

I have 10 years' experience as a superintendent and two years' experience as an equipment sales rep. The purpose of this article is to relate some of my experiences as a sales rep in hopes that this will increase understanding among the two

groups. Following are a number of the questions most commonly asked of me while I called on the hundreds of golf courses in southeast Florida.

"Do you miss being a golf course superintendent and, if so, what do you miss about it?"

I always thought the implication of this question was that I had left the industry. I never felt like I had left the golf course maintenance industry, although there were those who were disappointed to lose me as an "A" member.

The answer to the question was yes, even though at the time I had no intention of going back. Interaction with the crew was what I missed most. Training and educating are primary objectives of the superintendent's position, and I very much enjoyed that part of the job.

"How does it feel to not have all the pressure?"

When I was asked this I thought to myself, "What are you talking about?"

There is a tremendous amount of pressure in sales. It is amazing to me how the professional sales reps are so good at masking the effects of this pressure.

Superintendents and other decision makers do not see it and this is truly a tribute to how well these sales reps manage their own stress. Salespeople are expected to micro-manage their time to the minute but always come across as if you are the only customer on the planet.

Salespeople must produce sales every day. They can never allow themselves to be down or tell their customer what they really think about their decision to purchase a tractor for \$300 less from a dealer who could not care less about the golf industry!

In addition, you must address any problem situation that may occur while you are making sales. I was responsible for seeing to it that a very considerable percentage of the golf courses in south Florida were being mowed on a daily basis.

There is pressure from the principals in the distributorship, from the superintendents, the mechanics, the manufacturer's reps, and that guy who cut you off in traffic. Is there no pressure in sales?

Consider the following sales formula:

Production minus Sales = Scrap

"What can you do to help me do a better job?"

The salespeople who call on you are really your employees. They should be viewed as another resource who supports your efforts just like any other member of your crew.

Would you ask your assistant what he or she could do to help you do your job better?

I think a better question would be, "What can I do to help you do a better job?" I have some thoughts on this.

1) Be honest with your salespeople. Telling someone that you do not intend to do business with them this time is not pleasant. But tell them, tell them why, and tell them in a timely manner.

2) Give your salespeople good information. It is their job to find out what you are buying and when you are buying it. They also need to know what products you favor and why and if there is anything about these products you would like to see improved. This information will allow your salespeople to present the products that best fit your application. Sometimes getting this information is like pulling teeth. I am not sure what negative consequences could occur by

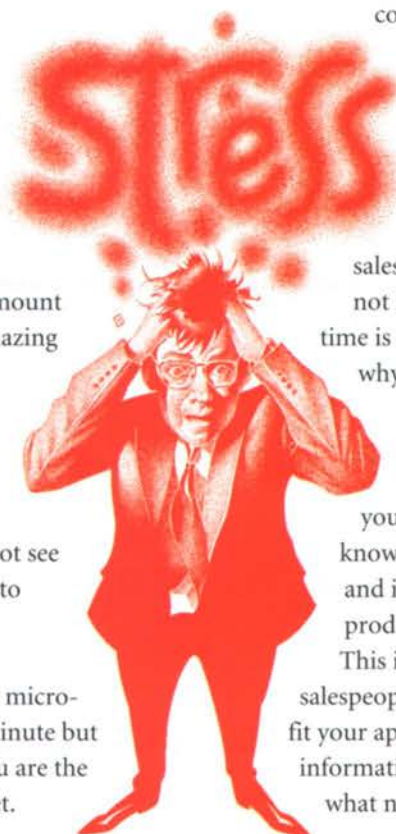
Do you miss being a superintendent?

Notes from a superintendent turned salesrep turned superintendent

Superintendent's Journal



Scott Wahlin, CGCS Longboat Key Club



providing this information; I cannot think of any.

3) Do not abuse demonstration equipment or demonstration policies. All of the manufacturers make excellent equipment. How long should it really take to determine whether a piece of equipment is best suited for your application?

Take as long as you need, but do not run up a lot of unnecessary hours or abuse the equipment. Internal damage resulting from misuse may not be apparent to the dealer or the future purchaser — a fellow superintendent.

4) I would like to make a note here regarding good sales tactics versus poor ones. When I called on a superintendent, I had three areas I wanted to discuss — my commitment to the industry, my company's commitment, and my products.

I never wanted to take valuable time to discuss shortfalls in my competition.

Every sales rep can do a very effective job of disparaging the competition. Chances are they know their competition as well as the people working there. Sales reps who resort to this should be viewed as weak and not worthy of your business.

5) I used to receive a newsletter that was published by one of the other manufacturers. There was an article in one of these that stated, "All things being equal, people will still do business with their friends."

