

Professionalism & The Elusive Buck

By Barry Denton

Have you ever wondered how you are perceived by your client? If not, you should, because the client's perception of you has an immediate and profound impact on your pocket book. Just what type of image do you present? Does your client think of you as a prominent businessman, a hardworking good ol'boy, or an artistic weirdo? In my book the answer would be a little of all three with the emphasis being on the first. If you are just one of three then I would advise working on the other two with the latter being the least important.

What is a prominent businessman? It is someone who takes his business seriously and tries to present a good image of himself by practicing good work habits and positive public relations. For instance, how does your shop look from the outside when a person pulls up to talk to you about a potential project? Is it friendly with some interesting artifacts, a nice sign, flower beds etc? Can the client find the door easily? How about the shop when he walks in? Is it strewn with scrap iron and beer cans or can you navigate through it easily? Is the shop well lit, which provides a friendlier and safer atmosphere? Too many times I have entered blacksmith shops with the smith working in the back only to climb mounds of junk to reach him. It is not an efficient system. Now if you tend to not want your clients in the working area then it would be advisable to have a separate room where clients may come in to pick up their products away from the work area. Just have a bell of some sort to alert you when a client has arrived so as not to keep them waiting. No client likes being told to wait while you are tending to something else. That conveys the feeling that they are not as important as whatever else you are doing at the time. It does not set a good tone for charging a lot and collecting it. If you maintain a neat and orderly shop your client may appreciate a tour when he arrives.

What is a hardworking good ol'boy? How about someone that gets to work on time, puts out a good days work, and has a pleasant attitude to go with it. Geez, that sounds kind of normal doesn't it? In other words, are your projects completed in a timely manner and when you told the client it would be completed? Is the quality of your work first class? Do you go the extra mile for your client? For instance if your contract is for 36 drawer pulls do you make him 40? If you are making a special item do you find a way to personalize it? Working hard is a great attribute, but working smart only enhances it. I always want my client leaving the shop with more than

they expect. A good job in a timely manner should be something all clients should get.

What is an artistic weirdo? This is the guy that gets so lost in the artistic portion of what he is making that he forgets all the other important parts of the business. Of course it is vital to be artistic in this business, but you have to be careful not too carry it too far. Being an artist tempered with "common sense" can take you a long way. If you are so involved in your art that you do not bathe, groom, or know what's going on in the outside world you may be in trouble. As there are exceptions to every rule you may point to a character you know that is very talented and successful that has no regard for grooming, cleanliness, or other people. Well that may be, but just think how much more successful he would be with those attributes.

The bottom line is that you want your blacksmith shop to make a profit. Some people say money isn't important, but to me money means freedom and independence. What's better than getting up in the morning and having the freedom to do what you want? A few things you need to remember are: 1. Continue to educate yourself in the craft. Go to clinics, conventions, read books, and expose yourself to others that know more than you. 2. Try hard to apply what you have learned in your everyday work. 3. Don't get in a hurry. Learning and achievement take time. 4. Take pride in yourself and what you do. If you can accomplish these few things prosperity is soon to follow.

Business Gems

"The importance of meeting deadlines is quite often underestimated. . . . Meeting deadlines relates to one's credibility and will establish client goodwill . . . Credibility is part of the entire package that a client is purchasing when commissioning your work."

"I'd rather lose a job than lose money. But if I get a job, I would rather lose money than compromise the quality of the work."

"My first price is my last price. If a prospective client wants to spend less, then reduce the volume or scope of the work, not the quality of the work."

John Boyd Smith

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