

How an Award-Winning Retailer Uses Secret Shops to Enhance Customer Service

One of our long-term customers, Company PET, just won Best Overall Single-Store Retailer at the Retailer Excellence Awards 2016. The folks at Company PET have been great proponents of mystery shopping. We asked what role mystery shopping played in the development of an award-winning customer service culture.

Presented by Mystery Shopper Services

We sat down with Person X, Store Manager, of Company PET for a chat.

How do you incorporate secret shops into developing customer service-oriented employees?

We've used Mystery Shopping for years. Secret Shopper input is very beneficial and considering the low cost of each shop, very worth the cost. Our owner became committed to using mystery shopping services after someone secret shopped our store, without us knowing, and sent the feedback report. She didn't like the results but turned it into a positive by incorporating secret shops into on-going employee training. Mystery shopping helps us show, not tell, our staff the importance of greeting and taking care of customers. It works.

We couple that feedback with several training options a month that cover health trends and products for pets. We routinely go to events and are very connected to animal rescue and welfare initiatives. Our people are all thirsty for pet knowledge.

What advice do you have for small retailers about creating a customer service culture?

We encounter a lot of other independent retailers and always share the benefits of secret shopping as a great place to start with training for customer service. This year we are expanding our radio and TV spots with a focus on talking to our community about pet health needs, and the fact that we are not more expensive than the big box stores, as a matter of fact we are often cheaper. All retailers should consider at least a suggestion box. However, "actionable" input is the big difference between a suggestion box and mystery shopping. Mystery shoppers give detail on their reports, which makes their experience actionable.

Mystery shopping is the best way we've found to not only train our staff in best practices for customer service but also to evaluate staffing levels. For example, sometimes we find that the feedback from a secret shop is tied to the fact that we didn't have enough people working the floor. If there's a questionable shop, we go back and review the tapes to understand better what went wrong. From there we can help the staff person alter their approach, or we may simply staff more people during certain times of the day.

What would you say to small retailers concerned about the costs associated with initiating a mystery shopping program?

There are so many things to invest in that can improve how well your store performs, but for us, given the low cost of each secret shop and the beneficial information we get from those shops, it's a good return on investment. We work in our store. It can become hard to perceive it the same way a visitor does. It's good to get a different point of view. Secret shoppers provide alternative perceptions that we turn into actions that make a difference to our bottom line.