

TRAINING OF A LIFE INSURANCE AGENT

How a Man May Qualify as a First-class Salesman— Persuasiveness a Great Asset

The following is the greater part of the essay declared to be the winning one in the competition of the Dominion Life Underwriters' Association for the best essay on salesmanship. It was written by Mr. D. H. Shortell, of the Montreal agency of the Confederation Life Assurance Company, Toronto:—

Salesmanship is the art exemplified in properly adjusting demand and supply. Viewed thus, its importance to society may be readily seen. It serves as the balance-wheel of modern economic life, preventing waste and preventing want. Again, looking at it from the point of view of the individual, since every man has something to sell which some other man wishes to buy, salesmanship enters, whether we will it or not, into the lives of each and every one of us. But only those men are known as salesmen whose efforts are openly devoted to the disposal of goods or other values. Their duties vary much—some have duties comparatively simple, others comparatively complex. Some so-called salesmen are mere order-takers—their work is vital.

In grading the duties of salesmen according to the difficulties they meet, it will be found that few have duties more difficult than those of the life insurance agent. For the very same reason none has more opportunity for the exercise of outstanding talent. For his market or buyers must be sought from unknown sources, and his wares at first sight are not attractive. He must, therefore, discover a buyer, educate him to the advantages of a contract apparently presenting no immediate gain, and persuade him of the necessity of entering the contract at once. His appeal must be to the intellect, to the emotions and to the will—in short, to the whole man.

A Sound Proposition.

How, then, is this almost impossible looking feat of skilful salesmanship to be accomplished? And how varied to suit the millions of individual buyers? Evidently there must be some unity in the variety of method as there is variety in the unity—and this characterizes all great art. The very elusive character of the proposition affords scope for salesmanship of a high order, and then the problem becomes quite simple.

For (1) the proposition is absolutely sound. Nothing bigger, nothing more stable, nothing more philanthropic, nothing more safely guarded and wisely administered exists in modern economic life than life insurance. Its coldly logical truth is based on extensive experience and pure mathematics. Its warmth of charity is measured not in terms of present needs, but of future safeguards. It is the counterpart of religion itself. The latter lays up spiritual treasures for the life beyond the grave, while the former stores temporal ones for the here or the hereafter.

And (2) it will inevitably mature. For what more certain than time and death? Endowment policies are based on the first, life policies on the second. Still, men are prone to buy a luxury and let a necessity wait: to buy an auto on credit and fail to provide a winter's supply of coal.

Persuasiveness, a Great Quality.

From this very weakness of human nature springs the need of the greatest quality in a life insurance salesman, viz., persuasiveness. There is little difficulty in convincing the average man of his personal need of insurance (if he has anything insurable), but to persuade him to act now—there's the question. And to do it gracefully, artfully and forcefully in order to compel immediate action will tax the best efforts of the best salesman. Here can easily be seen the room for indefinite advancement in the art of selling. Each policy sold may accumulate a certain momentum for selling, but may be absolutely no guide in selling the next; so different are individuals that each case must be handled on its own merits. This infinite variety lends not only attractiveness to the work, but impetus. Further, it lends security, for prospects will never be wanting. The agent must select his own, and in so doing display another phase of his art. No trusts or corporations can ever corner the market.

Another stimulus to action and progressive methods is the amount of good done. For few buy insurance without being canvassed. Hence the salesman is not only doing phil-

anthropic work, but likely doing some work which would remain undone if he failed to do it.

Finally, no line of selling will be long continued if permanent satisfaction and pleasure do not arise from the work. Now, in selling certain lines of goods it might appear at times that the salesman and the firm he represents would realize most by disposing of the goods. Styles in wearing apparel, and even in breakfast foods, change quickly, and the failure to sell old goods results in a loss. But in selling life insurance the interests of the company, of the salesman and of the buyer are all identical; the sale benefits all alike according as it is wisely made. This is what raises the work into the rank of a profession. So the insurance salesman has all the monetary advantages offered to the business man which are seldom offered to the professional man, while he possesses in his work, on the other hand, the philanthropic character of the professional man seldom offered to the business man.

Thus glancing over the whole field of salesmen, it will be seen that none has greater difficulties and none has greater opportunities than the life insurance salesman. Like the doctor, he is at every man's service at any hour; his whole work is philanthropic service. Like that of the teacher and the preacher, his work is always educative, always beneficial. Like the lawyer and the judge, he has ever knotty questions to decide. Like the business man, the harder he works the more he sees to do. He is all salesman combined—the very essence of salesmanship.

POWER COMPANIES WARNED

"So rapidly is the demand for hydro-electric power increasing in the Niagara zone that more than 83,000 additional horse-power will be required within a very short time." This was the statement made by Sir Adam Beck in addressing the Union of Canadian Municipalities at the recent convention. Sir Adam Beck issued a warning to the power generating companies which now export 140,000 horse-power from Niagara to the American side, that unless they deal fairly with the people, the Hydro-Electric Power Commission will avail itself of the machinery to end such exportation. The commission, he said, is prepared to make use of the machinery provided by the legislation under which expropriation proceedings may be undertaken.

He intimated that an order-in-council is now pending to expropriate the whole of the energy generated on the Canadian side, for the use of the people of Ontario. Sir Adam declared that no objection can be raised to such action when the purpose is to conserve the power for the people of Canada.

INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING FOR LIFE COMPANIES

At the recent annual convention at Winnipeg of the life underwriters, Mr. B. W. N. Grigg, publicity manager of the Mutual Life Assurance Company of Canada, Waterloo, Ont., pointed out that institutional advertising would certainly create a very much enlarged market and those companies would capture the market who did the most attractive individual advertising. Thus, if the companies provided the funds, there would be a heavy contribution required for the "pool," and also a big additional outlay in order to take advantage of the increased demand. The speaker suggested that the expense might be borne by the agents and the companies jointly—the agents contributing either directly or by a reduced commission. Mr. Grigg maintained that an agent could afford to work at a lower commission for a well-advertised company, than for one that did not advertise. Similarly, if the co-operative advertising were paid for by the companies it would be fair to expect a reduction of commissions. It was hoped the new movement would increase the amount of business produced for the same money and at the same time the agent's income would not suffer because he would more than make up in the number of applications for the reduced commission on the individual policy.

It will be seen from the above what a complex problem is presented by institutional advertising and in view of the heavy expense the speaker suggested that the project be held over until after the war when the strain of the extra mortality incident to the war would be relaxed. In any event, if adopted, it would be a great success if properly done and while increasing the amount of the new business would effect an economy which to-day is so vital to the interests of life insurance.