

## LESSON 2 HELPING THE PRODUCT SELL ITSELF.

*Once a salesperson assists a customer in realizing they have a need for the product - as long as the product is suitable, it will sell itself. The role of the salesperson in encouraging a purchase is to help the customer make their own discovery. Ways to do this:*

1. Sales staff should focus on asking questions for the customer's sake, and have the patience to keep that focus; it must be centred on the customer's wants and not the salesperson's. This projects a message to the customer that the salesperson is trustworthy – this feeling then flows on to the business and makes customers also more likely to recommend that business to their family and friends.
2. The key is for the salesperson to assist the customer go through their own process of discovery, and realise they want or need the product first. Ask questions solely to aid in the customer's discovery. A customer who has personally identified their own need for a product is more likely to be enthusiastic about purchasing, as it is their own decision. The product can then sell itself based on their need for it (or because they may just 'want' it).
3. If a customer already knows they want or need a product then the product just has to be accessible for it to sell itself. Helping a product sell itself involves ensuring it is easily accessible to potential buyers and presented in a clear, attractive manner that emphasizes its benefits.



A good sales person can do much to enhance a product's chances of selling itself.

- Making it easy to get at
- Making great displays
- Always have healthy plants
- Offer attractive, functional or useful products that are placed in eye-catching positions.

A salesperson can either make or break a sale - as discussed earlier: lack of knowledge, lack of interest, unfriendliness, talking too much or not offering friendly advice can all contribute.

Here are some further points that every sales person should know:

- Know how to advise the customers to ensure they are buying the right product. Be sensitive and alert. Buying can be a big decision for some people; they can be nervous and sometimes find difficulty expressing themselves. Often all that is needed is to allow people time to relax, whilst offering some kind words to put them at ease. Don't rush them. Hard selling can make a nervous person more nervous.
- Have knowledge of the products you are selling: what it does, what situation it is right for and where it won't work and be able to offer an alternative if a product or plant is deemed unsuitable. Always be truthful –don't lie about your products.
- Handle products with respect.
- Know what your customer has on their shopping list – this is the first and most important bit of information in helping you find the right products for your customer.
- Know where and how to find the product/brochures/catalogues/order forms, or anything else relating to a sale. The prices to charge and the terms of sale; know the company policies on returns, damaged goods etc.
- Understand the practical procedures for making a sale: how to use the cash register (if appropriate), issue receipts, fill out an order book (if that is part of the business's system), package the goods, know the delivery procedures or any added services the business offers and direct the customer to those services or explain the delivery details as appropriate.
- Understand the sales process: how to open and close a sale (discussed in later lessons).
- Be sensitive to buying signals. When they are nearing the point of making a decision the customer will say or do things which indicate their likelihood of buying. They might start looking more closely at one product compared to others. They might say something like "this one looks good".
- Know how to maintain order and tidiness in sales and products areas (important in a small business) or know who to call if other employees are responsible for floor and display maintenance (as may be the case in larger businesses). The same applies to keeping records.
- Understand that fulfilling the customer's needs is more important than improving your own knowledge or sales technique. Remember that the customer is always right without them you are not going to remain in business.
- Know the importance of presentation: dress, grooming and great communication skills.

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### Suggested Tasks

Think of some open and closed questions you might use in a sales situation.

Make a list of reasons why we use open ended questions to encourage a sale.

## Merchandising and Displays

A great product will sell itself. But giving products as much assistance as possible will maximise these sales. Merchandising, layout, and displays all help give products that extra push into the limelight.

Merchandising

Merchandising involves:

- Developing an image
- Buying stock
- Selling
- Pricing
- Stock control
- Success of any retail business depends heavily on your approach to merchandising.

Merchandising is any form/way of promoting a product within the business. Merchandising strategies are usually more important in retail outlets than in production or wholesaling businesses. The aim is to maximise profits, stock turnover and visual impact.

An attractive and constantly changing display is an important aspect in drawing customers to a garden centre. It is not only important for the internal layout of a garden centre to be attractive but it must also be functional; customers and staff need to be able to move freely around the displays without fear of injury to themselves or the plants.

