



ITEMS

NEWSLETTER

February 2003

Foundry Tours Prove Big Hit With Customers, Community



AB&I has long welcomed visitors to the Oakland foundry for a first-hand look at the processes and procedures that go into making quality cast iron products, and to meet the people who actually produce those products. These foundry tours were started decades ago, mainly as a means of building customer confidence, but today's tours go much further in reaching out to the community in general, reinforcing the "good neighbor" policies that have characterized AB&I in recent years.

"What started out as an occasional tour has grown into a constant stream of visitors," said Kip Wixson, AB&I vice president.

Today's tour group is just as likely to be comprised of students from a local technical college as a customer, and the importance of the tour is as much in developing good relations with the community as in building new business.

"We're located in a busy urban area," continues Wixson, "and maintaining an open door policy with our neighbors is important to us. Also, we have developed some pretty interesting foundry technology over the years, and many people in the cast iron business like to see what we're doing. We try to be as helpful to the industry as we can, without giving away too many trade secrets."

AB&I encourages any company or group wishing to visit the Oakland facility to call and arrange a tour. Visitors will be shown all the major departments in the foundry and introduced to the people who make things run.

"We try to make these tours as informative as possible," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham. "We start with the front office," he continues, "then to the pattern shop, then on to the furnace area where iron is melted, then to the various pouring and casting facilities. The tour ends at the finishing department where the castings are ground and readied for packaging and shipping."

For more information about a tour for your group, please call the customer service department toll free at 800/GOT-IRON.

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Kip Wixson


Perspective

Who Gives a ?>(*&^% If You Use Bad Language? Are more people cursing more than ever, or am I imagining things?

Vanderbilt University has a football coach named Bobby Johnson who does not allow any of his players or coaches to swear. Thinking about how unique this policy is causes us to think about how far we've come (or how far we've regressed) in the past fifty or so years.

I remember when I first heard the F word in a movie. I slumped down in my seat and don't think I heard a word people said for five minutes after that.

Johnson will demand that any player using any swear word (that's right, any swear word) will have to lay on the ground and roll sideways the length of the football field, 100 yards. Most players get physically ill about the 40 yard line. This prohibition has caused players to invent new words to vent their feeling, meaningless gibberish like Frap and Jit.

Now, you may ask yourself, why in the world would a coach, whose very employment depends on how hard his players work and on how well he can recruit, demand such "out-of-date" behavior?

Well, it turns out that Bobby Johnson has this outrageous idea that it is his responsibility to develop the quality of the men that are entrusted to him. He feels that he can instill the idea that his players can perform to a higher standard - not merely stoop to meet the level of the lowest common denominator.

A few years after I was out of school, I attended a high school football game where I was knocked out by the language that I heard coming from a coach of a Catholic high school! I was sitting in the stands and couldn't believe that he saw the value in using the F word in every other sentence. In the years that followed, I went through a series of such experiences, from movies to the TV, even to young ladies(?) who apparently believe such talk makes them more credible in a "man's world." To my ear, there is nothing more unattractive than the F-bomb being dropped in the middle of a conversation.

I know, I know, this is the twenty-first century, and you should just get over it, Wixson. But doesn't the example of the Vanderbilt coach show us that not everyone thinks that way? Shouldn't we

aspire to reach that higher level that Bobby Johnson pushes his players to attain? Is it necessary for TV, radio, and the movies to use obscenities at every turn? Does it really depict real life more accurately? Not my life, or the lives of most people I know.

I met a businessman from China recently at a lunch with two other people. Every third word out of the mouth of this guy was the F word or worse. I was very surprised, since nobody else at the table even said "hell" or "damn." When I asked him how he learned to speak English, he said he learned in school and by watching American movies. Enough said.

Now, I don't mean to be preachy, but does this colorful language really add much to communication? I think some guys use it as a way of fitting in, but does it help or hinder good communication? Are we really impressed by people who use a lot of bad language, or do we think a little less of them, deep down? As a rule, none of us uses that language when we're around women, or kids, or our parents, so why do we do it amongst ourselves? I'm sure psychologists or anthropologists or whoever studies this kind of thing would have something to say about it, but the bottom line is it really doesn't accomplish anything all that great.

I think that clear, unadorned communication says a lot about a person, including their respect for themselves and the people around them. The idea, that this kind of talk is more acceptable today because we somehow live in more modern times than our forebears, is balderdash. To many people, bad language reflects poorly on the speaker, putting them in a category of limited respect and admiration. Think about how you sound to others. Can you reach a higher standard? I think we all can.

Thought for the day...

