

THE GUERRILLA FRAMER

The Guerrilla Workout:

Increase Production Efficiency And Extend The Holiday Selling Season

(Consult your physician before you begin)

by Paul Cascio



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The holiday season is fast approaching, and I'm excited already. I just love the holiday spirit. I thrill to the jingle of bells—cash register bells, that is. Oh yes, I do love the holidays. But most of all I love making money—lots of it.

As we enter our busiest time of the year, sales at many frame shops double, or even triple, their usual monthly average. Concern now swings from "how do we increase sales?" to "how do we get the work out?"

The holiday season also provides the opportunity to increase your vocabulary. You'll learn many new words during the next two months: words such as back-order, overtime, insomnia and terminal exhaustion.

During this time of year, everyone at my shop works extra hard to efficiently complete orders and keep the customers happy. Occasionally, even I will roll up my sleeves and do a little framing. Unfortunately—and I readily admit this—I am not a terrific framer. I lack both the patience and concentration that good framers possess. My staff even refers to me good-naturedly as "the gorilla framer."

Actually, I do a pretty fair job when framing one or two items. But after that, my weaknesses are exposed. I develop what I refer to as the Midas Touch: everything I touch turns into a muffler.

It's not that I don't know how to frame. When I started my business,

I was *the* framer. Nowadays, I generally stay out of the shop as much as possible. I still play an active role in training new employees, however. I believe in hiring quality people, training them adequately, and then leaving them alone to do their job.

Recognizing my limitations as a framer, I choose instead to focus on developing and implementing efficient production methods that save time, reduce labor costs, increase profits and make my framers' job easier.

For example, the timer on our mounting press is set to approximately 2½ to 3 minutes. While one picture is in the press, the next is prepared for mounting. The timer on the press serves to pace the operator. This speeds production and reduces the amount of time each day that the press is in operation. Which, in turn, reduces my monthly contribution to the finances of the local public utility company.

Because we offer one-day framing, production speed and efficiency are the responsibility of the entire staff. Each of us constantly seeks ways to improve production methods. New ideas are solicited and rewarded with recognition.

There are a number of things you can do to maximize efficiency at your shop. Improving production output needs to be a team effort, however; you can't simply demand that your

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employees work harder.

Most production bottlenecks arise not because your employees are lazy, but because of inefficient procedures, lack of training, inadequate equipment or poor shop layout. Adding a v-nailer or switching from a cold press to hot one can substantially reduce production time, as can redesigning your backroom.

In addition, simply asking your employees to work harder is not sufficient. Instead, show them how to work smarter and make it easier for them to do their jobs.

It's What You Learn After You Know It All That Really Counts

When you hire a framer, take time to observe his or her techniques. Do this in a non-obtrusive way. Rec-

ognize that each framer will use different methods to complete various tasks. Respect this individuality and resist tampering as long as the methods work.

On the other hand, don't assume that an experienced framer knows everything. Ask questions and provide guidance. A truly professional framer welcomes new ideas, especially those that make the job easier. Most of what I know about framing came from observing others; the rest came from making mistakes.

Implementing Changes

Creating a more productive work environment is a team effort. Start by announcing a staff meeting to discuss ways to make framing easier. Announce the meeting a few days ahead of time and ask your staff to begin

thinking of ideas. Chances are they've already given considerable thought to this topic.

At the meeting, begin by asking how long it takes, on average, to complete a frame. Then ask how much that figure could be reduced with a more efficient environment. Determine what changes would be necessary to achieve this goal. Be sure to let your framers set this goal, and let them determine what changes will be needed to achieve it.

Decide if their goal is realistic, allowing time for overhead such as cleanup, ordering materials, etc. Insist that quality not be sacrificed for the sake of speed. Ask again if their goal is realistic or if it needs to be modified.

Once your staff has established a goal, identify the changes needed to achieve it. These changes may include acquisition of equipment, hiring another employee, etc.

It may also include rearranging the shop to create more work space and provide a more logical work flow. For example, the glass cutter and glass storage area should be located adjacent to the fitting table; incoming orders stored next to the press; mat storage located next to the mat cutter.

Next, analyze your material storage systems. Are mats stored in numerical order? Adding index tabs to your mat storage bins makes it easier to locate specific mats. It also makes reordering simple.

You can create indexed dividers for each mat number using cardboard. Cut up a mat specifier and tape the appropriate color swatch to each divider, then indicate the mat number using a bold magic marker.

Store partial mats together with whole mats. This makes it easier to select the smallest piece usable for each order. Attach an extended tape measure to the top or side of the storage bin so your framer can quickly determine if the board is of adequate size.

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Moulding should also be stored logically, either by the manufacturer's part number or grouped according to finish. Again, as with mats, store partial moulding lengths together with full sticks. As you did with mat storage bins, attach an extended tape measure to the floor or wall to facilitate measuring.

Using partial mats and moulding lengths saves money, thereby increasing profit. To encourage your staff to implement any money-saving system, you need to minimize the inconvenience the procedure might involve. You also need to monitor compliance. The amount of monitoring that's needed is generally proportionate to the inconvenience the system creates. Therefore, it's in your best interest to find and apply simple solutions whenever possible.

A Lasting Investment

Devoting a full day, or even several days, to rearranging your shop, organizing storage, and performing the *Big Clean* is a short-term investment that provides long-term results.

Now is also a good time to analyze your production needs and, if necessary, purchase additional equipment. Having the right tools increases capacity, speeds production and extends the cutoff date for holiday orders.

More Tips To Maximize Holiday Profits

Be sure you have multiple sources available for purchasing materials. If your suppliers offer delivery service, you may want to order mats from a supplier who delivers on Tuesday and other materials from a supplier who delivers later in the week.

Also ask each of your suppliers to provide a weekly list of out-of-stock items. When a moulding is out of stock, temporarily remove the corner sample from your display.

Many framers stop accepting Christmas orders in early December.

*Most
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By offering your customers a discount (perhaps 10%) on orders that can wait to be completed until after Christmas, you'll encourage customers to extend the due date of their orders. This technique lets you manage production time more efficiently so you can extend the cutoff date for holiday orders.

Creating a more efficient and enjoyable work place is one of the best holiday gifts you can provide for your staff and yourself. (Of course, don't forget the Christmas bonus too.) You'll not only improve efficiency, you'll also boost morale, improve quality, and increase profit. At no time of the year is it more important to operate efficiently than during the busy holiday buying season. Advance planning and preparation will help ensure your success. ☞