

## An Inconvenient Truth Worth Reflecting Upon in New Year

January inspires reflection upon the previous year, as well as promises for the year ahead.

Al Gore's 2006 documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," is a memorable film that can carry over into our actions this year.

In the movie, the former vice president calls for personal action to reverse the negative trends that left unchecked could spell disaster for our planet. Corporate responsibility factors little into his plea. Yet the moral challenge he de-

livers applies as much to companies as to individuals.

As cyclists, many of us already expend less carbon dioxide by commuting by bike instead of car. As purveyors of alternative transportation, all of us contribute to an environmental movement that suggests driving less. But as business owners, managers and employees we can do more to ensure that our businesses are environmentally responsible.

This issue highlights companies such

as Clif Bar, Outdoor Gear Canada and Quality Bicycle Products that are taking proactive steps to reduce their footprints on the planet. While their strides are massive, all companies and retailers can take baby steps in the right direction.

Not every business is in a position to design a carbon-neutral building, but replacing standard light bulbs with energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs can reduce carbon dioxide.

Not every product lends itself to

incorporating eco-friendly fibers or materials, but reducing the amount of product packaging and hangtags and using recycled paper can cut down on waste and save trees.

Goals can even be as simple as increasing the number of recycling bins around your building or substituting print marketing materials with digital versions when possible.

As New Year's resolutions go, pledging to be more environmentally conscious is important—and attainable.

## Guest Editorial

### Try the Three S Technique for More Sales, Happier Customers

BY RAY KEENER

The variety of bicycle choices our stores offer creates both an opportunity and a problem for specialty retailers.

The opportunity: Consumers come into our stores wanting an expert counselor to guide them through the myriad options of bicycle types, price points and accessories.

The problem: We get caught up in pushing our own expertise and agenda. We forget that the customer's desires, even if we don't always agree with them, are paramount.

This situation became crystal clear as I recently helped female friends shop for bicycles and golf clubs. Salespeople, who were more interested in being experts than making the sale, caused us to vote with our feet and go find another store.

The buyers were convinced that they wanted women's-specific products. The salespeople, despite the fact that they had the women's product, were determined to push a men's product that was

"just as good" or a "better deal." Sales were lost to competitors.

Despite what our egos may tell us, we are salespeople first, expert counselors second. When it comes to issues of sizing or safety, the customer and the store's reputation must be protected. But in nearly all cases, the customer's brand, style or color preference should come first.

So how does a salesperson wear both these hats? Here's a technique that allows you to respect the customer's choices while also offering options you think might be better.

I call it the "Three S technique: Support, Suggest, Support. Support the customer's preconceptions about what they want; Suggest an alternative you think might be better; then Support the decision they make on the way to closing the sale.

Let's say a new cyclist is asking for a mountain bike. In your qualifying process, you've determined that a hybrid would suit his needs better than an off-

roader. Here's the Three S technique in action:

**Customer:** So what kind of bike do you think would be best for me?

**Salesperson:** Well, it sounds like you like the idea of a mountain bike. That could be a great choice for you, and we'll look at some recreational mountain bikes. (Support)

**Customer:** Great!

**Salesperson:** I have another type of bike I'd like to show you. Would you be open to considering another option? (Suggest)

**Customer:** Sure, you're the expert.

**Salesperson:** This is a hybrid bike. It has a lot more versatility than a mountain bike, and it's lighter and faster on the pavement, so this might be better for you.

**Customer:** You know, I think I really do want a mountain bike.

**Salesperson:** Great. We have a wide selection of models and colors. Let's figure out which mountain bike will work out best for you. (Support)

Your attitude is the key to making this process work. If you get defensive or lose enthusiasm when they don't follow your suggestion, they may vote with their feet.

Here's your mantra to keep this from happening: It's their bike. Whether they listen to what you suggest is less important than how much and how often they ride.

The goal is to turn them into loyal customers for your store so you can help them enjoy cycling. Don't let the details or your "expert" ego get in the way.

*Ray Keener is the president of Growth Cycle.*

### SHOP TALK



Subscription rates and inquiries: *Bicycle Retailer & Industry News* (ISSN 1069-8493, USPS 010-073) is published 18 times per year (Monthly in January, February and September through December, and semi-monthly March through August) by NBDA Services, Inc., 777 W. 19th St. Suite O, Costa Mesa, CA 92627. Subscriptions are free to qualified bicycle retailers, distributors, wholesalers, importers, manufacturers and others allied to the field in the U.S. Subscriptions for non-qualified readers in the U.S. is \$65 per year. A one-year foreign subscription, payable in U.S. dollars, is \$78 in Canada and Mexico. For all other countries (Airmail only) it is U.S. \$173. Two-year subscriptions receive a 20 percent discount: U.S., \$104; Canada/Mexico, \$125; overseas, \$277. Periodical postage paid at Laguna Hills, CA 92653 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to *Bicycle Retailer & Industry News*, P.O. Box 1294, Skokie, IL 60076-8294. Editorial and advertising offices: 25431 Cabot Road, Suite 204 (949)206-1677. For address changes, single copy sales, subscription information, and other customer service inquiries, write to *Bicycle Retailer & Industry News*, P.O. Box 1294, Skokie, IL 60076-8294 or call (847) 763-9050. Printed in the USA.