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Amazing Car Salesman Tells How He Does It

Dennis Tilko could not figure out why he lost a car sale. He made it a point to find out.

I've known Dennis Tilko for more than 30 years. In all that time, the only thing that's changed is his attitude. It keeps getting more and more positive. For Dennis, attitude is everything, and good or bad, to him everything is an opportunity.

Dennis has worked in the automotive business for as long as he can remember. He started out cleaning and detailing cars during high school to help pay for college. After graduating he started full-time as a sales associate in a Cadillac dealership.

"I was really frustrated one day," he says. "I lost a sale to the Oldsmobile dealership next door, even though I offered the customer more on her trade and a better price on the car."

Dennis could not figure out why she would leave and pay more at another dealership. He was perplexed, so he called her to find out what could he have done better?

"She told me the people at the other dealership were nicer. They offered her coffee, gave her a tour, introduced her to people in every department and treated her like she was a VIP from the second she walked in."

He described it as an "ah-ha" moment. He realized there was much more to closing a sale than offering the best price.

He realized salespeople are great at turning buyers into shoppers. Even so, he wasn't quite sure what the difference was. After all, he had followed his training. He greeted the customer, delivered a hood-to-trunk presentation, took the customer on a demo drive, negotiated and thought he was close to closing the sale.



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But no one had taught Dennis how his attitude could influence a customer relationship.

“As salespeople, we learn the mechanics of selling, but not how to work with people,” he says. “No one shows us how to build and maintain relationships.”

He learned the dealership that had won his customer over used a sales process we at APB call the Red Carpet Treatment. After learning more, he persuaded his management to adopt the system. He learned its principles and still uses them today at the Mercedes dealership where he works now.

Dennis believes that a positive attitude is the biggest factor in turning shoppers (people who come in, look and leave) into buyers, and ultimately into loyal clientele.

“Dealers may spend \$50,000 or more on advertising to bring people in, but they forget to put value on the customers’ experience once they walk in,” Dennis tells me. “It is like giving salespeople a broom and asking them to sweep potential customers out the door.”

Dennis is passionate about treating customers individually based on their unique needs, wants and desires. He builds, cultivates and nurtures long-term relationships. It’s not just about closing a deal; it’s about building a friendship that goes beyond the sale.

“I realized years ago my job is not selling cars. My job is to give customers every possible detail and every reason to make the decision to work with me, my dealership and our products. I can only do this if I am passionate and enthusiastic about the product I sell.

My customers’ job is to give me the order. I just help them buy,” Dennis says.

Most salespeople are taught to “get to the numbers.” Dennis educates customers on why spending \$50,000 to \$60,000 on his brand is a good investment. He gets to know them and what they are seeking.



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He asks questions such as, “What are you driving now? Do you like it? Do you like the service you get? Is it powerful enough?”

He customizes his presentations to get customers excited about the value of Mercedes. He’ll show a crash-test video, talk about how Daimler invented the first race car, about its patented safety features and more. He explains that buying a Mercedes is like buying a fine suit. He goes the extra mile to show he cares.

“If a customer has dogs, I give them a bag of doggie treats. I send flowers as a thank you for coming in. I buy customers lunch and share new information about our brand. Basically, I do whatever it takes to create an honest, positive impression.

“Yet none of this makes a difference without a positive attitude, without wanting to ‘wow’ customers. I want my customers to say there is no one they’d rather work with but me.”

Dennis never rushes to judgment based on how a customer looks, what they say or what they need. One time a customer came in simply wanting to learn how to drive a vehicle with a manual transmission so she could take a cross country trip in an old truck. So, he taught her how. He took the opportunity to talk with her and to get to know her needs. In the end, she bought a new truck.

The bottom line is he sincerely cares about each of his customers. In fact, he makes sure each one has his business card and cell phone number.

“I am available to help with every service concern my clients have, whether making an appointment or helping in a crisis. One woman called me at home at 11 p.m. upset about a problem with her car. I took the call, solved the problem and sent her a gift card for lunch at her favorite restaurant. She sent me two referrals.” He also tells them, “If you drink, that’s your business. But, call me anytime you need a ride, 24/7. I will pick you up wherever you are and drive you home.”



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And, he's done it, many, many times.

I've asked Dennis what he would tell new car salespeople. Here's his top-10 list:

1. Stop looking at the job as a stepping stone. View it as a career. Otherwise, you'll never have the right attitude.
2. Be passionate about the products and brand you are selling.
3. Take every opportunity to learn about the product, the brand and the processes.
4. Learn how to work with people.
5. Understand most Americans are pulled in a million directions, managing homes, kids, work and other challenges. Actively listen to customers regardless of what they want to talk about.
6. Read each customer and change your approach to suit individual personalities, temperaments, learning styles and interests.
7. Never say "no" to a customer. If someone simply wants their trade appraised, do it. In the process, learn more about them so you can find a friendly way to show them cars.
8. Accept that you will lose one out of three sales. Don't accept that you couldn't have done something differently to change the outcome. Learn from each next time you will win.
9. Always tell the truth.
10. Be positive. Attitude will make or break a sale.

At APB, we hear people say all the time that maintaining a positive attitude at all times is easier said than done. No one could ever know this better than Dennis. He lost his son at age five, and supported his wife through a 4-year losing battle with cancer.



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Even during the darkest time in his life, while working part-time, he sold 15 vehicles a month. His attitude saw him through then, and it still does today.

“I always tell myself, there is someone out there that has it worse than me. I get out of bed every day and take a deep breath, and think it is time for me to get in shape for the day.

I can't change what has happened in my life. I did the best I could and that's all I can do. But, I can decide how I want to approach every day that's left and choose to make it the best I can for me and everyone else I come in contact with.”

They say attitude is contagious. If so, I hope we catch what Dennis has.



Richard F. Libin has written two acclaimed books that help people of all walks of life improve their sales skills, because as he says, “everyone is a selling something.” His most recent book, *Who Knew?* (Who-Knew.com), was published in early 2017. His first book, “*Who Stopped the Sale?*” (WhoStoppedTheSale.com), is now in its second edition. As president of APB-Automotive Profit Builders, Inc., a firm with more than 48 years experience working with both sales and service professionals, he helps his clientele, through personnel development and technology, to build customer satisfaction and maximize gross profits in their businesses. Mr. Libin can be reached at rlibin@apb.cc or 508-626-9200 or www.apb.cc.