

## The American Dream Model

by: Janet Ilacqua The present model of business and career motivation, the one most closely associated with the "American Dream" which emphasizes entrepreneurship, individual achievement, competition, and domination has been around for at least the last 50 years. Up to the mid 20th century, the predominant prosperity model was the Calvinist work ethic originally derived from the Puritan. The Calvinist work ethic emphasized hard work, saving for the future, and foregoing vacations, paying bills in cash, and foregoing luxuries to save for a rainy day. On the other, the motivation for moneymaking is no longer saving for the future, but, what Thorstein Veblen, the famous 19th century economist characterized as "conspicuous consumption." Luxury homes, luxury cars, fancy electronic gadgets, and exotic vacations create the illusion of wealth. The philosophy of the Amway Corporation, now known as Quixtel in the U. S. is a good illustration of the concepts involved. Amway Corporation is a direct selling organization that produces and markets products using a Multilevel Marketing system (or MLM for short). Multilevel marketing is a form of direct selling in which manufacturers authorize independent contractors to sell their products directly to consumers, bypassing intermediaries and retail stores. Using the garage or a spare bedroom as a warehouse and a home office as a business hub, a distributor makes a profit by buying wholesale from his or her company and selling to customers at retail prices. MLM is also a recruiting business. A distributor is permitted to sign up other individuals to become part of his company's distribution force--and is paid a commission on the wholesale product purchases made by recruits. Both methods then furnish consumers with new options in acquiring consumer items they desire. The motivator for work and sole measure of success measured is money and the goods that money can buy: This is a business, and a main reason people work at any business is to earn money that not only will help them pay their bills, but also meet other goals. Those may be short- or long-term goals, and they could be large (like buying a new house) or small (like saving for a vacation). A better standard of living is a common motivation and reward for people starting any kind of business. Money - and what it can buy - is the universally recognizable indicator of success that distributors use to motivate and establish credibility for their business. (<http://www.amway.com/InfoCenter/questions/question20.asp>) Another important aspect of this success model is that one has only one self's to blame for one's own success or failure. And yet given the low success rate in Amway, "the data from one investigative report reveal that only 1,000 of over 200,000 distributors ever achieved the rank of Direct Distributor or higher," it is also quite clear that the company does not offer success to anyone who enters the business [Bromley, 1995:151]. How can all these well-meaning people not succeed? The only ideologically accepted explanation is that these well-meaning people had no commitment to "the dream." The product is irrelevant. It is keeping the dream alive and resisting everything that could possibly rob one of The American Dream that counts. For "the dream" is God's blessing, the divine will, the American Way, family, morality, and the free-enterprise system. Hence, The American Dream becomes a cardinal article of faith, a foundation stone of America's civil religion. [Striker 1984: 128]As Striker describes it, the product lines in Amway come to signify and reveal something central to the growth of the company and the role of ideology. Amway is a performance-based business that rewards people in direct proportion to their effort. The bigger the financial goal, the more time and effort a distributor will need to put into his or her business. With an Amway business, a distributor can work as much or little as he or she likes. The rewards are based directly on the distributor's accomplishments. Recently, the American success model has been taken a battering. The competition for business markets and jobs is stiff. The faith in business has been eroded by corporate fraud scandals, massive layoffs, and outsourcing. However, at least for now, it remains the predominant success model in today's America.

## About the Author

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