

Success With Serenity

A Self-Study and Clinic on Sales and Marketing Gleaned From 42 Years in the Ice Cream Business

By Doc Abernethy

Editor's Note: *The loss of Doc Abernethy in early 1994 saddened us all. He left a legacy of wisdom, wit and humor that continues to influence us for the better. We think it is most appropriate at this 25th Anniversary celebration to present to you again Doc's wise and witty look at the history of our business. These memories of 42 years in the ice cream industry were first presented at our 1992 convention.*

Good Morning. I'm Doc Abernethy and I'm older than dirt. The great thing about being old is that you can lie about things that happened a long time ago and nobody who was around then is still around now to correct you. I shouldn't say "lie" because that's one of many things I don't do. Let's say that sometimes I embroider on the tapestry of truth — to make a better story for a good purpose.

This morning I'm not going to feed you any pap: this is the straight skinny.

1. Definition of my title "Success With Serenity."

2. Story of my life in brief before I succumbed to a burning love affair with ice cream.

3. Story of my 42 years in ice cream in somewhat more detail. Lots of stories.

4. Then an insight into Doc Abernethy and what makes him tick.

5. Some tips on sales and marketing: things I've learned the hard way.

6. Lastly, I will give you, absolutely free, the "eight secrets of success and serenity in your life." It took me 52 years to figure these out! If you excel at these, the world will be at your feet. If you do only a fair job, your lot in life will be far better than most.

7. I'll close with questions. Surely some of you are old enough or smart enough to challenge the "old man."

What Ralph Waldo Says

"Success With Serenity" — that's a catchy title, but what does it mean? Ralph Waldo Emerson has a very beautiful and poetic definition.

"What Is Success?"

To laugh often and much.

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children.

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends.

To appreciate beauty.

To find the best in others.

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition.

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.

This is to have succeeded.

Webster defines "success" as "a favorable termination of a venture, the attainment of wealth, favor, eminence." I like to think that if a person perceives himself or herself as a "success" and their friends, peers, acquaintances and associates share that perception, then they are indeed a success.

"Serenity." Webster defines it as "the quality or state of being serene, marked by or suggestive of utter calm and unruffled repose or quietude."

In a nutshell — you did good and you feel good about it and so does everybody else. Win — win — win! That's success with serenity.



Doc Abernethy

Before Ice Cream

For a quick review of what I did before ice cream.

- 1940-1941: Civil engineer, Miami, Florida. Miami Airport construction, highways, seawalls, etc. Had to cook for six months before I got this job.

- 1941-1945: Aircraft tooling, machinery and plating parts for war effort — B-26, B-25, B-29. Tool and die: jig and fixture. Worked seven days a week; every night was Saturday night!

- 1945-1946: Furniture manufacturing. Borax, 10,000 knocked-down tables to carload. So bad had to de-leaf the furniture.

- 1946-1949: Cotton planter, Mississippi Delta. Thought all you needed was a mint julep and some share croppers. Wouldn't think a boll weevil could drive a Cadillac, but one drove mine out of Mississippi.

The Birth of the Bomb Pop

Finally I got into the ice cream business with Jim Merritt and Hearn Tidwell, two great buddies of mine. I joined them at Southern Ice Cream in Memphis, Tennessee, and took a crash course in selling and hanging neon window signs, most of which I broke. After a week of intense training, I moved to Kansas City and attacked.

On the way from Memphis near Marked Tree, Arkansas, Jim Merritt and I came up with the idea of the Bomb Pop. We enlisted the aid of a friend of ours, Jack Daniels. I'm going to take credit for inventing the Bomb Pop because Jim is dead and Jack Daniels can't speak. Not bad for one night in Arkansas: 80 million dozen to date and between \$300 million and \$400 million at retail. Things were getting smaller and cheaper, so we went against the trend by going larger and higher — works sometimes.

Time flew by and we went into and out of the packaged ice cream business, lost our shirts playing the sugar future market, etc. Along about 1970, Jim and Hearn had died and I was working for Sid Bair. Sid is a great guy, he's a bean counter with the characteristics of a crap-shooter.

The Birth of the IAICV

Sid had all kinds of great ideas, one of which was to invite five or six large street vendors to Kansas City in the dead of winter (at their own expense, of course) and propose the founding of this fine organization -- the IAICV. Well nobody believed it would ever happen except Sid and me. After our very unsatisfactory meeting, I was supposed to sell them Bomb Pops. So I took a deep breath and I tried, and — can you believe — they bought 'em! Moral: Never be afraid to try.

Things were getting smaller and cheaper, so we went against the trend by going larger and higher — works sometimes.

The Bomb Pop Jr. came out of our lawsuit in federal court in Houston against Popsicle and Blue Bell. We derived something good out of trouble and chaos. Moral: Always be a positive thinker!

When Sid and his partner, Jim Wilkerson, sold out to the Southland Corporation, they decided to pigeon hole me; I'd just had open heart surgery and they wanted to ease me out. No way, Jose!

