



SECURING YOUR STORE *with tactics and teamwork*

BY TARA NOLAN

When I was in high school, I worked at an independent candy store in the small town where I grew up. The owner was very involved in the day-to-day operations of the store, scooping ice cream on busy summer afternoons and ringing in Belgian chocolates on the cash register. The pride he took in the store was contagious. I felt especially protective of the candy shop after watching him chase a kid down the street for a roll of fruit pastilles. It made me more vigilant.

Instilling that sense of pride and ownership – and being the owner who is always around – is a tactic that Doryne Appleyard has recently taken in one of her stores. Appleyard and her husband own several businesses including 14 Hallmark card locations and a Buck Or Two dollar store in downtown Winnipeg. In 2010, after recording \$100,000 in shrink at the Buck Or Two location, Appleyard and her husband immediately assessed the situation, changed how the store was run, established new policies and even escalated the issue to the mayor of Winnipeg, the chief of police and the Premier of Manitoba.

To start with, Appleyard let the store manager go, enabling her to have a regular presence in the store and to see for herself what needed to change. “My husband and I felt we couldn’t blame anybody else for the shrink until we knew we had done everything we possibly could to prevent it,” she says.

Not being vigilant, even with staff, can lead to complacency, a lesson Gerri Charles, the Owner/Operator of Champagne & Lace Bridal Centre in Abbotsford, B.C., learned in the fall of 2010. Charles discovered that a staff member was taking store supplies home in her purse. “It shook our staff trust,” she says.

This is why rallying the troops, as they say, is so important. “As Owner-Manager, my active involvement in the day-to-day operations of the business helps with ongoing training, diligence and awareness of potential problems.” As Diane Petryna, Owner of Take A Hike! in Thunder Bay, Ontario, points out, “When we discover that something has been stolen, we use it as a training opportunity and a reminder that we must be more diligent.”

Kill them with kindness

Independent retailers don’t always have the deep pockets that big stores have to implement certain technologies or hire loss prevention experts, but sometimes even the simplest methods can act as an efficient deterrent. “We don’t want to catch

shoplifters, we want to prevent them,” says Appleyard, whose staff has experienced both physical and verbal abuse when confronting shoplifters. She tries to teach her staff that it’s better to be extremely helpful rather than accusatory and suspicious, such as offering a basket if they suspect a product is going to make its way into a customer’s pocket. Another thing she watches for are the customers in the store who are consistently looking at her and making eye contact. “Those people will get the best customer service they’ve ever experienced,” she laughs.

Petryna uses a similar tactic, making potential shoplifters feel so uncomfortable that they want to leave. She’ll stand close to them, asking lots of personal questions and expressing enthusiasm for her latest theft prevention measures. And on occasion she’s had to inform a trustworthy customer that she has to step away for a moment to keep an eye on someone else in the store. “Often our better customers are as protective of our product as we are,” she says.

Hatch a plan

Putting in place set policies also provides store staff with the comfort in knowing what to do when faced with potential thievery. Petryna’s employees use a hand signal that is meant to alert each other of potential wrongdoing in the store. Raif Shoufani, Owner of Sue’s Bed & Bath in Mississauga, Ontario, has a secret word he shares with staff also meant to alert each other of suspicious activities in the store.

For Appleyard, whose store sees a lot of food products disappear, one new policy that she employs involves all chips, drinks and candy going straight to the till at the request of the store attendant. “It gives our staff something to say to the customer that’s not confrontational, but proactive,” she explains.

These type of unifying tactics help staff members work together to minimize problems. “All of the staff work together now as a team to prevent loss,” says Appleyard. “They weren’t doing that before. They have more power working together.”

Display tactics

While it may seem like a no-brainer, arranging merchandise strategically within the store can also really help curb shoplifting. “It is important to design your store and displays so you have clear sight lines,” says Petryna. Shoufani’s store has wide aisles, each viewed with a mirror that can be watched from



the main counter. And in Appleyard's store, everything that is more susceptible to theft is at the till area or visible from the till. A chain at one end of the pop and chip aisle directs customers back to the till area - where staff can then enforce the policy if they have to. When it's busy at Take A Hike!, Petryna will position a person at the entrance whose only task is to greet customers and keep an eye on activities within the store.

To catch a thief

One of the biggest challenges for independent retailers is in understanding what to do if they catch someone shoplifting in their store. Appleyard operates in an area where local law enforcement often take 12 to 14 hours to pick up a shoplifter that has been apprehended by mall security. And, once apprehended that shoplifter is often aware that they'll likely be released soon after. The lack of repercussions felt by shoplifters has led Appleyard to take matters into her own hands. "To me it seems no one wants to address shoplifting," she says. Recently Appleyard sent a letter to the Mayor of Winnipeg, the chief of police and the Premier of Manitoba. By doing so she garnered some local media attention during the most recent Mayoral race.

Appleyard explains that it's very difficult to get changes made to the justice system which would ensure that police treat the issue with more seriousness (though change is on its way - see sidebar). If someone stole \$100,000 all at once it would be front page news, but \$100,000 over the course of a year, one dollar at a time, doesn't often elicit any type of recourse. Another issue that many independent retailers face involves the actual reporting of an incident, she explains, often requiring an employee to miss work hours - something a small store with limited resources can ill afford.

Because of the limited resources that independent retailers

are often operating with to ensure that merchandise is displayed properly and neatly in the store, product inventory is accurately tracked and maintained and that exceptional service is being provided for the customer, it's a definite added challenge to prevent shrink and loss. However, with proactive measures in place, a strategic approach to store layout, and teamwork among staff, loss can be reduced significantly. With this approach in mind, Appleyard's diligence has paid off. She has seen her shrinkage go from \$100,000 to about \$30,000 over the past year.

NEW RIGHTS FOR SHOP OWNERS ON THE WAY

A new bill proposed to parliament by Toronto MP Olivia Chow will see more rights granted to shop owners who attempt to apprehend people stealing from them.

In 2009, David Chen, who owns the Lucky Moose Food Mart in downtown Toronto's Chinatown, was charged (along with two others) after he tied up a man who had stolen from his store. It was revealed in court that Chen was fed up by repeated shoplifting incidents - and by the indifference of police. According to the *National Post*, in October, the judge threw out the charges concluding that, "David Chen tried to fill the void where the justice system failed."

The Citizen's Arrest and Self-Defence Act was put forth to prevent shopkeepers and small business owners from being criminally charged if they are attempting to defend their property after someone commits a crime. Currently, a thief can only be apprehended if he is still holding the merchandise. This new bill, if passed, will allow the shopkeeper to arrest a suspect without a warrant if they find them committing an offence on their property.