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[HAWAII AT WORK]



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Mia Kuromaru, 19 months, and her mother, Eriko, get samples of Island Princess candy popcorn from Marjory Merrill at the Murakai store on Dillingham Boulevard.

Demo specialist handles the sweetest science

As a demo specialist for Island Princess, I handle a good part of the in-store retail demonstrations for this gourmet macadamia and chocolate company. You will find me at most of the major retail outlets that carry Island Princess products.

My job sounds simple -- handing out samples, telling people about our Mele Macs, Macadamia Popcorn Crunch

Marjory Merrill

and other products -- but I am dedicated to the company and truly put my heart into spreading the word about its products. I've been told that I do my job well; in fact, the company nicknamed me "The Queen of Demos," which I take as a well-earned compliment.

Title: Demo specialist

Company: Island Princess

Philosophy: "The 'science of sampling' cannot be taught. It comes from understanding customers and having an intuition about what works best in various situations."

I decided long ago that one has to believe in a company to be able to successfully represent it and sell its products. My background was in the restaurant business, so I understand food-related enterprises. But what I understand best is how to relate with people.

Most useful to demo specialists are a keen memory and a sense of humor. I am able to remember faces well, so when people come back after sampling, I recall exactly what they tasted. It surprises people, and they are delighted to find that I remember them.

It is also important to engage your potential customer and make them feel you are interested in more than just selling something. This is where my gift with small talk comes in handy. A successful demo specialist must have a thorough knowledge of the entire product line so you can answer any questions about the products and how they are made.

Many salespeople rely on being assertive, but, particularly in Hawaii, being overly assertive is the wrong approach. I am able to make people feel at ease and comfortable. I also know they will be 100 percent satisfied with Island Princess's quality products, and selling a great product is an advantage that makes my job much more easy and enjoyable.

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