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RUGS

MYK-5000



PILLOWS

SY-008, SY-011, SY-013



THROWS

THL-4000, THL-4001, THL-4002, THL-4003, THL-4004, THL-4005, THL-4006



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OUTDOOR

AA-001, BDH-501-M, CHT-761-M, ECH-450-L, KLL-846-M, LUA-491-L, LUA-493-S, PA-001, SKE-4007



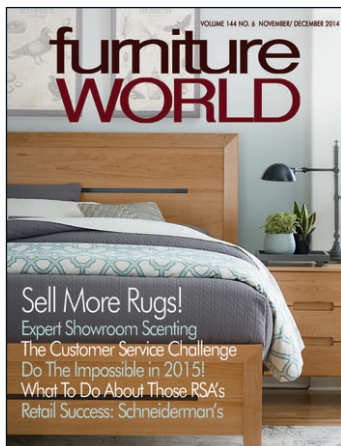
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KID'S

BUD-2000, TIA-1005



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The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers

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Cover Image: It's a new day at American-made Borkholder Furniture. Here, the new Transitions collection explores the intersection of heirloom quality furniture and mid-century Scandinavian design. See more information on Borkholder's offerings on page 11 of this issue or visit www.borkholderfurniture.com.

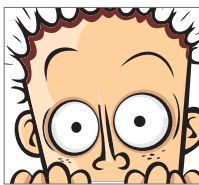
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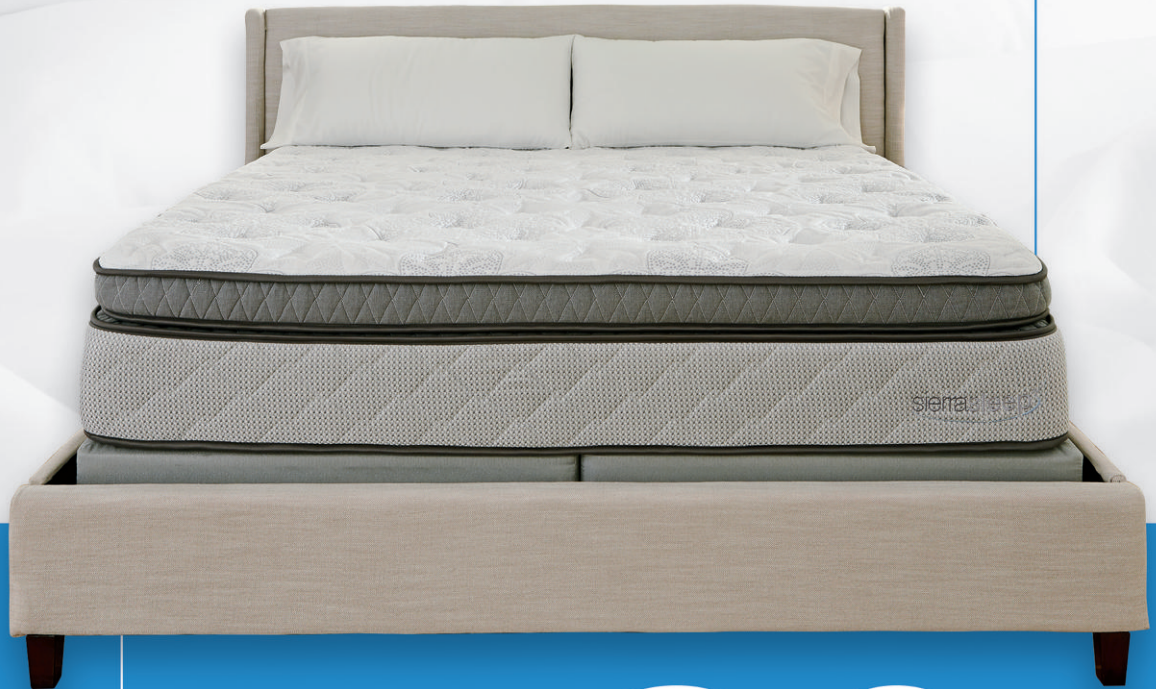


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EDITOR'S CORNER

Remembering Larry Stein

You may have seen him in High Point as recently as five years ago. Nearer to 90 than 80, gaze directed beyond his next step, walking steadily, carrying a black case. A small man, perhaps five foot four when he was young and closer to upright.

He eventually lost some of his words, but never his gentle spirit. Larry Stein, Furniture World's former Associate Publisher passed away at 92 just before the October High Point Market.

During his tenure in the industry he worked for Home Furnishings Daily, was Midwest Manager for House Beautiful Special Publications, and Associate Publisher for NHFA's (now NAHFA) in-house publication Competitive Edge.

He was a WW2 Veteran, quick to tell a funny story, a lifelong musician and entertainer. Not long ago I found him in the Las Vegas Paris Hotel lobby doing a soft shoe and softly singing Swing lyrics to a delighted group of four.

At his center, Larry was a gentleman, a mentor, soft spoken, genuine and professional. He was the kind of sales professional potential customers want to buy from, and that people with even a speck of good sense aspire to be more like.

See his award winning 1997 "Furniture Idol" performance at a City of Hope High Point event posted to www.furninfo.com.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2015.

Russell Bienenstock
Editorial Director

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WORLD**

EXECUTIVE CONTACTS

Editorial Director, CEO
Russell Bienenstock
russ@furninfo.com

Art/ Design Editor
Barbara Bienenstock

Associate Editor
S.T. Bienenstock

Retail Feature Editor
Janet Holt-Johnstone

Comptroller
Gifford Dorival
gifford@furninfo.com

Publisher
Barton Bienenstock
barton@furninfo.com

Vice President
Thelma Mason Davis
thelma@furninfo.com

Advertising Sales Director
Gary Siegel
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THE ART & SCIENCE OF RETAIL SCENTS

Use ambient scenting to bolster the customer experience.

by Roger Bensinger, Prolitec Inc.

When a national furniture retailer wanted to move more product, the U.S.-based company did something fairly unconventional—it pumped fragrance into its stores rather than just pumping more money into TV ads. While the line between correlation and definitive causation can be difficult to draw, the chain was bullish about the sales uptick it experienced during its scenting pilot program. So much so that it rolled out ambient scenting systems in 100 stores last year.

DOLLARS AND SCENTS

And in fact, scientific research has shown that there is something to an assumption that has been widely held within the furniture industry for years: namely, that the smell of fresh-baked cookies or other pleasant aromas can have a positive effect on the customer experience and, by extension, sales. In a famous study by the marketing researcher E.R. Spangenberg and colleagues, pumping a pleasant scent into a simulated retail environment had a distinctive effect, with the research subjects being more likely to say good things about the environ-

ment and products in a scented room versus an unscented one. Other research, such as that published by Mattila and Wirtz in 2001, also suggests that pleasant ambient scent can improve customer evaluations of a store's environment. And like the aforementioned furniture chain, various retailers over the years have noticed strong correlations between their scenting programs and sales increases. According to the December 2013 issue of the POPAI Global Retail Trends Report, the Netherlands-based retailer Hunkemoller ramped up sales of its lingerie (the average customer ticket size increased by 20 percent) simply by scenting its stores with the aroma of chocolate.

BRAND CONSIDERATIONS

Precisely how to scent your store requires a lot of thought and attention to detail. Generally speaking, furniture stores want to aim for a warm, homey environment—something that makes customers feel as though they are in a comfortable, well-appointed home, as opposed to a sterile conveyor of beds, sofas and chairs. Little wonder so many furniture stores like the idea of baking cookies in a bid to

"Retailers over the years have noticed strong correlations between their scenting programs and sales increases."

create an appealing experience. From a logistical standpoint, however, furniture stores are not in the baking business and should not have to run an oven 24/7. Even if they were able to do so, it is difficult to efficiently and evenly distribute the aroma of fresh-baked goods throughout a cavernous furniture showroom.

There are cultural considerations as well, depending on where in the world the furniture store is located. In the United States and Latin America, for example, people tend to love sweets, from chocolate chip cookies to piña coladas. In Europe, however, people generally prefer to avoid wearing sweet perfumes or using sweet ambient scenting formulations. In other words, what some people consider to be a nice aroma, others from a differ-



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"It is simply not the case that that every bedroom set should be scented with lavender, or that every furniture retailer would be wise to adopt a signature fragrance based on fresh-baked cookies."

ent cultural context are more likely to see as cloying. Likewise, tastes and preferences around scent intensity can be culturally determined. In Latin America and the Middle East, people do not mind wearing stronger fragrances or scenting commercial environments fairly heavily. In Asia, people tend to prefer a very light touch when it comes to matters of scent.

Brand considerations, too, can play a significant role. If a particular furniture brand is flashy, in your face and youthful—perhaps using bold colors and funky shapes—the retailer might be wise to scent that product display with a brash and “loud” fragrance. The idea here would be to call out to customers in a multi-sensorial way. But what if the products on display were more elegant, demure and mature with a target audience of baby boomers? Here, a more subtle

approach would likely be most appropriate.

FRAGRANCE CHOICE

Fragrance choice should be matched to the store’s brand and other strategic objectives. Toward that end, it can be helpful to understand the “primary colors” of ambient scenting—otherwise known as the six scent families—and their likeliest emotional and cognitive effects. For example, the citrus family—lemon, lime, mandarin, orange, grapefruit, bergamot and clementine—is often described as crisp and clean. Research shows that the aroma of grapefruit tends to have an uplifting, energizing and refreshing effect, while lime can be cheerful, uplifting and purifying. Think about the adjectives used to capture the essence of your furniture brand (or of specific product lines or categories). Do those adjectives match the general description of the citrus family? If so, you have a possible starting point for a signature scent or product-specific fragrance.

At bare minimum, citrus family scents that convey “clean” and “fresh” can be a good idea for clearance areas, as shoppers sometimes have unconscious concerns about the quality of items in these areas.

Meanwhile, floral scents such as rose, jasmine, gardenia, orange blossoms and violet are often most appropriate for upscale furniture stores or room settings. If the product setting is one in which shoppers might expect to find a bouquet of fresh flowers, a flo-

ral scent might well be a good fit. However, if the room is full of patio or other outdoors-oriented furniture, the outdoorsy scent family could be most appropriate. These fragrances include woody notes such as pine and cedar, green notes such as fresh green grass and mint, and herbal notes of basil and sage.

Fruity fragrances are bright, uplifting, often youthful, and tend to be anxiety reducing as well. Examples include peach, apple, pear, plum and apricot. Imagine a room with a large setting of peach-colored furniture; here, the subtle aroma of peach could highlight the furniture quite nicely. For its part, the ozonic family could be likened to “the scent in the air after a thunderstorm.” It is usually described as airy and fresh, subtle and light. Ozonic fragrances are often used in

"Citrus family scents that convey “clean” and “fresh” can be a good idea for clearance areas, as shoppers can sometimes have unconscious concerns about the quality of items in these areas."

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RISING AND SHINING

BORKHOLDER FURNITURE BEGINS A FRESH NEW ERA IN SOLID WOOD STYLE

It's a new day at Borkholder Furniture, where the company's talented American craftspeople are busy exploring the energy created at the crossroads of heirloom quality furnishings and clean-lined, mid-century design.

Just four years ago, Ola Yoder, chief executive officer of Kountry Wood Products, purchased the furniture firm based in Nappanee, IN, eager to restore the Amish company's long-standing reputation as a respected manufacturer of quality, solid wood furniture. To lead the revitalization, he tapped industry sales and marketing veteran Tom Halvorsen as vice president.



Today, Borkholder Furniture is in the midst of a renaissance, fueled by consumers' increasing desire for American-made, high quality, solid wood

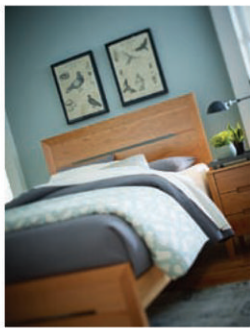
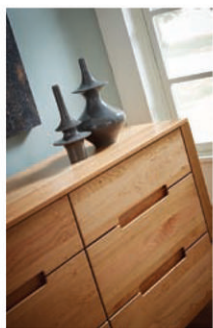
products, and a line that is quickly expanding beyond the company's traditional roots with fresh, transitional and soft modern styles.



Long known for its Arts and Crafts-influenced bedroom, dining and occasional furniture, Borkholder hinted at Yoder's ultimate vision—to become an industry leader in furniture for the whole home—with the introduction of coordinated upholstered goods in two new collections at the most recent High Point Market. Subtle shifts in style direction were also in evidence in new case pieces, most notably with the Transitions Collection, inspired by the clean and sophisticated lines of mid-century Scandinavian design, ideal for casual, though style-conscious lifestyles.

AWAKEN TO THE POSSIBILITIES

As the company grows, what will not change is Borkholder Furniture's dedication to producing quality products, handcrafted in America by Amish artisans using time-honored techniques passed down through generations. "We believe that there are ways to make a company successful while maintaining our values and integrity," Yoder says. "Our goals for Borkholder are simple: Ship on time, ship complete, and satisfy the customer with excellent quality at a fair price."



"When you shop this line at Market, it's so impressive," comments long-time retail customer Marty Darvin, partner at Chicago-based Top 100 chain Darvin Furniture. "When you touch it, feel it, open a drawer or take a leaf out of a table to see the sliding mechanism, and you learn about how they produce the furniture, you feel very good about carrying it.

Borkholder builds a beautiful product and they really put forth the effort in trying to please us a customer. Of course, with furniture like they make, that's easy to do."

"Everyone here is very hands-on and responsive to dealers and vendors," Halvorsen says. "I'm not sure whether it's a cultural thing, or just because it's the right way to do business, but the bottom line is that Borkholder is a company with a clear appreciation and understanding of where it has been and where we want to go."

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RETAIL SCENTS

small spaces to reinforce the impression of a fresh, breezy and open atmosphere.

Lastly, gourmand aromas like coffee

"Computer-controlled systems give you the power to control scent intensity and maintain the integrity of the experience."

and chocolate are designed to convey the scent dimension of a food. As noted in the lingerie company study, they can boost shoppers' appetites for non-food merchandise as well. Gourmand-family fragrances are an obvious choice for showroom areas where dining room or kitchen furniture is on display. Generally, homier fragrances work well.

Along with the general considerations above, fragrances are known to have specific effects. Some make people feel energized, while others are soothing to the point of putting people to sleep. In one Duke University study the scent of lavender relaxed the subjects every bit as much as a physical massage. Lavender is perfectly suited for areas in which bedroom furniture or mattresses are on display, as some furniture stores have already discovered.

As a caveat, however, it is important to remember that scent, like visual merchandising, is not about "one size fits all." Just as it would be absurd for a store designer to say, "All furniture store entrances should have a red color palate," it is simply not the case that every bedroom set should be

scented with lavender, or that every furniture retailer would be wise to adopt a signature fragrance based on fresh-baked cookies. Rather, context is king. Different stores have different customers, products and needs.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS

How to go about scenting different parts of the same store is another relevant question. Today, leading-edge scent-delivery systems allow furniture stores to control scent intensities in much the same way that they can dial the volume of in-store music up or down. Tabletop-, wall- or ceiling-mounted scent delivery devices can be used to strategically deploy appropriate fragrances in room settings, semi-enclosed furniture displays or specific sections of the store. You can also scent an entire showroom area using a single HVAC-integrated unit.

But whether you are scenting individual rooms, larger sections of the showroom or the entire selling area, in-store scenting devices ideally should be computer-controlled and programmable. This allows you to take into account traffic flow and store hours to ensure a consistent scent experience as well as to keep scenting costs down. Micro-technology offers the ability to ramp up this efficiency even further. By converting aqueous or non-aqueous liquids into plumes of ultra-fine droplets (measuring about 1 micron in diameter), some scenting devices create scent effects that blend with and uniformly treat the air using just a tiny amount of hypoallergenic liquid.

This approach is far more efficient and effective than old-school methods such as candles, incense sticks and plug-in air fresheners. The flexibility today's microtechnology systems offer is important from a customer experience standpoint as well: An overpow-

ering fragrance can backfire by irritating potential buyers; computer-controlled systems give you the power to control scent intensity and maintain the integrity of the experience. Just as furniture stores are not in the business of baking cookies for the scent effect, they are not in the business of laboriously and inefficiently spraying aerosols to try to maintain a particular scent effect in the store.

