American author and publisher William A. Feather (1889–1981) once said, “The happiest people are those who are too busy to notice whether they are or not.” Way back in 1927, his thoughts on “Why I Like Business” ran in the Manitowoc Herald-Times. Most of the reasons he listed are the same reasons are the same reasons why I love the car business!

So with apologies to Mr. Feather, let me tell you why you have the best job in the world.

I love this business because it is very competitive. Unlike the sports world, there are no special physical attributes, natural talents or abilities required to be successful. The car business offers a level playing field to all who wish to play. The same could be said of the NBA, but if you aren’t at least six feet tall, the odds are stacked against you. There are no one-legged ballerinas, 280-pound jockeys or 65-year-old fighter pilots.

Every successful car dealer I know is extremely competitive, but within their ranks you will find tall, short, thin, heavy, young, old, male and female dealers. Their success is always the result of hard work and individual effort, not natural talent, physical size or outward appearance. You can be a lazy dealer, and you can be a successful dealer, but you can’t be both.

I love this business because we keep score. The monthly financial statement is our scoreboard. Each and every month, it shows the bottom line for every department, either a profit or loss. It shows whether we gained business or lost business. In the car business, there are no tie games, mulligans or participation trophies. And on the first day of every month, win or lose, a new game begins. There is no time to rest on your laurels, because you’re back to zero units delivered every time you change the calendar.

I love this business because it compels devotion. Wannabes, amateurs and dilltantes need not apply. To be a successful dealer, you’re either all in or you’re soon out. Once you get in, you must fight for every customer, every deal and every dollar of gross profit, every day.

Dealers have to fight to obtain and carry the right inventory and to find, hire and train the right people. You have to fight your manufacturer’s often unrealistic demands, fight to control expenses and fight for your very survival. Lose even a few of those fights, and pretty soon you’ll end up on the sidelines, working for someone else.

I love this business because it requires courage. I’m talking about the courage it takes to order scores of new cars every year that aren’t yet sold, in colors you haven’t yet seen, with new engines, transmissions and technology that customer might not even buy. It takes courage to deliver a $50,000 car to a perfect stranger and put $20,000 in their trade-in, hoping there is someone else out there yearning for a used purple diesel pickup with a lift kit. It takes courage to commit to spending $25,000 in advertising, $1 million in facility upgrades, and $500,000 in used cars at the auction after losing $50,000 the month before. There are no cowards in the car business.

I love this business because it demands faith — faith that most people are basically honest and faith in human nature. The fact is, we are all born with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds, and most of our actions are governed by a general self-interest. That’s why people buy new cars!

This business demands you have faith in yourself, your partners, your manufacturers and your products. It demands faith in your lenders, your vendors, your employees and
your customers. It also demands faith that doing what’s right is always the right thing to do, and that tomorrow can and will be better than today.

I love this business because it rewards deeds and not words. In this country, if you can read from a teleprompter and you’re willing to tell people what they want to hear — even if you know it’s not true — you can become president. But you’ll never make it as a car dealer. In politics, soaring rhetoric, unfulfilled promises and outright lies win elections. In the car business, they’ll just get you sued.

Successful dealers don’t just talk about selling cars. You’re out there doing it day after day, month after month, year after year, to millions and millions of satisfied customers. And you’re doing it honestly, ethically and for a fair profit. When a customer walks out the door, either you sold them a car or you didn’t sell them a car. You either made money or you lost money. Whether you’re selling 50, 100 or 200 cars a month, doing it one at a time, at a profit, with outstanding CSI, you should be rewarded.

I love this business because, unlike the government, it undertakes to please customers, not dictate behavior or reform society. The government’s response to every problem is to hire some overeducated, unemployable elitist wonk who has never set foot outside their ivory tower to mandate a new regulation that in theory will result in the desired solution. Then they’re always surprised by the unintended consequences.

If you’re the government, you can mandate that cars have to get 54.5 miles per gallon. Who cares if anybody will actually buy them or not? Not your problem. When you’re in the dictating business, there’s no problem you can’t solve, which is a good thing, because you’re constantly creating new ones.

I love this business because it is honestly selfish, thereby avoiding the hypocrisy of the enlightened intelligentsia with their smug, sanctimonious attitude. We’re not consumer advocates trying to protect the innocents from the evils of capitalism. We’re not rabid animal rights advocates raging against the evils of leather seats. And we’re not environmental fanatics trying to force consumers into buying overpriced, impractical cars that don’t fit their needs, just because we think we know better than they do what they should drive. Those are the same arro-
gant, self-righteous hypocrites who demand we save the planet from the evils of fossil fuels as they circle it in their private jets.

The fact of the matter is that nobody needs a new car. Nor do we need smartphones, iPads and HD TVs. Human beings need food, clothing and shelter. In this country, they’re also entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Everything else is a luxury. Fortunately for us, it’s all the stuff people don’t need that makes them happy. They don’t need a new car; they want a new car, with all the bells and whistles they can afford. And it’s not our job to try to talk them out of it.

I love this business because it always penalizes mistakes, lack of commitment and inefficiency. Complacency, incompetence and deception will drive you right out of business. Oh, you may be able to get by with it for a while. You may even be able to make a lot of money. But sooner or later, whether your company is called Volkswagen, General Motors, Takata, Gunderson, Heard or Eddie’s Used Cars, you will pay for your mistakes.

Just as there is no way to gloss over the fact that your products kill and injure people, there is no way to gloss over deceptive sales practices, a 35% service contract penetration, missing a manufacturer’s stair-step incentive by one unit or losing $5,000 on a trade-in you thought was a four-wheel drive. Mistakes are an expensive education, but successful dealers have paid the tuition, and they all graduated from the school of hard knocks.

I love this business because it is the essence of life. Whether it’s a car or an F&I product, selling is about helping someone else get what they want, which enables us to get what we want. When it’s done right, both parties win. And nobody does selling better than an automobile dealer. Oh, sure, dreamers are good. People and companies with imagination, creativity and thinking outside the box are vital to continued growth. Goals are certainly a key component of any successful business. But right now, you need to sell some cars. Until you do, you can’t finance that car or sell any accessories or F&I products, and it won’t be back in your service department.

But more than anything, I love this business because each day brings a fresh, new adventure. That means new models, new products, new technology and new trade-ins to recondition and resell. It means finding financing for that first-time buyer, building new relationships, strengthening existing ones and developing a winning team. It means facing new challenges, seizing new opportunities and the possibility of even greater rewards.

Each day offers another opportunity to help a customer, provide a good livelihood for our employees and build something great. God, I love this business!