



ITEMS

NEWSLETTER

August 2002

Best Set Closet Rings Continue to Set Industry Standard for Quality, Ease of Installation



The Best Set closet ring is available in 2", 3" and 4" sizes, with and without test caps.

Known by many plumbing pros as AB&I's "Best Kept Secret," the Best Set™ closet ring provides numerous advantages over competing products. In fact, many plumbers insist on the Best Set because of its trouble-free reputation and ease of installation.

"The Best Set is, quite simply, the best closet ring on the market today, bar none," says AB&I sales manager, Greg Seiler.

Designed by AB&I engineers, in conjunction with plumbing contractors, the Best Set closet flange has set the industry standard

since its introduction in the 1980s.

"We went the extra mile when we started engineering the Best Set," recalls Kip Wixson, AB&I vice president for pipe and fittings sales. "We developed four alternative designs, produced them in limited quantity, and distributed them to several area plumbing contractors," says Wixson. "We asked them for their comments, good and bad. The feedback they provided us resulted in the final Best Set flange, and it's been a proven winner ever since."

The Best Set has traditionally been available in 2" and 4" sizes, both with and without test caps. AB&I has just introduced a new 3" size, in response to market demand, filling the gamut of needs for quality closet flanges.

"We continue to be surprised at the number of contractors who don't know about the Best Set," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham. Customers are reminded that the Best Set can be easily combined with other products in truckload shipments, reducing the need to order flanges from multiple suppliers.

"We encourage contractors who haven't yet used the Best Set to give them a try," says Wickham. "We're sure they'll find them both reliable and easy to install, reducing labor costs and quality-related callbacks."

For more information, contact your field sales representative or AB&I.

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Perspective

"The Future Ain't What It Used To Be..."

Yogi Berra

How many times do we, ourselves, abandon Common Sense?

Reading the papers these days can be downright depressing. News of wars and clashes around the world, and of natural disasters that kill and maim by the thousands, seems to fill every headline.

I know, there have always been wars and hurricanes, and bad news sells advertising, so that's what they feed us. But what really bugs me lately are the countless stories of how we're doing ourselves in, through the willful application of dumb policies and practices that lead us down the road toward national decline.

I'm talking about the apparent death of common sense. I got motivated on this subject as a result of an email I received the other day. Rather than paraphrase it, I wanted to share it with you in its entirety, so here goes...

OBITUARY (The Times, 5/29/02)

Today, we mourn the passing of an old friend, by the name of Common Sense.

Common Sense lived a long life but died from heart failure early in the new millennium. No one really knows how old he was since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape.

He selflessly devoted his life to service in schools, hospitals, homes, factories and offices, helping folks get the job done without fanfare and foolishness. For decades, petty rules, silly laws and frivolous lawsuits held no power over Common Sense. He was credited with cultivating such valued lessons as to know when to come in out of the rain, the early bird gets the worm, and life isn't always fair.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you earn), reliable parenting strategies (the adults are in charge, not the kids), and it's okay to come in second (or even last, as long as your best efforts were given).

A veteran of the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression, and the Technological Revolution, Common Sense survived cultural and educational trends including body piercing, whole language reading, and New Math. But his health declined when he became infected with the "ifonlyhelpsonepersonitsworthit" virus. In recent decades, his waning strength proved no match for the ravages of overbearing regulations.

He watched in pain as good people became ruled by self-serving lawyers. His health rapidly deteriorated when schools endlessly implemented zero tolerance policies; reports of six-year-old boys charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate, a teen suspended for taking a swig of mouthwash after lunch, and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student. It declined even further when schools had to get parental consent to administer aspirin to a student, but cannot inform parents when the female student is pregnant or wants an abortion.

Finally, Common Sense lost his will to live as the Ten Commandments became contraband, churches became businesses, criminals received better treatment than their victims, and federal judges stuck their noses into everything from Boy Scouts to professional sports. Finally, a woman who was stupid enough not to realize that coffee is hot was awarded a huge payout because she, and her attorney, decided to take on Common Sense. And they won.

Common Sense was preceded in life by his parents, Truth and Trust; his wife, Discretion; his daughter, Responsibility; and his son, Reason. He is survived by two stepbrothers, My Rights and Ima Whiner. Not many attended the funeral, because so few realized he was gone.



