

Independent retailers regularly state customer care and service as a strength and distinguishing characteristic for their industry. While customer service is a keystone for an independent retailer to beat big-box stores in the minds of their customers and sustain a healthy business, retailers must walk the walk as well. Training can instill the tenets of customer service into employees, but habits from everyday life and an unawareness of how customers react to certain behaviors can still creep into employee interactions with customers. To get ahead of these potentially reputation-damaging situations, *Hardware Retailing* developed this list of 10 things employees should never say to a customer. Also, visit nrha.org/free-training to check out sales associate training tips from the North American Retail Hardware Association's Trainer's Toolbox series. ➔

"This has never been an issue before."

Whether it is a customer bringing in a return for an item that didn't work or someone bringing a complaint about store services to you, this kind of phrase immediately puts the customer on the defensive. Acknowledge the issue at hand and explain what efforts can be made to either resolve the complaint or find an alternative solution.

"Please hold."

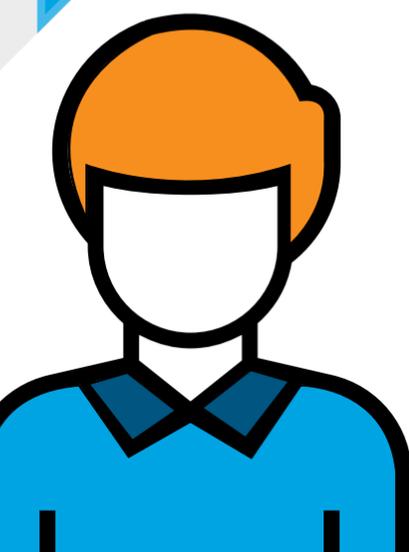
People understand there are things happening around whomever answered the phone, but shutting a caller down immediately with a "please hold" will sour a customer's day. Instead, greet the caller as you've been trained, engage with the topic of their call and ask for their patience.

"I don't know why we do this, but ..."

Rentals, returns and delivery situations can all have policies attached to them. If a customer takes issue with a policy you disagree with or where you are unsure of the purpose, don't let the customer know you are unclear about something they will be signing. Find someone more familiar with the policy and allow them to resolve the situation.

"That's in Aisle 8."

Sometimes there's too much happening in the store and you don't have enough time to walk every customer directly to the product they need. However, you should strive to walk with customers to the aisle they need to find what they are looking for. Besides the personal attention, this also allows you the opportunity to suggest related products or look for an opening for add-on sales.



"If I had to guess ..."

We get it. You've been trained in session after session about being attentive to customers' needs and looking to help them solve their problems. However, well-meaning assumptions or guesswork will leave customers feeling lost and unclear on if they have received the kind of advice or direction they expect from an expert in hardware. It's OK to say you don't know how to help the customer and lead them to someone who can.

"I don't think you understand."

For many consumers, part of taking on new projects involves acquiring new tools and skills provided by independent retailers. However, you should always work to make the customer comfortable, and belittling their lack of knowledge on a subject will leave a bad taste in their mouth.

"Calm down."

Almost every retail employee will, at some point, encounter a customer who is beyond the point of rational conversation. The cause could be something related to your business or your store could just be the venue for a customer's venting. Try to empathize with the customer and don't rise to the same level of anger or distress.

"You ..."

Separating the customer from your business makes the issue their problem. Don't use phrases like, "You needed to come in before noon to receive that offer." Instead, say, "I'm sorry, we had that offer available earlier today. Is there something else we can help you with?"

"We don't have anything that can help you."

Customers want problem-solvers. When a customer comes in with a unique request or an off-the-wall project, don't shut them down and send them packing. Take the extra time to find a customer a solution they can be happy with.

"#\$@&%!"

Don't use swear words around customers. Just don't. Remember that you're on display for all customers while on the company's time, and even if some language is OK around known and trusted customers and friends, it may make other customers uncomfortable or turn them away.