

# Customer Service Training Guide

Updated July 29, 2025

## Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to help volunteers provide outstanding customer service while honoring Smart's mission of providing employment opportunities to adults with intellectual disabilities by selling reused art + craft supplies at low cost for the people of Middle Tennessee to create with.

As a volunteer, you are a vital part of making our space welcoming, accessible, and joyful for every guest. This guide will walk you through customer service basics, provide helpful examples, and reinforce the unique spirit of Smart.

## Our Mission in Action

Smart Art + Craft Supplies is more than a store—it's a space that:

- Makes crafting affordable and accessible for all.
- Diverts usable supplies from landfills.
- Provides vocational training and paid employment for adults with intellectual disabilities.
- Fosters a sense of community, creativity, and dignity.

Remember, we're not just helping someone find the right yarn—we're supporting a mission of inclusion and empowerment. We serve that mission best by putting our best foot forward.

## 1. Welcome Every Customer

Your friendly greeting sets the tone for every visit!

Best Practices:

- Smile and make eye contact.
- Greet every guest within 30 seconds of them entering.
- Use a friendly, open tone:  
*"Hi there! Welcome to Smart."*

Pro Tips:

- For returning customers, try to remember names, previous purchases, or projects.

- If someone looks unsure or overwhelmed, offer gentle guidance:  
*"Is this your first time here?"* and give the customer the "lay of the land."
- Use open ended questions like *"What are you looking for?"* that prompt conversation, rather than yes or no questions such as *"Can I help you find anything?"* that kill the conversation with a one-word response.

## 2. Understanding the Store Layout & Inventory

Because our inventory is based on donations, it changes often. Volunteers should familiarize themselves with general sections (beads, paints, yarn, scrapbooking, tools, etc.) and any current promotions.

Helpful Info to Share:

- Items are grouped by type, not brand.
- New donations are put out regularly—so customers should check back often!
- Signage may indicate special events (e.g., sales, community projects, classes, etc.)

If a customer asks where to find an item, try to show them with your feet. That is, walk with them to the correct bin. Try to avoid just pointing.

## 3. Supporting Inclusive Employment

Some of your coworkers are individuals with intellectual disabilities. Volunteers should model inclusive, respectful behavior for shoppers.

Best Practices:

- Treat all team members with respect, patience, and encouragement.
- Never speak about someone as if they're not present.
- Offer help or guidance when asked—but avoid assuming someone can't do a task.

If a guest has questions about our mission or supported employment, you can say:

*"Yes! All proceeds go toward programs that support adults with intellectual disabilities through job training and paid work opportunities—many of our team members are part of that program."*

## 4. Answering Common Customer Questions

Question	Suggested Answer
<i>Where do your supplies come from?</i>	<i>"Everything is donated by community members and businesses—we're a creative reuse center!"</i>

<i>Can I donate items?</i>	"Absolutely! We accept donations during store hours. I can show you a list of what we do and don't accept."
<i>Do you carry X?</i>	Before answering this one, check the area on the sales floor where the item should be. If it's not there, ask a staff member if we might have it somewhere in processing.  If we don't have it: "We don't have any in stock right now, but check back with us! Because everything we sell is donated, our inventory is always changing!"
<i>Do you have any locations in other cities?</i>	"This is the only Smart location, but there are similar stores all over the country. There are some great resources online to find them, just look for creative reuse centers."
<i>Where does the money go?</i>	"All proceeds support vocational training and paid work for adults with intellectual disabilities right here in Nashville."
<i>I know someone with IDD. Can they work here?</i>	"We are always looking for volunteers to join our team. Check out the volunteer page on our website. If you have any further questions, you can reach out to our Head of Operations, Kyle." Kyle's business cards are always available at checkout for anyone who needs them.

## 5. Handling Challenges with Kindness

Sometimes customers may be confused, frustrated, or unaware of our policies. Here's how to respond with calm professionalism.

### Situational Tips:

- If a customer becomes upset:  
Stay calm and polite.  
*"I hear your concern—let me see what I can do to help or find someone who can."*
- If someone tries to haggle or negotiate prices:  
*"Thanks for asking! Since this is a nonprofit store and prices are already deeply discounted, we're not able to offer further markdowns."*  
If they persist, find a manager.
- If you're unsure how to help:  
Never guess—ask a staff member or store lead.  
*"Let me grab someone who can help you with that!"*

## 6. Checking Out & Farewell

Even if you're not running the register, the checkout area is a chance to end the experience on a high note! For details on running the register, please refer to the [Cash Register Training Guide](#).

Using the Bell:

- If there are 3 customers in line, ring the bell once for backup.
- For complaints, invoices or troubleshooting, ring the bell twice for a manager.

Tips:

- Thank customers for supporting the mission.
- Remind them to check back for new items or upcoming events.
- Ask if they need help taking items to their car—remember carts can't leave the store!

Bounce Backs:

- The post card at the register promoting the next sale or event is known as a bounce back. A bounce back is our opportunity to invite the customer to the sale and explain the sale concept. Bounce backs need to be handed to each customer by the cashier.

## 7. Assisting with Donations

Donations are the heart of Smart's mission. Every paintbrush, bead, or bolt of fabric someone brings in helps support creativity, sustainability, and inclusive employment. Providing excellent service during donation drop-offs ensures donors feel appreciated and encourages them to give again.

When Someone Arrives with a Donation

If a customer mentions they're dropping off donations or you see someone unloading items outside, here's what to do:

Step-by-Step:

1. Greet the Donor with a Smile

*"Hi! Are you dropping off donations? Thank you for supporting Smart!"*

2. Offer to Bring a Cart

We have three carts volunteers can use to assist with unloading donations. Let the donor know you're happy to help, especially if they have heavy or bulky items.

*"Let me grab a cart and help you bring those in—it'll just take a second."*

### 3. Guide Them to the Donation Shelves

Donations go on the shelves just inside the front door. Kindly guide or point donors in that direction.

*"We place all incoming donations right here by the entrance—feel free to set things on the shelves, or I can help unload directly."*

### 4. Say Thank You (Sincerely!)

A warm thank-you goes a long way. Donors are doing something generous, and your gratitude reinforces their impact.

*"Thanks so much for thinking of Smart. Your donation really helps us keep supplies affordable and support our community programs!"*

## Important Reminders

- Never leave donors waiting outside if you see them with boxes or bags.
- Ask for help if needed—some donations are heavy, and we have plenty of people around to team up.
- If someone asks for a donation receipt, direct them to the iPad just to the right of the donation shelves. Let the donor know it may take up to two weeks to receive an email.

## 8. Volunteer-Specific Notes

- Ask Questions: You're not expected to know everything! Staff are happy to help.
- Breaks: Misery is optional! Take a break if needed. This should be a fun, positive experience.
- Grab a snack and stay hydrated: In the breakroom, you'll often find snacks, soft drinks, and water. Please help yourself to one snack and one soft drink per shift, and as much water as you like!

## 9. Representing Smart in the Community

Whether you're helping in-store, at an event, or from home, remember:

- You represent an organization rooted in dignity, accessibility, and joy.
- Your kindness and effort help build a more creative, inclusive world, one interaction at a time.
- New connections lead to more donors, more volunteers, and more customers.

## Final Thought

At Smart Art + Craft Supplies, we believe in the power of art to connect people and the importance of creating a world where everyone belongs. Let's make every visitor feel seen, inspired, and welcomed! We are a unique retail experience and you are the key to that.

**SMART**  
ART+CRAFT SUPPLIES