

Direct Selling News™

Serving the Direct Selling and Network Marketing Executive

Volume 5, Issue 7

July 2009

Top Desk with Nigel Branson

Opportunity

Requires More Than Equality

Giving People the Right Tools to Prosper in Tough Times

My father was an Air France executive in South Africa, where I grew up. As a result of my father's employment, I traveled the world and learned from many different cultures. This connection to people in all walks of life gave me insight on how discrimination can defeat the human spirit. I think the discrimination I witnessed in South Africa and other countries was the motivation that brought me to America, and to the opportunity of direct selling.

Opportunity. Although that's what I was pursuing when I came to America, I didn't really find it until I discovered direct selling. I had been fortunate to enjoy a life of privilege in South Africa, where I became an award-winning salesman for BMW, and I was similarly successful with BMW sales in America. But the longing in me that was not answered by mere financial success was for an opportunity more *democratic* than what I'd found in sales. And this is what FirstFitness Chairman Lee Causey revealed to me when he introduced me to direct selling.

Causey is a weight-loss pioneer and inventor of the world's first diet shake. He turned his invention into a marketing phenomenon with the success of *Slender Now* in the 1970s, growing to \$1 million in its first year, \$20 million in the second year, and more than \$250 million in the third year. I'd fallen in love with Causey's daughter, Candace, and he wasn't about to see his youngest child hitched to a *foreigner* who didn't share his vision of equal opportunity through direct selling. And with the dual incentives of Candace's beauty and Lee's first words to me—"How would you like to make a million dollars before you're 30, kid?"—*I didn't have a chance!*

FirstFitness Celebrates 20 Years

Direct Selling from the Ground Up—Learning as a Distributor

Making a million dollars sounded great to me, but *I had no idea what I'd have to do to earn it*. Three years and hundreds of opportunity meetings later, I had learned the most important lesson I would ever learn in direct selling: The hardest and most important work in a direct selling company is done by distributors in the field, and anyone at the corporate level who says differently should go get a job selling cars.

The Right Tools for the Job

Any plumber or mechanic can tell you that *half the work of getting the job done is having the right tools*. Even though we know times have changed and the "work" of being a distributor is tougher now than ever, many who manage direct selling companies give distributors the same tools they've always been given. As a result, sponsoring and sales decline.

Many of us in the industry have cheered ourselves up along the way by quoting platitudes: "Our industry does great in hard times! Direct selling prospers during recessions." And there's a lot of *popular wisdom* to support these truisms of the past—there was Kramer on TV telling everybody how network marketing is "recession-proof!" There was the president of Avon on PBS telling Charlie Rose about giving women a chance to be in business for themselves, but not by themselves. But what also was true is what had worked for us in the past had ceased to work for us in the present. If we wanted to be successful in the future, we had to find some new truths.

Finding the Eyes to See

I realized that perhaps I was too close to my own story to discover what was wrong with it. So I turned to a friend who helped us at the beginning of FirstFitness, Dr. Clifton Jolley, President of Advent Communications. He had created some of our most effective marketing campaigns in those early days when we were jump-starting our momentum,



Nigel Branson, President and CEO, FirstFitness

and he has been instrumental in helping us redirect our new marketing strategy.

Together, we spent weeks analyzing everything, from our product mix to our compensation strategy and marketing tools, and concluded: "The answer is simple, but it's an answer a lot of companies are missing."

We've Never Seen a Recession Like This One

Many of the statistics charting the troubles of our economy are worse than they were in the Great Depression, and the simple fact is that direct selling wasn't around the last time we had an economy in this much trouble. So, the old saws won't cut the wood they used to stack, and talking about how "bad times are good for direct selling" misses the fact of how bad the times are for many direct selling companies.

The result is that the tools distributors have been given just aren't working anymore. You can have the same great product, but the same old story and tired old approaches just aren't working anymore.

Right Product, Right Time, Wrong Approach

Lee Causey was a pioneer in wellness and weight loss, and the company's products reflect the genius of his sense of branding and innovation. Couple that with the fact that obesity is epidemic in the United States



\$11 million earner, Dr. Eileen Silva, FirstFitness Crown Presidential Director from Southlake, Texas, standing beside 3-Day Sampling display.

and throughout the world—it's the No. 1 one health risk factor among Americans and the No. 2 risk factor worldwide.

