

Knocking On Doors - Ed O'Connell [00:12:38]

Intro: Welcome to Profiles In Prosperity, with your host, David Heimer.

David Heimer: Hi, I'm David Heimer, welcome to Profiles In Prosperity. Today, we're speaking with Ed O'Connell. Ed is the founder of O'Connell Plumbing, which had the best tagline I've ever seen. It was, "the only plumbing company highly recommended by my mother." Hilarious, clever, very creative, which is very appropriate and common for Ed. Here's a bit more about Ed. He founded, grew, and ran O'Connell Plumbing, which he built into a very successful residential plumbing company, and then he sold it a few years ago for a very tidy sum. When he ran O'Connell Plumbing, he was named The Service Roundtable Contributor of the year. And after selling O'Connell Plumbing and becoming an industry consultant, he was named The Tom McCart Consultant of the year. He was a speaker at the International Roundtable in Fort Worth a few years ago. He speaks at our Success by Design Days, periodically. He's a columnist for Contractor Magazine. He's a mentor for two Service Nation Alliance Advisory Boards and he's an industry consultant as well. So, welcome Ed, thanks for agreeing to do this with me.

Ed O'Connell: Well, thanks, David. When you listed all that stuff, I really didn't realize how much I had to live up to here.

David Heimer: Well, it's all true and you've been a big success. So one of the interesting things you told me about when you ran O'Connell Plumbing, was that you used to choose a neighborhood, and I may be getting this wrong, and you would just walk around it, knock on doors, introduce yourself and this generated a whole bunch of business for you. Can you tell me more about that?

Ed O'Connell: Yeah. I came home one day and right next door was one of my competitors, and he's part of the Service Roundtable. In fact, he's a really good friend of

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mine, Gene Burch. We were friendly competitors in the same County, Marin County, California. I came home and there's Gene Burch's truck, a plumbing truck in front of my neighbor's house. And I went, what's going on here? You know, I live right next door to this person and they didn't call me for plumbing. So, after the truck left, I went next door and her name is Jacqueline. And I said, "Jacqueline, you just called Gene Burch, and you didn't call me for plumbing." She said, "I didn't even know you were a plumber." And we'd lived next door for about two or three years. So, that got me thinking.

And one of the things I'd done successfully when I was doing the construction work, was, once or twice a week, I would stop at a General Contractor's Office and go in and just introduce myself, and try to market that way. So I sort of extrapolated that from this experience with Gene. And, so I went around, I said, I'm going to go around the rest of my neighborhood and just make sure everybody knows I'm a plumber. So I went around my immediate neighborhood, Hill Avenue, and knocked on doors and let people know. I said, "do you know I'm a plumber and I have a plumbing company. And if you ever need plumbing, I'd be glad to help you out and even give you a good neighbor discount, 10% off our listed prices." And they don't {inaudible 3:00}. A lot of people did and some people didn't. There were about 20 people and the next day, I got two calls from my neighborhood that came into my office. So this got me thinking, and I'm spending all this money in the Yellow Pages at the time, for advertising, that I had my doubts about.

So I said, let's see if I can do this myself. So I picked a neighborhood. It was a long dead-end road, it was semi-wealthy. And I just said, I'm going to get a little brochure made up. I made up a brochure with an offer. I think it was free plumbing servicing, to include looking at your toilets, and flushing your water heater, for like, kind of at the time, \$29. And of course, it was a loss leader, and I was just trying to get in the front door, and I had fun doing this. I don't know whether you have to be a special kind of

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person or not fear rejection, you're just having fun and just don't give a damn. But I would go, I knocked on doors. I think it was five houses at night. And it usually morphed into 10, and I just go knock on doors. And if nobody was there, I'd leave a door hanger. But out of 10 doors, I might knock on, about four or five would answer the door. And I tell them, "I'm your neighbor, I'm not here to sell you anything. Don't get nervous. I'm not a Seventh Day Adventist or selling girls scout cookies." I said, "I'm not selling anything. I'm just here to let you know, I'm your neighbor, and I have a plumbing company and I'm looking for new business, and here's an offer for you." And I'd give it to them. And, oh, I also had magnets. Those magnets were really big, a free magnet for your fridge and like that there.

And about a month and a half, two months after doing that, I went to my CSR and I said, do we have any calls from this particular street? And she says, we got a bunch. And I said "yeah?" That's how I tracked, by the way. Do we have any calls here? Yeah, we got a bunch. Okay. That was my tracking. Anyway, I got my Vespa Motor Scooter and I went out to Sleepy Hollow. It was called Sleepy Hollow Drive. And I went down there and, four of my trucks, within, I think it's two miles long. I saw four of my trucks there, and all those trucks came from just knocking on doors. And either that, or leaving a brochure, and the brochure said, I'm your neighbor and I listed where I was, I put my address down there. And to this day, from what I understand, because I sold the company, to this day we still have a lot of clients right along Butterfield Drive, that's it. So I have to thank Gene Birch, a real close competitor, for opening my eyes and getting me to do this kind of thing.

David Heimer: So step me through this for a moment, were you uniformed when you went and made these calls?

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Ed O'Connell: I did, yeah. My uniform was a jeans and a really nice shirt.

David Heimer: Yeah. But it said O'Connell Plumbing on it. Right?

Ed O'Connell: Right.

David Heimer: Okay. So you step up to the door, you knock on it. What time of day would you do this?

