

MAKING A PHARMACIST.*

BY SENECA S. SMITH.¹

The subject I have chosen on which to address you reminds me of the gentleman who, upon seeing the sign "Smith Manufacturing Co." remarked that he had always wondered where all the Smiths came from and now he knew.

One might almost suppose from the title that I intended telling you of some magical phar-ma-cog-nos-ti-cal machine where pharmacists, ready to use, are turned out.

Nothing is further from my mind. I am not even going to tell you of the merit or demerit of our colleges of pharmacy or speak of their method or lack of method, as the case may be. I could say a lot along those lines, for I am frequently reminded of some of the shortcomings of our graduates, as well as the graduates of other colleges.

It is not my intention to speak to you as a member of the faculty of one of our great colleges, but rather as a member of that great army of ambassadors who call on you with such regularity, the "commercial traveler." From his point of view, I am going to outline to you what I consider the duty of every pharmacist to his apprentice, the embryonic pharmacist.

In a store where I was making a call a youth, of perhaps sixteen years, had that morning started employment, with the evident intention of some day becoming the leading member of our profession, in a metropolis. I might say that I have a perfect right to use the pronoun "our" in speaking of the profession of pharmacy, as I am proud to say that I am a pharmacist. The proprietor and the boy were the only ones in the store, excepting myself. I was back of the prescription counter with the owner (Mr. X, I shall call him) taking an order, while the boy was industriously at work sweeping the floor when a lady entered the store. The boy had never served a customer nor had he had any previous opportunity to observe the method of approach, and yet Mr. X said, "See what she wants, Henry," actually allowing this novice to go to the front and attempt to satisfy the wants of the customer. It is because of such apparent lack of interest in a clerk's training that I make bold to speak to you on the subject of making a pharmacist.

In using the term pharmacist, I mean the all-round individual; the one who knows how to keep up the appearance of the store, properly serve customers, keep a want book, price the merchandise for resale, buy, take inventory, etc.; as well as to put up prescriptions, manufacture pharmaceuticals, check up doses and the hundred and one other things which we generally define as ethical; in fact, I mean a person who actually knows how to run a drug store or pharmacy.

Gentlemen, the rank and file of store-keepers expect the colleges to take a raw recruit, sometimes spoiled before the college receives him and, after a lapse of two or three years, hand him back as a worth while, desirable, finished clerk, and I want to tell you that it cannot be done or, at least, it cannot be done properly, without considerable coöperation.

Some years ago, I had access to a printing establishment and I recall that the pages illustrating the various styles of type and the printed forms always started with the words, *Experience Teaches*.

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I do not believe it is possible for a college to properly function without the assistance of the pharmacist-employer and if a student graduates with no previous experience it simply means that he will finish his education and become proficient only after considerable practical experience.

The Education Departments of many states recognize this as a fact, when they require a certain amount of practical experience, in addition to their college education, before a license to practice pharmacy will be issued. I am sure that you are glad there is such a requirement, because you must agree with me that experience is absolutely essential.

I have said that you have a duty to perform toward your apprentice and, while I am not going to withdraw that statement, I want to explain and modify it to some extent.

No one does things well simply because it is a duty to do them, nor does he do them well under compulsion. To do a thing well, we must have a liking for the thing to be done and there must be a reward, even though it be nothing more than the plaudits of our fellowmen. Few of us care to do a thing simply because it is our duty to do it.

That being so, we must look for some reason other than duty for any effort we are going to put forth to change the tyro into a clerk with whom it will be a pleasure and a profit to associate, whether a youth or an adult. Naturally, the reason must be one which affects our interests, either considerably or vitally.

If our clerk functions properly our business will be affected favorably and this will, in turn, increase our profits; therefore, it is really worth a little effort to train him so that he will function properly. This being the case it simply resolves itself into a question of asset or liability.

If we accept the principle that everything pertaining to a store is either an asset or a liability, it will considerably increase our interest in the progress made by our clerk. Shall we accept this principle? Assets are things of value, whether they be things tangible and which can be turned into cash, such as merchandise we have purchased for resale at a profit, or the "Good Will" our store has, which brings people there to purchase such merchandise.

Is a dirty floor, or an unclean case, or a sloppy soda counter, or a slovenly, disagreeable, untrained clerk an asset or a liability or neither? Does it matter if customers receive proper attention, so that the need of merchandise in our line immediately brings to mind our store and a desire to trade with us? If it does—and I, for one, believe it does—we have a very definite reason for making a business man, if not a complete pharmacist, of our apprentice, with as much speed as is consistent with good judgment and his ability to absorb whatever is taught him.

