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LAPPING IT UP: *Conrad N Hilton believed too much luxury was never enough. Photo: iStockphoto*

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The masters of the (sales) universe

Every salesperson is looking for an edge, a way to get through the door to the decision maker. It has always been that way.

I began this year by reading a 60-year-old book on the masters of selling. The book, titled *America's Twelve Master Salesmen*, was written and published by BC Forbes & Sons in 1953.

The book was based on the fact that each one of these master salespeople had one extremely powerful overriding principle or philosophy upon which his or her success was based.

Not that it was their only quality, but rather the words they stood for.

It is amazing how self-truths become self-evident truths after 30 or 40 years of exposure - one way or the other.

I suppose you could adopt (or adapt) all of these masters' single best characteristic into your own set of capabilities. That would be power.

And so, to challenge your 2015 thinking, here are the master's philosophies from 1953. I have added my own to the list - even though in 1953 I was just a child.

1. James A Farley (corporate executive)

Principle: Idlers do not last long

Starting as a door-to-door salesman, raising to vice-president of sales for Universal Gypsum, and ultimately sitting on the board of directors for several large companies including Coca-Cola, Farley believed that doing several things at once was the key to accomplishment. His secret was doing new things at the same time he was following up and building relationships. Often sending 100 letters a day, he was renowned for making and keeping friends.

2. Max Hess, Jr. (retail store chain owner)

Principle: Strive for a specific goals

Hess's father used to say: "There's no fun or excitement in just running a store. That way it's drudgery. The fun and excitement come out of always figuring ways to stay ahead of the other fellow."

He believed in the stimulating power of keeping Hess Brothers forever exciting, not only for the people who shopped there, but for those who worked in the store. Hess made a business plan full of goals. And in a small-town environment he achieved big-city results by working his plan every day, and having a happy army of people (his employees) helping him every step of the way.

3. Conrad N Hilton (hotel owner)

Principle: Make them want to come back

"It is our theory that when a hotel is in the top-glamour category ... you just can't make it too luxurious. You heap it on. You never stop pondering the question, 'What aren't guests getting that they might be getting in the way of elegance and personal attention?'" Hilton knew that one hotel is like any other hotel. The difference is in how you treat the guests. All he asked of his employees was to be nice to people so they will want to come back. They have been coming back for nearly 100 years.

4. Alex M Lewyt (manufacturer of the Lewyt vacuum cleaner)

Principle: Believe in your product and love it. So will the world

Lewyt was an engineer who was convinced he had built the world's best vacuum cleaner. He advertised it before production was finished, creating a demand in the market with no product. When the cleaner finally emerged on the market, it sold 4 million units in four years. Lewyt said that having the best product was not enough. You must believe it's the best, and share your passion through every marketing and advertising means.

5. Mary Margaret McBride (radio broadcaster and columnist)

Principle: Honesty is the best policy

"If I am convinced in my heart and mind that I'm speaking the truth, I approach the job as I would a sale - with zest and interest. And in my heart I know that I am actually performing a service on behalf of my listener, who is in reality, my customer. Honesty breeds loyal customers." Her values made her a fortune.

Gitomer note on honesty

When you hear a corporate message like: "To serve you better..." or an employee says, "We're doing the best we can ... ," no matter how you want to defend those words, they're lies.

The quote by renowned US author Orison Swett Marden that "No substitute has yet been found for honesty" is a benchmark that everyone will read and agree with - yet very few will follow.

Next week, in part two, more of the master salespeople of their time, including Red Motley and Elmer Letterman, will reveal sales insights that will take you to the next level.

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