So what does the demise of Common Sense mean to us as people and as business leaders? For starters, it makes life more expensive than it has to be, more fraught with dangers. For instance, I recently heard of a lawsuit involving a guy who got his car stolen. The thief hit another car while driving the stolen vehicle, seriously injuring the other driver. After the cops arrested the thief and the attorneys got involved, the thief sued the owner of the car he stole for leaving his keys in the ignition. It seems that leaving your keys in the car is worse than grand theft auto, and when the dust settled, the victim's insurance company settled for an undisclosed amount. Common Sense had died by that time, so I suppose we

shouldn't be surprised by the outcome.

A tort legal system out of control, corporations and their auditors who cook the books, church leaders shielding child molesters, a culture that worships pop celebrities who grow rich and arrogant because their throats vibrate at a certain frequency, athletes who make many times more than heart surgeons, teachers who can't teach and students who won't learn, political correctness run amok - these are just a few things that happen when Common Sense is allowed to flounder.

Our country is at a crossroads. Our Asian brothers across the ocean are on the verge of busting their economy loose, overtaking the entire West in just a generation or two. What will be our

response? If recent trends are an indication, we'll probably pass more laws that make us less able to compete, further hobbling ourselves in the name of social progress.

On the other hand, if we make a serious stab at getting back to basics, to establishing universal rules of fairness and justice based on clear thinking, we will continue to prosper and lead the way.

AB&I has always been a big believer in the basics. Though it seemed for awhile that our business style was going the way of the buggy whip, it also seems that our methods might be coming back in style. Maybe if we all behave as though Common Sense were still alive, its principles might regenerate, take on a new life, and provide the basis for another banner century for the USA.

Good News on the Economy...**POLL-U.S. CPI Seen As Unchanged at 0.2 Percent in June**

According to the Reuters News Service, US inflation kept a low profile on the economic radar screen in June. Economists polled by Reuters expected the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the most widely-used inflation gauge, to remain essentially unchanged from May, ticking upward at a scant 0.2% rate.

Excluding food and energy prices, the core index is expected to have increased by 0.2%, with some analysts saying a rise in state tax on cigarettes may contribute to the rise. May's index reading also increased by 0.2%.

The expectations indicate that many economists see a very low presence of inflation. This should give the Federal Reserve another reason to delay any upward changes in interest rates. Economists who listened to Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan's testimony in July already believe rates will remain unchanged for the next several months.

Many economists agree that the continuation of low interest rates is an important factor in future economic growth. With inflation in check, the stage could well be set for a growth spurt that could pull the country out of what is seen in some sectors as the doldrums.

"In our western market area, building activity ranges from near dead to quite healthy, depending on the region in question," says AB&I's Kip Wixson.

For example, Southern California runs both hot and cold, depending on the city. The number of building permits in Los Angeles, for example, is down 50% for single family residences and more than 67% for multiple family construction. Divide out just Northwest LA, however, and you get an entirely different picture. While permits for single family homes remain down 8.5%, permits for multifamily construction are up a whopping 227% compared with last year. Similar differences can be found in cities in Northern California, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona.

"This spotty growth is one indication that things might be turning around for the better," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham. "The trend is toward improvement, and with inflation keeping the pressure off interest rates, the picture for building activity remains favorable."

**Shutdown Scheduled, Production Planned Ahead To Meet Customer Orders**

The annual AB&I shutdown is scheduled for July 26 to August 11. During that time, most major foundry systems will get extensive maintenance, and some new equipment will be installed.

"Shutdown is the time we tackle the big foundry projects," says AB&I vice president, Kip Wixson. From the cupola and furnace to the pipe finishing department, major repairs and maintenance will consume the full two weeks of shutdown. At the same time that maintenance is taking place, a new sand lab will be built, a back fence installed, and power will be installed in the guard shack.

A total of 66 projects will be completed during shutdown, but production will cease entirely. To ensure that all orders will be filled quickly during this downtime, the pipe team has been building inventories over the preceding weeks.

"We do a lot of planning for shutdown," says Wixson, "and we don't expect any problems filling orders."

Price Increase Holding Firm

A surge in business in the days just before the July 1 price change has resulted in the foundry and shipping teams working overtime to fill orders complete



"We're doing everything we can to meet the demand, including increasing inventories at both the Oakland foundry and LA Service Center," says AB&I marketing manager, Gary Wickham.

