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# Showmanship Is High Note in Pro Shop Selling

By VIC BAKER

As Told to Bob Hall

If you're like the average buyer these days, and a clerk bustles up to you with: "May I help you?", you quickly lose interest in the item you were inspecting—and say: "No, I was just looking around."

You amble off to a golf game. Thankful maybe that you'd saved some money on a purchase, but still wondering if those new clubs might have helped your game, your enjoyment of the game, and the better relaxation of yourself in your recreation.

You wonder to yourself—"Why didn't I ask the clerk about those clubs?"

And the only answer can be—he scared me away.

Maybe that's why Vic Baker, professional and course manager at Lakewood CC, Long Beach, Calif., for many, many years, is finding renewed success in shop sales at a time when some pros are finding that the postwar sales honeymoon is over.

But, let Vic tell it:

"Please don't get me wrong about that 'may I help you' line. That's often good, and in most businesses it's the best. In golf, I find that you've got to take a different approach.

"For instance, suppose you come into your shop and find a man testing and feeling a set of irons.

"Naturally, you look upon him as a potential customer. But, don't act like a hungry animal and rush over with: 'Can I help you?' Study his build, his stance,



VIC BAKER

his style, even his clothes—they'll tell you what he might need in clubs, his golf ability and his means.

## Suggestion Helps Sales

"Then, approach the man with this kind of suggestion: 'That's a mighty fine club, and one of the best, but had you noticed this one? It might fit your swing a little better, and perhaps give you a little more distance because it's less (or more) whippy.'"

The man's not frightened away. He's interested in the suggestion. Maybe he did try the wrong club. He tries the one the pro suggested. If the pro is right—he has made a sale. If he's wrong, he at least has gotten closer to the man and can follow-thru from there.

As Vic says: "You're not only a salesman in golf today. You've got to be a showman, too. And you've got to think of the guy who is your prospective customer. You're a showman with a flourish, a psychologist and an expert consultant, as well. If more pros combined the three, I think they'd make more sales."

Whether the man who stops at the counter is the chip-on-the-shoulder kind, or the pleasure-to-wait-on sort, or the timid-rabbit type who shies away, it's a wise salesman who shows a willing-to-help attitude, and it's even a wiser one who steps back and figures out the right approach.

As one of Vic Baker's memos to us, as his "bible" of salesmanship, says:

"Even if your first words are double-talk, if you utter them promptly and courteously with a smile, and keep your prospect interested, the effect will be unbeatable.

"It's all in this, that the fanciest sales techniques in creation aren't half as important as a friendly and sympathetic—



**ONE ENTERS VIC'S SHOP**—This is the sight which greets a golfer when he steps into the Lakewood Country Club pro shop to purchase his green-fee ticket: A long showcase, top and front of which is in thick plate glass. On the right, a rack of odd clubs ranging from wedges to plenty of putters. The showcase, where one signs the register, has a dozen of every popular brand of ball peeking up at one when he signs his name. Under the ball rack are trophies, shoes and sox, and other odds and ends. The showcase on the left contains tape, gauze and other emergency aids such as sunburn lotion, and even safety pins, needles and thread. The two lower shelves are nicely stocked with sweaters, shirts and caps. On top the left hand case are used balls gathered from the lakes on the course, and selling to the golfer at good bargains of 50c or three for a dollar. The case against the ball wall between the two cash registers contains a full line of sox and small gifts, such as wallets, key rings and the like. The floor from the door to the showcase is matted with a heavy rubber to enable golfers in spikes to walk without risk. "Little Jimmy" Thompson is behind the counter.

and even a good professional—interest in the customer's wants and problems.

"In the case of the chip-on-the-shoulder customer, it helps if you can adopt a detached, impersonal attitude. Don't take his remarks personally. View him as an interesting problem—a puzzle for you to solve.

"In this one, you've got to be sharp, and you may have to take some guff. If you solve the problem, you get a sale. Try out several sets of clubs — or whatever he wants. Bring out all the shoes in the place if necessary. Show him you're willing to cooperate, but don't give him the idea you're after a sale. He wants to see the merchandise. You are showing it to him.

"Sales strategy is invaluable in this case. Fortunately, there are not too many of this kind.

#### **Attitude First — Then Approach**

"After the right attitude has been reached, comes the right approach.

