

Black and White @ White and Black

An African-American sales associate succeeds at a store that serves a mostly white clientele

By Bangi Ofon

My part-time jobs have unintentionally revolved around retail clothing shops like Forever 21. And even though I hardly received any training, I quickly learned the importance of being cordial to unpleasant customers.

I recently started working at White House| Black Market at Montgomery Mall. It is a boutique that offers a unique shopping experience to women, while making them feel beautiful. I was quite relieved when I got the job, as I could no longer deal with preteen girls, with their raging hor-



Photo courtesy Microsoft Office Publisher 2007

mones, who jammed the aisles at Forever 21 on weekends. I was more than ready on to “adult conversations” with mature customers.

My first weeks at the upscale clothing boutique went well: the floor managers were patient with me during my training, giving me detailed information on how to get things done quickly and effectively. I was starting to settle into my new work environment and enjoying the benefits of working for a clothing store whose main consumers were professional women, and the 40% employee discount made it all worthwhile.

The clientele at White House| Black Market are affluent women who spend between \$600 to \$1,000. There is an apparent sense of entitlement among the shoppers when it comes

to dealing with sales associates.

After working for a couple of weeks, I started noticing certain repeated behaviors that I first brushed off, telling myself not to over-react. As a black woman working in a predominantly white store I have learned a couple of things that have made it easier for me to deal with certain customers’ attitudes.:

#1 Always smile even when you are being talked to a certain way; it makes you look professional and makes the customer aware that they are your priority.

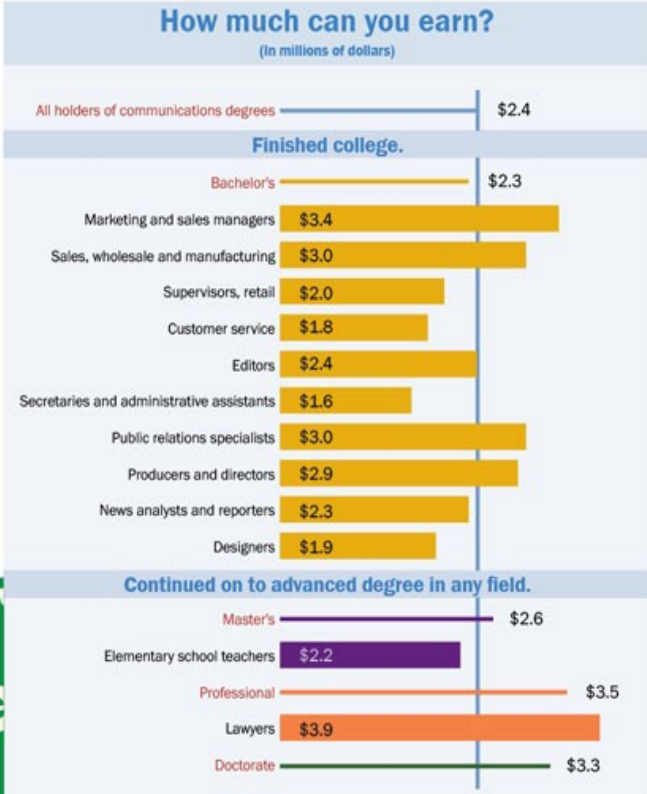
#2 If a customer detects that you have an accent (which I have) and changes their attitude towards you, don’t get offended: tell them your name, how happy you will be to assist them and remind them of the ongoing sales (women love sales regardless of their paycheck) you will notice their eyes suddenly meeting yours.

#3 If a customer complains about the look you chose for them implying your lack of sophistication, don’t be offended. Grab a catalog to show the customer the look. Oddly, women feel confident wearing a look they’ve seen on a model.

#4 When ringing up a customer, always ask them whether they would like to receive a call from you reminding them of upcoming sales, promotions and new arrivals. The customer will feel appreciated and remember the great customer service you provided.

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Educational Attainment, Common Occupations, and Synthetic Work-Life Earnings Estimates



= 25,000 people
Note: Synthetic work-life earnings are created by adding annual earnings between age 25 and 64. For more information on these numbers please see www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/acs/infographics/faqs.html.
Source: 2010 American Community Survey.