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GEORGEA KOVANIS

Good service means I'll be back

September 16, 2007

I've been telling friends -- and anyone else who will listen -- about what a great time I had shopping for a battery charger at Best Buy in Madison Heights.

I was greeted by several employees, got help from a knowledgeable clerk, made it through checkout easily and was on my way back to work before I knew it.

Which is so fabulous. And kind of sad.

At many stores, I am ignored.

No smile. No hello. No "How may I help you?"

And from me, no sale.

It's common sense, but now a survey quantifies it: A bad experience with a salesclerk is the biggest reason a shopper stops shopping at a store.

According to the study, being unable to find a store clerk causes retailers to lose about 6% of their business.

Being ignored by salesclerks drives away 3% of shoppers.

The bottom line is that shopping isn't so much about buying a shirt or washing machine or a can of paint, it's about the experience.

Where to go? Here are seven stores where I've experienced consistently good service: • **Trader Joe's**: Just walking in reduces my stress level -- and it's not just because I know I'll be walking out with a bottle of the \$2.99 Charles Shaw wine! The employees are so incredibly helpful and upbeat. If you buy something you don't like, Trader Joe's will give you your money back. On top of that: The prices tend to be good! There are four Trader Joe stores in metro Detroit and one in Ann Arbor. To find a store: www.traderjoes.com

• **Holiday Market**: From the in-store wine expert to the staff at the cheese counter and everyone else, the folks at Holiday know all about what they're selling -- and are super happy to share their knowledge. I will be forever grateful to the worker who warned me against buying a super stinky cheese for a work-related meeting -- it would probably stink everyone out of the conference room. 1203 S. Main, Royal Oak. 248-541-1414 or www.holiday-market.com.

• **Catching Fireflies**: It's not surprising that this quirky store won a 2007 gold medal from Gifts & Decorative Accessories Magazine -- Fireflies is super accessible and inclusive. Its two stores are full of art tiles, jewelry, wonderful cards and photo albums, wacky housewares and pet products. And it has special deals for birthday girls and guys. 3117 W. Twelve Mile, Berkley, 248-336-2030; 203 E. University, Rochester, 248-650-3318. Also: www.shopcatchingfireflies.com •

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(HUGH GRANNUM/Detroit Free Press)

Claire Nelson, an owner of Bureau of Urban Living, a modern home store, is enthusiastic and friendly.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Where have you been treated well?

Today I'm sharing the tales of seven stores that have provided good service.

Now, I'd like you to tell me where you get good service.

Is there a salesperson who goes above and beyond?

A store that makes you feel good about your purchases -- and yourself?

Tell me!

I'll share your favorites in a future column.

Just e-mail: gkovanis@freepress.com

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SHOPPING


Leon & Lulu: Another 2007 Retailer Excellence Award gold medal winner! Leon & Lulu has won kudos for its fabulous visual merchandising, which means the furniture and accessories store looks great. More than that, it's comfortable! Located inside the former Ambassador Roller Rink, they don't mind if you test out a sofa -- or just stop by for a free coffee. It's welcoming and attentive without being smothering. 96 W. Fourteen Mile, Clawson, 248-288-3600 or www.leonandlulu.com

• **Neiman Marcus.** Whether you're buying something at full price -- or on deep discount during the store's legendary Last Call sales -- Neiman Marcus treats everyone the same way: fabulously. Every shopper gets a clean, spacious fitting room. Every shopper gets the help he or she needs. Every shopper feels important. Somerset Collection South, Troy, 248-643-3300 or www.neimanmarcus.com


• **The housewares and china department at the Oakland Mall Macy's:** Even when they're swamped with shoppers, the clerks are helpful and friendly. I bought two extremely discounted crystal vases, and the clerk was as excited about the fabulous deal as I was! I-75 and Fourteen Mile, Troy. 248-597-2200 or www.macys.com

• **Bureau of Urban Living:** What I like about this Midtown Detroit store is the enthusiasm with which Claire Nelson, who owns the store with her husband, Francis Grunow, conducts business. The gift and housewares merchandise -- some of it from local entrepreneurs and artisans -- is intriguing and well-priced; most things are in the \$18 range. When Nelson chats with shoppers, she seems genuinely interested. 460 W. Canfield, Detroit, 313-833-9336.

Contact **GEORGEA KOVANIS** at 313-222-6842 or kovanis@freepress.com.



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I Am Write

If bad customer service and dumb rude clerks can lose so many customers, then why is Wal-Mart doing so well?

Posted: Mon Sep 17, 2007 7:01 am

kegan1

Me and my dad do the deliveries for leon and lulu in Clawson, and its a blast. we meet lots of really nice customers. at leon and lulu we do our best to make the customer happy, even if it means delivering something 3 times

Posted: Sun Sep 16, 2007 9:37 pm

Bob Wilson

I'm pleased to see that Trader Joe's is at the top of the list. There's one about a mile from my house in Orange County CA that I walk to weekly.

TJ's started in Southern California about 50 years ago but is now owned by Aldi USA, part of a German grocery chain. To their credit, they have maintained TJ.s original concept of high-quality, eclectic food offerings (no preservatives, no coloring, etc) at stunningly low prices. As Georgea pointed out, they also consider customer service their top priority with friendly and knowledgeable staff. The relaxed Hawaiian theme in stores and similar attire by all working there adds an exotic touch and contributes to a laid-back shopping experience which we Californians easily tune in to.

With apologies to Georgea about the Charles Shaw wine for under \$3, well let's just say I use it for a disinfectant. But they do stock better wines (mostly cabernet sauvignon for me; merlot isn't worth drinking, thank you) at impossible prices. Very drinkable day-to-day wines from Napa, CA's wine country, are \$5-10 (try Black Mountain cab for \$5.99); others for special occasions are \$25-50 -- still cheaper than major grocery store chains (Franciscan & Jordan cabs are enjoyable now, but best if stored for a few more years). You may want to try selections from small wineries you've never heard of -- there are real gems out there, so take a chance occasionally. (Yes, yes, I know -- wine snob here ... Now, would you mind very much moving along? The heat from your body is taking the chill off my Far Niente Chardonnay...)

For pricing, however, nobody beats Costco, the #1 volume retailer of wines. I understand that MI law provides that anyone can purchase alcoholic beverages (only -- no other goods) at Costco without requiring membership. Check at the door for details.