

Small Businesses

News & Views

Danger Signals

What type of danger signals should a small business owner look for in managing a small retail or service store? Can you hear and see these danger signals? Well, yes! You can hear your customers complaining about the lack of service! You can hear your employees giving customers misinformation about your products and service! You can touch dusty counters and displays! You can see customers walk out without buying! You can see the loss when your cash register continuously checks up short each week.

Fortunately you don't need super senses to hear, touch and see some of these danger signals happening in your business. These signals pop up like red flags on the expired parking meters in front of your store.

Some of the danger signals concerning your customers may show up in the following manner. Many of your customers walk out without buying your goods or services. Many old customers no longer visit your store. The traffic in front of your store has fallen off. Your employees do not urge your customers to buy additional or more expensive items in your store. Your customers are returning more merchandise than they did in the past. Your sales are down this month over the same month last year.

A small store invites customers to stay away in a number of different ways. Your display window may not be trimmed with new and exciting merchandise. Your display racks, shelves and counters are dusty, and merchandise is poorly displayed. Perhaps some of your stock looks shopworn. Your store may have a rundown look and the crowded aisles may make it hard for customers to reach the stock.

Your store's profits may be slipping and if so you should think about the following items. Your prices may not be in line with your competition. You may have accumulated too many sizes and colors that simply will not sell. Your stocks may not be flagged to remind you to reorder at the proper time. Your markdowns on style items are not made quickly as your customers begin to discard one style for another. Your store may not take advantage of cash discounts on store purchases.

Then there are warning flags that are hoisted by your employees. Your employees may be slow in greeting customers and may appear indifferent and make customers wait unnecessarily. The personal appearance of your employees may not be good. Your sales employees may lack knowledge of your store's merchandise and services. Your employees are making too many mistakes in handling sales transactions. Some of your best and most qualified employees may be leaving your store to go with your competition.

Early storm warnings can also be sounded by money problems. A small store may be in financial trouble if the owner-manager barely makes ends meet from month to month. The owner-manager may have trouble meeting payments on bank and other commercial debts. Your store may be penalized for paying its bills too late. The owner-manager may pay himself or herself more than is justified by the store's total sales.

For additional information contact the Economic Development Division, Center for Improving Mountain Living, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC 28723.

Performers Few In Numbers?

Black Soapers In Sorry State

By Sherry Johnson
Special To The Post

"I have been on 'One Life to Live' for 12 consecutive years, making me the most durable black performer in daytime," said Ellen Holly in a "Soap Opera Digest" interview before she left her long-standing role of Carla Scott last fall. "I wish I could feel I've pioneered something, but instead I felt a tremendous sense of frustration."

A sentiment shared, no doubt, by those loyal, sympathetic friends like Frank and Nancy Grant on "All My Children"; those faithful sidekicks like Calvin Barnes on "The Doctors"; the ones who portray television's socially acceptable "good Negroes" - her fellow black actors on soap operas.

Herb Davis, remembered as Carla's former "One Life" boyfriend and most recently as Lt.

Luke Chandler on "The Edge of Night," could have been describing Bryan Phillips ("General Hospital") or Sadie Gray ("One Life to Live") or Calvin Stone ("Edge of Night") or any black daytimer when he said of his role, "After all, my function on 'Edge of Night' has been to validate white people's decisions: When I am shown out on a date, such as at dinner in a white people's restaurant - my lady friend and I discuss what white people are doing. I am a sort of neuter good guy."

These black good guys - and gals - are few in number. Last year, the Concerned Black Artists for Action estimated that a meager 4 percent of daytime drama's 350 continuing roles were black ones. Add that to the fact that "Ryan's Hope," "The Young and the Restless," "Texas," "Search for Tomorrow," "The Guiding Light" and "Days of Our Lives" feature no regular black characters and you have a dismal picture of the status of blacks on soap operas.

Ironically, soap opera has fought its way from stepchild of the entertainment industry to national

fad to subject matter of university courses by being "innovative." No longer just the thematic province of amnesia victims, wayward husbands and unwed mothers, daytime drama's long-form structure allows it to delve deeply into the most intimate of human relationships and has also made it perfect forum to examine both ticklish and timely topics. Recent serial storylines have explored the emotional perimeters of surrogate mothering and the emotional ambiguities of

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acquaintance rape. Steady daytime viewers have been fed a steady diet of visual spectacle: "Ryan's Hope's" Siobhan being pursued by a shark; "General Hospital's" Luke and Laura swirling romantically through a department store; Nina Courtland's masqued ball on "All My Children". And what could run the risk of stepping on more sensitive toes than a nun falling in love and leaving her order as Sister Marie Justin did on "Days of Our Lives?"

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