



IX. GREAT THINGS HAPPEN WHEN YOU WORK HARD

Age: 19

I arrived in Tampa, Florida. Being extremely excited to see my new store, I didn't even take the time to check into my hotel before going there. I wanted to meet my crew, and see the exiting manager before he departed. I was ecstatic with what I saw. University Square was a new mall (barely one year old) and its square footage was twice that of the store I left. Yet, it was consistently at the bottom of the district (last or second to last) in retail sales volume. Not for long! Where I came from and who I was mentored by mediocrity was not an option. We had excelled in an old mall with significantly fewer resources than I was inheriting.

If my short time in retail to date had showed me anything, it was recognizing opportunity and I saw plenty of it. I began by evaluating mall traffic. What was the demographic of the mall? Where did it come from? Where was the traffic going in the mall? What were they buying and why? What was driving our store's traffic and the decisions our customers were making? Did our inventory provide them with what they wanted and needed? Was our staff properly trained to serve them? Who were our competitors? Where were they in the mall? What was their skill level? And how were they performing?

This information was essential for me to put a sales plan together. But, I would have to immediately change everyone's expectation toward what we could achieve. I started with the assistant manager and began by telling him what to expect our sales volume to be the next day. I later learned that he thought my expectation was a pipe dream. He shared it as such with the manager I was replacing as they took their last walk in the mall to say their goodbyes.

They had a good laugh together believing I was out of my mind as my number was over twice as much for that day of the week than they had ever done. That made exceeding my projection even more satisfying. Which is exactly what we did. That was all I needed to get everyone's attention and to believe in me. But, it was only the beginning of doing what no one corporately or otherwise believed could be done. Sales numbers at that time were tracked and reported on a weekly basis. Sunday through Saturday. I took the helm on a Wednesday.

We went from 13 out of 14 stores to number four in the district in only four days. The following week (our first full week together) we were number one. We beat the big boys and my former store in Jacksonville and that was no easy task. It was extremely exciting. But like a game on a team's schedule it was just one week. I believed we not only could continue being number one in the district, but in the southeast region as well. In a matter of only six weeks we grew weekly sales volume 450 percent and were on our way.

This was all great. However, we had one big problem. We were running out of product to sell. We were putting up these extraordinary numbers with the lowest inventory in the region. The rate of travel for new merchandise couldn't keep up with our selling pace. There was only one thing I could do to keep up our momentum and growth. Transfer enough inventory from the other stores in Tampa, Clearwater and St. Petersburg to keep us going until it could. And that is what we did.

With corporate agreeing I was able after store hours to do transfers. It required many all nighters. And I mean all night. There were a couple of days where I went from working all day to closing to transferring to restocking before opening and starting my day all over again without even closing my eyes for a moment. I could send staff home to sleep, but I needed to be there. When you are 19 and highly motivated you can do it. It was Navy SEAL training for retail. We weathered the storm of success and we were on our way.