

A DAY in the LIFE OF...

A Car Salesman in Vermillion

By Elyse Brightman
The Plain Talk

When it comes time to buy a new car, going to a dealership and dealing with a salesman is thought of to be an arduous task.

Many car salesmen are stereotyped as pushy and difficult so we rarely open up to them and get to see their more human side, but a car salesman is really there to help customers fulfill a need as well as make a living just like everyone else.

"Selling cars, you don't get to save the world, but you do get to fulfill a need and if you go after selling cars with the idea that you're going to help them find what they want, you're going to be a lot more successful at it then just wanting to sell something you can see," said Dan VanOsdel, a car salesman at Vermillion Ford.

VanOsdel starts his mornings well before talking to any customers. For the last 17 years around 3 a.m., he delivers newspapers in Yankton.

"I throw bundles out of my car to the schools, hospitals, some commercial accounts. I drive around for an hour and a half doing that," he said.

Then he makes the commute to arrive at the Ford dealership around

8:30 a.m.

"Every morning when I get to work I write down who I've got coming in that day. We get some emails and I respond to them. And I put a star when I've had a real solid contact and my goal is to have at least 10 of those every day," VanOsdel said.

Each of those stars tell him that he's making a customer happy and his ultimate goal is to make a lot of people happy.

"Especially your banker," he joked.

VanOsdel doesn't measure success based on the number of sales he makes, but rather will consider it a successful day if he makes those 10 stars even if it's just by talking to customers and listens to what they want so he can search for it.

"That presents a challenge to find it," he said. "Nothing sweeter than having some guy come in and tell you he wants this or that and it's really unusual. Then three days later you find it. That's a real heart pounder for me."

VanOsdel started his career in sales by selling beer for nine years then moved to selling encyclopedias door-to-door. After finding encyclopedias tough to sell full time, he accepted a job selling cars at Ford-Chrysler dealership

in Yankton where he stayed for 18 years.

After leaving there, he bounced around between a few places including a GMC dealer and another Chrysler dealer before being offered a job with the Vermillion Ford.

"(A good car salesman is) honest and just looking out for our customer and just following through on commitments and just trying to be as fair as possible," said Donny Stewart, the general manager at Vermillion Ford.

Stewart has been working with VanOsdel for three years and says VanOsdel is a lot better at it than he is.

"He really cares about his customers and he's just a good guy all around. He tries extremely hard for everything," said Stewart.

Dealing with all kinds of people can make customer service jobs challenging, but all the different people is really what VanOsdel likes about selling cars.

"Some people like to, along with buying a car, they like to let you know how much they know about cars, and you just let them. The best salesmen are the guys that hardly ever say anything. Just listen. We sell with our ears," VanOsdel explains.



Dan VanOsdel, a car salesman at Vermillion Ford, says the most important part about selling a car is just listening to what the customer needs.

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"The more you talk the less you're doing."

Though he likes to deal with everyone, there are certain people Dan pays attention to more than others.

"When a couple come in, I always pay attention to what the woman says more than the guy because they can say what they want but she's the final decision maker," he said. "Every guy in the world can say they're in charge but they're not. The wife usually is."

"You always want to make sure you can get them together if you can."

The cars that VanOsdel

finds sell the best are those that are inexpensive and reliable.

"Anything in that \$5,000 and under category, that's worth it, those sell real well," he says and adds pick-ups are another big seller because of farming purposes.

As for his choice of car? "I drive a Ford Focus. I know I look pretty big for driving a Ford Focus, don't I," he said with a laugh.

"It's inexpensive, runs well, drives well. Good gas mileage. Believe it or not it fits me well."

"And my wife got tired of driving old used cars so

finally had to break down and get a newer one."

The day usually ends around 6 o'clock unless VanOsdel stops in Yankton during his drive home to talk to someone about their car. If that happens, he could work until 7 or 8.

"I don't have to but it's convenient for them for me to come over and look at their car," he said.

Car salesmen are paid on commission meaning they are more apt to work and take minimal days off, but when someone loves a job as much as VanOsdel, it seems the best place to find him would be at his desk.

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read it, the students would get a point and if they had, the athletes would get a point."

Elementary and college students alike were equally touched.

"We went there and encouraged them to continue to read and helping them realize reading is thinking, reading is going to get you to the next level," said USD Women's Basketball coach Chuck Love. "Reading in college, that's an in. They can do it right now to get a head start. They're going to be future stars here. We believe in them. Going to the school every single day, trying to read to them, play games with them and trying to keep it exciting I believe that was the biggest thing for us."

According to Galvin, the reading program had four major benchmarks that were celebrated in turn when reached.

At 250,000 minutes, parents were invited to the school for a 'Read and Feed.'

Once 500,000 minutes was reached, the kids hit the road.

"We put the kids on busses and each grade level picked some place they wanted to go and read," Galvin said. "It was like going on tour but we read instead."

