

## Who Are These Shoplifters?

**The Professional Shoplifter** is in the minority - about 15% - but easily matches the amateur in dollar amounts stolen. Pros are more likely to go for small expensive items that can be quickly resold. They are so sophisticated that usually only your monthly inventory shows you've been had. These criminals plan their thefts and will use many "tricks of the trade" to distract employees and conceal merchandise.

1. **Hide it in the clothes.** Be wary of loose fitting clothing, out-of-season coats and jackets, fake casts or slings, tight or improper fitting clothes.
2. **Hide it in another package.** "Booster" boxes, gift boxes, store bags, large purses, newspapers, or books can all be used to conceal items. A policy of checking packages/ bags at the door and sealing all packages after purchase will help eliminate this problem.
3. **Price tag switch.** Close observation and a knowledgeable employee can catch these tricksters.
4. **Create a diversion.** Any disturbance either by one or more persons should be a tip to employees that a crime is being committed. Don't hesitate to call for assistance or security if necessary.
5. **Hide and seek.** Thieves working in groups or pairs will hide items under counters and in dressing rooms for pick up later by an accomplice.
6. **Phoney refund.** All items returned for a refund should be accompanied by a receipt, and don't be afraid to ask for identification from the person.

**The Amateur Shoplifter** represents the largest group of shoplifters. Teenagers from middle-income families make up the majority of this group. They often steal for kicks, to impress their friends, or to "beat the system." Older shoplifters often justify their crime as an attempt to balance or supplement their budgets. Amateurs steal impulsively. Any block you throw in their way is likely to stop this kind of thief.

**The Career Criminal** has the most potential to be dangerous. Drug addicts, vagrants, the unemployed, or other persons in deep financial despair are found in this group. Use caution in trying to detain this type of person. They may offer violent physical resistance or may even have a weapon. They use the grab and run technique in many cases and do not try to conceal the crime.

**A Kleptomaniac** steals because of a psychological compulsion. This type of shoplifting is rare. Many kleptomaniacs are very bold and subconsciously want to be caught.

*The most important thing to watch for is the person who is continuously on the alert or defensive and refuses service repeatedly. Keep an eye on customers who don't seem interested in articles they have asked about, who appear unduly nervous or who appear to be waiting for something to happen.*

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**PREVENT  
SHOPLIFTING**

# Make it Hard on the Shoplifter

**Proper design** of your store is essential in preventing this crime. The way you display merchandise can reduce the opportunity for theft.

- ❖ Avoid narrow, cluttered aisles.
- ❖ Arrange counters and displays so that merchandise is in full view of employees.
- ❖ Keep racks and counters low so employees can see customers at all times.
- ❖ Keep expensive items away from entrances.
- ❖ Easily removable items should be in locked cases whenever possible.
- ❖ Alternate hanger directions on racks to avoid “grab and run” losses.
- ❖ Locate mirrors so that several sections of the store can be seen at one glance.
- ❖ Place a cash register in a location that provides employees with a view of the store.
- ❖ Consider alarms on little-used or hard-to see doors.
- ❖ Make sure employees follow strict dressing room procedures, limit the number of items taken in at one time, return unpurchased items to racks, and place dressing room entrance in clear view of employees.
- ❖ Post warning signs that you are on guard and will prosecute shoplifters. Honest customers will appreciate this because they realize that shoplifting is costing them money too!

**Divide** your store into sections and designate areas to employees. Develop a warning system so employees can be alerted when the presence of a thief is suspected.

**Courtesy and attention** are good for business but bad for the shoplifter.

## Have clerks greet each person.

The phrase “May I help you, please?” is a nice hello for paying customers and a warning to the shoplifter. Make good eye contact with customers and offer assistance in selection of correct size and colors. If possible, carry selected merchandise to dressing rooms and register for the customer. If a customer turns down your assistance but remains in the store, periodically re-offer your assistance.

## To assist you in prosecuting the shoplifter, follow this checklist:

1. Be courteous and have another employee accompany you and the shoplifter to a private area of the store.
2. CALL THE SHERIFF’S OFFICE IMMEDIATELY!
3. Keep your notes in detail on the incident and shoplifter.
4. Reclaim everything that was stolen along with any receipts, boxes, or tools used to commit the crime and hold for the responding deputy.
5. Do an inventory of all stolen items with the deputy, sign and keep a copy for court use.
6. Get all witnesses together for written statements for the deputy.
7. Before you appear in court, review the police report and your earlier statement in order to refresh your memory.

**Alert, well-trained employees are your #1 defense against shoplifting!**

# YOU AND THE LAW

## Florida State Statute F.S.S. 812.05

Allows a merchant with “probable cause” to detain a person “in a reasonable manner for a reasonable length of time” if he believes merchandise has been unlawfully taken. You or your employee must observe this act yourself and be reasonably sure the individual has merchandise in his/her possession for which there is no intent to pay.

## Hearsay is NOT probable cause!

The clerk must witness the theft of merchandise or have a customer/witness who is willing to testify in court.

The law protects you/your employee from false arrest provided you show probable cause for your actions. It also spells out penalties for an individual who resists your efforts to detain him/her and is subsequently found to be guilty of the theft.

## Florida State Statute F.S.S. 812.035

Allows a merchant to take civil actions against parents for willful destruction or theft of property by minors. This law provides for recovery against parents of a minor for theft.