Of course, any fragrances employed should be hypoallergenic, gentle and documented as being completely safe. These days, sensitive customers are well aware of the dangers of the kinds of cheap air fresheners often used in the home. In one University of Washington study of mass-market air fresheners, researchers found toxic volatile organic compounds such as ethanol, ethyl acetate, benzaldehyde and acetone. The good news is that fragrance can be produced from ingredients, and produced in quantities, that are perfectly safe and involve neither volatile organic compounds nor sooty fragrance oil.

SCENTING STRATEGIES

Scenting strategies can also hinge on other considerations. Christmas is an obvious time when people expect visual and auditory displays to change. By calling to mind candy cane, evergreen boughs and the like, holiday scent programs can be congruent with these consumer expectations. Holiday scenting represents an opportunity to generate some excitement and variability in the store.

Likewise, furniture stores are wise to try to eliminate malodors from paint, vinyl, foam and other fresh-out-of-the-factory materials. These smells



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RETAIL SCENTS



"Furniture stores are wise to try to eliminate malodors from paint, vinyl, foam and other fresh-out-of-the-factory materials. These can be distracting and unpleasant for consumers."

can be distracting and unpleasant for consumers. In some cases, specific fragrance formulations can be used to neutralize problem malodors while simultaneously providing a pleasant scent effect. Stores that sell used furniture, in particular, might need to deal with malodors related to cigarette smoke, mold and mildew, and more.

In the end, scent is arguably a more primal—and powerful—faculty than many of us fully appreciate. While the physiology of scent has been well understood for decades, there is still something a bit mysterious about its influence on behavior and cognition. For example, research shows that the mere presence of ambient scent in a store can cause visitors to feel better served by associates. One top retailer in Europe diffused an ambient scent in its checkout areas and found that this contributed to a sense of time-compression among shoppers in the space. Another study showed people stayed longer, spent more money and felt more satisfied when in a scented store as compared to an unscented one.

Scientists have recorded all kinds of other ways in which the presence of a pleasant ambient scent can cause

people to engage in largely unconscious behavior, including being more honest at the cash register. Exactly why scent brings out our "better angels" in this way is still unclear, but we do know that scent is processed in the same part of the brain that handles our emotions, memory and creativity. Researchers now believe humans can distinguish more than 10,000 different aromas. That means leaving the scent impressions in your store to random chance is a risky strategy. Furniture retailers invest lots of money in lighting, décor, sound systems, flooring, product displays and more in a bid to create pleasing, multisensory selling environments. Why neglect the nose, which is, after all, one of shoppers' primary tools for exploring their world?

About Roger Bensinger: Roger Bensinger is Executive Vice President of Prolitec Inc., whose AirQ LEED enabling service is a leading provider of ambient scenting services to retailers and other businesses, with more than 60,000 installations across the globe. For more information about scenting solutions in retail stores contact rbensinger@airq.com.



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THE 2015 CUSTOMER SERVICE CHALLENGE

Find at least five opportunities in each example to turn good into great customer service!



by Gordon Hecht

Decades ago this story made the rounds of the Borscht Belt, aka the Catskills Resorts to anyone born after 1957. A 40-year old son of immigrant parents does extremely well in his chosen field. So well in fact, that he is able to purchase a yacht and hire a full-time crew. He brings his aged parents on board for the inaugural voyage. He greets them wearing nautical garb, with white pants, navy blue double breasted blazer (with gold buttons and braids) and a captain's cap.

Once on board, he says to his father, "Pop, isn't this great, 50 years ago you came to this country on a boat, and here I am, CAPTAIN of my own yacht".

The old man looks at his son squarely in the eye. He admonishes, "Son-by me you are a captain, by mama you are a captain, and by you, you are a captain, but by a captain, YOU'RE NO CAPTAIN!"

THE CHALLENGE

This story points to a truth. People may not see you the way you see yourself. Likewise, your customers may not view your store's customer service the same way you do.

Today's shoppers can spend their scarce retail dollars in many different places. Your goal is to help them choose to enrich their lives with a comfortable home environment, and make sure that their rooms are filled with fur-

niture and bedding purchased from your store. The truth is we are up against tough competition both in and out of our industry, and when shoppers decide to furnish their homes; they find a lot of look-alike merchandise in the market place. Everybody has great products, great prices, and long-term financing.

When I ask Store Managers, Sales Teams, Operations and Delivery Teams why a shopper should choose their store to buy, the words "Great Customer Service " almost always is given as a reason.

I challenge you to define for your team what Great Customer Service means. Look at the two examples below, think about Great Customer Service, and then choose which one comes closer to your ideal. Here's a hint, there are at least 5 "opportunities" in each example that could turn the level of customer service from good to GREAT. See if you can find them!

EXAMPLE #1-ALL QUIET ON THE KITCHEN FRONT

In a typical furniture store a couple enters a store early in the month. They tell the salesperson they need a small dining set for daily use. The salesperson takes the shoppers to the casual dining area where they fall in love with a five-piece pub set, especially the cloth padded seats on the stools. They ask the

salesperson when it can be delivered, and after some checking he tells them it will be 10 days. They request delivery on the 15th of the month, which is open on the delivery calendar. The salesperson starts to enter the order, and the wife mentions that her mother often comes to visit, and is there any way they can get one additional stool for the set. The salesperson says they can, quotes the price, and enters it in the order.

The merchandise arrives on the 13th of the month. The customer is called to confirm delivery. They ask what time the truck will arrive, and are told they can call a number the evening before delivery for a time frame. Calling back at 5 pm on the 14th, they are told the truck will arrive between 2 and 6 pm.

The truck arrives at 4:30 pm, and the five stools are set in the kitchen. Table

"The customers signs off on the partial delivery. The manager calls back and says the DC is closed until Monday. You can imagine the response."

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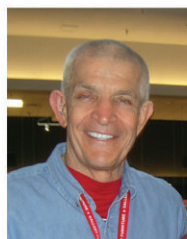
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THE CHALLENGE

legs are attached in the truck; the customer looks at everything and says that it is ok. The drivers get a signature and leave the house.

EXAMPLE #2-NO ONE LIKES A ONE NIGHTSTAND

On the same day, in a neighboring furniture store, another couple decides to spend their tax refund on their very first new bedroom set. The salesperson greets them, finds out what style they like and the size bed they want. They soon find a mid-priced group, and ask for a price on the bed, dresser, mirror, chest, and two nightstands. The quoted price exceeds the amount of their

refund, so and they decide they can do without a chest. As the customer has reached their budget, the salesperson figures she better not ask them to overspend and doesn't mention the mattress department. They also ask for delivery before the 20th of the month as their old college friends are coming in to town and they want to show off their house and decorations. Everything is in stock and delivery is set for Saturday, the 19th. The bedroom comes in on the 17th, and the delivery is confirmed. The customer asks for a delivery time, and is asked to call back on the evening of the 18th. On the Friday before delivery the customer calls and finds out the truck

will arrive between 2-5 pm.

At 4:45 the truck arrives and the set is brought in. The bed is assembled and the customer's existing mattress is placed on it. The mirror is attached to the dresser, but when the drivers go to get the nightstands, it seems only one was placed on the truck. They bring in the one, and tell the customer they will ensure that it is brought out first thing on the next delivery day, Tuesday. The customer says this is unacceptable, calls the store, and is connected with the manager. The manager requests time to check things out and asks the customer to sign for what they received, so the drivers can leave. The customer signs off on the partial delivery. The manager calls back and says the "DC is closed until Monday". You can imagine the response. The manager asks for a few more moments, and explains that she will call them back. She then calls the store owner at home, who calls the DC manager on his cell. It is agreed that the DC manager will bring the nightstand out to the customer in the service van the next day, Sunday, before 12 noon.

"Although the customer had a budget in mind, the tax refund, the salesperson should have offered to extend that budget."

The manager is relieved, and feels that she has moved heaven and earth to satisfy the customer. She calls the customer, and an agreement is made for the Sunday delivery. To compensate them for the inconvenience, she offers to send out a \$25 store gift card.

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"The manager is relieved, and feels that she has moved heaven and earth to satisfy the customer. She calls the customer, and an agreement is made for the Sunday delivery."

Fair

Good

Excellent

WHICH DID YOU PICK?

Which did you pick? Which example is more common in your store?

The point of these stories is that with few exceptions, store owners, managers and their team members believe that they provide GREAT customer service every day. The more important question is... would our customers agree?

HERE'S WHAT I THINK

Example #1 is an example of good customer service. The store team did everything they said they were going to do. The furniture came in promptly; everything got loaded on the truck, and arrived unmarred at the customer's house. The walls and floors were not injured on delivery, all within the quoted timeframe. We in the retail field often mistake this for GREAT customer service. But certain actions and information were left out of the sales and delivery process. What could have made this good experience GREAT?

Example #2 is an example of good intentions gone awry. That store team made an error and disappointed a customer. Notice I said the store team and not the delivery department. Customers buy from a STORE, not any one department, and we win and lose as a team. Everyone scrambled to make it right. Even the Owner and DC manager got involved, and one put in time on his day off to personally resolve the situation. We also believe this is GREAT service, but how do you think your customer views it? Add to that the service on the sales floor; do you believe that even

approached GOOD? What could have made that customer experience GREAT from the time they entered the store until after delivery.

YOUR TURN TO DO BETTER

Both Example #1 and #2 depict good, average, and poor customer service, some obvious, others less so.

Great Customer Service begins from initial contact (think phone), store shopping, experience at the customer service counter, delivery contact, and after delivery contact. Our business consists of buildings, trucks, inventory, equipment, and valuable associates. Our most valuable, expensive, and hardest to replace asset, however, is the customer walking into the store, or waiting at home for a delivery. Take command of the situation, Captain, and treat them with the kindness, attention, and care that their value is worth, and your business will flourish. If you don't treat them GREAT, someone else will.

FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE ON EXAMPLE #1

1. The barstools have cloth padded seats. On a dining table that is used daily, there is a very good chance that those seats will get soiled. Offering fabric protection or cleaning instructions would ensure that the stools would look good for a long time.

2. When the couple asked when the dining set could be delivered, the salesperson should have asked "When do you need it?" This allows the salesperson to develop alternate choices

should the first-choice merchandise not be available when needed.

3. The salesperson should have asked how many people will be using the dining set before the couple requested an additional barstool. Also, adding one stool is okay, but the salesperson should have added a sixth stool, as it may be difficult to get one more added in the future.

4. The wife mentioned that her mother visits often. A great salesperson would have asked if anything else was needed at the house to make "Mom" more comfortable, perhaps a new guest room mattress!

5. When confirming delivery, the customer is told to call back for a delivery time. Good service companies initiate that call. GREAT service companies utilize routing software, GPS, and texting to alert customers for delivery times.

FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE ON EXAMPLE #2

1. I hope you did not miss this one. The salesperson did not offer the customer the opportunity to upgrade their mattress set.

2. Although the customer had a budget in mind, the tax refund, the salesperson should have offered to extend that budget with the store's finance offer. Remember, the couple scratched the chest off of their order to save money. However furniture collections get discontinued and finish colors change, often with no notice. It is almost

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THE CHALLENGE

always better to provide complete room groups.

3. Sure, it was a mistake to forget both nightstands. Outgoing orders need to go out complete and in showroom condition. Beyond that, store owners need to empower their showroom and DC managers to work together. The store manager should not have had to call the owner to get the special delivery made. Optimally, the store team should develop a "crisis response" procedure ahead of the botched delivery, so the delivery can be completed SAME day.

4. The \$25 Gift Card is a nice thought, but our customers have busy schedules, and with gas at \$3.50 a gallon (or more) you can bet that card will never be redeemed! Why not make the gift something that will be remembered-like a pair of lamps or area rug. Or create a package of accessories worth \$200 or more at retail that will have a real impact. If tight margins limit you to under \$50, send a restaurant gift card.

5. Besides that, the apology gift should be delivered on Sunday with that missing night stand. Think how that will look on Facebook!

FIVE WINNING TIPS FOR GREAT SERVICE

1. **Great Salespeople** learn their shopper's names in a friendly manner, and use them often. They understand that most shoppers are not furniture buying experts. Great salespeople offer solutions to ALL of their customer's furniture needs and leave it up to them choose the items and services they want to purchase.

2. **Great Store Managers** greet as many shoppers as possible, and congratulate buyers at the point of purchase.

3. **Great Owners** ACTIVELY seek information from shoppers and buyers on their experience, and then fearlessly share that information for recognition and improvement.

4. **Great Companies** recognize their Most Valuable Customers (think about the 10, 50, or 100 people who purchased the most from you in 2014), keep in contact with them, and invite them back to shop often. They use a complimentary gift to enhance that invitation.

5. **Great Operations Teams** wear uniforms with name badges or ID cards, drive clean trucks, even the cab and box! They pad and protect customer homes, polish wood furniture, clean glass and mirrors, and fluff sofa cushions. They take time to compliment the customer's choice, thank them, and leave a card with service information in case it is ever needed.

About Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, nearly 400 mostly locally owned and operated bed-

ding stores across the country selling Serta-branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses. He started his 30+ years experience in the Home Furnishings industry in Las Vegas, NV as a delivery helper and driver. From that ground level start he started his sales career and passion for our industry, while in college.

He has been recognized for outstanding sales and management achievement with several organizations including Ashley Furniture HomeStores, Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. He has served as Store Manager, Multi-unit manager and National Director of Sales. With his first-hand knowledge of our industry's front line, Gordon has devoted his career to guiding others to exceed their goals.

Joining National Bedding Company in 2014, as part of the Serta Retail Concepts Group, his goal is to grow America's Mattress stores into one of the fastest growing bedding retailers in the country.

Co-author of the "Better Bedding Selling Tips" featured on Furniture World Online, Gordon has been a frequent contributor to company newsletters, and contributing writer for industry magazines. Gordon is based in Columbus, OH and is married with one adult son. Questions and comments can be directed to him at ghecht@serta.com.



"Both Examples depict good, average, and poor customer service, some obvious, others less so. See what you come up with and what you would improve."

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SELL MORE RUGS THAN YOU EVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE!

Part 2: Best practices that will help you make more rug sales.

By Russell Bienenstock



In the first part of this retail series published in the September/ October 2014 issue of Furniture World (see it at <http://furninfo.com/Series/RugSales>), experts in the field shared suggestions with Furniture World readers on how to create a compelling rug buying experience for customers. In this issue, the discussion continues with a focus on retail sales training programs, and sales techniques.

What's The Best Approach To Sell More Rugs?

We asked Jim Hering, Vice President and co-founder of Colorado-based retail operation HW Home, if he has a standard sales process for selling rugs. He replied, "It's most important that our salespeople listen, figure out our customer's needs, and then try to steer them in the right direction in terms of what they actually need to fulfill their goals for living a luxurious lifestyle. And very often it's hard for customers to articulate this information. Some people come to our store just to buy a rug. Others come in because they're looking for a sofa, and then as we're putting the room together, they realize that they actually do need a rug. So, a rug sale can happen anywhere throughout the course of the sale.

"We organize our rugs on the racks by color, because our store is all

about aspirational living and it's very visual. We want people to come in to our store and say, 'Wow, I want to live like this.' It makes no sense to have particular styles of rugs grouped together because most don't care if it's 100 percent wool, a wool and silk blend, nylon, or all synthetic. Initially what customers are looking at, and what they're looking for is a style and a color. So we group rugs by color. Once they are sold on the idea of getting a rug of a particular color or style, it's not as difficult to walk them in to an up-sale, a finer quality rug.

"Sometimes they do buy a \$1,000 rug, but very often they'll see one that's \$4,000 or even \$8,000 that's the perfect rug for their space. And it will tie in beautifully to everything else they've selected in the room."

Rugs come in myriad colors, styles, constructions and price points. So, where to start, when choosing rugs for displays?

