

SALES STAR



The World's Best Salesman: Joe Girard

[By Mary Waldron]

Ever wonder what kind of a salesperson could sell 13,001 cars in one career? Well, look no further. This guy is even in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for being the most successful salesman, so listen up because he is the selling authority. Joe Girard changed the world of sales single-handedly, starting from the very bottom and pushing his way to the top. Coming from a rough life in Detroit, Girard was destined for failure, but his mother's love and support and his passion to prove others wrong kept him moving toward his goal of success.

Girard's tenacity as a salesperson began developing when he was a young boy. Growing up with an abusive father who told him he would never amount to anything made him always try harder. His mother, whom Girard refers to as an angel, would always encourage him to do his best to prove his father wrong, saying, "Show him. Show him, Joe."

By the time he was nine, Girard was working odd jobs to help out at home. He worked as a shoe shiner and news carrier in his neighborhood. As a news carrier for the *Detroit Free Press*, Girard excelled, repeatedly winning contests for news carriers who sold the most new subscriptions. For each new customer they signed up, the news carriers would get a case of Coca-Cola. Pretty soon, Girard had quite a stockpile of the popular drink. This led to his next business venture: selling the cola at a price lower than that of vendors. When he was 12, Girard also won another subscription contest that awarded him a new bike—a huge advancement for Girard, who had never had a bike.

By the time Girard was a teenager, times were still tough at home with his father, but he continued working hard at odd jobs after school until he was in the 11th grade. When his principal reprimanded him for talking in class, he called Girard some offensive and derogatory names, and the two got into it. After this incident, Girard was permanently kicked out of school.

Around this time, Girard got a job as a stove

assembler at the Michigan Stove Company, which paid him more than he had ever made before: \$75 per week. This job was short-lived, though. After a year, he was forced to resign because harmful insulation particles had gotten stuck in his lungs. He has lived with severe asthma ever since.

After a short stint in the U.S. Army before being honorably discharged for a back injury and a series of unsuccessful careers, Girard's luck turned around when he met Abraham Saperstein, a building contractor who would make an impression on him. After hiring him and teaching him everything he knew, Saperstein, who later became a role model and mentor for Girard, retired and left him his business.



Girard made some bad business decisions and ended up losing his million-dollar company, which left him about \$60,000 in debt, with no savings to fall back on.

"I don't care what you do in this life, you need to be focused. You never make a move unless you know that it's a good move," he said.

At this point, Girard had lost his home and cars, and his family had no food to eat. He had hit rock bottom.

One day in January, while he was looking

for work, Girard walked into a Chevrolet dealership. The manager at the dealership was skeptical about hiring Girard because of his lack of sales experience but asked him to return in July when there would be more business. Girard told the man if he would give him a desk and a phone, he would become the dealership's top salesman in two months.

"He said, 'Are you crazy?' I said, 'No, just hungry,'" Girard recalled.

Despite his doubts, the manager said, "Okay."



The manager and his other salespeople snickered at Girard's pleas, but this only gave Girard more fuel to prove them wrong—something he had learned early on from dealing with his father.

At the end of his first day, Girard looked around his office at 8:15 p.m. and realized that all the other salespeople except for one were gone for the night, even though they were supposed to work until 9:00 p.m.

"If you're supposed to play nine innings of baseball, you don't walk away at the seventh inning," he said.

As Girard sat and thought about his hungry family waiting at home for him, luck came walking through the door.

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"I looked at the customer, and he's walking toward me like a bag of groceries," he said. After an hour and a half, Girard made the sale. Then he went to his boss, told him his situation, and begged for an advance of \$10 so he could buy groceries for his family. He was granted the \$10 and was able to buy two big bags of groceries. That night, he told his wife, "This will never happen again," and he was right.

This time around, failure was not on Girard's agenda. He was coming back.



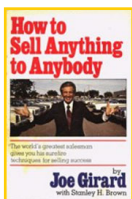
Soon, Girard was selling an average of six or more cars per day. Not used cars. He didn't sell them in bulk. He sold individual cars at retail value to customers. To this day, no salesperson has ever beat his record. During his 15-year career, Girard sold 13,001 cars in total.

Today, Girard spends most of his time writing and speaking to motivate others. He has written bestselling books, including *How to Sell Anything to Anybody*, *How to Close Every Sale*, and *How to Sell Yourself*.

So how did Girard do so well, you ask? He had a solid work ethic and drive, and he knew how to connect with people.

"It's called sincerity. Show people you want them. Talk to them like you're talking to your mother. Don't talk or look like a businessperson or a salesperson," he said.

Every night after he came home from work, Girard used to meditate about what he did all day.



"Compliment yourself," he said. "Because if you wait for someone to pat you on the back, you'll live to be 3,000. No one is going to pat you on your back."

Based on his career and experiences, Girard developed a set of 12 rules that explain the guidelines he used to become a selling phenomenon:

Joe Girard's 12 Rules for Success

1. Be Organized. Keep an appointment book so you don't have to use the words that sicken me: "I forgot." At the end of each day, list what you did and plan your work for the next day. If you know where you are going, you will get there.

2. Work When You Work. Don't take long lunch hours or play golf when you should be working. Eat with people who can help your cause, not coworkers.

3. Dress the Part. If you are selling to blue-collar workers, don't wear \$500 suits and expensive shoes, jewelry, or watches; wear it on your own time, not when you're working. Clothes can turn people off.

4. Observe Girard's No-Nos. No smoking, cigars, chewing tobacco, or gum. No aftershave, profanity, or dirty jokes; and men, do not wear earrings when you are working.

5. Listen! People can tell if you are not listening. The longer you listen, the more obligated people will feel to you. The more you listen, the more likely a customer is going to do business with you. Listening shows that you care. "The mouth should only be used for eating; keep your big mouth shut!"

6. Smile! A smile increases your face value. If people would smile more, they would feel better and make their customers feel like doing business with them.

7. Keep a Positive Attitude. Hang around with positive people; stay away from naysayers, crybabies. If something isn't going right in your life, keep it to yourself. No one wants to hear your problems.

8. Return All Phone Calls. Not returning calls is a way to lose customers and friends. Return your calls as soon as possible.

9. Tell the Truth. If you get caught in a lie once, you are always a liar. You can tell the truth the rest of your life, and no one will ever believe you.

10. Don't Overcharge. If you do and the customer compares your deal with somebody else, you have lost him. Take a little and leave a little. Joe only worked on a small profit, but he was heavy on volume, averaging six automobile sales a day. Word of mouth got around that you "can't beat Joe Girard's price."

11. Stand in Front of Your Product or Services, Not Behind. The most important thing to do for your customer is *service* them, and they will do business with you over and over again.

12. Learn from Every Sale. When people tell you why they do business with you, they are reinforcing their trust in you. You learn about things they like and what they don't like, and if they like you, they will do business with you forever.

On the Net

Joe Girard
www.joegirard.com

Detroit Free Press
www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/frontpage

Chevrolet
www.chevrolet.com