

Four Key Qualities Of A True Professional

I don't like to shop. Clothes shopping, grocery shopping, car shopping; it doesn't matter -- I don't like it. I want to get in, get what I want (fast), and get out. A recent shopping experience, however, was a pleasant surprise.

This experience showcased customer service at its best, and at its most simple. Once again I was reminded that great service isn't about grand acts, it is about common courtesy, artfully delivered.

While on vacation in Chicago, I needed to buy a pair of casual shoes (I had forgotten mine). I found myself in a store called the Walking Company. A friend once told me it was a good store. It was crowded, so I almost left. But one of the salespeople made eye contact with me. It wasn't the kind of eye contact that said, "Oh no, another customer." Instead, it was eye contact that said, "I'll be right with you." It was good eye contact.

So I browsed around for a few minutes and found a pair of shoes I liked. Sure enough, the salesperson came up and said, "Sorry about the wait, let's get you some shoes." I showed her the pair I wanted and asked to try size 10. She said, "Let's measure your foot just to make sure." I know I wear size 10, but her whole demeanor showed that she wanted to make sure I got the right shoes.

She measured my foot and said, "Size 10 is right, but you have a very 'Rubenesque' foot. The type of shoe you've selected won't be the most comfortable for you. I think this other style would feel much better."

Being the sceptic that I am, I looked at the price of her suggested shoes to see how much she was up selling me. Same price. Hmm. With nothing to lose, I tried on the style she suggested, and they were extremely comfortable. I must admit: they are the most comfortable pair of casual shoes I've ever owned.

As I paid for the shoes, the salesperson continued to wow me. She said, "If you ever buy a pair of shoes somewhere else be sure to tell the salesperson that the arches in your foot have fallen a little, and you need shoes with some arch support -- like these."

When I get good service like this, I want to keep it going. I asked her if there is a Walking Company in Orlando, where I live. "Absolutely, it's at the Millennium Mall." Since then I've bought two pairs of dress shoes at the Orlando Walking Company, again with great service. I can't imagine buying shoes anywhere else. And I've sent plenty of friends there.

Now, let's look at what this salesperson did that made this a great shopping experience. I'll analyze the details in a moment, but one word sums up her style -- professional. This lady was a professional in every sense of the word. Her skills would apply anywhere, as applicable in a bank, hospital, theme park, or law office as they are in a shoe store.

Here are four universal traits of a professional in any job position:

1. Professionals are responsive: When I entered the store, the salesperson made immediate eye contact with me. It was sincere eye contact that said she cared that I was there. And as soon as she was finished with her customer she came right over to help me and apologized for the wait.

The store was busy. But I noticed that everyone was being helped. The salespeople had mastered the art of handling more than one customer at a time while making each customer feel like he/she was the only one. None of the salespeople looked frantic, just responsive.

2. Professionals are knowledgeable: This salesperson knew about shoes. On the other hand, I know very little about shoes. Seeing that this was the case, she took charge of the situation and made sure that I was getting shoes that were right for me. I benefited from her knowledge.

There is an art to sharing knowledge, I admit. Some customers may say, "I know what I want. Just get it for me." By briefly talking to me, however, she realized she could make a recommendation for me, that I was flexible. Professionals read the situation and adapt to the personality and needs of the customer.

Of course, all of this means knowing your product. Professionals are constantly learning about their products and their customers. The only way that the Walking Company salesperson could steer me to the right pair of shoes was by knowing shoes and feet. Professionals know their stuff.

3. Professionals care about what they do: My Walking Company salesperson could have easily brought me the pair of shoes I originally asked for. But she wasn't selling shoes -- she was selling the right shoes. That's the difference. Professionals aren't happy just selling a product. They want it to be the right product for the customer.

4. Professionals teach you something: I left the Walking Company knowing more than when I walked in. I now know to ask for extra arch support in my shoes. Not a big deal, but I will always remember that advice.

Think of some of your best service experiences: the waiter who made the perfect recommendation, the computer helpdesk that gave you a tip on how to make an application more effective, or the clothing store employee who helped you coordinate colors.

In most cases of outstanding service, the employee left you more knowledgeable than when he/she found you. The new information might not change your life (though it could), but it does make your life a tad better.

Conclusion: *Professional behaviours are simple. What's not simple is the consistent application of them. Being a true professional takes thought and effort. But, once you are truly professional you can go just about anywhere.*

The skills are universal, and they are rare. True professionals stand out from the crowd and grow rewarding and satisfying careers. And the customers of the world know when one is at work.