The market is firmly supporting the price increase that took effect on July 1. "We don't see any chance of the price weakening," says Wickham.

Kip's Perspective Brings Response From Reader

Kip's Perspective in the July issue of Items discussed the proliferation of golf tournaments and other promotional activities put on by distributors and paid for, largely, by manufacturers. Kip questioned the value of all these events, and called for a moratorium on them to see if business actually would fall if free golf, burgers and beer were eliminated from the promotional mix.

"We thought we were going way out on a limb," says Kip Wixson. One of the responses so far has been a technical correction provided by Jeff Perry, of Benicia Plumbing. In the article, Kip referred to Tom Cruise and quoted him as saying "Show me the money" in one of his movies. Jeff reminded us that it was, in fact, Cuba Gooding, Jr. who said "Show me the money," not Tom Cruise. Our mistake. We just got our philosophers mixed up.

In closing his comments to Kip, Jeff also reminded us that their golf tournament is in October.



UFO Lands At AB&I Headquarters, Changes Pricing Policy

It's one thing to read the National Enquirer, it's another thing to believe what it says...

Last week, a rumor floated back to me about the done, finished and now firmly-in-place-with-no-price-protection price increase. This increase was announced to the trade six months ago, should have caught nobody by surprise, and went off as planned and advertised.

This rumor, however, from a "reliable source," reports that the effective date of the price increase was delayed and that AB&I is protecting the price on some orders or jobs.

Well, at AB&I, all orders received before the effective date for immediate shipment were at the old price. All orders received and shipped after the effective date were, and continue to be, at the new price, without any deviation. As always, there has been no price protection on orders or jobs.

"All orders received and shipped after the effective date were, and continue to be, at the new price, without any deviation."

We have no explanation as to how this rumor got started, unless little green men invaded our offices in the dead of night and changed our invoices. While that's possible, we doubt that it happened, since our security system didn't go off and there wasn't any green goo on the floor. We'll keep you posted on the ongoing investigation.



Just for Fun...

Some of Our Favorite Hollywood Squares



Rumor has it that the celebrities on the current Hollywood Squares are briefed in advance on the questions they will be given and on possible answers they might provide. It didn't used to be that way. In its heyday, Hollywood Squares had some of the entertainment world's wittiest, most original comedy professional on as regular guests. Consider these excerpts...

- Q. Do female frogs croak?
A. Paul Lynde: If you hold their little throats under the water long enough.
- Q. If you're going to make a parachute jump, you should be at least how high?
A. Charlie Weaver: Three days of steady drinking should do it.
- Q. You've been having trouble going to sleep. Are you probably a man or a woman?
A. Don Knotts: That's what's been keeping me awake.
- Q. Which of your five senses tends to diminish as you get older?
A. Charlie Weaver: My sense of decency.
- Q. Why do Hells Angels wear leather?
A. Paul Lynde: Because chiffon wrinkles too easily.

- Q. As you grow older, do you tend to gesture more or less with your hands while talking?
A. Rosemary: You ask me any more of those growing older questions, Peter, and I'll show you a hand gesture you'll never forget.
- Q. Back in the old days, when Grandpa put horseradish on his head, what was he trying to do?
A. George Gobel: Put it in his mouth.
- Q. Jackie Gleason recently revealed that he firmly believes in them and has actually seen them on at least two occasions. What are they?
A. Charlie Weaver: His feet.
- Q. Who stays pregnant longer, your wife or your elephant?
A. Paul Lynde: Who told you about my elephant?

Airline Humor

While taxiing, the crew of a US Air flight departing for Ft. Lauderdale made a wrong turn and came face-to-face with a United 727. The irate female ground controller lashed out at the US Air crew, screaming, "US Air 2771, where are you going? You turned right on taxiway delta. Stop right there! I know it's difficult for you tell the difference between Cs and Ds, but get it right! You can expect additional taxi instructions in about half an hour and I want you to go exactly where I tell you, and how I tell you. You got that, US Air 2771?"

"Yes, ma'am," the humbled crew responded. Naturally, the ground control frequency was dead silent after the verbal bashing of US Air 2771. Nobody wanted to engage the irate controller. Tension in every cockpit at LGA was running high. Then, an unknown pilot from an unknown aircraft broke the silence and asked, "Wasn't I married to you once?"

