

A career in the pink

by Jennifer Davies

Anne Newbury is the embodiment of the Mary Kay dream come true.

Newbury drove a pink Cadillac for much of her 38 years with the company, and won numerous mink coats, exotic trips and fancy jewels as rewards for her hard work.

A POSITIVE ATTITUDE - Anne Newbury started with Mary Kay in 1969 and collected more than \$11 million in commissions over the years. CNS Photo by K.C. Alfred. But her biggest reward arrived when Newbury became the first Mary Kay salesperson ever to earn more than \$1 million in commissions in a single year.

For the achievement, Newbury was feted at the 2006 Mary Kay convention in Dallas in an extravagant fashion with her own fireworks display.

That she achieved the milestone in her last year with the company is a fact that she still relishes.

"I don't compete with my friends at the top, but I do run my own race," Newbury said. "To retire at the No. 1 position was something I always had in the back of my brain."

Newbury, who moved to San Diego two years ago, didn't have such grand designs when she started at Mary Kay in 1969.

After hearing about the company from a relative, Newbury thought it might be a good way to make some extra money.

"When I had my first daughter, I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom," she said. "But I realized the budget was getting tighter than it should."

At first, Newbury said, she didn't take the job seriously, selling only when she felt like it. It was only after a move to Massachusetts that she began to commit to the Mary Kay business model. Mary Kay was virtually unknown in the Northeast, and a sales director pointed out to Newbury that she had a golden - or rather pink - opportunity to build the brand.

The business model has been very, very good to Newbury. The key with Mary Kay is to recruit new sales consultants and then have them recruit more sales consultants and so on. The more people recruited and the more of those recruits who move up the ladder to become sales directors and then national sales directors, which is the top position, the more commissions one makes.

To become a sales director, one needs to recruit 30 sales consultants. An independent sales consultant has to buy a starter kit for about \$100 as well as some inventory, but any unused product can be returned for 90 percent of the original price.

While some have criticized the Mary Kay business model, comparing it unfavorably to pyramid schemes, Newbury said that Mary Kay Ash, who founded the company, designed it so that there would be no limit to what a sales consultant could accomplish.

By the end of her career, the company said, Newbury had collected more than \$11 million in commissions and had a sales organization that spanned 12 countries with some 85,000 beauty consultants. Because of her strong earning power, Mary Kay said Newbury's retirement package guarantees her \$8.5 million over the next 15 years.

Mary Kay vice chairman Tom Whatley said Newbury is an icon in the organization.

"Anne in many ways is looked up to as much as Mary Kay herself," Whatley said.

For those who started with her at the beginning, Newbury's success was no surprise and no accident. They all describe Newbury as someone with an intense work ethic, a passion for the business and an unrelenting optimism.

Nancy Sullivan, one of Newbury's first recruits, said Newbury always taught people to think big. Newbury told all her recruits that if they followed the Mary Kay business model, they would be successful.

At one of the early meetings at Newbury's Massachusetts home, Sullivan remembered Newbury pointing to all the attendees' parked cars and saying that one day they would all be pink Cadillacs.

"Just as she predicted, all our cars turned to pink," Sullivan said.

Marcia Groberty, another Mary Kay national sales director, said Newbury had such a reputation within the organization that she worked especially hard to get a meeting with her.

The deal was, Groberty said, that she had to hold 10 classes, in which a sales consultant demonstrates the Mary Kay products, to win a lunch meeting with Newbury, then a star in the organization. Groberty completed

the challenge and remembers being mesmerized by Newbury.

"She made me feel important. She made me feel special," Groberty said. "She has the ability to make people believe that they can do whatever they want to do."

Bonnie White, another early Newbury recruit, also remembers her mentor leading by example with a combination of hard work and grit. Before she gave birth to her fourth child, Newbury was in a challenge to give 10 classes in a week.

"She finished the last class and went off to the hospital to give birth," White said.

Newbury was also the ultimate saleswoman, using her powers of persuasion to sign up new customers and new sales consultants.

"She got in her car and literally drove across the country to meet people in their homes," Whatley said.

Sullivan remembers initially being a little put off when Newbury decided to personally deliver the Mary Kay products she had purchased.

Newbury drove an hour to Sullivan's house in New Hampshire and demonstrated the products while convincing Sullivan and her husband of the merits of Mary Kay.

"My husband called while she was there and he said, 'Is the cosmetic lady still there?' and I told him 'Yes' and that he shouldn't come home for lunch. But Anne said he should come," Sullivan said. "She knew that if she talked to the husband, he would understand the business plan."

Groberty said that for all Newbury's hard work, she also likes to play hard, relishing luxurious Mary Kay retreats to Mexico and lavish shopping sprees. It was Newbury who taught Groberty and others how to shop like champions.

"Her motto was live comfortably beyond your means," Groberty said. "Charge it, and you go home and work to pay for it."

Said Sullivan: "She definitely raised our luxury levels."

But for all of Newbury's ambition, those who worked closely with her said she motivated by nurturing her sales team.

"For all the 34 years I worked with her, she has never criticized me," Sullivan said. "You always felt unconditional support."

When Sullivan was having a hard time signing up new recruits so she could become a sales director, Newbury stepped in to help her polish her presentation skills.

Sullivan said that Newbury often told her and others, "If you really want it, I won't let you fail."

To Newbury, it's all about having an optimistic attitude even as you face difficulties. For instance, she said that in the 1970s the gas shortage caused many Mary Kay sales consultants to drop out, hurting Newbury's and the company's earnings. In the 1980s, as direct marketing business models like Mary Kay's came under increased scrutiny, it became harder and more time-consuming to recruit sales consultants. Those setbacks never got her down.

"Even if there are problems out there, there is always a list of solutions," Newbury said.

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