

MARVIN A. JOLSON

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In July of this year, the selling and sales management business and academic communities lost one of their strongest devotees, Marvin A. Jolson. Marv was a gifted individual, accomplishing unstinting success in every aspect of his life--personal, family, business, and academic. But despite his achievements, he was the consummate gentleman, a paragon of humility, a lover of people, and a benefactor to numerous students, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances. He has left an indelible impact on so many people the world over, especially in the selling and sales management arena.

What is especially ironic about Marv's sales orientation is that he began his professional career as an electrical engineer, after graduating from George Washington University. But even during his academic training to become an engineer, he evinced an interest in selling by assuming a part-time position as a direct-to-home encyclopedia salesperson for Encyclopedia Britannica (EB). He did so, though, to support his family, not for vocational purposes. That initial sales experience, however, so vivified him that he began a fifty-year journey devoted to the selling profession.

After spending one year in an electrical engineering job, Marv decided to become a full-time salesperson for EB. He wanted to progress in a career at his pace, not one dictated by a timetable (as in engineering). So, in 1950 he relinquished his slide rule and picked up his sales bag, thus commencing an eighteen-year career at EB. During those eighteen years, he moved quickly through the ranks from salesperson to division to zone manager, ultimately becoming a Senior Vice President (where he was responsible for over 12,000 employees and offices throughout the United States) as well as a member of the board of directors. As a tribute to Marv's contributions to EB, its executive committee noted in a missive to him that he had "...helped to shape the future of this company to what it is today, thereby making all of our lives much better and richer."

Although Marv was inundated with myriad responsibilities at EB, he enrolled in the Executive Program at the University of Chicago, from which he earned an MBA in 1965. Working on MBA classes whetted his appetite for further education. Consequently, Marv decided to matriculate in the doctoral program in marketing at the University of Maryland. He did this with the blessing of EB's CEO and a promise to return to EB upon completing the degree. In fact, EB held Marv in such high regard, that the firm continued to pay him his salary while he attended the University of Maryland. In 1969, he earned his doctorate, thus representing Maryland's first doctoral graduating class in marketing. Upon graduation, he was invited to stay on at Maryland and become an assistant professor; he accepted the invitation, thus launching a thirty-year academic career. And what did EB do? The CEO wished Marv well and instructed Marv to forego paying back his grad school salary!

Just as he did at EB, Marv rose through the academic ranks quickly, becoming a full professor in ten years. Although he taught many different courses, his heart was in teaching sales management at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. He was an extremely dedicated instructor; he enjoyed the students, and they appreciated his interest in them. He had an open door policy and would even accept collect phone calls at his home from students needing assistance. He equipped students for the real world--after all, his plethora of business experience served to complement the juxtaposed theory that he provided. And his indefatigable efforts with doctoral students afforded him opportunity to instill in them a strong dose of pragmatism along with doctrinaire marketing concepts.

Although he paid keen attention to teaching, Marv was a prolific researcher and publisher. He wrote over 100 articles, was an author or co-author of five books (one of which was translated into Japanese), and gave numerous presentations at academic conferences. One of his articles was voted as the "Best Article of the Year" in the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (JPSSM). Moreover, he was the second editor of the JPSSM, serving from 1982-1984. During his editorship, the journal's reputation was enhanced markedly, as he worked incessantly to augment its stature. As editor, he was JPSSM's international spokesperson, as he never missed an opportunity to talk about the journal to prospective

target markets, especially businesspeople. He firmly believed that the articles in JPSSM should be "must reading" for both marketing academics and practitioners involved in what was for Marv "the wonderful world of selling."

In addition to Marv's scholarly teaching, research, and book writing, he also was busy applying his academic and EB training in business settings. In fact, he founded Crime Prevention Company of America (CRIMPCO), a large residential and commercial security firm in the Mid-Atlantic region. Even after the firm realized great success and the reins of the firm had been passed on to his son, Bob, Marv continued to make sales calls and attend to customers' problems, frequently taking calls at his home during all hours of the day and night. Dealing with prospects and customers was his passion and second nature to him. In addition to his CRIMPCO activities, he also was a frequent consultant to industry, serving clients (such as MCI and the Baltimore Orioles) from around the globe.

Marv had the amazing ability to juggle many balls at once--and what he did, he did extremely well. With so many talents, so much verve, and so many achievements, Marv was understandably the recipient of numerous awards. He was awarded the Engineering Alumni Achievement Award by George Washington University. Also, the College of Business and Management at the University of Maryland presented him with the Distinguished Doctoral Graduate Award. Furthermore, he was designated as Professor Emeritus of Marketing at the University of Maryland.

Perhaps the one award that most clearly recognizes Marv's portentous contributions to selling and sales management was one given to him in 1999. He was the inaugural recipient of the American Marketing Association's Sales Special Interest Group's Lifetime Achievement Award. This award is bestowed on "... an individual who has made significant contributions to the academic sales profession..." and "...who has made a career of furthering the academic advancement of selling and sales management."

Throughout Marv's professional life, he had many advocates and well wishers. But undoubtedly his strongest supporter was his wife, Betty. The preternatural bond between them, which was almost sixty years in duration, was replete with love, adoration, respect, and friendship. Betty was Marv's partner, cheerleader, sidekick, and confidant. To observe them interact with each other was an overwhelming tableau, a picture that transcended even what the world's greatest artists could have ever captured on canvass.

Despite Marv's high energy and dedication to his profession, he also found time for two major avocations. He was a golf enthusiast--and an accomplished one at that. Irrespective of the season, Marv was ever-ready to don his golfing garb and head for the links. In addition, he was an ardent Baltimore Orioles fan. Through good and bad weather conditions and effective and ineffective baseball playing, Marv and Betty would sit in their season ticket seats year after year, cheering on their men of summer.

Marvin A. Jolson arguably was a preeminent scholar and practitioner in selling and sales management. Even toward the end of his life, he was extremely active--still writing articles, working on a book, and consulting. His enthusiasm for the domain was unbounded, as was his success. In a newsletter to EB salespeople, Marv averred: "A successful person is one who has developed the art of being enthusiastic long before he became successful Enthusiasm is contagious." Marv's enthusiasm and passion for selling and sales management were contagious, as were his love and concern for people. He was the quintessential sales apostle, ambassador, and prophet, and most of all, human being.