

Building a Stronger Shoe Business

Trish Johnson's tips and strategies can help other stores increase shoe sales

By Jodi L. Hodak

For **Trish Johnson**, managing the shoe department at Store #2067 in Jackson, Mich., is the perfect fit. By combining her love of shoes with a finely tuned mix of customer service, initiative, and goal setting, this 13-year JCPenney veteran has firmly established herself as “the shoe lady” in her local community; and a role model among her colleagues.

Johnson skillfully uses her experience and enthusiasm to motivate customers to buy and associates to sell — in good times and bad. Before becoming shoe sales manager in 2001, she was an All-Star in sales, customer service, and catalog referrals. She has “all the right stuff” when it comes to managing her store within a store, according to Store Manager **Linda Steele**.

“Trish has several winning associate qualities that make her successful,” Steele explains. “She has a real sense of urgency when it comes to customer service and accepts full accountability for running her department. She sets high standards and motivates her associates to achieve them. She shows initiative and follow-through in everything she does. And, she never asks anyone to do something that she hasn't already done herself.”

With shoe departments in JCPenney stores across the nation working on rebuilding sales, Steele believes some of the steps Johnson and her team are taking to turn things around in their department can be used successfully in other stores as well.

Finding Solutions to Common Challenges

“One of the biggest challenges I face is keeping the department stocked with the top-selling shoes,” says Johnson. “The popular brands go fast, and if I can't fit the customer in the size they need, I've missed out on an important sale and customer service opportunity.”

To remedy her supply and demand challenge, Johnson is



working closely with her Senior Merchandise Planner (SMP), who directs her to the proper channels for getting the extra shoes her department needs. Johnson also stays current with the Company's new floor layouts and keeps a close watch on how her associates handle professional selling standards like "Four on the Floor" and "Sell What's Available Today" (SWAT).

"The new women's section layout, along with the addition of more popular brand name shoes, has brought new customers into our store," Johnson says. "Since many of the customers come into our department with one type of shoe in mind, I constantly

In her experience, Johnson has found catalog referrals to be highly effective in building sales because most customers will immediately say 'yes' when asked if they'd like you to place a catalog order for them.

Prospecting Makes the Difference

Another challenge Johnson faces is keeping her team of eight associates upbeat when it comes to selling. Her solution to this challenge is prospecting. As a strong believer in the power of prospecting, she has two prospecting books full of customers that



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encourage my associates to widen the customer's view by always bringing out 'four on the floor.' Once the associates get used to this, it's a pretty easy process and does encourage customers to buy the merchandise we have in stock."

Catalog Referrals

Johnson believes catalog referrals give shoe departments another avenue for boosting sales. "In addition to showing the customer you care enough to go the extra mile for them, catalog referrals give us the opportunity to keep that person as our customer," Johnson says. "If you're not able to sway them by presenting four on the floor, sway them with the catalog."

she contacts on a regular basis.

"I ask the associates to set aside 15 minutes a day to call ten customers and let them know about an upcoming sale, special event, or a particularly good time to buy," Johnson explains. "This is a really good sales tool that has always worked well for me. Everywhere I go, I prospect."

Johnson is so adept at prospecting, in fact, that she carries her business cards with her when she attends gatherings and parties with her husband. "People in our local community call me 'the shoe lady' and often come to me for information about upcoming sales and merchandise. It just doesn't get much better than that!"