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# **THE ULTIMATE AUTOMOTIVE SALESPERSON**

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by  
Mike Whitty

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Southfield, Michigan

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## THE ULTIMATE AUTOMOTIVE SALESPERSON

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**This book is written in the masculine gender to enhance the ease of writing.**  
The authors and Salesperson, Inc. do not discriminate on the basis of age or gender, and believe that anyone who applies himself/herself to the study and practice of selling can and should be an outstanding automotive salesperson.

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## Introduction

The automobile salesperson is a rare individual. He works many hours, endures the ups and downs of the industry, works basically on commission, and faces the heartbreak of rejection every day. To survive in this business you have to be a psychologist, teacher, friend, and consultant. Your basic job is to make people happy with their selection of a car, and to make as much money as possible for yourself and for the dealership.

Why would anyone stay in automotive sales with all of these demands? It's one of the few businesses where you have millions of dollars of inventory, a telephone answering service, office space, and an advertising budget, with absolutely no investment of your own. It seems too good to be true, doesn't it? But even with all these benefits, fewer than 40% of the salespeople will continue to sell cars next year.

Here are my theories why this is so:

### ■ TRAINING

When an individual makes the commitment to become an automobile salesperson, he receives very little, if any, training. Although training and development programs are slowly gaining importance in the industry, it takes more than what is currently being offered to adequately prepare the salesperson for today's market.

### ■ ORGANIZATION

It actually takes a lot of skill for an individual to become organized. I'm not just talking about scheduling your appointments so you can go to lunch at the same time every day. I'm referring to organizing every part of your life in order to achieve a ***"better you!"***

### ■ GOAL SETTING

There is nothing more exciting than setting a goal and achieving it. However, knowing how to do this successfully requires skill, patience, and training. If an individual does not set goals, his income will be determined by luck, instead of skill.

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## ■ BEING NEW

If you are a new recruit who is starting automobile sales as a new career, you're probably feeling a little nervous and insecure. Starting anything new can be frightening unless you have a complete overview of what to realistically expect. By understanding your responsibilities in advance, you will know which tasks to learn, and what kind of goals to set.

These are just a few of the reasons why I have written **The Ultimate Automotive Salesperson**. As you thumb through the chapters, you will find everything you need to give you a better than average chance for success in automobile sales. But keep in mind, this book is meant to be a "*guide*."

It is meant to counsel and direct you in a path that fits your needs. It is not meant to be the only course you follow. I wrote this book to stimulate your yearning for education.

*...You should keep on learning as long as there  
is something you do not know.*

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

*Every person should strive to be the best that he can be, no matter what the challenge.* It is your responsibility to educate yourself, and not wait for someone to do it for you. With the vast array of books, seminars, and educational and motivational materials available to you, it is your obligation to strive for excellence. I hope **The Ultimate Automotive Salesperson** will help you accomplish your goals.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Section I    Introduction**

#### ***Chapter 1***

Philosophy of an Automobile Salesperson

#### ***Chapter 2***

Philosophy of an Automobile Customer

#### ***Chapter 3***

How to Get Started

### **Section II   Sales Procedure**

#### ***Chapter 4***

Greeting

#### ***Chapter 5***

Inventory Walk

#### ***Chapter 6***

Product Presentation

#### ***Chapter 7***

Demo Ride

#### ***Chapter 8***

Negotiation

#### ***Chapter 9***

If You Don't Sell The Car

---

***Chapter 10***

If You Do Sell The Car

***Chapter 11***

Pre-Delivery Procedure

***Chapter 12***

Delivery Procedure

**Section III Business Money Makers**

***Chapter 13***

Prospecting

***Chapter 14***

Phone-Ups

***Chapter 15***

Switching To A Used Car

***Chapter 16***

Out Of Stock vs. Dealer Trades

***Chapter 17***

Follow-Up Programs

**Section IV Educational Material**

***Chapter 18***

Paperwork

***Chapter 19***

Organization

---

***Chapter 20***

Qualifying Customers

***Chapter 21***

How To Sell To Women

***Chapter 22***

Competitive Analysis

***Chapter 23***

Leasing vs. Buying

***Chapter 24***

Objections and Closes

***Chapter 25***

Continuing Education

***Chapter 26***

How To Handle A Slump

***Chapter 27***

How To Use Computers In Your Business

***Suggested Reading***

***Glossary***

***Index***

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## Chapter 1

### Philosophy of an Automobile Salesperson

*...Look out for the fellow who lets you do all the talking.*

—Frank McKinney Hubbard

Being an automobile salesperson brings with it many responsibilities, as well as rewards. Whether you are thinking of making this your career, or whether you've been an auto salesperson for years, you will realize that there is more to doing this job than the average salesperson pursues. The whole purpose of this book is to educate you on the proper sequence of doing business.

