



STARS Newsletter

South Texas Association of Resale Shops
visit us at: www.starsresale.com

June/July 2007

Volume 17, Number 3

What You Should Know About Customer Service

Some of you may think, Gee, Pat, all you do is harp about customer service. I have certainly spent enough space on the subject over the past year. But dear ones, doing it right is crucial to staying in business! I've been in resale shops that seem to do everything right—great look, good stuff, wonderful prices—but they have no customers. Do people come into your shop and never come back? Why is that, and what can you do about it? This topic must be at the top of your list to do something about. Take a hard look at everything you do and start talking to people.

Turn on the computer with an excel program, or get a plain old note pad and pen, and talk to your customers. Good honest dialogue beats any survey form at getting at the real truth. 1. Ask new customers after they have been in your store awhile what they like best about your store. 2. Ask regular customers what they like best. Make a list of their comments and how many times a particular comment is mentioned. Use this information to know your strengths and keep doing them. Nobody talks about your great prices? Uhhmm, think about that one. Use some of the comments in your ads. "I love to shop at xyz resale shop because...."

I would not ask a customer what they don't like about your shop. You don't want them thinking about that and I also believe they won't tell the truth to spare your feelings.

More customer service comments are on the following pages.

Editor,
Pat Swartley

Mark Your Calendars

June 22-25, 2007

NARTS Annual Conference in San Antonio, www.narts.org for more information

August 1, 2007

Next mail-out of the *STARS* Newsletter. We welcome news or articles of interest to our membership. Send to: Pat Swartley, 2206 Waters Edge Lane, League City, TX 77573 or call 281-338-9360. Email at pswartley@yahoo.com

October, 2007

Fall delivery of the *STARS* Official Directory.

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About STARS...

The *STARS* Newsletter is published bi-monthly 6 times a year for Feb/Mar, April/May, June/July, Aug/Sept, Oct/Nov and Dec/Jan and is mailed to *STARS* members, prospective members, *STAR*lets and other interested persons.

STARS was founded in 1991 to promote education, networking, mentoring and co-op advertising among member for-profit resale shops.

Membership in *STARS* is open to any for-profit resale shop in business for 1 year or more in the Greater Houston area. 2006 Membership dues are \$50 per year and new members are accepted at any time. *STAR*let provisional membership is offered to new resale shops in business less than 1 year. *STAR*lets enjoy most benefits of membership for free.

STAR membership provides the opportunity to have a listing on the *STARS* website, www.starsresale.com. You may also place a website link for a one time fee of \$50. Contact *STARS* at 713-789-6456.

The bi-annual Official *STARS* Directory is published in March and September. For information please call publisher, Jacke Shipwash at 1-409-927-1295.

STARS volunteer board members are: Yolanda Ramirez and Sandra Marin, Second Childhood on Fountainview, 713-789-6456.

STARS Newsletter Writer/

Editor:

Pat Swartley

281-338-9360

Layout/graphics:

Karen Frerking

Advertising is accepted.

Members may advertise

in a classified section free.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR...

I'm packing my bags for the NARTS Annual Conference in San Antonio to be held June 22-25. (See the NARTS website for details). I missed last year for the first time in many years so I am especially eager to get back to touch base with old conference friends and to catch up on the latest resale information. You know the old saying, "you can never be too rich or too thin"—I say, you can never learn everything there is to know about the resale industry even if you are considered an expert in the business. I look forward to sharing new ideas I pick up for future newsletters and teaching a workshop on how to gracefully exit the resale business.

As I travel around visiting resale shops I continue to see good bargains. **I have my favorite shops, and the ones I go to first, are the ones that I can easily find the type of merchandise I want, the price and value is consistent, and during my visit my presence was acknowledged and I was made to feel welcome and my business appreciated.** This is basic customer service, plain and simple.

Just the other day I spent 15 minutes in a resale shop (not a *STAR*) and was totally ignored although the employee or owner—whoever she was---walked past me several times freshening up store displays. I was the only person in the store. I hadn't been in this shop for over a year and guess what---? I won't be back for another year, if then. It is so spooky to be treated as an invisible person! All the marketing books will tell you that the number one reason a customer stops shopping in a particular business is because they were either ignored or treated with indifference.