Ed O'Connell: I usually did it in the evenings, like about, from 4 to 6. And most of the people that answered the door were women.

David Heimer: And so you turned on the Ed O'Connell charm? Hi, I'm Ed O'Connell and I'm your neighbor. And I'm a plumber, and I'm just knocking on my neighbor's doors to let them know I'm a plumber. I'm looking for more business and I've got a brochure here, an offer, and some other information about us. If you have any plumbing needs or anything, I'd love to help you guys out. So that's sort of it?

Ed O'Connell: Basically, that was it, David. You said it right, in a nutshell. Yeah.

David Heimer: And I mean, you're a good gregarious person, you're a friendly person, you like talking to people. So I think this is kind of natural for you, or do you think it's something that, I mean, it is natural for you. But do you think it is something that other people could do even if they weren't all that gregarious?

Ed O'Connell: You know, to be honest with you, I try it out, see how it goes and if you can't handle rejection, because a lot of people said, "get out of here. I don't need a plumber."

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David Heimer: Really?

Ed O'Connell: Yeah. Well, I mean, they were nicer about it than I'm being, but it came through, you know, listen, I don't care whether you're selling girl scout cookies, or selling plumbing. I don't need you here tonight. Okay, well, here it is anyway. I said I get your point, the same way I get all the stuff at home too. But, I just want to let people know, in my neighborhood, that I owned a really great plumbing company and because I had a website and everything. I said you can go online and check me out and the whole thing like that. So even with the rejections, a lot of them came to us too.

David Heimer: I got to thinking that, if you're going to use a plumber, and a guy in your neighborhood is a plumber and wants your business, you'd be more likely to go use him. I would.

Ed O'Connell: Yeah, really, it worked out. I think, from the days of when the fuller brush man or fuller brush person would come around, to sell you things and people were more amenable to that, you know, and say, okay, you're selling. And they try to help them out. I think there was a long period where knocking on doors would really irritate people. I think that's starting to change, I mean, my experience was that most of the people whose doors I knocked on were pretty nice.

David Heimer: Yeah.

Ed O'Connell: And then once you get into one person's house and if you use referrals, of course, that's how I grew my business list. You know, if you like me, would your son like me, your daughter like me, your mom, your dad. I had no fear about asking for referrals and we really grew our company. We were spending 8%, roughly, on

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advertising, but I bet you, we didn't even have to spend that with the referrals that we were getting. Nowadays, with such companies as review buzz. I mean, I don't see why people don't, not asking for referrals is throwing money out the door, now.

David Heimer: Was there any other sort of preparation you did before you went to, knock on doors? You were obviously cleaned up, wearing a nice-looking shirt, but sort of casual, you had brochures to hand out, you had door hangers, you had magnets, you had a special offer form. Anything else?

Ed O'Connell: Well, you know, it's interesting, you mentioned like that, but I had all that together, and what eventually, I came to find out was Joe Cunningham's Tech Pack. It was like a Pre Tech Pack, all the stuff I needed was in this clear envelope. And so I could hang this envelope right on a person's door. And, so, that's kind of how I prepared. As far as mentally preparing, if I thought about it, and I caught myself doing this, if I say, I don't really want to do this today and be so easy to stop. So I wouldn't think about it, I just say, I'm just going to do one house. It's like exercising, I hate the thought of exercising until I get my first shoe on. And once I get my shoe on, then I'm okay. Once I get to that first house, then I want to do the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, and then go to the other side of the street and work my way back and this was kind of a circle I did. And, eventually, I even got my guys to do it. That was really amazing.

David Heimer: How did they do that? Did they do it in their neighborhoods or did they do it in your neighborhood also?

Ed O'Connell: They did it in their neighborhoods, but also, we had a whole role-playing thing that we did. Where they would go, they'd finish a job and if they didn't have

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another job immediately, they'd go around and knock on doors and hand out the same packages that I handed out. And they would say, you know, we are your neighbor here in Marin County, and we're looking for work, we're a great plumbing company, and if you don't have a plumber that you can count on, we're one you can count on. Many of the time my guys would be out there, there'd be no other job on the line for them. They'd go next door, and all of a sudden, they're putting in a new water heater or they crawl underneath the house and they're putting in a whole new water system. We had fun and I think my company culture was one of fun, more than anything.

David Heimer: Well. Ed, thanks again. This has been terrific.

Ed O'Connell: It's been a pleasure David and I just want to say that, being part of the Service Roundtable and the Service Nation Alliance, has been one of the more uplifting experiences of my life. I have made so many friends and have so many, just acquaintances. And then when I go to the roundtables, like, I can't wait to go to Atlanta and see all my friends, and see all my people, because I just have the best time. You and your office have made business fun. That's the best thing I can say about it.

David Heimer: Well, thanks so much. You've been a big part of it. And thanks for taking this time to talk with us about networking and your experience. I really appreciated it. I know people can follow your posts through serviceroundtable.com. But if they wanted to contact you directly, would you mind sharing an email address with us?

Ed O'Connell: Yeah, sure. It's, ed.oconnell@outlook.com.

David Heimer: And no apostrophe or any funny punctuation?

Ed O'Connell: No.

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David Heimer: That it's just, O'Connell, two Ns, two Ls, all the way through@outlook.com.

Ed O'Connell: And I just got a new website up and running too.

David Heimer: Really?

Ed O'Connell: Not very sophisticated, but it's, www.edoconnell.net.

David Heimer: Got it. Okay, cool. Thank you very much.