

Willa Moats and the New York minute

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nobody's got
enough of is time.
That's where she
steps in.**



Willa Moats

They say that before you sell the product, you have to sell yourself. Few reps do that as well as Willa Moats.

“If you can smile, be warm and genuine, that’s the first step,” says Moats, president of Willcare Associates, an independent rep firm servicing Greater New York, northern New Jersey and Upstate New York.

Type A

Though she enjoyed nursing, Moats was attracted to business as well as the ability to increase her income. Having “an extreme Type A personality” made her think she could make it in sales. And she knew that her nursing

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Having hands-on clinical experience, a sense of humor and the ability to have a “presence” in front of customers doesn’t hurt either. Moats was recognized as the Winner’s Circle Vendor Rep of the Year at IMCO’s recent national convention.

Originally from northern New Jersey, Moats lives with her husband, Roger, in Milford, Pa., about 70 miles from New York City. She graduated from Bergen Community College in 1979 and was an OR and CCU nurse until 1985.

experience would give her credibility when calling on medical accounts.

“I had no clue about what I was doing,” she recalls of her early job search. But she had an “aha” moment when she read a classified ad for a sales job. “Medical knowledge a plus; earning potential unlimited,” it read. “I wanted to wear a suit and carry a briefcase,” she recalls. So she interviewed for the job and took on her first line as an independent rep – TENS units. Two years later,

she changed direction, focusing on radiology.

“I was young. I had two kids. I wanted to make money. I’m not shy. I’m not afraid. I thought, ‘I could do this.’ The people out there might have had business knowledge, but not medical. I could talk to medical professionals at a level that others couldn’t.”

her development as an independent rep. “I learned what manufacturing was like from the inside out,” she says. “And I learned how independent reps could be successful or not.”

Habit maker, breaker

Using a combination of assertiveness, patience, networking and good judgment, Moats built her

business to what it is today. She calls on all medical markets, including DME, physical therapy and wound care. With sales associate Helene Philippou along with Moats’ husband, who handles much of Willcare’s administrative and IT work, she represents a mix of equipment and supplies.

“I often say, when asked what I do for a living, that I am a habit maker and breaker,” she says. “This refers to how I see myself in a sales role.”

Moats attributes much of her success to her strong relationships with distributor reps. Loyalty is important, she says. “I’m very supportive of the dealer rep who has the relationship or contact.” And though she’d prefer to make many more joint calls than she does, she knows there’s a good reason why that often doesn’t work out.

“The one thing that nobody’s got – whether it’s a distributor rep, doctor or consumer – is time,” she says. “There’s less time to present, to teach, the whole gamut.” It’s difficult to get to the doctor, she adds.

“You’re dealing mostly with the office manager or nurse manager.” But while some reps might consider that a negative, Moats uses it to her advantage. “That’s when I use my nursing experience. I let them know I come from their side, and that I understand what it’s like to be busy [as they are]. It validates them, and I usually gain an ear when I say I’m a nurse.

“Everything is condensed today, because of time and technology,” she continues. That’s good and not so good. “You can just get a lot more done in a day than you could



Willa and her husband Roger.

In 1996, she “went inside,” becoming national sales manager for Wolf X-Ray Corp., working with direct reps, manufacturer reps and distributors. “I was developing new market segments for a manufacturer that was encountering a change in distribution because of technology changes,” that is, a shift to digital radiography, she says.

Six years later, in the winter of 2002, she went back out to the field as an independent rep, taking on the Wolf line and adding others as she could. But the six years at Wolf proved to be valuable education for

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before,” she says, citing e-mails and social media as examples. “Spending hours in phone booths is a thing of the past.”

At the same time, she keeps a lid on the electronics. For example, although many reps find laptops and PowerPoint product presentations to be useful, Moats shies away from them. “I’d rather make [product presentations] on my own,” she says. “I’m not very good at reading scripts. I’d be a lousy actress. I’m much better ad libbing.”

And despite the ubiquity of electronic communications, some things don’t change, such as making a good first impression. It’s true that advances, such as e-mails, have eliminated some face-to-face follow-up visits, she says. “That has eliminated some of my face time. But that points me back to that initial meeting, where being personable is important. You might only have one chance to create that one-on-one relationship.”

Breakneck speed

If selling in general has accelerated, selling in New York takes it to another level. “The pace in New York is incredible,” she says. “You’ve heard of the New York minute. It isn’t fast enough.” And even though people from other parts of the country might think New Yorkers are rude and insensitive, that’s not true, she says. “But it is breakneck speed.”

To unwind, Moats works out, shops, and enjoys home life on her land in Milford. When she can, she takes the train into the city, to avoid what can be a three-hour drive and the parking hassles that are part of selling in New York. (“Roger has set a budget for parking tickets,” she says.) But it never fails that on the days she takes the train, she realizes she should have taken the car, and when she takes the car, she realizes she could have taken the train.

Breakneck speed notwithstanding, selling successfully in New York is the same as selling successfully anywhere else. “Show up, call back and make it fun,” she says. Product knowledge and follow-up are important, but if you do the other three, everything else pretty much falls into place.

“I can’t tell you how many times I hear dealers say ‘so-and-so didn’t get back to me.’ I use that as my edge. I do not know everything, and there’s nothing wrong with saying so and getting back to them with an answer.”

Other tips? Smile on the phone. “People can hear a smile,” she says. And pay attention to the little guys. “You never know where they’re going to wind up.”

It’s simple, she says. “But it’s amazing how we can complicate anything.”

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