

by Hugh Phibbs



Customer Service in Preservation

When clients bring work in to be framed, they may already know something about preservation. Their understanding can be further enhanced if the framer raises preservation issues as the framing package is designed. The client cannot be expected to know which items will be adversely affected by light, or which will be stressed by hanging vertically in a frame.

Most clients may be familiar with the perils of acidic materials, but they may not know the difference between a preservationally sound support, such as Japanese tissue and starch hinges or paper edge supports; and unsound supports, such as pressure activated or linen tapes applied to the work. The provision of information to the client is a critical part of the sale of any framing job.

How should this information fit into the transaction? In considering this question, it is useful to look at it from the client's perspective; to ask how we would want to be treated if we were in the client's place. Firstly, a wise frame buyer looks for good work at a fair price. Anything which involves hand labor and is inexpensive is likely to be carried out by workers who are not highly skilled, since their wages cannot be high enough to attract master craftspeople.

We can imagine that the buyer would like to know what it is that they

are paying for and how the materials they bring in will be cared for. An obvious place to begin a conversation with such a buyer is preservation. Here, the framer can establish his commitment to the proper care of the client's materials.

If the framer is willing to address the possibility that certain items cannot be safely maintained for long periods in a frame, his concern for the preservation of the value of the client's material can be established. This should not be seen as losing a sale, but rather as gaining a customer. The place on the wall which that item would have filled will still need something. The framer may be able to point to alternative items, which will do well in a frame and that will meet the client's aesthetic needs.

Evaluating Items

Some items which come into the shop may not be rare and may have low monetary value. Museum and children's posters are an example of the sort of item which may not require preservation framing. If such a poster were to be preserved, it should be kept in conservation-quality materials in the dark. A client who wants one of these posters framed may be best served if their money is spent on good mounting and (if the frame is to go into a child's room) shatter-resistant glazing. Here, advising the client to use non-preservation methods can demonstrate the framer's concern for the client's finan-

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cial and aesthetic satisfaction.

Unique or valuable items which can be safely framed may be considered first in terms of their preservation needs. This part of the frame package should not be optional. Conservation-quality boards, glazing, and support techniques are more costly, but money spent here will ensure that the framing will not harm the object.

If the client wants to economize, that can be done with the choice of a less expensive frame. The frame can always be upgraded and more decorative over mats added, but the work should not be rehinged or removed from its support any more than necessary. Indeed, since items in frames should be returned to the framer periodically so that their condition can be checked, changes in frame or additions to the matting can be contemplated at that time.

Here too, the focus is on building a lasting relationship with the client. This is exactly what a shop needs to prosper, since no other form of advertising can compete with recommendations from satisfied customers.

Building Relationships

Most successful businesses in our economy excel because they build a loyal customer base by giving people what they want and need. In enterprises where products can be produced and sold in massive amounts, price may be paramount. This is most true when the product need not perform at a high level. If thousands of inexpensive reproductions were being framed for a hotel chain, mechanized or assembly line techniques may be the most appropriate means to cre-

ate a good product at the most competitive price.

A shop which sells unique and valuable items, which arrive in small quantities, cannot have its output driven simply by price and should not worry if sales to aggressive bargain hunters are lost. As such, a shop can build friendly, enduring relationships with its customers by focusing on preserving their work. In some cases, this may entail preparing the work for storage outside the frame or the choice of a less costly frame so that the proper preservation procedures can be included within the client's budget.

The loss of potential profit which this kind of selling involves will be more than made up for in development of customer loyalty. A customer who knows that the framer has his best interests at heart will be receptive to the recommendation of more expensive frames and matting treatments when the work warrants them. In a sales relationship like this, when a framer "sells" preservation, both client and framer benefit. ■