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## If It's Not on the Shelf, We Don't Have It

### *Observed Cases of Unnecessary 'No' During the Busiest Shopping Season*

This year, I set myself a target: complete all holiday shopping by the end of November and avoid the annual December rush. While finishing my shopping early, I noticed that missed sales happen very easily, because many employees give unnecessary negative answers - and that alone can kill the holiday experience just as much as any "Grinch."

A selection of real interactions, all within one month:

A simple "Do you have X?" was answered with "No." Full stop. No attempt to check stock, recommend an alternative or gather more information. A customer already in the store is close to conversion, but the opportunity ended there.

"Do you have this in size M?" was met with "If it's not on the shelf, we don't have it." Shelves are rarely full stock records. Even when an item isn't available, there are many ways to move forward: confirming through the system, suggesting another size or model, offering delivery options, sending the customer to a different branch or taking their contact details. Instead, the conversation stopped immediately.

In a toy shop, the question "Is this suitable for a six-year-old?" was answered with "I don't know, I don't have kids." Knowledge gaps are normal. Lack of initiative is not. Checking the recommended age, asking a colleague or simply exploring the child's interests would have demonstrated curiosity. That alone changes how a customer feels and how likely they are to continue.



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“Do you have X?” was followed by “No, but the shop across the street might.” While honest, directing a customer straight to the competitor without first attempting to help sends revenue elsewhere. Understanding the request, suggesting substitutes and checking stock before referring out keeps the customer engaged.

Finally, “Do you wrap gifts?” received the answer “No, I’m not Santa.” The tone was humorous, but it still represented a missed opportunity. Gift wrapping is an easy add-on that creates delight and, in some cases, earns additional income.

Not all examples are negative. One of my favourite service moments came from a past mystery shopping project involving jewelry stores. The shopper’s scenario was to buy gifts. During the interaction, the salesperson noticed the shopper lingering over an item and simply suggested that while buying for others, she might consider treating herself as well. It was offered naturally, without pressure. The shopper ultimately bought the piece for herself for around €200 - an unplanned purchase, not part of the assignment and not refunded. The salesperson achieved it by listening, personalising and creating emotional value. No discount or marketing push was required.

These contrasting situations highlight a consistent pattern. The negative examples weren’t about rudeness; they were defined by a lack of initiative: no curiosity, no exploration, no effort to find alternatives. In busy shopping periods especially, this attitude quietly drains revenue. “No” may sometimes be accurate, but it doesn’t need to be final. Small gestures - checking stock, suggesting an alternative, asking clarifying questions - require minimal effort and can significantly impact conversion, loyalty and overall customer experience.

The busiest shopping months bring customers who are already prepared to spend. Whether those sales materialise often depends on how willing someone is to assist, explore and guide. Retail spaces are full of possibility, but it is easy to lose opportunities through unnecessary refusal.

The season doesn’t need a Grinch to take away its commercial potential. A single sentence: “If it’s not on the shelf, we don’t have it” - can do that on its own.

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