
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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**Albany, NY - 17th Convention, National
Commercial Traveling Salesmen of America**

Radio Address from Albany to the Seventeenth Annual Convention
of the National Commercial Traveling Salesmen of America
Held in New York City, July 16, 1931

American Salesmanship

As Governor of the State of New York, it affords me very great pleasure, on behalf of the people of my State, to welcome the convention of the National Commercial Traveling Salesmen of America which is meeting in New York City. It would have afforded me great pleasure to have been present in person and I know of no other body from which I could have gathered more useful information, in connection with our tremendous economic industrial problems of today, than from these ambassadors of American business. However, official engagements in Albany have prevented my attendance but I am delighted to accept the invitation to address my remarks, not only to representatives now gathered together, but to the salesmen of the Nation at large, that great body of nine hundred thousand of American travelers representing all divisions of American industry.

Sometimes, in moments of depression at the lack of knowledge or understanding of conditions and problems which indirectly but vitally affect their own local prosperity not only of people generally but those who are particularly active in official or political life, I am moved to wish either that one of the requisites for taking part in public affairs should be a preliminary course as traveling salesman, or else that traveling salesmen would devote far more time than they do to considering governmental and political problems. In either case the result would be a far more intelligent handling of our State and local governments and an end to the discouraging lack of cooperation between State governments in handling problems common to all much of which is due in nine cases out of ten, to an ignorance of what sister states are doing. The traveling salesman who must, from the very necessity of his job, be a person of more than average intelligence and sound judgment, learns more and understands more of the economic problems of our country and of the causes that underlie both prosperity and depression than ninety-nine out of a hundred of our citizens. His knowledge is first hand, in so far as his own territory is concerned, and that territory usually embraces a very large geographical section of the United States. With that spirit of comradeship, which the Association now meeting in New York so ably and intelligently stimulates, he learns from other ambassadors of business not theories, but facts, in other states outside of his own itinerary.

I would like, to go on record, incidentally, as to my high opinion of those informal conferences in the smokers of our Pullman cars which our humorous writers are so fond of misrepresenting as a sort of male sewing society for the assimilation of gossip and numerous stories. I have heard more intelligent discussion, based on more accurate knowledge of our National problems, from the salesmen gathered in the smoker than in many conferences of politicians and statesmen or those who devote their time to the study of civic and economic affairs.

I wish every salesman would realize that he is in a peculiar position to help the citizens of our various states to know each other better. Not only is he in a position to gather, as I have said, accurate information first-hand, but he is also in a particularly advantageous position to distribute this

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information among those who are tied down by their business affairs to their own locality.

I hope you will all feel a certain civic responsibility to take an intelligent interest in these problems as you go from place to place, to weigh them thoughtfully and judicially and to spread the knowledge you have gained and the conclusions you have reached among those you meet daily in the pursuit of your profession.

I understand that the organization now in convention is desirous of particularly stressing the self-evident truth that traveling salesmen must be the breakers of the trail back to prosperity. I cannot imagine anyone more stupid than a manufacturer who sits sadly at his desk and bewails the timidity of our citizens as regards the purchase of his product on account of the recent business depression, but who at the same time deliberately reduces his force of traveling salesmen, who constitute the only possible way by which he can stimulate the desire of the public to buy.

I think, in this particular emergency, if I were a manufacturer I would double my force of traveling salesmen as the first step towards inducing the public to purchase my goods. I believe thoroughly in the campaign which has been started by most of our public press to induce our citizens to loosen their purse strings and buy liberally and those who are listening to me tonight who are purchasers rather than sellers will, I hope feel that the salesman who calls upon them at this particular time is, in a real sense an advance agent of returning confidence. That they will feel in offering his wares he is also affording them an opportunity towards doing their bit bringing back a greater prosperity.

At the same time, I want to offer a word of warning, which perhaps should be more properly addressed to the salesmen's employers than to himself. I hope word will go forth with every salesman's instructions to the effect that value of his services will be based, not so much on the mere volume of his sales, as upon the judgment which he has exercised in not encouraging his customers to purchase beyond their means, and that it will be the customer who has been secured as a permanent and recurring purchaser who will count heaviest in summing up a salesman's record on the road. In other words, our people should be encouraged to buy, and to buy liberally, but they should be also advised to buy wisely. Nothing is so short sighted as to secure by "high pressure salesmanship" orders so far in excess of a customer's ability to pay for them, as eventually to involve the purchaser in financial difficulties and perhaps in eventual bankruptcy.

I am told that statisticians estimate the difference between depression and prosperity in business somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 per cent of the total volume of purchases. I believe our merchants can easily dispose of this additional 10 per cent so badly needed now to restore good business conditions, but to sell him an additional 25 or 50 per cent by a clever and enthusiastic sales talk would be, in my judgment, laying the foundation for a continued depression.

Personally, I hope traveling salesmen in sound of my voice, who are interested in broad matters of government and economic conditions, when they make Albany their stopping point, will feel that they will be more than welcome at my Executive offices in the Capitol and I for my part will feel that they will be conferring a favor upon me in letting me know what they have found by actual personal observation and by conversation with merchants in all parts of our State and Country.