

## **A CASE STUDY OF EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN SELLING: THE RAYMOND D. MEYO STORY**

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The story of Raymond D. Meyo is one of hope, hard work, family values, and dedication. Diagnosed with mental retardation as a small boy, Raymond D. Meyo overcame great adversity to later achieve extraordinary sales success. This story is one that provides inspiration, insight, and illumination of what is possible in our free enterprise system in which sales success is a function of motivation and skill. In addition, this case study can provide a road map to people who are currently trying to overcome adversity and discrimination while seeking the achievement of extraordinary success within the American free enterprise system.

### **Introduction**

Suppose you had taken a tiny firm, whose debts were fifty times greater than its assets, from near total obscurity to hundreds of millions of dollars in sales in the space of a few years. Suppose that success had made you a local celebrity and that you lived in a the second largest house in the county (Dyer 2007) with over 13,914 square feet and 26 rooms on a 2.8 acre lot valued at \$3.5 million and this was detailed in the local newspaper (Irwin 2003). Would you put your title of CEO on the line if your company performance did not further improve? If you did “put it all on the line” would you really step down if the promised goals were not reached? And, if you would do all these things, would you announce your departure from the company the day before you were to speak at a large gathering of people at a meeting of the Sales and Marketing Executives Association?

Raymond D. Meyo is the former Chief Executive Officer of Telxon Corporation, which was a major player in the hand-held computer business, and Mr. Meyo did all of these things. The roots of Meyo’s character

are strong. He knows the difference between right and wrong and does what is right. He keeps his promises. When his company’s performance did not improve, he left the firm as he promised. True to his nature, Meyo quickly got involved with another business adventure in which his entrepreneurial and selling skills could again be tested. And after that adventure he started another and then another, and so on. And most importantly, no matter what adversity was faced, the Meyo family has always lived happily ever after.

### **From Coal Fields to Notre Dame and Law School**

Now, let’s go back to the beginning. Life has not always been easy for Ray Meyo, but he avows that adversity is an opportunity to show one’s true character. To Meyo, adversity is a window of opportunity for trying something new and different in order to achieve personal improvement. A look at his life illustrates that in addition to just saying this, he really believes this. He has had many opportunities to put this view of adversity to the test.

Raymond Meyo was born November 1, 1943, into a warm, close-knit family with an older

brother, a loving mother, and a father who performed the strenuous and demanding work of a coal miner in western Pennsylvania. Young Meyo had a serious speech impediment and, when his concerned mother took him to a physician for treatment, he was diagnosed as being mentally retarded, a term that has become so stigmatic for people labeled with that diagnosis that the American Association on Mental Retardation officially changed its name to the American Society on Intellectual Disabilities (Schalock 2002).

People outside his family made cruel and incorrect judgments about him. These adversities had three profound effects upon his life. First, to this day he detests stereotypes because of their potentially limiting effects. Mr. Meyo strongly believes that each person should have equal

opportunity to succeed, regardless of circumstances. While it may take extra effort to overcome past negative stereotyping, his belief is that the free enterprise system is eventually the great equalizer and that success comes to people who perform at high levels.

Second, Ray Meyo dealt with his adversity by becoming a voracious reader. Unlike so many people around him, books were the friends that enlightened, rather than chided him. By the time he was ten years old, he had read all of the *Harvard Classics* not once but three times.

Third, he became determined to overcome his speech defect. In keeping with the principle of adaptation, the first element in the paradigm of sales street-smarts or contextual intelligence, Meyo went about the process of



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changing something about himself (Sujan 1999). This would prove no small task. Meyo spent hours in front of the mirror training himself to speak as clearly as others could. In the tradition of many American success stories, Ray Meyo worked his way out of sounding different. Words beginning with the consonant “p” still require special effort on his part, though one would never guess it to hear him speak.

And speak he does! Meyo has become not only an outspoken and spirited conversationalist, but an enthusiastic and inspirational public speaker as well. He openly shares his life and work experiences with others.

Ray Meyo did not always know that sales and business management would be his life’s work. Initially, his love of books led him to study medieval history at The University of Notre Dame, where he completed an undergraduate degree by the age of nineteen. A law degree from Case Western Reserve followed three years later.

