



ART MATERIALS

RETAILER

Yes, I *Mind* Waiting

Eight ways to reduce lineup stress for staff and customers

by Jeff Mowatt

How do you let a cashier know that you're in a hurry when you're waiting in line?

- a) look at your watch and shake your head
- b) sigh, huff, and roll your eyes
- c) complain to others in the line
- d) say to the person at the till, "We're in a hurry here!"
- e) all of the above

If you answered positively to any of these options, then you're like most of us who definitely do mind waiting. Lineups are frustrating. They are barriers that prevent customers from fulfilling necessary and often tedious tasks. That means that if you don't manage your lineups properly, you'll lose business due to customer frustration. Not to mention your staff will be stressed out. That's a lose/lose scenario.

Most managers think the best way to manage a lineup is to get the staff to work faster. Often, this only creates worse problems. Consider the impact on your staff of trying to work at full speed. It's impossible to go flat-out without eventual burnout. Morale drops. Turnover increases. Tired employees make more mistakes, which take even more time to fix.

Ditto for the negative impact of working faster on your customers. Only a fool would want tired, aggravated employees interacting with customers. Working faster to get through a lineup cuts short the human interaction that creates customer feelings of loyalty.

In the long term, working faster doesn't work. Instead, we need ways to reduce the stress of lineups for both customers and staff — without working faster. Here are eight.

1. Warn the customer in advance.

Ever been frustrated by the long waiting-room lineup to see a doctor? (I know — stupid question.) Though delays can happen for legitimate medical reasons, some doctors' offices reduce patient frustration by phoning in advance and warning them of the delay.

If your customer calls and says that they plan to come in, suggest the best times for them to drop in to avoid waiting.

2. Acknowledge people entering the line.

Too often, the first time the employee acknowledges the customer is when they get to the front of the line. That means a person who wants to spend money is being deliberately ignored. Lousy strategy. Instead, acknowledge customers with a "Hi there!" or "I'll be with you in just a few minutes!" as they enter the lineup.

3. Organize the line.

Often, people don't mind waiting if they can avoid standing in line and