

Wenner-Gren's drive for results

The story of one man's determination to make the vacuum cleaner a staple of every home.

The year was 1913. Mr. Axel Wenner-Gren, a young entrepreneur, approached the premises of AB Lux, the kerosene lamp manufacturer, in Stockholm carrying a vacuum cleaner. He had spent months looking for a manufacturing partner for this little-known household machine, but he had not yet found anyone interested. Wenner-Gren wasn't about to give up. His appointment on this particular day was with Mr. C.G. Lindblom at Lux.

Lindblom, a shrewd businessman, had been at the helm of a successful gas lantern business. Lindblom's Lux lanterns lined every major street in Sweden and, to meet the growing demands, he had built one of the biggest factories in Stockholm. But his luck ran out a few years earlier when the modern light bulb came to town, quickly making Lux gas lanterns obsolete. Before he knew it, Lindblom fell into debt.

The two men meet

Lindblom didn't rise from his desk when Wenner-Gren entered the office and only gave him ten minutes to present his case. Wenner-Gren greeted Lindblom, opened the cylinder case in his hand and began to clean.

Lindblom stood up and watched, amazed by the strength and small size of the machine. Then Wenner-Gren spoke quickly, "I want every home around the world to have one of these. I have the patented design – I just need a partner to help me in getting them built." He went on to give his pitch and explain his situation, but Lindblom couldn't imagine that people would be interested in having a vacuum. Lindblom explained, "you don't have money so all the risk lands on us and this is not a risk I am going to take."

The promise of success

But Wenner-Gren didn't shy away from risks and he knew he had something that would change the future of homes. "Sir, I can guarantee that the customers will want this little machine and will promise to personally sell 500 of these machines," he said. He also offered to share the profits and reimburse Lindblom for all the vacuum cleaners that couldn't sell.

Almost a minute passed before Lindblom spoke: "We have a deal, 500 machines, Mr. Wenner-Gren, by the end of 1913. What you don't sell, you pay for," he said.

Hitting the pavement

Within one year Wenner-Gren had created a team of salesmen and had trained them in a new sales method that he had picked up in America: door-to-door home sales. Wenner-Gren also implemented a money back guarantee, the first of its kind in Sweden. Together with a handful of salesmen, Wenner-Gren went door to door demonstrating the power of the model. The team travelled around Europe with the machines. At the end of 1913, 16,000 of the Lux 1 model were sold – 32 times the amount promised.

