

# ***HOW'S YOUR FRIENDLY QUOTIENT?***

**by Stephanie Bond**

Ever heard the phrase “Let a smile be your umbrella?” Okay, if that one’s a little too corny for you, how about “A smile is your best accessory.” When it comes to customer appeal, a smile does seem to have more influence than any designer clothes you might be wearing. But be forewarned—customers can spot a phony what-can-I-sell-you-today smile a mile away. If you or your employees are suffering from low morale or mid-season slump, embark on a program to cultivate a friendly buying atmosphere.

**Turn on the tunes.** It’s difficult *not* to smile when an upbeat tune is playing—try playing oldies or TV theme songs or children’s songs. Don’t forget to mix up selections so your employees don’t become immune!

**Make eye contact.** The best way to connect with a customer is the combination of a smile and direct eye contact, but some people aren’t comfortable with a gesture that might be perceived as assertive. Yet customers say that they are more likely to trust a person who makes eye contact. Train yourself and your customers to make and maintain eye contact for the duration of a helpful greeting.

**Master a helpful greeting.** Nothing puts a customer in a buying mood faster than a sincerely helpful salesperson. Don’t waste words on rhetorical greetings that quickly send you and your customer on your separate ways. Instead, ask your customer, “How can I help you?” or “What can I help you find today?”

**Come bearing gifts.** To further establish a connection with your customer, offer them a free item when they first enter your store—something as simple as a bookmark featuring current releases might spark a sale.

**Offer savings.** Establish yourself as an ally by letting the customer in on the best bargains in the store, and how to make the best use of discounts, such as frequent buyer programs. For instance, do you honor expired coupons? Competitors’ coupons? Don’t make your customers ask!

**Be a snoop.** Keep an eye on your customers. Do they look as if they need a book from an out-of-reach shelf? Offer to take selections to the counter to free up their arms for more browsing.

**(continued)**

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## ***HOW'S YOUR FRIENDLY QUOTIENT?*** (page 2)

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**Leave a good last impression.** Remember that a customer's 'friendly' experience should last from the time they enter your bookstore until they leave. As you ring up a customer, relate to them as one reader to another reader. Let them know you'd be glad to order any back titles they're looking for with a simple phone call. Express your sincere hope that they enjoy their purchase and wish them happy reading. And if a customer leaves without making a purchase, be sure to invite them back.

Remember, when it comes to fostering loyal customers, don't underestimate the basic 'friendly quotient'—good news for you budget-conscious booksellers, because being friendly doesn't cost a dime, and will undoubtedly enrich your workday as well!

~**SBond**