Customers are the most important part of any business. In fact, they are essential. That being admitted, you will also admit that our clerk must be taught to do the things that will be pleasing to the customer and that will engender sufficient good will, so that our store will be in mind as one of the pleasant places to visit.

This brings us to the things our employees must know and be and do if they are going to be assets, and all of us know that every store has sufficient liabilities without going to the trouble and expense of employing them. Let me enumerate and emphasize some of these things.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed on cleanliness. You cannot expect

a boy to know the difference between a hand towel and a dish towel unless he is taught, neither will he realize the importance of clean hands and clothes, unless the reasons are brought to his attention and sufficiently emphasized. I have been in a store when a boy wiped up the soda counter, dried his hands and then proceeded to dry the spoons on the same towel, and observed by several customers. I have also seen a clerk with dirty hands weigh out candy, using a scoop to be sure, but handling some of the pieces with his dirty fingers. You must teach him to keep one towel separate and clean for use on dishes only, and to always have clean hands when serving customers. One can hardly imagine the housewife using the hand towel on which to dry her dishes, and good will certainly will not be quickened by allowing such a proceeding in the store.

Start your clerk right. Do not bother with things that are too trivial but insist that things sufficiently worth while to receive mention are carried out as you desire. Reasons are always in order and it will always be easier for your clerk to do the thing you want done and in the way you want it done, if you will make the necessary explanation when the order is given.

Of course you expect honesty in your clerk but you cannot get it, nor can you logically teach it, unless you practice it scrupulously. I presume that you always report merchandise which comes in your order without being charged the same as you do shortages, and that you report errors in billing whether in your favor or not; but do you steal your clerk's time by not seeing to it that he is always relieved on time and given the full quota of time off? He undoubtedly thinks his recreation time is just as valuable as yours, even though his working time is not so costly. In New York State the pharmacy law defines the maximum number of hours a clerk may work in a pharmacy and I contend that a person violating this provision of the law is sowing the seed of dishonesty and discontent and that the clerk who is forced to break it will, naturally, feel that he is working for a law-breaker.

We should, therefore, practice both the spirit and the letter of the law. I do not see how a violator of the law, even of the Volstead Law, especially if done with a clerk's knowledge, can expect to profit by his ill-gotten gains without arousing the cupidity and jealousy of his clerk to such an extent that his efficiency and honesty may become impaired.

Have an agreement with your clerk as to how much free merchandise he is entitled to, if any. Do not let him decide it, for it may be decidedly to your disadvantage. Do you allow him soda water, ice cream, candy, tobacco, etc., for his own use, without charge? If so, how about postage stamps and medicine for his own use? If you allow him all of these things, does it include the treating of friends and taking candy, cream and tobacco home for the family? The point I am trying to make is just this—do you have a definite point beyond which your clerk must not go or do you have no actual arrangement? If you do not, you must know that he will eat candy, drink soda water and probably smoke your cigars and cigarettes, without paying for them, and if he does this without your consent, you cannot tell just how far he will go.

Have a definite arrangement regarding payment for merchandise of all kinds, how such payment is to be made and what percentage is to be added to cost, to meet the overhead. I am taking it for granted that your merchandise is priced intelligently, so as to furnish a fixed percentage of profit on the selling price and not on the cost.

A simple method for determining such selling price is to subtract your desired per cent of profit from one hundred and divide your cost by this remainder. Move your decimal point two places to the right, which is equivalent to multiplying by one hundred, and the result will be the desired selling price. Thus: an article costs \$9.00 per dozen and I desire a gross profit of $37\frac{1}{2}\%$ when I sell same. Subtracting $37\frac{1}{2}$ from 100 leaves $62\frac{1}{2}$. One twelfth of a dozen costs 75 cents, so I divide 75 cents by $62\frac{1}{2}$ and find that 1% equals $1\frac{2}{10}$ cents. Moving the decimal two places to the right, which is the same as multiplying by one hundred, I find my selling price to be \$1.20—to make a gross profit of $37\frac{1}{2}\%$ on the sale.

I hope you always correct a salesman who tries to show a very large per cent of profit on his merchandise, by figuring profit on cost instead of selling price. A 50% profit on cost is in reality only a profit of $33\frac{1}{3}\%$, while the 100% on cost is only 50%. A real 100% profit on selling price is impossible, unless the merchandise is given to you and the cost of handling (overhead) is not added.

Be sure and explain to your clerk that your overhead percentage, that is your expense for clerk hire, rent, heat, light, insurance, ice, paper, string and many other things which you buy but do not sell, is based on sales and that it is therefore necessary to figure your per cent of profit on a sales basis.

Again referring to the necessity of securing good will, let me refer to the need of punctuality. You probably have a definite time for the store to be opened and I hope that you are insistent that it shall be opened as you desire. Also that merchandise promised for delivery at a certain time must be delivered, or ready for delivery if on call, according to agreement.

