

## **Training and Motivating Front-line Associates with a Mystery Shopping Program**

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No one likes to feel as if they are being watched and judged. Initially, that is how a mystery shopping program might appear to your front-line associates. When launching a mystery shopping program, it is not unusual to receive resistance in the beginning. Associates might feel like “big brother is watching” or be suspicious of how the program’s results will affect them. The key is to make sure that associates understand the big picture and the role mystery shopping plays in providing excellent customer service and ultimately achieving business goals. Assuring associates that they are part of a team and that you share a common goal – to continually improve the quality of product and standard of service provided to customers – is necessary to the program’s success. Lastly, associates need to understand that it’s often hard for management and employees to really see things from the customer perspective, and mystery shopping does just this – measures perception through the eyes of the customer.

### **Involve the employees**

Not only front-line associates, but management and field operators should be made aware of your mystery shopping program and its objectives from the inception. When employees are properly introduced and included there is far less chance of a negative reaction. Carrie Tuttle, Service Intelligence Manager of Research and Communication, says, “Managers who use mystery shop reports as a feedback tool, and engage in constructive and motivational conversations with the team, notice a more positive team attitude.” Fast food franchise owner, Nigel Nary, agrees with Tuttle’s assertion, “Given willingness to accept feedback, mystery shopping provides a franchisee with insightful data that can be used in motivational coaching. Team building, contests, and bonus programs all can be built around the mystery shopping findings to ensure that coaching is embraced by employees.”

The focus of a mystery shopping program should be put on improving areas that are key drivers to revenue such as repeat visits, recommendation to friends and family, and average dollar purchase. Analysis has shown that stores with the highest sales volume in dollars also have the largest number of associates recommending additional or complementary products. Moreover, in a recent survey, retailers responded by stating that in 99 percent of visits where associates physically demonstrated a product’s features or services, shoppers responded that they would have been likely to make a purchase. This compares to only 65.8 percent of shoppers who would still make the purchase even if the product was not demonstrated to them. These two examples give credence to the idea that associate performance does have a major impact on sales and keeps your team motivated by providing them with the empowerment to affect changes that develop professional skills and align with corporate goals.

## **Reward Behavior**

To encourage associate buy-in for your mystery shopping program, take advantage of your organization's incentives and find new ways to reward associates. The best incentive programs are effective in recognizing and rewarding positive behavior, and often focus on improvements, instead of expectations of perfection. A financial institution awards "Night Away" vouchers and iPod Shuffles to associates who earn scores of 100 percent on a shop. In one year's time, 20 associates earned the incentives. Positive reinforcement can go a long way when it comes to employee morale and team building.

## **Share Information**

Continuing to educate associates on the benefits of a mystery shopping program is paramount to the success of your program. Choose custom communications campaigns designed to promote a positive perception and understanding of your mystery shopping program in relation to your business objectives and achievement of excellence in customer service. Utilizing an ongoing campaign delivered through a host of communication vehicles will capture associates' attention while driving awareness and comprehension of the impact of your mystery shopping program.

After your mystery shopping program has been implemented, regular meetings or verbal communications should be utilized to review results. Typical topics might include rankings by region or store, quarterly or monthly trends, promotional product revenue increases, and speed of service results. Your mystery shopping provider can provide the data and assist in its analysis and correlation to revenue. It's imperative that your staff knows the information gleaned from mystery shops will be utilized and what purpose it will ultimately serve. What if a negative report comes in? Tuttle believes, "It opens the door to reinforce core values and objectives and turn it into a positive coaching experience. The manager benefits from breaking the employee of a habit and avoiding negative customer impressions in the future." Positive or negative, mystery shopping results should be thought of as a win-win that provides valuable customer insight while directly impacting top line revenues and bottom line profits.