

SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY
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I hear that you are willing to hammer saws at your shop while a customer waits. But I also heard that you only make 8:00 a.m. appointments. Why is that?

The simple answer is that sawmills accomplish quality control by measuring boards and maintaining their equipment properly. I accomplish some of my quality control by keeping myself out of a situation where I might have to rush the saw hammering process.

I know that production sawmills don't have the luxury of being able to just take their time. But for me, and my kind of business, it's not about how many saws I do, but rather how well each saw comes out. In my business, if you do so many saws that you can't take the time to do them right, you will soon find yourself with lots of time to do very few saws. So I find it better to just keep myself in the position where I can take my time with a small number of saws so that they come out properly and a steady flow of longtime customers continues for years and years.

I can pick up time when needed by handling the saw a little faster or hammering or rolling at a brisker pace, but if I want good quality, I can NOT rush my decision-making process, rush my final checking process, or worse yet, compromise my running tolerances because it is getting late and I want to go home.

I schedule all of my customer waiting appointments at 8:00 a.m. so that I have all day to get the customer's saws done if I need it. I tell my customers that most likely I will have them out and back on the road before noon, but you never know just how long it will take to fix a saw properly. Sometimes the saws in the worst shape take less than an hour while a saw that just needs a little tweaking can take three or four hours. It is often easier to move the metal a large amount than to accurately move it just a little, without moving it too far so you have to bring it back again.

Not all of my customers take advantage of my willingness to hammer saws while the customer waits with them. It just doesn't work out well for some of my customers while there



Saws arrive at my shop in all conditions and by various means.

are also some who just aren't all that interested in saw hammering, at least not enough to want to watch while it is being done.

One of the things that happens when customers wait with their saws is that after seeing the saw(s), I often ask about the symptoms in an effort to make sure that the stated symptoms match the condition of the saw.

When the symptoms don't line up with what the saw looks like, I can fix the saw, but I also have to warn them that something else is wrong with the mill. If their symptoms are diametrically opposed to what the saw looks like, chances are that the better I fix the saw, the worse it will run until they straighten out whatever else is wrong in the mill.

On the other hand, when the symptoms match the condition of the saw, it is always great news because it means that fixing the saw will definitely solve their current problem. That is the simple way. When the symptoms don't match what is wrong with the saw, everything starts to get a lot more complicated. Now they have to go back and start looking for what else is wrong. And if they try to run the saw before they find out where the real problem is, chances are they will damage the saw enough that they will then have two

problems. If they fix the first problem the saw still won't run properly because now the saw needs to be re-hammered even though it was just hammered recently.

When a customer waits with the saw while it is being hammered, they generally come away with a better appreciation for the saw and the way it is being serviced. I also have to admit that often the back and forth conversations between me and the person who uses the saw can be extremely valuable. When I say valuable, I mean that in two different ways: valuable to the customer in that they might pick up some little clue about something they have been doing wrong for years. Like, I might say, "you do turn the saw back against the pins after mounting it on the arbor, right?" When they give me that funny sort of look, I know that I just gave them a very useful tip that could easily save them from shearing the pins and having to resurface the collars.

The other value is that the more I can contribute in information exchange to my customers having success with their saws, the more successful my business is in the long run. And I guess I have been at it long enough that I can see what the long run looks like.

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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