

**Pro Tip:****CHANGE WITH THE TIMES**

By Herb Graffis

HERE are views of the pro merchandising situation as seen by a man who makes a big income as a marketing advisor to big business concerns. He gets around to quite a few golf clubs in different parts of the country as a guest, and belongs to one in the New York metropolitan district.

He and I went out to lunch one day. I started telling him about some of the business problems of the pros. Then he told me for three hours.

Exception may be taken, by pros, to the validity of some of this marketing expert's statements. However, all of his opinions are worth the consideration of the thoughtful pro.

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Pros are in a fast changing business (the merchandising authority began) and are very much exposed to the risk of failing in their jobs unless they keep constantly studying trends.

For instance: The trend up to about eight years ago was such that "patronize the pro" was a good line to use. The pro was looked on somewhat in the light of a family retainer. The club itself was considered much as a family proposition. Therefore, the member felt that in limiting his golf purchases to his pro he was, in a way, helping to support his own family. It probably cost more, but it was a gentleman's traditional duty.

**Member's Attitude Has Changed**

Since the depression began that attitude has changed at many clubs. Members are told "you should support the pro." They ask "why?" The member has been having trouble supporting himself in the style to which he has been accustomed. He may have been able to retain his club membership only by exercise of thrift in some other directions. He feels that he owes to no one the obligation of spending money.

On that account, the pro appeal should be switched from the plea "support your pro" to the helpful suggestion "your pro serves you better." In each detail of the pro's printed or personal advertising, the idea should be put across that buying

from the pro assures the purchaser most satisfactory returns for his money. Any business solicitation by the pro based on the sympathy theme is out of date, and weakens the pro's position as a department head.

The club member does not feel that he himself requires any sympathy, and he doesn't feel any shame, when he buys from a store instead of from the pro. It's sheer stupidity for a pro to scorn or try to humiliate the member who has bought from a store, observes the marketing counselor. In the first place, the pro alienates someone who is buying, regardless from whom. With the per capita buying of golf playing equipment low enough, it obviously is unwise for any pro to discourage the trade of anyone who has given evidence of the buying habit.

**Pro's Method May Back-fire**

Secondly, unless the pro handles such cases discreetly the member who has bought elsewhere not only will stay away from the pro, but will become active in steering other business away from the pro. If the pro adopts a "get even" policy, so may the member.

In such cases the pro is in a better position than the store merchant because the pro can see who's buying what, and promptly revise his stocks or business solicitation methods accordingly. The merchants could make such discoveries only by lucky accident.

A discreet show of interest in the new purchases and an equally discreet presentation—not buying solicitation—of pro merchandise comparable in quality with the store merchandise and better in fitting or price, should be made. Above all, the pro must not act sore, or pout.

A friend of mine got a bargain set of clubs at a store. His pro hated to lose the sale, of course, but he was smart enough not to show it. The pro said to my friend, "that's a nice looking set of new clubs you have." My friend told about needing some new clubs and being unable to resist the advertised bargain. He told the price. "That's O. K.; I couldn't come within a

Many bulletins of help to pros and club officials who have problems of golf promotion are available free from the American Golf Institute, 19 Beekman St., N. Y. The American Golf Institute is Spalding's organization for golf development and is headed by Bob Jones.

One of the most recent publications of the Institute is a booklet "Group Instruction in Golf" written by Jones and Harold E. Lowe, assistant professor of physical education at Columbia university. It is something that will be a valuable aid to pros who are teaching groups at schools, offices and factories.

half-dollar a club of that," the pro cheerfully admitted. The half-dollar price rather surprised my friend. A saving of \$4.50 wasn't enough to interest him. He'd signed checks for drinks and lunches totalling more than \$4.50 before he'd started to play that afternoon.

"I like these blades, too," the pro remarked. I began to wonder about the pro myself. It listened like he was building up a competitor's merchandise too strong.

The pro wagged the shafts of all the clubs except the putter. "Good clubs for the price, these are," he said. "Say if you want a little tip on how to use them, you might try aiming your shots to the left. These shafts are about right for powerful wrists like Tommy Armour and Johnny Revolta have, but they're too stiff for your swing. I'm afraid you'll slice."

My friend replied; "Afraid I'll slice? I sliced all over the lot this afternoon."

"That's too bad. I see you knicked the sole of the mashie, so you can't take the clubs back and exchange them for some that would fit you. Well, so long. Good luck," the pro concluded cheerfully.

This friend of mine never could use those clubs after that. The psychology, as well as the shafts, were against him. He learned that the pro's advice in buying golf equipment was worth money. He sold himself on doing business with the pro.

#### Avoid High Pressure Methods

Another friend of mine is scared of high-pressure selling of the pro at his club. "I have two boys, one 11 and the other 14," this friend told me. I would like to have them playing golf but I don't want to start out buying them even \$20 worth of clubs apiece and have them outgrowing the clubs in a few years. They ought to be able to start with old clubs of mine, cut down.

"But I know if I ask our pro to do this, he will give me a fast solicitation on how such clubs won't be right for the kids

and why I should buy them proper sticks, and I won't be able to do anything but kick in. So my kids are not playing golf. The pro isn't looking ahead. He ought to know that after kids get started it won't be long until they put pressure on their old man to buy them new clubs for Christmas presents or birthdays."

Such cases are frequent around golf clubs. Almost every night the successful pro can learn a lot by honestly reviewing his selling work of the day. Almost every action and word of the pro at the club has some relation to his selling, either of his services or his merchandise. The pro must keep examining himself frankly for errors of omission and commission. Neither he, nor anybody else, can escape the dangers of changing conditions.

There is a reminder of the necessity of changing methods with the times when one tries to think of business organizations that were leaders 40 years ago, and who retain their leadership today. There are very few such in the entire country. Golf is changing about as fast as any other business, and if the pro wants to protect himself against being left out on a limb, he must study to anticipate developments. Nobody can do that job for him. It is an individual task and already is showing the survival of the fittest in pro golf.

### Dating Clubs Boosts Shop Sale Totals

A NEW England pro started experimenting three years ago with stamping year of purchase of clubs in small figures on the sole plate. He had learned that one reason his members were keeping clubs in play so long was that they didn't realize how old their clubs were.

He says he's already begun to see good selling results from his idea. He points out to players, in casual conversation, that there are about 500 changes annually in head, shaft and other parts of clubs designed and constructed by leading manufacturers. This mechanical improvement together with the change a few years' effects in the physical system of the club user, make it logical for the player to buy new clubs every three or four years. Now, the average life of clubs used by private club players is almost six years, according to a survey made with the cooperation of approximately 150 pros.