



Rosenberg
Research

*Economic Research
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Dave's Personal Notes: The Summer Job That Changed my Life — Selling Weed (Spray)

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I figured that since we're still in summertime, I would share with everyone the summer job that changed everything for me. This is what students today who are opting to sit back and relax and collect a government benefit are missing out on — the opportunity to go out there and make a difference. In my case, it was all about weed and grass. But not the kind you're thinking of.

It was the summer of 1982, between third and fourth year university in Toronto, I was working at a family-run firm called Metro Weed Control, spraying weeds. As long as it wasn't raining, I'd be given a list of a dozen houses to go to with my spraying apparatus where I'd walk up and down the front yard and then up and down the backyard in the blazing heat. That was the whole job.

My "uniform" was a pair of shorts, a grubby t-shirt and a baseball cap, probably because a real uniform would have absolutely stunk. I stank anyhow, to be honest. I'd go back to my roommates, and they'd shout, "*Rosie, straight to the shower!*"

Just thinking of the smell sends shivers down my spine. The chemicals definitely weren't the safest in the world, and to this day I'm still wondering why I don't have two thumbs on my left hand and six toes on my right foot. I remember being so thankful for soap that summer.

Then, halfway through the season, a salesperson left and the owner asked the sprayers if anyone wanted to step up into a sales role. I had both hands in the air so fast, saying "*Me! Me! Me!*" Now, instead of spraying weeds, I'd go door-to-door selling spring- and fall-time spray and fertilizer. I'd start with flyers in mailboxes and work up to knocking on doors. These were the days before the internet; I couldn't look anyone up or Google "sales techniques." I had to make it up in my own style. I also got a commission on every sale, which was quite the incentive, and soon enough I was their top salesperson.



My strategy was always to start by explaining I was a summer student at the University of Toronto, just a starving student working to get by. It's a fine art to suggest someone needs weed control without offending them and implying their lawn is way worse than the neighbours'. Did doors get slammed in my face? Absolutely. It's like baseball; you have to strike out a lot in order to score anything at all.

My most memorable sale was right after the World Cup; Italy had won. I saw this older gentleman on his knees beside his house picking dandelions by hand. I said to him, *"This is not something a man of your age should be doing."* I realize now he wasn't that old, probably my age today, so no wonder he said, *"No, no, no. I do things on my own."* I didn't know what to say, so I said, *"Viva Italia!"*

He said, *"You're Italian? Come into my house!"* Now, I'm not Italian, but I had recently watched *The Godfather*, so before I knew it, we were drinking homemade red wine at his kitchen table. He bought about three-years worth of spray and fertilizer — broke every record in the book. The only problem was I was too drunk to drive and had to walk an hour and a half back home.

I realized for the first time that summer — at 22 years old — that I had a gift to communicate and convince someone to do something that they might otherwise not do. You're really selling yourself and your ideas, which is true whether you're selling fertilizer or research — though some may say they're one and the same!

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