

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Conducted by Paul C. Olsen.*

A SOURCE OF SELLING IDEAS.

As you look along the station platform and down Auburn avenue in Monkton, the first drug store you see is Abel's Modern Pharmacy. Mr. Abel often had wondered just how many salesmen had stood on that platform, seen his store and started toward it.

Some of these salesmen were veterans whom Mr. Abel knew personally. Others were inexperienced youths, quite obviously making their first trips. Because of the location of his store, Mr. Abel was reasonably sure that he was visited by many more salesmen than any of the other druggists in Monkton.

In spite of the onslaughts of tyros and veterans, Mr. Abel had always tried to remain alert and open-minded, ever regardful of new ideas and methods by which he could increase his business and his profits.

He was discouraged because he learned so little from all the army of travelers who visited him. One after another their greeting would be in this fashion: "Anything for Waykal to-day?"

The easiest answer in the world to such a question is, "No, nothing to-day." Mr. Abel, being only human, had made that answer many, many times. He often thought he detected a look of relief as the salesman picked up his unopened brief case and started for the door. Perhaps the salesman thought, as he mentally crossed Mr. Abel's name from his route list, "Well, that's over."

Only once in a long time was Mr. Abel visited by such a salesman as John Wright. John Wright represented the great pharmaceutical house of Marvel, Murdoch and Company. On his first trip to Monkton, Mr. Wright did not greet Mr. Abel with a conventional, "My name is Wright,—Marvel, Murdoch and Company, Chicago. Anything for us to-day?"

Instead he stepped to the soda fountain and politely asked to borrow a spoon. Into the spoon he poured a little milk of magnesia from a crisp, clean package he took from his pocket.

Then offering the spoon to Mr. Abel and putting the bottle on the fountain where Mr. Abel could see it, he said:

"There is the smoothest milk of magnesia that is made to-day. Just taste it yourself and see if what I say isn't true."

It would have taken an extremely strong-willed man to refuse such a request, so tactfully phrased.

"Yes, that is good," conceded Mr. Abel.

"A special process which we control exclusively," continued Mr. Wright, "makes it possible for us to produce a thoroughly homogeneous product. That's what makes the smooth taste that you liked."

With a start like this it was easy to interest even the most callous buyer. From milk of magnesia it was but a step to other distinctive products of the Marvel,

* Instructor of Merchandising, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, Lecturer on Business Administration, Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.

Murdoch line. John Wright was always careful to lay stress upon the points which made his products different.

Many things had happened in the busy Abel drug store in the week that elapsed before the Marvel, Murdoch order arrived. Mr. Abel happened to be out when the shipment was unpacked.

He was hardly inside the store, before his manager asked rather excitedly, "Did you order this milk of magnesia? We have 4 brands here now and we never have had any calls for this new one. I have been trying to cut down our stock instead of increasing it."

Without a word, Mr. Abel stepped to the soda fountain and poured a little of the new milk of magnesia into a spoon. "Murphy, there's the smoothest milk of magnesia that's made to-day. Taste it and see if you don't agree with me."

"That is good," conceded Murphy.

Mr. Abel smiled at his almost parrot-like repetition of the salesman's argument, but he knew now that Murphy believed in the new milk of magnesia.

That evening Dr. Harris stopped in for his usual chat. Apropos of nothing at all, Mr. Abel said to him. "Doctor, I have here the smoothest milk of magnesia you ever tried. Taste a little and see if what I say isn't true."

"That is good," the doctor admitted. "Whose is it?"

Mr. Abel's hopes of the doctor's patronage were rewarded the next morning when two of his familiar blue prescriptions appeared specifying Marvel, Murdoch's milk of magnesia.

It is needless to detail here additional occurrences which tell how the other members of Mr. Abel's staff and his professional friends became enthusiastic advocates of the new milk of magnesia.

The principle that this example illustrates is one which can be used time after time in any drug store. The arguments a salesman uses to convince a druggist of the merits of his goods are in turn the arguments which the druggist can use to convince his staff and his customers.

For instance, the fact that a druggist buys a line of hot water bottles because the seams are reinforced with 7 plies of new live rubber is just as convincing to his assistants and customers as it was to him.

If a druggist buys a bath brush because it is a bargain, the fact that the brush is a bargain will make an impression on the people in the store and the customers, just as it did on the druggist himself.

From this discussion I am sure you will recognize that the salesmen who call on you and sell you goods are an invaluable source of selling ideas. Unfortunately, however, worth-while ideas are obtainable from only a very few of the many salesmen who call on a retail druggist.

The situation is very much like placer mining. All the effort of sifting through pan after pan of dirt is rewarded by the little nuggets of knowledge which the alert druggist can recover from time to time and use for himself.

WHO PAYS WHEN THE SALESMAN WAITS?

There are druggists who rather pride themselves on their high and mighty treatment of the salesmen who call on them. They rather enjoy busying themselves with imaginary duties while a salesman waits for them to appear.

Some druggists have been heard to say that a salesman thinks more of a druggist when he has to wait to see that druggist. No one denies that the salesman thinks more of such a druggist, but what he thinks is another matter.

A salesman who has been kept waiting 15 minutes or half an hour feels very naturally that this wait entitles him to at least that much time to explain his proposition fully. By keeping the salesman waiting the druggist, more often than not, has obligated himself, tacitly, to hear the salesman's story.

Many times the salesman's entire story is not worth hearing and the druggist wastes time that he could have saved had he seen the man immediately and dismissed him at once. Of course there are times when it is absolutely impossible to see every salesman the minute he arrives, but the fact remains that salesmen promptly interviewed are promptly and satisfactorily dispatched.

There is another aspect to this question of interviewing salesmen promptly. Transport yourself for a minute to the office of the sales manager of a large pharmaceutical house. Here the sales manager sits anxiously scanning a sheaf of salesmen's reports. Eight calls a day this man averages, 7 for this one, 9 for another, so the reports read one after the other.

"When I was out on the road I found out why the average salesman spends only about one hour in his 7-hour day actually talking to customers. The rest of the time he is either traveling or waiting—mostly waiting—because we have our territories laid out so a man can get from one customer to another with a minimum loss of time. But this druggist won't see anybody before 11 and this man won't see anybody after 12. And in this store you can talk to the buyer only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Add to that the natural crankiness of some druggists who keep a salesman waiting just because they know they have the salesman at their mercy.

"If our men only could increase their number of daily calls from 8 or 9 to 11 or 12 we could reduce our selling expenses by at least 20 per cent. It is telling no secret to say that that increase would make possible a 5 or 10 per cent reduction in our selling prices.

"But our men don't seem to be able to do it. The result is the druggist pays 5 to 10 per cent more for our merchandise because our salesmen can't see him promptly; they compel a man to come in 5 or 6 times when they could just as well reach a decision after one or two visits."

The sales manager is right. What he says is true not only of his company but of every company which sends salesmen to see the druggist.

The costs of distribution are tremendous, averaging for many commodities 50 per cent of the retail price. The only way these costs can be paid is by adding them to the price of the merchandise. Any action on the part of the retail druggist which increases the costs of selling merchandise to him he, himself, pays in the higher price of that merchandise.

SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

Stationery and school supplies
Fountain pens Mechanical pencils
Cameras and films
Developing, printing and enlarging

Spices and flavoring extracts
Soaps and bath supplies
Face creams and lotions
Brushes Hot water bottles