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Courtesy Toward Customers Remains Store's Biggest Asset

MANY years ago, the popular poet, Edgar A. Guest, expressed the opinion in rhyme that "the reason people pass one door to patronize another store" was not because of a difference in merchandise or price so much as "the only difference, I believe, is in the treatment folks receive."

Stores are larger now and it isn't as easy for merchants to know their customers personally, but people still like to feel their patronage is appreciated. Store managers know this, and it pains them when customers complain that they have been treated with indifference or even rudeness, but it happens.

Oklahoma City stores have many excellent, courteous clerks but some do not measure up. Customers no longer are limited to patronage of certain stores because of transportation. An abundance of shopping centers makes it easy to trade elsewhere, "to pass one door to patronize another store".

Quality of merchandise and prices are considerations, of course, but neither seems to be the main reason stores lose customers. R. E. "Gus" Page, extension economist in marketing at Oklahoma State University, cites these statistics on "Why Customers Quit":

One per cent of them die; 3 per cent move away; 5 per cent trade with friends; 9 per cent quit for competitive reasons; 14 per cent quit because of product dissatisfaction; and 68 per cent of those who quit do so because of attitudes of employees.

Certainly, indifference to customers or rudeness is not the policy of any firm which hopes to sell merchandise or services, and it is up to management to minimize it.

This isn't easily done, because employment practices now required do not encourage applicants to approach their jobs with a zeal to achieve success. Many are anxious to learn in order to increase earnings, but others may resist instruction and supervision that would help them to do a good job.

One executive said he considers all employees to be salespeople, regardless of titles, because whatever they do helps or hinders sales, even those who do not contact the public.

A business magazine published the biography of an outstanding salesman, who described his technique this way:

First, you have to be honest. Second, you should put yourself "in the shoes of" the person you are trying to sell. Third, you must know your business. Fourth, you must work. Fifth, you should never get discouraged.

Success in selling means success in business. The problem is not lack of knowledge on what to do, but inadequate motivation for getting it done, by both management and employees. Successful sales managers never neglect training of salespeople.

Of course, customers sometimes are finicky, hard to please, arrogant or thoughtless, but it may be easier to learn to live with their traits than to change human nature.