

ProSales

hanley-wood



Iron Man

WITH HARDLY A DAY OFF IN 36 YEARS, **CL GRAY** RELIES ON EXPERIENCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE TO CONSISTENTLY LEAD THE TINDELL'S BUILDING SUPPLY SALES TEAM IN VOLUME AND GROSS MARGIN.

In December 1996, CL Gray set a personal and company sales record at Knoxville, Tenn.-based Tindell's Building Supply, selling approximately \$800,000 in lumber and building materials to close out a year that saw his total volume hit \$8 million. For eight years, the record has gone untouched, and after 36 years in the business, Gray is considering retiring at the end of 2004—but not without taking one last shot at breaking his own record.

One of Tindell's Building Supply's first outside sales reps, Gray has been with the company since 1968, and has sold more than \$250 million of goods during his employment, according to company president Carl Tindell. Not simply a volume player, Gray also has been the company leader in gross margin almost exclusively during his career, relinquishing the title only three times in almost four decades. "CL had a customer base of 10 when he started, and during the past 36 years he has worked with over 2,000 contractors and builders in the Knoxville area," explains Tindell. "He's a tenacious competitor who is driven to succeed by having his customers succeed."

Gray doesn't argue with that assessment, claiming that though he may technically work for Tindell's, he considers the builder-customer employer No. 1. "I really work for my customers; they are who I focus on and I go to bat for them, because if I don't have them, I don't have any business," Gray says. "I've always believed that you can sell more than you sell if you simply take care of the customers [rather than focusing

on the sale itself]—and it has worked that way."

To keep a step ahead of his contractors, Gray has eschewed vacation and time off during his career at Tindell's, working day in and day out to keep customer satisfaction levels so high that almost all of his new accounts come directly from referrals. "I don't focus on the dollar amount [of the sale], and I don't focus on prices," Gray says. "I go out and check jobsites to ensure they are ready for delivery, I take a builder's plan away from them, and, other than providing product options and construction alternatives, I assume control of the entire building process. I just try to stay ahead of them all of the time." Gray is also relied upon as a clutch player to ramp up sales volume at new Tindell's locations as the pro dealer has grown from one to five locations over the past 20 years. When rookie salespeople join the Tindell's team, Gray is the consummate veteran leader—he is currently mentoring his ninth sales professional.

As for the sales record, Gray remains modest about what 2004 has in store, but an April sales tally of \$853,000—a new personal best—indicates that this sales leader is on pace for new highs. "I love this job; I've done it for so long," Gray says of his pending retirement. "I know when I retire I'll have to come back." In fact, Gray recently reached an agreement with Tindell's to keep his four best accounts after year-end so he can stay in the loop, both for his own love of the industry and in support of Tindell's Building Supply. ■