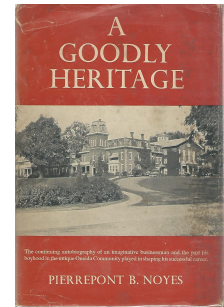


A Goodly Heritage

Pierrepoint B. Noyes (1958)

*Notes by Bob Evely
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2025.*



I love old books and stumbled across this one awhile back at a used bookstore. This is an intriguing memoir of the author's career in business, at Oneida Ltd., makers of "Community Plate" (silverware). Oneida Ltd. grew out of the commercial side of the "Oneida Community," which was a religious/social experiment founded in Oneida, New York. It was active from 1848 to 1881.

I gleaned a few excerpts that I believe are motivational to the businessperson and salesperson of our present day.

Sales perseverance (p. 55-6)

I was impressed in this part of the book by the personal goal-setting and commitment to meeting that goal through strong perseverance.

I should not like to suggest that life became a bed of roses after I discovered the key to overcoming the negatives of certain classes of buyers. It was always grim business. I zigzagged back and forth across icy avenues and streets all day long, often without getting a single order until late in the afternoon.

Very soon, however, I was able to adopt a rule that I would not go to bed any night until I had made a profit of at least three dollars, a resolution which often compelled me to spend the evening, sometimes until a very late hour, working Sixth Avenue, where the proprietors of all-night restaurants could be seen only at night. It took me four weeks to work Third Avenue – my best avenue – from Cooper Union to Fordham. Seventh Avenue required only a week. ... I aimed to cover every street in New York which sheltered a restaurant.

Taking ownership of success (p. 107)

Note the ownership taken by Noyes who saw the need to keep his factory running at full capacity.

Whenever we were threatened with a shortage of work, I used to pack my bag and sally forth, and I rarely came home until I had found some business to fill the gap.

The campaign (p. 190-7)

In this section of the book, I found inspiration from a well-orchestrated and executed sales campaign, in this case to introduce a new and improved product line. Note that a well-entrenched competitor was faced. Oneida counted the cost for advertising and an enlarged sales staff as they prepared for the campaign.

In 1901, Oneida executed an assault on Connecticut's monopoly of the silver-plated ware business.

As a last stroke of preparation, we revised and enlarged our sales organization. Grosvenor was sent to Chicago as manager of that office. ... Kinsley was added to the New York City staff. Inslee had a roving commission between New York and Chicago. Beers covered the South, and the Morgan, Allen Company, the Pacific Coast.

When Grosvenor talked with a customer or anyone else on serious business, he impressed his listener with the conviction that he had a well-thought-out idea or plan. The result was that customers listened to him, even though they had intended to say "no" in the end. ...

We made progress slowly in 1902; very slowly. ... However, we were not at all discouraged. We did not expect large sales. We were feeling our way and knew perfectly well that until we showed signs of extensive advertising to the consumer, few jewelers would take the chance of stocking goods they might not be able to sell. Our efforts were aimed, much as reconnaissance expeditions in war are aimed, at getting profitable information leading to additions to, or revisions of, their plans.

In 1903 I disclosed to the directors the significant financial dimensions of our proposed campaign to establish Community Silverware as a nationally known product. I enlarged upon the amount of advertising needed for the undertaking. I gave a glowing account of what large advertising had done for other firms.

Looking back on the first year of the campaign, in spite of totally uninspired advertising (from their first marketing firm), I give much credit to our salesmen. I am reminded of reports telling how American soldiers, at times, have fought and held their own without the backing of tanks or airplanes. Good advertising might have done for us what those weapons do for fighters. But our first agency's copy created neither tanks nor airplanes.

Sales call strategies (p. 201)

I love this description of two strategies used during a customer call. The first is an objection that is faced often – the drawback.

Grosvenor agreed with at least 50 percent of the objections advanced by a dealer and then deftly extracted from the remaining 50 percent enough favorable arguments to sell our silverware. It was all done quietly and with courteous appreciation for the other man's wisdom. Often, in the end, the merchant found himself asking for information from a man [Grosvenor] whose knowledge he had come to respect. Grosvenor sold his full share during those lean years.

The second strategy was employed by Noyes himself and speaks to the importance of extending the conversation.

My methods aimed at an interview prolonged until hope was gone or success attained. My technique involved selling our institution and myself to the man across the desk, before bringing the silverware attack to its climax.

A dynamic Sales Manager (p. 206)

Perhaps we can learn from this effective Sales Manager. Personality is not entirely an inherited trait. It can be home-grown and cultivated if one is dedicated to learning new habits.

Gerard Wayland-Smith became our dynamic Sales Manager. He had an unquenchable enthusiasm and a physical drive that spread to all his sales force of young men. More than all, he had a personality that no one could resist. Customers become his ardent friends, and his fellow salesmen set no limit to the hard work they would do for him.

Nothing is impossible (p. 232)

In 1917 this challenge was made to those claiming a request was impossible. Once the motivation was strong enough, the impossible could be achieved.

Baruch had put up to these steel executives a program for steel deliveries which they insisted was impossible. After endless argument, Baruch turned back to his desk with a final shot, "I expect you fellows to come across with that steel."

The steel men simply shook their heads. There was silence. Presently Legge asked casually, "You say you can't do it?" Again they shook their heads. Legge threw at them, "In that case, gentlemen, my advice to you is to buy a couple of German grammars and study up on the

language of the future.” The steel men agreed “to try,” and I learned later that they carried out most of the program.

Careful study when making decisions (p. 204)

Here is a description of good leadership, referring to Dunc Robertson who took over in 1926.

He is a man of courage, but his natural aggressiveness is always balanced by an instinct which insists upon a careful study of the pertinent facts and possibilities of each situation. With him, negative facts do not necessarily forbid action, but they are always given thorough consideration.

Dunc Robertson enjoys the confidence and affection of everyone connected with the Company and the respect of the vary wide circle of outside businessmen with whom he has come in contact.

There are many great ideas to be found in today’s sales training books or workshops. But I find, at times, that there is much wisdom that can be gleaned from tales of old – solid principles that were once effective and that can be effective again in this modern era. But more than anything, the value to me is finding inspiration and motivation in these old accounts to go out and do my best to succeed. Bottom line, **execution** is the most crucial thing; not techniques or strategies.

*Notes by Bob Evely
bob@EvelyLLC.com*