Well-designed garden centres will take into account various aspects of their daily business needs including:

1. Attractive displays
2. Easy access for customers
3. Separated work areas:
  - ◆ sales
  - ◆ potting areas
  - ◆ storage etc
  - ◆ access for deliveries
  - ◆ parking

### Displays

No matter how well you advertise a product, if people come to your garden centre or nursery and cannot readily see the product, they are much less likely to buy it. In addition, if they pass by a display of product that is well presented, they may buy on impulse. Some classic examples are potted colourful plants a display of gardening magazines, books or garden gloves at or near checkout points or sales counters.

Product displays that attract the eye can also remind the shopper that the product is something they need to buy but have left off their shopping list.

If products are displayed well, they sell well. The best-selling products should always be displayed in the most prominent positions for example: window displays, the main counter beside the cash register, the ends of rows, islands in open parts and points close to entry and exit. Products

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### Suggested Tasks

Google the term 'merchandising in a garden centre' - read one article that captures your attention. Take some notes. Spend about 10 minutes on this task.

placed at eye level tend to sell better than those below or above eye level.

Colourful products displayed in mass groups of twenty or more of the same plant together will create impact, whereas one mixed amongst other plants may go unnoticed. Feature products with large signs which highlight their selling points for example using signs to indicate discounted products.

People can become suspicious if there are only a few items on display. Keep displays full, the nursery looks healthier and it projects confidence to the customer if there is a quantity of what they are buying on display. It is also important not to put so much on display that it looks jumbled and messy.

Staging products or plants by height from high to low is also useful, odd numbers like 3 (three) helps. If you feature 3 types of fertiliser, display those three in even quantity, to make up a large display at the end of an aisle for example. Do not add a few other items to fill in any empty spaces. Fill it up with more of the same product.

## Spacing

Customers shy away from cluttered, confined spaces. If products are displayed with plenty of space both between the plants/products and in the surrounding area, then that part of the shop is more likely to be visited.

- Aisles should be wide enough for people to pass in, but not be too long. People should be able to get out of one aisle to go to the next without having to walk very long distances.

- It is most important not to over clutter items and to leave space between different items so customers can find different lines easily and access them without a mass landslide to the floor!
- Take notice where people stop and look at things most in your nursery and try to determine why this is so. Also notice dead areas, and try to determine what can be done to attract people into those parts of the nursery.
- In some nursery areas it may prove to create a 'journey' or path through a series of stock. If the path seems interesting, people will follow it along and you may be able to entice them in to buying more things along the way.

## Signs

### General signs

Many people like to make their own decisions with minimal help from salespeople. Signposting is one of the most important tools for communicating with customers in a nursery. The disadvantages are that signage may be expensive and also take time to source. The advantages are that customers easily find products and new staff learn quickly where things are.

Write signs from a customer's point of view and make sure all information is given to enable them to make a buying decision. Ensure every sign reflects your image and is a presentation of your knowledge. 80% of customers wait on themselves and 80% of customers' plant questions can be answered with the use of signs.

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### Suggested Tasks

Visit a garden centre and check out their general layout and displays or look carefully at the one that you are currently working in, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do they use the space they have to the best advantage?
- Are the displays attractive and eye catching?
- Do they have plants/products displayed in key positions to attract the eye of the customer and encourage impulse buys?
- Are the spaces comfortable to negotiate?
- Are plants healthy and attractive?
- What sort of atmosphere does this garden centre have in general?

When you get home think about what you saw and how you could improve on this – write down your ideas and ideas for improvements as this allows you to retain and recall what you saw and thought.

## Plant Labels and Signs

A plant label can contain very little or quite a lot of information and this is reflected in the price of the label. Colourful labels full of information are expensive but do 'sell' a plant. They are also less likely to be lost out of pots. Large labels give the customer the opportunity to discover the plant and what they need to know about it for themselves. They can then ask for more information if needed.

Plant signs are slightly different to plant labels they are usually included with groups of the same or similar plants (a range of ornamental grasses for example or roses varieties or lavender cultivars). They give the customer general information about that group and also make it easy to find what they are looking for.

The information usually:

- Identifies the plant or plant group.
- States why the customer should buy it, where and how to plant and care for it.
- Indicates price and general plant culture information.

It should also attract attention and be pleasant to look at.

