

Multi-level Evangelism

by Gene McCoy

The multi-level marketing model began in the 20's and 30's with such well-known organizations as the California Vitamin Company and the California Perfume Company. You know them as Nutrilite and Avon.

The products and services vary. But the characteristics of the system are similar. Among these are extreme energy, dedication, commitment and loyalty. Many have noted a cult-like feel to the system. Indeed, the tight relationships created within the organization have led some to regard their business associates as their church. Their business relationships are stronger and closer than their connection with spiritual brothers and sisters. Reverence for company founders and upline sponsors rivals, if not exceeds that which they afford spiritual elders and mentors. They minister to their business partners more readily than to their spiritual family. They will plan, save, sacrifice and travel so as to attend rallies with business associates, but would never give serious thought to attending a church-related convention.

These observations are made to prompt us to think about a parallel application to evangelism. Consider the impact on our evangelistic efforts if we approached them as we would our multi-level business.

A guest at a multi-level marketing recruitment event, I was astonished by the eagerness of some Christians to bear testimony for the benefits received from using the products. I was amazed because I had never heard them testify to the joy and peace of forgiveness and the assurance of salvation. I was also convicted by their example, wondering if I display such eagerness to declare the excellencies of Him Who called me out of darkness into His marvelous light (Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:9). Read Acts 26:12-18. Are they more committed and passionate about recruiting business partners than I am about evangelizing lost people?

As an upline associate in the church, I am also wondering how I could develop the skill of the upline business partner to generate the commitment of my downline church members to the degree that they would be as faithful and prompt for church meetings and events. And how I could transfer that ability so as to recruit people to be-

come involved in our Outreach Ministry Team. It is apparent that, given the right motivation, the people who are outgoing and welcoming at business meetings could be such in the context of evangelism and outreach. Is it incorrect to say that the motivation for evangelism has been provided by the grace Christians have received? And that the obvious lack of motivation to be actively involved in evangelism is a failure to properly respond to that grace?

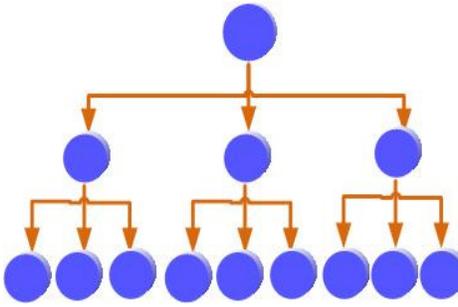
Sales people are trained to look and listen for an opening to present their product or business opportunity. They develop sensitivity to circumstances conducive to making the pitch. And they practice approaches, even mastering key talking points and terms to excite interest and feed curiosity with a view toward making the sale or recruiting an associate.

CAUTIONS

Some words of caution are in order.

There is the inherent danger of becoming a so-called "Johnny-One-Note," whose enthusiasm is so fanatical that he becomes a nuisance. Relatives and friends are either amused or annoyed by the obsession that is manifested by the enthusiastic distributor who thinks his product is a panacea. Chances of this are remote in our evangelistic efforts, even though we say we believe Jesus is the answer for societal ills. Obviously, faith in Jesus will not prevent or cure cancer. But it most certainly produces hope, joy and peace in the face of death.

Litigation against multi-level marketing has been based upon the allegation that it represents a pyramid scheme. The aspect of this allegation that applies to this discussion is the emphasis upon building an organization that can be characterized as a personal empire. Not to call into question the integrity of the Amway Corporation, but someone made the point that, for the business to succeed, someone has to sell soap. We can become so fixated upon building a personal organization (local church kingdom) that our focus on the organism (body of Christ) is lost. Evangelism is not about building a large congregation for the sake of increasing revenue to keep the organization solvent and profitable. Neither is it about an earthly legacy or congregational reputation. It is



upon converting sinners to Christ; making disciples. For the church to be the church, Jesus has to be King. We are not “selling” church membership but rather sacrifice and servanthood. Evangelism is not about the organization but the organism. It is not about mechanics (“doing church”) but ministry (being the church). It is not about property (structures) but people (souls). Its focus is not local (“my” church) but global (Christ’s church). It is not about the church visible (seen by men) but invisible (recognized by God). And it is not about us (personal/congregational promotion) but about the Lord (promoting Christ’s Kingdom).

TAKEAWAYS

There are lessons to be learned and applied.

A faithful steward of the gospel (an evangelist) will be alert to opportunities to present the gospel. And he will do so enthusiastically, confident that the message about Jesus will benefit people.

Christians intent upon fulfilling the commission to make disciples will continually cultivate the team, helping their downline develop skills that produce more disciple-makers. In this regard Ephesians 4:11-12 applies. One maxim in multi-level marketing is that you succeed only as you help others succeed. Our responsibility continues beyond our “downline’s” baptism to include his continual development. This involves personal training and accompaniment in their recruiting efforts, even to include several generations or levels.

Another maxim that applies to the church states that positives are passed down and negatives up. When problems and negatives arise, express them to your upline. Express only positives to your downline. Evangelism is hindered

when this rule is violated, especially when negatives are aired in the presence of non-Christians!

Celebrating expansion of the Kingdom by acknowledging the evangelists will encourage more evangelism. Praising those who are doing it encourages others to do it. It also cultivates a cohesive team and family dynamic when everyone celebrates.

Learning our product better will certainly enhance the evangelistic work of the church. But learning how to present the message is just as important and necessary. The Kingdom will not expand if we do not expand our connections. Along with our teaching of Bible content we should provide practical tips regarding its usefulness in evangelizing lost people. We cannot overstate, however, the power of personal testimony regarding the positive impact Jesus has made in our lives.

Christians should be possessed with passion, not only for the Lord but for the lost. So much so that they are consciously seeking opportunities to engage people with a view toward dispensing the good news of redemption and the blessings of discipleship.

At the most basic level, we should nurture a more welcoming environment that makes it pleasant and easy for sinners to receive and respond to the gospel. If marketers, motivated by profit and material benefits, can go out of their way to make prospective recruits believe the business is exciting and fulfilling, we can do no less as distributors of the forgiveness and grace offered through Jesus Christ, resulting in eternal life!