Weights and measures are very important considerations with the pharmacist, and while the prescription scales may be a matter of life and death, the counter scales may do a lot of injury to the profits of a business. The correct use of weights and measures should be taught at the earliest possible moment and also the fact that exact weight is the only correct weight and that over-weight is just as dishonest as short weight. If you handle bulk candy, be sure that most of your net profit is not being lost by over-weight. Prices are made on the expectation of selling sixteen ounces out of every pound purchased, and too much down weight will surely turn the desired profit into an actual loss, if overhead is taken into consideration.

The use of the "Want Book" is very important, and the reason for this importance should be properly explained, together with the proper method of keeping same, rather than to insist on entering items when out and stopping at that. Teach the clerk to make the necessary notation in the book, regarding balance on shelf; how much, if any, reserve stock; if it is a new article, the reason for putting it down, and then train him to check up incoming orders on the book, making a notation of shortages and omissions. A "want book," properly kept, will expedite the making up of an order and a clerk, carefully trained, will quickly learn to keep it correctly. I consider the "want book" of greater importance than the day book, but the reasons for both, together with their correct use, should be sufficiently emphasized.

As your clerk advances in usefulness, advertising should be explained. This need not necessarily consist of advertisement writing but rather of what kind of matter shall be used and how. He should be taught to make up a mailing list,

several copies of which should constantly be on hand. In this connection, window, show case and counter displays should be explained and the fact that they are made for their sales value rather than for their artistic effect thoroughly emphasized. Be sure and have him connect up his interior displays with his window trims, thus holding a prospective customer's interest, until he is in actual possession of the item which has aroused his desire for ownership.

Do not allow the clerk to neglect the companion sale for which we should always strive. Allied articles should always be in mind whenever a sale is made and related items should be in a convenient place if not actually displayed, connecting up with every display made. Emphasize the value of price-tickets on displayed stock and urge your clerk to practice lettering and show-card writing. Keep in mind that men do not like to ask prices, unless they are reasonably sure of making a purchase. Generally speaking, women are not so particular and will frequently ask a price and then tell you with considerable emphasis that they think the price too high, when they decline to buy.

Salesmanship follows right along in this same channel and it will be necessary for the clerk to know all that is to be known about the merchandise displayed if he is to be successful in selling it. I recall being present when the owner of a store was unsuccessful in selling a camera, because he did not know how to load it. The salesman who specializes with some particular article or line is apt to be very much more successful than the general salesman with the same item; the only reason is because he is so much more conversant with its merit and talking points. I might add that another reason is the fact that the specialist sees you once, while the general salesman is a frequent caller and, consequently, does not dare laud the article quite so highly nor urge its sale to the same extent.

You should never have any dead stock in your store. If you are sufficiently sold on any merchandise to buy it, you should be able to sell it and you probably would be if you really tried. Your clerk, however, cannot be expected to sell the article if you alone have heard the sales talk, while the clerk is merely handed the article and told to sell it.

Having your sales force present when purchasing new merchandise will permit them to hear the sales talk; this will considerably enhance their value to your store. Also suggest to them that they read advertisements and circulars descriptive of items you carry in stock. After a time their judgment on selection will be of tremendous help to you and will prevent the accumulation of dead stock.

A child learns by observation and queries. A clerk can do the same thing, but a constant repetition of rebuffs by an owner or a head clerk will, eventually, cause the tyro to cease asking questions. Idle curiosity may be reprehensible, but a desire to acquire knowledge is commendable and should be encouraged.

It may even be that you are not a person to be imitated and that you have never acquired a pleasing personality. If this is so, and if it is you must surely know it, impress on your clerk to do as you say and not as you do. This is especially true regarding courtesy.

It may be your policy to argue with your customers and to talk politics, religion and other controversial subjects with them. If you do, it is a privilege you have, but I would not accord to a clerk the same privilege. I am a firm believer in partisan politics, freedom of religious views and that every one should be granted

the privilege of a definite opinion on any and all subjects, but exploitation of these views should be reserved for the club, debating society or some other open forum rather than the store.

If there is to be any contention between your store and your customers, it should be turned over to you for adjustment and the clerk relieved of such responsibility. Any exception to this rule should be determined by you. A disturbing element of any kind should not be kept in your employ. Certainly a customer should never be allowed to leave your store inwardly "cussing" and vowing "never to step foot in your store again."

