

A onetime pro who made the switch from selling behind the counter to the front side, tells what he would do now if he were to go back and start running a shop operation again

The Picture Becomes Clearer When You Move Out of the Shop

We asked a friend who, a few years ago, resigned from a pro job at a good club to go into pro sales to tell us how his former pro job looks from the selling side of the fence. This article is his answer. He declares that he is still finding out so many new things about pro sales work that he doesn't want his name used because some of his old customers will think he is posing as an expert. He is only a "learner" at this stage, he says. — Ed.

When a man goes from a pro job into his own business of selling to professionals he begins to learn something about the pro golf business.

Ernie Sabayrac, Ren Smith, Ted Longworth, John Mahoney, Ted Woolley and several others were capable ro operators when they worked for clubs, but they are much better businessmen working for themselves. So am I. I have been in business for myself for about five years. If I had known as much when I was at a club as I do now about how to conduct a pro business, I'd still be at a club and making more money.

Ambitious And Lucky

I was ambitious and lucky. I was offered a good territory for a first grade golf bag. That was at a time when one equipment manufacturer was beginning a campaign that made high-priced golf bags a status symbol instead of mere containers for golf clubs. Pros found that if they could say "\$100" or "\$150" without choking when they pointed to a bag, it was bought many times by a guy who couldn't break 120.

To the bag line I added other lines that I had been selling well when I had my own shop.

The first thing I learned is that I had not been a smart purchasing man. I didn't have records in black and white that showed me what my members bought during the year, and would have tipped me off to what I might have done to sell them more. I always put in a fall order for clubs and bags and other important items for spring delivery and waited until spring to order apparel and other items, ordering only enough of these things to carry into June. Re-ordering always was a headache and called for more shipping charges than were necessary.

Careful About Credit Rating

My wife, who helped me run the shop, and I thought we had a good bookkeeping system. We always were careful to keep our credit good. What we didn't do was use our bookkeeping system to tell us in advance what we ought to have in stock. When I think of how much money I could have made and saved by going to a bank and borrowing to finance my opening stock and take advantage of all discounts, I shudder.

I picked up many ideas from GOLFDOM on things other pros had done that made money for them. GOLFDOM'S "Christmas Shopping at your Pro Shop" was the one idea that meant the difference between my wife and myself fending off creditors in the winter, taking a winter vacation and still putting money in the bank.

What the Christmas shopping idea showed me was that people want to spend

money on golf equipment at Christmas time. I had the mistaken impression they had to be sold. I learned rather late that if equipment and apparel are attractively displayed and the customer gets plenty of chances to handle and look at things in the shop, he or she is going to buy.

Avoiding "Close-Out" Months

The Christmas shopping idea not only put a profitable thirteenth month in my sales calendar but carried me safely past August and September, the "close-out" months, when my members and members of other clubs in the area were expecting prices on clubs to be cut. I was in position to stall off the bargain hunters and tell them to wait until the new models were in for Christmas. Then they could take their choice of brand new merchandise or still get the old stuff at cut prices. At Christmas time, I would switch their interest from the close-outs to the new stock.

Now, as a pro salesman, I see clearly one other thing I didn't see as a pro. The pro who pays his bills carries some weight. He has more to say in running the whole golf business than he realizes. But a pro whose credit rating isn't good is regarded as just another caddie who has been accidentally graduated to a job too big for him. Don't let anybody tell you this isn't the truth.

Don't Believe This One

Many professionals would be surprised if they knew how closely credit information is exchanged. I've heard that a manufacturer who is owed a lot of money by some pro will try to help that pro get a job so he can pay his bill, but I doubt that story. The club that is hiring — if the job is worth much — wants a pro with a good credit rating. It has a reputation to protect.

In my territory I would say that 30 per cent of the slow accounts are pros who thought the job was going to be better than it is. Fifty per cent are honest but careless and not educated as businessmen. The other 20 per cent have tough luck, either on the job or in their personal lives.

I have heard that a common fault of pros is that they buy from too many people. I also have heard that in some ter-

ritories a great deal of stuff in pro shops is there on consignment.

It's Money First

I suppose there is truth in both stories. I bought from many friends when I was a pro. Now, after some unpleasant experiences as a salesman, I have found that I, too, am in business for money first, then friendship. Unless the pro to whom I am selling, and I both make money I prefer to pass up the deal and go on to the next shop. I want my customers to sell what I sell them and I want them to have plenty of stock from which the members can buy. I do not want to hold the bag for a pro who has my merchandise and my selling expense and profit lying dead in his stock, or who is juggling money that belongs to me to pay off some other creditor who is putting pressure on him.

It is the same with consignments. I know pros who aren't sure what they have ordered on consignment. If they sell merchandise handled on this basis they go ahead and pay other manufacturers with funds derived from their consignment accounts. This can be risky business.

One of the most valuable ideas I got on running a shop I picked up from a New England pro who told me that one well known manufacturer always said a pro begins to be a businessman when he looks around his shop and sees money on display instead of clubs, bags, balls, clothing and shoes. After five years of selling to pro shops, I can see what this manufacturer meant.

Club Manager Workshops

Enrollment forms for workshops to be conducted over the next three months by the Club Managers Association can be obtained by writing to the CMAA, 1030 Fifteenth st., N.W. Washington, D.C., 20005. Two workshops have already been held. Six others are scheduled for the following locations: Aug. 9-13, Cornell U.; Aug. 18-20, Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C.; Sept. 8-10, Michigan State U., East Lansing; Sept. 13-15, New York U.; Sept. 22-24, San Francisco Hilton; and Oct. 4-6, Spokane (Wash.) Club. A repeat course in financial management is also to be held in Pittsburgh, Aug. 23-25.