



The Big Cost of Small Talk

By Doug Fleener

Here's an article you'll want to share with the entire staff.

During one shopping trip I walked into a local gift shop and was quickly engaged by a welcoming young lady. I'm thinking this is going to be a great experience but unfortunately, she asked me if I needed any help. We all know what I said next.

As I started "just looking" the woman started talking with another employee. She said, "As I was saying...." and continued on to share way too many details about her family life. This was awkward on many fronts. First, it was clear I had interrupted her story. How rude of me! Second, this woman has enough family issues to star in her own reality show.

As I walked around the store I thought about the impact of her asking me if I needed help and then having a personal conversation with her colleague. Here's what I came up with in the time it took her to trash her entire family.

* **Customers don't want to interrupt associates having a conversation.** I did have a question for Ms. Talkative, but it wasn't important enough to interrupt her. I would have asked my question if she had made herself available, and that could have led to a sale.

* **Personal conversations are distracting.** I couldn't give my full attention to looking at the products and still listen to why her sister is such a spoiled brat.

* **It's clear that the company doesn't care about customers.** Notice I said company, because at this point this employee's actions are the company in action. That might seem harsh, but that's exactly how a lot of customers feel.

Anyone who works in a specialty store knows they're not supposed to have personal conversations while customers are in the store. What I suspect not everyone thinks about is the cost of those conversations. Let me run some numbers.



Let's say that in this particular store they see 100 people a day, with a 40% conversion rate and an average sale of \$100. That adds up to \$4,000 in sales for the day.

I suggest that personal conversations could cost a store one sale a day. That's \$700 a week, and a whopping \$36,400 a year!! Looked at that way, a personal conversation, no matter how interesting, can wait

Even if you think my numbers are high, losing only two sales a week would add up to over \$10,000 a year.

So the next time you or someone around you starts to have a personal conversation on the sales floor, just remember the big cost of small talk. I bet you'd rather make the sale instead.

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.

