

MERCHANDISING



where he worked as a young book-keeper when his boss suggested he drive out in the country and "stir up some business." The boss didn't figure Stevenson would sell anything, but at least, he said, Stevenson could let people know they were in business. Here, condensed, is Stevenson's story:

"I was ill-equipped for stirring up business. I had never attended a sales school and most certainly had never heard the term "creative selling." So, I pointed the pickup truck toward the country, looking for a place to stop and visit.

"I turned the truck into a long lane that led to a two-story white farmstead with a huge red barn. There was a middle-aged man standing by the barn. I climbed out of the truck and walked to where he was standing. I smiled because I like to smile at people and they usually smile back. I shook hands with him because that is the style of civilized people when meeting. I told him my name because I wanted him to know who I was and where I worked so he wouldn't think I was just an idle joy rider.

"I didn't realize my actions were the studied steps to a positive sales approach. Smile. Shake hands. Tell the prospect who you are and what you are doing.

"I didn't think of the farmer as a prospect but as someone with whom I could spend a few pleasant moments.

"Are you a salesman?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. My first big lie of the day.

"Good," he said. "I have a problem."

"I was not aware that salesmen were expected to solve problems, especially for a person so obviously successful as my new friend.

"He told me his problem having to do with a livestock feeding situation.

"The gods of commerce were smiling. I had heard that same problem discussed in the store just the day

before. I explained the solution in detail and how it involved using one of our products. "That makes sense to me," the farmer said. "If I order this product you recommended and some other things, when could they be delivered?"

Unprofessionally, I blurted, "I'll get them right out to you." For some reason, he smiled. He gave me an order amounting to more than a week of normal sales for our store.

"Back in the truck and speeding down the lane, I realized I had not written down the order. I recited the items aloud, over and over, all the way back to town.

"I parked in the alley behind the store, went through the back room, past the cash register on the sales counter and into the office where my boss sat hunched over his record books.

"I told him 'I think I'd like to be a salesman.' Without looking up from his ledger he said, 'Sounds good to me.'

"That's how I became a salesman."

Sounds too easy to be true, doesn't it? But that's the way sales people work. They go out and find people with problems, and then proceed to solve them in a pleasant, appealing way by providing the appropriate product or service. It's often fun and it pays dividends.

Sure, you can become very sophisticated about sales techniques and the more you practice the more you learn, the more successful you become. But don't worry about that right now. Follow Leland Wells Stevenson's first fledgling steps: get in your truck and go out and stir up some business. Success is almost sure to follow.

Director of Communications
and Public Relations