

Real Estate

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SalesPeople

BIRTH OF A SALESMAN

**Meet Five Who
Made the Grade**

SURVIVING IRS AUDITS

**CAR PHONES:
TOOL OR TOY?**

**Conquering
Mountains
and
Mediocrity**

by Dr. Clifford Baird

"Born" Saleswoman Debbie DeGrote

BIRTH OF A SALE

Novice salesperson Dee Keith realized that she was being followed as she walked from the parking lot to the suburban Chicago real estate office where she had worked for less than a week. As she turned around, a shrill voice asked, "Do you have any ranches?" Thinking fast, Keith, who had just begun her company's six-week training program, answered, "Oh, lots!" For the next few hours, she and the stranger pored over listing books until they realized that the woman had already visited and rejected practically every available ranch-style home in the area.

Undaunted, Keith finally asked, "Well, could you tell me what you are looking for?" An open, contemporary, California-type house, replied the lady. "I saw a house just like that on tour two days ago," said Keith. "But I don't know where it is." Then she scoured the office for the address, which turned out to be unfamiliar, and asked the customer if she knew the neighborhood.

"*She told me* how to get to the home," Keith remembers with a laugh. "So we got there and walked through the living room, dining room and kitchen and she said, 'I want this house!'" Keith thought she had just heard the four most beautiful words in the English language, and knew that she was hopelessly hooked on the topsy-turvy, wily-but-wonderful world of real estate.

Unfortunately, few fledgling real estate agents experience that kind of beginner's luck. In fact, many struggle for months without selling a single property. The most recent National Association of Realtors statistics reveal that the median income for first-year agents is a mere \$6,000, which explains why so many quit the business in financial and emotional despair.

But there are lots of fulfilled survivors, too. Usually, they are intelligent, personable, ambitious, persevering, creative, hard-working, adaptable, success-oriented individuals.

The five salespeople you are about to meet belong to this club of survivors and achievers. And while they come from diverse backgrounds, numerous common themes run through their stories of evolution from beginners to veteran real estate salespeople.

ESMAN

By Carrie Sears Bell

How Five Diverse Personalities Became Sold on Selling Real Estate



Carolyn Weatherly

Debbie DeGrote, 24, earned \$425,000 last year in residential real estate commissions.

OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AND INTO THE BATHTUB

In June of 1979, 17-year-old Debbie DeGrote found herself at one of life's crossroads. A fresh high school graduate with an impressive grade point average, DeGrote was prime college material. The problem was that college would have meant borrowing money she wouldn't be able to pay back for years. She couldn't imagine doing that when all around her people selling real estate were driving Cadillacs and Mercedes and pondering what to do with their rapidly accumulating wealth. So,

against her father's wishes, she enrolled in a California real estate course. By August, she was a licensed salesperson. By the end of the year, she had sold enough houses to earn \$22,000. Not a bad start.

But that early success only hinted at what was to come. DeGrote knew she could do

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better. "I worked for a broker who had a small office [in Cerritos, Calif. south of Los Angeles] and really spent a lot of time with me," she says. "The first two years I worked hard by my standards at the time—not compared to what I do now—but I didn't have the work habits that I needed to be really successful. I used to sell about two or three houses a month, and that was pretty good for that time in the marketplace."

Most of her early sales were to friends, relatives and people she met while holding open houses "because I didn't really know what else to do." But DeGrote did a lot of listening—to customers, her broker and motivational real estate guru Tom Hopkins—and her fortunes steadily improved. She earned \$36,000 her second year and \$52,000 the third, despite skyrocketing interest rates.

"It was real hard to have a positive attitude when the prime rate was 21 or 22," she recalls. "That's when I went to a lot of seminars, listened to [motivational] tapes in my car, never listened to the news and never read the paper because it was too depressing."

DeGrote also opted to work for a larger company—Century 21—where her income shot up even more dramatically from \$134,000 in 1982 to \$310,000 in 1983, \$414,000 in 1984 and \$425,000 in 1985.

What's her secret? "Having a good work plan and sticking with it every day," she says. "The more people you talk to, you're gonna get somebody who says, 'Yeah, I like that house. Can you write it up for me?' So it doesn't really take talent. It just takes discipline." *continued on page 29*

BIRTH OF A SALESMAN

continued from page 13

For her, figuring out what people want is the easy part. "I ask a lot of questions," she explains. "I'll usually take 'em out once and then I'll get a real good sense of what they want. I sell people, on the average, first or second time out."

