

TRAINING TIP – First Impressions

When I was a struggling police cadet in the Queensland Police Academy, in Brisbane Australia our morning ritual was to line up on parade for a uniform inspection. There were 200 of us, all different shapes, sizes and genders on inspection before a duty sergeant that had little tolerance for sloppiness and a voice that was loud enough to make the earth rumble.

Now I had an issue. Well I had several but my main one that vexed me each morning was my inability to iron the sleeve of my uniform correctly so the badge would line up with the crease. I could drag a 300 pound dummy to safety and even was top of my class in firearms training, but this crease would be the bane of my life. Every morning we would be standing straight and tall when the sergeant would walk by. Some mornings he would just walk straight up to me and bawl me out. Other mornings he would play an emotional mind game with me, and would walk past, and just when I thought I had finally passed, he would double back. Regardless of the method, it would always end the same way. He would scream in my face, “CHRISTENSEN; WHAT DID YOU IRON THAT SHIRT WITH.....A 4 IRON????”

Even though this happened every morning, my class mates always got a giggle out of it. It was a tradition that I passed on to my staff members in our ice cream stores in Australia. Our staff was comprised of mostly school aged kids, and invariably they would place their uniform in the bottom of their schoolbag and then pile on 50 pounds of textbooks and other paraphernalia and trod off to school. When they got to the store after school, out comes the books and the uniform, and after changing shirts they emerged as if they had just rolled on the ground for 5 minutes. So, that’s when I would pass on my famous “4 iron” line

It was a smart man (or woman) that penned the phrase “You only get on chance at a First Impression” and most of your customers will no doubt get that impression from your staff members. We put a lot of time into the way our staff looked and dressed and I think it paid great dividends for us. I often received comments regarding the way our girls looked or greeted customers.



Some of my impressions regarding staff uniforms and the maintenance thereof:

- You don't have to spend big money on uniforms to make them effective. A simple colored t shirt under a full apron of contrasting color can be just as impressive and a printed shirt. Remember, that's why they call it a uniform. It needs to be consistent or "uniformed" with what everyone is wearing. Clean and pressed.
- If you to provide a printed T shirt or polo, most stores will issue 2 shirts and a cap/visor per staff member, have them sign a register for it. Any damage done to the shirt by the staff member outside of work hours must be the responsibility of the member and further shirts can be purchased by the staff at your cost.
- Steer clear of jeans as a requested form of trousers or shorts. Jeans coming in a multitude of different colors, washes and degrees of wear. I bet you didn't count on the knees torn out of them either. Usually a request for khakis, black or whites is pretty safe.
- Have spare uniform shirts and caps at the store for those members who show up less than prepared or those who experience the occasional blueberry explosion.
- Bleach will destroy a uniform quicker than you can say Jack Robinson. Consider less damaging sanitizers such as SteraSheen. It is easier on shirts and will remove milk stone from your ice cream equipment as a bonus.
- Your help wearing your uniform shirt as a casual shirt can be a great form of free marketing, however if they are smoking a joint at the bus stop in your company colors, they are doing more damage than good. Ensure they are aware of the ramifications of their actions out in public wearing your reputation on their back.

There is a lot of competition out there in ice cream alone. Having well groomed, uniformed and friendly staff is an easy way to have your customers return again and again because they are treated in a way that other businesses cannot replicate. It may take a little persistence and follow up but the benefits are worth the work.

I would be pleased to hear of your success stories in relation to staff training. Those who let these meetings slip by for the year are really missing out on valuable time with their staff members.