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Gleanings

by Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

How to Be a Champion Salesperson



The current edition of the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) is devoted to sales. Included in the journal is an article titled "Love Your Customers." This article relates the story of Joe Girard, a retail car salesman who sold 13,001 cars during a 15-year career. Joe's business was not fleet business, but individual customers. In other words, he sold cars one at a time.

Assuming that Joe typically worked 48 weeks per year and 50 hours per week, he worked 2,400 hours per year. Selling 13,001 cars during fifteen years means that he sold an average of 867 cars per year or 1 car every 2.8 hours.

The HBR article also stated that the typical car salesman sells 4 to 5 cars per month or 48 to 60 cars per year. Assuming that the average car salesman works 2,400 hours per year, the average salesman sells one car every 40 to 50 hours.

Not surprising, Joe Girard holds the Guinness World Record for the most cars sold in one month—174, or approximately one car every 1.2 hours.

Clearly, selling cars at Joe's rate could not include much customer prospecting. In fact, the HBR article noted that customers would make appointments with Joe sometimes a week in advance. For a car salesman, this is nothing less than phenomenal.

How did Joe achieve this amazing level of productivity? The HBR article attributed his success to fanatical service, which is not surprising. People respond positively to a salesman who treats them well and services their needs. Joe made it a point to see that his customers' problems were solved quickly and efficiently. To do this, he needed help from other people, such as, technicians in the service department.

How did he get help from technicians, who are generally paid by the hour and do not participate in the commissions from car sales? Simple—Joe treated the technicians very well. Eighteen times a year, he bought the technicians a nice dinner to say thank you for their help and to tell them how much he appreciated them.

This simple consistent pattern of honoring the technicians bought Joe favor with them. Hence, when a customer called Joe with a service issue, there was never a problem getting prompt service. The technicians so valued and appreciated Joe that they would go the extra mile to help him.

The key to Joe's success was not only impeccable sensitivity to the needs of his customers, but sensitivity to the people who helped him service his customers. Joe made sure that he had all the resources at his disposal to service his customers quickly and efficiently—no matter what the problem was.

What key principle did Joe embrace to deliver his world-class customer service? May I suggest that Joe practiced a biblical principle?

Joe's own description of his style was that he loved his customers—an interesting and a very biblical term. For Joe, to love his customers was to serve them. Genuine service is based on subordinating one's needs and wants to the needs of others. Service is about focused attention and understanding a person's needs and faithfully meeting those needs.

A wonderful biblical principle that points to selfless service is the Golden Rule: treat others the way that you want to be treated. By putting himself in the shoes of others, Joe gained empathy and an understanding of his customers' problems, which enabled him to be responsive to their issues.

To effectively respond to his customers, he needed to promptly and efficiently solve their problems. To do that, he needed others to support him. So he applied the Golden Rule to the way he treated the service technicians. Joe sowed love into the technicians, which enabled him to reap their help when needed.

Through the use of the Golden Rule, Joe delivered world-class, record-making results. The power of the Golden Rule is amazing. In fact, I have one client who recognizes its power and has declared that his company has only one rule—the Golden Rule.

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