



Meredith Morris,
President/General Manager,
Sudbury Hyundai



Manda Freyman,
Sales Consultant,
Windsor Infiniti



Nathalie Aumont,
President,
Joliette Toyota



Tracy Roulston,
Sales Manager,
Marigold Ford

WOMEN IN DEALERSHIPS

A Sign of Evolution

These days, it's not unusual to find women in car dealerships – not only as consumers, but also as salespeople, service advisers, managers and owners. It's another way the industry is changing and adapting to the times.

Although Manda Freyman, sales consultant at Windsor Infiniti, comes from an automotive background, she never thought she would have a career in cars, despite the fact her father builds racecar engines and she's been around cars all her life.

"I have a B.A. in sports psychology," Freyman says. "When I decided to take a year off school, I was bartending and answered an ad in the paper, thinking it would be just part-time. Little did I know that selling cars is not part-time!"

An alternative career path

That was twelve years ago, and Freyman believes her experience is typical of women in car sales. "It becomes an alternative career path to something else," she says. "But the industry is changing, and good female salespeople can be very successful."

Tracy Roulston, sales manager at Whitby's Marigold Ford, started out selling radio advertising. "I was let go because of ownership changes, and one of the folks I had been calling on for radio advertising was a car dealership," she recalls. "He had mentioned that he was interested in hiring me, so I thought I'd give it a try – and here I am, 26 years later."

Different sales technique

Women generally have a slightly different approach to selling than men, according to Roulston. "We're kind of nurturing," she observes. "The buying process is emotional, and I think by nature, women may be more patient and understanding. I'll really hold the customer's hand and guide them to help make the right decision."

Freyman takes a softer approach, and says people are more prone to talk to her about cars – especially men

who are not "gearheads." "It may be easier for a guy to talk to a woman who won't challenge him or make him feel uncomfortable with his knowledge about a vehicle," she says.

More women customers

As women have climbed the corporate ladder and have become more financially self-sufficient and independent, they more frequently make car purchases on their own. "Women consumers have evolved and they are very knowledgeable about cars, especially with the Internet," says Nathalie Aumont, president of Joliette Toyota. "And they see the advantage in having a woman salesperson. They want a quality car that is stylish and reliable – another woman will understand their needs."

Aumont says that while women customers may not seek to do business with a woman car salesperson, they appreciate the opportunity. Freyman agrees, saying, "Women don't walk in and look for a woman to do business with, but if they bump into one, they may be more prone to do business with you more immediately. There's less of a chase – it's easier and quicker doing business woman to woman."

Meredith Morris, president and general manager of Sudbury Hyundai, says that women tend to prefer dealing with a female salesperson because they feel less pressure and a higher trust level. "Some of my female salespeople have more luck selling to certain men because they have a hard time saying no to a woman," she quips.

A hiring trend

Aumont believes that this is part of a general trend in typically male-dominated professions. "In my dealership, I

have a woman who is a parts clerk and also a female service advisor," she says. "It's not just because I wanted to hire women, but because these were the best qualified candidates [for the job]."

According to Aumont, product knowledge is not an issue. "For a woman in this field, there is very little margin for error. So one must be very competent and know the characteristics of each vehicle," she says.

Morris agrees, saying that you should know what you're talking about when you're selling something. "It's okay to say you're not sure and you have to look into it, but you need to be able to answer questions." She'll recruit people through unique means. "If I'm out somewhere and I receive excellent service, I'll give the person my card and tell them if they're looking for a change in career, to give me a call," she notes. Currently, her dealership not only has female service advisers and sales people, but also a female lot attendant and apprentice.

An exciting and challenging field

Roulston loves her job, and says the auto industry is "awesome." "You have flexibility and a lot of fun – where else can you meet a different person every day and build a special rapport with them?" she asks. "When I'm doing a deal, by the end of the day, I know where the customer lives, where they work, what sports their kids are into – and they know the same about me." She adds that like any sales position, it can be difficult at first, but the key is to be patient and persistent – following the procedures and learning along the way.

According to Freyman, the key is to get into the career later in life, after having a family. "It's hard to

step away for a few years to raise a family and then rejuvenate your business. Loyalties don't run deep, you have to physically be there, otherwise people forget about you," she says.

Freyman adds, "If you have the drive, you can do it. And that's what it takes to be incredibly successful in this business, whether you're a man or a woman." 🔄

Krystyna Lagowski