



I Heard It Through The Grapevine...

Sales reps. They come in. They call. They interrupt you when you're in the middle of something. They help you out when you're stuck in the middle of something: a fast delivery to solve a problem, maybe some information on how to locate a product or fix a machine. Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em.

Sales reps are as different as framers. Some are just looking for somewhere to hang out. They have no office to go to, and the bars don't open until 4 p.m. Others work as hard as anyone I know — making calls, solving problems, giving information. Many fall in between the two extremes. But the real issue is: do you spend too much time with reps, too little, or just the right amount?

Let's first address "too much." Mind you, this is only my personal opinion, and we have to remember my personal objectives—I go to work every day to make money. Making money is about making use of resources, and the most basic resource we all have is time. Sales reps can suck up time like a customer who has nowhere to go, nothing to do, and has a crush on one of your employees.

The reps who share my desire to make money have other appointments to go to. But then there's the few who want to spend the entire afternoon and have no particular purpose. No new mouldings, no analysis of your purchases. No new techniques to share. Just endless stories of the good old days, gossip for today, and predictions for the future. A very costly afternoon.

On the other hand, there are professional sales representatives. They call to make appointments. They show up on time. And they leave. In between, they can give insights to new trends, help with your product selection, and solve problems. They can

turn you on to customer leads, and help fix the machine they sold you—maybe. They can educate you about different kinds of wood, finishes, and technical specifications of what you're buying. They can provide moral support. They can be your best friend. Wait a second—I said friend, not roommate! My friends call me for five or ten minutes, and then go back to work.

There's a balance here. I would suggest some analysis. (Not the shrink kind, the "what-did-I-do-today" kind.) Next time you spend some of your valuable time with a sales representative, think about what was gained. How much time did you invest? What did you learn? What did you buy?

Sales reps can be wonderful windows to the outside world. They are also people trying to make a living, just like you are. I've heard numerous stories about customers who blow off appointments, are rude, and—my favorite—make a rep drive over to pick up a very late check. That's not nice, and it's also not smart.

Sales reps talk. A lot. To each other. It doesn't take long before you're labeled a "jerk" or worse, and there's no upside.

If you don't like someone's line or you just don't like them, tell them what they sell "isn't for you." That's all. Don't waste their time and don't let them waste yours. If you don't believe that sales representatives can do you any good, you can still be cordial. Remember what you think of customers that treat you badly.

If I've ever treated a sales rep badly, I'm sorry. Please accept my apology—no need to call me.

P.S.—Dan Wenke, the president of Alumiframe, suggested I speak for all the sales reps out there. I hope I didn't speak too much. You are salesman of the year. I love you, Man. ■