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Business There, Just Harder to Get

FROM St. Louis, Mo., comes a story about a department store owner who told a newspaper advertising salesman that he was cutting out his promotion. The salesman asked: "Should the paper send over a reporter to write a story about your store closing?"

"Of course not!" was the snappy retort. "I'm just cutting back because 7 per cent of the people here are out of work. We are not going to close the store."

The salesman then directed the merchant's attention to the 93 per cent of the people who still have jobs, suggesting that it might be a good idea to tell them what he had to say. Result was the merchant ordered a new campaign to go after the business that is available.

More than 95 per cent of the people in Oklahoma are still at work, better than the national picture. It may be poetic justice or economic reality that the worst-hit states on unemployment include those where anti-business and anti-work demonstrations have occurred most frequently in the past 10 years.

"The business is out there," an Oklahoma City business man has been telling his statewide sales organization. "Let's go get it! We will have to work harder but we can get business if we really try." Results so far indicate he may be right.

Not all of the news is bad. Oklahoma cities and towns which collect sales taxes received nearly a million dollars more on November sales than a year earlier. Number of jobs in metropolitan Oklahoma City in December was above the total for December 1973. Bank deposits were

up 15 per cent, and mortgage companies say money is available.

Campaigns to outwit the recession by positive thinking will not, by themselves, put groceries on the tables of those who have been laid off their jobs, but positive thinking certainly can help to keep the situation from becoming worse.

Comparisons are being made between the present business slowdown and the Great Depression of the 1930s, when more than 15 million were unemployed out of a work force of around 60 million. Today's national unemployment rate still leaves over 85 million people at work.

Looking back, economists, political observers and other analysts

have pointed out that the Great Depression was made worse by panic.

Unfounded optimism will not prevent or cure business declines, but excessive pessimism certainly will accelerate them. Years ago, when he was struggling with the eternal farm problem as secretary of agriculture, Ezra T. Benson observed:

"There is seldom a practical political solution to an economic problem, and there is no economic solution to a political problem."

As public officials wrestle with the two, which are badly tangled, the rest of us might try to apply a business solution to the business problem. That is to go get the business that is out there, even if we have to work harder for it!