We knew our product was right for the times but realized we needed to trust in our product and trust in our people... and give our distributors something better to do.

We had been doing what we had always been doing—telling new distributors to make their goals list, to put it on the refrigerator, fill out a warm market list and so on—all the things that had been working for nearly two decades and weren't working anymore.

We began to question our business practices and rethink our fundamentals. *Why did people join FirstFitness? Which products did they buy? Which products did they not buy? What were our customers and distributors telling us? What was no longer working?*

What we came to realize is that a lot of what we had been telling people to do didn't accomplish what people most needed to be doing—earning money. As we talked to new distributors, they all told us the same thing: They were more interested in making ends meet than they were in hearing about how they could be living in a bigger house or driving a new car.

Finding a New Process for a New Time: Sampling!

Our principal product sale had been a 10-Day Diet Plan, and it worked really well. But what we realized is that when people bought it, what they really were doing was not making a goal to lose the weight they needed to lose, but *sampling our product*. It was the least expensive way to sample our Suddenly Slim System, and it cost more than \$60. You need to be quite a salesperson to get a stranger to give you \$60. And that meant our new distributors were focusing solely on their warm markets. But now—because of the hard times and hearing about it on the evening news every night—they were apprehensive about going to their families and friends *and asking for money*. The result? We were signing up distributors and giving them nothing they could do confidently.

What we needed was a less expensive threshold that *everyone felt safe to share and no one could say no to trying*.

The Result

The month after we introduced the new Suddenly Slim Sample Pak, sponsoring was up more than 50 percent and sales were up 12 percent. And since we were sampling at \$3 (instead of more than \$60), we could

introduce a new 30-Day Suddenly Slim System that was tied to our monthly qualification. Brilliant! Our average sale went from \$60 to \$100, and at the same time *sponsoring and sales were both increasing*.

After a number of months of declining sales and sponsoring, our turnaround began during the worst months of the market collapse! Why? How? *We gave our distributors something they could do immediately without knowing anything about the product.*

And we built tools around the sampling event.

Banner Stand, Mini Brochures and a Sample That Says, "Try Me!"

Dr. Jolley worked with Sprint back in the 1980s to develop direct selling as a marketing channel to change the way Americans make long-distance telephone calls, and he tells us that not since the Network 2000 "tabletop presentation" has there been a *display* that attracts people the way our FirstFitness Sampling Stand pulls them in. We've got two distributors who set up a Sampling Stand at a swap meet, sold 50 samples at three bucks a pop and made more than \$100 an hour on product they sold on the spot! What other MLM company is offering \$100 an hour to work a swap meet?! And that's not counting the residual sales over the next days and weeks as people start losing weight on the samples.

The answer to that question—*What other MLM company can do the same?—is: your company!* I don't think FirstFitness is unique. What we did is what *every MLM company should be doing*:

1. Look at your product....
2. Look at your people....
3. Ask yourself: *What have I given my people to do with my product?*

When we found the answer to that question, we found the way to turn *recession* into *recovery* for FirstFitness! By implementing the tips in this article, you, too, can turn the worst of times into the best of times.

20th-Anniversary Celebration: a Milestone and a Turning Point

This year we have reached a milestone that only a handful of direct selling companies attain—*longevity*. What makes this time unique is that we have turned a corner that will launch us into another 20 years. We have assembled a marketing strategy that works, and even during daunting times, we are building and growing. And, more important, our distributors are building and growing because we took the time to reassess our marketing, redesign our tools, understand and address the times and the needs of our people, and provide them with *effective* things to do from the day they sign up... *and henceforward*.

And we aren't stopping. We have learned from the success of tools and presentations that create immediate opportunities for sponsoring and sales, and at our 20th-anniversary celebration in Dallas in July, we are launching even more tools to turn Internet social networking into lead acquisitions. Making use of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube will provide our distributors robust new ways to grow their businesses beyond their warm markets and to continue the momentum of our current success.

We've discovered that direct selling is sufficiently nimble and creative enough to turn tough times into opportunity. All that is needed is to understand ourselves, our distributors and the times, and be willing and prepared to adapt who and what we are to a market that needs our products and to people who need our opportunity. **DSV**

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