As you head into the slower summer months take stock of your store's appearance. And don't forget how it looks from the outside. Can you put some plants out there to draw attention? Now is the time to make major changes to prepare for the fall business.

Be sure and take time off to rest up for the next busy season. Some stores close for a specific time to give everyone a vacation at once. (I hope they advertise it well and leave a big sign on the door! One shop took her employees on a cruise.) One advantage is not having to schedule vacation time that always seems to leave you short-handed.

Pat Swartley



Customer Service—what is it REALLY?

The easy answer: Providing services that make it easy for a customer to shop or consign in your store. The next step up in customer service would be to provide services and products that make the customer want to come to your store first before going to others with a similar product. The highest level of customer service is to provide services and products that no one else offers.

Each ascending level comes with its' own distinct challenges on your time and pocket book. One of the best ways to make a decision to achieve a higher standard of customer service is to listen to your customers whine or complain about something you don't do for them, such as accept consignments any time you are open without an appointment, or stay open later. Perhaps you would need a bigger payroll to implement these requests and the money isn't there to make the change. Perhaps you can offer some improvement in those areas without increasing the payroll or other costs.

Study other a-like shops in your area for ideas to offer more services to your customer. Are all the other shops closed on Monday? Consider being open on that day. Do the other shops have strict rules on consignor payouts? Can you offer an easier payment plan? Nobody offers buy-outright? Could you offer that service on selected items?

Talk to your customers, employees and friends. Do they have any ideas on additional services that would please the customers? **One new storeowner said that in talking to her first time consignors she found that they selected her store because the other shops seemed to be crowded and over-stocked. They felt their items would not get displayed well enough to sell.**

Last, but not least, how many ways can you make your customers feel welcome and appreciated in your business?

HOW DO YOU ANSWER THE BUSINESS PHONE?

82% of respondents in a national survey said that the way the phone is answered influences their opinion of the company they call. Think about it. It is not just WHAT you say when answering the phone, it is also HOW you say it. "ABC resale shop," said in a tired, defeated voice will not entice anyone to pursue further conversation! It clearly says, "I'm having a bad day and business is rotten."

Ok, so you ARE having a bad day and business is rotten, but please consider this action before answering the phone: 1. smile, 2. take a deep breath. Your voice will project the smile, and the breath will give you a stronger, more confident voice. Advice #3: always have pen and paper handy to write the caller's name or other information to avoid asking the caller to repeat anything they have said.

Call Yolanda today (713-789-6456) and listen to her say, "Good morning, Second Childhood, this is Yolanda," in her well-spoken, self-confident voice. Always answer your phone with a greeting, name of the business, and identify yourself. And don't forget to take a deep breath and SMILE! It is also nice to add, "How may I help you?" to the end of the greeting.



ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT COMPUTERS BUT DIDN'T KNOW WHO TO ASK....

Brian Wilson, founder and creator of ConsignPro software for consignment shops has written a number of articles about the computer for the NARTS Newsletter and he has graciously allowed *S.T.A.R.S.* access to these articles through this link:

www.vhsoftware.com/narts.htm



These articles address many computer issues you should know about including how to maintain a healthy computer and prevent common problems, what you should know before you buy one, how to get a website and much more. Pick from 12 topics.

TIRED OF HANDWRITING TAGS AND KEEPING HUGE BOOKS OF CONSIGNOR INFORMATION AND TAKING HOURS TO FIGURE PROFIT AND LOSS STATEMENTS?

If you are looking to upgrade your store with software specifically designed for resale/consignment shops, be sure and check out www.vhsoftware.com to see all the benefits of the ConsignPro software. A nice feature is the ability to download their program for a trial period. Want to sell online? Develop a website? Give consignors the opportunity to check their own account?

WANT A PERSONALIZED TRAINING VISIT FROM BRIAN HIMSELF?

A new benefit just recently made available to ConsignPro users (and prospective users) is a one day 8 hour "Regional Training Program" conducted "live" by Brian himself. He has offered the intensive one-day training at his facility in Miami for the past 3 years. Now you can save the airfare and let him come to YOU!

For more information check out this link: <http://www.vhsoftware.com/localtrain.asp>

If after checking this out you would like to participate in such a class, please contact Pat Swartley @ pswartley@yahoo.com

READY TO HIRE AN EMPLOYEE?