So, what are the major objectives of the salesperson? Simply stated, they are:

#### ■ TO SELL CARS AND MAKE MONEY

The primary reason and motivator for taking any job, or starting a career, is to earn money. After all, it would be difficult to purchase the necessities of life without it. And, if you didn't desire a better than average lifestyle, you would probably be satisfied to settle for a 9-to-5 job earning minimum wage. But, this isn't the case. You've decided to enter a career where the hours are long, the rejection is high, and the pay is unstable. If I haven't painted a pretty picture thus far, it wasn't my intention. Realize, however, that along with the downside of this profession, comes the opportunity to earn a tremendous amount of money. It has always been my philosophy that, if I am willing to work a lot of hours and if I am willing to take a lot of rejection, then I **want** to be earning a lot of money. And, where else can you virtually run your own business without any capital investment? Auto sales is one of the few occupations where an individual can have millions of dollars worth of inventory, office space, a telephone answering service, and an advertising budget—with no investment whatsoever.

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## ■ TO REPRESENT THE COMPANY IN A PROFESSIONAL MANNER

Professionalism is not a word that should be taken lightly. When you become involved in a "people business," you have to make sure that the way you portray yourself reflects kindly on your employer. The way you look, act, and handle your affairs both inside and outside the dealership will determine the type of salesperson you will become.

## ■ TO CONTINUE LEARNING YOUR TRADE

A salesperson was asked, *"How many years of experience do you have selling cars?"* and his reply was ten years. Then the question was posed, *"Do you have ten years of experience, or one year of experience ten times?"* What happens to many salespeople is that whatever they learn during their first year in the business is all they care to learn for the rest of their career, and so they remain stagnant. It should not be like this. Times change, people change, the economy changes, and cars change. With all of these changes taking place, the salesperson should take it upon himself to constantly upgrade his education in the career he is pursuing. It stands to reason that if a person wants to become more proficient, he should never stop learning.

There are, of course, many other philosophies for doing business such as, **"treat others as you would want to be treated,"** but the main point to remember is that **"success means growth and growth means change."** Always strive to be the best salesperson that you can be, and you will reap the rewards of your efforts.

*...Your reputation is determined by what others  
are not thinking about you.*

—Tom Masson

## Chapter 2

### Philosophy of an Automobile Customer

*...No customer can be worse than no customer.*

—Leopold Fechtner

There are many things a salesperson needs to know about a customer. But, the one basic fact that remains constant is, **you need him more than he needs you**. The sooner you realize this, the better your attitude will be on how important each individual customer is.

Because the automobile industry has changed dramatically over the years, car buying has become more complex. In the past:

- *The customer had fewer cars to choose from.*
- *There was less technology to understand.*
- *There were fewer dealers to visit.*

As a result, this customer had an easier time choosing and buying a car. He could be loyal to a particular salesperson longer because he had the tendency to stay with the same carline, a courtesy that was passed down from generation to generation.

Now there are many more automobile companies than before, increasing both the competition and the number of choices. Virtually every item on the car has become computerized and consequently more intricate than in previous models. So, as the number of buyers has increased, the sophistication of these buyers has also increased. It is rare for the automobile buyer today to make a choice without studying every aspect regarding his buying needs. And with the price of cars continuously climbing each year, buying a car has become a major household decision.

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It is understandable, that car buying has lost a lot of its glitter. With all of the technical information the buyer must study, and with all the product lines to consider, the fun is literally gone. The moment the customer steps into the dealership, he becomes apprehensive regarding the pressure tactics some salespeople use. And because auto salespeople have unfavorably been described as being "**crooks**," customers always feel like they're being cheated. They'll doubt you when they see a "**true invoice**" price because they think you've altered the figures. You can see why the customer is so confused.

