

# Who's Steering the Ship?

By Mark Othmer, Nebraska Field Director



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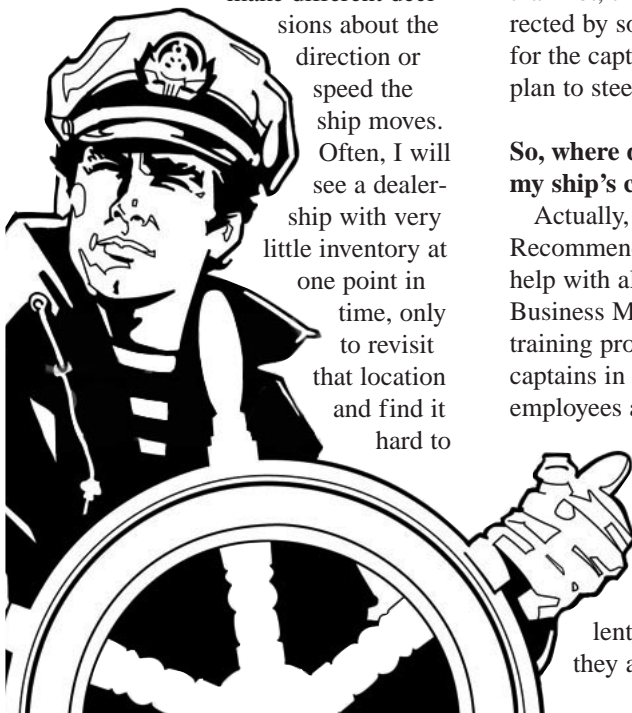
Is it summer already? It seems like yesterday I was trying to warm up from an early morning spring frost. Speaking of spring, we did seem to get a lot more rain than past years, so perhaps Mother Nature will smile on us this summer and keep the rain coming. It sure is causing the grass to grow in my yard!

## Who's steering the ship?

When talking with dealers, the comparison of their business to the operation of a ship often comes into play. Questions raised include, "Who's steering the ship?" or "Who is the ship's rudder?" More often than not, this responsibility lies with the owner or general manager of the business.

Another question often asked is, "Who is controlling the ship's motor?" Once again, you may surmise that the general manager or owner of the business would have his hand on the throttle – along with controlling the rudder – to determine speed and direction of the ship.

Unfortunately, the ship's captain described above is not always in total control of the rudder or throttle. Many outside forces can cause the captain to make different decisions about the direction or speed the ship moves. Often, I will see a dealership with very little inventory at one point in time, only to revisit that location and find it hard to



park my car due to all the new and used equipment inventory. This sometimes is due to the "market share" letter the dealer received from his mainline manufacturer, causing the ship's captain to go to full throttle with little attention or control of the rudder. While this may satisfy market share issues, it certainly can cause inventory turnover issues.

I encourage all members to look at each department of their business, not necessarily just the sales department, to determine who controls the rudder and who controls the throttle of the ship. Quite often, you will discover the person you entrusted control of the ship's steering mechanism to isn't in control after all. Somehow, some way, something or someone else is actually in control.

## So, the person I want to be in control isn't. What now?

As I stated earlier, there may be several reasons for the captain's lack of complete control of the ship. It's unwise to blame the captain, since some of the loss of control may be out of his realm of expertise or even caused by reasons beyond his area of authority. More often than not, the loss of control can be corrected by some timely and direct training for the captain, so he can put together a plan to steer the ship back on course.

## So, where do I find training for my ship's captain?

Actually, the Association has a great Recommended Service Provider that can help with all your training needs. Spader Business Management has developed training programs for all of the ship's captains in your business, from front line employees all the way up to top line managers. Typically, when the name "Spader" comes up, most of us think of 20 dealer groups. While Spader Business Management does an excellent job with 20 dealer groups, they also have a full line of train-

ing programs designed specifically for the equipment business. If you feel your management team is in need of additional training, Spader Business Management is a great place to turn.

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## From 35 Years Ago...

In the July 1972 newsletter I found this reminder: Don't curse the competition, they help keep you in business. Your competition is a guy who dreams up a way to give your customers better service. That keeps you in business. A competitor is never too friendly to point out your weakness. In fact, he feels obliged to tell your customers about them. Overcoming these weaknesses is what keeps you in business. A competitor is hard to live with but he would be harder to live without. Competitors also help promote general interest in your product. It's up to you to turn this interest into sales of your specific product. And it gives the customer a choice between the best of alternatives, you and your competitor. And that's what keeps you in business. ■