**"A person who is nice to you,
but rude to a waiter,
is not a nice person."**

A reader sent me this the other day. Makes sense to me; see what you think.

Dirt Roads

What's mainly wrong with society today is that too many dirt roads have been paved. There's not a problem in America today - crime, drugs, divorce, delinquency - that wouldn't be helped if we just had more dirt roads, because dirt roads give character.

People who live at the end of dirt roads learn early on that life is a bumpy ride, that it can jar you right down to your teeth sometimes. It's worth it, though, if at the end of that road is home, a loving spouse, happy kids, and a dog.

We wouldn't have near the trouble with our educational system if our kids got their exercise walking a dirt road with other kids, from whom they learn how to get along.

There was less crime in our streets before they were paved. Criminals didn't walk two dusty miles to rob or rape, if they knew they'd be welcomed by five barking dogs and a double-barrel shotgun. There were no drive-by shootings, either. Our values were better when our roads were worse. People did not worship their cars more than their kids. Dirt roads were more environmentally friendly; you didn't hop in your car to go get a quart of milk.

You walked to the barn for your milk. For your mail, you walked to the mailbox. What if it rained and the dirt road got washed out? That was the best part, because you stayed home and had some family time, roasted marshmallows and popped popcorn and had pony rides on dad's shoulders...and you learned how to make prettier quilts than anybody.

At the end of the dirt road, you soon learned that bad words tasted like soap. Most paved roads lead to trouble, while dirt roads likely lead to a fishing creek or a swimming hole. At the end of a dirt road, the only time you locked your car was in August, because if you didn't some neighbor would fill it up with zucchini. At the end of the dirt road, there was always extra springtime income, from when city dudes would get stuck and you'd have to pull them out. Usually, you got a dollar. Always, you got a new friend at the end of a dirt road.



How the AB&I Stocking Distributor Program Benefits Wholesalers

AB&I has long been on the leading edge of customer service. Most of our customers would agree that AB&I provides the highest level of support in the industry, and backs that support with the kind of personal attention that sets AB&I apart from the crowd.

Several years ago, AB&I made the decision to sell exclusively through stocking distributors. The thinking at the time was that AB&I could be most committed to supporting those distributors who, themselves, were most committed to AB&I. This reciprocal dedication was the best form of business relationship, and enabled AB&I to focus its attention on those sales channels that produce the most results over time.

Central to the AB&I stocking distributor program are four major commitments made by AB&I:

1) AB&I sales reps and officials will spend a significant part of their week calling on the major contractor customers and prospects of stocking distributors. The objective of these visits is to educate the market as to the many advantages of AB&I cast iron soil pipe, fittings, and couplings, and to drive the sales of these products to the distributor.

2) AB&I representatives will visit all major specifying engineers to ensure that the greatest majority of jobs specify or allow AB&I products throughout any given project. New applications for cast iron DWV are suggested, and the latest data concerning AB&I products is provided.

3) In the event of a customer complaint, AB&I commits to having a representative call or visit the customer within 24 hours to assist in the timely resolution of the problem. This service not only builds customer satisfaction and solves problems while they are small, but also relieves the distributor of much of the responsibility for providing this after-sale service.



4) AB&I will assist with the funding of appropriate and qualified distributor-based advertising and marketing programs, according to the terms specified in the stocking distributor agreement. This assistance, properly implemented, can aid greatly in prospecting for new business, and may be used for building goodwill among existing customers, as well as reaching new customers.

In exchange for these commitments, AB&I asks that its distributors stock and sell only AB&I cast iron DWV pipe and fittings, and maintain a reasonable inventory of AB&I products to meet the needs of contractors.

"This is really a good program, both for AB&I and the distributor," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham. "We're truly committed to those distributors who demonstrate a commitment to us," he continues, "and we're always looking for quality-oriented distributors to carry our flag."

This program has proven very beneficial to distributors over the years, providing them not only a steady source of supply when they need it, but also a reliable stream of sales and marketing assistance designed to build distributor profits.

For more information, contact Gary Wickham at 800/GOT-IRON.

SuperGrip 2002 Coupling: Engineered For Maximum Performance

The cost-effective alternative for applications requiring heavy-duty couplings.

Designed to be installed with pre-set torque wrench calibrated to 80 inch-pounds. Features Type 305 5/16" stainless hex head/shoulder screws.

1-1/2" through 4" couplings include 3" corrugated 304 stainless shield and four 304 clamps. 5" through 10" couplings feature a 4" shield and six clamps.



Clamps provide uniformly rigid joint, inhibiting pipe and fitting movement.

