

Colorado's highs burn Lowe's

Posted by Christine Tatum in Marijuana, Public Policy

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Yesterday, the checkout line at my favorite Lowe's Home Improvement store was so long that I watched an obviously frustrated man walk away from a shopping cart that easily contained what would have been a \$250 purchase.

The people in front of me and behind me were steamed, too. "The problem isn't just here in the garden center," one woman said. "The whole store is understaffed."

She was right — but I wasn't going to give up my spot in that line to wander inside the main store building to find a manager to address the situation. So, I held my ground, whipped out my mobile phone and called Lowe's toll-free, customer-service number (thanks, Lowe's, for posting that right over the register) to relay the problem — and what I'd just witnessed in terms of lost business.

What I ultimately learned from that conversation is that Lowe's corporate executives should have a hard discussion with Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper and economic-development offices in the cities where their stores operate in this state. **Why? Because Lowe's doesn't want to hire people who can't pass drug tests — and here in Cannabis, er, Colorful Colorado, the company is greeted with too many job applicants who test positive for THC, the active ingredient in marijuana.**

Wonder of wonders, Lowe's doesn't want people acutely or sub-acutely under the influence of marijuana operating forklifts, using circular saws, cutting ceramic tiles, driving company trucks — or cleaning its toilets. And no, the company isn't interested in lowering its hiring standards, either, said Amy, the friendly and always-approachable manager at my favorite Lowe's store.

Within minutes of the customer-service center alerting her of my call, Amy was on the line with me to apologize. I assured her that I wasn't at all angry. Instead, my call was motivated by a love of the place. It was by working for Lowe's that my younger brother picked up a lot of the skills that eventually helped him open his own residential remodeling company. I have dear friends who work for Lowe's. All my son wanted to do for his 4th birthday was invite a dozen of his

best buddies to Lowe's to build wooden race cars during one of the company's Saturday build-it workshops for kids. It's a longstanding joke in my family that we should own shares of the company given how many times my father visits his favorite Lowe's store every week. Dr. T, who serves in the U.S. Army, really appreciates Lowe's stated appreciation — and discounts — for those in the armed services.

So, call me crazy, but I'm actually protective of the company and its brand.

“We're trying to find the best people to hire, and it's really hard these days,” Amy the manager told me.

“Why do you think it's so difficult?” I asked.

“Because hardly anybody passes a drug test,” she quickly replied. **“It's a real problem.”**

When I probed a little more, I learned that marijuana use is the chief reason for the applicants' failed test results — and by a long shot.

Perhaps Lowe's is painfully aware that marijuana isn't like alcohol in all sorts of ways vital to workforce readiness. Maybe its executive ranks know how tough it is to pinpoint a marijuana user's level of impairment. Maybe the company is also versed in studies the world over showing the risk of a traffic accident significantly increases when a person has even 1 ng/ml THC in his or her system.

However, one thing is certain: Lowe's isn't the only Colorado employer struggling to find drug-free workers to fill decent jobs. Conspire!, a drug-testing company based in Colorado Springs, reports that THC-positive, workplace drug tests it has administered in that city have increased 30 percent since the start of 2013.

So, I get it: Lowe's, which stands by the slogan “Never stop improving,” faces a dilemma — and one that IS affecting its shoppers. I'm willing to wait a little longer in line because I like the company so much — but I suspect I'm an exception, not the rule.

And as a longstanding and loyal customer, I certainly don't want Lowe's to lower its hiring standards — or even feel pressured to do so.

Christine Tatum is an award-winning journalist who just planted her first back-yard garden thanks to the encouragement and help she received from all of the kind and knowledgeable people who work for her favorite Lowe's store in Aurora, Colo. She is not growing marijuana.

<http://drthurstone.com/lowes-careers-in-colorado/>