

This Unique, Sophisticated Industry We're In

- Al E. Bavry, Advisor, Kimal Lumber



Eavesdrop on a noisy cocktail party...Half dozen guys are “bloviating.” One guy, named Bob, with an over-active pie hole, knowing there were a couple of doctors in the small group, announced, “You know this ‘Doc’ thing may not be the big deal it’s cracked up to be.” He went on to say, “No, think about it. It’s kinda like a car mechanic. The mechanic hanging over the hood of the car, working on parts and things...Taking out, putting in...and the Doc is kind of a mechanic too. Lot of similarities...Right?” Well, one pretty savvy Doc piped up... “You know Bob, you’re somewhat right on that one. In fact, you seem like a quick learner. I could spend an intense half hour with you and ‘train’ you to remove an inflamed appendix. And if you followed that quick training...To the letter, pretty good chance the outcome would be successful!” While Bob was extending his ego-driven chest out a bit, the Doc added, “One catch, though, Bob...If things went wrong...Too horribly wrong....I’d have to train you for the NEXT FIVE YEARS on how to get out of that problem successfully!” So...truth is...becoming an “expert” in something may be a lot different than perception!

So, what about the experts in *our* field? We are a unique industry. Thinking back to my beginning in it about fifty-six years ago, across from Walker Lumber where I worked was a competitor, Orange State Lumber. Orange State was a sharp, full-service lumber company. I remember one of their many sharp associates...Reilly Proctor by name. Reilly was a lock guru. He could pick locks, key, master key, and grand master key for apartment or hospital complexes. Everyone--customers, competitors, all--if you had a lock issue, problem, whatever, you called Reilly. And that was his entire career. If he had suddenly dropped out of the picture, the next “Reilly” might have been ten or twenty years further down the road after years of dedication and intense self-training.

That’s just one example, and although “blue collar” in many ways, we’re still truly a team of “Experts.” In our case, I think of our Truss designers, who are probably just a few breaths away from being true engineers. Or take our window experts that have to know the many shades of glass, including “Turtle Extruder” glass. What about those yard and warehouse folks that have to know base from casing, sanded Yellow Pine plywood from CDX Shg? How do they get their expertise training? In some areas, it takes years of hands-on experience. One outside salesperson here started out his career working in the yard, then the door shop, and today is our *top* salesperson.

Wherever you look in our industry, some things really stand out...Most of the folks in it...Starting with myself, we all have “sawdust in our veins” and once we started, we never left it. And a uniqueness that stands out: While our beginning or roots were blue collar, few of us had the benefit or advantage of attaining higher education. High school, in most cases, was about it. So, we don’t adorn our office walls with “shingles” from some prominent college or colleges. We’re more apt to have on display several plaques from our community involvements, like sponsor of Little League, All Children’s Hospital, Ronald McDonald Houses...local Auto Club...etc. And we’re as proud of those plaques as if they’d come from Yale, or Harvard. I’ll end with this thought...We aren’t (and never have been) a bunch of folks just bringing in and shipping out sticks and plywood. We are in a very, very sophisticated, and complex industry, and the better we are, the more we can command a fair price for our “services.”

When was the last time you looked around at the incredible, often one-of-a-kind “Brain Trust” we have in our industry? In your own company, with these incredible people? I always talk about the strength we have in our *people*, but a better snapshot might be the very strength and uniqueness of those incredible folks, and that incredible team...Never to be taken for granted. Good selling as we come out of this Pandemic, and we begin to “get well again.”