"Not all retailers have such a well thought out display system for selling rugs," observes Jaipur's Asha Chaudhary. "Because rugs are so heavy, it's very difficult to manage how they are displayed on racks. Many stores jumble them in, one after the next. I think the way they should be displayed, is more by price point because it makes it easier for customers. Within that price point, there is an opportunity to organize the selection.

Photo Credit: Jaipur

Winter Warmth

Create cozy comforts in your storefront with throw accents



AS WE CONTINUE TO GO DEEPER INTO THE season of cold days and winter nights it might be a good time to rethink decorating with throws and blankets. Throws are as functional as they are stylish and are an easy way to draw curious eyes into your store.

Clearly, throws are a versatile style statement that can add pattern,

color and character to a room or furniture display, but it's their inviting warmth that charms people into curling up on a plush sofa for the evening.

Throws are important accents that breathe tangible feelings into great style.

For instance, a lush throw lazily draped over the sofa personifies late-night movie marathons, or the soft knit material folded next to a favorite chair embodies relaxing weekends cuddled up with a good book in hand.

By using throws as a means to express these familiar moods and experiences, people will not only become visually interested

but also emotionally drawn to explore and recreate the cozy comfort displayed in a store's vignette. Throws are a comfortable, cold-weather staple people will want to use in their homes year after year.

BELOW, CLOCKWISE:
Collection: Trinity, TRI09;
Collection: Parade, PAR01;
Collection: Gem, GEM01,
GEM04, GEM03



TOP TO BOTTOM: Collection: Spirit, SPR02;
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HW Home's flagship Cherry Creek North store in Denver.

"In vignettes, many furniture stores pair a sofa with a rug that's about one-third the cost of the sofa," she continues. "They've figured out that that's what many customers can comfortably spend. The best salespeople ask a lot of questions, such as, 'What are you thinking in terms of area rugs? Do you have a budget in mind?' And, if they don't know, the one-third rule is a good place to start. Most retailers won't pair a \$1,000 dollar sofa in a vignette with a \$3,000 rug. Likewise, it's probably not a good idea to start out by showing a \$200 rug with a \$3,000 sofa."

Capel's VP Sales Allen Roberson says there's an alternative strategy. "Some smart retailers," he adds, "will start out by showing a higher end rug so they can present how it has a better look, color and more design elements. Then if the shopper says he or

she doesn't want to pay that much, the salesperson can relate, 'Well, we've got some nice machine made rugs. They aren't the same as these hand knotted, but they still have a very nice look.' This approach lets them know up front where they can get better goods and knowledgeable advice. The shopper may leave and visit Home Depot to find a rug anyway, but nobody there has an interest in telling them anything about the rug."

What Do Sales People Need To Know?

Training is important, declares Asha Chaudhary, President of Jaipur Rugs. "The best retailers encourage reps to hold sales meetings. They want all the information available in as much detail as possible so that their sales people, who need to know why one rug is \$3,000 and another is \$400, can feel comfortable selling rugs."

"Yes, sales people need enough ammunition to feel comfortable explaining why this rug is 100 bucks, and that one is 500 bucks," confirms Seth King, Surya's Vice President, Sales. "But it's not necessary to overwhelm them with all the details. Basic construction is important. They have to know a hand-knotted rug, versus a hand-tufted rug, versus a machine-made rug. Those are three big categories, and each is distinctly different in how it is made, how long it is going to last, and why one is more expensive than the other. There, are 10 levels of detail below that, and at that point it's getting into specs that don't really need to be translated to the consumer in a big way. When retailers focus on specs they can miss the bigger picture

of color, design, and style."

King tells a story about a woman who goes into a store and is presented with a rug worth \$1000 that isn't the right color or style, but at a great price of just \$100. "Of course she won't come close to buying it," he says. "But If she looks at a rug that's worth 100 bucks with the perfect look and style, she might pay \$1,000, because it's exactly what she wants. That decision," he says, "has nothing to do with the specs, construction and all those details about the value of the rug. The value for her is how it will fit in her home. That's what's important for most rug sales."

Furniture World queried Jim Hering about the rug materials and construction details HW Home's sales associates need to know about. He replied that product knowledge is very important. "If people are coming in specifically to buy rugs," he explains, "they tend to be a little bit more knowledgeable in terms of what it is they're looking for. This type of rug shopper knows the difference between hand-knotted, machine tufted, etc.

"We organize our rugs on the racks by color, because our store is all about aspirational living and it's very visual. We want people to say, 'Wow, I want to live like this!'"

-Jim Hering, HW Home

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SELL MORE RUGS

Someone who's in to buy furniture and knows that they need a rug as well, often times knows very little. It's our job to explain what's available out there and why some products might be better than others. That doesn't mean necessarily that the most expensive rug is the best option for them. If they have dogs or kids, and if it's going to be used in a room that's heavily trafficked, it might be better to go all synthetic or steer them to something that's easier to clean and maintain, than to have a finely woven, hand-tufted or hand-knotted, wool and silk rug. These are the kinds of questions that people don't often think about if they're not really rug buyers. It's good for our people to be knowledgeable enough to say, 'Okay, that's a great rug, but it may not be the best fit for you in this space, and here's why.'

"At Safavieh Home Furnishings," observes its President Michael Yaraghi, "sales training is essential. We have found the best way to educate our sales staff is to have a rug expert conduct classes once a week in the stores. They explain the categories of rugs we sell, the lifestyles, and design styles. We show them the difference between contemporary, transitional or traditional Persian rugs, and the various weaving techniques from around the world."

Capel's Allen Robertson had somewhat different advice for the average retailer. "Consumers," he notes, "buy rugs off the racks, and it's important to make that process as simple as it can be. I spend a lot of time watching people shop for rugs. They go up and down the racks, and many times they get to the point where they will tell their salesperson, 'I want this rug,' or

ask, 'Does it come in a larger size?' Most retail salespeople let shoppers read the tags which identify the construction and yarn type. Most times the customer is going to pick out the color and design. They kind of know what they want. A regular furniture store salesperson, just needs to listen to customers, take them to the rugs, and be able to answer questions about price, size and construction. Regarding construction, shoppers don't really need to have a ton of detail beyond the basics of hand knotted rugs versus tufted rugs, versus machine made. The most important factors are color, design and the price."

How Good Are You At Gathering Information?

As with any furniture purchase, getting information from customers is an excellent place to start.

"Of course you want to qualify customers," Loloi's Cyrus Loloi tells us. "If they're saying they have a dog or a kid or a messy husband, you might want to suggest an industrial rug, but don't call it industrial, call it easy care. That's just one example. If someone

says, 'Hey, I need something for my entryway, it's going to get a lot of traffic.' You probably want to suggest something that's polypropylene or a wool construction that's going to be around for a while."

Capel's Allen Robertson warns salespeople not to, "make assumptions about what customers will be happy with. 'Prejudging them can backfire. If for example you find out that a customer has a busy lifestyle with pets and children, or looks like she can't afford a more expensive rug, you may tell her she needs something cheap such as a polypropylene rug, solution dyed and easy to clean. Afterwards, if she wants to look at a more expensive, hand knotted rug, can the same things be said?' It can turn into a negative for the better rug which the shopper might have purchased and been happier with. Don't under-qualify what they can spend," says Robertson. "As for buying signals," he continues, "if they start talking about other sizes or ask if it comes in other colors, that's a pretty good sign that they are serious."

Safavieh's Michael Yaraghi shares another story about pre judging customers. "My favorite story has a

"Salespeople need enough ammunition to feel comfortable explaining why this rug is 100 bucks, and that one is 500, but it's not necessary to overwhelm them with all the details." -Seth King, Surya



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Photo from Safavieh Home Furnishings' Broadway NYC store.

moral," he says, "Never underestimate a customer. When I was a young salesman, a client walked in with his wife and two little kids asking for the least expensive rug we carried at the time – a Dhurrie. The salesman up next, rejected them for that reason, and passed them on to me. I spent time talking to the couple, finding out about their home and lifestyle. I sold them \$120,000 in rugs that afternoon. I will never forget how upset that older salesman was."

"The nudge works well for rug sales. Customers are often reluctant to make the next step to purchase. Give them positive messages about purchasing by summing up the benefits and relating them to their needs." -Joyce Lowe, Nourison

We've established that pre-judging and making assumptions about customers is not a good idea, but asking question to find customer needs is another matter.

"Gathering information is probably the most important part of a sales

associate's job," Joyce Lowe, Nourison's Executive Director of the Area Rug Division explains to us. "Every other part of the sale leads back to information gathering. If you don't know the customer's needs, how can you take them to the right product? How will you know when to close? Making a sale is not about the merchandise, it's about the customer's needs. When this is done, the customer gets the perfect product and you get the sale. Determining customer needs is the most important part of the process! To take a customer to the right product, you must understand what he/she needs, you must find out where and how the product will be used and color/style preferences.

"Remember to let the customer do most of the talking. Customers will lead you to the right product if you just let them. Information gathering requires two important skills; listening and questioning. At the beginning of a customer interaction, the customer should be doing most of the talking. Listen to what the customer says, and ask questions to get more information.

"A question should not be able to be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no.' It should begin with words like How, Why, Tell me, and What. Ask open questions to encourage the customer to talk and reveal his/her needs."

Examples Lowe related are:

- "What style do you

have in mind?"

- "Tell me about the room where the rug will be?"
- "How do you plan to use the rug?"
- "What kind of traffic will the area have?"

"Once you ask an open question," she says, "stand back and listen. Encourage the customer along with phrases like, 'I see,' or 'Uh-huh.' Once you understand the customer's needs, lead him/her to the product you think will best serve the customer.

"The tip I have for retail salespeople is to be sure that the minute they see a client, they smile and introduce themselves by name," Safavieh's Michael Yaraghi tells us. "The next step is to say 'I would love to help you.' Then ask them to sit down and for the next five minutes, get to know them. Have a conversation about their home – what it looks like, where they live, how they like to live, etc. Talk about everything but furniture for the first five minutes."

"Also, If possible," adds Jaipur's Asha Chaudhary, "salespeople should find out if their customers have pets or allergies as well as the type of traffic to which the rug will be exposed. Answers to these questions help salespeople to direct customers to the types of rugs they should be showing. Customers generally don't spend much time thinking about what rugs are made from, but material can play a role for some customers," she adds.

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"When I was a young salesman a client walked in with his wife and 2 little kids asking for the least expensive rug we carried. The salesman up next passed the client on to me, and I spent time talking to the couple, finding out about their home and lifestyle. I sold them \$120,000 in rugs that afternoon." - Michael Yaraghi, Safavieh

What Is The Best Time To Introduce Rugs?

Furniture World asked Capel's Allen Robertson to explain at what point in the sale, the topic of rugs should be introduced.

"I find that the best time in the sales process to introduce a rug is when shoppers feel comfortable that they've selected furniture or have chosen fabric colors. That's when you say, 'We have a great deal on rugs here. They're in stock, available, and I will be glad to show you some that will go perfectly with what you've selected.' Or, 'We just got some new rugs in that will coordinate nicely with this. May I show them to you?' I don't think you can take somebody who comes in to look for furniture and direct them

immediately to the rugs. Furniture buyers generally select rugs as part of a package. If the salesperson gets the color and design right, they will sell a rug most of the time."

"Once the furniture for the room has been selected," agrees Nourison's Joyce Lowe, "coordinating rugs should be introduced to anchor the room. The rugs could also be selected before the fabrics. Since there are hundreds of fabrics available, the rug will provide the customer with a color palette to incorporate with paint and fabrics."

Furniture World received a very different answer from Michael Yaraghi of Safavieh. "You always start with a rug," he says. "A rug will help narrow and eliminate a lot of extraneous options in fabrics, colors and looks.

The rug helps your client make decisions about the style of the room, the color palette and the coordinating patterns. Our sales approach is to always start the conversation with a rug."

Best Practices For Rug Sales Education

On the topic of sales education, most of our experts advise retailers to do regular training sessions using materials made available by suppliers and encourage knowledgeable reps to perform general and product specific rug training sessions.

Regular Training Sessions: "Sales people certainly need to get familiar with the category in order to sell it," Cyrus Loloi of Loloi Rugs says. "Many retailers in the business community we sell to, do not have much rug knowledge. Even some buyers, as bad as it sounds, don't have a working knowledge of care and cleaning, fibers, durability and the pros and cons of various constructions. I think a lot of that responsibility falls on sales reps, to make sure that buyers, sales managers and salespeople in stores have the information they need so that their teams know how to sell the category and feel confident. The more knowledge you have, the more confident you're going to feel selling a category. A lot of our customers now carry a variety of products, so, they're not rug experts."

"Product training sessions," Nourison's Joyce Lowe suggests, "can be a powerful tool in the struggle to achieve superior product knowledge. Held at least twice a year, they serve to keep everyone up-to-date on changes and new product offerings, additional promotional opportunities available and emerging trends in the marketplace."

Simplify The Process: The training process will be different for each store. Stores that choose to limit selection to narrow price points or constructions can simplify the sales

Photo credit: Surya



SELL MORE RUGS

process and reduce the amount of required sales training.

"A common way stores simplify rug selection," explains Surya's Seth King, "is to limit rug price point options. For example, a \$200 level with a step-up to \$400. Or, limit special order sizes. This takes the confusion out right there," he observes. "The upholstery guys often supply small fabric swatches in a vignette near a sofa on the floor. There may be five, 10 or 20 options for that same sofa. They may display the gold one, but they also have a red option, a blue option, a beige, and a green. We have the same system. Salespeople who aren't designer trained, may be pretty much dead in the water if a customer says, 'Yeah, I do want a rug, but I don't like the green in that rug.' But if they have the tools nearby to give that customer three or four other options, the sale can easily be made by saying, 'Well if you don't like this rug, what about these other four? Here's the green one. Here's the red one. And here's the blue one. And they're all the same price.' And they can be the same pat-

tern as well. But at least they have a tool that helps them feel confident that they can still up sell the customer. That beats having to walk back to a 750-page catalog to try to pick from a huge sea of rugs. It's just a more difficult transition."

On the topic of sales education, Capel's Allen Roberson says, "Honestly, the rug category, it's not that complicated. Capable, smart, professional salespersons don't have problems getting familiar with the category. So it's important to have a process in place to train people properly."

Should You Have A Rug Specialist?

Many stores rely on reps to do in-store training. Another option is to designate one person in the store to become a rug specialist as the "go to" person for questions about rugs and training.

We asked Surya's Seth King about the advisability of having a rug specialist on staff. He replied, "Our sales team's job is to make sure that all

sales associates on the floor are equipped to sell rugs. For stores that want to get into bigger tickets, it's possible that a rug specialist will help, but we try to find ways to simplify the process."

"Since we began as a rug company and have been selling rugs for 100 years," says Michael Yaraghi, "a large percentage of consumers come to our stores looking specifically for area rugs, about 50%. We offer design service and our designer's obligation is to immediately ask for the rug. It is very important to have one dedicated person who understands the rug business to coordinate with sales reps and designers. This position at our stores is called Design and Rug Coordinator, and these people are knowledgeable in both residential and commercial applications."

"It's usually hard, however, to have a rug specialist in a smaller furniture store," adds Capel's Allen Robertson, "but we definitely recommend that somebody should be in charge of the rug area, a salesperson on the floor who knows the answer to any ques-

"Once furniture has been selected, coordinating rugs should be introduced to anchor the room. The rug will provide a color palette to incorporate with paint and fabrics." -Joyce Lowe, Nourison



Image from Safavieh's Broadway NYC store

"The best salespeople ask a lot of questions, such as, 'What are you thinking in terms of area rugs? Do you have a budget in mind?' And, if they don't know, the one-third rule is a good place to start." -Asha Chaudhary, Jaipur

tion. Someone who is good at selling mattresses, case goods or upholstery doesn't necessarily know all about rugs. It's important for the other salespeople to know there's somebody to turn to if any issues arise during the sales process. And, if that rug specialist has interior design training, that's even better."

"Some of the best stores, if they're large enough, and they have enough room," Jaipur's Asha Chaudhary tells us, "have a dedicated person in a rug department. These are the types of stores doing a huge rug business. Dedicated rug salespeople can help drive sales and emphasize the importance of the category."

