

## Feed Store Finds English a Boost

**P**am's Feed & Supply in North Fort Myers, Fla., has been in business 12 years, and Pam Leppala considers her customers "like family." She characterizes her store as a small mom and pop shop, but it's the only feed store in her county that stocks English tack.

"It got a lot of attention," Leppala said about taking a chance to branch out from Western only.

"A lot of boarding stables have folks that ride English, and the closest store with anything to offer was approximately an hour's drive from here in another county," said Leppala.

She started with a few items and followed through on customer requests and suggestions.

"We started with and are continuing to add to our line of tack," Leppala said.

"We really don't feature a discipline, but we have a varied selection of styles and are not concentrating on one in particular at this point in time," Leppala added.

Leppala suggests that anyone attempting to cross over from Western to English take advantage of one very good teacher.

"Our customers have been the best teachers in this area, especially since I ride Western only," Leppala said. "Learn as much as you can, and keep an open mind to all suggestions, whether you follow through on them or not. If you are in an area like we are, shop around since saving your customer some money helps you in the long run."

Sometimes, it takes several tries to get it right.

"Apparel is probably out of the question due to size and available funds," Leppala said.

"Be prepared to fall a few times, but pick yourself up just as fast—and remember, most folks do want to see you succeed so they have a place they can refer their friends to," Leppala said.

### Free Advice from High-Priced Consultants

Major companies pay huge sums to consultants to help them manage change in their business. We've distilled some of their comments. Six Sigma is a brand-name strategy to improve the bottom line. You don't have to become one of its "black belt" experts. Just remember the key message: Listen to the voice of the customer. What your customers tell you is your stimulus for change!

#### Here's a six-step program for crossing over:

- 1. Identify your goals:** You want to expand your sales.
- 2. Analyze your present situation:** Who has asked you about merchandise you don't stock now? What's the volume of demand and likely sales?
- 3. Develop your approach:** Through local professionals, research what styles and brands match your customers' expressed needs. Examine items at trade shows.
- 4. Construct your plan:** Work up what items to order, how many and where you'll stock them in your store. Plan your advertising campaign to communicate to the equestrian community.
- 5. Execute your plan:** Place your orders and launch your advertising to notify customers about your expansion.
- 6. Measure your results:** Analyze your sales records of added product lines, and compare to expectations. Adjust your plan to scale up or down.

*Feed stores are traditionally the home of Western riding equipment, but for Pam Leppala at Pam's Feed & Supply in Florida, English products have been a welcomed addition.*

