

Profiles of Successful Women Dealers

With tips for selling to women customers

by Gerry Myers

When Patty Yarbrough left corporate America in 1978, little did she realize it would completely change her life. “My Dad had always wanted to be in the car business,” said Yarbrough.

“Chrysler sponsored him and together we traveled around the country learning the business. In 1978, three days after he acquired his first dealership, the financial manager left. I quit my job and became Dad’s financial manager. After a few years, many of Mr. McKay’s friends and customers said they would buy trucks from him if he sold them. This prompted him to obtain a Dodge franchise and open a store in St. Cloud.”

Patty and her husband moved to St. Cloud, MN., in 1984 to open McKay’s Family Dodge. When her father passed away, his business had grown to four locations selling six franchises. Yarbrough ran the family business for three years before purchasing the McKay’s Family Dodge dealership from the family corporation.

Yarbrough attributes her success to many factors, including:

- Handling the ups and downs of day-to-day business
- Staying in tune with the market and what is important to customers
- Providing outstanding service
- Having a good selection of product
- Accepting new innovations, like the Internet
- Being involved in the community
- Hard work.

Tip for dealers and salespersons in selling to women: Always make sure who the buyer is. Listen to what they say, especially if the car is for a woman. Be sensitive to their needs.

Jeanne Brewer, Acura of Pasadena

Located in an historic building, Acura of Pasadena is led by co-owner Jeanne Brewer. Brewer has been in the car business for 20 years. She began selling Hondas after answering a newspaper ad seeking high achievers. In 1986 she was hired as a manager at Acura of Pasadena. In 1989, she became general manager, and today she is co-owner and operating manager.

“The biggest challenge I face as a woman dealer is the fact that first I have to establish my authority,” said Brewer. “Then I can deal with the issues. Another challenge is staying abreast of all the diversity in our business. A dealership is made up of so many different areas and governed by a lot of regulations.”

Brewer’s love of the business is obvious. “The last two years were so successful and I had so much fun,” commented Brewer. “My greatest satisfaction is watching employees

develop and blossom. I like to see their knowledge increase through training and attitudes change as they become successful in this business,” she said.

Brewer’s goals for the future are to continue to:

- Develop her people
- Sell every Acura the dealership can get
- Maximize every opportunity we have
- Make a profit
- Keep customers happy and coming back.

Tip for dealers and salespersons in selling to women: Treat your customers with respect. Listen to what women say—what their needs and hot buttons are, and respond appropriately.

Lynn Kimmel, Lockhart Automotive Group

Lynn Kimmel was exposed to the automotive industry as a youngster. But unlike her peers, it wasn’t her father who built a successful car business. “My mother was one of the first women to become a Cadillac dealer,” Kimmel stated.

Starting in 1976 as an F & I manager for Lockhart Cadillac, today Kimmel, along with her husband Chuck and brother Marc Lockhart, own two Cadillac, three Saturn, one Hummer franchise and an Indian Motorcycle dealerships. “Our Hummer franchise is located in a Cadillac store, but we are building a new facility for it,” said Kimmel.

Kimmel considers her biggest challenge to be finding the right team members who would buy in to her business philosophies and who are willing to take accountability and responsibility for their performance. By securing a good group of people, including women and ethnic minorities in all areas of the dealership, she has built a successful team. “Many of our long-term employees have helped us grow the business,” Kimmel said.

Not surprising, Kimmel also has many repeat customers who have been buying from them for years. Her future plans include continuing to grow existing customers’ relationships and expanding their customer base, especially with the new products now available.

Kimmel believes women dealers:

- Pay more attention to details
- Notice the physical environment of the facility more
- Want to make sure the customer is comfortable
- Empathize with the customer more.
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Tip for dealers and salespersons in selling to women: Make sure the environment is welcoming to female employees and customers. Women want to be listened to and their questions answered openly and honestly.