

## A Career-Saving Revelation

As an agent, I had qualified for MDRT my first year and for Prudential's Presidents Club my second year. In 1972, I began my first job in field management as a Division Manager in Prudential Financial's Charlotte, North Carolina, Agency. The man who hired me had resigned to accept a position with another company. I inherited six of his recruits and, during that first year, recruited five new agents on my own.

By the end of December, I had lost, or was in the process of losing, every member of my unit. I was failing miserably. I was depressed and frustrated. I was 32 years old, married with two children, and this was the first time in my adult life that I began to think of myself as a failure. I decided that I would leave field management.

Sitting at my desk one morning, contemplating what unexplored avenue I should consider, a brochure appeared on my desk from an organization called The General Agents and Managers Association. The brochure was promoting a new tape series titled The Legacy of Learning. The tapes promised to feature the industry's "living legends," who would share their secrets for building great agencies.

The topic of Tape No. 3 was recruiting. It featured a general agent from Central Life of Iowa, Clair Strummond. The brochure noted that Clair had achieved a four-year retention rate of more than 90 percent. His class of new recruits each year included accountants, attorneys, professional athletes, local political leaders, teachers, and coaches. I couldn't believe what I was reading. This description sounded like a fantasy, but I immediately ordered the tapes.

The package arrived, and on the first tape, Clair shared the most powerful secret I have learned in my career for recruiting the right people. He began by describing the candidate profile in his agency. Then he made the following statement: "A successful person never vents his vocational disturbance until presented with another opportunity."

In other words, a highly talented person will not share with you that they would entertain the thought of changing careers until presented with another opportunity. As simple and yet as profound as it may seem, I was recruiting the wrong people—people who were unemployed, young people looking for a job—people who needed me more than I needed them.

The lesson that Clair taught me is simple. When you recruit, never assume anything about the private life of a successful person. If you believe your story, tell it to the most successful people who will listen. And don't be surprised when they begin to ask you probing questions. You will know you have struck a sensitive nerve.

That day, I decided not to leave management but to employ the wisdom and advice that Clair had offered on the GAMA tape. Two and a half years later, the Smith Division in Charlotte ranked among the top in the company and earned me a promotion to a home office position. The Smith Division went on to achieve a four-year retention rate of 75 percent. Plus, 80 percent of our agents became CLUs, 50 percent qualified for MDRT, and one member became the General Manager of Prudential's St. Petersburg Agency.

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