"We don't have a rug specialist in each store adds Jim Hering. Everybody has to know what they're doing on every single product throughout our store, so we have extensive training. It takes about six months for somebody to really get up to speed, and feel confident and comfortable with everything we offer in the store. It is a long learning curve because there's just so many different vendors and so many different products on our floors.

"Some buyers don't have the background to know about care and cleaning, fibers, durability and the pros and cons of various constructions."

-Cyrus Loloi, Loloi Rugs

"HW Home," he concludes, "relies heavily on reps for training, provided they're good. I find, that the lines that do the best are the ones with a very committed rep who is in our stores often, knows the names of our people, is available to answer phone calls or emails at the drop of a hat, consid-

ers himself or herself an employee of our supplier's company—whether or not they are a direct employee of that organization or not, does organized training, and then often, spontaneous training. Those are the reps who do the best. Consequently their lines perform better in our stores—all the time.

Sell More Rugs Sales Tips

-by Joyce Lowe, Nourison-

Closing: Closing is the most important and most neglected part of the rug sales process. Many salespeople feel that trying to close a sale will make them look pushy or aggressive. In truth, many customers are waiting for the salesperson to close. Asking for the sale is essential in becoming a successful salesperson.

The Trial Close: A trial close is a yes or no question that shows you where you are in the sale. If a customer is interested in a product, build "yes momentum" by asking questions about the product. Questions can be as simple as, "do you like it?" or "It's a nice style isn't it?" If the customer continues to show interest, it may be time to close. There are four main reasons to trial close, including to uncover objections, move toward the close, get customers to agree with you, and build "yes" momentum.

Buying Signals: Buying signals tell you when to begin closing a rug sale. Look for telltale signals from the customer such as: they continue to rub the product, say they like it, nods between couples, making jokes, and stating that it will work in their home. When you hear or see these buying signals, it's time to start closing! The customer is ready to buy and all you have to do is ask for the sale.

Two Basic Ways to Close a Sale Without Being Pushy:

- *Just ask for it* - The simplest way to close a sale is to simply ask for it. Say something like, "May I write that up for you?" Customers don't mind being asked. They know that you are there to sell and they are there to buy. Just ask!
- *The nudge* - The nudge works well for rug sales. Customers are often reluctant to make the next step to purchase. Give the customer positive messages about purchasing the product by summing up the benefits and relating them to the customer's needs.



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BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Loloi

The Nova Collection features nine hand tufted 100 percent wool rugs from India. The bold designs lend themselves best to contemporary interiors looking for a punch of color.

Contact information on page 80.



Phillips Collection

Hand crafted by an Indonesian artist, the Dance Console Table is carved from a single piece of solid wood to form a fun wavy shape. Topped with glass, this sculptural console will make a statement.

Contact information on page 80.



Klausner

The Palmetto Chaise has aluminum legs with a wood stain look. Features include kidney pillow and contrasting welts. Available in 74 Sunbrella or Outdura solution dyed acrylic fabrics.

Contact information on page 80.



Elran

The Reilly collection features an integrated headrest, foam back, box style arm design, lounge seating and an inside pull handle. Other features include optional power recline, matching chair, loveseat and a regular three seated sofa.

Contact information on page 80.



Flash Furniture

These side Leather Lounge Chairs will highlight any office, lobby or reception area with graceful contours and color combinations.

Contact information on page 80.



A.C. Pacific

This power reclining sofa comes fully furnished with easily accessible storage arm consoles, power adjustable headrests, drop down table, reading lights, two A/C adapters and two USB ports.

Contact information on page 80.



Arthur W. Brown

This real wood corner cabinet is available in Maple and Oak. Comes in twelve standard finishes and custom paint colors.

Contact information on page 80.

Standard Furniture

Oakland Youth Bedroom has casual rustic styling, straight square lines and a two-tone smoky brown and grayed birch laminate finish. Twin, full panel beds and a captain's bed with reversible drawers are available.

Contact information on page 80.



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Nourison

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Contact information on page 80.



Alinea

The Chrysant Chair is a nature inspired piece that evokes the forms found in art deco. The hand carved mahogany frame and tightly upholstered insets make it a piece for today.

Contact information on page 80.

Natuzzi

The Dorian sectional is from Natuzzi's Italia collection. This square design contemporary sectional with wood base is available in leather or fabric.

Contact information on page 80.





B. Pila Design

The Player's Chair is a striking occasional chair inspired by Marcel Breuer. The elevated sling panel and upholstered cushion levitate between two acrylic panels via belt-like straps.

Contact information on page 80.

Surya

The Claudia lamp pairs a crisp linen shade with the graceful lines of an antique metal and brass base to bring timeless style and an air of refined luxury to living spaces.

Contact information on page 80.



Four Hands

The Constantine collection is made from smooth layers of concrete over a honeycomb core offering the strength, character and depth of traditional concrete without the weight. For use indoors or out.

Contact information on page 80.



American Leather

The Dax bed is from the American Walnut collection. Features include solid natural Walnut side rails, natural Walnut veneer headboard and footboard, and brushed stainless steel base. Available in any leather or fabric.

Contact information on page 80.



BEST SELLING

DESIGNS



Tayse Rugs

This Contemporary styled rug is from the Deco Collection, with Rich colors of cranberry red, espresso brown, teal blue, pear green, ecru gold, mushroom taupe, russet, and snowy ivory. Options include rounds and a three piece set for a coordinated look throughout the home. Machine made of soft polypropylene that is naturally stain-resistant and easy to maintain.

Contact information on page 80.



BDI

The Corridor Bar offers racking space for wine bottles and storage for a host of liquor bottles on shelves and doors. A wooden stemware rack keeps wine glasses within easy reach.

Contact information on page 80.

Christopher Guy

The Jolivet dining chair features a hand-carved mahogany backrest with distinctive curves and sumptuous upholstery for ultimate comfort.

Contact information on page 80.



Kincaid

This Foundry panel bed is made of Norwegian spruce. The collection's unique appearance is achieved by labor-intensive wire-brushing complemented by a multi-step finish with burnished edges for a warm, harmonic mixture.

Contact information on page 80.



Kas Rugs

Slate Artisanal is a Moroccan design in hand-tufted textured wool with space dyed effects. Made in India and available in 3 sizes. Suggested retail for a 5'x8' \$499.

Contact information on page 80.

Jaipur

Creamsicle and heather gray showcase a simplified Art Deco inspired print. It's an interesting rendition that accentuates clean, uncomplicated design. Suggested retail \$302.

Contact information on page 80.



Omnia

The Zen with contrast stitching and highlighted tufting is available in over 200 leathers and fabrics, and numerous configurations.

Contact information on page 80.

Legacy

Big Sur is a youth group designed to appeal to boys of all ages with a refined, rugged styling and attention to detail. The Saddle Brown finish is a warm cherry colored tone with subtle rub through, burnishing and lightly distressed edges.

Contact information on page 80.



BEST SELLING

DESIGNS



Capel

The Legacy collection comes in three patterns Keshan, Gabbeh and Shiraz. They are hand knotted at 64 knots per square inch for unparalleled quality.

Contact information on page 80.

Borkholder

The ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement (simplicity, functionality, honest design and construction) meet transitional style in this chest of drawers from the Lansing Collection. Made of Brown Maple in a chocolate finish.

Contact information on page 80.



Bramble

The Brittany Wing Chair offers an updated look on a classic silhouette. This Provence Collection chair is comfortable and stylish.

Contact information on page 80.



Broyhill

The Isla chair is perfect for any decor with its slightly rolled back, classic curved arms, shapely legs and ottoman for added relaxation. Hundreds of covers and many wood finishes available.

Contact information on page 80.

Magnussen

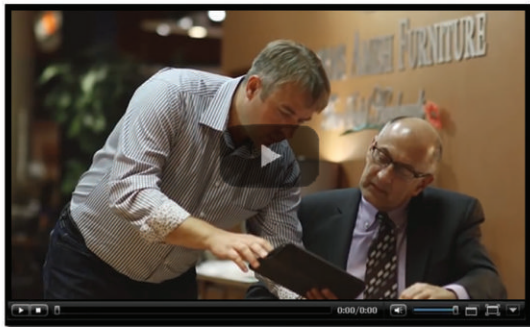
Cloverton Cove shown in warm Light Toffee finish on quarter cut figured Primavera veneer. The woven seagrass panels and warm bronze hardware create the perfect accent detail.

Contact information on page 80.



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HOW TO DO

THE IMPOSSIBLE

AT RETAIL IN 2015

by Larry Mullins

If you are a furniture entrepreneur and are still standing after the economic downturn in home furnishings over the last few years, you have already achieved the impossible. You have likely seen many furniture stores go under. You have survived, and fewer competitors are out there to challenge you. You may not realize it, but there are fresh opportunities that lie before you to flourish as never before.

The question is, how do you identify and prioritize these opportunities? What course of action should you take to do the impossible?

A woman named Tracy Goss wrote a book that may be of help. It is titled: *The Last Word on Power... Executive Re-Invention for Leaders Who Must Make the Impossible Happen*. Her

training has been praised by top executives in all phases of business. If you are game for managing a turnaround that everyone thinks is impossible, her ideas are worth examination.

First off, Goss challenges us with this counter-intuitive premise: The power that is the source of your success in the past is now preventing you from making the impossible happen in your life and work. I know there are those furniture entrepreneurs out there who believe they already have all the answers. They imagine that all they need to do, is do what they have always done, but do more of it, and maybe do it harder. Goss's philosophy will not interest them. However, if you will grant that demands on furniture retailers have become so chal-

lenging that a revolutionary new approach is called for, this article could be a game-changer for you.

Goss then proposes an even more remarkable premise:

The pathway to new power is to dare to "re-invent" yourself, to put at risk all the success you have become known for in exchange for the power of making the impossible happen.

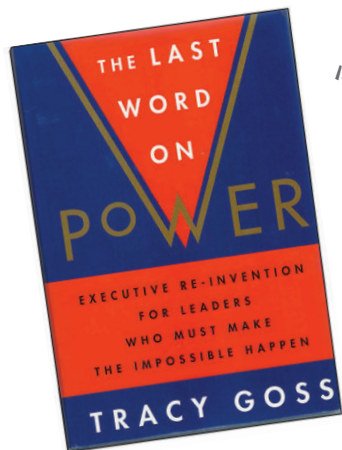
In other words, Good is the enemy of great. Make no mistake, though. This formula of Tracy Goss is not designed to achieve huge breakthroughs by ignoring the risks and attempting some colossal, audacious feat like Evel Knievel. No, it is very different than that. It is rather predicated upon the courage to take baby steps, one at a time, toward an audacious vision, and never look down. That is, plan, prepare, and count the cost. However, once you are engaged in the process of doing the impossible, never pause to imagine the dangers and costs of failure. A parallel formula, and one I recommend, is the process used by an authentic daredevil, named Philippe Petit, who actually did what any rational person would deem impossible.

TAKE BABY STEPS TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

Never heard of Philippe Petit? Neither had I, or so it seemed. He was

"Goss challenges us with this counter-intuitive premise:

The power that is the source of your success in the past is now preventing you from making the impossible happen in your life and work."



"You have survived, and fewer competitors are out there to challenge you. You may not realize it, but there are fresh opportunities that lie before you to flourish as never before."

recently asked to comment on the attribute of confidence. I read his response in the WSJ magazine. At that point I realized I had heard of him. Petit is best known for illegally walking between the roofs of Manhattan's Twin Towers on a high wire in 1974. In the article Petit said:

"The confidence that I could walk between the Twin Towers never came. That it could actually be done never dawned on me from the moment I first got the idea to the moment I stepped out on the wire. I was preparing myself, but I knew from the beginning

it was too big for a human being. But somehow I kept inching myself forward to make it happen. I never thought, 'Should I address the impossible?' No, because it was clearly impossible. If I had asked myself that question, I probably would not have done it. It would have slowed me down. But each time I realized it was impossible, I would shrug my shoulders like a poet, and say: 'Well sure, but so what?' I am a man who has done the impossible many times, but where the confidence comes to do it — it's a mysterious question to this

day. I cannot answer it."

How do we explain a guy who does the impossible, and then tells us that the "confidence that I could walk between the Twin Towers never came." He had no confidence? He must have had something that nearly all of us lack. What was it? Petit also said: "I knew from the beginning it was too big for a human being. But somehow I kept inching myself forward to make it happen."

What Petit is describing, and what I am advocating, is to take what Jeanna Gabelleini calls "baby steps"



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THE IMPOSSIBLE

toward doing the impossible. Robert Schuller once described this as the "Laminating Principle." The idea is the same as the way laminated wooden beams are built. They are stronger, and more fire resistant than steel. A laminated beam is made by gluing under pressure a layer of wood about one inch thick to another layer about the same thickness. Then, one by one, layers are added until the laminated beam is as much as three feet thick. Such a beam can span a space of about one hundred feet, and do this without supporting columns! In a like

manner, seemingly insignificant baby steps, wisely orchestrated toward a prodigious vision, can eventually accumulate great synergy and power to accomplish the impossible.

Petit may never have heard of a psychologist by the name of Emile Coue. Yet the philosophy of his fellow Frenchman had somehow been assimilated in the heart and soul of Philippe Petit.

EMILE COUE'S OBSERVATION

An observation by Emile Coue (1857 – 1926) may help us find the

answer to the intriguing success of Philippe Petit. Coue once observed: "When imagination and will power are in conflict, are antagonistic, it is always imagination that wins, without exception." In other words, what we see in our mind's eye will either inspire the human will towards achievement, or will paralyze it with possibly disastrous result. Take the example of Petit. He knew he had to prepare carefully. He counted the cost. He considered the wind factors, the distraction possibilities, and so on. For example, Petit was certain he would be arrested for



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"Seemingly insignificant

baby steps, wisely orchestrated toward a prodigious vision, can eventually accumulate great synergy and power to accomplish the impossible."

attempting the electrifying stunt, and he was right. Minutes after he made the successful high wire walk between the Twin Towers, Petit was detained.

For his unauthorized exploit (1350 feet above the ground), Petit rigged a 450-pound cable and used a custom-made 26-foot long, 55-pound balancing pole. He performed for 45 minutes, making eight passes along the wire. All legal charges were dismissed in exchange for his doing a performance in Central Park for children.

Once he began his epic wire walk, Petit focused on his vision of success. He kept "inching" himself forward. Beyond a vision of success, he focused on baby steps. He did not imagine failure. If he had imagined the danger, if he had a vision of falling, he very likely would have failed. According to the theory of Coue, imagination will always triumph when in conflict with willpower.

Are you wondering, as I did, how

Petit's team managed to rig a 450 pound high wire cable over the 1350 foot chasm? They did it in baby steps. First they used a bow and arrow to send a small rope from one side to the other. Then they used that rope to pull a slightly larger one across. Larger and larger ropes were used, then cables, and finally the final steel cable.

The take-away from all the above is to plan, prepare, and realistically count the cost. But once you are in the execution stage, take baby steps with patience and fortitude, focus and hold onto your vision, and never look down.

HOW DO YOU APPLY THIS PHILOSOPHY?

I will admit that the goals of higher levels of traffic, sales and profit are considered impossible in these days of fragmented media. How can an independent furniture store be heard when no one is listen-

ing? How can you tell your story when the big box stores are dominating all the media?

You can turn the tide by revising some of your assumptions. There follows some things I recommend:

Do NOT copy the big boxes. You will not be able to get your price-item messages seen and heard in the red ocean of traditional media.

The medium that offers the greatest chances for you is the internet. Don't put up a website and think you've done it. A poorly crafted website with inaccurate information is NOT better than none at all. However, there are blue oceans of opportunity through

"Concepts can be contained in icons or symbols and used in your ads and on signs. These icons communicate lots of information in a heartbeat.



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creative use of a well-designed website, one that is constantly updated and vibrant.

Define and Leverage your advantages. Tell the folks who you are. You are more than a corporate logo. You are the hometown boy. Your staff is composed of the community's friends and neighbors who provide hometown service and who possess national buying power. You have family-friendly hours. Your store has accumulated years of faithful service to the community. You offer a large selection of famous brand furniture, don't just tell them, show them. And on and on. Leverage these advantages by means of your staff (people media messages) and other means that those hastily produced price-item corporate flyers could never duplicate.

