

DEALING WITH PROTESTERS WITHOUT EMOTION

If you have protesters at your store, the best advice is to remain calm. Demonstrating is typically a dull affair. This is especially true if the protesters are working for the minimum wage. Accordingly, it is in your best interest to refrain from stoking the protesters' fire.

There is no point to "winning" a verbal debate with protesters. In fact, you will only make their time more interesting and enjoyable if you lose your temper. If the demonstration is being conducted in a legal manner, business as usual should be the order of the day.

Management, as well as store employees, will likely have strong feelings about the presence of protesters at the store and about the fairness of the protests. Giving vent to expressions of anger, however, will only show them that someone is paying attention to them.

It is important to keep in mind that the protest is not against you or your store. Regardless of what the demonstrators are saying, the protests are actually geared toward a broader audience. Therefore, any statements you wish to direct at protesters will have no effect on their aims or presence.

From their perspective, the objective is to generate a highly charged and emotional situation. Your conduct of business as normal tells the protesters that what they are doing ultimately doesn't matter, and that is typically the strongest message you can send.

A few other comments about the protests:

- The protesters generally have video resources present to record pictures of the demonstration and to record any newsworthy event.
- Protesters will often enlist the support of employees behind the counter in an effort to show the world that workers are joining their cause in real time.
- Keep in mind that to the extent that your employees choose to do so, they are actually protected by federal law from discipline or discharge.
- Under limited circumstances, they may be treated as strikers and possibly even "permanently replaced," but that should not be done without the advice of counsel.
- Newsworthy events are important to the demonstrators because they want to get on the evening news to obtain wider dissemination of their campaign.
- Demonstrators may attempt to provoke a reaction they can videotape, which will make the demonstration more unique, interesting or newsworthy. **NEWSWORTHY IS NOT WHAT THE STORE WANTS OR NEEDS.**
- Demonstrations typically involve women and children as a part of their protest activities to increase public empathy.
- Demonstrators have been known to stage incidents – such as a demonstrator pretending to be hit by a vehicle -- in order to draw media attention.

The business-as-usual approach is most favorable to the store because it causes the fewest possible reactions in the demonstrators and the public.

None of this is necessarily easy to carry out, but a business-like approach by all parts of the store team will best prevent your store's protest from becoming a feature story on the 10 O'clock News, or from going "viral" as part of a "facebook moment."