

MAY 19 1958

Circ.: m. Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP75
S. 261,421

Front Edit Other
Page Page Page
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Date:

Pounds Pavement Like a Salesman

Ex-CIA Agent Turned Banker Challenged by Doubtful Loan

(This is the tenth in a series of articles on New England jobs and the people behind them. The articles appear on successive Mondays.)

By JUAN CAMERON

In the oldtime decorous world of banking, staged in marble rooms guarded by heavily grilled windows, banker Hugh C. Ward might have caused eyebrows to arch.

To find business for his Boston bank today, Ward pounds the pavement like any salesman. He scours his district for customers. Sometimes he knocks on a door, introduces himself, and gives a sales pitch for his bank.

"The era has gone," says the 34-year-old Ward, "when bank-

ers can sit in their offices and wait for business to come to them. De. do door-to-door selling to find our customers today."

Sometimes Ward, like any salesman, suffers a rebuff when his prospect refuses to see him.

"But I find most people like to talk to bankers. Why? I suppose a lot of people want to borrow money," he jokes.

An assistant cashier with the Merchants National Bank of Boston, Ward represents part of the 43,000 New England men and women who are working in banking, finance and credit companies.

'Biggest Job'

"Our biggest job today is developing new business," he says. "We must keep increasing our deposits and number of customers to meet rising overhead and operating costs."

Three main sources provide funds for loans.

Seventy-five percent of a bank's customers are referred by present customers who are enthusiastic about their treatment. Old customers provide 50 to 60 percent of a bank's deposit growth.

A second major source is the customer who walks into the South station branch office. He may have seen an advertisement and found the branch location convenient.

The third source is salesmanship like Ward's. He is a salesman by "how much new business I can generate."

As an assistant cashier, he is a junior officer. The executive post brings additional responsibilities and a sharp increase in salary.

The U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says the average banking employee's weekly pay in New England is around \$60 a week (\$3100 a year). The American Bankers Association says officers' salaries range from \$7000 to more than \$100,000 with top at \$150,000, plus possible profit-sharing. The ABA estimates a typical salary

for a banker with 10 years experience will fall between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in leading banking centers like Boston.

Pay Is Better

In recent years, banking, in part to meet the competition for the best brains graduating from school and colleges, has sharply upgraded pay. Today a medium starting salary for a college graduate is estimated between \$3900 and \$4800, with business school graduates, engineers, geologists and other specialists drawing up to \$6000 in the larger cities.

Ward, a native Bostonian, entered banking five years ago after a lengthy stint in government intelligence.

On graduating from Yale in 1948, Ward returned to intelligence work in which he served in Burmas during World War II in the Office of Strategic Services.

In five years with the Central Intelligence Agency he became a crack analyst on Southeast Asia. He quit when he married Miss Diana Goss of Middlebury, Conn. in 1953. "It's a wonderful career for a single man, but if you're married it means being away from home too much," he explains. They have two sons, Hugh III, 4, and Jared II, 2, and live in a Victorian house in Hamilton.

"We play bridge occasionally, sometimes I play some golf, go to the beach or fish," he says. Some weekends the Wards drive their 1958 Plymouth station wagon to visit the family in Connecticut or to Lake Sunapee for a summer weekend. "We don't get away in the summer, partly because we can't farm the children, out with their grandparents any longer," he says.

Ward depends on the Boston & Maine Railroad and gripes about the constantly shifting schedules and service.

"It seems with every new timetable, the early trains get earlier, the late trains later—the result is you're late to work or too early," he says. He usually goes down on the 8:04 and returns on the 5:19.

Heart of Banking

Ward's day in the South Station branch (staffed by 22 men and women) is spent opening checking accounts; handling loan applications, safe deposit box rentals, and outside selling.

The heart of banking is making loans, he says. A printed form helps get information on income, employment, wife and children, living quarters, the use of the loan, but in the end the banker has to make a personal appraisal of the applicant, he finds.

He makes a habit of never saying no fight off when he can't say yes.

"I'm a relative neophyte in this business, but I'm more apt to say 'let's see' about doubtful cases, then see how I might be able to justify it," Ward points out.

"Some customers don't realize we're not lending our own money, but money given us to invest and handle wisely. Thus we keep in the front of our minds ability to repay," he says.

Ward recalls the largest sum he's ever loaned is \$15,000.

He hasn't yet made a bad loan, but notes every credit man has to expect two or three loans to turn sour; and to receive some sharp comments from his boss as a result.

How 'Friendly'?

Ward says bankers have only one thing to offer customers—service.

"You can't be high pressured about an intangible thing like service as you would be about toothpaste or shoe polish," he notes. "But, for instance, if a customer asks us to have several thousand dollars in small bills and change to be used in his business ready at a certain time, it's important to be ready. I find customers are becoming more and more conscious that we

banks can sell only service; and if the customers don't get it, they're prone to move away.

"It's increasingly competitive, which makes it more demanding. And then you're leading with all kinds of people, in all walks of life."

The security-trained Ward points to his glass walled branch, stripped of window and teller cage bars, painted in warm colors and wonders whether the "friendly bank" idea hasn't gone far enough.