

"Mystery shoppers' help monitor quality of service

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Q: What is the best way to find out how my employees are treating my customers when I cannot always be around?

A: "If you are in any type of a service-oriented industry, a mystery shopping service may be your answer," says Tina Hamilton, owner of InterSource Inc., an HR/Mystery Shopping provider in Fogelsville.

Mystery shopping companies hire people to act as customers and evaluate the quality of your service, product delivery, appearance of staff and site and overall operations of your business. After each visit, shoppers evaluate their experience, focusing on the areas that you want to know about.

The typical project lasts from six months to a year to make sure the data are reliable and to minimize inconsistencies. During the course of a project you will receive statistical and trend reporting for your use.

"Businesses have only one chance to make a first impression. Everything depends on the customer's first experience," Hamilton said. Mystery shopping makes it possible for business owners to keep a check-and-balance system running, even when they cannot be around. It is also a tool to be used to keep employees motivated to do a good job and to provide superior service at all times, to all customers.

An added benefit mystery shopping offers to you is an unbiased assessment of your employees' competencies and shortcomings. They highlight areas for improvement as well as strengths that merit recognition. Mystery shopping can be used as a tool to assist with employee development.

Once only offered nationally and to large companies, mystery shopping services are now available locally for any size business. Businesses such as home services (delivery, repair), retail, customer service departments, restaurants, hotels and others will benefit from the feedback of a mystery shopping service.

Questions are answered by the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce using local experts. Send questions about small business to: Small Business -- Tough Questions, Business News Department, The Morning Call, P.O. Box 1260, Allentown 18105; or e-mail to: businessnews@mcall.com.

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