

Title:

It Could Happen to You

Word Count:

914

Summary:

A true story of the writer's experience learning a business in every facet from the ground floor up while a young man living in the big Canadian Apple. It helped develop character, fortitude and taught him how to stand tall in the face of adversity amongst other skills learned.

Keywords:

business boot camp, ground floor opportunity, business training, business co-op, hands-on business training, learning a business from the ground floor up,

Article Body:

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This is a true story. I was 25 years old when I answered an ad in the Toronto Star one day. It read "GROUND FLOOR OPPORTUNITY". The content of the ad basically discussed the fact that the company was new, willing to train managers in every facet of the business and would promote successful candidates into their own office. As well they had large, international intentions. I walked into a cramped, shabby interior of an office smack dab in the heart of Chinatown but what struck me was the energy of the place and the confidence of the gentleman who interviewed me (unbeknownst to me at the time but he was a millionaire by the age of 30).

I was hired on a 100% commission plan only and thus I entered the world of telemarketing selling paper rolls and ribbons for POS, cash registers and credit card machines. It was a classic boiler room only the business was a legitimate model through and through. However, hustle and attitude were the vernacular of the day. These gentlemen had run businesses before but their forte was strictly a direct sales platform where their people were independent brokers and every deal was cash on the barrelhead.

The one big gaffe that they were committing and it proved to be a valuable lesson for me to pay heed to before I was promoted to my first office 11 months later was this: they had a phone book for every, and I mean every province, territory, region and major island in Canada. One gent even specialized

in contacting the Northwest Territories inside the Arctic Circle! Yes, there were citizens other than native peoples residing that far north. So, here they were shipping all over this vast nation right from Toronto.....but here is the kicker. They were giving everyone and his mother 30 day billing terms. Next thing you know they had rung up well over \$ 300 K in receivables in less than 100 days. We collected cash locally but this was astronomical and if it were not for the deep pockets of their direct sales divisions it would have sunk this ship rapidly. Let's just say it wasn't difficult getting sales under those premises and they inevitably took a 25 % burn on those outstanding invoices.

Now, several months later we were in beautiful but not always sunny Vancouver, B.C. Here came mistake # 2. We rolled out too much money on start-up including unnecessary furnishings and leasing an excessively large office space, etc. I was down \$30,000 before I could shake a stick at our first sale.

We eventually got better at the game and reached 34 offices over the next few years before the wheels came off. By the end of a two year tenure, our legal compliance dept. strongly advised us to pay ALL employees a base salary. The two biggest factors behind their reasoning were, unlike our direct sales divisions, we were dictating time and requiring them to work on our property utilizing our materials. Now, the hard knock school of only the strong survived transformed virtually overnight into one where everyone, regardless of performance, was guaranteed a weekly cheque. This did put a strain on one's payroll and we had to be very careful as to how much we invested into one's training and in how long we retained their services. A lot of us (managers) tended to put too much stock in a candidate who exuded professional habits and appearance, radiated great energy and spirit while possessing terrific interpersonal skills and leadership but who couldn't sell his/her way to a bagged lunch ! Needless to say this was rather costly as we strived to develop future "business owners" in record time.

Here's a real beauty. We were so naive when I look back in retrospect and perhaps we placed too many comparisons to our brothers and sisters in direct sales. We did not fulfill our sales tax submittals for the first 6 or 7 months (2 fiscal quarters anyway) to Revenue Canada (our version of the IRS). One day this ripe, old 26 year old gets a knock on the door by a visiting RC agent who isn't there to try our coffee. We have a fairly pleasant chat and 20 minutes later he's departed and I'm holding my head in my hands trying to figure out from where I'm going to get \$140 K ! I guess sales hadn't been too bad. Anyway, I paid it off in full within a few short months as I was fortunate to be somewhat talented in the sales and recruiting aspects of our business. As my millionaire mentor used to be fond of saying, I performed my best when my back was against the wall.

I realize many of you reading this might be thinking how could my predecessors

or I be so ignorant or naive but believe me when I say "it could happen to you".It is too easy to put on the blinders or get caught in a vortex when you are placing all of your energies into sales or recruiting or training that one easily catches themselves saying "manana".I have yet to meet a salesman /marketer who enjoys administration.

In closing,it was the most incredible business boot camp a young man could ever want and I would do it.....well,almost all of it all over again.I don't think the Wharton or Harvard business schools could have prepared me for the success for which I have been most grateful in achieving.