



President's Message **SALESMEN**

After twelve years in this business I've experienced so many attitude changes that sometimes the person behind my desk today only slightly resembles the one that occupied that same chair in 1973. Much of this change is probably due to the normal maturing process that everyone undergoes, but certainly some has been inspired by any number of incidents or events that left a distinct impression. Whatever the sources, I like to think that most of these changes have been for the better.

It may well be that the most dramatic change I've undergone is my feeling about salesmen. Gone are the days when I would refer to them as "peddlers" and the days when I had to force myself to give a salesman even the time of day. Hopefully I've come a long way down the road from being a dreaded stop on any salesman's agenda to being a visit most would find productive and useful — maybe even enjoyable. The strong superior / subordinate attitude has mellowed and given way to an open door and a more open mind. These guys, as a group, have really captured my respect and gratitude. No more cavalier treatment of them from me; a mean disposition just isn't necessary.

I can remember when I first started to give some thought to how important salesmen really are. We had been having some chronic problems with excessive wear on pump impeller shafts because of the dirty water we were pumping from Lake Mendota. It seemed like we were getting no more than three years of use on the bronze before the wear exceeded tolerances and the pump's capaci-

ty dropped out of sight. During one of these episodes the machinist who was reinstalling and reassembling the pump commented that he was sure our problems would be greatly reduced from now on because of a new procedure they were using. They had gotten set up in their shop to spray the impeller shaft with stainless steel and they then machined it to manufacturer's specifications. While visiting about details of how this was done I asked him where he learned about this new process. His reply? From a salesman! He added that keeping in close touch with all of the salesmen calling on him was the best way he knew for staying on top of new developments, new equipment, etc. It hit me like a ton of bricks.

Other events were less spectacular but, taken together, opened my eyes to what a resource I had in all of the salesmen that stopped. It was Jim Knapp running a hydraulic lift arm up from Janesville on a Friday night before the City Men's Golf Tournament on Saturday. It was the realization that Jerry O'Donnell was more akin to an Extension Turf Specialist than a Proturf salesman from Scotts. It was watching Charlie Wilson, Jim Latham and Bob Welch working tirelessly to make the Symposium a success and never mentioning a word about Milorganite. I've watched Ed Devinger work with complete devotion for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association for over three years — out of genuine concern and with no vague or veiled intent or attempt to sell anything. And last November, Hanley's generous gift to the WGCSA Scholarship and research fund left a substantial impression in my mind on how they view their broad responsibilities in our industry. Everyone probably has their own list of similar examples.

It would be naive to think that everyone on the road, selling, is a prince. There will always be those that typify the old fashioned impression of peddlers. These people earn whatever scorn and disdain that is heaped upon them. But thankfully they are in a distinct and very small minority and, somehow, they never seem to last very long. It is unfair to lump all salesmen into this category — most are profes-

sional, helpful and sincere.

If the way I now relate to salesmen has been an evolution, slow and cautious and measured, then my appreciation and grasp for the difficulty of their work was a near epiphany. I overheard a conversation while standing in the door to the office in the Clubhouse. Immediately adjacent to the office is a cloakroom, and in the cloakroom is a telephone that usually offers some privacy. But not that day — I was too close to miss what was being said. The man was a salesman; he had called his office to report to his boss that "I couldn't make the sale". After he had hung up, he passed within an arm's length of me — close enough for me to see his face and the look of rejection and disappointment that covered it. As he left he sighed and loosened his necktie. I felt sorry for him and was so glad that I didn't have to experience such rejection in my work, day in and day out. I'll bet even the most successful and most competent salesmen hear "No" much more often than they hear "Yes". They have to get themselves prepared each working day to accept what almost everyone dreads the most: impersonal, cold, outright rejection. Failure. How difficult it must be for them to maintain composure and patience when they are turned down; it could only be worse when that "No" is handed out in a rude or cruel way.

I am certainly not implying that we shouldn't work hard to "cut a good deal" or that we should become the proverbial "easy mark". It is as important for us to be a good businessman as it is to be a good agronomist. I'm merely suggesting that most salesmen serving us are worthy of our respect and trust, and that they can be very useful and helpful to us. I don't think anyone can deny that they have a very difficult job that requires a special kind of person to be successful, and that they deserve more kind and gentle words when we have to say, "I don't need what you're selling".

They are not a nuisance to me — the welcome mat is always at my shop door.

Guess I'll give Jim Knapp a call and find out if he has time for lunch tomorrow — I'm buying!

Monroe S. Miller
President