

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Conducted by Paul C. Olsen.*

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE INVITED AND WELCOME.

Readers are invited to submit comments, criticisms and suggestions regarding the material which appears in this department. The Editor will also undertake to answer questions regarding general problems of business management. Letters of general interest will be published, but the writer's name will not be revealed without his permission.

ADVERTISING AND SELLING PROBLEMS OF DRUG STORES.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL DRUG STORE SALESMEN.

BY PAUL C. OLSEN.

Honesty is a characteristic which in a drug store salesperson, or in any one, should require no defense or explanation. None the less, it is a regrettable fact that honesty is not so regarded everywhere.

Digressions vary all the way from "little white lies" to downright and discreditable deceit. It is not my business here to attempt to defend honesty from a moral standpoint. Indeed, it requires no such defense. I do want to try to explain, however, that regardless of these moral considerations, honesty is the best policy from a business and selling standpoint.

One of the most common disregards to-day of the principle of honesty and fair dealing is the practice of giving inside prices to favored customers. The reason that these customers are favored is not because they deserve to be favored, but rather because they insist upon being favored and the drug store proprietor or salesman is not courageous nor fair enough to deny their requests.

A woman says, "I can get such and such for such a price." All too often, the tendency to-day in many drug stores is in the particular sale to meet the alleged competitive price but not to make a general reduction to everybody in the selling price of that item. The serious thing about this practice is not the few pennies lost profit resulting from the reduction in price on the single sale but, on the one hand, the creation of the impression in the mind of the customer who gains such a favor that all prices in the store are subject to negotiation and, therefore, not to be trusted. An equally grave danger is the very distinct possibility that the customer gaining the favor will boast of it to people who have not obtained such favors. Again, confidence in the drug store and in its personnel is severely shaken, and confidence is the basis upon which successful and profitable drug store businesses are built.

I have discussed repeatedly in THIS JOURNAL the problems created by cut prices on standard identified merchandise and have attempted to indicate practical, profitable and confidence-winning methods of meeting such competition in considerable degree. When, instead of using these methods, a druggist immediately gives inside prices to those who ask most insistently for them, he is destroying the foundation stones upon which the success of his business must be built.

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There have been substitution practices in one way or another in prescriptions; such practices are, of course, entirely indefensible and require no excoriation here.

There is, however, a tendency to defend the inside price to favored customers and to put such practices in a class with the little white lies which are told customers when they ask about the ingredients in a prescription just brought in. Little white lies are defensible on the moral ground that they will cause less suffering than the truth and that they do not create nor maintain wrong impressions.

Honesty and truthfulness as characteristics in drug store salesmen are essentially negative and, as I said above, they are taken for granted. The absence of them creates not only moral but business problems such as I have outlined above.

A lack of honesty and truthfulness places an extra burden upon a drug store salesman. The honest and truthful salesperson has no such extra burden because his statements are always in accordance with the facts. The dishonest and untruthful person must have not only a clear knowledge of the facts but of the statements contrary to fact which he has made. It is this dual burden which eventually ruins the salesperson who is dishonest and untruthful.

A characteristic in drug store salespeople closely related to honesty and truthfulness is that of loyalty. It, too, is largely negative in its force. Loyalty is presumed to exist, unless circumstances and actions prove otherwise. I am quite willing to admit that loyalty does not bring always appropriate rewards. Undeserving persons are promoted, while loyal salespeople remain at their old duties or are even discharged. This does not, however, prove that loyalty is an undesirable characteristic in a drug store salesman. Justice does not always prevail and sometimes is slow to prevail. This does not excuse in a drug store salesman a lack of loyalty any more than an escape from punishment by a guilty murderer justifies that crime.

I have purposely left to the last this discussion of honesty, truthfulness and loyalty as characteristics of drug store salesmen, because, while they are fundamental to success, they are not in themselves characteristics which insure success. Without them a person cannot succeed for long, but he must have many other and more positive characteristics if he is to succeed in any important degree. Many persons, essentially honest, truthful and loyal, fill humble and subordinate positions; the absence of other and more positive characteristics wholly incapacitates them from doing more responsible work.

The drug store salesman who is not loyal to his employer, and feels he cannot be loyal to him because of an evident deficiency in the character of the employer, should not continue in such a position. If the fault is entirely with the employer, rather than with the salesman's analysis of the employer, he should seek employment elsewhere immediately. He cannot serve himself nor his employer in such a position. He should be sure, however, that the fault is with the employer and not merely in his own analysis of the situation.

I knew a young man once who, just prior to entering his last year in college, seriously considered leaving the employ of a drug store proprietor with whom he had worked all through his high school and college days and whose encouragement and financial help had enabled him to go to college. The dispute concerned summer wages and working hours. The young man had failed to realize that, during his last year in college on account of the increased schedule of laboratory and class

work in that year, he would be able to spend very little time in the store and thus to give the proprietor very little value for the wages he had agreed to pay him. The extra summer work was simply a partial compensation for this later loss which the proprietor would suffer. Fortunately, the young man was amenable to reason when the facts were carefully and tactfully explained to him, with the result he attacked his work during the remainder of the summer with a zest and enthusiasm which was of great profit to himself and to the store in which he worked.

Another characteristic basically negative in its force is alertness. It is taken for granted that a drug store salesman will be vigilant and ready in the performance of his duties. What we take for granted in this respect is not always achieved, moans many a drug store proprietor who has had to warn an apprentice that the sidewalk in front of the store is not the place to stand when he has no immediate duties to perform. The cold weather sequel of this—the apprentice with his nose pressed against the glass of the front door—is equally distasteful to the aggressive and thoughtful drug store proprietor. This is rightly so because employees so obviously idle bespeak a slack business. People are irresistibly attracted to the busiest stores, just as moths are drawn to the brightest lights. They avoid whenever possible the stores which do not appear to be busy, because a store which appears not to be busy makes people think that its merchandise and services are not satisfactory, otherwise it would be busy.

If a drug store salesman has the time and the inclination to read the morning paper, the place to read it is out of sight in the back room and not perched on top of a soda fountain stool. Should customers enter, the paper can be laid down secretly and the customer approached alertly and with contagious interest and enthusiasm.

Nothing is of greater importance than prompt service to the customers who enter the store. Other duties should be dropped as quickly as possible that customers may be served. A customer by entering the store has come the greater part of the way necessary to make possible a sale. Customers expect, and certainly not without reason, that having come this far, they should receive instantly the alert attention of a salesperson in order speedily to complete the transaction.

CONCENTRATED YELLOW MERCURIC OXIDE OINTMENT (10 PER CENT).

The Austrian Pharmacopœia is considering the following formula for inclusion:

Mercuric chloride	19 parts
Sodium hydroxide solution	80 parts
Distilled water	a sufficient quantity
Wool fat	30 parts
Soft paraffin, white	a sufficient quantity

Dissolve the mercuric chloride in 380 parts of hot water, filter, allow to cool to about 30° C., and pour with constant stirring, into the sodium hydroxide solution, diluted with 250 parts of

water. Set the mixture aside for one hour, stir frequently and protect from light. Collect the precipitate on a tared filter; when the liquid has drained off, wash with water at 30° C., until silver nitrate produces in the washings not more than an opalescence. Dry the precipitate without the aid of heat, and then triturate the mercuric oxide with the wool fat and 50 parts of soft paraffin. The filter is dried at 100° C., and weighed to determine the quantity of mercuric oxide still adhering, which must be deducted from the 15 parts of HgO resulting from 19 parts of HgCl₂. Add sufficient soft paraffin to produce ten times the weight of HgO formed, and triturate thoroughly.