

Sizing Up the Potential Coffee Buyer

Mind Reading, Based Upon a Close Study of Customer's Habits and Requirements, Is a Vital Aid to Salesmen That Pretend to Serve Their Trade with Satisfaction and a Minimum of Friction Through Friendship, Counsel and Guidance

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THE salesman that is able to accurately judge the amount of coffee that a prospect should buy will often land business where a salesman that disregards, or is not clever enough to estimate, the requirements of a buyer will fail to get business. A buyer with a store that is pretentious in size may be doing a small business and he may be very sensitive of the fact. His store may be large and contain a well assorted stock, his fixtures modern, his show windows well dressed and everything kept scrupulously clean, but for many reasons that are beside the question his sales volume is small. Therefore, the salesman that tries to sell him a bill of goods far in excess of his requirements may fail to get an order because the buyer—rather than admit that the quantity offered is too large—will pass up the proposition entirely. In other words, if a buyer either on account of his limited requirements or lack of capital, is only able to buy 25 pounds of bulk or a single case of canned coffee, it is a mistake to attempt to sell him 100 pounds of bulk or 5 cases of canned coffee even at a lower price that the added quantity would entitle him to.

SALESMAN MUST KNOW

On the other hand, if a salesman solicits an order much smaller in size than the buyer is accustomed to place, he will immediately conclude that the salesman is a piker and he will not react as he would had his requirements been properly gauged. In this case the buyer usually orders five full bags of bulk roasted coffee and ten cases of branded coffee, so you can judge how little he would be impressed should a salesman timidly ask him to buy 25 pounds of bulk or a single case of one dozen cans of coffee. That small quantity would be less than what he would sell over the counter in a single day. It is possible, also, that this latter store is much smaller than the first one mentioned, but the smaller store might have a large delivery system kept busy by means of personal house to house calls and telephone orders. Therefore, the salesman that is observant and sizes up his prospect correctly stands a much better chance of getting business than the one that is not.

A successful green coffee salesman told me how he sized up one of his customers that never needed anything but who invariably gave him an order. The account in question was a department store that had a first class grocery department in which were featured their freshly roasted coffee. It was

located in a thriving town where this salesman called about four times a year. From experience he knew exactly how much coffee they sold, having secured this information from the clerk who did the roasting and to whom the salesman had often spoken in checking his roasts and making suggestions tending to improve his product.

With this advance information in hand the salesman would call in the buyer and the following is what invariably took place:

ONE SALESMAN'S SUCCESSFUL METHOD

The salesman would be greeted very cordially but as he would start to open his grip the buyer would say that he had enough coffee until his next call and the conversation continued along these lines: "It's too bad Mr. Blank, that you do not need anything today because I selected a few small lots out of our stock that are particularly attractive as being the kind of coffees that you like" and as he spoke he would open his sample case and proceed to show him the assorted samples he had prepared for this account. "Here is an especially fine cupping Costa Rica—you will note that it is a strictly hard bean coffee. It is the last three bags remaining from a large lot that we used in our highest grade blend and I reserved it in case you could use it." Then he would show him a 5-bag lot of Guatemala of the same mark as he had sold him on the previous trip, explaining that, it being part of the same lot he was then using, it might be advisable to secure it as it would save him from having to cup a follow-up lot of Guatemala and also insure him uniformity in his blends insofar as the Guatemala portion was concerned. Next he would show him a 7- or 8-bag lot of Bourbon Santos that was strictly soft, and so on down the line until he had spread out an assortment of the various types that the buyer used totaling approximately 25 bags; the usual quantity that he purchased at one time. The buyer would invariably eye the samples hungrily as they were the kinds that he liked and he would consider them good values, having faith in the description given them by the salesman. Nine times out of ten he would say: "Well I don't need them now but you can send them along after the first of the month."

The reader may believe that this is a hypothetical situation prepared merely to illustrate my contention, but I can vouch for its authenticity and further assure you that this performance took place with scarcely any variation on each of this salesman's calls extending over a period of many years. Why was it possible to go through the same motions every time and get results? Because the salesman sized up his man correctly. Such descriptions as were given were absolutely true and the