"In the chip-on-the-shoulder type you've got to mold that attitude. The other two classes of buyers have the attitude. So, it's the approach that's important.

"Just make some casual comment about a sweater that he's looking at, like: 'That's a non-shrinkable, all-wool sweater. Do you have any like it?' Or: 'That pattern sure matches your tie'."

Instead of scaring the customer away, you get him into a conversation and give your salesmanship a chance to go to work.

This is especially invaluable with the "just looker", whom we've mentioned before. He scares away easy if he feels that someone's going to "high pressure" him. The right approach captures his interest before he has had a chance to realize that he really wasn't out to buy a sweater.

He may wind up doing so. His interest in looking at it in the first place showed a desire perhaps—and the right pro can do the rest.

#### **Shop Stock Extensive**

One of the first commandments of selling is to keep the range of selection as wide as possible.

Perhaps that's one reason why Vic Baker has had so much success at Lakewood. He maintains on display in perhaps one of

the finest pro shops in the country the widest array of equipment.

He has more than 50 golf bags, from canvas to the biggest of expensive leather.

He has in his shop nearly 100 complete sets of irons, and about 50 sets of woods.

He has golf balls of all popular makes, priced from three for a dollar to the regulation priced top standard ball.

He has a full line of golf hats, sweaters, shoes, jackets for both men and women.

And, it's generally known around Lakewood way, that if you don't see what you want—and you'll see plenty if you'll look at the pictures which accompany this article—then just ask.

Baker generally has more stored in his basement.

Like, during the war years when every pro in the country, even those on the tour, were begging for golf balls. Baker had more than \$7500 worth of them stored in his cellar.

What's more, if he doesn't have what you want, he'll get it for you within 24 hours.

Now, back to the "merchandising approach".

Don't let the customer get too specific about what he wants. If the sweater is for himself, take a look at the way he dresses. If he's conservative, bring out modified styles. If he's collegiate, keep that in mind when choosing the right item. If the sweater, golf clubs, golf bag or what not are to be a gift, find out the age and general type of the recipient.

But above all, be interested in the customer. Be helpful and cooperative.

### Sizing Up Price Appeal

Now, with regard to prices. Let your first selection be slightly above that which your customer seems to want. Maybe a little on the expensive side. It's easier to work down, once you've gotten him interested with the right approach, than it is to work up the ladder.

Furthermore, don't ask what price he wants to pay. If you are a good salesman, you should be able to read from his appearance about the range.



**ONE LOOKS AROUND**—From the showcase, where one signs the register and awaits his change, the golfer turns to this view at Vic Baker's pro shop. The shelves lining the entire west and north walls contain a full line of hats and caps for both men and women, shoes for men and women; spiked, lugged and for dress. The cabinets below the shelves serve as storage for sweaters, jackets, raincoats and more shoes. The small cabinet in the foreground displays a full line of golf gloves of all sizes and colors. To vary the scene Baker has several full sets of irons and a couple of dummies modeling jackets, sweaters and hats. Comfortable lounge chairs and a foot rest are available both for those who wish to relax, and for the salesman should one care to try on shoes. Both walls are dotted, but not overdone, with framed pictures of golfing notables.

After you've talked over the problems of the item the man seems to want, you begin your merchandising. It isn't necessary in most cases to drag out everything you have. Try two or three numbers at a time.

Let him look at them, tell you why he doesn't like them.

Then you return them and bring out two or three more which come closer to his preferences.

This not only keeps your stock neat, but keeps your purchaser from being overwhelmed, confused and stifled by masses of merchandise piled before him. He'll require less time to make a final choice if there are only two sweaters, golf clubs, golf bags or shoes before him instead of six.

Now here's where some showmanship can enter the picture.

Suppose you brought out two golf bags of identical price and quality. Or maybe, two sweaters or jackets. One you carelessly throw on the counter. The other you hold in your hand, carefully and reverently, as if it were priceless.

Which would the customer be inclined to value more?

You're quite right. The second sweater! Golf bag! Set of clubs!

The way you handled the article is a powerful tool in giving the customer the subconscious impression that he's getting better merchandise for his money.

When you've narrowed down the field to a few favorites, get the customer to try one of them out.

