

# STORE MANAGERS -

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

NOT APOLOGIES



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## Store Managers – Focus on Solutions NOT Apologies

Your customer is standing there, waiting for an answer. They saw the ad for the latest cross trainers, and want it in a size 7. But you are out of stock. As store managers, you immediately get into the apology phase. After all, your service training told you to show empathy, continue to be warm and optimistic, and suggest checking another store from your retail chain. **WRONG ANSWER!**

## Latest Research on Service Resolutions

The latest Harvard Business Review study cites research from the hospitality industry by Jagdip Singh of Case Western Reserve. The research questions the empathetic approach. Rather, the article [“Sorry is Not Enough” in HBR Feb 2018](#) issue points out that customers want to focus on options, effort and the process of getting to a result, rather than spending time on the empathy expressed by the service provider. In fact, the HBR article highlights that “customers cared less about the actual outcome than about the process by which the employee tried to offer assistance.”

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**(HBR)**

When a negative situation happens, customers are not interested in continual apologies and attempts at warmth. Beyond the first apology and some empathy for the situation, further such attempts merely frustrate shoppers. People felt these to be distractions, and that the service employee was not focused on resolving the negative issue, at hand.

Instead, HBR suggests, “after those opening seconds, employees should focus on energetically and creatively exploring a range of potential solutions to the problem.” Even if the outcome could not be changed, or resolved, customers were significantly more satisfied with this approach. Give them options, not apologies and empathy.

## Applying It In-Store

The key lesson is simple. When a shopper cannot find the item they want or need, yes, it is okay to apologize for the inconvenience. But then focus on resolving the problem by working vigorously to find a solution to get them the merchandise they want.

Two things are important here. First, make sure all your in-store associates, and call center staff know this key point. Focus on getting the problem solved, AND give the shopper options. Second, make sure you give your employees the tools they need to do the job effectively.

## In-Store Problem Solvers

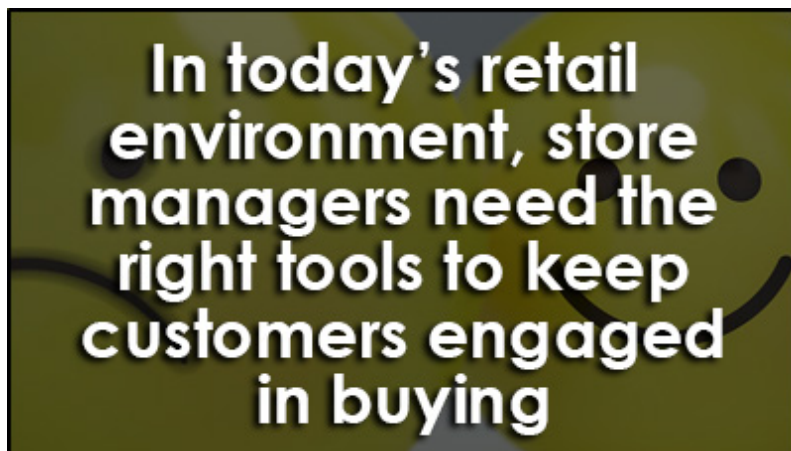
Store managers, this puts a burden on you to make sure your employees have access to the information and training they need.

Today’s shoppers may not know the term ‘omni-channel’ but they all know what that seamless shopping experience feels like. So make sure your staff know about the online inventory visibility / lookup for items, as a first step. Your chain needs to show customers where you have stock of various products, down to the store level details. If you don’t have this – raise it with your area manager, district director, or VP of retail sales. This is not a luxury – it is a necessity. Your shoppers expect this as a minimum.

Make sure your staff know about your ability to bring in an item from another store or the warehouse for an in-store pickup. They need to know how to place an order to ship to your customer's home, as an alternative. Let the customer know they can do a pickup from a sister or partner chain's locations, if that is more convenient for them. Then there are other options like shipping the item to a post office, a pickup center (like Penguin Pickup zones), or an in-store pickup locker.

Train your staff to discuss these options with the customer. This gives the shopper a good sense of control, empowering them to be part of the solution. That makes a bad situation feel more engaged, and better about the outcome – even if it is not ideal.

## Problem Solving Tools



Get familiar with the in-store tools to look up inventory at different locations, route orders to nearby stores, or the warehouse, and how to place an order online for your customer. Store to store inventory transfers, online orders from your location, or in-store pickup orders all need to be attributed to your staff. If they get compensated for it, then they will discuss

these options with your customer, driving sales higher. The point – make sure they get compensated on it!

Store managers, if your chain does not have an in-store routing app, detailed real-time inventory visibility, and an order management system that supports your team; This is a problem. So raise it as a problem. Your senior management team needs to understand that to compete in today's retail environment, you need the right tools. It keeps customers engaged in buying, and your staff engaged in selling – by providing the options it takes to close the deal.

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