



Lessons Learned from Reality Television

I confess. I'm a TV junkie. I love a relaxing evening in front of the tube. I particularly like makeover reality shows, anything that has to do with fashion or home design.

One fun little show that keeps me entertained on a Friday night is *Say Yes to the Dress*. This **TLC** cable show is a feel good fest that follows the sales staff at Kleinfeld Bridal shop in New York City. The show is full of lots of pretty women trying on even prettier bridal décor.

But, make no mistake. This show isn't just about wedding dresses and brides. It's really about the Kleinfeld sales force making a sale. After watching numerous episodes, I've discovered you can learn some great sales tips from the bridal consultants, who make every effort to close the sale at the first appointment. Although you are selling window treatments rather than wedding dresses, there's not a whole lot of difference in the sales techniques when you are selling people pretty things that cost a lot of money.

Here are some tips you can transfer into your own business.

Get The Budget Up Front

Every consultation on this show begins with the bridal consultant asking the bride what her budget range is. There is no beating around the bush and no embarrassment. It is a straight-out question that leaves the consultant with a solid idea of what her client is willing to spend. So if it works for brides it can work for homeowners too. There is no reason for you not to ask your client what their budget is. Many clients have no idea or have not really thought about what they planned on spending.

You can help clarify their budget by telling them what your base price for labor and fabric is. If you tell a client that a pair of panels starts at \$100, not including supplies, and there is a sudden intake of sharp breath, you know your client has a very tight budget. But, if they barely bat an eyelash, you know there might be a more flexible budget to work with.

Ask: "What Are You Looking For?"

Along with the question about the budget, the bridal consultants never fail to ask the bride what type of dress she is looking for. They ask if she has any pictures, if there are any particular designers she likes, and if they have already shopped for dresses.

It is crucial that the consultant listen to the bride to find a starting point for pulling dresses. Without some idea of what a client wants, the sales staff will waste everyone's time.

Your clients are not any different. Before any appointment with a client, you should take a few minutes to find out what the project consists of. Ask if they have looked at any pictures or picked out fabrics. Ask them about their decorating needs and discuss color schemes.

Listen To Your Client

The consultants at Kleinfeld don't just start the interview with a bride by asking her price and what she is looking for. They also ask what type of wedding it is, where is it being held, and how many people will be attending. This gives the consultant a good feel for who the bride is and what types of things she likes. Is she formal? Casual? Is this a black tie affair? Or a do-it-yourself wedding?

You should also take some time to get to know your client. Ask about their home and a little bit about their lifestyle. Are they formal? Kid friendly? Cat or dog people? What is their current decorating style? What colors are in the rooms you will be working in? What are the colors in the other rooms of the home?

Pay Attention To Client "Wants"

Sometimes, family members who are with the bride decide they know what is best for her. They start dancing around the sales floor picking out different dresses they want her to try on. The biggest problem with this is that these are usually dresses the bride has no interest in.

If a client says she does not want something, do not bother showing it to them. Do not start pulling out pictures of ruffles for a client looking for a clean modern look. Pay close attention to what your client does want and spend your time wisely showing them the sorts of things they are interested in.

Clients May Not Know What They Like; But They Always Know What They Don't Like

Brides who have never dress shopped before coming to Kleinfeld's sometimes have no idea

what sort of dress they like. But when the sales staff starts probing a little deeper and bringing out dresses, the brides are never afraid to say what they do not like.

Drapery clients are not much different. They may say they have no idea what they want to cover their sliding glass door, but show them a picture of vertical blinds, and they'll be sure to tell you they hate them. Getting to the right drapery treatment can be a process of elimination. You can help speed up the process before you get to the appointment by giving the client a few magazine or website suggestions and asking them to note exactly what they don't like. They always have strong opinions on this and it never fails to help narrow things down before you start the sales process.

Know Your Products

Kleinfeld Bridal has thousands of dresses, yet the consultants are still able to quickly pick out dresses the brides will like that are in their price range. That's because they know their stock and are familiar with the different dress designers.

Drapery workrooms also carry hundreds of fabrics and hardware choices, but by taking the time to study our products, we should be able to expertly steer our clients into the right product for their home and budget. This is true for both the experienced workroom selling a new product and the novice workroom. Look over your product lines, read the literature, organize the price lists, and even call the product suppliers and ask a few questions. Taking a little time to study your sales tools will help you become the expert your clients expect to work with.

