



Top trainer reminds dealers that class is in session whenever you walk through the door, and your influence — good or bad — extends beyond the showroom walls.

› **By Ron Reahard**

Our first teachers are our parents, who from a very young age helped instill many of our values and core beliefs. In school, our teachers helped teach, educate and inform us on the three “R”s and numerous other important subjects. Some of our best (and probably favorite) teachers or professors also taught us to think, reason and critically evaluate a problem or situation to determine the appropriate action. But the best teacher of all is life.

Buddhist monks pursue meditation as part of their path toward enlightenment, or a deeper understanding of life. The fact is, everything that happens or fails to happen teaches us something. Life continuously offers us lessons about humanity, and what is or is not important. Because despite our best efforts, life is uncertain. When you search for certainty in that which is uncertain, you merely create additional stress and mis-

ery for yourself, because you are fighting life, not living it.

While life is the ultimate teacher, I have also learned a lot from some other fantastic teachers: automobile dealers. A successful dealer is always a good businessperson. But whether a dealer likes it or not, every day, they are also teaching their employees lessons they will never forget. Lessons about what’s important in life. Lessons about how to treat others. Lessons about who they really are, what they truly believe, and whether or not they genuinely care about others.

Bad Teacher, Good Teacher

Years ago, at the first dealership where I sold cars for exactly three months, the dealer taught me how not to do business. For a 20-year old kid, to say it was an eye-opening experience is a monumental understatement. Customers and salespeople were lied to, cheated and

mislead. When you walked in the showroom, it had the appearance of new-car dealership. But in reality, it was a den of vipers and thieves. I was lucky to escape.

At the second dealership, the dealer, Tom Muscatell, who passed away just last year, taught me lessons that I remember to this day. Tom owned multiple automobile dealerships, including Muscatell Chevrolet Toyota Saab in Fargo, N.D., where I sold cars. He also taught quality salesmanship classes at Wayne State University in Michigan and was a two-term member of General Motors’ President’s Council.

Tom was a strong and an amazing dealer who looked for the best in everyone. The difference between Tom’s dealership and the first one where I worked was like the difference between Bernie Madoff and Warren Buffet. Not only was his dealership honest and ethical, he genuinely cared about each of his

Are You Teaching?

employees. And everybody that worked there knew it.

The small Toyota Saab showroom where I was a salesman was separated from the huge Chevrolet showroom by another business, so they were a good block and a half apart. Having sold cars there for a year — and been surprisingly successful at it — we had finally saved enough money to buy our first home. One day I was leaning against a car on the showroom along with the other salesmen, commiserating about the lack of ups, when we noticed Tom Muscatell, all by himself, striding purposefully down the sidewalk toward the import lot.

Like a frightened herd of deer, we scattered to our offices, trying to make certain we all looked busy when he walked in. As I sat in my office, with my 3x5 index card file of prospects open, talking on the handset to a dial tone, I watched with mounting trepidation as he strode through the door. My eyes grew wide as Mr. Muscatell headed straight for my office.

It was a true deer-in-the-headlights look as he stopped and stood right in my doorway, patiently waiting for me to finish my imaginary call. Holding the phone tightly to my ear so he wouldn't hear the dial tone, I quickly finished up my conversation. "Great. OK, we'll see you then." As I put the phone down, Tom said, "I wanted to let you to know that I just got a phone call about you."

Now thoroughly intimidated and sure I was in big trouble for something,

I managed to blurt out, "I hope it was a good one." Tom replied, "It was. It was the bank. They called to verify your employment, and confirm your income, because I understand you and your wife are buying a house. I told them that despite only being here one year, you were already one of our top salespeople, and doing a great job. So, I just wanted come down and let you know I'm confident they're going to approve your loan, and congratulate you on your first home."

Then as he shook my hand, he finished by saying, "And I see you're having another good month. Ron, keep up the good work." At that point, he turned around and walked back out of the showroom. After he left, I walked to the door and watched out the window as he walked all the way back up the street to the main showroom.

I couldn't believe it. The owner of the dealership had just walked a block and half down the street just to congratulate me on my new home. Wow! It was something I will never, ever forget. I walked on air for three days.

Every car deal also went across his desk, and he made note of who sold it and the gross profit. On more than one occasion, I watched him stop a salesman and congratulate him on having 13 or 19 units out for the month, because on any given day, he knew exactly how many units his top salespeople had sold.

Influence Your Dealership

Recently, I read the book "It's Not About You" by Bob Burg and John David

Mann. It's a little story about what matters most in business. What separates a legendary leader, a legendary teacher or a legendary dealer from an ordinary one is their ability to influence others. Convince is defined as "overcome by argument." Anybody can do that. Influence, on the other hand, is defined as "the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command."

Tom Muscatell got us to want to sell cars, not because he convinced us to do it, but because of the tremendous influence he had on us. That influence was derived from the fact that he genuinely cared about his employees. As a business owner, your level of influence will determine the success of your dealership.

Do you really care about your employees and their families, or are they just another cog in the wheel of that money machine that cranks out profits every month? When you walk in, class is in session. Knowing the teacher has arrived should be reassuring to every employee, because they know you will guide and improve their lives. Their teacher has arrived. What are you teaching? **ad**



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