

and ask him the value, he knows that so-and-so will probably put the customer on hold and call Harry himself on one of Mendelson's three other lines and the button will light up on the phone that the customer's hanging onto and Harry will pick up the extension and so-and-so will say. "Uh, Harry, what's the value of such and-such a coin?" It's happened before.

So Harry's a genuine expert and even though he pretends to regard experts as unabashed loudmouths. It's clear that that's not his opinion of a real expert, which is what he is and pretty tightlipped about it too. Funny thing though—the last thing anybody would ever say about Harry Mendelson is that he is tightlipped. He's a talker.

"When I was nine years old. I kicked my brother and God said he would punish me. He did. Look at this staff I got. The other day I yelled, 'Hey, Stupid,' and three of them turned around."

The thing about Mendelson's is that Harry and Hymie are funny. It's a secondhand store where you haggle. Where you can get bargains. Where you kind of always feel that you're being done, but you can't put your finger on it because they're doing these routines and it's funny and obvious and you must be getting shafted, but somehow you always walk out with something pretty good pretty cheap. Listen.

Customer : Have you got any cassette recorders?

Hymie : This one's in new condition. A Philips. I can let you have it for \$42. You'll be very happy with it.

Customer : I'll give you \$30

Hymie : No, I can't let it go for less than \$40.

Customer : \$35.

Hymie : OK, here, take it for \$38.

Customer : Make that \$38, including tax.

Hymie : I'll tell you what. You go and get a letter from the Prime Minister telling me he doesn't want to collect sales tax from me on this transaction and it's a deal.

[*Almost at the other end of the store, Harry has had the corner of his eye riveted on this scene. He sort of ambles in the general direction His brother accosts him on cue.*]

Hymie : Harry, I've asked \$42 for

this machine and.—

Harry : Oh, come on, Hymie! You can give it to him for \$40.

Customer : But he already said \$38.

Harry : No!

Hymie : Yeah, I did, Harry.

Harry : But that's a good machine. It shouldn't go for under \$40. We're going to go broke like this. But if you already made the deal, then you made it.

Hymie : Yeah, all right. [*He shrugs and addresses himself to the customer*] Do you want any cassettes to go with that, sir?

Customer : No, that's all, thanks.

THE man, happy, left with his purchase. Hymie, happy, rang up the sale. I took notes. You're just like my whole staff," said Harry. "You're pretending you're working."

Harry answered the phone. "Hello, Moe, you're looking good," he said.

More customers came in and were dealt with by Hymie and Lee Mendelson, who Hymie said I should get into the story because he's the only member of the next generation working in the store. Lee is their nephew and will probably be the one to inherit Mendelson's, according to Hymie. Harry overheard this.

"Nah," he said, getting off the phone, "I intend to take it with me."

A customer wanted an old-fashioned, square watch and Lee spent an hour showing him about 100 of them. One at a time, he took them from a huge pile in the cupboard behind the counter. He laid out a watch, flat, on a piece of blue velvet for the customer's inspection, and then took it away before showing him the next. Standard procedure. Looks better. Customers don't believe that a bunch of old watches in a pile can be worth \$50-\$100 each. One at a time is class.

"I only have two words to say to my customers," said Harry ominously.

"Yah? What are they, Harry?"

"Thank you."

Hymie was trying to sell a ring to a well-dressed man who had not come in with the intention of buying a ring. "Are you partial to rubies and diamonds?" he asked.

"No," said the man.

"Do you like an initial ring?"

"No."

He tilted the tray slightly so the customer could see the light glinting off the stones. The man's hand reached tentatively out.

"Ah, I knew you'd like that one." said Hymie when he saw the exact focus of the reaching hand.

"No, thank you."

"Just try it on. Make me happy. Try it on for a second. It can't hurt."

He slipped it on the man's little finger.

The man said it was too small and Hymie instantly hollered for his jeweller, had it enlarged in minutes and rang up another big sale.

"What can I seduce you with?" he said, turning to the next customer.

HARRY told about the lady client who convinced Hymie to extend her credit. After quite a few months she still hadn't paid. "So my brother, who likes a buck, gives her a call and asks for the money. She said she was insulted that he should call. She paid a while later. Then, a few months after that, she asked for credit again. I said, 'No.' She said, 'Why?' I said, 'I don't want to insult you.'"

Hymie sold a watch chain for \$9. He said he felt a little dissatisfied, a little empty as a result. "Why, Hymie?"

"Because he took the first price without batting an eyelash. I could have asked \$10."

A lady walked in. "Hello, sexy, You mad at me?" said Harry.

"I couldn't be mad at you, Harry," she said.

Harry smiled radiantly. "You know, I tell my customers so often that I'm nice that they start to believe it."

Another friend of Harry's walked in. He had been to a funeral that morning. He'd been one of the pallbearers.

"Did you read the will yet?" Harry asked him.

"No," he said.

"So how do you know if he left you anything?"

"I don't know," said the man.

"So why did you carry him?" said Harry.

Everybody chuckled. Harry has a way with jokes.

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