

So, You Want to Start a Business?

Written by Jamie Wolf

Tuesday, 03 December 2013 14:51



In the Spirit of Business

Getting Healthy – Part 5 of 6

I have spent the last 2 years studying marketing - taking courses, attending conferences, reading extensively. How do you attract more customers and compel them to want to buy what you offer? With what message, language, headline, psychology do you adeptly identify their pain or problem and urgently move them to action to buy your solution?

I have also migrated through a series of business models, from advising high tech, scalable businesses requiring millions of dollars, to small business, to consultant, to solopreneur, to direct sales or network marketing.

Solo entrepreneurs, consultants, contractors, and small business owners (including franchisees) comprise the majority of for-profit businesses. Small firms were responsible for 63% of net new jobs from 2009-2012. ("Small" business in the US is defined, dependent on the industry, as less than between 500-1500 employees and less than \$20 million in revenue. It is worth noting, however, that over 75% of small businesses generate less than \$100,000 in annual receipts and have fewer than 20 employees; most have one.) Most small business owners acknowledge they aren't much different from employees, trading time for money (meaning the money they generate is directly limited by their hours worked.) Also, if they are honest, they will tell you that after taxes, insurance, payroll, lease payments, and more, they are just barely holding their heads above water.

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High profile tech businesses needing millions in funding are the darlings of the media with front-page coverage in the Wall Street Journal. Yet you rarely read the ugly side, the side that says for every one that makes it to the top there are 10,000 that don't make it at all, or for every one that shines in the glorious spotlight momentarily, there are hundreds if not thousands that die brutal, ugly deaths with employees laid off, marriages ruined, friendships irrevocably broken, and demoralizing debt. Yet because the successful ones are paraded about like lottery winners, that model is the Holy Grail business schools and business accelerators hold up to the masses as worthy of aspiring to, odds and reality be damned!

Whether you identify more with white collar, blue collar, or no collar, we've been conditioned to align with high tech and against network marketing: it's illegal, it's a pyramid scheme, it's sleazy, and it's not real business, you might think. In 2012, network marketing was a \$167 billion dollar industry and it has continued to grow. To put that in perspective, in the same year, video gaming was a \$67 billion industry and the NFL generated \$9.5 billion; in other words, network marketing is more than 17 times larger than professional football (think about that next time you watch the Super Bowl, its halftime show, and Super Bowl ads!)

I expected the process of learning about business models and marketing to lead to getting customers and sales while hanging out my shingle. Instead it's resulted in something infinitely more valuable; understanding that network marketing is a business I can run by myself without being alone, is scalable without requiring millions or even tens of thousands of dollars, and success is incumbent solely upon defining and recognizing leadership skills, finding leaders, and becoming a leader myself. No amount of sales could exceed the value of my personal and self-development and this development awaits each person who chooses network marketing and sticks with it through the learning curve. The thrill and satisfaction inherent in this business model spring from the level of integrity and moral character of the teams around me, the genuine friendships, the inspiration, the motivation to excel – and of course, the very lucrative nature of the industry. (As the saying goes, without revenue you have a hobby not a business. Even non-profits are revenue driven.)

Which is why this discussion is relevant to the next installment, getting healthy spiritually. My favorite editor, Margaret Evans, claims to be "genetically allergic to any jargon smacking of 'self-help'" yet my journey across the map of business models has turned out to be a path of discovery of who I am and how I can be better. Those who pursue network marketing, to succeed, must travel the same path. As Margaret aptly observes about gratitude when she says "it's hard to browbeat someone into feeling thankful," it's equally hard to drive someone to be driven. They either are or aren't. (Maybe that quality is currently sleeping and will be awakened at a future point, but it is the individual's job to seek, and then accomplish, the awakening!)

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To prepare for writing about spirituality I read "A Guide for the Perplexed" by E. F. Schumacher. It is a short, brilliant, and difficult read. In fact reading it, for me, was like meditating. I'd happen upon insight, then realize my mind had wondered to important stuff like 'Did I put the wash in the drier?' In which case I'd have to reread the sentence, or sometimes the whole page, to catch the meaning. Published almost 40 years ago, it reflects today's woes with clarity. For instance he writes:

"...this change of mind stems initially not from spiritual insight but from materialistic fear aroused by the environmental crisis, the fuel crisis, the threat of a food crisis, and the indications of a coming health crisis. In the face of these – and many other – threats, most people still try to believe in the 'technological fix.'"

I cannot summarize his entire book in a few paragraphs but let me give you an overview.

Minerals, plants, animals, and people exist on earth and have matter, life, consciousness, and self-awareness respectively. Minerals aren't alive while plants have an essence that minerals lack, something Schumacher labels 'x' or life; you can kill a plant but not a rock. Moving "up" to a higher level of being, we find consciousness. For instance you would associate curiosity with a cat but not an oak tree or a diamond. "It is easy to recognize consciousness in a dog, a cat, or a horse, if only because they can be knocked unconscious." Next, we jump from animals to humans and the difference here, according to Schumacher, is self-awareness, or 'z'. "There is not merely a conscious being, but a being capable of being conscious of its consciousness; not merely a thinker, but a thinker capable of watching and studying his own thinking."

After addressing these four levels of being he articulates what he calls the "four fields of knowledge." He asserts there is a level beyond self-awareness, a difference between living and 'being lived,' and more . . . but you'll need to read his book to learn of his discovery!

Schumacher supports my curiosity around self-development by lending it credibility I didn't know it was lacking. I can now say that pursuit of self-development is more truly pursuit of self-awareness. As Margaret wryly noted, commercial 'self-help' in today's era "often seems to be the Ancient Chinese variety repackaged." But Schumacher's self-help is the essence of spirituality. I can now understand and appreciate the quest I have been on, oddly and unexpectedly initiated by my love of business and a motivation to help others while helping

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myself, my family, and my community. Schumacher eloquently states:

"Compared with inanimate matter, life is rare and precarious; in turn, compared with the ubiquitousness and tenacity of life, consciousness is even rarer and more vulnerable. Self-awareness is the rarest power of all, precious and vulnerable to the highest degree, the supreme and generally fleeting achievement of a person, present one moment and all too easily gone the next. The study of this factor has in all ages . . . been the primary concern of mankind."

A Guide for the Perplexed states unequivocally the fix lies not with technology but with the spirit-driven declaration, "Know thyself." Current society relies heavily on the former, while network marketing success encourages the latter. You choose!

Beaufort resident Jamie Wolf is the author of "Start Over! Start Now! Ten Keys to Success in Business and Life" available on Amazon with 10 accompanying guidebooks. She has started over a number of times and now focuses on helping people who are ready to Start Over with their health

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