



Standard operating procedures

In the final part of our series of insights **Dennis Reid** explains how to introduce some advantageous procedures into your business

Have you ever heard of a travel agent who consistently booked holidays to the wrong destination; a waitress who never attended tables unless asked; a flight attendant who told passengers they could only get drinks for another 15 minutes because the plane took off late and he was now supposed to be off work?

While you may never have come across one of these people, how about a salesperson who constantly made errors ringing up sales; a salesperson who waited for customers to ask for help before approaching them; a salesperson who told customers to leave because the practice was closing?

The reason you've never heard of the situations in the first list is because the occupations require certain standards that are rarely violated. However, retail managers have a tendency to be less stringent when it comes to insisting that their staff follow certain standards.

Take McDonald's for example. It has over 31,000 restaurants worldwide and you can go into any one and the assistant will always ask if you want large fries or something to drink. That is the standard and McDonald's staff follow it. They don't ask questions, they don't argue, they just do it.

Look around and you'll find that staff in certain professions or companies just get things done



Burger/Phaner/Rex Features

Specific actions on the sales floor will help to increase sales and enhance customer perception of your practice

routinely day in and day out. So why should it be any different in your practice? Why should your staff be allowed to choose which standards they will or won't follow? You have the right to insist that staff do things the way you want them done. There are certain standards and behaviours that are non-negotiable. There is no room for compromise.

Let us take a look at the examples listed earlier to really put this into perspective. How long would a travel agent who consistently booked holidays to the wrong destination last? Not long. Yet a retail salesperson is often allowed to make numerous

paperwork errors before (if ever) being dismissed. How long would a waitress last in a restaurant if she never offered to take an order without being asked? Not long. Yet staff often allow customers to roam throughout the practice without ever being approached.

A flight attendant would never stop serving drinks because it was past the time when he was originally scheduled to work. So why should staff be allowed to rush customers out of the practice in order to close on time? The list goes on and on. Why are situations such as these so prevalent in retail? Because managers rarely have standards to begin with and when they do, they don't insist on staff meeting them.

There are specific actions on the sales floor that, if executed with every single customer, will help to increase sales and enhance customer perception of your practice. Typically, non-negotiable standards only address the operations side of the business such as following proper closing procedures. However, the sales side of the business must have standards as well. How else will you be able to ensure that your staff do what is best for the customer every time?

The Key Points panel lists a few of the many basic standards that you can establish in your practice. They will serve not only to increase productivity but also enhance your image as a customer-focused practice.

You can establish as many standards as you want, but you must be prepared to follow up with appropriate action if the standard is violated. Otherwise, you will end up enforcing some standards and not others, with no consequence. If you allow this happen, you will end up with an environment in which staff choose to play by some of the rules, but not all. ●

● **Dennis Reid** is chairman of Retail Performance Specialists and has written this article in conjunction with the Vision Care Institute of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care. RPS specialises in improving retail performance and can be contacted on 01344 849397 or via www.rps-global.com

KEY POINTS

Basic standards in retail practice

- **Acknowledge every customer, even when the practice is busy.** Acknowledging customers conveys a professional and friendly atmosphere, making it more likely that customers will wait to be served. In addition, acknowledging customers is the number one deterrent to theft
- **Always try to add on.** Do your salespeople feel it is pushy to suggest an additional item or accessory to a customer? Selling add-ons should be viewed as a service to the customer. Of course, you may not get every customer to buy an additional item, but if every salesperson asks every customer, every time, your add-on sales are bound to increase
- **Thank all customers and invite them back.** It is a nice touch to express your personal appreciation to your customers. After all, they chose to buy from you and not one of your competitors