For the balance of this article I will also explain how to determine what baby steps you should be taking now toward achieving the impossible. Your personal next-steps are always lying around in plain sight and are much simpler to determine than you might think.

THE NEXT-STEP STRATEGY

The Next-Step Strategy is the process of movement, no matter how slight, in the direction you know you should be going.

Ideas are easy. Action is not. The "Next-Step Strategy" is about completing decisions with action. I have talked to countless furniture men and women, and few have

defined, long-range goals. Yet, the vision, the big picture, is requisite and comes first. ("Without vision the people perish.") Then the baby steps come easy.

In fact, the first baby step is often the need to sit down and put in writing where you want to be at this time next year. This action will automatically put you in the top ten percent of business people. (Only one business in ten has a written, long term vision or goal.) Bret Beemer tells us that when Fortune 500 CEOs were surveyed and asked if their companies had a defined, long range plan, 80 percent of them said "Yes." So, here is the formula:

- *Take ten minutes off and relax. Think peacefully and comfortably about where you want to be this time next year. Keep it simple, something you can visualize.*
- *Put it into a short, simple statement.*
- *Share it with your staff. Ask them for feedback. Give them the option to make their own written declaration about where they want to be. Ask them to add to that statement what they will need from you to achieve their goal. Give them a week to complete the statement, no longer. Some folks will not be able to do this. Give them the option of meeting with you one-on-one to smoke them out.*
- *Finally, check on progress at two month intervals.*

Too corny? For some maybe.

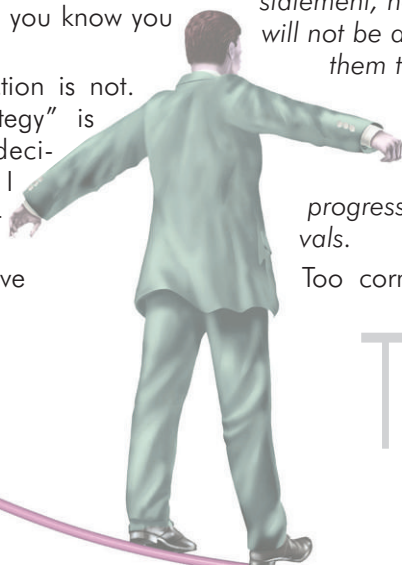
"Ken has stated that this program helped him grow his furniture chain by a factor of eight in less than a decade. I must add that Ken executed the formula above with passion and verve."

However, the above is a simplification of the very program that Ken Larson, the founder of Slumberland Furniture, and I developed. Ken has stated that this program helped him grow his furniture chain by a factor of eight in less than a decade. I must add that Ken executed the formula above with passion and verve.

MANTRAS AND CONCEPTS ARE POWERFUL—USE THEM

My first furniture job was with Curtis Bros. in Washington, D.C. At the time, Curtis Bros. was the largest furniture store under one roof in America. Young Charles Curtis was considered a marketing genius. Curtis Bros. was run like a well-oiled, disciplined machine. There was a strict dress code for sales consultants. If you were late for a morning sales meeting you did not work that day. Charles was a fan of Vince Lombardi.

Like Lombardi, though, if you made the team you enjoyed great benefits.



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(Lombardi created the first NFL carpeted locker room; Curtis provided each salesman with a small desk and their own telephone.) Curtis paid generous commissions and spiffs. But what I want to tell you about are the mantras that Charles Curtis drilled into our heads. I never forgot them. These were small, seemingly insignificant statements, baby steps if you will. But the accumulated, repetitive effect was important to the culture. Here are a few Curtis sayings:

- "A promise is a promise."
- "Be in charge of the sales sequence. Never let a patron-clerk relationship develop between you and a customer."
- "There are always at least three lines of resistance in a sales sequence. Overcome these objections and you will make the sale."
- "Never walk by anything you see that is wrong. Fix it."
- "Remember, as far as customers are concerned, YOU are Curtis Bros."

Make up your own set of mantras to reflect your company's core values. Use them repetitively and they will stick, believe me.

Concepts are also of extreme value. They can be contained in icons or symbols and used in your ads and on signs. These icons communicate lots of information in a heartbeat. Moreover, people tend to believe, trust and accept them more readily than the written word. These are also small, seemingly unimportant steps toward creating a brand or image, yet they are proven to have significant effect. A few copyrighted icons I have developed for clients are included in this article.

Keep in mind that mantras and symbols communicate information. If you want your staff to have your store's values and services in the forefront of their minds, use these devices repetitively and tirelessly and you will impact your company's culture favor-

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ably. Ken Larson has stated: "The culture of a company is the job of the CEO. It absolutely cannot be delegated."

The challenge of the new millennium for the independent furniture entrepreneur is to do the seemingly impossible. Yet, as I wrote at the beginning of this article, there are opportunities that lie before you to flourish as never before.

You can identify and prioritize these opportunities by holding a worthy vision and taking baby steps toward achieving it. You can do the impossi-

ble one doable step at a time. And, never forget: "When imagination and will power are in conflict, are antagonistic, it is always imagination that wins, without exception." It's true.

About Larry Mullins: Larry Mullins is Marketing Feature Editor for Furniture World and has 35+ years' experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work with promotion specialists, and mastery of advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in furniture marketing. His turnkey High-

Impact programs produce legendary results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest book is *THE METAVALUES BREAKTHROUGH*, available on Amazon and in book stores. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc.

See more articles by Larry at www.furninfo.com or visit his site at www.ultrasales.com. Questions on this article? Call Larry directly for a free, no-obligation consultation about how to add 25% or so to your bottom line in 2015 at 904.794.9212, or contact him at larry@larrymullins.com.

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WHAT TO DO ABOUT THOSE RSA'S IN 2015

Tips on how to find, hire, evaluate and compensate your most important assets.

by David Benbow

What do we do about the Retail Sales Associate (R.S.A.)? Will any store owner, distributor or manufacturer argue with me when I suggest that the R.S.A. is the “weak link” in the chain? The chain I’m referring to extends from raw materials procurement through manufacturing all the way to the consumer’s home.

Why is this? Millions of dollars are spent on research, design, development, advertising, marketing, manufacturing, etc., by manufacturers and retailers only to leave the destiny of the product in the hands of a Retail Sales Associate; all too often a recent high school graduate with two days of training and three weeks of on-the-floor experience.

Please do not think I am disparaging the professional R.S.A. who goes to the trouble to thoroughly prepare himself or herself. Then, with that training and preparation, flawlessly executes the sales principles that virtually guarantee success. The problem is, there aren’t very many R.S.A.s who fit this descrip-

tion. How do I know this? First, years of observation and second, I talk to a lot of people around the country about their retail experiences. The most common theme of my discussions is customers’ dissatisfaction with retail salespeople.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE R.S.A.

Is the R.S.A. important? I think so. In fact, you could make the argument that the R.S.A. is the most important link in the whole chain, and yet is still the weakest link in that same chain. Retail stores and consumers both rely on the R.S.A. to communicate necessary information to the consumer. Rare is the store that leaves the product selection of big ticket items entirely in the hands of the consumer. Most consumers, I believe, hope that they can rely on information from the R.S.A. to make a smart decision. In the March/April 2014 issue of Furniture World, Volume 144, No.2, “Keep Control of Every Mattress Sale” article, I quoted Larry Mullins as saying “The power of the

one-on-one conversation remains the most effective method of selling on earth.” The conversation Mr. Mullins is referring to is the conversation between the R.S.A. and the consumer. Therefore, in virtually every sale, the R.S.A. has participated in some way, and, conversely, the R.S.A. has probably participated in every “lost” sale, as well. So, yes, the R.S.A. isn’t just important, he is critical to a successful sales effort.

If the R.S.A. is so important, why does store management so often FAIL to hire, train and prepare the best candidates to fill the most important link in their chain? Why is this part of the business so often left to chance?

“There are a lot more ‘weeds’ than ‘flowers’ in every crop of applicants. How does the interviewer sort out which is which?”

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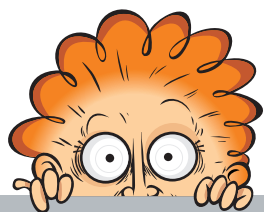
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CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL R.S.A

Does anyone know the characteristics of a good R.S.A? I don't even know if I do, and I've been training them for over 15 years. I've seen big, outgoing personalities fail miserably, and quiet, unassuming personalities succeed spectacularly. And, of course, I've seen the opposite, as well.

I have come to believe, however, that, there are at least two characteristics that are absolutely essential to R.S.A. success.

The first characteristic is the willingness and drive to thoroughly prepare for the job. Preparing for the job means learning all the tools of the trade including mastery of both the five groups of knowledge and the sales pre-

"The first characteristic is: the willingness and drive to thoroughly prepare for the job. The second characteristic is the burning desire to make the sale."

sentation. Every successful Retail Sales Associate I've ever known was expert in the use of both of these critical tools.

Note that the five groups of knowledge include: product knowledge, knowledge of policies, knowledge of advertising, knowledge of inventory and knowledge of financing.

The second important characteristic is a burning desire to make the sale. Call it by whatever euphemism you want, such as desire to help the customer, etc. but every professional out there possesses what I call the "killer instinct," which, simply said, is the drive to win, to make the sale.

Retail sales is a serious game. It is a game of winners and losers. There is no in between. The "ball" is the customer and the objective is to "score" (make the sale). The prepared R.S.A. with the burning desire to make the sale will "score" most of the time. And, as we all know, the team that scores most often, wins the game.

R.S.A. RESPONSIBILITIES

The R.S.A. is the connection between the Product and the buying customer. By the "Product", we mean everything that goes into making the product; raw materials supplier, manufacturer, distributor, and store. The R.S.A. is, in effect, working for all of these entities.

The customer needs information. The R.S.A. should have this information. Therefore, the R.S.A.'s job is to channel information from Product to customer. To do this, the R.S.A. MUST be fully fluent (prepared) in all aspects of the Product from construction to demonstration to price.

This concept is so fundamental and

undeniable, yet the floors of our showrooms are often populated with R.S.A.'s who don't have a clue as to this basic idea. So much so, that the unprepared R.S.A. can actually be more of a liability than no R.S.A. at all.

Briefly stated then, the responsibilities of the R.S.A. are to (1) be completely prepared and (2) use that preparation to solve each customer's problem.



FINDING AND HIRING THE POTENTIAL R.S.A.

It isn't hard to call the newspaper and place a help-wanted ad. The hard part begins when every manner of job-seeker shows up for an interview. There are a lot more "weeds" than "flowers" in every crop of applicants. How does the interviewer sort out which is which?

Some applicants are obvious. I usually eliminate them if (a) they bring along a family member on the interview (b) they have no means of transportation (c) they have a sloppy, displeasing appearance (d) they display a serious "edge" or attitude during the interview (e) they misspell their own name on the application.

So much for eliminating undesirables. What do we look for? This is actually much harder, because a lot of candidates look good in the interview and fall completely apart during training and work. Potentially great R.S.A.'s just don't jump out and signal, "I'm the

"The true professional

will make triple the sales of an average R.S.A. Not only that, but the average sale will be higher sales volume, of better merchandise, with fewer operational troubles."

one you are waiting for." Once you eliminate the obvious, what is left over might have a chance to be a good candidate.

How about sales experience? Should you favor the veteran over the raw twenty year old? Maybe it's just me, but I've had better luck with new, inexperienced candidates, particularly younger ones with fewer bad habits. Younger candidates also haven't been shell-shocked by years of retail sales work. Dealing with customers can be a stressful job. Retail burn-out is real. There may not be a cure.

TRAINING

I will repeat myself yet again. The R.S.A. MUST BE PREPARED. I don't think any initial training program less than an intense two week "boot camp" is going to be enough. My book How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual details a very thorough training program. If your candidate diligently learns and applies everything the book calls for, he probably has the potential to become a very capable R.S.A.

Training never ends. The boot camp is just the beginning. Just as you should follow up with sales leads, you should also follow up with advanced training for your R.S.A.s. Manufacturer's reps are good sources of information. Request frequent product knowledge classes for all sales associates. The reps are always glad to serve.

HOW MUCH IS A GREAT RSA WORTH?

What should the sales manager expect out of his R.S.A? How much is a

great R.S.A. worth? As an illustration, here is an situation I observed some years ago that will shed light on the difference between poor and superior sales work.

The story goes like this. A good many years ago, I was involved in a new store opening. The location was first rate, with a high traffic count, easy visibility, ample funding, sharp advertising, a powerful product lineup including most of the major brand names, well mer-

chandised. We were blessed with three talented, highly prepared, professional retail sales people. The results? The store was turning over \$50 per square foot in sales in the first month, which is an annualized rate of \$600 per square foot. And, this was without a Grand Opening. We experienced even greater sales the second and third months. Then, all of a sudden, the proprietors had some disagreements and parted company, with one owner left in con-



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WHAT TO DO

trol. The professional sales people also left and found employment elsewhere.

The new and sole owner, whose ideas were much more traditional and less aggressive, brought in some trainees and a manager whose primary experience was in warehouse management, not retail sales. The results were nothing short of astonishing. Sales plunged immediately by over 80 percent. Another interested party, who did business with both the previous ownership group and the new owner, said he never realized what a difference sales people could make until he witnessed this event. His words; "I figured there would be a sales decline, but I didn't expect anything like this. I assumed that the great location would be enough to keep sales volume at a respectable level. It is obvious to me now that the sales staff made all the difference."

I've been around this business a long time. I've been able to observe, measure and compare: (1) great R.S.A.s (2) average R.S.A.s and (3) utterly mediocre R.S.A.s. I firmly believe that the true professional will make triple the sales that an average R.S.A. will. Not only that, but the average sale will be higher sales volume, of better merchandise, with fewer operational troubles and a much happier customer who WILL return and become a repeat customer. In the first sentence of this section, we asked the question, "What should the Sales Manager expect out of his R.S.A.?" Nothing less than the performance I just described. Anything less shouts "room for improvement."

COMPENSATION

Here, we get to the crux of the prob-

lem. Many retail stores have a compensation plan that follows the "One size fits all" practice. Everybody gets paid on the same plan. The only way the R.S.A. makes more money is to make more sales.

In this article, I am not introducing any revolutionary new compensation plan. I'm just suggesting that maybe sales management think about the idea of an "Elite R.S.A. Contingent" that is recognized and more highly paid. If you have an R.S.A. that is outselling everybody else by two to one, and he or she is not cheating, or "skating" to do this, you may have a valuable property on your hands. This is a sales person you do not want to lose. I'd like to suggest developing a way that this sales person can make more money.

Here is another idea to consider. A lot of successful, large automobile dealers employ a greeter/closer sales practice. Why do they do this? They recognize that "closing" is important, and closing is a skill that not all R.S.A.s possess, especially those with less experience. I have rarely observed this practice in furniture showrooms, but I don't know why it wouldn't be effective, if exercised correctly. At the car dealer, the "closer" usually makes significantly more money than the greeter. The closer also enjoys more recognition and respect.

RECOGNIZING SUCCESS (ARE THEY REALLY GOOD?)

How does sales management recognize success? This sounds like an easy question, but it is not quite as cut and dried as you might think. The sales profession is a magnet to would-be con artists, and a good con artist can fool a

sales manager as easily as he can fool a customer, at least in the short run.

Here are a few clues to watch for.

First, how well did the candidate do in the training boot camp? Do they really know their Five Groups of Knowledge? Do they understand the Steps of the Sale and how to execute them? The slacker who barely got by in class is rarely going to be a top notch R.S.A.

Second, watch them on the floor. Do they execute the steps of the sale? Are they friendly and outgoing? Do they stay with their customer, or do they drop them when the first objection is voiced?

Third, measure their results. Furniture World publishes some very good articles on measuring success in sales people. Here are some things to look for; (1) what percentage of their "ups" do they close? (2) what is their average ticket sales volume, or average unit selling price (AUSP)? (3) how much of their sales volume is add-ons? (4) how well do they follow up with buyers and prospective buyers? Are they exceeding the store average in all these categories?

"A lot of successful, large automobile dealers employ a greeter/closer sales practice. Why do they do this?"

