

Cutting
a
New
Path

It goes beyond our impressive statistics and growth figures. Today, most people you'll talk to about network marketing know of someone who's had a positive experience. We're less apologetic and more sensible. We have a proven track record, and we're getting much, much better at what we do.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two paths diverged in the wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost, *Mountain Interval*, 1920

When I was seventeen, I began a brief career in “alternative” education. Some friends and I were dissatisfied with the schools where we punched our time clocks, and wanted to see if we could create a better way.

A way where we took the pursuit of our education into our own hands.

We imagined a school where there were absolutely no requirements—no mandates, no externally imposed strictures—and where each student designed his or her own course of

study. In other words, where we learned what we wanted, when we wanted, how we wanted.

Does this sound familiar?

We didn't know it back then, but we were thinking like network marketers. We wanted to be a volunteer army, not a lockstep formation of grudging corporate conscripts.

We were educational entrepreneurs.

Among our motley crew, I was the one blessed with unusually forward-thinking parents who believed in me and in us and our vision enough to let me leave my then-current career (public school, an in-training version of the nine-to-five track) so I could spend the rest of the year spearheading the project.

Now, how on earth does a scattershot band of disaffected sophomores and juniors start their own high school? The answer is, they don't. It's impossible. It can't be done.

Happily, we were not aware of this. Much like the bumblebee—you know, the bug that flies because it never got the memo explaining that it can't—we didn't know it was impossible. So we did it.

The next year the school opened, and it operated successfully for a solid decade onward. We had absolutely no accreditation from any private or state body, but we were accredited by our own results. We successfully placed our graduates into places like Yale, Harvard, and a good crop of state colleges, too. The environment we had pictured, of students voluntarily pursuing their own education, worked.

A few years later, I began another career, this time in "alternative" health. We called it macrobiotics, but what it boiled down to was a bunch of people who looked at the then-current model of "health care" (which was really illness

care) and wanted to create a better way.

A way where we took the pursuit of our health into our own hands.

We were nutritional and physiological entrepreneurs.

A few years after that, I put my foot on another career path, this time one in “alternative” business. We called it network marketing, but what it boiled down to was a bunch of people who looked at the then-current model of livelihood and wanted to create a better way.

A way where we took the pursuit of our financial future into our own hands.

We were occupational entrepreneurs.

I seem to keep finding myself on these “alternative” paths. Except something is happening now: we’re gradually losing the quotation marks around the word alternative. In fact, son of a gun, I think we’re even starting to flirt seriously with losing the term altogether.

I put the term “alternative” in quotes because that’s how people often mean it: like something that is not quite real, not quite respectable, certainly not proven, and probably not efficacious. We say it in that open-minded yet patronizing way, making air quotes with our fingers.

At least, that’s how it used to be. But now look.

Education? Everyone knows the old system is a dinosaur. The federal government tried fixing it with a plan optimistically

named No Child Left Behind, and whoops! A whole generation is getting Left Behind. Suddenly (or finally), the alternatives are starting to look pretty good, after all.

Health care? Paul Zane Pilzer is telling us that what we used to called macrobiotics is suddenly a \$400 billion industry—and fast on its way to a trillion—called wellness. Ladies and gentlemen, the alternative, all grown up, wearing long pants and everything.

And network marketing?

Just watch.

Born in the sixties; learned how to ride a bike, played stickball and scraped its knees in the seventies; went through that awkward growth spurt as a talented but tantrumy teenager in the eighties (anyone who has teenagers knows what I mean, and so does anyone who watched network marketing during that decade).

In the nineties we used to walk around saying, “Network marketing has come of age,” and it was true, in the sense that any eager young adult barely out of a four-year college can be said to be *of age*.

In the nineties, we certainly became more professional. And professionals started showing up: doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, “serious” people.

And in the aughts (or whatever this decade is called)?

Now we've finally entered into that age when you've made enough mistakes, embarrassed yourself enough times, and mounted enough earnest efforts at responsible commerce to

begin to have some perspective. Not perfect, not even wise, but at least approaching something resembling maturity.

Give you an example.

Used to be, we talked mostly about the merry-go-round golden-ring style of success, the fractional percentage of people with both the exceptionally good timing and the right skill set or personality profile to hit an opportunity just right and catapult to the top. "Success" in those days was mostly shown off in terms of those elite few with yachts, personal jet planes, and ridiculous fortunes. Robin ("Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous") Leach was just hitting stride in the late eighties, and the style resonated with gawky young teenaged em-el-em. Success might happen to only a few, but the rest of us could dream, right?

Today we do more than dream. The way we describe success in the network marketing of 2007 has been shaped by The Millionaire Next Door, the Latte Factor® and...

The hundreds of thousands of serious networkers sincerely and sanely pursuing a reasonable goal of replacement income and financial stability.

Goodbye get rich quick, hello get smart now.