New and Daring

That's when I appointed myself as the "new project/new ventures" manager. I had felt helpless at the hands of Popsicle, Eskimo Pie, Drumstick, Heath, D.C.A., etc. They had too many people making their products. Some didn't know

*Never give up.
There is always a way
to skin a cat.*

their costs; some didn't have good quality. About the time you would get a customer on their products or open up a new market, some fool would screw it up.

I dreamed of exclusivity. I dreamed of new and daring products that no one else would have. So I prowled the stores and came up with a "hit list" — Castle & Cooke (Dole), Del Monte, Nabisco, Smucker, Ocean Spray, Sun Diamond/Sun Maid, etc.

Couldn't strike any fire anywhere! I liked the Dole opportunity, so after the sales/marketing administration people wouldn't give me any house, I went to their tech center in San Jose. These people are always lonely and receptive. We created the products, and the tech center submitted them as their work. Of course, I was standing behind them. Moral: Never give up. There is *always* a way to skin a cat.

This Dole Frozen Dessert business was a good one: 120 million dozen sold from 1984 to 1991, and \$600 million at retail. The country was ready for a good fruit and juice bar with a good name; and we created it! Our target was the active young female; if you got her, you got everybody. We had a pretty

low-calorie product, but we were afraid we'd lose a big percentage of our audience if we said that — they'd think it didn't taste good. So we went the "what a wonderful way to eat fruit" route and let 'em discover the "low-cal" as a bonus.

When You're Hot You're Hot

Once you're hot, you're hot. Next came "Pink Panther" (annual sales \$500,000 -- \$2 million at retail). The bar succeeded even though the movie bombed after Peter Sellers' death. Then "Ghostbusters and Slimer" (annual sales \$1 -- 4 million at retail). Now "A&W Root Beer Float" and "Squirt Citrus Pops."

Remember the time I wore a "cowa bunga" tee-shirt to announce that Merritt did not have "Batman" but did have "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?" What a program, and still going strong at Wells. At Merritt, sales of \$4.3 million in 1990 and \$5.9 million in 1991. Supermarkets in New York City waived their \$20,000 an item slotting on the four-pack. Then came Bozo, Widget and curtains at Merritt.

Good Advice

I can best tell the story of what I've learned and tips and suggestions through cliches or one-liners.

- Be different.
- Have an exclusive (item, gimmick or service).
- Selling is everything.
- Give people what they want and when and where they want it.
- Selling is telling a story, a true story.
- Nice guys don't always finish last.
- Be an entrepreneur.
- Dare to dream; dare to try.
- Never ever give up.
- Imagination is "more important than knowledge" (Albert Einstein).
- Never assume anything.
- Never preclude anything.
- Never pre-judge.
- Don't just know your cus-

tomers, have a love affair with them. Kill 'em with kindness -- little things like K.C. bar-b-que sauce, Omaha steaks, flowers, candy.

- Don't ever sell price; you're dead if you do. Sell quality, sell service, sell yourself. You are the only person who can do that.

- Don't ever knock your competitor. They are your good friends; they push you to the limit of your talents and capabilities.

- If somebody tells you they can buy something cheaper, tell them to do it. That's probably what it's worth and what they deserve. Tell them your clientele buys the best, not the cheapest.

- Don't put the tough calls or tough jobs off. Take 'em head on and first. They may not be as tough as you think.

- Keep making calls — keep trying. Remember that every turn-down or failure you meet improves your odds of making a sale!

- Don't paint yourself into a corner.

- Don't promise more than you can deliver.

- Be frank. Price increases, we need the money.

- Make fun of yourself — the wolf has been at our door so long that we put a collar on him and told the neighbors he was our dog.

- Don't fall in love with an idea or concept; read the danger signs.

***Listen! Listen!
Listen! Especially
to the children.***

I've had my share of chickens, like ice cream filled twinkies, Snoopy and the Peanuts Gang (\$400,000 loss), Clammy the Creep, the Italian Bomb, the Big Ear, and others.

- Be ready for change.

- If you're wrong, admit it. You'll feel better and everyone will forgive you. If they don't, you forgive them.

- Don't do research if you're going to ignore the results.

- Listen! Listen! Listen! Especially to the children.

- Don't let people hurt your feelings and don't hurt theirs.

The Eight Secrets

And now for the eight secrets of success with serenity in your life. It took me 52 years of living to figure these out:

1. "The Serenity Prayer."

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

2. Do the best you can every day and then forget it.

3. Think and act positively.

4. Worry about other people, not yourself.

5. Don't overdo anything.

6. Do something. Act. If it's right, you have a head start. If it's wrong, you can do 180 degrees and be on the right track quickly.

7. Lighten up and have a good time -- it's later than you think.

Don't take yourself too seriously; you'll never get out of it alive.

8. If you can't solve a problem, stand it on its head. Then you can see its underwear.

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