The next time you think you are having your time wasted by a sales rep making small talk, consider this statement. It is the sales rep's job to maximize sales. If making friendships among clients will accomplish this, then that is what must be done.

If we all make sure we are basing our purchasing decisions on value and what is best for our clubs, and not personal relationships, both sales reps and

superintendents could use their time more wisely.

"You should sell your equipment for cost because you make so much money on parts."

This is the capitalist free market system of American we're talking about here. If there was so much money to be made distributing golf course equipment, investors would be tripping over each other to get into the business. Certainly there is a profit to be made, but it is an honest profit.

No one is getting rich overnight doing this.

There is a minimum amount of profit that must be made in order to justify the risks associated with doing business. It is my impression that most distributorships operate very close to this minimum profit margin.

It is also my impression that if the profit margin was to fall below this minimum, the owners would be better

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“How difficult was it to make the transition from superintendent to sales?”

There are many similarities between these two positions.

Most superintendents are excellent salespeople and they do not know it. How do you get projects and budgets approved? You sell them to the decision makers.

How did you get your position in the first place? You sold yourself and what you had to offer.

I believe in order to be a good superintendent you must have all the attributes and skills necessary to be a good salesperson. Preparation for budget presentations and sales proposal presentations are practically the same.

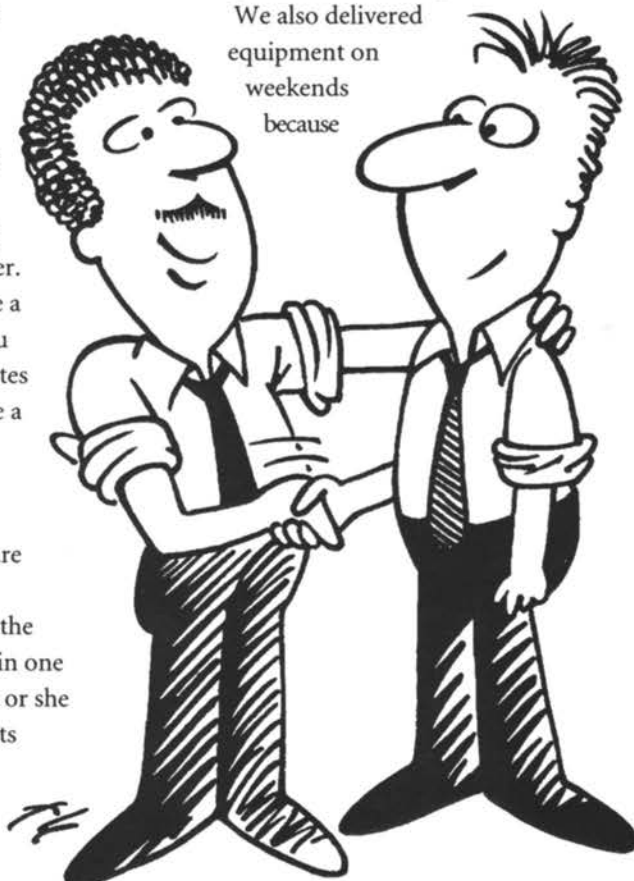
One difference is that the salesperson is an expert in one facet of the industry. He or she can focus on the products they sell and the competition's as well. The superintendent

must manage all of the different facets and cannot focus too long on any one area.

“What's it like to take weekends off?”

There are many salespeople who work weekends. We did many demonstrations on weekends because it was the only time we could free up the piece of equipment and the superintendent was agreeable.

We also delivered equipment on weekends because



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the superintendents were desperate to receive it. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, salespeople must micro-manage their time.

If decision makers are at work, the sales rep needs to be out calling on them. Weekends and evenings are the only time most salespeople can do planning and other paperwork, and there is much of that.

I like to tell my assistants that they cannot know what it is like to be a superintendent until they have held the position. Those who went on to accept head jobs later agreed.

I feel the same is true for sales

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positions. I believe most superintendents feel they have some idea of what it must be like to be in sales. I do not believe they do.

I believe salespeople work much longer and harder than most superintendents realize. I found the people in the sales arena to be highly



trained, devoted professionals. It is a position that keeps you up at night, considering how you might best serve

the customer and thus get an edge on your competition.

I found that the best superintendents treated their salespeople like professionals, and this is the way it should be.

Author's Note: Yes, I'm a superintendent again. I enjoyed the sales

position I had very much. But, like any new opportunity that comes along there are risks and rewards.

This one wasn't meant to be. The Wahlin family is now settled in to a new location on the West Coast. Longboat Key.

By the way, sales reps are welcome!

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