"Fish Got to Swim and Birds Got to Fly."

— Billie Holiday

To which I would add, salespeople have got to sell.

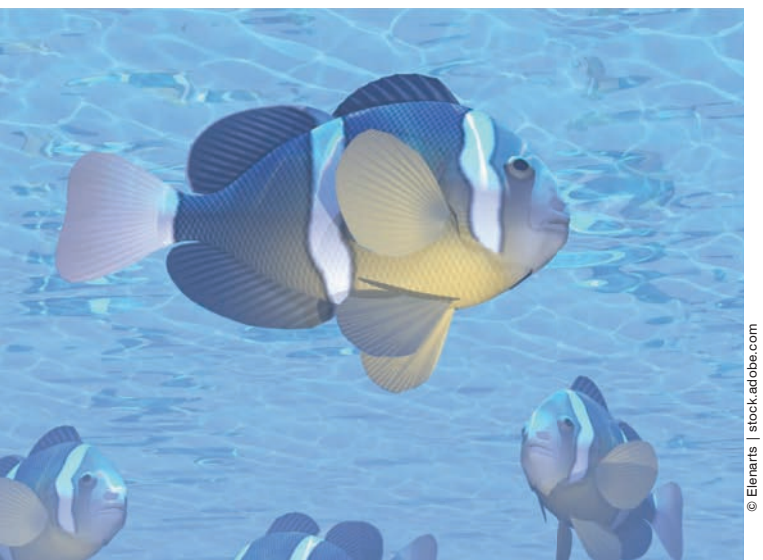
It's surprising how much people do the things they're paid to do during their work day long after their work day ends. Teachers use their skills to teach outside the curriculum they're paid to teach, engineers invent things in industries outside their employers' markets, and salespeople sell ideas and concepts that have been important to them personally or to their careers.

This is how I first learned about MANA 27 years ago, and why I've promoted MANA membership to other reps ever since.

Let's go back 27 years to how I first learned about MANA in one of my customers' parking lots. It was a beautiful summer day. I ran into a rep who had sold me sheet metal before I became a rep, when I was a buyer at a manufacturer of testing equipment. Learning that I'd become a rep, he felt compelled to introduce me to MANA right there in the parking lot.

Needless to say, he did a great selling job on me and I've been a faithful member of MANA ever since!

The benefits I have received have been many, but the highlight of those benefits has been signing two major lines from ads in MANA's classified ads, the commission from either of which would easily pay a lifetime of MANA membership dues.



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Ever since joining MANA, I found that selling MANA to my fellow representatives and to my principals was a great way to give back to an organization that helped me shape and grow my rep firm to 32 employees across a territory that spans from Maine to Virginia.

And I don't just sell MANA to my fellow reps. I also sell MANA to my customers. I ask about their route to market, and whether they use their own, very expensive sales force or perhaps have no sales force at all.

Joining MANA might open their eyes to a mutually profitable and beneficial relationship. With a rep sales force, who knows, that customer might double in size and buy twice as much from me as they do now. And of course, it would only help my status with that customer if I was the person who shared an idea that doubled their sales. A win for the rep industry, a win for the reps who got the line, and a win for me too!

And the customers to whom I recommend MANA can be in any industry from housewares to electronics. Because MANA reps sell pretty much any manufactured product, I can safely recommend MANA as a resource to any manufacturer, regardless of what they make. I like to say MANA covers housewares to electronics and anything in between.

I also like to point out that for $549 annual dues manufacturers get an "all you can eat" buffet of all the best practice information they'll need to succeed with reps, including an excellent, editable specimen rep

agreement, and access to MANA's *RepFinder* database of MANA rep members.

It's no great secret that the number of reps in the U.S. is decreasing. The reasons are too numerous to list in this article. However, as I like to remind my sales team, there are still a ***lot*** of accounts and customers reps can sell to.

Selling MANA to your customers and principals makes the rep industry stronger, and when the rep industry becomes stronger, there will be more manufacturers selling through reps and therefore more principals for you to represent.

Am I sharing my "secret weapon" when I promote MANA membership to competing reps? Perhaps just a little. But good representative competition is good for our industry, so I'm still promoting MANA membership to every rep I meet, because I don't consider other reps to be my competition. My competition, and yours, is direct sales forces. And the more we can band together to encourage rep sales forces instead of direct sales forces, the better off all of us will be.

John Beaver founded GSA Optimum, Oakdale, New York, in 1984. The metropolitan New York/New Jersey independent manufacturers' representative firm has 33 employees covering Maine to Virginia out of its four offices. The agency specializes in electrical mechanical, electronic, and electrical components. This growth can be partly attributed to his successful acquisition of six firms. In 2015 he began his tenure as a MANA Board member. He is also an active member of ERA and NEMRA. As a member of ERA he serves as a National Delegate and is the Chairperson of Metro NY/NJ ERA local chapter.

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