

SALES STAR



Chet Holmes: A Selling Phenomenon

[By Mary Waldron]

He has doubled the sales at every company he has worked for. Genius sales trainer, strategist, and motivation expert Chet Holmes has managed to break all the boundaries in sales with his set of core selling principles combined with a warm and winning personality. Today, he is retired from a career in sales and takes a new approach to the business. As a self-employed sales strategist extraordinaire, Holmes is en route to change the entire world of sales by spreading his personal recipe for success.

Holmes never intended to go into sales. At the age of 19, he was managing a movie theater in a small town in upstate New York. But one day, opportunity came knocking on Holmes' door, and he answered. A woman who owned a furniture store approached him about selling for her. Holmes agreed to try it for a week, but when she told him that the quota for the month was \$20,000, he began to have second thoughts about the sales profession.

Strangely enough, Holmes managed to sell \$18,000 worth of furniture in his first week! What is even stranger is that he did not even have to try very hard. So why did he end up tripling his quota while his fellow salesmen struggled so much? Was it beginner's luck? Nope. Holmes had the natural instincts and traits of a superb salesman.

"I bond very quickly with people. I am an outgoing guy who has a natural affinity and bond with people, and I'm not afraid to help people make decisions," he said. "Most salespeople can lead you right up to the close and then not close you. I'm like, 'Would you like that today or tomorrow?'"

Although Holmes never had any formal sales schooling or college experience, he took advantage of the examples and coaching provided by the veteran class of salesmen he worked with. The manager of the furniture store (he went by John J.) gave him some great training that he implements during his sales training seminars to this day. "Every word that he said to me was never lost," said Holmes.

Once he had grasped the basics of sales, Holmes decided to move to New York City, where he dominated the sales numbers at all of his jobs. Holmes began working in a personnel agency; he then worked in real estate, advertising sales, and, finally, for billionaire Charles Munger, the vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway Corporation, the diversified investment corporation chaired by investor Warren Buffett.

Holmes always wondered why huge companies did not exclusively hire "top producers" like himself. He learned why once he began hiring for his divisions under Munger. "They're *really* rare," he said.

Holmes found that during the hiring process, he met many salesmen with varying skill sets. For example, some salesmen would

have fearless attitudes and tremendous deal-closing skills but lousy bonding skills. Others would be great at bonding and following up, but they just could not "get in the door" or close deals. Holmes realized that it took a certain package of skills to be a "top producer." As a result, he began creating programs to help his salesmen in the areas where they were weakest because he found that it was rare to find somebody who was good at all of it.



Four years later, he was heading and running nine divisions of Munger's companies, having doubled the sales in each one within approximately 12 to 18 months.

Holmes' strategic system designed to strengthen the weaknesses of salesmen was a proven, working formula. This led him to consider sharing his advice and system with other large companies. And since he wanted to embrace the opportunity to work for himself, he did.

To date, Holmes has successfully coached and trained more than 60 Fortune 500 companies as well as many others, including Wells Fargo, Apple Computer, Estee Lauder, and Merrill Lynch. It's not always easy, though.

"Large companies don't move fast. There's an enormous bureaucracy," he said. Because

Q. What are your hobbies and interests?

A. I love boating. It's like going to another planet.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. My daughter's CD. It's unreleased, but it's available at www.amandaholmes.com.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Heroes* is cool. And *American Idol*.

Q. What was the last magazine that you read?

A. *People*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. James Cameron and Tony Robbins.

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there are so many levels and people who must approve ideas, it typically can take one to four years to implement new sales strategies. For Holmes, it has been more fulfilling to work with entrepreneurs who can apply ideas more quickly and easily, and although he has a wide variety of important clients, he tends to stick with those types.

So what does Holmes teach these companies? What is the magic formula for a sales victory? Persistence is one of the keys. According to Holmes, 52% of all salespeople give up on a sale after a potential client says “no” once. By the fourth “no,” 95% of all salespeople have completely given up. Holmes advises salespeople to “never” give up on a dream client.

While he was working for one of Munger’s publications, Holmes did not let his advertising sales team give up, either. After finding out who the top 167 advertisers were for their competition, Holmes’ team called all of them every two weeks. For the first four weeks, they did not meet with any interest from any of the companies. By the fifth, they got one response, which was a huge breakthrough for the company. The

next month, they had 28 advertisers fighting for the prime positions in the magazine. Persistence pays off, especially when you have virtually no competition after the fourth call.



Holmes has even begun to test his persistence in Hollywood. He has always had a lifelong dream of making it in the entertainment industry. With an eye for commercial success and a knack for storytelling, he has jumped into scriptwriting and producing. In fact, as an executive producer, he just wrapped up filming for *In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale*, starring Leelee Sobieski, Ray Liotta, and Matthew Lillard.

As a salesman, Holmes believes that no matter how far along you are in your career, you always need to be learning. Throughout his career, he has studied all of the sales and personal growth books and training methods; growth is the leading factor for a

great salesman. Holmes warns not to trust any salesmen who say they are “self-taught.”

“Top producers always want to learn,” he said. “You don’t have to invent the wheel. There are masters of selling who have great information and insights that have made them the masters. Discipline is also really, really important.”

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