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WHAT TO DO IN 2015

Fourth, even if they start out like gang-busters, are they still performing at the same pace after six months? Are they consistent in their performance?

Fifth, are they taking advantage of advanced training and learning opportunities? If you give them an advanced product knowledge test after six months, will they pass or fail?

Sixth, what do the other R.S.A.s think about them? Observe and listen to your staff, clandestinely or directly.

RECOGNIZING FAILURE

Recognizing failure is usually easier than recognizing success. The problem is, failure, like success, comes in degrees. How failed does the R.S.A. have to be before you terminate their employment? This is a decision that each store must make on its own. Here is my input on that subject. Use the same criteria to determine failure that you used in "Recognizing Success." Keep a scorecard that you, as sales manager, will use to decide the minimum level of performance that you will tolerate before parting company with the low-performance R.S.A.

Don't keep a low performance, disgruntled employee, R.S.A. or otherwise. That person will be toxic to the rest of your staff.



SUMMARY

Since the R.S.A. is a critical link in the chain, and great R.S.A.s are so hard to find, is there an alternative to the Retail Sales Associate? Sure, you can put out information-laden placards on all your merchandise. You can have informational videos running on every aisle. You may have a few customers that respond favorably, especially those few that "already know what they want" or "don't like to talk to sales people." But, watch out, if a new store opens down the street that is manned with real professional sales people. I predict they will take a large share of your sales.

So, what is the answer? Better training and better compensation. The promise of high pay will attract better people. Does anyone argue with that proposition?

Let me emphasize one more note on better training. How much training does it take to become a doctor, a lawyer, a C.P.A., a college professor, a computer programmer? Would you

feel confident going to a doctor who just "got by" during his years in medical school? What about a lawyer or a C.P.A. who didn't stay up-to-date on the newest legislation?

I'll admit, the incompetent furniture Retail Sales Associate does not have the same capacity for damage to society as the incompetent physician. But, think about this. How much damage can the incompetent Retail Sales Associate do to your business and your finances?

In the next issues of Furniture World, we will begin a series of articles that can be used as the outline of a training curriculum. Each article will select and discuss one of the "tools of the trade" that we just mentioned.

About David Benbow: David Benbow, a twenty-three year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry, is owner of Mattress Retail Training Company offering retailers retail guidance; from small store management to training retail sales associates. His years of hands-on experience as a retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding. David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete, text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or www.mattressretailtraining.com.

He also offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and offers on-line classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above.

David can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or in person at 361-648-3775.

"Use the same criteria to determine failure that you used in "Recognizing Success." Keep a scorecard that you will use to decide the minimum level of performance."



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YOU KNOW YOU SHOULD DO THIS!

Five simple selling techniques you should be able to implement flawlessly.

by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure

I hope this article is a timely reminder to take a look at your business and see if you too have missed profit opportunities. These are simple tasks that most retailers know about, but not that many implement flawlessly. There's a good chance you have room for improvement, and now is the perfect time to get things in order.

Do This First: Make a sale to get a customer!

For some, this notion is deeply implanted into their marketing mindset. For the rest, allow me to explain this in detail because it's critical for you to understand and embrace. The average business owner typically thinks in trans-

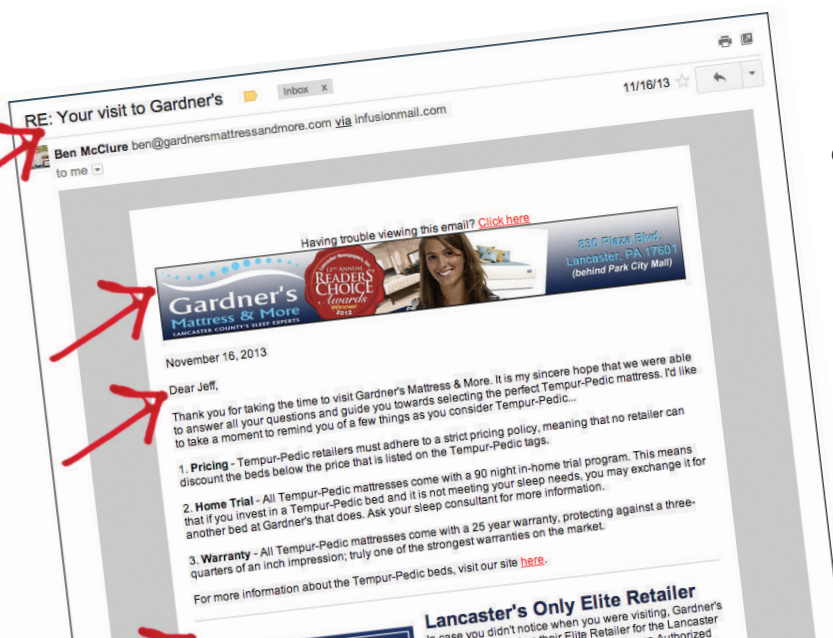
actions, for example, "I need to serve 30 lunches today" or "I need to fill 10 rooms." Their goal is to get a customer in order to make a sale. They are content with the transaction and as soon as it's over, they're focused on the next one.

The smart business owner thinks differently and realizes the whole point of making a sale is to get a customer! Read that again because if you get this simple shift, I've just handed you the keys to higher profits and happier customers!

For 99% of business owners, the first sale could be the doorway to a long-term relationship with the customer, but most business owners don't understand this or cannot figure out a way to make

it happen. This is a huge mistake and one you must avoid! If you're not thinking this way, the rest of this article will help you grasp this game-changer. If you already get it, this will be a timely reminder.

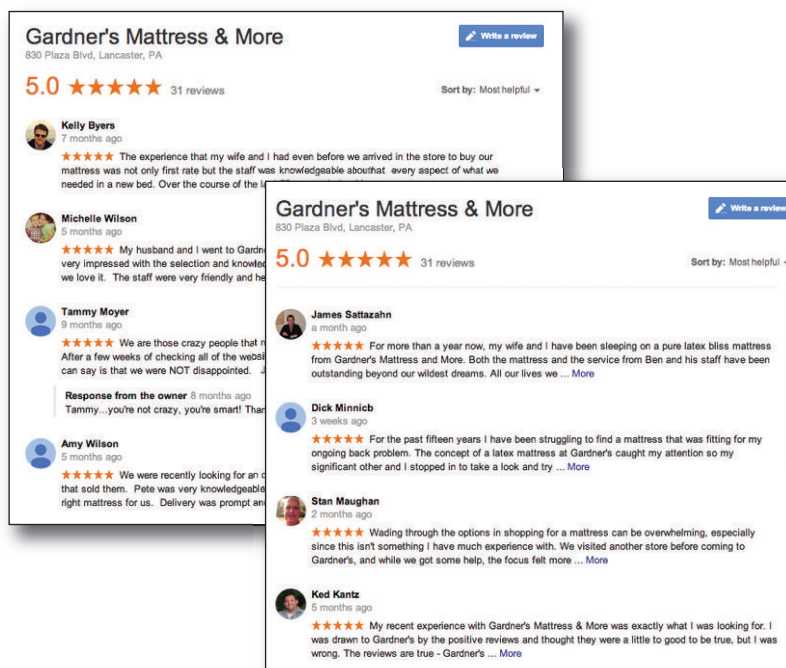
"The smart business owner thinks differently and realizes the whole point of making a sale is to get a customer!"



Gardner's Mattresses & More uses their Dream Room both as a closing tool and a be back tool. Their customers book Dream Room appointments by paying a non-refundable deposit on their mattress. They do this because they have selected a mattress they think will work, but aren't 100% positive yet. The Dream Room lets them "try before they buy." Once appointments are made, customers are committed. No more shopping.

Shown at left is an email from Gardner's "in store, no sale" follow up sequence. It is personalized both to the person (using their first name) and to the brand of mattress they looked for. Highly personal and never confused with the bland and boring "dear customer" messages retailers often send out.

You can never have enough fresh reviews and testimonials in your marketing toolkit. You need to have a system in place to capture and use them. Asking for testimonials is very important and using them in your marketing is even more important.



Do This Second: Offer opportunities to people to spend more with you.

I'm a firm believer in creating ways for shoppers who want more, to get more from you. I'm not suggesting cliché-type upsells. Instead, frame this process as a desire to fulfill the wants and needs of that percentage of your customer base who will be happier with additional or better quality goods and services. If these pathways do not exist in your operation, there is pent-up customer demand plus un-realized revenue potential. Neither are desirable.

In our world, presentation of products such as adjustable beds, furniture protection, and occasional tables are often lumped into the category of add-ons. When presented at the end of a sale, they can be seen as blatant money grabs. However, when a proper sales presentation is used, and the right scripted sales choreography followed, you can create a systematized pathway for people to spend more.

As an example, when it comes to adjustable beds, a thorough discussion of shoppers' sleep needs, and how they use their bedrooms, in almost every case, uncovers the need for an adjustable bed. A proper discussion of how the customer will use their furniture and proper timing will change what could become a negative experience. When presenting upholstered furniture, ask if they eat in their living room. Find

out who uses the furniture (children, teens, pets?). Discover how the furniture will be used. Do they do crafts or office work that could increase the chance of a puncture or tear from scissors left behind?

Discovering the answers to these questions as opposed to just asking, "So do you like brown or black for your living room?" automatically puts customers on the path to spend more with you and adequately fulfill their needs.

Do This Third: Capture contact information. Use it for follow-up marketing!

You're probably thinking this is too basic to include in an article like this, but most furniture retailers don't do it.

Allowing somebody to leave your store or showroom without making an attempt to collect their name and email and/or mailing address is a wasted opportunity. Again, this doesn't have to be a hard-sell type experience. Assuming you're doing everything else right, there's going to be a decent percentage of people who would appreciate hearing from you in the future, which leads me to Reminder #4...

Do This Fourth: Always follow up!

Making the effort to collect contact information is only part of the equation - you must do something with this valu-

able data. I recently consulted with a retail business owner in the Los Angeles area. He collected over 9,000 email addresses from people who visited his stores and never did anything with them! He never emailed them offers, specials, etc. The list sat unused and wasted.

Again, there's going to be a decent percentage of people who want to hear from you. They want to know what's going on in your business. They want to receive special offers and invitations. Not following up with unconverted leads is the single biggest missed opportunity among furniture and bedding businesses today.

Do This Fifth: Ask for testimonials.

Another basic strategy and one that is becoming even more important with

"When a proper sales presentation is installed and the right scripted sales choreography followed, you have a systematized pathway for people to spend more with you."



Testimonials (above) can be collected and used everywhere from print ads in the newspaper, to radio copy. Gardner's uses Facebook reviews and screen capture Google reviews on the home screen of their website, and also on postcards.

the ubiquitous nature of online reviews. I don't think you can ever have enough fresh reviews and testimonials in your marketing toolkit. You need to have a system in place to capture and use them.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

So what are you doing to revolutionize your business? I won't even make the attempt to help revolutionize your business via these pages. But what I can do is offer some suggestions so you can begin to lay the groundwork.

1. Copy Success. Begin to look at what successful businesses are

DO THIS!

doing that excites customers. Apple and Starbucks are good examples. Another is Patagonia an outdoor hiking, climbing, and camping gear company.

2. Rub elbows. Interact with people both inside and outside of your industry. There are foundational truths present in every business. Furniture people can learn from Dentists. Chiropractors can learn from jewelry store owners and mattress people can learn from women with no mattress experience. The late great author, speaker, and marketer Jim Rohn says you are the sum of the five people you spend the most time with. If those people are your reps, staff, and fellow retailers then it shouldn't be surprising that you struggle to revolutionize your business. But when your five people are from varied and unique backgrounds all with proven skills and successes along with failures they've learned from, that is when something magical begins to take hold.

3. Fresh eyes. Always have your marketing radar turned on. Look with fresh eyes at every retail, selling, and service experience you encounter. My business partner and I have made

Gardner's Mattress & More what it is today because of this principle. Without this skill set, our business would not exist.

4. Fail faster. That's right it's OK to fail. We've all heard that you can learn something when you fail. I suggest you just speed up the process. Stop thinking about the next outside the box promotion, just do it already. It's likely it will fail. The 80/20 rule in action. So what? The difference between launching a promotion once you have every last detail thought out versus rapid implementation, is the elapsed time. Think about it. If an early launch fails and you still think it's a good idea, you can run that a promotion three more times and perfect it. Once you have perfected it, you will have a marketing asset to successfully use time and again. Failing faster can actually be a good thing.

About Jeff & Ben: Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure co-own Gardner's Mattress & More in Lancaster, PA a multi unit destination boutique mattress store. They also co authored the book "Mega Mattress Margins" and "Retail is Dead" as well as created the industry's only turn key, done for you, sales and marketing machine called Automated Mattress Profits that creates captures and converts prospects into paying customers. Questions on any aspect of bedding promotion can be directed to Jeff and Ben care of editor@furninfo.com. And, to get more information on their "Automated Mattress Profits CRM system visit <http://www.AutomatedMattressProfits.com>.



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CALL OF THE COUCH

Schneiderman's Furniture: An uncommon, ongoing Success Story.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

THE REVIEW!

We're assuming you have a copy of Larry Schneiderman's blockbuster, "Call of the Couch", conveniently close at hand for ready reference, or at least it's at the top of your priority list of future purchases!

The title suggests numerous provocative avenues of thought if you let your mind wander a bit. But the author, President of Schneiderman's Furniture, defines his intent in the sub-head, "A Family's Love Affair with Its Business".

This is no ordinary handbook or manual to success. Its 211 pages read like an engaging novel with heady, totally unexpected, overtones of murder and mayhem, and a constant flow of genial humour interspersed, sadly, with moments of human tragedy. But its essence is an appreciation of the essential characters at the heart of the founding and evolution of this remarkable, almost seven decades long, retail adven-

ture.

"Couch" is well organized for an uninterrupted read and hits a high point when you reach the chapter where Larry earmarks "What I've Learned". Have a pad and pencil ready to take copious notes. You are guaranteed to find concepts and philosophies and clear, definitive suggestions that will stimulate both thought and action. And, too, you'll discover an engaging personal empathy as you absorb Larry's experiences and touchstone conclusions.

If you are shopping for a good read now that the cooler months are upon us, something absorbing, informative and downright exciting, don't go to that latest Grisham or Atwood potboiler, look instead to "Call of the Couch". Its knock-your-socks-off drama kick-starts a warm family tale and then evolves into one of the most insightful "how-to" handbooks of the home furnishings industry.

Don't buy just one copy for your own library. You will need several for friends

and colleagues.

THE STORY!

Schneiderman's Furniture, was founded in 1948. Today there are six large stores in the Minnesota cities of Duluth, Lakeville, Roseville, Woodbury, Plymouth and Rochester, with 200 staff.

Strictly speaking, the Schneiderman's U.S. saga came to life when Larry's grandfather, Russian-born Elias, first stepped on North American shores. At a family gathering in the '80s that included Uncle Harry, Elias's older brother, Harry remarked, "You know your name isn't really Schneiderman, it's Mintczer." That statement understandably engaged everyone's attention! Then Harry went on to say, "Elias arrived in 1905, and he couldn't speak English very well. He

Pictured are Larry and Jason Schneiderman and the recently renovated Woodbury store.



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"We have used Custom Design Software for 14 years now. I believe that speaks volumes as to how well the software has worked for our company. It is very user friendly. It is obvious the software was written by someone with prior retail furniture background. I have had many a conversation with Jerry Katz, owner of CDS, over the years. I consider him an expert in the field of retail furniture software, and also a friend and business partner to help us be the best furniture store possible." - Bob Erwin, BF Meyers Furniture

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thought when the Immigration Officer asked his name that he'd said 'What do you do for a living?' So, Elias replied, 'Schneiderman.' Translated, Schneiderman means 'tailor man'. So he became Eli Schneiderman, but his real name was Elias Mintzner!" Uncle Harry was like that.

Larry's volatile, larger-than-life father, Max, was born in New York City in 1910, but Elias soon moved his growing family west to Duluth, Minnesota, probably, the family surmises, because he couldn't find work in New York. Energetic Max's adolescence was difficult, but he found himself a job at the steel plant and became an active member of the Naval Reserve, service that continued for five years during World War II.