If it's a putter, tell him to putt for a while. A sweater, try it on. A golf bag; put his clubs in for measurement and fit.

It makes a sale easier, too, if you are waiting on two at once to have one of the customers busy trying on or testing, while you're wrapping up the item of the other. And in some cases, if the pro is fortunate to have two at once, it helps the customer make up his mind faster.

Once he gets the feel of the club, or has the garment on and sees himself in it—that's where several good full length mirrors help in Vic's shop—he's got the feeling that it half-way belongs to him.

### Don't Make "No" Easy

But, you don't say: "Would you like to try it on?"

Nope, that's like asking him in the beginning if you could help him. You leave yourself wide open for a "no".

Instead, you say: "Try this on by the mirror there, and you'll see how nicely it fits."

It's the "YOU" sentences that help. You'll get a lot of wear out of this"; or "That's just fitted to You"; or, "You certainly look well in this color"; or, "You certainly have powerful wrists and shoul-

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**HEADING FOR THE TEE**—After registering and obtaining green-fee ticket, the golfer turns to the left for the first tee at Lakewood CC, and here's his scene. The register and golf racks are on the right foreground, incidently. But, in line of vision are virtually every major line of golf clubs, from woods, shown on the left foreground, to the irons lined up on the right and background wall. Along the wall, Vic has his clubs stacked in full sets in golf bags from the canvas light ones to the more durable leather, and colorful fabric ones just coming into the scene. A candy and gum machine are convenient for the golfer as he leaves the shop for the first tee, and the score card is also at his left hand as he pulls the screen door.

what can be done with organization and leadership and the alert professional will not overlook the long term advantages to be gained from the expenditure of a little time and effort in encouraging the youngsters of today.

It isn't too late for the professional to help some youngster on his way by preparing him for one of the following events this year, or at least get a program under way which will make it possible for him to help the youngsters on their way next year. The national junior events this year are as follows:

- July 27-30—USGA Junior Championship, Congressional CC, Washington, D.C.
- Aug. 1-6—Women's Western Junior Amateur, Onwentsia CC, Lake Forest, Ill.
- Aug. 2-7—U. S. Junior Chamber of Commerce National Junior Amateur Championship, Houston (Texas) CC.
- Aug. 2-4—Hearst National Junior Championship, Medinah (Chicago) CC.
- Aug. 16-19—WGA Junior Championship, Univ. of Michigan GC, Ann Arbor.
- Aug. 29-Sept. 3—National Caddie Championship, University GC, Columbus, Ohio.

### **Women's Western Junior Renewed, Aug. 1-5**

Women's Western GA renews its junior championship Aug. 1-5 at Onwentsia club, Lake Forest, Ill. Age limit is 18th birthday. Handicap limit is 36. Entry fee is \$3. Entries close July 27 with Mrs. Charles Dennehy, 436 E. Woodland Rd., Lake Forest, Ill.

Pros are asked by WWGA officials and members to bring this event to attention of parents of their promising young girl golfers. The event was started in 1920, discontinued when the war started, and revived when Patty Berg gave her prize money as winner of 1948 WWGA Open to bringing this event back to the calendar.

### **SHOWMANSHIP IS HIGH NOTE**

*(Continued from page 30)*

ders. I'm sure you'll find your game will improve with these clubs."

And then, after the sale is made, are you going to let the customer trot away without making a tie-in sale?

Let me give you one on Vic Baker that'll remain in my mind's eye as a masterpiece. He and I were "chewing the fat" in the easy chairs of his shop one day when two golfers walked in.

"Vic," said the first one. "I've decided to buy that set of clubs we were talking about the other day. And that bag over there."

Vic courteously excused himself to me, and walked over to the rack. Got the clubs

and bag, put them together, talking and chatting all the while.

Then, the customer asked what would be allowed on a trade-in of his old clubs. Vic mentioned a fair price. The deal was completed. The man wrote out a check, and went out to play.

But, Vic had noticed that the customer's friend had taken a "rent set".

The next day, he sold that friend the same set of used clubs he'd taken in, and at a neat profit.

In the meantime, he'd had his shop man clean 'em up and they looked like new.

### **Keeping All Satisfied**

Both the first customer and his friend were satisfied. Each had gotten what he needed. Each had got a square deal.

