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IT ISN'T ABOUT THE PINK STUFF



I AM A MARY KAY KID. My mother started her direct sales career with Mary Kay Cosmetics when I was six years old and remained a member of that awesome company until the day she died more than thirty years later. Whenever I mention the fact that my mom was in Mary Kay, the first question inevitably asked of me is, “Did she have a pink Cadillac?” Yep, she sure did. That freakin’ pink car of hers, which was replaced every two years with a brand new model, was the bane of my existence growing up. It was a beautiful machine and certainly had all of the luxurious bells and whistles that one could ever want in an automobile. But I could never get over its color; I was just so embarrassed by its...pinkness.

Mom got into Mary Kay in the early '70s, very soon after she and my dad divorced. Mary Kay was the perfect career option for my mother as she had used the product line for years, needed to earn more income than her nursing job provided, and wanted to be available when her children needed her. With Mom's natural affinity for the products and her remarkable gift of gab, she had all the makings of a successful Mary Kay businesswoman.

Before Mom started winning cars, furs, and diamonds, I would often tag along with her to the in-home sales presentations she made. By the time I was in third grade I could easily recite the five basic steps in the Mary Kay skin care line including their features, benefits, and proper application techniques. I was fluent in the company's extensive glamour line and could describe the key elements of conducting a recruiting interview. Through Mom's extraordinary efforts she quickly moved into a management role after building a large, highly productive team of salespeople. I was fortunate enough to travel around the country with her as she gave motivational speeches and taught sales training classes in front of huge groups of adoring females. I swear I met more women by the time I was ten years old than most people meet in a lifetime.

While Mom shared with me many details of her growing business, she did her best to shield me from the unpleasanties and disappointments. For example, I had no clue about the gravity of her weekly sales summary report. To me this report was just another Mary Kay form, similar to the order forms, skin care profiles, and consultant agreements that were stacked on her desk. What I didn't realize at the time is that the numbers Mom put in the little boxes on the sales report dictated what we were going to spend at the grocery store that week, if I was going to get a new pair of shoes for school, and how generous Santa was going to be that year.

A few months before Mom died I asked her to tell me about the most difficult aspects of her career. Mom immediately launched into a great story about her early Mary Kay days. She said, "Teeter, there was nothing harder than maintaining a positive attitude after being totally exhausted from a full day's work, having to drive my beat-up Datsun B-210 in a Minnesota snowstorm, hauling heavy pink product cases into some stranger's house, spending two hours on my aching feet in high heels, and selling one mascara. Trust me, honey, *that* was hard to do."

When I was growing up I never saw this emotionally taxing part of her business. Instead, Mom only exposed me to the positive

side. She was, after all, the Queen of Positive Mental Attitude. Our two-bedroom apartment had stacks of inspirational books in every room, affirmations written on scraps of paper taped around the house, and mirrors next to each telephone so Mom could check her smile while speaking to a customer or recruit. Books and tapes from motivational gurus like Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins, and Napoleon Hill were permanent fixtures in our home. My mom had a vision board before vision boards were cool.

No matter how many setbacks she endured, the woman never lost sight of the dream to run her own business. Through years of hard work and practicing the Law of Attraction, as well as her unwavering belief in herself and Spirit, Mom created the career she desired. She was able to provide for her family, earn a sizable income, have a beautiful home, take nice vacations, and most importantly, have the flexibility to do what she wanted, when she wanted. My mother never missed any of my piano recitals, school plays, choral performances, or other events that are so important to kids. Every day Mom was at home when I left for school and every day she was there when I returned. Quite simply, the company with the pink jars and the pink cars enabled my mother to *be there* for me.

Mary Kay had such a positive impact on my life that, while in my twenties, I thought I would try to make a go at it myself. I failed dismally at it—twice. Having to work when I didn't want to, talking to strangers, and booking classes were my downfalls. I could easily envision myself at the enviable national management level, not only from an income perspective but also from a responsibilities standpoint. The problem wasn't visualizing the future; it was doing the actual work in the present. I just couldn't or wouldn't get my butt out of the house to generate the sale. A viable direct sales business isn't made while sitting in one's cushy home office ordering product and making brochures. Eventually I had to surrender the fantasy of being my own boss (in Mary Kay at least), and continued down the corporate path until many interesting twists and turns brought me to my current vocation as a writer.

As I reflect on the tremendous influence that organization had on me, both as an MK kid and a struggling consultant, I feel badly I gave my mom so much grief about the pink car. I recently recalled a memory from long ago. After listening to her self-absorbed teenage daughter blather on about the cheesiness of the family roadster, Mom calmly replied, “Teeter, it isn’t about the pink stuff. It’s about what the pink stuff provides us.” Her observation was simple yet profound. Not only does it apply to those women who sell cosmetics but also to all who have chosen scrapbooks, candles, jewelry, plastic storage, or anything else found in a catalog as a means to provide for themselves and their families.

With age comes wisdom. Maturity has given me a deeper appreciation for all that goes into these entrepreneurial careers, and I honor each and every woman who decides to take it on. I now realize it’s not about the pink stuff; it’s about the green. These brave warrior women deserve my utmost respect regardless of the color of their cars. Bravo, ladies, for a job well done.