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# LEADING THE WAY

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## Direct Selling News

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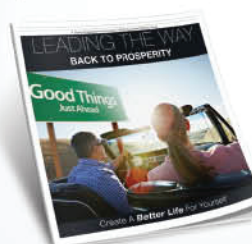
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## » Cover Story

# Leading the Way Back to Prosperity

by Chelsea Greenwood

**America**—the land of opportunity, prosperity and success—where are you hiding amid all of the glum news today? Layoffs, job consolidation, shrinking budgets, enormous debt—these are the sad words defining our recent economic reality. Is American prosperity a thing of the past? A footnote in our history books? With policy experts predicting that the jobs crisis will continue to be the dominant conversation through the 2012 election and beyond, the dream seems lost to many Americans.



**S**arah Barter, 34, of Syracuse, N.Y., was laid off from her teaching job of eight years and then informed that the district wasn't paying unemployment. For two years she jumped from job to job, trying to find work. She was beginning to question whether any kind of success was in her future.

Barrie Chapin, 64, also from New York, had 30 years of experience in technology managing a large team of developers for a global financial services firm on Wall Street. Being the first black woman vice president in operations at a global financial services firm on Wall Street didn't make a difference when the budget was sliced—she got the boot along with six of her staff.

Barter was at the beginning of her career and moderately paid; Chapin was nearing the end of a stellar 30-year career and highly paid. Both women found themselves unexpectedly without work and starting over. Thankfully, what they both found after they were laid off was that the American dream of freedom, success and prosperity is indeed alive and well.

Though from completely different backgrounds, both women have restored their financial freedom working for themselves as independent representatives of Silpada, a leader in sterling silver fashion jewelry and accessories. Barter says, "I love that I don't have to worry about being laid off or unemployed." Chapin agrees, saying, "I love the freedom of being my

own boss. The only way I'd go back to corporate America is if the police came and got me and put me in handcuffs."

Small business ownership and entrepreneurialism still hold out hope for many people who have become disillusioned as traditional reliance on corporate jobs turns into a thing of the past. In fact, becoming an independent business owner is a choice that more and more people are making. In 2010, according to the Direct Selling

Association (DSA), the industry saw estimated total sales of \$28.56 billion in the United States, with 16.1 million active salespeople. Globally, the industry pulls in over \$132 billion.

Interestingly, these numbers are not counted in the U.S. Department of Labor's statistics surrounding unemployment and the job market. But in truth, in the face of layoffs, shrinking corporate opportunities and a shaken trust in the traditional workplace, many

**"I love that I don't have to worry about being laid off or unemployed."**

—Sarah Barter, independent representative, Silpada

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T H E G N L D F A M I L Y O F B R A N D S





turn to direct selling—some might call it *social selling*—either full-time or part-time, as a way to return to a level of prosperity they've either lost or are continuing to seek.

Stacy Itzel, independent rep for The Pampered Chef for the last seven years, has also found her part of the American dream within direct selling. Needing to pay off credit card debt, Itzel started her own business in 2005. She works at her business less than 30 hours per week, yet earns more than \$5,700 per month holding around eight parties per month. Itzel says, "This business has done more for me than just provide financial peace. I am now more than a stay-at-home

mom with no college degree; I am a successful business owner who can pay my home mortgage and put my kids through private school. The value this opportunity has had on me, as a woman, is undeniable."

### All for One

The average entrepreneur can lead a lonely and even risky existence: When he or she hangs out a shingle, it's often done alone, with little support other than the well wishes of family and friends. She may have invested her life savings or he may have borrowed heavily just to get the doors open.

However, when a new representative

or consultant steps out into the field for the first time, he does so with the complete backing of a corporation—often a large, well established one—that's invested in his success. On a mental and emotional level, that's huge. The rep knows that, in essence, every person in that company is working to help him achieve his goals. He also paid very little to join the organization, as most companies have a start-up kit ranging from under \$100 to \$500.

The start-up process not only makes it possible to "open for business," but also provides invaluable resources. On the back end, the company conducts all the development and branding necessary

to ensure that its product or service is viable. Then, on the front end, it provides the mechanisms needed for the salesperson to build a lucrative business based on that product.

This support structure is the most appealing aspect of the industry according to David Bach, a personal finance expert and best-selling author on *The New York Times* list. He says, "The beauty of the direct selling business opportunity is that it's all done for you. You don't have to create a business plan. You don't have to create a product.

**"The beauty of the direct selling business opportunity is that it's all done for you."**

—David Bach, personal finance expert and best-selling author

The only thing you need to do is find a reputable company—one that you can trust—that offers a product or service that you believe in and can get passionate about."

Modern technologies have helped the industry grow as well. Thanks to the Internet, social media and mobile devices, direct selling is very different than it was just 20 years ago. Previously time-consuming tasks (e.g., processing phone orders and checks) have now become a breeze; recruiting is possible across all locations; reps can completely monitor their businesses on the go; and training, tracking and support materials are available at the click of a button.

### One for All

Indeed, this is a channel of distribution that is all about people, and companies understand that. They offer the rep flexibility and control because they want him to make choices to suit





his needs and desires. After all, he knows what *he* requires to succeed.

According to the DSA, the three largest product categories are *home/family care/home durables, wellness and personal care*, but the market is so huge and diverse that there's literally something for every taste. Products range from cosmetics and skincare to nutritionals and weight-loss and from energy and telecommunications to accessories, and more.

For those individuals willing to put in time and energy, the opportunity truly has unlimited earning potential. Many people get involved with a company in order to make a car payment, pay school tuition or credit card debt, or for other specific reasons. At first, they may work a handful of hours per week to earn this

**"I am a successful business owner who can pay my home mortgage and put my kids through private school."**

—Stacy Itzel, independent rep for The Pampered Chef

extra money. But many quickly come to understand that direct selling is based upon a directly proportional equation: The more time and energy you put into building your business, the more money you make. It's really that simple.

On the high end of the spectrum, the earning potential is unlimited. Take Holly Chen, for example. Cameras flash and a thousand fans cheer as she takes the stage. Soon, a video flickers on,

showing the 5-foot-tall woman exiting a private jet, cruising in a convertible and holding the attention of a rally 20,000 strong. If you're thinking Chen must be a rock star, you'd be right—in a way.

This 68-year-old woman, who addressed the aforementioned crowd at a Las Vegas convention earlier this year, is a leader with Amway. Along with husband Barry Chi, Chen is the company's biggest distributor, leading

a global network of 300,000. And it all started when Chen left her teaching position some 30 years ago to give direct selling a shot.

Chen discovered early on what many Americans are now realizing: Direct selling packs a powerful one-two punch. On one hand, the representative enjoys the security and stability of a large company, which offers resources and support. On the other, the rep is a free agent in charge of her own business, with the freedom to tailor every aspect to her lifestyle.

Whether the government's statisticians ever come to include the entrepreneurial efforts of these millions of people, they know they are leading the way back to prosperity for so many Americans. ■



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