A Little Bling Goes A Long Way

It is amazing what a little sparkle can do to jazz up an otherwise boring dress. The bridal consultants often pull out sparkle belts, jazzy pins, and beaded veils to cinch the sale on a dress. Window treatments can have just as much "bling", and adding a beaded tassel fringe, piping, or banding to an otherwise fairly plain fabric can convince your client this is the treatment for them.

continued on page 30

Family and Friends Can Influence Decisions

The hardest tight rope the bridal consultants walk is to please the bride, while handling her family and friends. Relatives and friends often have their own ideas about what looks best on a bride and that does not always mesh with what the bride wants. Most of the time drapery appointments are with just the client, but it is

not unusual for clients to invite her/his friend, mother, sister, significant other, to sit in on the sales call. And everyone has an opinion on what should be done. It is

important to listen to these other voices, because they do influence your client. But try and keep the appointment on track by referring back to the client and making sure her/his voice is the one that is being heard above all the din. Assure that the final decision is one the client is happy with and what they had in mind when they first called you.

Too Many Choices Can Be Overwhelming

The Kleinfeld Bridal store has a back room that is filled with thousands of dresses for brides to choose from. But, brides and their family members are not allowed in the back room. Instead, the consultants bring in two or three dresses at a time for the bride to try on. This keeps the bride from being overwhelmed with too many choices and helps them narrow down their decision to the dresses that will work best for them.

Drapery clients can also get overwhelmed with too many choices. It helps you to narrow down both the design ideas and the fabric choices to help them focus in on what will work best for their windows. If a client is looking for valances, direct them to the valance section of your design idea book. Do not force them to look through 10 pages of panels before they get there. If they want fabrics in the red

family, bring in four or five fabric books with shades of red and help them look through them by picking out certain fabrics to show.

Sometimes You Can Add Something New To The Mix

Every once in a while the bridal consultants bring in a dress that is quite different than what the client originally said they were looking for. This is a

gamble on the part of the sales staff, and it occasionally pays off with a bride that loves the dress. Other times it is a failure and the dress is rejected

before it even makes it onto the bride's body.

If you keep up-to-date with new ideas, you can sometimes throw out an idea that is completely different from what your client had in mind but may work perfectly for their project. This shows your client that you are innovative and an expert who pays attention to what is happening in your field. Your gamble may pay off, and the client may love it. If the client immediately hates the idea, don't push it. Tell them this was just an idea and move on to the next design.

Give Your Opinion If The Client Seems Unsure

Many of the sales staff at Kleinfeld's have years of retail experience and several have been there for more than five years. These are people who know their product and know what looks good on a bride. So if a bride seems unsure of a dress and how it looks on them, they do not hesitate to gently tell them if a dress is or isn't working for them. After all, the consultants are the experts.

Your clients' have also brought you to their home because you are the expert. A gentle nudge in one direction or the other can be just the help your client needs to help them make a decision. So if your client asks you what you think, don't keep

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telling them: "It's up to you; what do you like best?" Give them an opinion; even if they don't follow your advice, it can help them finalize the decision.

KNOW WHAT LOOKS BEST ON WHAT BODY TYPES

If everyone knew what looked best on their bodies, there would be no need for the sales consultants at Kleinfeld Bridal. The brides would walk in, pick the best dress for them, pay, and leave. But, people are unsure of themselves and how they look in certain clothes. Body issues are a huge problem for many women and part of the sales staff's job is to know what looks best on what body type.

People don't have as many issues about their homes as they do their bodies, but they are still emotionally invested in how it looks and what other people think. So it's important for you to understand that people feel their home is a reflection of themselves. Therefore, as the expert in window treatments you should know what works best on what sort of windows and how that treatment works best with the client's home and lifestyle.

Make Your Client Feel Good

Because so many women have body issues, what should be a basic shopping trip can turn into a nightmare of self-doubt and body hating. That's why the bridal consultants go out of their way to make the dress shopping as pleasant an experience as possible for the clients. A bride who feels good about her experience with the consultant and the store is more likely to buy.

The same goes for your drapery clients. If you make the appointment upbeat and fun, the client is going to enjoy themselves and be more likely to buy from you. Work to be friendly and open. Interact with the client's family, children, and pets. Compliment their home and feel free to share personal stories. Selling window treatments is about building relationships with customers and a cranky, uninvolved consultant isn't going to have much success building relationships or selling.

Ask: Is This The Dress?

At the end of a successful bridal consultation at Kleinfeld Bridal, the bride stands on a raised

platform in her chosen dress with family and friends, and the sales consultant asks one important question: "Is this the dress?" A solid "Yes!" erupts from the bride and everyone hugs. Okay, so they may be playing for the cameras here, and your clients are rarely going to shed tears of joy at picking the perfect pair of drapery panels, but the bridal consultants have asked one crucial question. Have you made your final decision? You should also ask your clients the same question. Is this the treatment you want? Is this the right fabric? Is this the perfect finish? If you are up front with the question, write it down, and have the client review it with you. This can help eliminate any second guessing and arguments at the time of the installation.

Experts say too much TV can rot your brain. But, I disagree. After a long day of working and chasing after kids, it can be a relaxing and pleasant experience. And, if you watch the right shows you just might learn a thing or two about how to improve your sales and make more money than before you "wasted" a couple of hours in front of the tube. 🌿



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