

Sets Up Four Rules for Operating Pro Shop—and Sticks to Them

By EMMETT MAUM

WHAT does it take to run a successful pro shop?

When this question was put to J. C. Fondren, pro at Colonial CC, Memphis, Tenn., a short time ago, his reply came so unhesitatingly and was so concisely stated that you would have thought the interview had been rehearsed, or someone had tipped off J. C. that a GOLFDOM roving reporter was in the neighborhood and to get his answers prepared in advance.

But, as the Colonial pro explained after answering the above question, he groped around for several years trying to find what he thought were the right answers. Then, after reaching some pretty clear cut

decisions as to what they are so far as he personally is concerned, he has always kept them on the tip of his tongue.

They boil down to these four basic rules, principles, or whatever you might want to call them:

(1) Go the extra mile in giving service to the members; (2) Handle only top-grade merchandise; (3) Don't use high pressure to make sales; (4) Go out of your way to help members in making merchandise selection so they'll be sure to get the best.

Fondren hurriedly points out that he doesn't think there is any magic or great merchandising secrets behind the rules he has adopted for running his pro shop.



J. C. Fondren, pro at Colonial CC, Memphis, Tenn., stands between two of the five glass showcases used to display merchandise in his shop. The shop has oak flooring over concrete, with rubber mats on top of it to prevent damage from spikes.



Built-in racks are used to display clubs and bags. Other racks show shoes and trousers. At right is portion of the display window. Above racks is a plaque listing club champions and runnersup since 1932. Entire shop is dotted with interesting pictures, with emphasis on members' photos.

"Everybody knows about them," he says, "All of us have been tripping over them for as long as we've been in business. They're as basic as ABC, but the real question is: 'How long does it take us to learn how to apply them?'"

Meaning of Service

"Let's take a look at this business of going the extra mile in giving service," the Colonial pro continues. "How many pros actually do that? Most of them say they do, but how many occasionally take time out to oversee the club cleaning operation and insist that the fellow handling the chore give the members' clubs that extra minute's attention in order to turn an ordinary job into an A-1 job? Or, if the pro detects a flaw in a member's swing does he offer unsolicited tips on how to correct it, or does he say to himself: 'I'm not supposed to be giving unasked advice free. If the fellow wants to improve his game, let him take lessons.'"

"Service requires an understanding of each member's temperament and requirements. It isn't merely a matter of being cheerfully willing to work to increase a member's enjoyment of the club but also is a matter of thinking ahead of the member and doing more than is expected by members and officials.

"Pros have failed on jobs because they didn't have a clear understanding of what their duties were supposed to be but I've never heard yet of a pro who didn't stand high and strong at his club because he did more than was expected of him to make the members happy.

"Service is a matter that is too broad to define sharply. It differs with almost every member at a club. Some members may be difficult and discouraging but they're the same sort of a challenge to a first-class businessman professional that a testing-class golf hole is. You can't skip the tough member or the tough golf hole. They're both part of the course. You've got to learn how to play them."

As for top-grade merchandise Fondren asserts there are at least three advantages in handling it.

For one thing the pro must protect and extend his own reputation by association with highest quality. Secondly, the name brands, because of their standards of manufacture, their years of honorable and mutually profitable service to their customers and their advertising to the pros' kind of customers have built up an acceptance that makes selling easier and customer satisfaction more certain. And

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Sticks to 4 Operating Rules

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thirdly, the quality merchandise represents the greatest value for the money and doesn't involve trouble in exchanging defective merchandise.

Speaking of pressure selling, Fondren sums it up this way: "Sooner or later the fellow who has been pressured is going to realize what happened to him. Whether you know it or not, you've probably lost a customer as of that moment. Anyway, the persuasive approach brings more sales in the long run."

The best policy in pro shop selling is to make it easy and pleasant for players to buy what they need to improve their games and increase their enjoyment of golf.

Rule 4 is closely tied in with Rule 2, according to Fondren. It amounts to giving the member the best possible merchandise for his money and being careful to sell him equipment that he can use to the greatest possible advantage. "Everybody agrees we should learn more about club fitting," says the Memphis pro, "but I think that should be extended to shoes and wearing apparel. It's only when the pro becomes the complete merchandiser that he'll have a chance of getting all his members' business."

The Colonial pro operates in a 24 x 72 ft. shop that was built for him two years ago. One thing that excites the envy of most other pros who have seen the shop is that it has plenty of storage and display space and an excellent workshop where there's ample room for a fellow to move around in.

Shirts and hats are displayed in five large glass showcases complete with mirrors which give an added gleam to the merchandise. Two and one-half ft. high bins are used for displaying golf bags, clubs, shirts and miscellaneous items while trousers, shoes and other wearing apparel are shown in rack-type displays.

To keep members occupied and comfortable, Fondren has his shop outfitted with a TV set, several well upholstered chairs and a vibrator chair which gives a refreshing treatment to the weary golfer.

Fondren keeps on the lookout for stories and articles about the members, or their families, which appear in local newspapers and posts them in a conspicuous spot near the TV set for all to read. All these things add to the folksy atmosphere of the Colonial pro shop which is contrived to a certain degree, as the Memphis pro candidly admits, to get people in where they come contact with the merchandise he sells.