

Never Give Up On Quality

This is not an advertisement. It is a public interest article.



By Tom Lincir,
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As worldwide demand pushes the cost of raw materials and energy through the roof, there's always a temptation to cut quality to cushion the impact on equipment prices. During this time, we must keep in mind that while commodity supply and demand cycles come and go, one thing remains an unrelenting constant. The formula for success in any business is to offer quality, promote quality, and charge for quality. It is human nature to appreciate quality and be turned off by cheap stuff. This has been true for thousands of years, and will be true at the end of the current supply and demand cycle.

People whose strategy is to be "the low price competitor" often cite Walmart in support of their position. But before there was a Walmart, people of this mind set would cite K Mart in support of their position. As we now know, K Mart is going belly up because their only reason for being was low price,

and Walmart took this away from them overnight by offering even lower prices. Anyone who tries to compete on a low price basis is always vulnerable to a similar kind of instant oblivion. They also fall into a downward spiral of having to cut more and more quality to meet lower and lower prices, until they eventually go out of business. It's important to keep this in mind and not fall into this trap.

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Stainless Steel Olympic Bar

In the last two years stainless steel has doubled in price, and there are many ways we could cut the cost of our stainless steel bar without the customer ever knowing.



Ivanko's Stainless Steel Olympic Bar will always have a tensile strength of 218,000 PSI, will always be ultrasonic and magnetic particle tested for internal and external cracks, and will always have a surface that never peels, chips, or rusts.

For example, we could eliminate sonic testing and mag testing, which detect internal and external cracks in the steel. This would save the cost of the testing and the cost of all the bars with hidden faults that we would normally scrap! The customer would never know the difference...unless...the bar snapped unexpectedly during an overhead lift. Then he would know.

Or, if we used standard mill run material and accepted the tolerance that the steel mill considers straight, the first time customer would never know. Our long time customers who have grown used to perfect straightening would pick it up immediately. That's why Ivanko purchases oversized, material then grinds, polishes and straightens it to exact tolerances ourselves.

Another change we could make that would not show up initially would be to eliminate heat treating the bar to 218,000 PSI tensile strength. This would save the cost of heat treatment and the cost of cleaning the discoloration off the bar after heat treatment. (Stainless steel turns purple after heat treatment. I like the look, but most customers want it cleaned to look like stainless)

"I have always had a passion for sawing products in half to examine their internal integrity".

The material we start with in heat treatment is 150,000 PSI, which is already stronger than most of our competition. This might work in some light duty environments, but we have learned from 38 years of experience that anything less will not stand the abuse in today's commercial gym environment.

Now, if we changed any of those things we are currently doing, you would still have a product that looked like Ivanko's Stainless Steel Olympic Bar, but beneath the surface it would be like everyone else's. This bar did not become number 1 on three continents by being like everyone else's.

Urethane Plates and Dumbbells

I have always had a passion for sawing products in



Ivanko's 45 pound Urethane plate has 6-1/2 pounds of Urethane, which is over 2 pounds more than its closest competitor.

half to examine their internal integrity. I first did this with a brand new Eleiko Olympic bar back in the mid 1970's. People thought I was nuts (some still do) but it was the only way I could check out the chemistry and strength of the steel. I still have the lab report, and I am planning to saw a current production model in half to see if they've changed internal qualities to stay price competitive. I wouldn't be surprised, because I have recently received an increasing number of calls on bent Eleiko bars. In the past these bars rarely bent unless they were severely abused. My suspicions are furthered by lab reports in my possession from the prestigious German Laboratory Wolf-Dieter Schulz GMBH that show a lower PSI and a slightly different chemistry than the bar from my 1970's analysis.

The curiosity to cut things in half drove me to also saw all of our competitors dumbbells and urethane plates in half. It is amazing what you find out when you look beneath the surface of a product to examine the often more important internal qualities. For example, an Ivanko Urethane dumbbell has 1/2" thick urethane on the side, more than any other we checked, and almost twice as much as the second best dumbbell. On one dumbbell the thickness of urethane was only a little more than the thickness of a heavy coat of paint.

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The findings are similar in the case of weight plates. Ivanko's 45 pound urethane plate uses more than 6-1/2 pounds of urethane versus 4-1/2 pounds for the closest competitor. Further, where one company advertises that their urethane is permanently bonded to the core, I was able to rip it off with my bare hands. I must admit it's kind of nice to rip off some of my competitors for a change. Another company that advertises a steel core inside their urethane plates has downgraded to cast iron in their latest model. Now, both may be adequate, but steel is stronger and more expensive than cast iron. I only bring this up because it exemplifies what this article is about. Downgrading internal qualities to hold price levels.

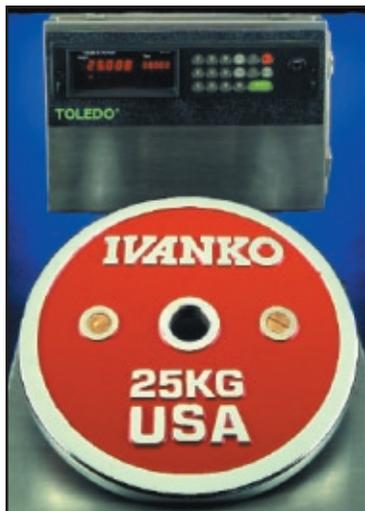
All cut samples are tagged and safely stored in the company vault for future comparisons to see if anything has changed.

Checking Weight Accuracy

Another strategy is to weigh the low-end weight plates. When you push the foundry too hard on price, they will try to get away with less material. I have personally weighed thousands of plates for accuracy — Ivanko's and our competitors. Only about 50% fall within the +/- 2% range considered acceptable in the

industry. The rest run the gamut from slightly off to grossly off. The worst were plates that weighed 37.5 pounds and one that weighed 59 pounds. I still have these plates in my collection.

When we first calibrated our competition powerlifting plates to within the weight of a business card, we were called extremists. Few recognized that



Toledo custom-made special scales for Ivanko so that weight could be measured accurately to within +/- 2 grams.

when plates are even a few ounces off, the cumulative error of several plates can render the stated weight irrelevant. Now Ivanko calibrated plates are used in more major powerlifting championships than any

other, including the European and Pan American championships, the World Games, and the Special Olympics.

The current commodity cycle will run its course. Supply will surge to meet the new demand. It always does. Prices will restabilize. Accordingly, you must ask yourself whether you want the reputation of one who has compromised quality to compete on price, or do you want to emerge with your reputation untarnished? Think long term and the answer is an easy one. Offer quality, promote quality, and charge a little more for the difference that people have always appreciated, and always will.

When we design a product line, price is not an initial consideration. Function, durability, and safety are the primary concerns. When you analyze things the way you're not supposed to from an internal perspective, one thing becomes obvious. There is Ivanko and there is everyone else.

Ivanko Barbell Company was founded by Tom Lincir in 1967, and it is the leading provider of professional and commercial grade barbell and dumbbell products worldwide. Your comments or questions are welcome. Contact Tom Lincir at Ivanko Barbell Company, call toll free 1.800.247.9044 ext. 205, send correspondence to P.O. Box 1470, San Pedro, CA U.S.A. 90733, or e-mail tom@ivankobarbell.com