*...A consumer is a shopper who is sore  
about something.*

—Harold Coffin

So, let's try to keep it simple and identify what customers really want.

## **CUSTOMERS WANT:**

### **■ TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT**

No one likes to be treated like a second-class citizen. Regardless of age, sex, or physical appearance, make certain you greet every customer who walks through the door with enthusiasm, warmth, and respect. Being made to feel special seems to break down many barriers.

### **■ TO BE EDUCATED ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT**

With as many vehicles as there are on the market, one reason the customer shops around is to find out what the differences are between the various carlines. Your responsibility then is to educate this customer to the best of your ability. Give him as much positive information as he can absorb, so that he can make the correct buying decision.

### **■ TO BE GIVEN A FAIR DEAL**

It certainly would be nice if we could sell every car for the amount appearing on the sticker. But that kind of deal doesn't seem to interest very many customers. Therefore, while you are negotiating price, continue to build value into your carline. This strategy will help you earn

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as much profit as is feasibly possible.

#### ■ TO RECEIVE GOOD SERVICE AFTER THE SALE

In order for you to get repeat customers and referrals, you have to make sure this customer is cared for long after you have made the sale. Most of these ways will be learned as you read further.

If you study these four items carefully, you are on your way to understanding how a customer thinks and what a customer needs and expects.

*... A salesperson, tired of his job, gave it up and joined the police force.  
Several months later, a friend asked him how he liked being a policeman.  
"Well," he replied, "the pay and the hours are good, but what I like best  
of all is that the customer is always wrong."*

—Sales Scrap Book

## Chapter 3

### How to Get Started

*...Be not afraid of growing slowly, be only of  
standing still.*

— Chinese Proverb

I can still remember the very first day I walked into the dealership as a salesperson. I had studied all the brochures the weekend before, gathered as much information as my head could hold, and dressed up in my finest suit. I was ready to step into a new career that would offer me unlimited financial potential with no investment whatsoever. ***What a deal!*** And then it hit me. What if someone asks me a question I can't answer? What if my mind goes completely blank and I don't remember a thing I studied? So many options, so many engines, so many different car lines to remember. Being the perfectionist I was, the embarrassment would be more than I'd want to endure. I could feel the butterflies churning in my stomach as I realized, at the ripe old age of 30, I was the new kid on the block again having to work my way up the ladder of success.

At that point, I became very hesitant to wait on customers, and so I went back into my office to hide. Everything was fine up till then because there were other salespeople who could handle the traffic in the showroom during the slow time of the day. But then came the moment of truth — **TRAFFIC OVERFLOW!** I was forced to show myself to the public and attempt to impress a customer with my knowledge and good looks. So I walked over to the first person I saw who looked as lonely on the outside as I did on the inside.

***"Can I help you?"***

Obviously being new, I wasn't versed on how to greet a customer to my advantage, so he came back with the comeback response his father probably taught him,

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***"No thanks, I'm just looking."***

Where was I to go from here? I was a little relieved that he didn't have a question for me, but at the same time, I was already on the floor and wasn't about to hide again. I had to say something to give this customer some idea that I was interested enough to pursue his business, so I blurted out,

***"Well, let me look along with you,  
I could use the practice"***

And that's exactly what we did. I took him out to the new car lot, showed him the line of cars he was interested in, and the next day closed the deal for a \$363 commission. I remember thinking to myself how easy that was. All I did was remain friendly throughout his visit, showed him what he wanted, and decided on a fair and equitable price.

Needless to say, all of my sales haven't been that easy. But if I had to have an ice breaker, I'm glad it was that one. The first step toward a customer is always the hardest one. But once you do it enough times, it really does get a lot easier.

I've made a list of suggestions to help you get through the beginning stages of your career in automobile sales. Follow each one carefully, and you'll gain the confidence needed to succeed.

#### **■ TALK TO CUSTOMERS EVEN IF YOU'RE AFRAID**

It doesn't even have to be auto related, just say anything to get you into the habit of being on the showroom floor and having a one-on-one conversation with someone. Service customers are an excellent way to break the ice. They have already purchased a car, so the pressure of having to sell something is gone. They're probably in your showroom waiting for their car to be serviced and just want to see how the new models differ from the one they own. This is where you can start relaying a few facts with which you feel comfortable. Every time you say it aloud, it becomes embedded in your memory. And who knows? You might just get lucky and sell a car!

