

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/learn-to-create-opportunities/>

Business leader, author and rocket scientist Sylvia Acevedo describes her experience growing up in a low-income family in New Mexico, and explains how selling Girl Scout Cookies taught her crucial lessons about both confidence and sales strategies. She explores how the instinct to not take "no" for an answer grew stronger the more she exercised her confidence.



Transcript

- When I grew up, my family, we really lived paycheck 00:00:07,350 to paycheck, and sometimes we didn't even have money, we had to go live with family members.. So, it was kind of tough, and we also, at times lived on dirt roads.. So we really didn't know how to create opportunities.. So one of the first things I learned in girl Scouts was how to create opportunity.. Because, I really couldn't afford to be in girl Scouts but my troop leader said, "Yes you can." You gotta sell.... For everything you wanna do, you gotta sell a lot of cookies.. (Tina laughing) So, that was a really large number of cookies I had to sell.. So she taught me how to create.... How to create opportunity and make your dreams come true.. So first you set that goal, and then you break that goal up into smaller increment..

And then when you start working it, and if you need help, you ask for help.. Now, that sounds simple and everyone who's on this call you know how to do that otherwise you wouldn't be on this call.. But to somebody raised in living paycheck to paycheck or near poverty, you don't know how to break out of that cycle.. So learning how to create opportunity, that was huge, how to make your dreams come true.. And then the other thing; and I've used this my entire life, is never walk away from a sale, until you've heard no at least three times.. - That's really important, that's great.. 00:01:20,570 - It was, because I grew up 00:01:23,572 in a very traditional Mexican household, and children weren't supposed to speak first to adults.. So that's kind of hard to sell cookies if you don't speak first.. And so my trip leader gave me that advice.. And so, the first time somebody said no to me, I just stood there in front of them, and then I said, is there anybody else that might wanna buy cookies? And she looked at me and she said, no again..

And at that point, there's a thought bubble over my head, that says, "troop leader, Mrs.. (indistinct) says, "Never walk away from sale until you've heard no three times." So I asked again, "Anybody's day you would make if you bought some cookies?" - How sweet? 00:01:58,765 - And she bought one box.. 00:02:01,710 But it taught me persistence, resilience, and I used that going forward.. I used that when my band director wouldn't let.... I played Timbale, I played the drums.. I was first chair and he wouldn't let me march with the big timbale drums because I was a girl.. And I said, "Well, that was my first no, why else can't I?" And he said, "Well, they're heavy." And I said, "Okay, so you don't think I'm strong enough?" So then I worked up, worked out, worked out, worked out so I got strong enough so I could carry those Timbales.. So, even at that young age I began, figuring out how do you get to that yes? How do you overcome the obstacles? And that if you're an entrepreneur, is an important skill to know...