

Ken Kubik and Bert Jones, owners of Grass Roots, a golf supply business in New Jersey, believe the best way to keep customers is to keep them happy with quick and reliable service. Their formula's working; sales have increased seven times since the company was founded six years ago.

Back to Basics

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor



Ken Kubik's corporate philosophy is to provide quick and efficient service to his customers.

Ken Kubik's original career plan was to become a minister. A stint on a golf course at age 12 changed that.

Today, Kubik's partnership in a metropolitan New York golf course supply wholesaling business is flourishing and the 39-year-old credits his golf course "hands on experience" as invaluable in making that happen.

From caddy, Kubik progressed to other jobs around the course and finally became assistant superintendent at Crestmont Country Club in West Orange, NJ, assisting course superintendent Peter Pedrazzi. That job lasted 14 years.

"I had thought about becoming a minister, and I had thought about

majoring in labor management, philosophy, anthropology or sociology, but after working on the golf course for so many years, my true love was turf. I loved the job because it wasn't sedentary."

But when Kubik was in his 30s, he felt it was time for a change.

"I had been at the golf course since 1973 and had worked as a sales manager at Andrew Wilson in New Jersey and felt myself reaching a plateau."

Kubik did a lot of soul searching and felt his ideas and energies could best be developed through starting his own business.

"The name for the business, Grass Roots, kind of developed naturally.

For me, this decision was getting back to basics, and I wanted my business to reflect that," explained Kubik.

So, in December of 1978, Grass Roots was founded.

Controlled growth

Kubik's current business gives him everything but time to be sedentary.

He and his partner, Bert Jones, make about 42 sales calls a week. Grass Roots services about 150 golf courses in a 75 mile radius of the firm's home base of Mt. Freedom, NJ.

"Everything they say about starting a business is true," says Kubik.

"Even though I've been around golf courses my whole life, you still have to prove yourself and get reaccepted in a new position. It's as much selling yourself as your products."

Grass Roots represents Royal Coach-Buckner, Swan Hose, Lebanon Country Club Fertilizer, Aquatrols Aqua Grow, Lofts Seed, Mobay Standard Golf Company's Pro line, Par Aide golf products, Milliken's Blazon and PeneTurf, among other lines.

Kubik is very conscious about controlled growth for the company. He does not want to expand his lines only for the sake of expansion. The same holds true for the territory he covers.

"It's very important to us to fill our current commitments and to provide the type of service we've become known for before branching out anymore."

Sales since the company was founded have gone up seven times. Kubik reports 30 percent more growth this year than last year. He and Jones are considering some plant expansion and warehouse improvements.

"This market has been competitive and will continue to be competitive," Kubik predicts. "Experience is extremely important. I consider myself an ever-changing constant. We want to give better service every time we go out. It doesn't matter if the order is for a caseload of chemicals or a tee marker, superintendents in this area

are used to getting things when they need them."

Kubik estimates he is competing with anywhere from 12 to 18 firms in a 75-mile radius.

Quickness is one of the attributes Grass Roots arms itself with to combat the competition.

"This is not only a competitive area sales wise, but also among golf courses," Kubik says. "When a superintendent needs something he needs it now. We react to the situation."

Kubik and Jones make up the company's sales team. Their wives take care of the office and bookkeeping work. The company also employs three deliverymen.

Kubik says he and Jones enjoy a special kind of business relationship in that it is a true partnership—decisions are made together and there are no petty rivalries.

I can't express the respect we have for each other," says Kubik of his partner.

Before joining Kubik, Jones was a vice president at Andrew Wilson and a sales manager at John Manville.

On the road

Grass Roots is a firm believer in trade

shows. Kubik says his company goes to shows for visibility and to pick up new lines.

"It's a good way to get to know the manufacturers and for the manufacturers to get to know you. If you don't get off on the right foot with manufacturers, it can break you."

Another area where Kubik feels

Kubik plans to continue developing his company through his "elastic band theory."

the industry can be broken is in federal regulations.

"The federal government is over-regulating the professional," he says. "The professional shouldn't be penalized because of the incompetence of others. This industry doesn't need alarmists."

Kubik feels the best interests of the industry can be served through local and state legislators and industry associations.

"We really are self-regulating and licensing dealers and superintendents."

What's ahead

Kubik plans to continue developing his company through his "elastic band theory"; that of slow, controlled growth.

"We will become even more solidified, stronger and with more credibility," Kubik predicts.

And did starting his own business fulfill that niche Kubik felt in his 30s?

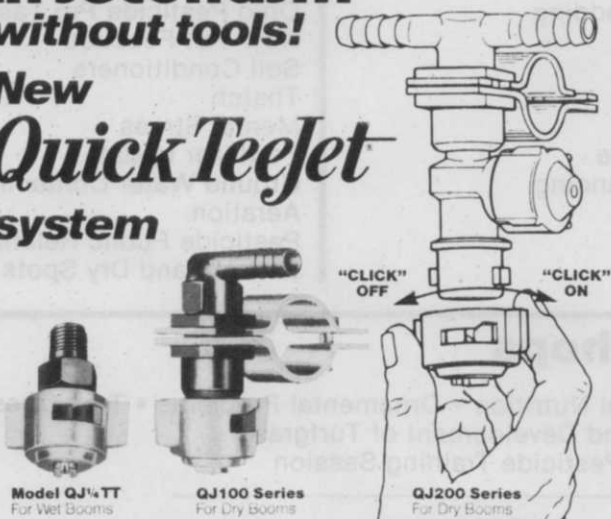
"More than I ever anticipated," he says. "I'm a more complete person. You get physically exhausted, but it's exciting. There's something about having your own business—you cause and solve your own problems."

Besides pumping hours into the business, Kubik says it's important to him to find time for his wife and four children and to play tennis, soccer and handball. (He was town tennis champ six times.)

Kubik and Jones have another company philosophy that they credit to the firm's steady growth. According to Kubik, "We limit ourselves to making the same mistake only once." **WT&T**

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