There are a number of rules that should be followed for plant signs:

1. Always tell the truth.
2. Make it readable.
3. Use laypersons terms.

4. Assume the customer has no knowledge of the plant.
5. Present information the customer wants to know.
6. Generally three, short key benefits are enough on an A4 sign
7. Explain words and activities that suggest special knowledge.
8. Be consistent in the size and placement of signs.

An important factor in product display is the amount of information presented. The golden rule is to keep information brief and to the point! Limit your information to the key and most persuasive factors.

## How Customers Pay

Once the customer wants the product and has picked it up, they still need to be able to pay for it to enable the product to be actually sold. No matter how great a product is, a financial transaction needs to happen before a sale can be made. By emphasising the various payment options available (through posters, advertisements or verbally), the product becomes financially accessible to a wider range of customers. These days, a customer is most likely to want to pay by credit card or through their savings account electronically. It is important that the salesperson ensures the customer is aware of methods and types of cards the company will accept for payment. The customer can then focus on solely on the product.

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### Suggested Tasks

Imagine you are a customer and returning to the garden centre you visited earlier in your suggested task or your own place of work (check with your manager to see if this is OK first): look at the way that signage is used to inform and direct customers and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does this business use signs?
2. Are the signs attractive easy to read and clearly worded?
3. Do they contain all the information discussed earlier?
4. Did the signage help you find or understand the product or plants?
5. How would you improve on these signs?

## LESSON 2

### ADDITIONAL READING

## Garden Centre Products and Services

The nursery industry provides a wide range of products and services. They include:

### Plants (also called 'Green Life')

The majority of sales are usually plants, seed or flowers. These can include: natives, trees, shrubs, ground covers, climbers, perennials, herbs, bulbs, tubers and corms, indoor plants, cacti, bonsai, topiary, potted colour (flowering annuals), hanging baskets, terrariums, vegetable seedlings, berry plants, fruit trees, instant turf (sod), cut flowers, lawn seed, flower seed, vegetable seed, tree and shrub seed.

### Allied Products

These are things purchased to help grow plants better, or to be used in landscaping. They provide 'add-on sales' when customers buy plants and can include: fertilisers, stakes, pots, mulch, soil additives, tree guards, chemical sprays, tools and equipment, horticultural fabrics, soils and potting media, hydroponic equipment, irrigation/watering equipment, garden buildings, fencing, rock and stone, masonry, concrete, timber, garden furniture, statues, ponds, pumps, etc.

A big push in the nursery industry is add-on sales. This refers to additional products that can be sold

with a primary product. For example, the primary product is a pot plant and the add-on sales opportunities are fertiliser, pest control, new pot, watering can, etc.

This can help increase the sale per customer however some customers may reject the sales pitch and refuse the initial primary product. For example, if your customer only has a certain amount of money to spend, he may hesitate about favouring one product at the expense of another. It can cause an "I'll need to think about it" put-off. It is best to identify your client's priority and to meet that need. Once that need is met and the 'product' is in the trolley (and guaranteed to be sold), you may then identify the next priority and help to sell that. Do this again and again in terms of your customer's needs.

### Services

Nurseries may have the expertise already on staff to offer some special services either free or at a charge. Alternatively, they may develop a relationship with local "experts" to provide such services. These services can include: Landscape design, delivering plants, identifying pest and disease problems, tree surgery, lawn repair, garden renovation, chemical spraying, routine garden maintenance, landscape construction, installing irrigation systems, erecting garden buildings, transplanting, pruning, recycling (refunds for used pots, chipping prunings etc), entertainment (e.g. a guitar player or clown), a garden advice booth, garden lectures, Courses, etc.

### Allied services

Allied services are those that have a synergistic relationship with the nursery operation. They include franchises and business partnerships. For example, there has been a strong trend by retail nurseries in recent years to add a tea room or cafe to their operations. As well as generating income, these facilities encourage customers to spend longer in the nursery, increasing the likelihood they will make a purchase.

### Other

There is a range of other things which may be included in nurseries to generate extra turnover. They need to be relevant to the type of nursery, and the type and number of customers attracted. They can include: self-service drink or snack food machines, books, magazines, multimedia, art and craft, cards, souvenirs, aquarium supplies, pet shop, hardware supplies, pool and spa supplies, online courses etc.