



*Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols*  
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**Prudential Insurance Agents**  
Kansas City, Missouri January 31, 1936

The stage is well set for increased realty values.

Population doubled in 35 years prior to 1930.

We are still growing at least a million population per year.

Not static.

Number of persons per family in 1910, 5.17 – 1934, 4.37. Number of families increasing more rapidly than population.

Typical of American people to strive for better living better homes, Constant upward trend.

Over half a million building units erected in 1925; an average of 400,000 from 1921 to 1929, yet during the last six years the average has been less than 50,000.

Safe to assume we need at least 400,000 new units per year.

More units destroyed by fire and demolition last year than were built.

Vacancies going down rapidly. Our vacancies in single homes decreased approximately 40% in the last year in Kansas City. Some cities have an acute shortage.

It will take a long time for new building activity to catch up.

Increasing rates in marriages and births certainly creating good market condition for our repossessed houses.

2 or 3 years ago, we started the practice of renting our own repossessed houses, believing we would have a better market later. I believe we are right in our conclusion, and I think the time is now approaching for the sale of these houses.

I realize every man who goes out to sell an old house, even though reconditioned, has to contend with a certain amount of obsolescence in the house he offers as well as his competition with new houses of more modern design and with more modern equipment.

However, you must never forget that your house is a big step upward and far more convenient and better equipped than a great bracket of houses below yours, and that there is always a constant upward swelling of demand from those who have lived in apartments or smaller homes with less conveniences.

Home sentiment was at a low ebb in 1932 and is reviving rapidly.

Never in our history were there so many agencies encouraging home ownership.

Never in the experience of any living realtor was it possible to obtain such desirable terms in the purchase of a home.

Your terms in interest saving alone will reduce the cost of a home at least 10%.

Then, too the very assurance you give your buyer of not having to run the risk of refinancing his home every few years is the greatest thing that has happened in the selling of houses.

Beginning this year, we had about 32,300,000 families, increasing the number of families alone about 350,000 per year. These are prospects for us to sell.

In addition to this we have the movement upward of people of established families wanting better homes. This probably offers a bigger range of prospects.

Confidence in the ownership of real estate is rapidly coming back.

It is in the air.

People are beginning to see that a man who owned a piece of real estate and carried it through the depression is better off than those who had stocks which they were forced to sell at big losses.

If we have any real money inflation, all agree there is no better hedge than buying real estate. If we have only a continuance of credit inflation, such as we already have, it is bound to gradually increase labor and materials used in the construction of homes, apartments and business buildings.

Then, too, there are a lot of people who have been making money rapidly in the rise of the stock market.

Many of these people were burned before from carrying stocks too long and many of them will be taking their profits and salting them safely away in the ownership of real estate.

I know of several sales made in our office recently largely as a result of recent profits in the stock market.

People perhaps have become more analytical in buying than heretofore.

In my opinion it is necessary for a salesman to be much better informed concerning his product. People are inquiring about the annual taxes; the cost of heating and other maintenance; the character of construction; the type of neighborhood.

A salesman who takes the time to study his property knows how to present its good features, etc., will certainly be the man who wins out and makes the sale.

This very carefulness on the part of the buyers, makes it essential for us to more carefully study our prospects to know more about their habits, their likes and dislikes, their friends, their hobbies, their recreation, the clubs to which they belong, their need for schools and church affiliation, and all of the many factors which go to influence them in their decision to buy homes.

A salesman should use his head to make a careful analysis of all these questions, study the psychology and the mental attitude of his buyer, as well as his financial condition and ability to pay for the property.

I know full well the rebuffs and discouragements that have confronted salesmen in the past five years or more. Having been a salesman all my life, I realize the almost unlimited amount of courage and stamina it takes to carry on.

It is one thing for a sales manager to sit at his desk and tell the boys how to do it, but it is still another thing to go out in the highways and the byways and get the results,

Only two or three years ago some men would almost throw a salesman out of his office when he approached him and tried to interest him in the purchase of a home. This man perhaps was already worried to death about how he was going to save his business, or was fighting a bitter battle trying to keep down his expenses.

He did not need enlarged space for his business, nor did he feel any interest in buying a new home. He had heard of many of his friends and neighbors, who had lost their homes under foreclosure, or perhaps he himself had lost his home, and he was not in the mood to shout the glories of home ownership.

But, there is a strange thing about the desire to own property. Study the real estate slumps of this country from the time of the Revolution, and you will be astounded with the rapidity with which people forget losses in real estate, and the almost miraculous manner in which they again acquire the desire to own real estate.

An active real estate market rolls up like a snowball going downhill. It gathers force like a cyclone, and once it permeates a community there is no stopping it.

I do not believe we have yet reached this period, although many of the best thinkers on real estate feel that by 1940 we will be into the greatest real estate boom we have ever known. So great that it will probably be disastrous in the long run.

I do believe that we are decidedly on an upward trend as far as the desire to own property is concerned.

