

# IDEAS



>>> **Inside IDEAS**

> **Streetwise** Page 40

> **Lessons Learned** Page 42

> **The Customer Whisperer** Page 44

> **My Turn** Page 48

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## CELEBRATE THE PLAYER, PART II

An unfamiliar patron cruises into your store slinging an Internet-auction renegade or a nearly unidentifiable guitar-shaped object from the local toy shop. He gets the third degree — called a traitor — from an employee. Or worse, the snipe comes from one of the owners.

In July, I discussed this fatal intolerance and the importance of “celebrating the player.” Now, let’s look at constructive ways to implement this mantra.

**Leave the (music store) attitude in the breakroom.** It’s easy to get carried away with our own prejudices on what constitutes acceptable equipment. We offer good, better and best options, but with imprudent good intentions, we often squeeze the customer further up the food chain, past his or her comfort level, not because we make more money but because we tend to impart our values. Worst case, we become condescending in our proselytizing, and we risk losing business to alternative out-



lets, simply because we serve a buying culture that does not want to be “sold.” Today’s clients want to buy. They want our advice, but they don’t want *us* to decide for them.

**Be open and tolerant to a diverse continuum of customer goals and needs.** Not every golfer wants to work as hard as Tiger Woods. Some like to strut the fairways for the air, exercise and socializing. In the same way, some musicians want to pick on the porch or play “Happy Birthday” on piano at a party — that’s it!

They don’t want to master all the Hanon exercises. We need to celebrate all hacks, hobbyists and hone-ers. They don’t have to be good to spend money, so why not simply rejoice in their interest in music?

**Welcome a stranger to a foreign land.** Folks are intimidated by the wide range of products in our stores. A “first contact” experience by the alien newbie or nonmusician can be sensory overload. We, on the other side of the cash register, live in our stores 40-plus hours a week. Walk that fine line between pouncing on them and making them feel welcome. Don’t just tolerate their ignorance, embrace it as an opportunity to meet a brand-new, lifelong friend.

**Offer community-wide extensions.** If our focus is on the broader goal of validating and spreading music activity, we need to wire our stores as conduits for this purpose and not be seduced by the immediate sale close. Counter this terminal myopia (pun intended) by offering musician bulletin boards, in-

store and online; sponsoring concerts; presenting workshops; and making your sales floor an inviting place for musicians to hang.

**Focus on the next sale by creating an atmosphere of discovery.** People access information differently than they did in the pre-Internet era. Slammed with multichannel marketing and advertising, smacked routinely by spam not only in e-mails but in billboards and mainstream media, their inner guard is always up. They Google to get their information and are prone to explore, mining facts and features in this information frontier. They expect to see educational details on your point-of-sale signs and are loathe to ask your staff questions. This is a major cultural paradigm shift. You will guide your customers’ journey far more effectively with information they can uncover for themselves. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 29-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.