

## Ice Cubes to Eskimos

When I'm scheduled to speak I try to come in early to meet people and listen to the presentations before mine. At a recent national sales meeting I was booked at I was able to sit in on a session where the regional managers honored their salespeople in front of the group. The managers detailed individual salesman and saleswoman's innovative marketing and displays, their increases in sales totals, sales of particular brands, and/or new clients they were able to add. Each salesman had a specific state or high population city that they were responsible for except one older gentleman whose sales area was in Southern California and was a few cities along a freeway corridor. I got the feeling that he chose his territory while everyone else was assigned theirs. There were many younger people being honored but when the veteran salesman's manager was introducing his many accomplishments in the past year he described him as "being able to sell ice cubes to Eskimos".

Like many companies they had been recently bought up by a larger group and had gone through a shuffling of personnel and management. This was the first time many of the people in the room had met the veteran salesman. I'm sure the manager was paying the salesman his ultimate compliment by saying he could sell ice cubes to Eskimos. That's how I took it at first until I started thinking about how a salesman gets to the point where he thrives through mergers and wholesale changes in a company, and is so valuable that he can name his own territory.

He wouldn't sell Eskimos ice cubes. If he did he would never make another sale there. He would get to know them and help them solve their issues. He would start with sunglasses and the latest in dental care. He would introduce them to nutritional supplements, polar fleece pajamas, and full spectrum light bulbs for the long dark winter. They would need generators to power those lights and charge their toothbrushes and because of the relationships he had built they would come to him for them and for the gas to run them. A great salesman is in partnership with his customers and would never risk selling them something they didn't need. I'm sure it was just a figure of speech and I guess he could sell them ice cubes, he just wouldn't.

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