



He Knew His Market

Serve a need & consider your clients' best interests

by: Reena Philpot, Reena Philpot Sales Coaching

I often think about my sales style and where I picked up some of my lessons. My Daddy was one of the first salespeople I ever knew. Now, that seems funny to say, especially since most of his career was spent as a coal miner, like most of those in our family and community. But he was also a little unique. He was often an entrepreneur looking for other ways to make a living outside of coal mining. I do not even know if he has ever considered himself a salesperson, but he was — and was pretty good at it. He had a car lot for a few years while I was growing up. It was a very small lot; just three or four cars — the maximum my parents' space and budget for inventory would allow.

I remember like it was yesterday. The first two cars purchased to begin the adventure were a Volkswagen Beetle and an AMC Gremlin. I always picked out my favorites. I loved the Volkswagen, but could not understand why anyone, including Daddy, would buy the Gremlin. In my mind, the things you offered for sale should be pretty, but I was only nine years old. What did I know?

Almost every week, a car was sold and a new one entered the lot. The cars were usually about 10 years old. I sometimes spent the day with Daddy going to pick one up or making a trip back and forth to town to get this part or that part to get another one going. Mommy stayed at home for the short trips; just he and I would go.

Daddy worked long hours in the mines during the week and I did not get to see him much. So, his answer to work/life balance was to take me along on trips others might have thought would be more difficult with a child. I think he was onto something. I never felt he did not make time for me.

Saturday night was auction night. Mommy came along on those nights, tended to me and was available to do some driving if needed. The auction was a couple of hours from home. We would leave early on Saturday afternoon. Sometimes my aunt, uncle and little cousin would go, and we would have a big time. Sometimes we would leave in three or four cars because we had cars to sell and would all come home in one car. Other times we would go to the auction in one car and come home with three.

When we arrived at the auction, we would see cars lined up — rows and rows. The parking lot was full of people kicking tires and asking questions. The cars' open hoods and doors filled the outdoor space and a building in the middle housed the auction. In the center of the building was an open path where cars would enter on one end and exit on the other.



I can still see rows and rows of cars, smell the hot oil in the air and hear the sound of missing mufflers. A man would be auctioneering and the owner of the car would stand by him when it was his car's turn to be up for auction. The auctioneer would start talking loudly but slowly and speed up in the middle, trying to get the price up as high as he could. I loved the way he would end: "Are you all done? All through? SOLD to bidder #X!" and repeating the final price.

Sometimes Daddy bought cars other places than at the auction. I would walk beside him as he looked at the cars he was interested in purchasing. He circled the cars, looking at them with his hands behind his back as he considered the purchases. He often bought a car with someone in mind — someone who needed a car. He knew what he (or she) wanted and he was there to make a deal. I loved to watch him negotiate the price. He was always kind and friendly. He would negotiate when he wanted to pay for a car and again when he sold a car.

He was willing to take offers on what he had for sale. He would at least listen, then come back with a counter or terms to extend the time to pay in full. I loved this part and I still love this process of meeting in the middle. I was always listening. On occasion, I was lucky enough to be there when he purchased a particular car and again when he sold the same car, so I got to see a deal from start to finish. This was a good opportunity to learn about profit and, sometimes, loss.

Every week we got a magazine with vehicles for sale in the area. I would always take it to my room when Daddy was finished, play pretend and pick out the cars I would buy when I grew up. I loved the European cars — the Volvos and Mercedes. I never saw these types of cars in our community. They seemed rich and refined. I imagined the lives of the owners of those

cars being very different than ours. The cars Daddy bought were practical and did not have many bells and whistles. I imagined the seats in the cars I picked out were big and cushy. I imagined the interiors being worn leather. The seats and interiors of the cars Daddy purchased were usually plain vinyl that felt cold and hard in comparison.

Daddy was not interested in the luxury cars that caught my eye. They did not suit the customers in his market. Those who bought Daddy's cars were not interested in luxury or comfort. They were interested in reliable and affordable cars made by brands they knew.

Daddy did the things I do today with office technology. He took the cars that were needed to his market — cars customers may not even know they wanted until they saw them. He would collect a few so the people in the community had access to them. The customers in his market did not have time or the desire to travel and find cars. And he also only offered a few models — cars that met the market's needs.

The people Daddy served did not want expensive, brand-new cars. The ones he sold were often second cars. Many men had to drive bad roads to work in the mines. Their cars came home every day with added layers of gray dust and clumps of mud that left chalky marks on their clothes every time they got in and out of them. Daddy solved a problem — the families in our

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community were able to keep their good cars clean and readily available after they purchased their second cars from his lot.

A sale is not about pushing things that people do not need or are not interested in purchasing. Even if you are a used car salesman, you can meet a need or solve a problem. Over the years, I have had people make remarks to me like, "Sales makes me feel like a used car salesman." I just smile and, sometimes when appropriate, I say, "I always wanted to sell cars, but the hours

are bad." There is nothing wrong with selling anything — even a used car — if you are serving a need and have the client's best interests at heart. ■

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