Meanwhile, as we've matured, the world around us has changed. The corporate model of financial security has crumbled away. Two generations ago, going to work for a company was "security"; working for yourself from your home was "risky."

Today, it's gone clear the other way around.

In 2004, the Small Business Administration told President Bush that small business accounts for more than half the nation's

economic output and employs more than half the country's non-governmental employees—and that more than half of those small businesses are home-based businesses.

Warren Buffet, the “oracle of Omaha” and famed billionaire stock market expert, turned heads on Wall Street in 2002 when he bought a network marketing company. Actually, he doesn't own one direct selling company—he owns three. (And has been quoted, speaking about one of them, as saying, “It's the best investment I've ever made.”)

Network marketing today is a \$100 billion concern worldwide (some \$30 billion of it in the U.S.).

Right now, as you read these words, there are about 70,000 people around the world who are not network marketers—and by this same time tomorrow *will be*.

The DSA's Neil Offen projects that over the next ten years, more than 200 million people worldwide will join our industry.

Paul Pilzer projects that over those same ten years, the US economy will create ten million new millionaires—and that many of them will be created in network marketing.

And it goes beyond statistics and figures.

Ten years ago, most people you'd talk to about network marketing either knew nothing about it, or knew someone who'd had a negative experience. Today, most people you'll talk to about network marketing know of someone who's had a positive experience. We're less apologetic and more sensible. We have a track record, and we're getting much, much better at what we do.

But don't take just my word for it. Here are some comments from a few of the people I've interviewed for stories in *Networking Times* in just the past few months, when I asked what were their views of where our business stands in the world:

U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) is one of our leading friends on Capitol Hill and was the prime mover behind the Dietary Supplement Health Education Act (DSHEA) of '93. Here's what Senator Hatch had to say about our profession:

"The companies that have developed this marketing approach with truly high-quality products are doing a lot of good in the world. ... [Network marketing] is a critically important way of helping people to use high-quality products ... it's also a way to give certain people an opportunity to sell those products and earn a good living from it. I see it playing a very important role in the twenty-first century."

Jim Turner, author of *The Chemical Feast*, worked with Ralph Nader in the sixties, then cofounded Swankin & Turner, a D.C.-based consumer advocacy law firm, and now also serves as Chairman of the Board of Citizens for Health, a major consumer-advocacy lobbying group. Jim was responsible, for example, for making acupuncture needles legal in the United States. Here's what Jim told me:

"Network marketing is in the vanguard of a major consumer movement in which consumers and producers are merging and becoming the same thing. In a very interesting way, the multilevel marketing companies are the first generation of what Alvin Toffler calls 'prosumers.' ... I'd say you could have perhaps 150 million households successfully involved in network marketing, at least part-time.... You could easily become a major part of a majority of the households in America."

Frank Maguire worked with JFK in the White House, with Fred Smith at FedEx and with Colonel Sanders at KFC. His first job fresh out of college was head of programming for ABC, where he gave Ted Koppel and Charles Osgood their first jobs at major networks. Frank, in other words, has been around the block. Here's his homily to network marketing, which came right at the end of our interview:

"I think [network marketing] is potentially the greatest economic opportunity that has ever existed. Network marketing is turning off the spotlight of working for a corporation and turning on the floodlight of the greatness that we all have within us. I love what you're doing in network marketing, because you're creating an opportunity to affect the self-esteem of many, many people. That's the essence of what you're doing; you're giving people hope and providing a launching pad for people to discover their own greatness. You are the future."

With world-class leaders like Hatch, Turner, and Maguire saying things about us like that, can we really call this "alternative" any more?

Our model works; we've proven it, over and over. Now the rest of the world has begun to realize it. In fact, it's working a lot better than many of the other, more traditional modes of earning a living. Come to think of it, the next time a serious prospect tells you he or she isn't really interested in taking a look at building long-term residual income and financial security with your business model, you might just say:

"You're not? Okay, no problem. But I'm curious... if you don't mind my asking—what's your alternative?"

John David Mann is one of the United States' preeminent writers on network marketing. He was cofounder and senior editor of the *Upline journal*, editor in chief of *Network Marketing Lifestyles* and editor in chief of *Networking Times*. He edited and produced John Milton Fogg's *The Greatest Networker in the World* (1992), which sold more than a million copies in eight languages; worked with Paul Zane Pilzer writing *The Next Millionaires*, with Jeff Olson writing *The Slight Edge* and with Cameron Johnson writing *You Call the Shots: Succeed Your Way—and Live the Life You Want—with the 19 Essential Secrets of Entrepreneurship* (Simon & Schuster, Jan. '07).

John has been a network marketer for more than twenty years; during the 1990s built an organization of over 100,000 distributors. He is also a concert cellist and prize-winning composer, recipient of several New Jersey State grants for composition and of the 1969 BMI Awards to Student Composers. At age seventeen he founded a private high school in Orange, New Jersey, called Changes, Inc. Visit him on the web at <http://JohnDavidMann.com>.

