

Chris's Corner: Always ask for advice, then take it or leave it.

I speak to people every day and after a few moments of conversation it's apparent to me that they've done some homework. Doing homework is fantastic; it makes you a semi-knowledgeable consumer and gives you some idea of what you believe you are interested in.

However, no matter how firmly you believe you are making a good decision, ask for the seller's opinion about the machine and its true capabilities. Tell them exactly what finished products you envision the machine producing or contributing to the production of.

In my position, not initially knowing the level of my customer's knowledge, I tend to start slow. I want to evaluate the customer's needs and the potential usage they see in buying a piece of equipment. After a few well positioned questions, I often find that what they think they want isn't actually what they need.

How many times has a dealer been content to merely offer up equipment that seemingly meets the customer's requirements based upon the customer's limited knowledge and gone ahead and made a fast buck selling too large, too small or just the wrong machine for the customer's needs just because that's what the customer said they wanted?

I am not happy with that arrangement, because in either the short or long run if you sold the wrong machine the customer is going to regret the purchase. It doesn't matter how the wrong machine ended up being sold; it just was. The customer spent money unwisely and the dealer could have prevented it if they were on top of their game and

moved beyond the role of order taker to that that of consultant or problem solver.

I ask probing questions, not because I am nosey but because I want to solve a real issue and provide a value based solution.

Someone calls me and says they want a price on a 20 quart mixer. The first thing out of my mouth will be, what are you planning on using it for? A 20 quart mixer is a fantastic piece of engineering wonder and a capable addition to many operations's production line, but if what they think they can use it for isn't in line with reality, trouble lies ahead.

I can't tell you how many service calls we have had on 20 quart mixers being used in small pizza shops. When a 20 quart mixer breaks doing pizza dough it never is a cheap repair. Guess who the bad guy is; me, the guy whose company is fixing the machine.

Almost never, ever was the owner of the machine warned of the dangers of using such a small, yet affordable to buy, machine for pizza dough. I am willing to bet that most of the time, no one bothered to ask what the machine was going to be used for when it was sold.

I imagine the deal went something like this. I want a Hobart HL200. How much will you sell it to me for? Ok I will take it. Thanks.

A few simple questions and a buyer beware could have made the purchaser understand the limitations of the machine. If they have no alternative and have to buy it for pizza dough, I can guarantee you they've read the owner's manual and studied the load capacity chart. They've calibrated their recipe to fit within the safe operating guidelines by the manufacturer of their machine. They've gone over the operation of the machine and the exact recipe guidelines to be

followed each and every time, with each and every operator of the machine. Plus as soon as they're socked away enough money they're getting a bigger machine pronto.

I am only happy if my customer is happy with a purchase many years after purchasing it. I believe if we work together in a spirit of openness and good intention we always can find a solution to a problem. In my case, it takes me being willing to do some work and not take the apparent fast buck.

I say apparent, because if you haven't done your best and sold the right machine at the right price, down the road someone will be unhappy and guess what? It always will be the sellers fault for not giving the customer his professional best. Sometimes that even means that a seller has to be willing to not make a sale at all. I do that all the time.

Even if you are 100% sure of what you want, take the time and get the seller's opinion. Take it or leave it, but get it!