. We only talk positively about someone if he/she is not present.
2. We each take responsibility to ask someone to stop talking negatively about another person.
3. We focus our feedback on someone's behaviors and actions, not the person.
4. We speak directly to any person with whom we are having an issue. We ask a manager to facilitate a conversation if we are unable to do so ourselves.
5. We focus on solutions rather than complaining about problems or issues.
6. We avoid sharing any personal problems at work.
7. We treat every colleague and customer **better** than we would like to be treated ourselves.



I suggest posting these guidelines in a very visible location in the backroom. I've enclosed an 8/12x11 sign you can use, or put them into your own document.

While sharing and posting these guidelines won't stop all drama, it does cut down on the drama since the appropriate behaviors are kept top mind. It also makes it easier to address inappropriate behavior once you've made it clear that it is, in fact, inappropriate.

Here are some tips and guidelines for eliminating drama in your store:

1. Don't participate. The first guideline to a drama-free store is to only speak positively about someone if he/she is not present. How often does one employee tell you something another said or did behind your back? In many workplaces it happens all the time.

You may think the information the person is sharing with you is valuable. It absolutely is - IF the other person is acting in a way that threatens the business or another employee. It's not, if all it does is add a layer of drama in how you lead and coach that employee. I call it noise. Noise that does nothing but get in the way of you helping people be successful.

Worse, by allowing people to speak behind other's backs you're demonstrating the wrong behavior with the employee who is gossiping. I recommend that you tell the chatty person that unless the other employee's actions are hurting others or the business, you'd rather not hear about it. Make it clear that you do want to hear about it **if** someone's behaviors are causing a legitimate problem. It rarely is.

This will make your job a lot less stressful, and the information you're not getting will have very little impact on your business.

2. Teach changing conversations as a key skill. The second guideline to a drama-free store is learning to take responsibility for asking someone to stop speaking negatively about another person.

That is not an easy thing to do, and that's why you train on it at a store meeting. Just as you teach your staff how to engage a customer or check in an order, people need to learn and practice how to not participate in gossip.



It is as simple as saying, when one person begins to talk about someone who isn't present, replying, "Let's change the subject." It's not confrontational. It's not judgmental. It's just an easy way to move the conversation from gossip to something more productive. Practice it in a store meeting and you'll be amazed at how much drama is reduced.

3. Resolve conflict before it becomes drama. Most drama is the result of unresolved conflict between two or more people. That's why it is so important to address any conflict the minute you're aware of it. If the conflict is not resolved it can fester and take on a life of its own.

I first tell people to work the issue out among each other. We're all adults, even if not everybody acts like it some of the time. The key is to give the parties a timeframe for it to be resolved by, and to tell you when it has been resolved. Giving that deadline is key.

Don't try to fix conflict by yourself. I'm the first to admit that when I was a store manager I tried to fix any issue between two employees. I'd talk to one person. Then I'd talk to the other person. Then I'd go back to the first one. At the end of the day the only thing I had accomplished was making myself mad at both of them!

If the parties can't work it out, have a sit-down to resolve it. Just addressing an issue in the open is usually enough to make everyone so uncomfortable it gets resolved pretty quickly. Here are some guidelines I give the parties in a sit-down.

a) Don't make it personal. Keep the conversation centered on what someone actually said or did, and how it made the other person feel. No hearsay. No rumors. No sharing what someone thinks the other person thought. As the detective on the old crime drama said, "Just the facts."

b) Keep the primary focus on how to move forward. Although we do need to start with how the conflict began, the main focus should be on how to move forward. If not, the meeting really becomes a 'he said - she said' marathon. I get a headache just thinking about that!

I like to ask the individuals, "What can each of you do going forward to ensure there is no further conflict? Notice that with this question that we're asking each person to take responsibility for his/her own future actions.



c) Make sure each person feels that the conflict is resolved by the time the meeting ends. While I love to say that people can agree to disagree, at the end of this meeting there needs to be resolution and no disagreement. I ask each person if they feel there has been a resolution, and if he/she is ready to move forward. If not, then at this point I'm playing judge and jury, and I decide on the resolution. This could leave one or both employees unhappy. Again, you can't let the conflict linger and grow into drama.

4. Roll out the guidelines to a drama-free store. Making this foundational will greatly reduce the possibility of even having to take the steps I've just described.

So let me ask, how drama free is your store? Consider using these guidelines and tips to reduce and address the drama in your store.

Doug

Speaker and consultant Doug Fleener has 25-years of hands-on experience with world-class companies including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores.



In his ten years at Bose, Doug grew the Retail Direct Group from four to 100 stores and was instrumental in developing Bose's unique and engaging customer experience approaches.

He is now president and managing partner of Sixth Star Consulting, a boutique consulting firm located in Lexington, MA.

Doug encourages people to look at their business differently, to see how good they are and how much better they can become. He shares the positive actions people can take to differentiate their business, improve themselves and their teams, and deliver more engaging and productive customer service experience.

Our guidelines for a Drama Free Store

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