

# SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY  
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You are not going to believe what I heard today from one of my customers.

As a courtesy, I often break with the saw doctor tradition of secrecy and mystery, and allow customer-waiting appointments. That means that a customer can bring a saw, or saws, and wait around watching what I do to them. Then they can take the finished saws back to the mill. It not only saves them a trip, but I often find that the direct communication between the customer and me, while I am working on the saws, can be very helpful to both of us. Helpful to me in that I get the chance to match symptoms with exactly what I am seeing in the saws, and helpful to customers in that they get to see what is being done to the saws and they also get to ask any and all questions they may have.

I often suggest that new customers take advantage of this opportunity, at least for their first visit. And I make sure to suggest that the best person to send would be the sawyer. The sawyer will most likely leave knowing a little more about the saws he is using, and I will know a little more about that specific mill and how the saws and related equipment are being maintained and used.

Today I had an appointment with an old mill customer that I haven't dealt with in quite a while. Fortunately the mill sent its relatively new head sawyer. I think he had been in that position for just a couple of months. He was looking forward to gaining some knowledge and as many of my customers will testify to, I am opinionated enough that I am always ready and willing to share my many opinions on sawmilling, and more. As I like to point out, ask any two saw doctors a question and you will get at least three opinions.

Let me make it clear that what I am about to tell you is not meant to make fun of this new sawyer. Nobody is born knowing what they need to know about sawing. It takes time and experience and a little help from people who know what they are doing and are willing to share. Unfortunately some of what happens is that a new sawyer will get help from someone who really doesn't know how things really work, no matter how well intentioned they may be.

In this case, I noticed that the board-side guidelines on all three of his saws were really shiny and had a lot of wear for saws that I knew were not all that old. So of course I mentioned that guides are really mis-named, because they are not intended to actually guide the saw, but rather their job is to catch it when there is a problem. They should be set close to each side of the saw, I explained, but not touching it.

Somewhere in this conversation he explained to me that every morning when he starts up the headsaw, there is this old guy who had been working for the mill for years, who helps him get the guides lined up properly.

As many of you know, the old hand-set mills had guides that you would adjust while unsafely looking down the barrel of the running saw. With the advent of the sawyer's booth, many mills have remote guide adjusters so that the sawyer can adjust the guides from the safety of the booth. That's a great idea, but often the sawyer doesn't have a great view of the guides from there. So in this case, this new sawyer was lucky enough to have this old timer willing to watch the guides directly at the saw, while he adjusted them from inside the booth.

What I found out during the process of this conversation was that the old guy was actually sighting along the saw and having the sawyer adjust the guides to move the rim of the saw until the saw was lined up with the splitter (some say spreader) bar. This blew my mind, since the proper way to align the saw relative to the spreader is by *adjusting the spreader*. In addition to making absolutely no sense, this procedure puts the rim of the saw into direct contact with the guide at all times, causing a good deal of friction and resulting heat. That's what brought the saws into my shop.

To reiterate, I absolutely could not believe what I was hearing. No wonder the guideline was worn so much. I even had to ask this sawyer if there was a chance he was pulling my leg or if someone I know had sent him there to play a joke on me. I was so flabbergasted that I couldn't even come up with a proper analogy for something so incredibly ridiculous.

I have only been at this game for 35 years and although I

have heard some really crazy stuff when it comes to people's ideas of how to make a sawmill work, I think that I have never heard anything as wild as moving the rim of the saw with the guides until the saw lines up with the spreader bar.

That would be like eating a much bigger breakfast than usual to get your belt to fit, instead of actually tightening the belt. I can't tell you what I first said he should do with the old guy, but I eventually said he should only listen to him after he has asked him why he says to do something a certain way and then check to see if the explanation has any logic to it that adds up properly.

Well-intentioned advice is welcome, but

you should always ask why—especially if it pertains to how you make your living—so that you can determine if the advice makes sense relative to what you happen to be doing. Of course, I now have a real jaw-dropper to add to my list of myths and misinformation surrounding sawmills and sawmilling.

**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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