## ■ NEVER BE AFRAID TO SAY "I DON'T KNOW"

It's not a crime not to know every fact and figure about automobiles. There is a tremendous amount of knowledge you'll need to gather that only time and study will help. If you're asked a question that you're not sure of, simply say that you don't know and will look it up. This shows your willingness to answer the customer's question and gives you one more fact to occupy that vast library upstairs.

If you want to lose your credibility and become totally embarrassed, try lying about a fact of which you're not sure and have the customer catch you at it. Believe me, the customer won't think you're stupid if you don't know an answer, but he will if he catches you in a lie.

Many times customers feel more comfortable dealing with a new salesperson. As soon as you tell customers you're new, the guard they put up before they entered the dealership seems to drop, because now they don't feel that they'll be confronted with this high-powered salesperson who knows every trick in the book, and will continuously try to slam them into a car they don't even want at a price they can't afford. I have seen salespeople use the "**I'm New**" technique for years just to put customers at ease. The basic reason is that customers don't always want to be sold. Many times they feel more comfortable selling themselves on buying a car and would like to assume they know more about what they need than you do. That's where a new salesperson has the edge, he'll just let them feel that way.

## ■ GET EVERYONE TO TAKE A DEMO RIDE

The best way to show customers your product is to get them physically involved in it. Just explaining it to them on the showroom floor takes away from the excitement they will feel by actually driving your product. Even if they're not planning on buying today or in the near future, getting them into the car and going for a ride gives them that feeling of what a new car is again. Those firm seats, the lack of noise, that new car smell, these are senses they haven't felt since they bought their last car. And it might just trigger the sensation you're looking for to turn them into buyers now. The very least that's going to happen is that you will get more practice selling your customers during the demo ride, which is all important in creating the sale, and you will learn more about your product. I'll discuss more about the demo ride in another chapter.

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## ■ STUDY PRODUCT INFORMATION DURING SLOW TIMES

Update your product knowledge when there are no customers in the showroom and you're just sitting around. There are three sources in your dealership that will supply you with all the information you need:

### — *Brochures*

These have all the facts and figures a customer needs to make a good buying decision. When I won the *National Walkaround Competition* for Mazda, I didn't use any other piece of literature in our dealership. The brochure had virtually all the facts I needed.

### — *Video Tapes*

Almost all dealerships carry a good supply of video tapes that cover product knowledge, competitive analysis, and even some tapes on how to sell. Watch these any time you need to freshen up on your facts.

### — *Master Product Book*

This book has complete documentation about your car line.

The more you study your product, the more confidence you will have when dealing with a customer. It could mean the difference between making or losing a sale. Customers like to deal with salespeople who are knowledgeable about their business. It's embarrassing when a customer asks you a question and you don't know the answer, especially when it's about the car you're trying to sell him. Knowing your product gives you an energy that you're not likely to see in someone who doesn't have that type of knowledge. It gives you a sense of direction and a plan of attack that will make your presentation a successful one.

## ■ BE FRIENDLY

It's been said that people buy cars from friends even if they're not good salespeople. When you're working with customers and you're new in the business, the very least that should happen is that you try to make friends with them. Don't worry so much about the

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presentation and the sale, but concentrate more on gaining a rapport with them. Talk about things that interest them. One of the best ways to get customers to communicate with you is to get them talking about themselves. It could be anything from sports to grandchildren. Try to establish some common ground with them. If they feel that the salesperson they're dealing with is a lot like them, they're more likely to buy from him than from someone who comes across as high-powered and totally business-like.

#### ■ WORK CLOSELY WITH MANAGEMENT

Your manager is there for a reason. It's his responsibility to guide, train, and motivate his sales staff to produce as many sales as possible. So use him to get the results you're looking for. The one thing you should never do as a new salesperson is to let your customer leave without introducing him to your manager. He will be able to ask the proper exiting questions to make sure that all the bases were covered, which in the long run will earn you more money. Listen to him and learn. If he's a good manager, and if his income relies on your sale, you can bet that he'll want to get involved with every customer to maximize his chances of a higher paycheck.

*...I really believe my greatest service is in  
the many unwise steps I prevent.*

—William Lyon McKenzie King

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