**Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong**

**Sales is about people, not products**

I graduated with two degrees in college, business management and marketing, with a minor degree in philosophy. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would use the marketing knowledge I learned from the textbooks in real life; and would use the philosophy beliefs that I never understood.

Yes, a lot of folks said that going to college is a waste of time. Spending four years to learn about different brands of beer and Survival 101 (living on $10 a week in food and beverage). Yes, $8 on malt beverages and $2 on food. That was the time that I learned about priorities. Somehow, we have to set the fine line for survival; just disregard what our wives’ opinions are.

Yes, I did use what I’ve learned from my business management courses. However, that was just book knowledge. It was in working with real people that I have learned what business is about.

Goodness, I could start teaching a course in college on that subject these days. What the textbooks stated is true, in a sense. Yet, it is the reality that one has to adapt in order to make sense of what the content is about.

Business Management 101 is learning how to work with people, how to motivate them, and how to work as a team to achieve our goals. The old days of “I am the boss, and you do what I want or else” are gone.

It still exists in many workplaces, but we all want to work in a place where we are comfortable and feel at home. Money is an issue, but not anymore. If you can make $14/hour and be happy and appreciated, compared to making $16/hour yet be miserably treated and not happy at all, what’s your choice?

I have worked with many miserable bosses. Just because they wore the badge “I am the boss” didn’t impress me at all. All they understood was to get the quota, working the employees 12 hours a day, seven days a week in order to get the job done.

No teaching, no training, no communicating, no organizing and no planning (I call it TTCOP — teaching, training, communicating, organizing and planning — a must for all organizations). So, if the job is done well, but with no recognition or credit is given to anyone, except the boss, what’s the motivation; and why keep going through the grind mill every day?

I’ve been a consultant for years and was enjoying my career of helping others with my knowledge and expertise in the hospitality industry. However, after 9/11, the horrible incident that shook the world, my business suffered immensely.

All my projects that were lined up for months got canceled. “Call us in six months, please. We still need your help. But right now, our sales have dropped more than 50​ percent, we just can’t afford you for right now.” The same message, over and over. So, what to do for six months or more to fill the gap?

Then I read an ad in the paper that a local car dealership was looking for sales associates (well, salesmen, to be exact). I applied and was hired on the spot. “Good luck, we’ve been looking for someone just like you,” they said.

I didn’t understand what he was talking about, as I have no knowledge of cars, period. To this day, I still don’t have any idea about the difference of a V-6 and a V-8 engine, the sizes of the wheels (16 inches, 18 inches, 22 inches … what’s the difference?) and many other terms of a car which I have no clue.

Yet, I could tell the size of the seats and different colors of the coatings. Yet, I became a car salesman, putting my college degree to work and not knowing what I was doing. Ain’t life a fluke?

After a week of intensive training and watching video after video of different models, comparing to the competitors, my mind was still clouded. Lordy, what am I getting into? Then I was given a desk and was put on deck (started selling).

Not knowing much about the business, I was struggling. Then something happened one day that changed my whole perspective about selling. A Hispanic gentleman walked in one day in his overalls, smelling like he just got off the dirt field and was interested in a truck ($35,000).

All other salesman found excuses not to associate with this gentleman, so I stepped in and used my limited Spanish to start an acquaintance with him. It is hysterical listening to a Chinese man speaking Spanish (or any other languages). With a dictionary on the side, we managed.

I found out that his name was Jose and he came from Jalisco, Mexico, many years ago. His family came because Wisconsin was looking for farmers then to help with the industry. He became a citizen and has kept on farming since. He was looking for a truck that could help him transport workers and products. He already knew about the truck as his buddy already owned one. He was looking for a red truck. That was it, a red truck!

When I tried to explain to him the finance plans he could choose, he said, “No, señor, no necessito. I’ll pay cash.” With that, he unbuttoned his overalls and whipped out $40,000 cash from his undershirt. I stood there, dumbfounded and speechless.

Not only have I never seen so much cash at one time, but from a dirty, stinky pair of overalls? No paperwork to sign, no nothing at all, a business transaction was done, just like that. There’s so much to learn in life.

Overnight, my status of being a sales rookie had changed and I’ve learned more about marketing and sales. While marketing is how to get your clients to know your product, sales is how you get the job done. The customers are actually paying cash to purchase your product!

Jose was already sold on the truck as his buddy owned one. He just wanted to own one. He didn’t care about the finance programs, the discounts, all the promotion packages. He just wanted the truck, a red one, and bought it with cash!

I sold more cars than any other salesman during the time I was with the dealership. I wasn’t focused on the rims, the engine sizes and other features that I knew nothing about. I was more interested in what are the needs of the customers. One could tell when they walked in the door.

Most of the time, customers that walked in already knew everything about what they wanted from the internet. They already knew the base price, the car value and all the features that they found interesting. So why waste their time in trying to repeat what they already know?

So, my success in selling is with how to sell people. Yes, how to sell people. Do not sell what you have, but instead, listening to the customers and sell them what they want. Strange concept, but it worked for me.

A family would walk in, the kids would be going after features like video movie features, but Grandma would be touching the seats and stretching her legs in between. Guess who I would go after to explain to her about those comfort features and her favorite colors?

While most companies would focus on their marketing techniques, most missed out on what the consumers really are after.

Ah, so much to learn.