In fact, one of the biggest points in pro selling today is in keeping the golfer satisfied. Make him know that you are there to serve his needs. That you'll give him a square deal. That you've got what he wants, or can get it, and that you are not going to high-pressure him into taking something he doesn't want or need.

Keep your customers' confidence.

Vic Baker has done that for many, many years in Southern California. Not only that but he has been the guiding light for many new merchandising customs.

He was the first pro in California to stock real golf shoes and shirts in the pro shop, and back in 1933 at Potrero, he started the now popular custom of making every golfer pass through the shop to get his green-fee ticket.

Strange thing, though, when Vic returned from World War I, where he'd served in the Signal Corps, he was not a golfer. He'd lived in North Dakota and Montana all his life—and was headed for a future as a telegraph operator.

Whatever it was that sent him to Southern California in 1920, where he opened a cafe in Los Angeles is a mystery. But it has been a boon to golfers on the West Coast.

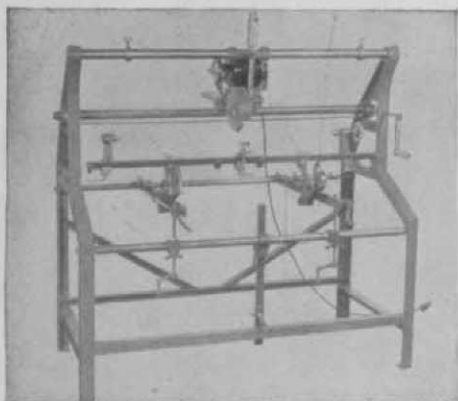
He switched from the cafeteria to the Beverly Driving Range, in association with Ray Burea, in 1923, and a year later opened the Slauson Driving Range. From there he moved to Crenshaw Driving Range in 1923, to Potrero private course as pro-manager from 1930-35, and he has been at Lakewood ever since, except for another 3 years in his country's service as a Coast Guardsman in World War II.

At Potrero he was associated in a four-way partnership with Gene Marzoff, Louie Hoff and Chester Nelson.

### **Vic Plays "Santa Claus"**

It was at Potrero, too, that Vic conceived the now popular idea of wrapping golf gifts in Christmas packages—and what's more





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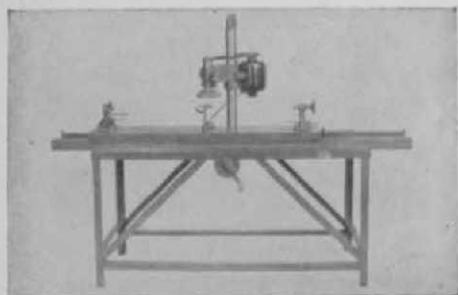
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he even plays Santa Claus by loading a small truck the day before Christmas and delivering to his customers.

Most of the Christmas business comes from wives and children, but in recent years the husbands have been finding something to suit the ladies in Vic's shop.

Another innovation that Vic lays partial claim to in pro selling is on the fact that most golfers complain after a high round that it was putting which caused it. Actually, most golfers do waste a goodly share of their strokes on the putting green.

He then assumed that "poor putting" was an epidemic.

What did he do?

He still does have on display a putter rack, where he keeps on eye-appeal display, about 100 putters of all makes and shapes.

When you walk into Vic Baker's shop at Lakewood you have no trouble picking out the corner for your merchandise. He has a large shop, and knows the finer points of display.

The accompanying pictures should prove that. Unless the golfer walks with his eyes on his toe nails, he can't help seeing a goodly portion of golf merchandise.

Vic maintains a shop where one can buy candy for a nickel or a set of clubs for \$100.

He keeps on hand in the shop about \$10,000 worth of equipment at all times.

Another interesting innovation that Baker has installed at his plant at Lakewood—the plant includes the pro shop, a driving fairways and a repair shop—is an inter-communication system. The system hooks with the pro shop, starter at the first tee, the locker room, the range, the repair shop and the grill.

A master switch connects all, and all six can be on the party-line at once if necessary. Or, it can be from first tee to range thusly: "Range, Range. Starter calling. Send Joe Smith to the tee. He's off in five minutes." "Okey, starter, Joe's on his way."

That repair shop, too, is something that has taken Southern California golf by storm. Tex and Mrs. Shirley, both experts in golf equipment, including mending of all leather and canvas goods, will repair anything from your shoes, golf bags and clubs to even making a new shaft for that one you wrapped around the tree.

