ALUMNI IN RETAILING

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Retailing for me was a first choice from high school years on. We were raised in a rural environment and the world seemed filled with opportunities to add value to products. Early experiences included milking the cow and selling the milk, buying biddies and selling the fryers six weeks later, chickens would lay eggs that could be sold in grocery stores. There were grapefruit, fig, and tangerine trees that could be harvested and the product sold. Yes, there were lawns to be mowed and houses to be painted; but adding value to a product and selling it seemed a more exiting and productive course to pursue.

In later years while in high school, I added a department store experience working in the leading locally owned department store, Cohen Brothers. I was considered too young to be trained to sell suits, but was able to pick up ideas from the trained salesmen and yearned for the opportunity to be a sales person myself.

In due course, it was time to pursue a higher education at the insistence of my father. That would be the University of Florida in 1947 where more entrepreneurial opportunities awaited, including grading papers, having a laundry route, ROTC, and working in the cafeteria. Before graduating in 1951, I was interviewed by J.C. Penney, Proctor & Gamble, Western Auto, and several oil companies but the Korean War came first. After a required tour of duty in the Air Force, I settled on an offer from J.C. Penney and rest is history.

Maybe the most difficult lesson for any young retailer is to “take the customer’s side.” Always work to improve the transaction on behalf of the customer but in an efficient manner. Said another way, ask the customer what they expect and then deliver more than they expect, efficiently! It’s a mental attitude that must be pervasive in your organization. How can I do more for the customer?