And once DeGrote knows she has the right house, she'll practically move heaven and earth to show it to her clients. "Recently, I listed a house and I knew that I had the couple that would desperately want that particular house," she says. But when she and her clients arrived at the home, she discovered she had the wrong keys. "They looked at the outside and said, 'Oh, we love it! We want to buy it! We just have to get inside!' The buyer was about six-foot-four and pushed me up through this bathroom window that was about 10 feet off the ground. I looked down, thinking it was such a long drop into the bathtub. Of course I was wearing white and I snagged my nylons. But the point is, if I know it's the right house, I'm not going to let anything get in the way. In our marketplace right now, a good property will last on the market two to three days, maybe a week. So you can't fool around."

DeGrote has had at least one deal, however, that she wasn't sure she ought to pursue. A few years ago, after listing a property referred to her by another Century 21 office, she learned that the home's owner was a reputed drug dealer. "He had major bars on his windows—had walled up his bedroom windows—and always had the police over there," she remembers. "I mean, you couldn't even show the property. It was ridiculous."

When she suggested that he cancel the listing, he said he had a friend who wanted to buy the house and offered to pay DeGrote her commission if she would bring the grant deed and papers needed to carry out the transaction. DeGrote agreed, but only after getting a disclaimer letter from her attorney that said the seller might need to seek legal advice and make sure the loan was assumable.

"I took the grant deed over and the guy came in with his suitcase, popped it open and handed my client \$30,000 cash. He turned around and handed me my 6 percent commission. I had my husband waiting out in the car. I jumped in and we drove to my broker's house and said 'take it.'"

DeGrote refers to that experience as "my most unusual circumstance." Most days, she gladly reports, are more routine. Mondays through Thursdays, she teaches a training class for new salespeople from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m., and works with clients and goes knocking on doors from 9 a.m. until about 9 p.m. Then she takes Fridays off and works with clients again on Saturdays and Sundays from about 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. As for vacations, she schedules them for the last two weeks of December, "the slow time of year" in real estate.

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"In general, it isn't real glamorous," she admits. "People tend to think you get in your nice car and drive to lunch and go to the bank. And it really isn't like that. In the summer, you're door-knocking and it's 102

degrees and you have to wear your [Century 21] gold jacket so people will recognize you. My husband [also a Realtor] was out 'farming' the other day and he had these new Italian leather shoes on. This little dog ran out the door and peed on his foot and ruined his new gray shoes."

DeGrote, at 24, is an old pro at farming and a variety of other techniques for soliciting customers. In addition to door-knocking 100 homes a day in her 1,200-home farm area, she has her secretary barrage the neighborhoods with monthly newsletters and two or three other monthly mailers. "They hear from me about four to five times a month," DeGrote says. Many of those homeowners have responded. Right now, she believes she averages five or six

sales a month just from her past clients. That's one of the reasons she can't imagine ever quitting real estate. "I just have too much time into getting clientele to give it up."

FROM HOMICIDE TO HOME SALES

In the early 1970s, Rick DeLuca was the youngest detective in Reno, Nevada's history. The work was exciting for an ambitious young man. After six and a half years as a policeman, however, he found himself earning just \$17,000 a year. Surrounded by a burgeoning local real estate market, DeLuca decided in 1975 to try to supplement his income by selling homes part-time. So he got his license and spent the next 12 months chasing after potential customers in his spare time, earning disappointingly little for his trouble. By 1976, he still believed that real estate offered tremendous financial opportunities, but only for full-time salespeople. He decided to become one.

Ten years later, 37-year-old DeLuca is a real estate success story. Five years ago, the

handsome agent-broker with the silver-flecked brown hair became president and owner of Myers Realty in Reno. Today he has 100 agents working for him and is active in the Reno Board of Realtors, which named him Salesman of the Year in 1981. DeLuca, who frequently teaches real estate sales seminars and training classes, was also named Nevada Realtor of the Year in 1984; and last year, *Real Estate Today* labelled his workplace one of the nation's 11 most attractive real estate offices.

When it comes to his favorite subject, real estate, DeLuca sounds like a born teacher. But he is not. Like most people who go into this business, he learned, sometimes painfully, by doing. "I remember working with a young fellow who wanted to buy a house my first year in real