

GIVE SALESMEN A BREAK!

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

Says former club manager, who admits probably 75% of our good ideas are sold to us

A FORMER club manager who now is very highly paid and famous in the hotel business, informally entertained some of his club manager friends one evening recently, and as is usual when the fellows get together, they began comparing notes on their businesses. The hotel executive listened to the managers tell of their work and troubles. Eventually he put in his word:

"I've heard you fellows," he said, "a thousand times talk about the myriad details of club management, but one of the most important things about your job you either don't appreciate or are afraid to mention."

That remark halted the lively exchange of gab. The managers were keenly intent on listening to the hotel man expand his statement:

"Where many managers miss and miss badly," continued the hotel chief, "is in their attitude toward salesmen. We've made a big success of the hotel business and when I consider the ideas that have made the most money and the most guests for us, I realize that about 75% of these ideas were sold to us; only about a quarter of the ideas are our own.

Clubs Hard to Sell

"One thing many club managers don't appreciate is that a country club is one of the hardest places in the world to sell, simply because of its far-out location and the widely scattered placing of the clubs. A salesman assigned to country club trade has a job every bit as tough as that of a club manager and deserves courtesy from the gentleman and businessman a country club manager should be. The salesman isn't out there because he is charmed by the personality of the manager. He is out to sell his merchandise because other clubs have found it a profitable purchase. The salesman has ideas about the use of his merchandise that almost any successful manager would travel miles to learn. It may take skillful questioning by the managers to get the information they want from these salesmen, but the value of the information is worth the time and effort.

"The alibi of lack of time to receive salesmen isn't one that stands up with

me. I know what the answer is. It's mostly lack of executive ability. I know how many things a manager has to do; how he has to operate without enough properly trained help; and all the rest of the excuses. I went through the same thing, but I learned that I could tell inside of 10 minutes whether a salesman had something for our club and our budget, and if he didn't I politely eased him on his way so his time and mine was saved. I sold him on the idea that we had a great club and competent management, but really couldn't buy wisely from him at the time.

Sees Salesmen Personally

"In our organization now we have a purchasing department that buys in the millions every year, but I still see star salesmen myself. I want to see them. They bring me ideas. They advertise us. The details are up to our purchasing department but the policy is up to me. A club manager has both the buying policy and the buying details to handle. He has twice my reasons for seeing salesmen.

"I can look around at clubs now and see where smart hotels have gone miles ahead of most of the smart clubs in food and liquor stocks, preparation and service. It used to be the other way around. One of the reasons I've got my job is because there wasn't a thing smart and new that I didn't grab when it fitted my clubs. My clubs served so much more smartly than even the swankiest hotels; I was given a fine proposition—as you fellows remember—to go into the hotel business.

"Salesmen, by the way, passed on the word-of-mouth advertising about my club operation. They built me up and ballyhooed me to the men higher up.

"The strange part of it is that the employers of many of the salesmen who don't get courteous reception from some club managers are the class of men who

are prominent in club affairs. These men get comparing reports about Manager so-and-so being impossible to see. They naturally put in a rap against the manager when they happen to meet friends of theirs who belong to the unfortunate manager's club, and the manager ends up wondering who put the knife in on him.

"Big men are not hard to see. It's the self-important, fuss-budget, inefficient second-raters in any line of business who make it so tough for salesmen to get interviews with them. A test of an executive's ability is his capacity for handling men quickly and getting ideas and advertising out of them.

"Consider the fellows who are really big in club management. They see more salesmen in a day than the majority of managers see in a week. They don't rate themselves too busy to see salesmen. That's part of their business. They see a lot less salesmen than the head man of a small hotel does. The club being out in the country cuts down the number of salesmen who call. The salesman and the sales manager are not going to waste their company's time and mileage money unless their proposition warrants at least a brief, but thoughtful and courteous interview from the manager who is visited.

"I've heard from a lot of sales managers that country club managers are about the hardest men in the world for salesmen to see. They volunteer that information to me while I'm receiving them on a matter having to do with selling the hotels in our chain.

"These sales managers tell me that when the manager won't receive their salesmen, some executive in their company invariably knows an official or active member of the club where the salesman wasn't received. Things then are made uncomfortable for the manager and the net result is to minimize the manager's responsibility and rating of his executive ability and courtesy.

"The manager of any of our hotels wouldn't get by a month if he muffed handling of salesmen like many club managers do."

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Glasses were getting low. The host ended his discourse on handling salesmen and attended to the material requirements of his guests. The managerial guests drank meditatively. "Damned if you haven't just said something . . .," declared one of the veteran managers.

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