In the matter of inventory which, of course, you take at least once a year, do not allow your clerk to look on it as drudgery, whatever your viewpoint. Rather, tell him you are going to find out if you have made anything over a given period and to hunt for buried or dead stock which is not too far gone to reclaim. Make the necessary preparation for the inventory just as you do for the manufacture of a pharmaceutical. Just get your material ready before you actually take it and it will be easy. Have the book or the paper, on which the inventory is to be taken, written up during periods of dull business, so that the actual taking of the inventory will merely mean the filling in of quantities. Items should be written in the order in which they appear on the shelves or in the cases, cupboards or drawers. Prices can also be entered at odd moments before the stock taking is begun. They should be at cost or market, whichever is lowest.

While the inventory is being taken, all other work, so far as possible, should be discontinued, but the serving of customers must not be neglected. Never allow anything to interfere with customers, not even visiting with a friend, for they are your daily bread as well as the food and drink of your clerks and of your landlord.

I am reminded of an incident which occurred many years ago. I was taking an order from a pharmacist, when a gentleman came in carrying two grips. He was without doubt a salesman. He dropped his grips in front of the cigar case and stood in a waiting attitude. Two clerks had disappeared temporarily, which is not at all unusual when the boss is busy. My customer ignored the salesman for several minutes, continuing to give me the order. Finally he stood up, squared his shoulders, and walking over to the salesman, stood ready for the combat. "Well Sir," he said in an aggressive tone. The salesman leaned over and picked up his grips. "I came in for a cigar but I don't feel like smoking now," he replied and walked out. Again I say, never allow a customer to be neglected, even momentarily, for any cause unless it be on account of preceding customers and then a word of greeting or possibly an apology for the delay should be made.

If two can work at the taking of inventory, it will decidedly expedite matters to have one call the quantities while the other enters them in the proper place in the book, previously prepared. Finally, figure up the total and after checking up to determine if the business has been profitable or not, it should be kept in the safe, for reference and in case of a fire loss.

There are many other things I might suggest, but they would necessarily be along the lines already mentioned. Rarely is a clerk criticized for his prescription or laboratory work, for the trouble is usually very much deeper. Frequently, it is impossible to locate any one thing that is worse than many others, but the fact is that our clerk is not exactly satisfactory and causes much worry and many

petty annoyances. We finally arrive at the conclusion that the boys of to-day are not as alert and capable as they were when we were boys, whereas the real reason is because they do not have the same opportunity.

When we consider that the business of the chain stores is entirely dependent on clerks, it certainly makes us feel that the poorest kind of a clerk could be made worth-while, if properly trained. You may be sure that their employees are taught the various things to be done and the way to do them, before they are turned loose in the store.

A friend of mine, a fellow salesman, once remarked to me that every clerk who had preliminary training with Mr. G— had been a decided success and that his protégés made good wherever employed. Needless to say that Mr. G. is a pharmacist who does things thoroughly himself and insists that his employees do things as he wants them done. He is by no means a disagreeable man to work for and there is always a pleasant atmosphere about his store. If he has any criticism to make to an employee, it is always done in a friendly way and when they are alone. Customers, salesmen, or fellow-clerks are never embarrassed by being forced to be unwilling listeners to a "calling down" such as I have often heard in some stores and sometimes accompanied by profanity.

I am sure that no one in such an intelligent gathering as this would be guilty of such actions and I am also certain that such a procedure drives customers away. A pleasant atmosphere in which to work is very important, both to get the most out of the ensemble and for your own satisfaction and contentment.

If you have not properly trained yourself along these lines, right now is a good time to start. It is difficult for any individual to rise very much above his environment and a boy with an employer who is neglectful, untidy, irresponsible, lawless and unsuccessful, has an exceedingly hard road to travel, before he can hope to be a success as a clerk.

In conclusion, I wish to say that it is largely in your hands to have either good clerks—clerks who are real assets—or mediocre clerks who make you grouchy and make you wish that you had a one-man store, without a clerk problem.

It is your own fault if there is discord and dissension, where the most perfect harmony is desirable, if not essential. Colleges will continue to hand you clerks as a casting comes from the mould, unfinished. The necessary polish and finish will always have to be acquired in practice, which means—that the actual making of the pharmacist will be done by the employer as well as the college. If you will keep in mind that it is very decidedly to your advantage to give your clerks careful training, training that has been thoughtfully planned, we shall very soon cease to hear criticism of the quality of boys who are now taking up pharmacy.

I am most anxious to see a more cordial relationship between the pharmacist and his clerk and to see the latter in his proper place, as a helpful unit in the happy family of business men, instead of being what I have sometimes heard him called, "a necessary evil."

"RIGHT IS AN ECONOMIC AS WELL AS AN ETHICAL PRINCIPLE."

The influences of trades and professions, good or bad, radiate in every direction. They affect the individuals engaged and those served by them. The influence depends on the contact and number of individuals.