One very lucky day, on a blind date, he met Edna Kretschmar, a nurse in training, daughter of a Lutheran pastor. Another exceedingly important moment

in Schneiderman history! Edna was an "amazing woman" who owed some of her chutzpah to Josephine, her mother, who had raised Edna and her five siblings. Josephine saw to it, through hard work and persistence, that her children were "educated, solid" citizens who went on to live successful, productive lives.

Vital to Larry's "Call of the Couch" was Edna's well-written and insightful journal. It's a treat that lies in wait for the reader since Larry quotes her frequently, linking family happenings with Max's strong desire to build his own business. Max had the opportunity to stay in the Navy as a career but family necessity governed his return to the steel industry. Then came that fateful classified newspaper ad and a car trip to Elmer, Minnesota, to view a problematic grocery/general store and post office. They bought it when the



Original store in Elmer, MN and the Woodbury location renovated in 2014.

fabled Josephine loaned them \$5000 for the down payment. And, again dear reader, you won't believe what happens next!

Recapturing the history of this vibrant family led naturally to the knotty but fascinating question of succession. And the on-going mentoring that aids and abets effective succession. Larry offers his reflections.

SUCCESSION

"I was still a young man and we were

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Managing Change: Eight Reasons Why Change Initiatives Fail
There are eight main reasons why 50 percent of companies, large and small, fail at bringing new ideas to their businesses. Here's what you can do to improve your odds of success.

City Furniture Opens New Ashley Furniture HomeStore
Retailer plans to open three more Ashley Furniture HomeStore locations and another City Furniture showroom in South Florida in the next three years.

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"Dad proclaimed that

his success was based on his three-legged stool of unwavering principles. His beliefs worked for him, but it wasn't long before the growth of the company required doing the absolute opposite!"

a single location business when I sold some furniture to an older man who owned a small clothing store in Duluth. He shared that he still worked 50 hours a week and had just turned 70. His two sons worked for him and he went on to say he was getting tired. I asked him, 'Why don't you let your two sons take over?' He responded, 'They're not close to being ready, no way.' I probed, 'How old are they?' He pondered for a couple of moments and answered, 'Forty-six and forty-four.'

"It seemed ridiculous to me at the time, but now I can see how this could happen. As time goes by, we begin to remember what we've done to keep the business viable, we remember the sacrifices we've made; we may even have the self-awareness to know we may have left too much of ourselves in that business. I admit I'm proud of what we've accomplished and it seems unappealing and even scary to think about separating my identity from the business.

"Now add to that a lingering question or two or more about differences between the aging owner and the next generation. My wife, Sheila, needed to remind me, 'Remember how you and your Dad differed. Remember him telling you never to advertise; never to have a

sale; and never to pay commissions?'

"But my Dad wasn't cool like I am! Jason (Larry's son, now in the business) should hang on every word. Right...!

"In the case of Schneidman's, my long-time partner, my brother Russ, passed away three years after he retired. It wasn't easy for us to pay those life insurance premiums all those years, but we had a buy-sell agreement funded with life insurance.

"Back in 1968 when I was 19, Dad had incorporated the store. He got 25 per cent, Edna 25 percent and each of five of the children, 10 per cent.

"I think I would have liked my two daughters to be involved in the business, but neither one wanted that. Fortunately, my son has the same fire for the business as I do. I have known for a long time I am fortunate indeed this is the case. I also know it's difficult for me to simply let go. For this reason, when it came time for us to structure an agreement, I did NOT want to retain control. He deserves my trust and knowing he really does have the final say gives him confidence.

"What would we have done had we not had a son to 'carry on'? Operating a business like ours takes a huge personal commitment. While our two daughters (Jodi* and Jenna**) are bright and capa-

ble, they don't have 'the calling'. The world doesn't need more people who aren't inspired by what they're doing. We may have considered an ESOP (employee stock ownership plan), but it's difficult to say."

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Larry's charismatic Dad had a highly developed knack for mentoring. His philosophies were deeply felt. In particular he spoke his mind about marketing. "Dad proclaimed that his success was based on his three-legged stool of unwavering principles. His beliefs worked for him, but it wasn't long before the growth of the company required doing the absolute opposite!"

Larry's mentoring has taken on a different, introspective flavor. In "Couch" he mentions a course he experienced at St. Thomas University in Minneapolis, "Leading from Within". (He graduated from U of M with a BA in Business Administration/Economics.)

He explained, "It was a year-long course and involved several types of leaders from the business world to school superintendents to health care. Most of these people were employed by large companies. As the title implies, we undertook a journey to find out what our



Woodbury store built in 1995. In 2013, the roof was raised 19 feet and a second floor added.



true core beliefs are and how we use or don't use these beliefs in our leadership styles. We explored many aspects of leadership. For instance, we spent several hours with an expert on personality types. In one case, we spent a lot of time learning how to identify 'Adaptors', those people who view change as incremental but are often the people who get things done. In contrast, we looked at 'Innovators', those folks who like to throw out ideas but have little interest in the nitty-gritty of implementation. Finally, we looked at the people in the middle, the 'Bridgers', people who can talk and think with Adaptors and Innovators. Most of us, but not all, fit the 'Bridger' category.

"In discussing our own experiences it became plain to me our company was mainly made up of Adaptors or Bridgers leaning that way. For example, let's say a team is having a meeting trying to solve a problem. After an hour, the group decides on a path. Now, an Innovator is

very likely to say, 'I don't really think we've identified the problem'. This is a real classic line, Innovators don't stop thinking just because a consensus had been reached. It made me smile at the time because my brother, Phil, would do exactly that. We would have a drawn out meeting and then he would question the

question. My brother, Russ, was an extreme Adaptor, which made him an effective Implementer. When Phil would make his comment and Russ was glad the meeting was done, it didn't make for harmony. And consider this, Russ had to be thinking the whole time, 'I'm the one who is going to do all the work here'.

"Another example is managing change. We listened to an expert on change and he began the class by asking, 'Who here loves change?' Nobody raised their hand. He added, 'Good, no liars!'

"In the end, the conclusion brought forward was that change is a lot like a white-water rafter tackling a tough and demanding course. At the end, it is a great feeling of satisfaction to have navigated a difficult and dangerous path. It is in that stillness of satisfaction, where you look back and feel good about what you've accomplished. The period of actual change is hardly enjoyable for

"While overall numbers for traffic, close ratio and average sale are very important, think micro. Think of where those numbers come from... people!"

"Every Salesperson Set Records During Larry's Event!"



"Our Slumberland Furniture store underwent an extensive renovation last summer. The entire front of the building was being re-done and it looked like we were closed and had gone out of business. During that time, Larry Mullins developed a massive 9-week renovation event for us. The instructions were easy to follow and he had everything mapped out to the last detail. I was skeptical because I had never worked an event like this. I can't believe how well it went. Our store set sales records working out of a building that didn't even look open. Every salesperson set personal sales records during this sale. Larry's program brought in customers who had never been in our store before. It was a great opportunity for us to broaden our customer base, and we did! Thank you Larry!"

Andy Howell, Assistant Manager, Slumberland Furniture, Davenport, IA

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SCHNEIDERMAN'S

Schneiderman's Rochester store's interior and exterior branding

most people. It's getting through it and celebrating success. Keeping this in mind while implementing change can be the difference between succeeding and failing.

"As I look back on my own ideas about leadership, the 'Leading from Within' approach led me to realizing I could be the same person, both in the role as a leader and as a person of faith. I have to make decisions at times which aren't popular with people. However, if I'm making them for the right reasons and my intentions are good, I can feel comfortable with them."

SALES APPROACHES

Chapter 11, "What I've Learned", suggests speculation about how Larry translates his ideas into day-to-day life within the stores. Said Larry, "'What I've Learned' often rings more true for me than it is with others. This is likely because it's colored by who I learned the lesson from and what my background is compared to others. My younger, formative years (I'm still formulating!) found me in a remote store where most people arrived after driving 35 to 50 miles or more." (He sold his first piece of furniture at age 15.) "So, when customers came by and mumbled, 'We're just looking', my brother, Russ, or myself would laugh and respond, 'Yes, we know you're either looking for furniture or you're lost. Are you lost?!'

"We may have only had five customers in a day, but our goal was always to sell all of them. When I walk through our stores today, I love it when we have, for instance, five customers and all five are engaged with a sales consultant. I complement the manager when I see that, and will remind her/him this is better than eight customers and four engaged. What

I've learned is while overall numbers for traffic, close ratio and average sale are very important, think micro. Think of where those numbers come from . . . people!

"We have at one of our stores one manager in particular who combines an ability to think micro along with her good business sense. So, a month before Thanksgiving, she asked each sales associate to furnish their open business report to her and to note which customers expected delivery prior to the holidays. She also requested notations as to what dates each sales consultant talked with each customer and their updates. One salesperson, not known for acceptable follow-up, handed in her report as complete. The manager decided to check a couple and, guess what, no, the customers hadn't been called. So, the two of them met to discuss the matter. The sales consultant began, 'Let me tell you first, you have a serious 'micro-management' issue . . .

"I've noticed this overused expression is often used by people who eschew details. In fact, an article in the Harvard Business Review said it well, 'If you're not micro-managing, you're not managing.'

"My 'What I've Learned' rules, if you will, should be common sense. However, just because something is simple doesn't mean it will be easy to execute. I know I have 10 pounds to lose and I know how to do it. Yet, I haven't lost the weight. I eat out a lot, I love food, I enjoy a cocktail. Similarly, overcoming bad habits in the showroom can't be overcome by erratic application.

"My brother, Phil, often commented, 'Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die'.

"We can't monitor peoples' behavior to any significant extent and so we

depend upon our associates' good business sense, the instruction we give them, and modeling the behavior we believe is best for all concerned.

"But, in the end, if they believe following these 'rules' is in their interest, it can happen and often does."

Larry told us that his sales associates often ask a potential customer, "Tell me about your room", certainly a bridge to the individual's dream. Given a response, the associate does a rough sketch on a piece of paper. "Not a scale drawing, just a rough sketch. This helps with the placement of furniture and identifies a focal point. By doing this, the

"However, just because something is simple doesn't mean it will be easy to execute. I know I have 10 pounds to lose and I know how to do it. Yet, I haven't lost the weight. I eat out a lot, I love food, I enjoy a cocktail. Similarly, overcoming bad habits in the showroom can't be overcome by erratic application."



Max (left), Jason & Larry Schneiderman (below).



consultant immediately separates herself from the people out there who don't service the customer or who will just sell anybody. It's been proven time and again, a sales consultant can close many more customers this way. What's frustrating is we have to push people to do it, even incentive beyond their commission. I'm not really sure why people on commission don't do this, but bad habits are tough to change. Sketching is not new. I learned from my mother a long time ago how helpful this is. When I did it, I also noticed customers asked me to come to their homes more as their confidence in my decorating abilities went from neutral to positive.

"My mother taught me one other technique helpful for both the customer and the company. When I sold a sofa, I would ask the customer what they were going to hang above it. Most had no plan. My mother's solution was to always have two and only two wall art pieces in mind and say, 'Could I show you just two pieces of wall art which would look great?' Plan on bringing them to the sofa. Plan on the customer taking one home with them!"

Sometimes after repeated negative experiences, whatever the cause, a sales consultant might feel rebuffed or depressed. Said Larry, "If we consider our store with the most sales consultants (23) it would be possible to rate them by attitude and number from # 1 to #23. By definition, somebody is always on the bottom. In the theoretical world, it may be advantageous to a company to do as General Electric did under the leadership

of Jack Welch. Every department head was required to determine who the lowest 10 per cent performers were and to let them go. It's not as inhumane as it sounds.

"However, being pragmatic, we are having a very challenging time finding sales consultants to hire. For the most part, people bring their attitudes and personalities with them. We do test for this and we do require two interviews and so we don't hire anybody for sales unless they appear to have the right kind of attitude and have the right kind of skills or the potential to learn them. I have seen sales consultants develop negative attitudes and I have seen people develop good ones. The store managers have a lot to do with the store attitude. While maintaining the standards of the store, do they show our associates that they are appreciated? Do they thank and praise them where warranted? Are they direct and timely when issues need to be sorted out? Are they understanding when understanding is called for, but also are they assertive and clear when those traits are called for?

"We are a family business. We are not the U.S. Army. If somebody has a question or an issue, we would like them first to work with their manager, but associates are welcome to approach our general manager or Jason and I. Some do. I would rather have somebody come to me with their complaints or suggestions

"By doing a sketch, the consultant immediately separates herself from the people out there who don't service the customer or who will just sell anybody. It's been proven time and again, a sales consultant can close many more customers this way."

than be upset about it, even for a day.

"It's extremely unlikely a sales consultant will treat our customers right if our associates don't think we treat them right. I think one of the common mistakes managers make in this regard is by thinking an e-mail will suffice instead of a brief face-to-face meeting.

"Rejection by customers can cause sales consultants to feel down. Some parts of attitude we cannot change. Still, I would emphasize to all our associates once you've done your absolute best, there is nothing more you can do. If they do their absolute best, they'll do very well."

STORE-TO-STORE NEWSLETTER

Larry writes the lead column of "Store to Store", a monthly company newsletter provided to all Schneiderman staff. In Volume 25, Issues seven and eight, Larry talks of "learning from one another", he highlights timely key goals and he recognizes staff achievements, makes several points about the value of networking sharing a warm personal experience, a Kretschman family reunion. And he uses the opportunity as a reminder of the

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"Most people arrived after driving 35 to 50 miles or more. So, when customers came by and mumbled, 'We're just looking', my brother, Russ, or myself would laugh and respond, 'Yes, we know you're either looking for furniture or you're lost.'"

power of "word-of-mouth, far more effective than any commercial ad". Shades of Max!

"Store to Store" also carries a regular column, Display & Merchandising. Well-written by staffers Natalie Stob and Susan Strong, it's defined as "A monthly article on happenings in display, merchandising and trends from our Schneiderman's Merchandising Team perspective". The heading goes on to ask readers to "Let us know what you would like to read about in this article and we will be happy to share our thoughts and perceptions." Topics range from in-depth descriptions of new product lines and effective display, to "Made in the USA" wall art.

A "Comments" section offers uplifting praise from happy customers naming sales associates, delivery staff and others who've contributed to outstanding Schneiderman experiences.

Each newsletter features "New Employees", short, welcoming vignettes of peo-

ple, their positions, locations and hobbies. And the section solicits rewarded input in the referral of qualified "new hires".

BUSINESS RESOURCES

Business mentoring is many-splendored and on-going, and Larry reached out to Dr. Peter A. Marino. "I had enjoyed reading his articles in 'Furniture World'. Initially, I invited him to lead a series of sales training sessions. Peter and I decided we would work together for a year. He taught all of us something. We spent a great deal of time teaching our managers and management human relationship skills. I've used memorable

quotes from Peter in my book. What I learned most from him is to appreciate our sales team and to express my appreciation to them. He's a real spirit, a kind and

ethical person. Unforgettable, really."

A constant, selective reader, Larry particularly recommends (once you've absorbed "Couch's" messages!) "First, Break All the Rules", subtitled "What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently", by business authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, who offer solutions to better employee satisfaction. (Both Larry and daughter, Jodi, endorse this book.) And, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", written by Stephen R. Covey, principles of a character ethic presented as universal and timeless, also well worth perusing.

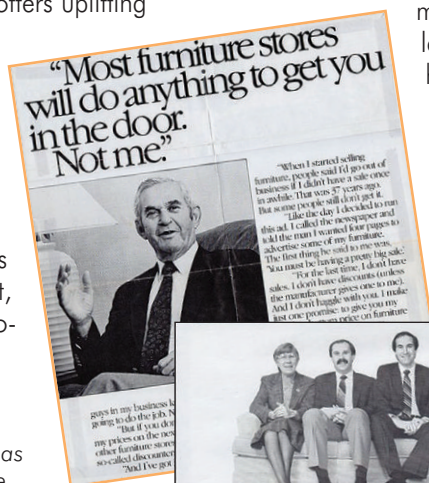
MANUFACTURING FORAY

Back in 1990, the Schneiderman entrepreneurs surprisingly ventured into manufacturing, "high quality casual dining furniture. My reason for starting American Furniture Craftsmen was I was active in community development at the time and knew this could help. At our peak we had 38 full-time workers. I could write a book on this experience alone. As I look back, it's amazing I thought I could get into manufacturing furniture when I had no background in it whatsoever. And, even more amazing, we became profitable in 1993.

