

## What is a "Professional" Picture Framer?

By Jay Goltz

**I**n other professions, it's easy to tell when someone is a professional. It means they do it for a living, such as a professional baseball player, a professional fisherman, or a professional singer. They all have one thing in common -- they get paid! Even the worst baseball player in the major leagues is still called a professional.

In other fields though, "professional" falls into a grey area. Is the guy that works on your car in his garage at home still a professional? Is the unlicensed person that cuts your hair working out of his/her home still a professional? Is your neighbor who moonlights as a carpenter a professional carpenter? I think that in these cases, as in picture framing, the answer lies in the end result. When someone says, "He's a professional", it implies that they know what they're doing and they do a good job. When they don't, they're often called incompetent, a bozo, a hack, an idiot, and an assortment of other names.

Since picture framing is an unlicensed industry, and since just about anyone can start a business for \$100 and pretend to know what they're doing, we have more than our share of people who fall into that category. In my mind, to be a professional picture framer requires the following three things.

### **GOOD INTENTIONS**

There needs to be respect for both the customer and their art. As professionals, we should assume anything that people bring in to be framed is important to them. That means we have to take particular care in protecting their art, and

suggest appropriate materials in which to frame their piece.

We need to understand both the needs of the customer and the art. That requires finding out what the customers' intentions are, where they're hanging the art, what their preferences are and discussing with them the merits of conservation framing. I believe that a professional does what is appropriate for the customer and is not swayed by how much money they're making on the order. When you go to the doctor, you don't want them to suggest an appendectomy so that they can make a Mercedes payment. I believe you make money long-term by being professional, and not by figuring out creative ways to sell the customer things they don't need.

### **KNOWLEDGE**

There's an old saying that goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Someone who wants to take care of the customer and their art and who understands the responsibility of the right materials and techniques doesn't do any good if they don't know what the right ones are. Whether it's reading books, magazines, attending seminars or a framing school, one needs to be educated to find out these things. You can't necessarily learn things by trial and error since the results of the errors might not show up for ten or twenty years.

That brings me to the topic of trade shows. Trade shows are a wonderful opportunity to talk to vendors, go to seminars and talk to other framers on what's new and to get ideas on what's going on in the fram-



ing world. I'm always amused by people who say they can't afford to go to the trade shows. How can they afford not to?

#### **MANAGEMENT**

Good intentions and knowing what you're doing don't mean much if you're not the one doing it. The question is, do your employees know what they're doing, do they have good intentions and do they do what they're supposed to do? Management means your employees are well trained and you know what they're doing. Obviously, it would be difficult to oversee each and every frame job, so you

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have to count on good management.

While I don't think it's practical that picture framing become a licensed industry, I'd like to believe that as framers get more educated, the industry will get more professional.

It would be nice if a customer could go into a frame store and be assured that their limited edition print isn't going to be masking taped to corrugated cardboard. Unfortunately, someone's probably doing that as you're reading this article and it makes all of us look bad. Oh, well. □

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*Jay Goltz started Artists' Frame Service in 1978 fresh out of college. Artists' Frame Service now employs 120 persons at its main location, a 35,000 square-foot showroom and production facility in Chicago. Goltz has received numerous business honors including induction into the Arthur Andersen and University of Illinois Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame (1992). He regularly speaks at business conferences on topics ranging from entrepreneurship to customer service. Goltz is best-known for his straight-talk on how to succeed in business.*