**THE POLO ASSUMPTION**

By

Charles Warner

When I went to work at CBS Radio Spot Sales as Eastern Sales Manager in 1967, I made a number of friends in the various sales organizations at CBS: WCBS-AM, WCBS-TV, CBS National Television Sales, and the CBS Television Network.

Many of us would meet at a small restaurant, Rose’s, on 52nd Street, just down from Black Rock, and tell stories about battles with agency buyers and our triumphs over the weaker, dumber, shiftless competition. The king of the storytellers and everyone’s hero was Frank Hussey, a TV network salesman.  I don’t have any qualms about calling him a salesman instead of the gender-neutral term salesperson preferred nowadays because in the 1960s there were no women in sales at CBS.

After several Bloody Marys, Frank’s voice would ratchet up and everyone would crowd around as he regaled us.  Frank and his stories soon became legend in the radio and, especially, television business in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of the stories were probably apocryphal, but like fairy tales, Hussey stories, as they came to be known, told us how to live our lives and were repeated to each new generation of salesmen at CBS.

One Hussey story told salesmen how to psyche out the competition: On most evenings after work, Frank would join a small cadre of network television salesmen that gathered at the bar at the 21 Club, several doors down 52nd Street from CBS, Rose’s Restaurant, and Toots Shore’s. The 21 Club, or “the numbers” as the cognoscente called it, was Frank’s last stop before trying to make it home to Greenwich, which he often did.  One evening he saw the salesmen from NBC and ABC who called on Doyle, Dane, Bernbach, one of the advertising agencies Frank also called on. Frank walked up to them and with his Hussey-patented cockiness and said, “Hey, you’d better get over to Doyle Dane first thing in the morning. I left enough Volkswagen money for only one of you.”

However, my favorite Hussey Story was one he told on himself, which I am fairly certain is apocryphal. But like all Hussey Stories it is instructive.  In 1957, in his first year at CBS, Frank went to Akron, Ohio, to make a call on Mr. Harvey Firestone of Firestone Tires. Mr. Firestone, who was in his 80s, sat ensconced behind a huge polished walnut desk in an enormous mahogany-paneled office.

“Mr. Firestone,” Frank said, “your name is the finest name in tires. Your name stands for quality and excellence. We believe that your great name should be associated with the crown jewel of CBS’s news programming, which also stands for quality and excellence, *Face the Nation*.

“*Face the Nation*?” When is it on the air?”, asked Mr. Firestone gruffly.

“Three o’clock Sunday afternoons,” replied Frank with confidence.

“Three o’clock Sunday afternoons!” Why that’s ridiculous! No one is watching television Sunday afternoon! *Everyone* is out playing polo!”

Frank didn’t make a sale that day. But his story is more valuable than selling the program for a season would have been because it dramatically makes an important point: Generalizing the behavior of an entire population from a sample of one is terrible research. To assume that everyone behaves as you do or one or two members of your family or close friends do is a foolhardy assumption. I call it the Polo Assumption.

Don’t make the Polo Assumption; always look at objective research with a reasonably large sample when you’re trying to make a point; it’s much more credible.