

"A weekly improvement program? Sounds impressive. How does it work?" I asked.

"Well, it really isn't anything elaborate," she continued, "it's just a plan to help me do a better job as each week rolls around.

"To keep my forward thinking on the track, I've divided my job into four elements: customers, employees, merchandise, and promotion. All during the week I make notes and jot down ideas as to how I can improve my business.

"Then, every Monday evening, I set aside four hours to review the ideas I've jotted down and figure out how to put the solid ones to use in the business.

"In this four-hour period I force myself to take a hard look at my operation. I don't simply wish more customers would shop in my store. Instead I ask myself, 'What can I do to attract more customers?' 'How can I develop regular, loyal customers?'"

She went on describing numerous little innovations that made her first three stores so successful: things like the way she arranged the merchandise within her stores, her suggestion-selling technique that sold two out of three customers merchandise they had not planned to buy when they entered her stores, the credit plan she devised when many of her customers were out of work because of a strike, the contest she developed that boosted sales during a slack season.

"I ask myself, 'What can I do to improve my merchandise offerings?' and I get ideas. Let me cite just one case. Four weeks ago, it occurred to me that I should do something to get more youngsters into the store. I reasoned, if I had something here to draw the kids to the store, I'd also draw more of the parents. I kept thinking about it, and then this idea came: Put in a line of small carded toys for children in the four-to-eight age bracket. It's