FIRST STEP: Decide what you want in an employee. Common traits usually wanted is, "a good attitude," "a leader," "team player," "friendly, people person."

SECOND STEP: Develop a "behavior-based" set of questions to help you determine if the potential employee has the traits you are looking for. For example: give them a situation they will have to handle in their work environment and ask how they would handle it. Devise an interview in which the applicant does 80% of the talking. Tip: list the worst tasks that go with the job first to see if they are still interested in the job. This could save a lot of interview time!

FINALLY: Check your gut instinct—ask yourself: "Did I feel comfortable with her/him?" "Would I feel comfortable with this person meeting my most important clients?" "Will this person fit in with my other employees?"



NEWS AROUND THE GALAXY

New *STARS* Member

Style Plus

12121 Westheimer #101

Houston, Tx 77077

Phone: 281-589-6832

email: styleplus@sbcglobal.net

Owner, Ruth Crownover, is a charter member of *STARS* and we welcome her back to the fold. Her shop has long been regarded as the premiere store in Houston for ladies plus size clothing and we are honored to include their listing on our website.

AROUND THE GALAXY

New owner of *Saturday's Child Resale* is Laura Reyes as of June 1st. Located in Katy on Mason Road. Phone: 281-578-9425. (See the *STARS* website for more information) Laura plans to begin classes in her store on breast-feeding, lactation education and infant massage. Another new feature: adding cloth diapers to the inventory. We wish former owner, Shirley Bracksieck a happy retirement.

Sunday's Child, owner Andrea Palker, has been a *STARS* member most of her three years in business. Located on Main Street in League City, she has a classic tale of how she got into the resale business. First of all, she avidly shopped resale and became a customer of *Sunday's Child*. She became friends with the owner and helped her out from time to time and when the owner had to move away, Andrea bought the shop. Many new successful resale shop owners share this experience.

Andrea is however, unique in one way, in that although her store is a small children's shop, she only works two full days on Tues and Thurs, and part time on Mon and Weds. She takes off Fri., Sat., and Sunday (closed on Sunday). It helps to have excellent part-time employees to help you dodge the burnout bullet.



She is a satisfied ConsignPro software user. Favorite advertising venues are: the *STARS* Directory, as well as Jacke Shipwash's Shopping Guide for south Harris and Galveston counties, and Space City Parent Magazine published for the Bay Area communities. Call *Sunday's Child* at 281-388-5439.

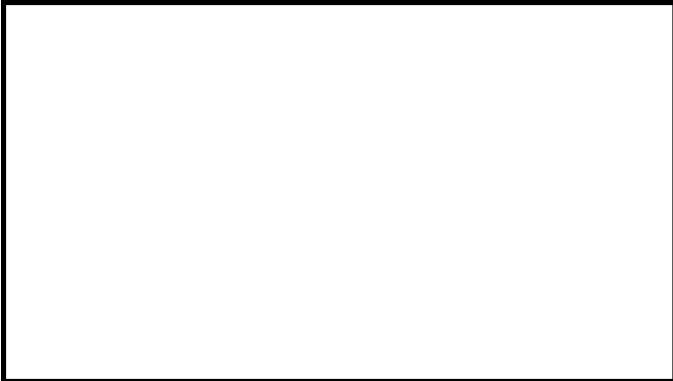
Andrea took advantage of the Mother's Day Holiday to promote her business.

"Mother's Day Give-away! Spend \$25 or more and enter your name in a drawing for a free Manicure or Pedicure."

This is a great promotion and there are a lot of ways to make it work for you. Make the offer for at least 3 weeks before Mother's Day. Consider asking the salon doing the service to pass out cards inviting their customers to visit your shop. To encourage more sales you could let a customer enter their name in the drawing for EACH \$25 or more spent during the time of the offer. Use your imagination to increase sales.

Final tip: Some beauty operators will donate their services in the hopes of getting a new client. I Once had a lady donate 10 minute chair massages for several hours on the day before Mother's Day in conjunction with a special sale during the day.

***LOOK INSIDE FOR THE LATEST
S.T.A.R.S. DIRECTORY INFORMATION***



***S.T.A.R.S. Newsletter
C/O Yolanda Ramirez
1922 Fountain View
Houston, TX 77057***

**First Class Mail
Address Correction Requested**



A PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTH TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF RESALE SHOPS