

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 also will 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.

HORACE HAMPTON TELLS HOW TO GET PRESCRIPTION BUSINESS.

(Concluded from p. 398, April Issue.)

Luncheon over, Horace Hampton and his friend and classmate, Floyd Hamel, Cleartown druggist, were back in Mr. Hampton's store.

"This has been very kind of you, Horace," began Mr. Hamel, "to take all this time and trouble to tell me in detail just why prescription business is so profitable and desirable and to explain how I can figure how much of it there is to be had in Cleartown. If I had known some of the things ten years ago that you told me today, I would be a lot better off financially. The one thing that distinguishes a druggist from all other retail merchants is his professional training and standing. I can see now how I have been neglecting the very thing which should have been my biggest asset."

"Well, Floyd, the thing to do is to look ahead and not backward. If I've told you anything to-day which you can use, I am more than pleased."

"You have said several times, Horace, that there are three steps in this matter of building up the professional standing and practice of a drug store. Two of them you've already explained to me: First, why prescription business is desirable and, second, how to figure how much of it there is. Now that you've explained both of these propositions for me, the concluding step is how to go about getting this business.

"Yes, that's the real problem. It is easy enough to figure out that something is desirable but quite another matter to obtain it."

"You talk as if the proposition is rather hopeless."

"Not at all. I am simply saying that it takes a lot more than merely wishing to bring a worthwhile volume of prescription into your store or into any store."

"What's the first thing to do?"

"There is a long-established principle of salesmanship that to build a permanent success in selling, the product must be right. In this case the product is your prescription service. You really have two people to satisfy—the patient and the physician.

"Consider first what you have to do to make your product right in the eyes of the physician. You know as well as I do, what it means—a clean, neat and

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

orderly prescription room; balances, mortars, glassware and other equipment, accurate and immaculate; standard ingredients and everything used fresh and full strength; neat, typewritten labels; painstaking care in the way in which the prescription is packaged.

"I am speaking now only of external appearances. It is taken for granted that any pharmacist can be depended upon for unflinching accuracy and skill in compounding.

"If your store is laid out like most stores, your customers won't see any of these things, except the results of your care and skill in attractively packaging your prescriptions. Physicians will see many things that your customers don't see or at least don't recognize; however, you know that physicians can't fail to be impressed favorably by the neat and orderly appearance of your prescription department and your evident care in all the details in prescription compounding.

"The other important step in getting the product right is in the store itself. You can't expect physicians to recommend your services to their patients if your store is plastered from one end to the other with signs and preparations inviting self-medication in ways which are contrary to accepted medical practice. It is just as if an automobile manufacturer were to suggest to prospective buyers that they look into the pleasures of bicycle riding.

"Physicians can have no objection to your recommending personally and by display any of the accepted, simple home remedies; in fact they believe that this actually is a help to their practice. Their objection, and a perfectly justified one, I think, is to a druggist seeking, with one hand, business in cure-alls and nostrums and, with the other hand, asking for the professional business directed to him by physicians.

"Granted that you do get your prescription business on a high plane, it doesn't follow that immediately you are going to start filling 10 or 20 times as many prescriptions as you do now. Of course, physicians will learn gradually that you do conduct the professional side of your business on a very high plane. The hitch is in that word *gradually*. You may be an old man, Floyd, before enough of them have learned about it forcefully enough to result in your having an important volume of prescriptions.

"The problem thus becomes one of speeding up the rate at which physicians learn about your high professional standards and practice. That is up to you. If you wait for them to find it out, it will take a long time. On the other hand, if in a dignified and perfectly ethical manner you take it upon yourself to acquaint physicians with these facts, you accomplish your purpose long before you otherwise would."

"What is this dignified and perfectly ethical method which I can use to get physicians interested enough in my prescription department to send their patients to me, Horace?"

"The plan I used, and the plan which I think you can use profitably, was to go out and call on the physicians whom I felt should be recommending my prescription department."

"You mean, Horace, I should go around and tell them all what a wonderful pharmacist I am?"

"No, indeed, Floyd, you have to be a lot more subtle than that. In the first

place, if you were to go out simply with the idea of explaining to physicians your talents in pharmacy, you would find them, at the best, only vaguely and generally interested. That is to say, the effect of your call would be hazy and indefinite, and hazy and indefinite efforts produce hazy and indefinite results. You want definite, tangible results in the form of prescription business.

"The way I did was not to go out with the idea of selling my professional services but rather with the idea of selling specific pharmaceutical products. Call it detailing, if you want to. This had for me, at least, a two-barreled effect. There are so many new pharmaceutical products being introduced every month that it is a physical impossibility for a physician to keep posted on all of them. I found that I was able to get and hold their interest by talking intelligently on new products which would be of profit to them in their practice. In fact, I was fortunate enough to be able to make enough direct sales to physicians in the kind of pharmaceutical products that can be sold to a physician, to make my calls profitable from that standpoint alone.

"More important, however, I felt that an impression I was leaving after each one of those calls was that I had an up-to-the-minute knowledge in a profession which is none too well understood anyway. Therefore I seemed to be a pharmacist to whom the physician could safely refer his patients.

"As you know, when I started in business I had very little money and I simply had to make my time spent in calling on physicians immediately profitable. Luckily, it worked out all right and I feel sure sooner or later, that in working along similar lines in Cleartown, the impression is going to be created among the worthwhile physicians here that you are the up and coming and outstanding pharmacist of the town.

"So far, I have said nothing about selling your prescription services to patients. Really, though, it is much more important to get the active coöperation and interest of the physicians. If a physician definitely tells a patient to take a prescription to your store, the chances are decidedly remote that he will do anything but what the doctor tells him. That is why it is so important to deserve and have the good will of physicians.

"Nevertheless, there are some things you can do profitably to interest customers in your prescription work. You have seen, I am sure, suggestions for letter inserts, blotters, newspaper advertising and cards to display in the store.

"However, the most important thing, it seems to me, is to remember that prescription service, as far as the customer is concerned, is usually an emergency matter. When a prescription is to be filled the customer is perhaps ill himself or certainly under a strain and anxious to be served as quickly as possible. Your best opportunity to please him is by speedy, confidence-inspiring service. It is well also to popularize the idea that your store is as near as the customer's telephone and that your delivery service is prompt and dependable."

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION MEETING.

The American Library Association held its fifty-first annual convention in Washington during the week of May 13th, with an attendance of more than 2000 members, representing organizations and groups from every state in the Union and the provinces of Canada.