

For Father's Day—A Paint Defect

A return trip to the store sends the message that anything less than quality is utterly unacceptable.

What is more peaceful and enjoyable than an outdoor campfire? Spires of bright orange flames dancing from an aged log warming skin that's been cooled by the crisp evening air. Few experiences satisfy the soul like a good old fashioned campfire.

Thus, for a suburban city dweller like me, the advent of the outdoor fireplace seemed a godsend. No longer were my campfire experiences relegated to the occasional camping trip, but could now be had in the comfort and convenience of my own backyard.

So it was that for ten years my trusty old outdoor fireplace had provided evening upon evening of backyard enjoyment. After a decade of faithful service, though, my trusty old fireplace had become my rusty old fireplace. So much so, in fact, that when Father's Day 2009 arrived, my family treated me to a shopping trip to pick out a new fireplace.

The first store we visited had a nice selection of fireplaces, though none were just perfect. The same could be said of the second, third and fourth stores.

At the fifth store I found what I

believed to be the ideal outdoor fireplace but, just to be sure, I visited stores number six and seven to be certain that I couldn't find an even better one.

Of course by this time my children were rolling their eyes at one another and asking why they hadn't had to good sense to have bought me a necktie instead of a fireplace. Their patience was eventually rewarded when, more than four hours after the start of our shopping trip, we returned to store number five and purchased the near perfect fireplace.

Judging from the size and shape of the box that was loaded into my truck it was pretty clear that some assembly of the fireplace was to be required. Sure enough I found myself in the backyard with a crescent wrench and a screwdriver attaching legs and handles to the basin. Then came the assembly of the cover. Four wire mesh pieces that came together to form the top.

I couldn't wait to throw a few logs in the fireplace and break it in. Then it happened. As I attached the final component—ready to celebrate my triumph - there it was. Smack dab in the center of my brand new outdoor

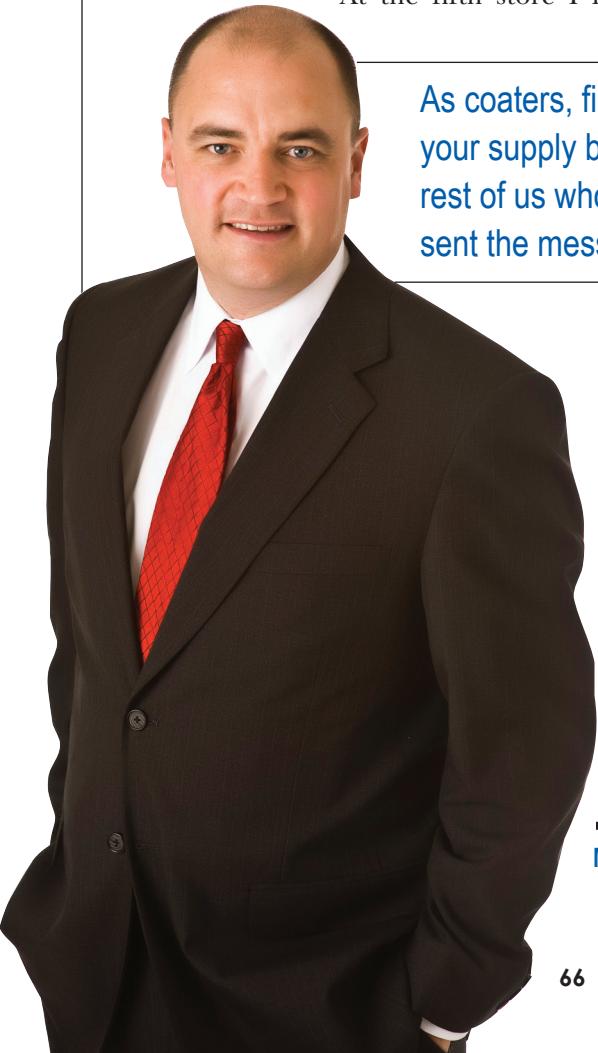
As coaters, finishers and suppliers, demand high quality and service from your supply base. Each time you do anything less, you lower the bar for the rest of us who will receive a lower level of quality and service because you sent the message to your provider that poor quality is acceptable.

fireplace - a major defect in the paint finish. And it wasn't on the bottom where no one could see it, but right in the center of the cover!

What to do? After hours of shopping and time spent assembling, did I really have the stomach to return the fireplace for one without a defect?

Years ago I read somewhere about the idea that, as consumers, we have not just the right to demand quality goods and services but we have the obligation to do so. The theory goes that for so long as an individual purchases a defective product and chooses to live with the defect rather than return it, the de-facto message to the store that sold the defective product, and to the manufacturer that produced it, is that poor quality is acceptable.

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Put another way, if there is no adverse financial consequence for manufacturing and selling a poor quality product, there is no incentive for a manufacturer to build quality into its products and processes. The result is even more poor quality. This credo made so much sense to me that I have lived by it ever since.

It was for exactly this reason that I found myself collecting the pieces of my fireplace with the paint defect, and returning the whole works to the store where the defective fireplace had been purchased.

Imagine the cost and inconvenience incurred by the store—that had to pay someone to disassemble the fireplace, and place it back in its box so it could be returned to the manufacturer.

Think of the freight cost involved in sending it back to the manufacturer, who in turn had to remove it from the box and replace the defective part so that it could be shipped yet another time to a store that could sell it. All of this could have been avoided had the company that created the paint defect had adequate process controls in place, had person who removed the part from the paint line rejected it, or had the person who placed it in the box rejected it.

As it turns out, my only consolation that I had to waste my time returning the fireplace was that the manufacturer that caused the defect was punished financially for its error.

As consumers, accept nothing but quality products and high levels of service from the products and services you procure. As coaters, finishers and suppliers, demand high quality and service from your supply base. Each time you do anything less you lower the bar for the rest of us who will receive a lower level of quality and service because you sent the message to your provider that poor quality is acceptable.

Oh, and one other thing, let the folks that work on your paint line know that there is a consumer that will eventually take delivery of every part they pass, and nobody wants to take delivery of a defective part. ■

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