



# SEPTEMBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

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## BRIGHT IDEAS:

### Boise, ID

The Main Mama question comes from Nancy: "Help! We are having growing pains! How can we possible keep up with trade-ins and processing when the season is at the peak? (They had record 83 trades in one day) The short answer is you can't -- especially during the first cold or warm spell of each season. The long answer is that in order to get through high season, we recently tried "short cuts" that enabled us to first serve trade-in customers and customers ready to check out (our highest priority) and then worry about processing.

Naturally the racks get thin fast if you don't keep up on processing, so just know there is going to be plenty to do during high season. I thought hard about how we handle high season at our store, and Zoe called most of you to determine how you handle high season at your store.

First, every high season I try to add extra help to the store on a "temporary" basis. In our size store I will add three "temporary" people for three-week basis and let them know this is our busy season -- sort of like the busy season other retail stores have during Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year holidays. In a small store this might involve one to two extra people. They mainly process items. The amount they can get out on the floor more than pays for the extra payroll. In a large store we often keep the best employee of the three temporary hires. Either we phase out those temporary and other hires that haven't been reliable, or they're not working well with other employees, or they phase themselves out (because they're going back to school, having a baby, getting married, or just moving on to a higher paying job).

Second, we only clothes pin the "odd ball" items where there might be some question about where it falls in the price chart. This allows us to move quickly through a trade-in and on to the next. Less experienced workers "pre-sort" trade-ins to the best of their ability. They lay trade-in clothing flat on the counter with the sign-in card on top of the main pile. They put the "out of season" pile right next to the pile that is ready for the "Pricer" to give a final inspection for quality and a quick add up. The "Pricer" follows the price chart consistently and pins only items that involve some judgment.

Think assembly line. Less experienced workers take finished piles over to the tagging table where an inexperienced worker tags the items right in the stack. That same stack is moved to an experienced person that knows the price chart, whips the sizes and prices on the ready pile. That pile is then hung and put out by a less experienced person. Remember, with today's fabrics we haven't found that steaming adds to the bottom line of the store. Also, in either a small or a large store the less experienced workers may be doing more than one of these jobs. Take as much work as you can off the "Pricer" so they can serve the trade-in customer quickly.

Have a less experienced person run the register and call for help if the line gets too long. Use short cuts on the keyboard to speed up the checkout process (K2=\$2.99, B4=\$4.99, etc). Have a second person "call" prices, take merchandise off hangers and bag the purchase when the register is extra busy.

Still not caught up? I know we aren't! So we only bag clothes for later processing during the craziest of times. We currently have one small dressing room piled high with unprocessed clothing bags. I take home bags during high season and tag and price them while I watch movies or T.V. We occasionally have night or Sunday work parties to fatten up the racks (usually not more than one per quarter). I know we'll pay for this later, but we are not tagging our out-of-season clothes during this rushed time. The out-of-season clothes are getting bagged in white tall kitchen bags that are marked "summer-to be tagged and priced". This is the first year in about 20 that I've done that, but I know from experience that December, January, and February will be slower, so we will just have to deal with it then.

**Tempted to severely limit what people bring in or when they bring it in for your convenience rather than theirs? DON'T BE! Those who have tried to do that only end up losing customers, merchandise to sell to customers, and, ultimately, their money or their store. Those who put some "Hustle in their Bustle" make lots of money... Good example-Nancy and Val just hit a record \$79K in their Boise store and \$40K in their smaller store in Nampa. So, Scotty, set your engines to WARP speed, get rid of those who are not working out as employees, set a fast but friendly pace and go, go, go.**

***Take care of your customers, because in the long run they are the ones who take care of you.***