The young man who had been diagnosed as mentally retarded was admitted to the Ohio Bar at age twenty-two after scoring in the top one percent of all people who took the exam. What an achievement! Simply passing the bar is a major life achievement for any American. Scoring in the top one percent is truly exceptional. Doing so after having been diagnosed as mentally retarded is absolutely amazing!

### **From History and Law to Sales**

It was while working his way through law school as a car salesperson that Meyo

developed his love for the challenge of persuasion and for the sales profession. He pursued these interests abroad by going to work for an import house in London, England. Meyo was required to return to the United States, however, when the United States government informed him that he was eligible for the draft and a tour of duty in Vietnam. He gave up his job in London, came home, and waited to receive his orders.

After months without a word, he approached the recruiter and, in his typically candid manner, requested to be either drafted or set free to pursue other interests. His father thought that this was too risky and reminded Ray of the old adage that “no news is good news.” Meyo was never one to avoid confrontation, though, and his tactic paid off. He was soon officially notified that his military services were not going to be required.

Books, which had always been a staple in his life, helped the unemployed Raymond Meyo plan for his next career move. His research suggested the potential for a career in computer sales. First, he sold for Honeywell. Then he went to work for NCR where he sold the Century line of main frame computers. How fitting, that Meyo would work at NCR, a company with such a history of innovation in the field of selling. Indeed, John Patterson, the founder of NCR, has been called the “father of modern salesmanship” (Hawes 1985).

While he experienced great sales success at NCR, Meyo readily admits that he was not suited to be a small cog in a large corporate wheel where his candid expressions were not

always well received. Consequently, he decided to go to work for a much smaller firm, Marketing Systems, Inc. (MSI). This innovative company was a manufacturer of hand-held computers used for inventory control within the retailing sector.

### **Building a Company and a Reputation**

Exposure to the growing business of hand-held computers helped Meyo become aware of the potential of a company called Electronics Laboratories, Incorporated (ELI), a small player in the industry. In the early 1970s Meyo began selling for this very small firm whose products could collect data from remote locations such as retail stores or water meters and transmit that data to a central computer for subsequent processing and analysis. In 1974, Electronic Laboratories changed its name to Telxon, an acronym derived from telecommunications (tel) transmitting data (x), and sign-on, sign-off (on).

In 1978, Meyo formed a partnership with Telxon founder Robert F. Meyerson to run the company and they moved the firm to Bath, Ohio (Vanac 1999). At that time, the firm had assets of only \$6,000 while facing accounts payable of over \$300,000. But Ray Meyo was used to overcoming adversity. Dealing with this financial challenge was nothing in comparison to the adversity that Meyo had faced earlier in life.

Meyo set out to build on the organization's foundation and expand the firm's base of operations through internal sales growth and the purchase of other companies. Telxon was one of Ohio's fastest growing technology companies during the 1980s. By 1985, Telxon

had become the dominant player in the hand-held computer market due to Meyo's creation of a worldwide, world class sales network to promote Telxon's products and services. Over the eleven years of Meyo's leadership, Telxon's revenue grew at a compounded annual rate of 23 percent and its income grew at a compounded rate of 26 percent ("Ex Telxon Chief . . ." 2000).

Meyo's initial role in Telxon was to serve as Executive Vice President with a focus on developing sales revenue. In 1981, he became President and Chief Operating Officer. He was named Chief Executive Officer in 1985 (Vanac 1999). No matter what his title and official duties, Raymond Meyo always served as Telxon's number one salesperson and its most successful cheerleader.

Meyo exudes enthusiasm, optimism, and inspiration whether speaking before a large audience or working alongside one of his employees. As demonstrated by Sujana (1999), optimism is a key factor that fosters a salesperson's street-smarts and contributes to success. Perhaps at least partially because of this personality trait, Meyo took the fledgling Telxon from the verge of bankruptcy and made it a healthy, robust firm with revenues in the hundreds of millions of dollars in only eleven years. At one point during Meyo's leadership, Telxon even attempted to buy MSI, Meyo's former employer. MSI, however, had qualms about being purchased by its primary competitor, then run by one of their former salespeople. To avoid such a fate, MSI instead agreed to be purchased by Symbol Technologies, Inc. Meyo understood MSI's point of view and did not take the turn of events personally.

