

# SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY  
CREAMER

SAW  
DOCTOR



One of my competitors who I happen to be good friends with asked me what I thought was an interesting question a few days ago. He said “given the current state of the economy, aren’t you sorry you taught all of those people how to hammer saws?” And then just two days later another one of my friends who happens to be a competitor asked me pretty much the same question.

Of course my answer to both of them was exactly the same. I am glad that I was willing to teach people this profession and I am especially proud of the ones I taught who have gone on to become really good at hammering saws. And I am proud of myself for having a hand in that education.

The reason I started hammering saws in the first place was because I couldn’t find anyone around who seemed to know what they were doing. I eventually met George Lorimer after I started hammering saws. He was a great sawsmith, but he didn’t want to teach. He wasn’t trying to keep it a secret. I think he just didn’t feel comfortable in the role of teacher. It certainly takes a lot of patience to hammer saws, but it also takes another amount of patience to teach people how to hammer saws.

The reason that I couldn’t find competent hammermen (with the exception of George) was because there had been a long-standing tradition of keeping this trade a big secret. When you refuse to let others learn, you create a situation where they try to teach themselves anyway, and they often miss the mark a bit without someone giving them the basic foundation. And worse yet, because it was such a big secret, they were able to go out and hammer saws for the mills because nobody at the mills knew who really knew and who really didn’t know how to properly hammer a saw. The secrecy was supposed to create job security, but instead it created a bunch of people out there hammering saws without the knowledge they really needed to be able to do a good job of it.

If I had found lots of competent hammermen, I certainly wouldn’t have ever bothered to learn how to do it myself. So you see, that secrecy that was supposed to create job security had just the opposite affect. If you want job security, do your job well, and make sure that those who you do your

job for, know enough about what you are doing to be able to appreciate how well you do it.

Some base their decision about teaching on the student’s geographical location. In other words, if they are far enough away that they won’t be competing with me, I will be willing to teach them. I don’t subscribe to that method either. If someone wants to learn, and they want to start a saw shop across the street from me, I am still willing to train them. Why not? The last thing I want is a saw shop across the street from me that goes around ruining saws and making every mill manager think that anyone with a saw hammer in their hand is liable to do more harm than good to their saws. This just makes life harder for me. First, I have to try to fix the saw that they ruined. The hardest saw to repair is one that was hammered incorrectly. I can usually figure out what happened to a saw at the mill and then all I have to do is counteract that to put the saw back into shape. But trying to figure what someone who didn’t know what they were doing did, to a saw can really be a tough task. I have seen these saws and sometimes there is just no rhyme nor reason to what has been done to them, and until you can figure out exactly how they got into that condition, it is extremely hard to figure out how to correct it.

If someone wants to start a saw shop across the street from me, I want to train them and train them properly so that they are perfectly capable of putting up a saw properly. Then I can compete with them on a normal basis. It then comes down to who treats their customers a little better than the next guy. And in fact, I would never have to worry about losing business to them simply because they are closer to a particular mill than me. If I lose a customer it would be because they did a better job in meeting their customer’s needs. And once I see that, I can easily figure out how to do better next time. I think all saw shops lose some business to competitors who may not even be as good as they are, but they happen to be more convenient for the mill based on their geographic location.

There is one more very important reason that I am willing to teach others how to hammer saws. There were a few people who were willing to teach me, many years ago. Of

course you can't learn it all in a few weeks of training, but what you can get is a good enough foundation that you can begin to teach yourself by doing.

How disgusting would it be for me to find some people willing to teach me, and then I turn around and decide to keep that knowledge a secret? Somehow that just seems morally wrong to me. It is sort of like the city folks who move out into the country and then as soon as they get there, they want to pull up the ladder and close the hatch. They can be the loudest voices at trying to preserve the "rural; character" of their area but preventing those darn city people from moving in. Maybe hypocrisy is the word.

**Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.**

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