

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.

COURTESY, TACT, PATIENCE AND SELF-CONTROL—FOUR ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES IN SUCCESSFUL DRUG STORE SALESMANSHIP.

BY PAUL C. OLSEN.

Half a dozen bottles of an aperient water to be delivered at once a half mile away is not the simplest order in the world to fill from a drug store. This is particularly true if immediate delivery is demanded and, especially so, when the demand comes from one of those pompous matrons who wants what she wants when she wants it—or, at least, thinks she does. It is useless to try to tell her that the delivery boy has just left for the wholesale house and won't be back for three-quarters of an hour and that you are alone in the store. It is hopeless, also, to try to make her understand that a half dozen bottles of Perrier water bulk considerably larger than the usual drug store delivery.

These are the conditions under which a drug store salesman has opportunity, if he will, for the exercise of four very important virtues which are characteristic of successful drug store salesmen. Real ability is required to be courteous and pleasant to a woman who states her wants in a tone she might use in talking to the garbage man. Not only is courtesy required, but also a degree of self-control comparable to that of the biblical Job.

The most natural thing to do is to give such a person a red-hot retort in kind. A druggist is not in business, however, to engage in sarcastic conversational exchanges with his customers. His business is to supply the merchandise his customers want in a way that will impress them so favorably that they will want to visit the store again.

Any drug store salesman who has had any experience at all can tell stories of shabbily dressed people who visit drug stores regularly and buy surprisingly large quantities of merchandise. It is a mistake for a salesman to think that he can tell by looking at him how much money a person has in his pocket.

I have seen a drug store salesman leave, without apology, a woman dressed in the style of 1907, who was on the point of buying several dollars worth of supplies for her first-aid cabinet, and rush over to a gaudily attired young woman who then spent fifteen minutes fingering the entire stock of lipsticks, trying to decide whether to buy a 25 or a 35-cent one. Meanwhile, the woman in the out-of-date clothes had left the store.

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Regardless of their manners (or lack of them) or appearance, a drug store salesman should treat the people who visit the store in the same courteous attentive way in which he meets the people who are his best friends. Peculiarities of manner and dress are not matters which really concern him. His job is to give people what they need and want, as far as it is possible for him to do so.

There is no use denying, however, that courtesy and three virtues closely related to it—tact, patience and self-control—are most difficult to practice under some of the provocations which a druggist has to endure.

Courtesy is something more than having a smile on one's face. Real courtesy requires a sincere consideration of the wishes, needs and desires of others. This does not mean that a drug store salesman must assume an air of subservience and undue humiliation, but it does mean that every customer should receive polite and interested attention.

Many times customers will say and do things which, to a person experienced in a drug store, are ridiculously absurd and hilariously funny.

Nobody likes to be corrected for their mistakes and a druggist is the last person in the world who should criticize customers' spelling and pronunciation. A courteous salesman never willingly embarrasses or humiliates a customer.

As mentioned in the preceding article in this series many articles sold in a drug store require little or no selling effort. When a woman comes in to buy a 25-cent bottle of tincture of iodine, no sales talk need be delivered to interest her in its purchase. She already has made up her mind. But what she does demand and appreciate is prompt, polite and interested service.

A tactful person is one who gets along with other people because he is considerate of other people's feelings. He does nothing and says nothing which would give offense or cause embarrassment. Tact is shown by the salesman who greets the prospective buyer of hair dye without a meaningful glance at her ink-black tresses. A tactful salesman never shows, by word or facial expression, any surprise at a portly matron's sudden and repeated purchases of "reducing" salts.

Patience is the ability to endure calmly and placidly things which may not be altogether pleasant and enjoyable. Anybody who works around a drug store knows how important patience is. When fifty powder papers are carefully arranged on the prescription counter and just ready to be folded and then somebody opens the back door and lets in a terrific gust of wind, that's a situation in which patience is indeed difficult to exercise. Nothing is gained, however, and much is lost by letting the unfortunate occasion be the cause of an out-burst of angry words.

There are tiresome customers who insist on telling, in the minutest detail, every incident in their uninteresting lives. There are venerable medical practitioners who endlessly retell jokes which were current in their college days. These doctors would be deeply grieved and offended if their jokes each time told to the long suffering drug store salespeople did not produce at least a good semblance of uproarious laughter. Then there are dull and stupid customers who never seem to learn, for instance, how to fill a fountain pen or to put a film in a camera.

The rewards of patience under these trying conditions are profitable sales. Patience does not mean that a drug store salesman must constantly humble and humiliate himself, nor does it mean he must spend endless minutes listening to idle gossip while the telephone rings and prescriptions are waiting to be com-

pounded. That's when the related characteristics of tact and courtesy are especially important. The skilful salesman deftly switches the conversation in a way which leaves the talkative person pleased and satisfied and the salesman free to do his work.

OUR BEST CUSTOMER—BABY.*

BY SAMUEL KRONE.

Isn't it true? It would indeed surprise you to check the amount of money invested in baby merchandise.

Even in depression and unemployment, when every necessity is considered a luxury, baby's needs come first. He is the druggist's most consistent and exacting patron.

What are we doing to make this business one of our features and specialties? Except for an occasional display in a window, a table or so, a few leading items at cut prices, the baby goods are spread out all over the store. The rubber sundries one place, foods in another, bottles somewhere else and specialty items in the rear.

The modern mother demands the best for her baby. She has her doctor but cannot go to him every day and for each little thing. There can be some one there—the neighborhood druggist.

Why not be a headquarters for the baby? The mother must go somewhere for her needs and it may as well be you.

Secure pamphlets from the Labor Department, state and local health authorities on the care of the infant from birth up to three years of age.

Become familiar with all the needs, symptoms, and in every way each step of the baby's growth. Teach your clerk to speak intelligently on this subject. Secure additional information from your favorite physician. Give this advice freely and with authority, and let the people know about it.

Reserve a complete section of your store exclusively for baby merchandise. Add many items not usually carried, such as bibs, layettes and summer suits and scales.

Have everything marked plainly and be ready to answer questions on any of the merchandise offered.

Keep your stock fresh, return all old foods for exchange, and complete the atmosphere with pictures of prize babies.

Once a year have three or four drug stores run a baby show for the neighborhood. With each dollar of baby goods purchased a free entry is given. Have your known local baby specialist take charge. It means added publicity and the cost will be reasonable. The writer will gladly demonstrate the success of this plan.

Issue prizes and print the photos of the winning infants in the local paper. Have photographs of leading contestants in your window.

Department and furniture houses do these things successfully; why not the druggist? He is certainly entitled to the business, if he will only go after it.

"A baby drug store" will mean more professional respect, added confidence and a business that cut prices cannot even touch. It is a good business. The

* Section on Commercial Interests, A. P. H. A., Miami meeting, 1931.