Three Traits of an Auctioneer

I wish I could say that I came up with this, but I didn’t. When two people that I know respectfully commented on the statement (below) it made me think. They had taken a Continuing Education class and both independently stated this really stuck with them. So I'm going to borrow the statement. I’m not sure of his premise, but here are my thoughts.

He stated, *"Auctioneers are cheap, proud, and paranoid."*

After letting this set in, I realized that it keeps popping back into my thoughts as different situations occurred during the next few weeks. The more I thought about it, I felt this was a very accurate statement in my mind. I also thought about how this has probably been very accurate for years but with the changing process of how goods are sold, what do we as auctioneers need to think about?

Let’s first talk about cheap. One of the first questions we all are asked as auctioneers is, “what do you charge for commission?” Our clients ask, “how cheap is the commission?” Or, “how much is this going to cost? Your competition said they would do it for X.”  I feel that now more than ever our customers need to be educated that this may be the wrong first question to ask. Let’s take a look back into the past. Maybe your trade area isn't affected in the same way that we are seeing. This conversation is what I’ve seen in my 35 years of involvement in the auction industry. In the past most of us had a trade area of 50, 75, 100 miles. All of us marketed in those areas using newspapers, mailings, posting fliers, and perhaps a sign. Everyone’s cost to do this was more or less the same. Our customers automatically saw our commission as profit. Fairly easy to compare.

Now let’s look at today. We as auctioneers in many cases are selling a lifetime of dreams or liquidation of a business or farm. This is a major event in someone’s life! Let’s compare this to other major events: You go to the doctor because you need his help. Do you go from doctor to doctor to see who will do it the cheapest? You need an attorney... do you shop for the cheapest? In many cases the sales tax fee that we collect and do the reporting and accounting is a greater percentage than we make after adjusting for expenses. I think you see where I’m going with this; it can make for some thoughtful reflection.

The service we provide is very important and I feel it’s our job to explain and educate others on what we do.  Sellers may not know the complexity of the modern day auction.

The tools we use to ensure a successful auction have changed and are more sophisticated just as many other industries have changed. Buyers have so many more avenues to buy goods. We aren’t the only game in town. Of course we all need to be competitive, but we need to help our clients to focus on what we do first over what we charge. The world around us is constantly changing.  It's necessary for all aspects of the auctioneering world to change as well.

Curtis Werner