



XIII. ALWAYS DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE

Age: 20

I arrived at my new store. I didn't know it at the time, but I couldn't have made a worse decision. I jumped in without looking believing everything I was told. I had bought the illusion not the reality and walked into a hornet's nest. I had a Hallmark movie idea of what it would be like to live and work in Massachusetts and it wasn't Worcester. I was about to pay the price for not doing my due diligence.

I had been spoiled living and working in coastal communities in Florida. However, my living situation was easy enough to fix. Framingham wasn't too far away and I found the perfect apartment to escape to at the end of the day. In reality it didn't really matter. It was more about the challenge and the opportunity than where I would live. My objective was simple. Turn this store around, make it sustainably successful and go on to the next one.

On the other hand, my challenges in the mall and at the store were not as simple to correct as finding the right place to live. There were reasons why this store had problems and needed help. None of which were shared with me in advance. Despite all of that, I figured I had been through a couple of big challenges before and succeeded, why would this be any different? The idea that I couldn't never entered my mind.

The issue was never about whether we would get the job done, it was how long it would take. Back-to-school was coming and there was very little time to prepare for it. The store wasn't getting any family traffic and I needed to know why fast. If I was going to do what needed to be done I needed to get answers so I could come up with a solution. The customers we wanted and needed were shopping elsewhere in the mall. It was as if the store had a sign on it that discouraged them from entering.

I discovered early on if you wanted to know something go to the source. In this case it was the customers themselves. I went out among them. I asked, I listened, and what I learned was not good. The image of the store was as bad as it could get. It appeared that the previous team wasn't just selling apparel. I was shocked. But, I was also locked and loaded. It was image cleanup and restoration time.

Putting an Under New Management sign up wasn't going to accomplish anything. I had to get the word out and get people to come in and see for themselves. I needed to hire locals. People who lived in the community, knew the mall, and its customers, not just demographically, but personally. We had to get the word out quickly and we did.

It was the height of the disco nightclub scene and that was a big market for everything we sold. I began sponsoring dance contests and fashion shows on a regular basis with gift certificates to the winners and runners-up. It did wonders for our name recognition and as a result our traffic exploded. In a very short time it was as if we were in a totally different store and the sales numbers reflected the change.

I now had a very well trained and equipped sales team that was as loyal as any I had worked with. We had gotten our traction in Worcester and were now poised and ready to conquer the Merry-Go-Round World. The only question left for me to answer was; "Was this a world I wanted to live in?"