

Introduction

As a kid growing up in a middle class, Irish Catholic family, I never thought much about what I wanted to be as an adult. Like most guys in the neighborhood, I thought it would be great to be a baseball player, or some kind of professional athlete. The reality of life for our family, however, was that we were cops and firemen, dock workers and civil servants. What a surprise: Irish cops and firemen. Wanting to be a little different, I decided to be a teacher. After getting BA and MA degrees in English literature, I became a certified English teacher, grades 7-12.

Teaching 6th grade for a year in the Catholic school system was a blast, but I moved into a city system for a larger paycheck. Two more years went by before I realized that while I liked teaching - assessing student abilities, getting to know them, tailoring and passing on knowledge which helped the kids think their way through things, commonly known as “problem solving”, I didn’t like the confines of an 8-5 environment, nor did I like spending much of my time being a baby sitter/disciplinarian/father, when all I wanted to do was teach. The other major problem I experienced was that no matter how hard I worked in class, my pay was going to increase at a snail’s pace and that pace was decided by the school board and the Teacher’s Union - **not me**.

Unsatisfied with the circumstances of teaching, and determined to avoid fire, police, or civil service exams, I wrote a resume and went to an employment agency. A shrewd recruiter, the owner of the company, sat me down and said: “What do you want to do, kid?” And I answered: “I’ve got a lot of education; I’ve worked in the steel plant; I have my longshoreman union card - I need a job and I’m not afraid to work.” (Did I mention I

had just gotten married)? He looked me directly in the eye, and, serious as a heart attack, said: "Looks like sales for you."

I was appalled. Salesman? Me? No way. Salesmen were creeps. We weren't salesmen, not in our family, nor did I want to be one. Although I had neither sales experience nor any real knowledge of the trade, I, like most people, had the stereotypical image of a salesman as being a slimy, cheating, pushy thief. But I needed a job, and the opportunity was there, so I took it.

Trying to make it as a salesman was the toughest thing I had ever tried; tougher than shoveling slag in the steel plant; tougher than emptying box cars in the grain elevator; tougher than passing oral exams for a master's degree. At first, things didn't go well. Once, during my field training period, my trainer told me to pull over and stop the car. I got a bad feeling and drove into a food market parking lot. He said, get out and open your trunk. We got out and I did. He, a very successful salesman, 5 foot 8 inches and 140 pounds soaking wet, took my two sales bags, both stuffed with literature, samples, price books, etc., opened them, and dumped them onto the asphalt parking lot. People stared at us as if we were deranged and quickly walked away. Papers flew everywhere. He then got into my face and said in a voice I can hear to this day: "If you want to keep your job, pick up your, repack your bags, and get your head on straight. If you don't, get back in the car and drive away. This will be your last day."

I didn't know whether to cry, or take a swing at him. He was trying to point out to me in a rather direct way, after months of more subtle warnings, that my head wasn't in the game. I hadn't gotten over my distaste for being a "salesman". I wasn't committed completely to my job. I was, to put it simply, going through the motions, but neither my head nor, more importantly, my heart was really into selling. Standing in that parking lot, I'm not kidding, I had to decide who I was right there and then. Pick up my stuff and start doing it right, or put my tail between my legs and quit. All I could think about was this: I

had never given up; I had always accomplished what I set out to do, but most importantly, I couldn't go home and tell my wife that I quit. Couldn't do it. Couldn't move back home as a failure. I kept my mouth shut, picked up my stuff, packed my bags and put them back in the trunk. My trainer, who never lifted a finger to help, said: "Good choice. Let's get a cup of coffee."

That was forty-nine years ago and in my mind it happened yesterday. Since then, I've been a successful salesman, area manager, district manager, regional manager, national sales manager, general manager, and company CEO. My trainer was right. I owe him. Big time. Take what you want from the story, but here are the main ideas I want to convey:

- Sales is all about heart and head: no great desire, no great success
- You're either in or out: there is no successful middle ground
- No sales book is worth a damn if you aren't committed to the work
- The sales job is about financial results: no results-no job

This isn't a feel-good book designed to pump you up in order to get the job done. While everyone needs and appreciates encouragement once and awhile, in my experience good salesmen come with egos that are relatively bulletproof. The only thing I have ever found that constantly makes me feel good is success- which in our case means sales/income/satisfaction- and success requires doing the sales job well. I feel good when I can give my kids what they need; when we can pay the bills; when we can move into a better house when we need to; when we can put money away for savings and education. I feel good when I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. I feel good when I get awards up on stage in front of the other salesmen,

because they understand how tough it is. I feel really good when a customer says, “Thanks, you did a great job for us.”

The book is entitled *The Good Salesman* for a number of reasons. The obvious title would have been “The Great Salesman”; after all, who wants to settle for good when one can be great? I called it *The Good Salesman* because I’m trying to convey a few critical ideas to you, particularly to the newer sales people. The word “Good” carries two distinct meanings. The first is, “OK. He’s a good salesman, but not a great one.” The truth of the matter is that very few salespeople become the top salesman in their company or their field. In fact, in most of the sales organizations I have worked with, 70-80% of the sales have been delivered by 20-30% of the salesmen. However, **the top people were once the bottom people and they had to learn their craft before rising to the top.** Sometimes that journey happens in a year or two, sometimes it takes far longer. To paraphrase, we learn to crawl before we walk. Salespeople have to be good before they can be great. **It’s called learning the basics.**

The other meaning associated with “good” is a moral one, as in being a “good person”. Believe me when I say that I try very hard to separate religion or religious ideas from business. My beliefs may not be your beliefs and that’s fine. But being a good person as a salesman means **doing the right thing for the customer.** This concept isn’t a Christian thing, or a Moslem thing, or a Buddhist thing. Doing the right thing for the customer is good, common business sense. Why? Because the long-term goal of *The Good Salesman* is to take a territory and make a life there, which means *The Good Salesman* will be living in the same community and calling on the same customers, and any new ones that come along, for 20,30, or 40 years. One builds a reputation over time and word gets out. As a salesman, if you always try to do the right thing by them (the customers) they will often do the right thing by you, and they will do so with enough frequency to provide you and yours with a good life. The converse is true also: get

a reputation for sharp practice and not following through on promises and the prospects of a successful, long term career in one area begin to fade.

***The Good Salesman* is about learning the basics of running a sales territory well and realizing the need to take care of the customers as if they were life's blood, which, from a salesman's prospective, they are.**

This book, while discussing many specifics, is generalist in nature. *The Good Salesman* is designed to provide a solid overview of the sales job and what needs to be done on a daily basis to succeed. I recognize that all sales jobs are not the same. What works in one job might not work in another. There is no way to cover all situations and needs. If you find nothing in this book that can help you, however, no matter what type of sales job you have, I will be very surprised.

There are many things not addressed here, and many things assumed. One of the great assumptions is that whoever hired you provided adequate technical training on their products and acceptable sales tools (samples, literature, etc.) to use. Product knowledge is absolutely essential and the proper use of good sales tools and literature will often pull a salesman through when words aren't getting it done. Remember as you read: there are many ways to skin a cat. What one salesman can do might seem and may be impossible for another to pull off. Everyone gets it done a little differently. The following chapters tell you how I and many other successful sales people work. The learning process never ends. Hopefully, after a few good years in the job, you will have developed personal stories of success along with solid sales techniques you have developed. Good luck and enjoy the book. **Then, go sell something!**