"At the time, our main competition in the category was two major manufacturers based in California. We essentially modeled our styles (ok, we copied!) after less expensive styles, and then made them better. Everything we made used solid Red Oak.

"Our upholstering quality likely was too good, meaning too expensive to do. We sold thousands of chairs and never sustained a single complaint on tailoring.

"Looking back, I had the good fortune to become friends with Bob Anderson, a real craftsman, but also a tireless worker and committed to seeing



Larry's father Max acted as store spokesperson in the mid-eighties. He had a firm "no sales" policy. Max was eventually overruled. Their first clearance sale ad appeared in 1986 (right). Larry says, "My dad was a good sport and posed for the picture, but didn't talk to me for two weeks. Most of our current advertising is online or television. We do some, but not much ROP. We try to be a little humorous. Sometimes it backfires. This didn't."

"3 out of 4 of us Schneidermans think a clearance sale is a good idea."

"Last year we talked dad into his first sale in 38 years of business. We pointed out that we'd overbought a few styles and had accumulated a lot of floor samples, discontinued one-of-a-kind pieces that we didn't know what to do with, and that we ought to have a clearance sale. Dad said we'd all lose our credibility if we had a sale, but we were free to make our own mistakes.

"Well, we had the sale and sold everything out and made a lot of folks happy. Now we're going to have another clearance sale for the same reasons May 9 & 10. But preferred customers like you can take advantage of the savings even earlier. Just come in Thursday or Friday May 7 & 8 before the sale starts and you'll have your choice of select styles of quality furniture, bedding and carpeting. We'll be open 'til 9:00 both those nights.

"Dad still doesn't think a clearance sale is a good idea, but he thinks it's more important we Schneidermans stick together when it comes to policy. That's why he agreed to help us with this sale. Thanks, dad."

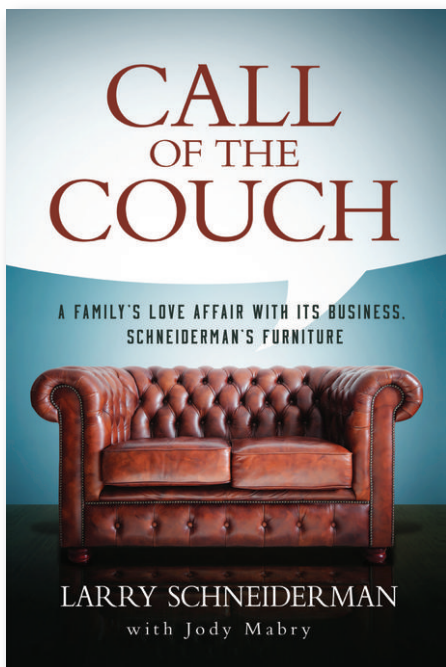
Moore, Russell and Larry Schneiderman

P.S. There's another sale going on in our store during our Clearance Sale. This sale is being put on by the local and other furniture stores and will end at 9:00 on that morning. How nice of us to make our everyday low prices even lower.

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MasterCard/VISA Accepted/All Sales Final

Delaware (May 13 arrive from Target): 206-722-2292
Lakeland (Take Hwy 50 to downtown): 512-609-1000
Hendersonville (Just outside of town): 281-621-2118

Schneiderman's



the company grow.

"We developed a sales manager-customer service manager, Sean Bakken, who started as a sander and proved to be the perfect match with Bob.

"Our upholstery manager, Kathy Olson, saw to it every chair was done like it was for her own home.

"My brother, Phil, did have manufacturing experience and he worked with Bob and Sean. Phil and I got hold of a book named 'The Goal' which is a classic in the manufacturing field. It's written in a novel form, but the bottom line is just-in-time manufacturing. We had our own little book club as we set up an additional break where people took turns reading the book. We operated our little factory with just-in-time principles.

"At the time, Cochrane Furniture was a thriving company in South Carolina and Schneiderman's bought lots of it. The two owners, Red and Jerry Cochrane, as a favor came and visited our plant. I was looking for suggestions. They told me they were amazed at what we were doing and asked if they could copy our swivel tilt chairs. We had no problem with that and they did.

"One of my very best days at work was the day I called on Gary Steinhafel in Milwaukee. I presented the line to Gary and he gave Joanne Warner the go-ahead to put in a program. Steinhafel's did well with our line as did Nebraska Furniture Mart, Homemakers, Goods,

SCHNEIDERMAN'S

Kaceys and many others including Schneiderman's, of course.

"We sold American Furniture Craftsmen in 1996 and the company went out of business in 1999. Why did we sell the factory? Three things happened. Bob Anderson developed personal family issues and had to leave. My brother, Phil, left for Florida, and I needed to move to the Twin Cities. While we did quite well the last three years, keep in mind there were no imports in the category at that time. When the look started being made in China, it changed everything."

STAYING RELEVANT

Schneiderman's continuous search for industry knowledge persuaded Larry to join the national buying group, Furniture First, a purchasing cooperative with over 200 stockholder-members, representing more than 430 furniture stores in 47 states. Larry served on the Board and connected with "many good furniture people. Most important, for sure, is getting to know and sharing information with a great group of retailers. The staff is excellent and continues to help us with various issues and questions which arise. The Furniture First team can be an important resource.

"I spoke at one symposium and afterwards enjoyed a discussion with a group of single-store owners. A hot topic was their difficulties in competing with multi-store competitors, like Schneiderman's. My opinion is that a well-run single location should win every time. Just as often the best restaurants are family restaurants with a working owner on site, independent furniture stores have a similar opportunity. There are land mines to negotiate. Just as employees often say they like to be part of a family business, if the business is not run as a professional business needs to be, or if employees are

treated poorly, the advantage becomes a disadvantage. A single store should also have flexibility to move quickly on new ideas. It's far tougher when six locations need change.

"A month ago, I was asked to address a marketing class at a local college. The instructor asked me to share how our company has remained 'relevant' for over 60 years. This proved to be an interesting topic for me to think about. I believe this is the challenge to every business. If we went out of business tomorrow, would we be missed by our customers and our employees? Or, would we be easily replaced?

"We stay relevant by filling the needs of our customers better than others and by never being satisfied with the status quo. We benchmark, borrowing from others who do some things better, knowing others will do the same with us. We learn from others and share when we can.

"Just surviving is not a long term option. We have to attract good people and we are in a tough period for recruiting right now. Just surviving will not enable us to attract and keep the people we need to be successful. Just surviving will not generate excitement. Just surviving is not a description of a good place to be.

"The lack of women in leadership posi-

"If we consider our store with the most sales consultants (23) it would be possible to rate them by attitude and number from # 1 to #23."

CALL OF THE COUCH

tions in our industry has been a well-known fact for as long as I can remember. Personally, I think this is a symptom of a larger problem and that is lack of fresh leadership overall. It's an industry joke about people in top management being recycled through different companies. I was only mildly surprised a few years ago when a general manager was fired from a manufacturer who was a key vendor of ours. I'll be blunt. The guy is arrogant, doesn't listen to people, bulldozes over his own team and doesn't communicate. Finally, somebody fired him and we were glad to see him gone. Market came around a couple of months later and he now had an even bigger position for a larger company. As the expression goes, 'He landed on his feet'. So, when he came over to let me know he was now VP of Sales for this firm, he actually asked me, 'Are you surprised?' I admitted I was. He grinned and responded, 'Well, you know there are only 100 executives in the furniture world of North Carolina and we just keep getting recycled.' Here was an unusual moment for me. I had nothing to say.

"I think we all fall into traps. When we look for people, we tend to advertise in the same places, even use the same ads. With that approach, we're going to have similar results and that's not necessarily bad. Even at the manufacturer level, the people looking for people tend to find people like themselves. So, if the leaders are white males, it takes some desire to change to move from that at hiring time. I do believe younger people are much less prone to this behavior but again, who is making the decisions? There are no reasons why this industry wouldn't be

a good match for women in general for all the reasons we know. What can be done to appeal to capable people regardless of gender?"

And reaching out to the consumer? When Schneiderman's first expanded to Duluth, Max, of course, rebelled when his family made its ground-breaking decision to advertise, a legacy move! That first ad is an all-time classic, the lead, "3 out of 4 of us Schneidermans think a clearance sale is a good idea" and the visual is priceless. Consumer response was phenomenal. In actuality, it was an early step in the "moving on" process.

Each element of exposure has its own weight in the total mix. Take the revamped Schneiderman logo. "We knew the time had come to create a new logo, so Jason and I got together with Linnihan-Foy, an agency in Minneapolis. At the time, (I'm not sure if they use it today), Rotman's Furniture used the word 'fantastic' in their ads. We thought it was memorable and we began discussing what word we could use as a type of tag line to go with our long name.

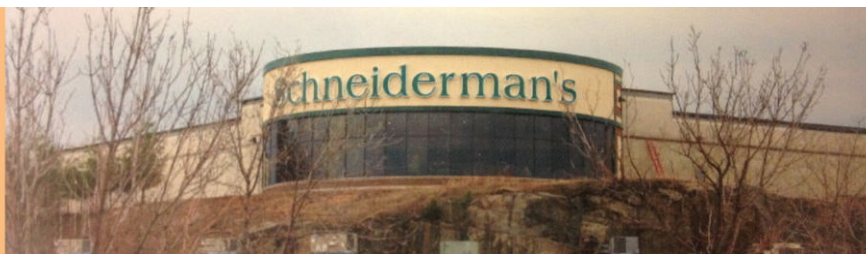
"We do a great deal of special ordering and so we started from there with the word, 'EXACTLY'. We also use it to describe how our customers can get 'exactly' what they're looking for. Larry gives credit to Art Director, Brian Fils, for the choice of fonts and design. Fils struck a corporate nerve by describing the "rich dark brown font" as "comfortable, like a couch", that it "balances the more corporate but clean Schneiderman's Furniture". That must have struck a bell.

Why "Call Of The Couch"?: Which brings us to a question you might have

asked yourself, why the title "Call of the Couch"? Back in the '40s when the business was new and things financial were more than tight, the family badly needed a couch for their home over the store. So, always resilient and practical, Max took a part-time job with Marshall-Wells. It was really the beginning. "Dad put a few pieces of furniture in the store and had people ordering from catalogues. It saved customers money because there was no high overhead. And, yes, the title does tie into the story of the family's need for a couch. However, while I don't want to sound too heavy about it, I do think of my work as a 'calling'. I kept this in mind as I wrote the book. Everybody has a path. This has been mine, and I'm thankful".

Advertising & Research: Carefully crafted television and Internet outreach each pull their own targeted demographics in Schneiderman stores, particularly those messages with a humorous base. "We

"My mother taught me one other technique helpful for both the customer and the company. When I sold a sofa, I would ask the customer what they were going to hang above it."



Schneiderman's in Duluth
55,000 square feet

discovered through our research that many people who hadn't shopped with us thought we were more expensive than we are. So we mounted the 'We're not rich' campaign. It was funny, people remembered. And came into the stores and bought."

The 21st century Internet opportunity occasioned more research. "We knew it was necessary to use the Internet and to master a good, interactive website. We found out that over 85 per cent of women shop our website before coming to the store, and Schneiderman's rates well with women 35 to 62, our most important demographic. Jason oversees our website and we have one in-store employee dedicated to it full-time.

"We're told that currently about 12 per cent of all furniture is sold over the Internet. I think that when people care about their furniture and how it looks and feels in their home, you can't improve on a good sales consultant in a good store with good furniture. However, if a person just wants to buy a sofa and not The Sofa, an Internet purchase is an alternative to consider."

Community Outreach: In 1988, Schneiderman's celebrated their 40th anniversary by donating 40 rooms of furniture to Habitat for Humanity, "a meaningful way to reciprocate the loyalty that many Minnesotans have shown us. We committed to supplying a living room, dining room, or bedroom set to the next 40 homes built. It was a great success and the first major donation of furniture they ever received.

"We also work with an outstanding organization called Bridging. When a customer buys a piece of furniture from us, we offer to pick up their used piece if it's in good condition. We then have that item delivered to Bridging, an amazing operation that cleans everything and then provides a shopping experience for families in transition at their locations in Bloomington and Roseville. We've recy-

cled over 12,000 pieces of furniture through this program.

"We've been involved with our communities through various charities, but our efforts with the Ronald McDonald House have been the most important. As of 2013, we've contributed over \$450,000 to the Ronald McDonald House largely through our annual golf tournament and auction.

"Our relationship with RMH evolved from my brother Russell's son, Joey, who at age five died of lymphoblastic leukemia. During his illness, Russ and his wife, Monica, spent a year at the Ronald McDonald House and became believers in their mission. In 2011 there was no golf tournament because Russ was ill and he and Monica had carried the weight of organizing the event since its inception in 1990. So it was with great pride in June, 2012, that Monica, their daughter Molly and I, led an amazing group of volunteers in our first Russ Schneiderman Memorial Golf Tournament. Russ had always wanted to have 144 golfers for the tournament and in 2012 we reached that goal for the first time. And in 2013 we did it again."

"We've sponsored charity-driven events in our stores for RMH, and Bridging and also Parkinson's Research at the University of Minnesota."

THE FUTURE

2012, a banner year, also marked and celebrated the 100th birthday of Edna Schneiderman, the honoured matriarch and scribe of the family.

Although Larry was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, he is as always planning ahead both for the business and

his personal objectives. "My kids call me the 'Over-Planner'. I have reservations for a 12 day trip in late May, 2015, following the Apostle Paul's route through Greece and Turkey. Sheila can't handle a trip like this due to her health, but all three of the kids as well as my daughter-in law will be going with me. It will be fantastic. Exactly!

"It's time for the second generation of Schneiderman's operating the family business to pass on the torch. I know I still have many good years ahead of me. But for Schneiderman's to continue to be successful, it needs strong leadership. I am fortunate to have a son with the passion and drive to continue the business.

"Like my father Max's bold statement about the three legs of his success, perhaps my philosophies and list of business truths will be refuted by future experiences, but I seriously doubt it. (I imagine my father would have said the same!) I guess we'll have to check back with my son, Jason, in 30 years to find out."

Will there be a sequel of "Call of the Couch"? I think we could safely bet on it!

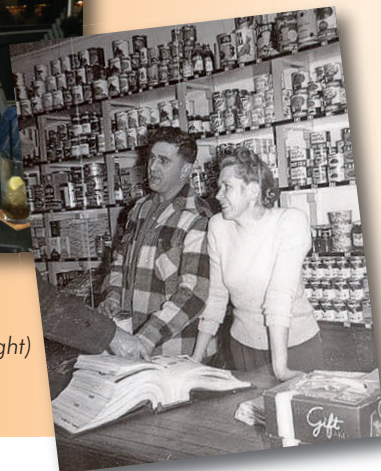
**Jodi is an industrial psychologist and counselor with two masters' degrees, working now as a college career counsellor in Colorado. Her partner, Chris, should soon earn his PhD. The couple this year adopted a two year old girl from China, "our first grandchild!"*

***Jenna, born in Korea, was adopted by Larry and Sheila. She and Larry travelled to Korea when Jenna was a teenager to meet her birth mother. (Consult "Couch" for details.) Jenna did work for Schneiderman's and "proved to be a top sales consultant". But a graduate of the College of Visual Arts, St. Paul, she is married to Collin, another artist, and they live and work in New York, both doing well. "But, of course, we'd love to have her back in the business!"*



Larry eating a huge pot pie.

Max and Edna Schneiderman (right) in the original store in 1948.





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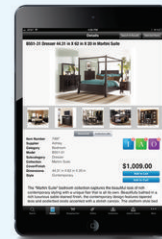
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American Leather	972-969-9599	bduncan@americanleather.com	37	Nouveau Concept	800-465-0716	info@nouveauconcept.com	57
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