They're even equipped now to make clubs.

### **No Consignment Deals**

Vic has another angle that's always good in any business. He has never placed an item in his shop on consignment.

If he doesn't think it will sell, he refuses to handle it. If he does think it will sell, he buys it.

He makes it a definite rule—and maybe he's fortunate in that he can do it—to keep

his credit rating A-1, and to pay all bills to obtain that 2% discount for payment within a certain period.

"With the bulk of business I do, and over a period of years," Vic will explain, "That 2% item amounts into a right tidy sum of saving."

Vic's always thinking ahead for the little things—and they often become big ones.

Speaking of making that little saving on merchandise of 2%, there's another one. In the early 1940s there was a rumor of a tax to be levied on all golf balls because of a rubber shortage.

Vic looked at that tax, and decided to get as much protection as possible. He scraped down deep, dug up \$7500 and bought the lot in golf balls. Result?

He missed the tax levy—and a year later began the greatest shortage on first rate golf balls. He collected there, too.

But there was never a shortage at Lakewood. In fact, Vic doled 'em out slowly to his fellow pros to tide them over the hump—and most of the pros in the Southern California area made it, largely due to Vic Baker's foresight in merchandising.

He makes it a point to look ahead if possible.

His big turnover enables him to figure a low percentage on volume, and unlike many pro shops, his sweaters, shirts and hats sell for less than the downtown stores for that very reason.

Vic also ties in most closely with the men's and women's clubs at Lakewood, attending all their meetings, offering merchandise prizes freely as competitive and door prizes.

He'll tell you that's the best possible kind of golf shop advertising.

Speaking of advertising, Vic's pupils are carrying the "gospel" on many fronts.

For instance, he had a couple of favorite caddies back at Potrero in the early 1930s—Earl Martin and Ray Fisher.

Earl's now pro at the course, which has since become the Inglewood CC, and Fisher is at a New York course.

His assistants at Lakewood have been many and most capable.

Perhaps the most successful has been George Lake, who jumped from a year at Lakewood to Recreation Park as an assistant to Harry Bassler, and now has been at the Long Beach Municipal Links for over 12 years as head man. He is serving his fourth term as Southern California PGA section president, and is now in his second year as National chairman for the PGA in Junior golf promotion.

Among the others who are now well established who have come through Vic's shop are Jackson Bradley, now at St. Charles, Ill.; Dale Andreason; Paul Jopes,




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now at Hacienda; Clyde Hudson, pro at Meadowlark; Roy Beardon, pro at the L. A. County links at Santa Anita; Eddie Nowak, Jimmy Thompson, now at Provo, Utah, and others.

So Vic Baker's story, although his selling is tied in with showmanship, is also one of good sound, solid business sense, and a look at the future, for which he has been most adept in the past—and in present conditions, seems to be doing even better than in 1948.

## DUES INCOME'S RELATION

(Continued from page 42)

from 48 to 60 cents on the dollar, and all reported that the real stress by officials was on food costs.

I do not wish, and it is farthest from my mind to convey that an attempt is being made, to reduce to absurdity the question of new pricing policies, but I am stressing that costs of material should be only one of many factors considered in any rearrangement of selling prices.

### Economy Cries Analyzed

The other expenses which are generally considered variable, are certainly less variable than product price—there is gas, water, laundry, heat, insurance, etc., and yes—even labor—which has had a ten-

dency towards becoming fixed in the past several years.

The question of volume has also to be kept in mind. An examination of the statistics of 17 clubs in the New York City area over the past six months discloses that both the attendance of members at their clubs and departmental receipts have fallen off.

This situation is also true in several of the country and golf clubs and although it is too early to be certain about their summer business, the indications are that receipts will decline. The house charges of those members who can write off part of what they spend as promotional expense in their business will be lower not only because the value of the item has a smaller tax deductible value but because their directors will demand more justification for free spending in the future.

It is reasonable therefore to conclude that there will be fewer guests—with less entertainment allowance money available for meals, beverages, golf and other club services.

In the review of information gathered from the sources mentioned, it was surprising to note that the regular monthly attendance of resident membership averaged only 40% for some and in a few, many members in that classification had not been on hand for months.