Telxon's early success made Ray Meyo a well-known business figure throughout Ohio. To some extent, Ray became a local celebrity. He became familiar to many in and out of the business world. He frequently appeared on television, fulfilled a variety of speaking engagements, gathered numerous awards, and served on many boards.

Meyo's philanthropic activities added to his fame and to the regard in which he was held. He made a major donation enabling the construction of an athletic facility at Notre Dame. It includes a 100-yard Prestige Turf field with end zones, surrounded by a six-lane track one-fifth of a mile long. There is no larger indoor track facility in the nation. Notre Dame named the facility Meyo Field in his honor.

This contributed significantly to Meyo's already considerable reputation for wealth coupled with generosity. Always a lover of books, Meyo also made a donation enabling the creation of the Meyo Library at an exclusive private school which his children attended. Meyo, community booster, great football fan, and friend of coaches Lou Holtz and Jerry Faust, was once called upon by The University of Akron to save its football team when low attendance totals threatened its recently acquired Division I status. Suddenly, because of Ray, every remaining seat, for the entire season, was sold.

### **Meyo's Pledge to the Stockholders**

Meyo had recognized that, if the firm was to grow, Telxon needed to develop custom software packages. But Meyo's software development program was not as successful as planned. Even though sales continued to

climb, manufacturing costs and inventory expenses increased more rapidly than had been predicted.

In the Fall of 1989, Ray Meyo, the consummate and definitive salesperson, made a surprising promise to his shareholders at the company's annual meeting. His unprecedented pledge was to either improve Telxon's performance or to step down as Chief Executive Officer. Analysts in both the business world and on university campuses termed his pledge foolhardy. Raymond Meyo, though, believed that taking risks inspires yourself and those around you. His bold move was meant to light a fire under all Telxon employees, including himself.

When Telxon continued to struggle with earnings, Meyo unexpectedly made good on his promise to step down in 1992. The very next day he was scheduled to receive the Executive of the Year award and speak at the Sales and Marketing Executives Association of Akron's gala celebration of National Sales Month with an audience of over 350 people. Many wondered how he would bear up under public scrutiny in light of the events of the previous day. Some even offered Meyo their sympathy for his being put in such an awkward position. Meyo brushed aside such sentiments. He responded that, "It is not how many times you fall down in life that counts, it's how many times you get back up and keep trying."

Drawing a comparison with the fact that the Chinese characters for crisis and opportunity are very similar, Meyo viewed his resignation from Telxon as an opportunity to branch out into a noncompeting area and to start other business ventures.

## Conclusion

Since leaving Telxon, Meyo has achieved exceptional business success over and over again. He continues to live the American dream. A firm believer in capitalism and the merits of entrepreneurship, Meyo has worked on a number of different business projects. What he likes to do is obtain an ownership position in a small firm, add value to it, then sell his ownership position and find another opportunity in which he can add value. He has also successfully started his own ventures from scratch.

Meyo has honed his sales and entrepreneurial skills over the years. He states that he works on closing the sale from the very beginning of each sales call. His interaction with his opposite number in the buyer-seller dyad begins with Meyo asking what he can do for that other person. "People will state only two or three reasons for making a purchase," declares Meyo, "so it is up to me to find out just what the key criteria are."

Ray Meyo believes that an essential element of any successful sale is making the customer feel comfortable and safe. Customers must be treated with respect and must be convinced of the marketer's reliability and concern for the consumer's well being. People who know Ray Meyo's story could hardly doubt the honor and the trusted word of this sales executive.

"The highest human endeavor is to ethically persuade someone to your point of view," states Raymond Meyo. Those words clearly and succinctly express the philosophy of a man who has known tremendous success as a corporate executive and community leader. Yet, even with those attainments to his credit, he still loves to sell and continues to think of himself as a salesperson first and foremost.

Ray Meyo clearly and consistently shows that he really does see adversity as a window of opportunity for improvement and as a chance to find new success.

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