Enthusiasm for Members, Products Is Best Sales Standby

By JOHN CAULKINS
Sales rep, PGA Golf Equipment Co.

I've seen the pro merchandising picture from both sides of the counter — as an assistant pro for four years and as a sales rep for the last two.

I like to think that I was a fairly competent merchandiser when I was working in a shop. But there is nothing like working as a sales rep and traveling around a little to show you where you may have been deficient when you were working on the inside. You see yourself and your shortcomings reflected in many small ways in many of the pros and assistants you talk to.

Generally, in its members and players, the pro shop staff is dealing with the most congenial group of people there is to be found. When these people come to a course they either have pushed aside their cares for the day, or they are trying to. If they ever are in a buying mood, this is the time for it. Congeniality, a little enthusiasm in the greeting the pro or his assistant gives them, may be all that's necessary to set them off.

You Start with An Advantage

As for merchandise, the pro staff should work up real enthusiasm for it? If it isn’t the best money can buy, it’s awfully close to it. The competition doesn’t have anything to equal it from quality and price standpoints, but it's up to the pro and his assistants to sell and keep selling these points. It takes enthusiasm, among other things, to do this.

I have stood off to the side many times in making my rounds and watched the people in the shops greet golfers as they come in. At the more successful places, members are treated as if the shop employees are genuinely glad to see them.
At other spots, where business perhaps is just fair, the greetings usually are no more than perfunctory. How can anyone succeed in business when his attitude is cold or indifferent?

**Old Fashioned Handshake**

What’s wrong with the old fashioned handshake in greeting golfers you haven’t seen for a week or so. Or, warm and cordial treatment of the women players? Every sale you make starts the moment that golfer comes in the door of the shop. Whether you sell more than the customer actually intends to buy may depend on the way you greet him. Have you ever stopped to speculate on the sales you may have missed because you may have been indifferent to members when they came into your shop?

There are a few other things that come under the heading of “welcoming the member” that I think the pro and his employees should keep in mind. Every time a member brings a guest to the club to play, there is nothing wrong in assuming that the guest may be the member’s boss. So, why not go out of your way in being just a little more cordial than ordinarily to both of these people? What it amounts to is “putting it on” a little for the benefit of the member. It doesn’t cost you anything to do it and, if you have to look upon these gracious acts with a mercenary motive in the back of your mind, remember it may eventually do you some good.

**Degree of Familiarity**

I think that every pro and his assistants should determine as quickly as possible the degree of familiarity that should be used in greeting members. Some men don’t want to be called Mr.; others practically insist on it. It’s up to you to separate the rather austere people from those who are a little more down to earth. As for women players, I feel that you are wise to avoid first-name calling if they are married; and most single girls certainly resent being referred to as “Miss”.

It’s rather surprising that some pros avoid playing with the poor golfers at their clubs. This attitude even extends to the giving of lessons. There are few in the fraternity who feel that because they can belt the ball 250 yards and score in the low ‘70s they shouldn’t have to be burdened with teaching or playing with a member who shoots above 90. This attitude doesn’t make sense. Most mem-
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bers want to play with their pro. The high handicap player surely is the one who needs help, and usually the big lesson revenue source is among the members who don’t play very well. In addition, many persons who play poorly are partly victimized by ill-fitted clubs that usually weren’t bought in a pro shop. The pro has a potentially big new club market among these people if he has enough patience and vision to develop it. I’m certainly not uttering any words of wisdom when I say that if you put enough enthusiasm and dedication into your teaching of the not-so-gifted golfer and enable him to cut three or four strokes off his score, you’ve not only made a friend but you’ve won a customer.

The last year I was working as an assistant, a threesome invited me to play nine holes with them one dead afternoon. None of these people was a very good golfer, but I think we all got a good deal of enjoyment out of the round. I know I did because I sold one of the players a set of top grade irons, and another signed up for a series of lessons.

Selling clubs, incidentally, isn’t exactly a patented thing. When I was working in a pro shop, I used to specialize in this department. I became resigned to the fact that it is sometimes difficult to make a club sale stick. “Returns” have to be expected because new clubs very often don’t feel quite right to the buyer because he has been using his old clubs so long. I learned that you can’t allow yourself to become discouraged by the “returns”. If a person goes so far as to take a set of clubs out, you can be sure he is definitely in the market. From then on it takes persistence, as well as patience, to make the sale final. And, you’re no better than an average salesman if, after selling a member a set of irons, you don’t try to get him to invest in a set of woods.

In fact, you should never be content to sell just one item, regardless of what it is. There is always something that matches or accompanies it. Just look around your pro shop and make a list of the things that can or should be sold in pairs. It’s amazing the combinations that can be worked out.

As for enthusiasm for the merchandise that is sold in the pro shop, it all stems from how well the pro and his staff know the goods which they are handling, and how adequately it is stocked.

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**Ohio Turf Meeting**

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