

Set-up for Sales

By George Porter

A few months ago I had the privilege to do a seminar for the North Carolina Assoc. Steve Zimiara called and said that they needed a continuing education class for installers and he was interested in a class for sales people as well. It is the law in N. C. that as a sales person, you have to have so many hours of continuing education to maintain your state license. This class was near the deadline and I think most of them were there because this was the only way left to get the ticket punched, so to speak.

The #1 question that day, even before we got started, was “ how can knowing about installation help me make more sales?” The answer to the question is another question, “what is the #1 best way to get more customers?” That answer was easy; it’s called referrals from former clients. Every salesman or saleswoman worth their salt is 100% aware of this. It does not matter who messed up the buying experience, it is the salesman who will not get a positive referral.

Basically you have to look at sales as a process that starts in the factory; has a milepost when the keys and title are transferred to the new homeowner; and never really ends. This may seem like a long time but exactly when did you want the referrals to stop?

A salespersons job is much more satisfying and lucrative when his clients never become disappointed with the product they bought from him. Installation is how this becomes possible and a salesperson really can help an installer make this happen by asking a few simple questions.

For instance:

1. Is the lot suitable for the home?
2. Will the installer be able to make the home comply with the laws of the state under these lot conditions?
3. Will there be any especially heavy furniture or equipment in the home that may need some extra support?
4. Can you advise the consumer about decks and porches or garages?
5. How can you give a client a price on a home if you don't have some fairly general idea of what it costs to install it?
6. Do you know what it is going to take to even get the home to the lot?
7. Are you familiar with the three HUD Code maps?
8. What is FEMA?
9. Do you or the consumer have any idea of the load bearing capacity of the soil?
10. Etc. etc. etc.

Selling Manufactured Housing is more like selling heavy equipment than selling ordinary automobiles, you have to make it fit the client's needs and in order to do that you must know a bunch about the product. Otherwise you just sell them something and maybe it will work for what they need and maybe it won't. You have to know the questions to ask

and what it takes to make it turn out right. If the customer is pleased with your recommendations then you prosper, if not, well... you don't.

Most of the folks in the class seemed to understand that this really was in their own best interest and also that of their customers. Many of them have a new way of interviewing their buyers. Here is how some of them talk to their customers now:

"So.. This is the home that you want; let me ask you a few questions that will make it so you will like it even more.

Do you have any hobbies?

Really, Tropical fish!

Do you have a big tank for them?

Wow, a 200 Gallon aquarium!

Where would you put that in your new home?

Right there between those two windows, Humm, let me make a suggestion. Would you like it sort of in the center of the home against the bedroom wall there? Let me tell you why, first the sunlight next to the window will make the algae grow like crazy and the two steel beams under it there will help hold it because it is going to weigh about 1000 plus pounds when it is full. But, if you want it over there by the window then we will have to install some extra piers under it so it is nice and solid. And oh, by the way, you will have a full cover on it so the evaporation won't affect the home won't you?

OR

So.. You play the piano; do you have one you are going to put in this home?

Really! A baby grand (about 1200 lbs), Wow, they are pretty big! And only three legs with tiny little wheels. Let me help you position it in the big room there so each leg is on a floor joist and we'll put a four inch square piece of wood, stained to match either the piano or the carpet, about 1 inch thick under each wheel so it won't damage the floor. I know most people don't do this, but your floors have a little flex to them and when you have a big weight on the same spot for years it can hurt any floor in any home. If you ever decide to move it somewhere else you will not have dents in the floor where it was.

OR

So.. You have an upright player piano, (about 800 lbs) how neat! Where would you want to put that in here? Ahh, I see, right between the windows.... (See the aquarium scenario above)

OR

So... You have a large antique oak chest with overhead cabinet (1000+ lbs) and you are going to fill it with your grannies dishes (100's of lbs). Aren't you lucky! And where would you put it?

Got the idea now?

Think this generates referrals?

Each of the questions relates to the structure and/or setup of the home. In some cases what people think they know about houses doesn't work on a manufactured home. The sidewalls are the weakest part of the floor and the center is the beefiest. This is exactly opposite from a "conventional" home. Our foundation is mostly under the home on the beams not at the edges. When you put something heavy out there on the sidewall or a marriage wall (which is really two sidewalls put together) if it is over 400 lbs, then the floor out there might need help.

This is just one example of what we covered that day and I think everyone got something out of it. Remember, without sales there is no setup, and without proper setup there are far less sales.