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JULY 2012

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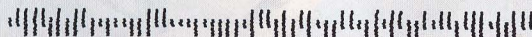
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## The first 20 minutes



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➤ The first 20 minutes with a client, especially a new client, is probably the most important time you can spend with them.

There are lots of things that should happen in that first face-to-face time with the client. However, before I delve into them, allow me to share an experience I recently had that triggered the thought for this article. We needed four outside wall lights and two post lights. We decided to try a relatively new lighting fixture store fairly close to home. We did this in lieu of the “big box” that was even closer. The store was in an industrial park area, but the storefront was appealing and the parking was easy. Remember, this was our first visit to the store.

We entered, did the look to the left and the right like most folks do and walked deeper into the maze of hanging lights, floor and table lamps, and accessory items that filled the space. In the center/rear of the showroom was a large counter. The multitude of vendor books were in a bookcase behind the counter and there was a sales lady standing there talking on the phone. She nodded acknowledgement that she saw us and we kept on walking.

The space was broken out into three rooms. We found outdoor lighting in the last room. After perusing the selection on display and deciding that what we wanted wasn't there, we went back to the counter area.

## Be prepared when that new customer walks through the door.

The sales lady was off the phone doing paperwork. She had completely ignored us and we were the only folks in the store. At this point she asked what we were looking for. She said that what we saw on display was it. But, she had several vendors that sold outdoor lighting and we were welcome to go through their catalogues (without her offering to assist us).

So with her standing behind the counter doing her thing (whatever that was), we browsed through the books, found what we were looking for, wrote down the specs and left. No other words from the sales lady. When we got home, a pretty quick Google search told us where else we might buy the product (not via the Internet) and a phone call later, the order was placed.

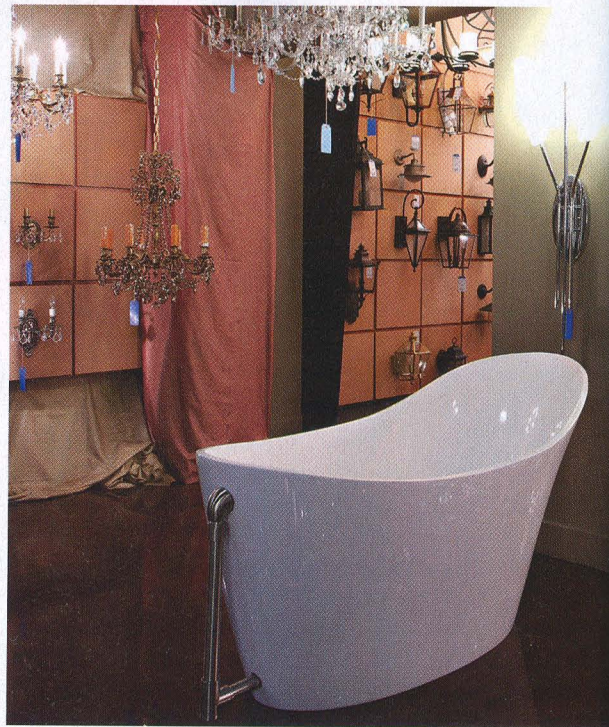


Photo courtesy Tom Taylor/Tom Taylor Photography

I'm sure it was the easiest \$1,000-plus order these folks would get all week.

I'm a pretty loyal guy when it comes to shopping. If someone works to get my business, I do everything I can to give it to them. But, if they're not interested enough to find out who I am, why I'm there and if I'm a viable prospect, then I feel no obligation to “give” them the business.

So here's the deal. The owner of the store had invested a fair amount of money doing the showroom build out, putting product on display and marketing the business. But, it had an employee that either hadn't been trained, wasn't motivated and didn't give a hoot about customer service, or probably all of the above. When friends ask, “Where did you get those great looking fixtures?” what do you think I'll tell them? “Go anywhere but 'X' lighting because their service stinks!”

### Don't be afraid to train

This disappointing experience took me back to the days when we owned our own DPH showroom business. I knew how very important it was to meet and