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A Goal Bigger than You

APPLIED ALTRUISM IS SMART BUSINESS

BY MARK YARNELL

Let me suggest an impractical way for someone to succeed in network marketing. It's impractical-but it works. The entire notion of applying altruistic and spiritual principles to a business or scientific pursuit seems fraught with contradiction-and yet, that has been my winning formula. I have come to believe that we live in a cosmos based almost entirely on spiritual "deal making." (I speak with some authority, as a retired Christian minister turned network marketer.)

I've heard all the pseudo-piety and absurd rationalizations that suggest poverty itself is a virtue. I frequently take comfort in the statement of one of Ghandi's public relations consultants, who quipped, shortly after the great man's death:

"You have no idea how much it cost us to keep him in poverty."

When I exited the ministry to begin a new career in network marketing, I was still motivated by a sense of altruism. I had come to the conclusion I could do more good as a spiritual person with vast sums of money than I could as an impoverished minister.

My assumption has proven accurate. In fact, I am now what one might call an "abundance evangelist." I fervently believe that Christ wasn't playing games when He stated:

"I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

The "Payoff"

The living world is pervaded by two equal and seemingly opposite principles-altruism and self-seeking. Most people, in a simplistic way, will label the first as "noble but impractical" and the second as evil or "animalistic." To which I answer-nonsense. In fact, the two ethical imperatives are linked, up and down the great chain of being, from the survival activities of the simplest multi-cellular organisms up to the most elevated of human endeavors.

Let's start at the bottom: the Darwinian conception of evolution as a process of dog-eat-dog, of "survival of the fittest" brought on by genetic mutation and resulting from natural selection. The Darwinian model of evolution has been challenged recently by scientists who suggest that life could only have evolved through symbiotic cooperation. The "fittest" creatures to survive have turned out to be the most cooperative too. Even single-cell bacteria can now be seen to "make deals" of a sort with their competitors in order to grow and flourish.

If the most seemingly brutal of natural processes contain within them the seeds of altruism, then conversely, the most elevated forms of heroism contain vital elements of self-interest. Mother Teresa, for instance, did her good works in order to please Jesus Christ-her personal friend-and attain eternal salvation. (Not a bad trade-off, for a few years of hard work. Talk about residual outcomes!)

Ayn Rand, the brilliant philosopher, denounced "altruism" in her novel Atlas Shrugged, proclaiming instead "the virtue of selfishness." She was right to say that people's motives for giving could be selfish. But she didn't understand the cooperative nature of success.

For almost every philanthropist, artist, or hero, the "payoff" for good work is very important-even if his left hand doesn't know what his right hand is doing, and all he gets back is a quiet sense, of accomplishment. (Sometimes, that's the most powerful of rewards.)

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First, when we give our money or time to help others, we usually feel better about ourselves. Sometimes our peers feel better about us too. When we feel there is something decent and wonderful about ourselves we work harder and accomplish more. And-to get suddenly quantifiable-we make more money. See how simple that is?

I can say this because I pe rsonally have achieved the kind of wealth which is so admired and did so while focused on helping other people, instead of gazing constantly at my own bottom line.

Did I do it for selfish reasons? Partly, you bet. I love feeling good and receiving praise. I'd rather be regarded as a nice fool than as a nasty genius.

When we create a goal bigger than ourselves, we tend to work even more deligently because others are dependent on the outcome. Failing yourself is one thing: You can forgive yourself, too. But failing a bunch of helpless people in need? Forget it - we'll do anything to avoid that. With that kind of a goal, we run faster and farther.

To wit: in i972, it took me four months to raise $5,000 in order to start my own company. In 1991, it took me less than four days to raise $185,000 for a lady in Michigan who needed a bone marrow transplant. By understanding the first, I gathered the means to accomplish the second. But charitable goals such as the second gave me the motivation to achieve the business end.

Finally, we get pragmatic. You can benefit by helping others because you'll make