

March 2025

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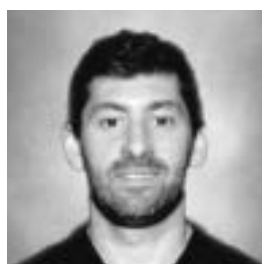
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PHIL HOTAREK

The Pitfalls of Planned Obsolescence

IN THE KITCHEN and bath industry, we've all seen it: the faucet that looks sleek in a showroom but starts to leak after a year, the "affordable" fixture with a finish that tarnishes before the warranty card even gets mailed. These issues aren't just isolated defects – they're symptoms of a bigger problem: planned obsolescence.

For years, planned obsolescence has quietly infiltrated our industry. Plumbing fixtures that once stood as symbols of craftsmanship are now engineered to fail. As professionals, this puts us in a tough spot: how do we help clients navigate a sea of short-lived products while staying true to the principles of quality and sustainability?

The good news? Showrooms, designers and manufacturers have the power to flip the script. By focusing on education, authenticity and superior products, we can guide customers toward choices that last a lifetime – and help our industry regain its reputation for excellence.

THE TRUE COST OF CHEAP FIXTURES

The allure of affordable plumbing fixtures is strong, but the hidden costs are staggering. Many mass-market products cut corners in ways the average consumer doesn't see:

- **Plastic Cartridges:** Unlike ceramic disc cartridges, plastic ones degrade quickly, leading to leaks and inevitable replacements.
- **Thin Coatings:** Cheaper finishes peel and tarnish within a few years.
- **Non-Replaceable Parts:** Built-in obsolescence means when one small part fails, the whole product ends up in a landfill.

This race to the bottom isn't limited to knockoff brands. Even legacy names have bowed to cost-cutting measures. Once-reliable companies now sacrifice quality for margins, leaving their products a shadow of their former glory.

As showroom professionals and designers, we're often the first to hear from clients when these shortcuts catch up with them. A faucet fails. A finish fades. Trust is broken – not just in the product, but in our guidance.

SHOWROOMS: FRONT LINE OF CHANGE

Here's where showrooms can make a real difference. We have something no algorithm or big-box aisle can offer: expertise. When we sell a product, we're not just offering a transaction – we're offering a partnership based on trust and knowledge.

Teach the Value of What Lasts: Consumers don't always know what makes one fixture better than another. It's our job to educate them, not overwhelm them. Some talking points to consider:

- **Ceramic Disc Cartridges:** Explain how they eliminate drips and outlast plastic by years.

- **Solid Brass Construction:** Let customers feel the weight of a solid brass fixture and compare it to a cheaper model. The difference is undeniable.
- **PVD Lifetime Finishes:** Show how PVD resists scratches and tarnish, maintaining its beauty far longer than painted or plated finishes.

And don't just tell – show. Invite customers to handle fixtures and feel the craftsmanship. A side-by-side comparison of a solid brass faucet and a hollow, plastic-based one is often all it takes to make the case for quality.

Build Trust with Certifications: Greenwashing is everywhere, but credible certifications can cut through the noise. Highlight labels that matter:

- **WaterSense:** Guarantees water efficiency without sacrificing performance.
- **Energy Star:** Ensures lighting and appliances meet high energy-saving standards.
- **FSC Certified Wood:** Indicates sustainably sourced materials for bath furniture.
- **Low-VOC Finishes:** Minimizes harmful emissions for healthier homes.

When a customer questions why a higher-priced product is worth it, certifications provide proof – not just promises. Keep information handy to back up these claims and make it easy for customers to understand the benefits.

Make the Sale Personal: Buying plumbing fixtures isn't just about functionality, it's about the experience. Your role is to help customers envision how their choices will improve their homes and lives.

- **For Designers:** Help them align their aesthetic vision with products that are built to last. Suggest timeless finishes and durable materials that won't leave their clients frustrated down the line.
- **For Homeowners:** Share how investing in a quality faucet now can save them the hassle and expense of replacing it every few years.
- **For Builders:** Highlight products with serviceable parts, so they can reassure clients about long-term maintenance.

The more you tailor your pitch to the person in front of you, the more they'll trust your expertise – and the product.

DESIGNERS: ADVOCATING FOR QUALITY

As a designer, your reputation hinges on the performance of the products you specify. If a bathroom renovation looks stunning on day one but starts falling apart by year two, that reflects poorly on you.

When specifying products, don't just rely on aesthetics or price. Dive deeper:

- Recommend faucets with ceramic disc cartridges and solid brass interiors for reliability.

- Choose bath furniture made from FSC-certified wood with low-VOC finishes.
- Use LED lighting with Energy Star ratings for energy efficiency.

Your clients trust you to make choices they can't fully evaluate themselves. By prioritizing products with proven durability, you build trust and enhance your reputation.

MANUFACTURERS: THE CALL TO INTEGRITY

Manufacturers play a pivotal role in reversing the trend of planned obsolescence. The most respected brands in the industry prioritize:

- **Repairable Components:** Products designed with serviceable parts instead of forcing replacements.
- **Lifetime Warranties:** A promise to stand behind their craftsmanship.
- **Transparency:** Sharing details about materials, processes and sustainability efforts builds trust with showrooms and consumers.

When manufacturers partner with showrooms, they create a powerful alliance rooted in shared values.

QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The kitchen and bath industry doesn't have to settle for planned obsolescence. Together, showrooms, designers and manufacturers can change the narrative – shifting the focus back to quality, longevity and sustainability.

By prioritizing products that last and guiding clients toward thoughtful choices, we can rebuild trust in our industry. It starts with educating consumers, celebrating craftsmanship and aligning with brands that share our values.

This isn't just about making a sale; it's about leaving a legacy. A legacy of homes filled with products that perform beautifully for decades. A legacy of sustainable choices that reduce waste and protect the planet. A legacy that proves quality is always worth it.

Let's get back to what matters.

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