Nearly everyone today is glad at least to talk about it.

Most people will agree with you that it is a good thing to be an owner of land.

Many people, and more than you realize, feel away back in their heads that it is a good hedge against inflation.

Many people are finding improvement in their own business, they are beginning to see profits.

Many are worrying that as they build up their business the government will take away from them what they are earning and they begin to feel that it is pretty smart to salt it away in a home for their families, or a permanent structure for their business.

I find that in the case of my own sales organization who have been whipped and lashed about for the past several years in trying to keep our property moving, frequently our prospects are more enthusiastic than we are, ourselves.

As a matter of fact, every salesman today should fairly breathe the atmosphere of confidence and assurance in his wares.

I remember after the war when we were left with over half a million dollars worth of unsold houses on our hands, there was a period of a year or two when we could not sell

anything, then almost overnight the market opened up and within a few months we had sold every house we had on hand, and were building more rapidly than we ever had before, finding it difficult to develop new streets to provide new sites rapidly enough for the market.

The point I am trying to make is that a good market can come quickly in real estate.

I believe the chances are that every man to whom you offer one of your pieces of property today at your present price is really buying a bargain, and perhaps a whole lot better bargain than you realize when you sell it to him.

There may come a time when these properties will almost sell themselves but that time is not yet here. It still takes good, active, alert, salesmanship.

It is still necessary to bring every possible influence to bear upon the mind of your prospect. Study your man and find out his weakest point. Most men have a lot of handles sticking out all over them ready for you to take hold of if you study them.

There is always a good and a bad approach. Many sales are lost in the first few words of your introduction.

Many sales are lost in your becoming argumentative, or too assertive; by endeavoring too hard to force your viewpoint. You can lead a prospect but you cannot drive him to a sale.

I have seen many a good sale lost because the salesman failed to learn enough about his prospect so that he could adequately fill the prospects needs, or failed to show him the property in the proper manner bringing out the feature; which could have meant the most to him, and then all at once the salesman awakens to the fact that he has lost the sale to someone else who had no better or more suitable product than he had himself if it had been properly presented.

A salesman is doomed to failure if he shows a piece of property which he has not carefully studied so that he knows every single item about it; knows about the neighborhood; the restrictions in effect; knows the names of some of the people of importance who live nearby. Moreover, a salesman who does not inform himself along these lines is not fair to the firm for whom he is working.

A salesman's first duty to himself and to his employer is to know everything he can learn about the prospect before he takes him out to look at the property – how many children in the family; what other members there are; what are his social activities; his club; business affiliations, etc.

There are many little personal habits which often times are extremely annoying to prospects and sometimes lose a sale that otherwise might have been made. Watch out for these little things, because they may be small to you, they loom large when it comes to influencing your prospect. Of course, no salesman should ever smoke a cigar while talking to a woman prospect, or keep his hat on in her presence. Rattling of money in your pocket, thus distracting your prospect's attention may mean the loss of the sale for you. Too much jewelry; dandruff on your coat; the unconscious habit of rubbing your nose; dirty fingernails, or a multitude of other little things should be avoided. Things of

this nature distract the attention of your prospect taking his attention off of what you are saying, frequently building up a resistance far greater than you realize.

The salesman who fails to study his prospect and wins not only the confidence of his prospect, but his friendship, has little chance of success.

Make friends of your prospects.

Be so careful in the accuracy of your statements that they give absolute confidence to what you say. Understate rather than overstate the advantages of your property. Never gloss or glide over small details. The thing that may seem unimportant to you may be of enormous proportions in the mind of your prospect,

Gentlemen, when you are selling real estate you are in one of the greatest professions in the world. I know of no calling that requires more intelligence; skill; diplomacy; honesty and perseverance. It is a good thing to represent a strong, reliable company. Many splendid salesmen are licked because of a lack of confidence in the people for whom they work.

It is a great thing for you to speak for the Prudential Ins. Co. when you make a statement. This creates an even greater responsibility upon you. Properly handled it can be one of your greatest assets.

Many of us who a few years ago felt we had reached the place where we could let down and take things easy for a time, found that as a result of the depression we have been forced to work harder than ever. I presume this applies to many of the men in this room. To a certain extent it means we are beginning our careers all over again. Long hours, discouraging turndowns losses of sales to other firms, all these things to be lived through again.

You must remember that sales are cumulative. Every time you sell a desirable family you have opened the door to many of their friends.

It is a time that calls for a little harder work; a little closer application; a little more careful study and planning than for many years, but it is not a lost cause by any means.

It is my honest belief that with such devoted effort and loyalty to your firm; with more analytical study of your own sales methods; with absolute confidence and assurance in the future of America, and with a solid belief in the security of real estate in the long run, everyone engaged in the sale of real estate is in a position not only to be of service to mankind, but to profit for himself and be repaid for the lifeblood he puts into his job.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN035

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911- ), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.