Students retreated to places like Old Main, the Wellness Center, the W.H. Over Museum on USD campus as well as the public library.

"When we hit 750,000 minutes, it happened to fall when the Coyotes were playing in championship of the league tournament so we went to the gym to cheer them on."

Then of course there was the million minute mark which the kids celebrated Tuesday at the Dome.

"You guys are awesome," Love said during the rally. "We appreciate you coming to the Dome today and having a little bit of fun with us. Fourth and fifth graders, I want you to know second and third graders lost to me every game in dodgeball. If you want to face me in basketball, dodgeball, four-square, come find me."

The athletes made sure to let the kids know how much they enjoyed the time together.

"It was great to play with you guys," said

Brandon Bos of the Men's team. "When I was your age something like this was a dream to me. I hope you guys enjoyed this day. You deserved it."

"We were regular season champions and that was our goal and it feels so good to achieve that goal and I bet all of you feel good achieving that goal," said Margaret McCloud of the women's team. "All of you supported each other in reaching that goal like we supported each other to reach our goal."

A few Jolley kids also took an opportunity to publicly thank the athletes.

"In the past I did not like reading books," said Brady. "When the USD basketball team came in they pumped me up for reading. They talked about the importance of reading. They said reading makes you smarter. Then I started reading about 30 minutes a day. Now I actually enjoy reading. I am so glad that I listened to the advice that the USD basketball team gave me about reading. I really look up to them. I hope in the future I have the chance to encourage kids to read every day."

"Every Thursday they came to tell us that reading is important and that we'll need it later in life," said Mackenzie. "I think they're the whole reason we're getting better at reading. You have the power to inspire others like they inspire us through our lives, not just to read but to also make good choices."

Coach Love knows first hand how influential reading can be throughout your life.

"Reading has been huge in my life," he said. "I grew up in a single-parent household and my mom every day read to me. It carried with me all through high school and college even when I was done with basketball."

"It just carried me to that next level and now I'm trying to help kids out the way it helped me and that's what I'm trying to help them with as well."

Love's son currently attends Jolley elementary as a third grader.

With the readathon is over, the Jolley kids are increasing preparation for the upcoming state assessment.

"Just like basketball the more kids practice, the more confident they get," Galvin said. "It's really fun to see kids increase their confidence in reading as well."

Taking Plunge for Special Olympics

By Elyse Brightman
The Plain Talk

A brisk wind blew a chill into the air on the fall-like Saturday where 45 plungers jumped into a tub of freezing water at the 6th annual Polar Plunge to raise money for Special Olympics South Dakota.

"Freezin' for a reason is what we call it," said Patrol Officer Jon Cole of the Vermillion Police Department who organized this year's event. "The water, when we last took the temp, was right around 36 degrees."

The plungers each raised at least \$100 for the chance to jump into the water one by one wearing funny costumes that ranged from fairies to serial killers to Fred Flintstone. All together this year's event raised about \$11,000.

"It benefits both the local athletes and the state athletes. We split the proceeds with the local and state," Cole said. "Without the state, the local wouldn't happen."

Hollie Fetterhoff was there jumping for her son, Andrew, and the rest of the athletes.

"It was good," said Andrew, about what it was like to watch his mom jump into the freezing water.

Andrew, 12, competes in basketball, track, swimming and bowling, but says basketball is his favorite.

"(The Polar Plunge) helps fund the trips that we go on," Fetterhoff said. "We went to Pierre at the beginning of this month and we're going to Aberdeen this coming month for track and swimming. It



The University of South Dakota football player Matt Miller participates in Saturday's Polar Plunge to benefit Special Olympics South Dakota.

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allows them to go around to the different areas and just participate."

Many groups were represented, including the University of South Dakota athletics and Dakota Realty, but ultimately everyone was there to support the athletes.

"We did it two years ago and I really liked doing it and raising money for the cause," said USD football player Keyen Lage accompanied by teammate Matt Miller. "We were able to make a little more this year which I was really excited about."

According to Miller, the football team at USD was raised about \$500.

Before taking his plunge, Miller gave a shout-out to Andrew while he watched from the bleachers.

"I met Andrew after the Illinois State game. Officer Cole introduced us and he's just a great kid to be around, he's so much fun, and that's kind of how I met him," Miller said.

didn't know they were going to get the ticket," he said. "Special Olympics is something I hold near and dear to my heart and to see them jump in with me was pretty awesome."

Cole also serves as the assistant director for the Law Enforcement Torch Run, a group of officers world-wide that raise awareness and money for the Special Olympics.

"We're the guardians for the flame of hope, which is the flame for the Special Olympics," he said.

The summer games will be held May 28-31 in Brookings and the world-wide games are scheduled for July in Los Angeles.

Vermillion Area Community Foundation
Annual Meeting
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VCDC Conference Room
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