

by CHUCK CUMMING

# The Profit Pro Shop

## WILL THERE BE A GOLF PROFESSIONAL?

I recently returned from the West Coast where I had the opportunity to visit with golf professionals in several different levels of shops, from the country club shop to the municipal golf course operator to the professional who runs a downtown pro shop. Interestingly, in each case the professional was concerned about his particular operation. The concern was not centered on what equipment or soft goods he could sell, but how long it would be before he was eliminated from the golf business as a professional.

First, let's look at the golf professional. He must be on the job early to take care of the member who wants to play early and he must stay until the last player is off the course. He must finance and sell his own inventory, hire and train his own assistants. He must handle all the tournaments at his club. He has to cater to the whims of his members and still be sharp enough to attend the meetings of the board of directors that night. He, simply, must be in top physical and mental condition to withstand the pressures of the "game."

It is no wonder that excellent young men reject the job of professional in favor of other forms of employment. If the golf industry would take a good hard look at itself, it wouldn't lose the young man who wants to be a golf professional, and the professional wouldn't be wondering how long he will be around or if the profession itself isn't a dying art as far as merchandising and being a club professional is concerned.

We see daily the claims of the sporting goods retailer in advertisements in local newspapers and other publications—proclaiming how much cheaper; how much larger his inventory is than that in the pro shop and how much easier it is to buy at his store than at the pro shop.

All the rhetoric is geared to con-

vince the public that the "downtown" store is better, or at least able to supply the golfer with all he needs.

Do we see the professional fighting back to protect himself against this oncoming wave of merchandising? No. As a rule, we hear the same tired complaint, "I can't compete with the 'downtown' store."

I have been on both sides of the fence, having sold both retail and professional. I know also that up until the past couple of years, the "downtown" retailer was afraid to handle the same golf merchandise as the pro, because he knew he couldn't sell \$100 golf bags, \$300 sets of golf clubs, \$15 a dozen golf balls, nor could he supply free golf lessons or the air of camaraderie found at the golf course. He always was shying away from competing directly with the golf professional. That is no longer the case.

The retailer not only wants to compete for your member, he is offering him all kinds of inducements to come into his store to buy his golf equipment. This is your member he is after. Because of the professional's passivity, the "downtown" retailer has progressed. He now gives lessons with the purchase of a new set of clubs and he has a qualified teaching instructor. He sells golf balls for whatever price the market will bear. He helps customers select the proper clubs. In fact, he does everything the golf professional does, and in too many cases, won't do. In some cases, he is doing it better than the golf professional.

All is not lost, however—yet. The golf professional can fight back, but if he is to progress he must do all or at least some of the following:

1. Be a better buyer;
2. Be a better organizer;
3. Be a better idea man;
4. Be a better teacher;
5. Be a better public relations man with his members;
6. Be a better advertising executive;

7. Be a trainer of your assistants;
8. Be prepared to compete in the field of merchandising;
9. Be a learner and a doer;
10. Be an offensive fighter.

One of the advantages the golf professional has over the retail store operator is his "captive" consumers. I believe that 80 per cent of all the members of a golf club would buy from their golf professional if they were asked to do so by the professional.

Let's say the club has 400 members. That doesn't mean the professional has only 400 potential buyers. He has many, many more. The average family belonging to a country club numbers about three. All are eligible buyers. Now, you have 1,200 potentially captive buyers. Show me a retailer who wouldn't give his right arm to have 1,200 captive buyers walking into his store.

The problem then arises, do you have, or have you purchased, the correct merchandise for your members? If merchandising were just a matter of stocking golf equipment, the job would be easy. But it becomes more complicated when soft goods lines are added, which must be "right" for the male and female members as well as their children. You must also carry tennis equipment and soft goods, if your club doesn't have a tennis professional. If the club has a swimming pool, then the professional must stock swim trunks and other swimming apparel and accessories.

You must know everything about every piece of merchandise you sell. What is the content of a golf shirt, will it wash, does it have to be ironed? How many colors does it come in? Can you re-order? How many smalls, mediums, how many larges should you buy? All these and many other questions must be answered.

### ASSISTANTS CAN HELP, TOO

If you employ an assistant, he, too must know the answers. Never blame an assistant when he makes

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**CUMMING** *continued*

an error selling the merchandise that you have purchased, if you haven't taught him how to sell it. Remember, you heard the salesman's pitch, you were sold on the item. Tell your assistants why you bought it, what the correct selling tools are and then you will have an eager salesman who will make you money.

All too often the professional feels he is wasting his time by training an assistant because he will leave or be after the professional's job. Yes, he will leave. That you can count on. But if you have done your job well in training him, you will be adding another fine golf professional to the ranks of the industry. Gary Wiren, the educational director of the Professional Golfers' Assn., has told me this many times and has tried to bring this out in the PGA business schools, that if the golf industry is to succeed and the PGA to grow, both have to develop assistant golf professionals.

As for getting your job, if that did happen, you for some reason or another, left yourself wide open

for a change in employment, but not because you did a good job in bringing along your assistant.

Let's examine now what you should be asking yourself about teaching a young assistant.

1. Do you explain what you want done in the shop? A job description, written out in black and white, will make it easier for the young man to know exactly what you expect of him. It also makes it easier for you to evaluate his performance.

2. What is a job description? It should include how much time you want him to spend on teaching, how much on buying, on selling, on cleaning clubs, putting away carts, selling golf bags and equipment and on the many other small jobs that have to be done.

3. Try to give your assistant a chance to express himself. Turn over to him the merchandising of soft goods for two weeks. Let him do what he wants with your merchandise, but with your advice. Chances are you will find he has some fine ideas himself. By implementing a few of his ideas he gains confidence and you gain be-

cause you can do a better merchandising job.

The man working in your shop is the best asset you have to compete with the "downtown" stores. Make your assistant a part of your team and you will not have to worry about the question, "Will there be a golf professional?"

**ABOUT THE COLUMN**

"The Profit Pro Shop," beginning with this issue of GOLFDOM, will cover a wide range of subjects and will try to provide "something for everyone," as Chuck Cumming puts it. Topics for the future include: how to save money by buying, keeping records and training good assistants; how to better merchandise your golf shop; cooperative buying; pro-only merchandise; advertising in the golf shop; customer attitude and golf salesmen.

We welcome your views and ideas for future topics pertaining to pro shop selling. Write Chuck Cumming, c/o GOLFDOM, 235 East 45th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.



CHUCK CUMMING has been working in the golf industry for 25 years, beginning as a salesman for Wilson Sporting Goods and leaving that company as branch manager to become national sales manager of Charles A. Eaton Co. and on to his present position of national sales manager of the Double Eagle Professional Div., of Ajay Enterprises Corp.

He has been a consultant for various companies in the golf industry, has given over 150 lectures on pro shop merchandising to PGA sections and assistant business schools, has been on different committees on merchandising and is a past president of the Golf Manufacturers & Distributors Assn.

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