

BY JAMES FISHER

Some Would Say That Familiar Icons Were Not Retailers

WHILE CATCHING A FLIGHT RECENTLY, I passed one of the all-too-familiar airport gift shops. Something looking back at me from shop's window caught my eye – the famous “three wise monkeys,” also known as the “See No Evil, Hear No Evil and Say No Evil” trio.

The monkeys have been familiar icons in Japan for hundreds of years, but they originated in seventh-century China. A Buddhist monk introduced them to promote the teaching that if we do not hear, see or say evil, we ourselves shall be spared evil. The monk depicted his humor and wisdom by choosing the three monkeys to illustrate his belief and make it easier to teach children the meaning of self-control.

Unfortunately, the monkeys have also become symbols of denial and inaction — deadly sins in business, that is, deadly to succeeding. The retail business is not a struggle between the forces of good and evil, but it is also not a spectator sport.

You can be contemplative and reserved in various aspects of your life, but when it's time to deliver you need to keep all your senses in tune with your environment, and you need to take the appropriate action to satisfy the situation. Can you imagine a store owner, manager, or cashier who did not believe this when it comes to properly serving customers?

What's scary is that it happens! We all see it on an almost daily basis; we have witnessed the cashier who is too busy to conduct a transaction because he or she is talking on the phone or filling out paperwork and the manager who assumes the “role of manager” rather than “doer.”

In some stores, it appears the monkeys show their faces on a daily basis. I have decided the critters should be re-named “Stop, Look and Listen.”

“Stop” is the fellow with the hands over the mouth. With “Stop,” I try my very best to remem-

ber the legendary warning: “The reason we have two ears and one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less.”

“Look” reminds us that even at the busiest times in the retail day, just reminding ourselves to keep our eyes open and watching for details means better customer service and a much improved store-level performance. The human retina captures 10 images per second that are instantly processed by the brain. However, you cannot take advantage of that select information if you keep your eyes covered.

“Listen” also makes a huge difference. You know you can feel the “aura or air” when things are going really well at any given retail location. Good “noise” means success, and if you are not hearing it, then you must find out why it has disappeared. In the daily hustle and bustle, you can become so immersed in what you are doing that you miss small events and mini-milestones that are taking place before your very eyes and ears. “Listen” can ensure the “Look” is targeted in the right direction. It can also assist “Stop” in possibly preventing your own self-embarrassment when pre-maturely opening your mouth.

Much could be said as to why the three monkeys could not succeed in retail simply because of the way they use their hands. In retail, there is always something better to do with your hands than to use them to cover your eyes. After all, you can put them in your pockets, scratch your head, etc. However, within our select industry of choice, we must keep them free to help a customer or fellow employee, to straighten merchandise, shake a hand or reach an otherwise unreachable item.

Perhaps the real message my three little pals are trying to give me is that when I am prone to taking action whenever and at whatever cost is required, then I can (and will) make a monkey out of myself every once in a while. However, when that possibility is compared to not responding to circumstances (both problems and opportunities) that present themselves, then conceivably enduring a little embarrassment is the lesser evil. **NPN**



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