

An open letter to a pro

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Editor's note: When we visited a prominent club in the Midwest recently, the professional griped about the fact that, try as he would, he simply couldn't get some of his members to buy from him. Why? We wondered. So we asked the club manager for the names of some of the members, and we talked with several. One of them—an advertising man—volunteered to write this letter.

Dear Jack:

You've been telling me for years what's wrong with my game. Now I'm going to tell you what's wrong with your shop—and why some of the members aren't buying there anymore.

Physically, you've got a nice set-up. A lot of small shops here in downtown would envy you. Especially that parking area so near the door. But you've got the *junkiest* arrangement of merchandise I ever saw. Half the time it looks like a bargain basement after a mob of women had gone through it. Doesn't your help spend any time at all keeping the place neat and in order? And how about some lights at the back of the shop where you hide the slacks? A customer can't tell black from blue in that twilight zone.

And your pricing policy is out of this world—about 50 years out. Why can't you put price tags on each item? Last week I wanted a blazer. Yours looked pretty nice. I hunted for a price tag. None in sight. I asked your assistant Bob. "\$49.50, I think," was his answer. I had to tell him "Go ask your boss" before I could get a straight answer. Remember? You said \$47.50.

I bought the jacket. I've known you for a good many years and I like to support the club—but the newer members won't put up with that kind of "service". And service, whether you realize it or not, is just as important in your pro

shop as it is in any store downtown. You just don't keep customers standing around while you discuss scores with someone else. You just don't have enough help in the shop—or, rather you don't schedule your help properly.

We've watched the "traffic pattern" in your shop. Thursdays and Fridays, from noon until late evening, are always busy. And weekends, of course. But you never seem to have extra help in the shop at those particular times. So members have to stand around and wait. And a lot of men, whether you know it or not, don't wait—they buy their equipment and their golfwear downtown now—where they get service.

You know, golf is supposed to be fun, relaxation. It's a mood as well as a game. The more you contribute to that mood, the more your members will want to come into the shop. You are really selling service as much as merchandise.

When I bought my new set of clubs last year, you spent a lot of time with me, making sure I got what I needed. And I've really enjoyed them. You have a real knack for this. If you could pass this quality of service—this interest in the member—on to your assistants, you'd have a lot more money coming into the shop.

The two young guys you have in the shop off and on will sell me a shirt or jacket or a glove, if I ask for it. But neither one will ever suggest a new color or point out a matching pair of slacks. They're both smart boys, but it's up to you to train them in merchandising. They'll be worth a lot more to you if you'll do this!

Another thing that "bugs" me is the way you stock merchandise. You've got an "upper class" membership here at the club—people who are used to buying quality products and who expect to spend money for them. Yet you've got a lot of rather ordinary \$5 golf shirts

and darned few of the good ones at \$10!

Maybe you're afraid that members will think your prices are too high. Don't worry about it. You are competitive with the fine stores downtown. And the players here aren't likely to go to Joe's Bargain Basement to buy a golf cart—or any other golf equipment.

For one thing, they're very brand conscious. And they also rely on the pro—on you—for advice on major golf purchases. Which brings us to another point: You're losing sales simply because you're not promoting the brands you have in the shop.

And you do have some very good brands—manufacturers who advertise in national magazines, on TV, etc. They're good merchandisers, and I'll just bet they send you all kinds of displays, ad reprints, etc. Why don't you use them? Show your members the brand names you have for them. If you tie in your merchandise displays with the merchandise featured in the ads, you'll be surprised how these reprints can work for you. People have learned to trust nationally advertised brands, and to place confidence in the man who sells them.

My wife just read this over my shoulder. Her comment: "Why don't you suggest to Jack that he have a lady assistant in the shop two or three days a week? If he announced this plan, and posted the hours she would be there, I think he would probably get a lot more of the girls coming into the shop on weekdays." She's probably right.

Maybe it sounds as though all I've been doing is tossing brickbats at you, Jack. But since you've always been very frank in telling me what's wrong with my game (and you're right), I thought a little frank talk from my side of the counter might help you, too!

Best wishes for a better shop.

John D.