Neoprene gasket (ASTM-564) features multiple sealing beads located off-center relative to the overlying clamp bands. When clamped, gasket forms a slightly conical shape, impeding movement and providing a safe, sure seal.

Designed to Deliver Better Pressure Performance Than Any Heavy Duty Coupling on the Market Today

Fractional Box Fittings Save Time, Money

Customers are reminded that fittings are available in fractional box lots, enabling the packaging of up to four different fittings in a single sectional carton.

"Our customers find that they save big on handling and stocking costs with this packaging," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham. Rather than sorting through the box at the time they're delivered, all fittings of a given size/style are packaged in the same compartment for easier, quicker stocking. The result is less time spent stocking product.

This packaging also makes it easier to account for received shipments. "Our customers want to know that they're getting what they paid for," says Wickham, and this packaging makes it easier to do just that.

Just for Fun...**George Carlin's View on Aging**

The only time in our lives when we like to get older is when we're kids. If you're less than 10, you think about your age in fractions. "How old are you?" "I'm four and a half." You're never thirty-six and a half, you're four and a half, going on five! That's the key.

When you get into your teens, they can't hold you back. You jump to the next number, or even a few ahead. "How old are you?" "I'm gonna be sixteen." You could be thirteen, but your gonna be sixteen!

And then, the greatest day of your life - you become twenty one. Even the words sound ceremonial, you BECOME 21. YESSS!

But then, you TURN thirty. Oooh, what happened there? Makes you sound like bad milk. He TURNED, we had to throw him out. What's wrong, what changed? You BECOME twenty one, but you TURN thirty, then....you're PUSHING forty. Before you know it, you REACH fifty. But wait, you MAKE IT to sixty. By then, you've built up so much speed you HIT seventy. After that, it's day to day. You HIT Wednesday. You get to eighty, and every day is a complete cycle. You HIT lunch, you TURN 4:30, and you REACH bedtime.

Into your nineties, you start going backwards. "I was JUST 92." When you hit 100, you become a little kid again. "I'm a hundred and a half."

May you all make it to a healthy one hundred and a half!

Worth Considering: How Taxes Work

It's almost tax time, and Congress is considering some changes to our current laws. This came from a colleague, and we thought it worth sharing.

Suppose that every day, ten men go out for dinner. The bill for all ten comes to \$100. If they paid their bill the way we pay our taxes, it would go something like this: The first four men -- the poorest -- would pay nothing; the fifth would pay \$1, the sixth would pay \$3, the seventh \$7, the eighth \$12, the ninth \$18, and the tenth man -- the richest -- would pay \$59.

That's what they decided to do. The ten men ate dinner in the restaurant every day and seemed quite happy with the arrangement -- until one day, the owner threw them a curve (in tax language a tax cut). "Since you are all such good customers," he said, "I'm going to reduce the cost of your daily meal by \$20." So now dinner for the ten only cost \$80.

The group still wanted to pay their bill the way we pay our taxes. So the first four men were unaffected. They would still eat for free. But what about the other six -- the paying customers? How could they divvy up the \$20 windfall so that everyone would get his "fair share?"

The six men realized that \$20 divided by six is \$3.33. But if they subtracted that from everybody's share, the fifth man and the sixth man would end up being PAID to eat their meal. So the restaurant owner suggested that it would be fair to reduce each man's bill by roughly the same amount, and he proceeded to work out the amounts each should pay.

And so the fifth man paid nothing, the sixth pitched in \$2, the seventh paid \$5, the eighth paid \$9, the ninth paid \$12, leaving the tenth man with a bill of \$52 instead of his earlier \$59. Each of the six was better off than before. And the first four continued to eat for free. But once outside the restaurant, the men

began to compare their savings.

"I only got a dollar out of the \$20," declared the sixth man, pointing to the tenth. "But he got \$7!"

"Yeah, that's right," exclaimed the fifth man, "I only saved a dollar, too,It's unfair that he got seven times more than me!"

"That's true!," shouted the seventh man, "why should he get \$7 back when I got only \$2? The wealthy get all the breaks!"

"Wait a minute," yelled the first four men in unison, "We didn't get anything at all. The system exploits the poor!"

The nine men surrounded the tenth and beat him up. The next night he didn't show up for dinner, so the nine sat down and ate without him. But when it came time to pay the bill, they discovered, a little late, what was very important. They were FIFTY-TWO DOLLARS short of paying the bill! Imagine that!

And that, boys and girls, journalists and college instructors, is how the tax system works. The people who pay the highest taxes get the most benefit from a tax reduction. Tax them too much, attack them for being wealthy, and they just may not show up at the table anymore. Where would that leave the rest?

