

THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking internationally on management, marketing and business innovation



To all our readers and fans of the Donald Cooper 'straight talk' Management E-Newsletter:

We're keeping up with the times. As of December, 2016 our monthly E-Newsletter has become a Blog. It will be shorter, but more frequent and easier to read on portable devices. Our website has also been redone to be compatible with portable devices.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and Happy 'whatever else you hold dear'. Wishing for you and the ones you love health, joy, love, adventure and prosperity.

...Donald Cooper

An important business lesson from 'The Christmas Tree Man':

(Time to read this Blog article is about 90 seconds)

Note: I originally wrote this article a few years ago, but we get so many requests to repeat it that I offer it each year at this time. It's a wonderful true story and a powerful message for every business. Even if you've read it before...it's worth another look.

I often caution clients about the danger of 'judging' customers by how they're dressed, or by who they appear to be. Back in my days as an 'almost famous' retailer of ladies fashions and gifts, I learned this powerful and moving lesson from **'The Christmas Tree Man'**.

Our staff came to me one December day to express concern about an unshaven, disheveled and generally unwashed gentleman who kept coming into our store. As he shuffled through our ladies clothing and gift departments he would glance out the window every few minutes and then, sometimes, he would rush out the door and disappear...empty-handed. This process was repeated several times each day; sometimes resulting in a purchase and sometimes in yet another mysterious disappearance.

When he did buy he always paid cash from a huge roll of bills with an old, knotted elastic band wound twice around it. But mostly he would look out the window, then rush out the door and disappear.

This strange behavior was spooking our staff. When they started making some very unflattering assumptions about this unusual gentleman, I assured them that there was probably a logical explanation and I promised to chat with him on his next visit.



Sure enough, a few hours later, he reappeared. I approached him, explaining that our staff was quite intrigued by his mysterious comings and goings. "Oh", he said, "I'm the Christmas tree man. That's my Christmas tree lot just down the road with the little house trailer. I grow the trees on my farm up north, you know, and then I come down here for three weeks each year to sell them to you city folks."

"I work all alone so I have no time off to buy gifts and I don't get back home until well after midnight on Christmas Eve. So, whenever I have a few minutes, I rush up here to shop. I really love your store. You have wonderful things, and every day I choose a few gifts for the ladies on my list."

"But you keep looking out the window." I said. "Oh," he replied, "I'm just checking to see if anyone has pulled into my lot to buy a tree... And if they have, I have to rush back before they leave, or I won't get the business. You can't take those trees back to the forest and replant them, you know. Once they're cut, they're cut."

"By the way" he said, "I know that I don't look like your usual customer. In fact, I probably look a bit scary to some folks and I guess I don't smell too good either. I don't have much more than a bed and a stove in my little trailer. No place to wash up. There's not a lot of money in real Christmas trees anymore, you know. It's kind of sad, really. But your staff, they're so wonderful. They treat me with respect and I really appreciate that!"

The Christmas tree man spent almost \$3,000 in our store over a three-week period. He came and he went, he came and he went, day after day, always looking out the window, sometimes rushing to serve a customer. And at the end, on Christmas Eve, before he left for home, he stopped by one more time and gave each of us a real Christmas tree! But the real gift that he gave us was the reminder that we should treat everyone with dignity, joy, respect and understanding. *That* was his most beautiful gift.

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