

WHEN THE NOSE OF THE CAMEL IS IN THE TENT

by Mark
Matteson

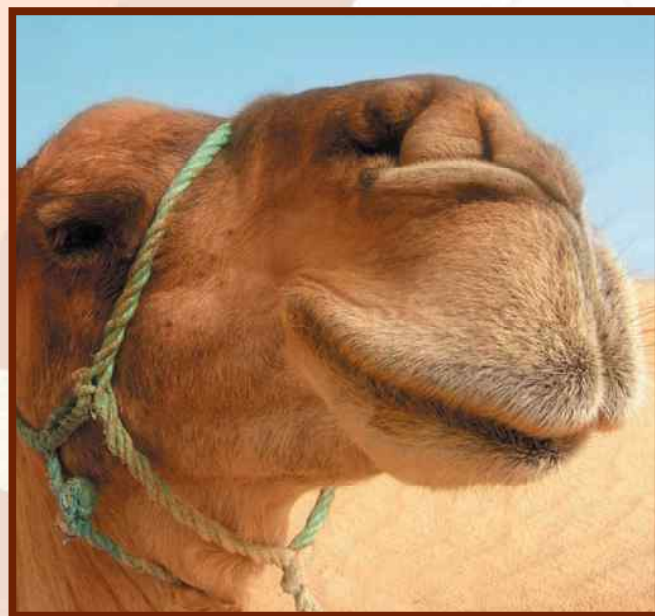


Ed. Note—It's not unknown for pressure washer service technicians to move into sales positions. In this story, Mark Matteson describes his move from HVAC technician to sales. What he discovered is applicable in our industry.

My new job was to sell commercial service agreements. It was a fine company. They were growing. They wanted to expand their service base. I had a territory that no one wanted. It was the farthest away from the office. "There is no business there!" was all I heard from everyone when I first took the job. I also heard, "You're nuts! Why did you give up the security of being a technician?"

I had to. I was stale. I was restless. I was a C+ technician on my best day.

But I had people skills. I made friends easily. I liked people. I took the personality profile. I was made for the job. I read a lot. I was curious. I was ambitious. I have always been an entrepreneur. Now I was an Intra-prenuer.



Selling commercial service agreements in Seattle, Washington is tough. The Pacific North-WET—average annual rainfall, 32 inches and average annual temperature, 55 degrees. When compressors fail, we switch to outside air, economizer mode, aka, "free cooling."

I was calling on people who did not want to see me and talk about something they did not care about. Getting the appointment is the toughest part of the sale. I would walk into 50 buildings, to get 40 names, talk to 30 people by telephone, to secure 20 face-to-face appointments, to close 5 deals. Start with 50, end with 5.

One such person was Barb Gregory. She was the facility manager for Bartell Drugs. They had 40 locations. One contractor was serving all 40. They were a good company. I had friends working there.

As I listened to her, it was clear she was fairly content with whom she was using. It's a common challenge. How does a salesman (or saleswoman) overcome that one? Then something I had read in a sales book by Frank Bettger sparked an idea. "Compared to what or whom?"

"How do you know you are happy?" I asked Barb. "Pardon me?" she asserted. "How do you know you are happy? Compared to what? All you have ever had is one contractor. As good as they are, one thing I do know about human nature, when we think we have it all, arrogance and complacency creep in. Wouldn't it be nice to raise the bar a little?" It was a bold move. I had nothing to lose. I hadn't made a sale in awhile.

"Where are you going with this?" she asked, leaning forward like the RCA Dog listening to the phonograph for the first time. "Well, I just wonder how much better your service would be from ABC Mechanical if they knew WE were in one of their stores." The silence was deafening. I just smiled and sat back. I knew I had struck gold. Thanks, Frank. It was sound business logic. What could she say? I had established reasonable doubt, a rock in her shoe.

Waiting for her to finish her thought process, I finally interjected one more idea. "All I am looking for is one store," I said with a smile curling up slowly from one side like the Mona Lisa. "Just one, the worst one—the one you have the most problems with. It will give us a chance to demonstrate our competency. How do you feel about that?"

After another long pause, she said, "Okay, just one. Here is the manager's name and number. The address is..." I was delighted. It had worked!

We went after that store with gusto. Our best tech solved their "Three compressor failures in six months problem." There were two problems, liquid migrating back to the crankcase and occasional brown-outs. We installed a crankcase heater and phase protection. We eliminated the moisture in the system. We made the manager happy.

Barb said to me over lunch a month later, "Okay, I am going to give you guys another two stores. But don't get your hopes up. I will never give you more than half the stores." I was speechless. Twenty stores! I could hardly contain my glee. Mona Lisa was gone. I am certain I looked more like Ronald McDonald at that point. "Fine," I said with a big grin. I finished my pasta marinara with McChicken.

We talked about the Mariners and Sonics.

All I could think about was the old proverb, "When the nose of the camel is in the tent, the rest of the camel isn't far behind." Who else could I call?

Sales are like a four legged chair. The legs are: Trust, Relationship, Competence, and Timing. If one of the legs is missing, we don't sit too well or comfortably.

Mark Matteson is a business consultant in areas such as sales, presentations, communications, and customer service. His web address is www.mattesonavenue.com. cr

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