

COLUMN

It's about time

Playing the MLM Game

Like baseball, chess or Candyland, what if you looked at network marketing as a game you were playing— would that change the way you played...?

by **John Fogg**

There are at least two kinds of games: finite and infinite.

A finite game is a game that has fixed rules and boundaries, that is played for the purpose of winning and thereby ending the game.

An infinite game has no fixed rules or boundaries. In an infinite game you play with the boundaries and the purpose is to continue the game.

James P. Carse *Finite and Infinite Games*

Are you playing the MLM game...?

Really...?

As I know it, games have rules, structure, starting and stopping times and a clear way to keep score— how to know if you won or lost.

What are the rules of the MLM Game... the structure... how do you keep score, know when you win... or lose?

There aren't. There isn't. And, you don't.

Strange game.

Just about every game I'm aware of has rules: chess, Monopoly, tennis, golf, football... each one has pretty elaborate regulations or laws governing how the game is played. Players agree to abide by the rules, because if they didn't the game can't really be played. What would happen in any of the games I mentioned if one person didn't play by the rules or simply made up their own as the game went along? Just wouldn't work to tackle a batter running from first to second base, or take another card... then another... and just one more making seven-card stud a 10 card game for you.

Of course there's always cheating... breaking the rules. Hey, I'm the banker; what's another 10 thousand or three to me?

But that's not fair and all games are fair— aren't they?

And structure... all games *must* have structure. You can't play tennis with a football; hit the clubhouse after 12 holes while the rest of the foursome plays all 18 and then compare scores; take a cab for the final 6 miles, 385 yards of the New York City Marathon (like you used to be able to do in Boston :-). No, all games have clear structures. They've got to or it isn't a game.

Start times. Ending times. "Play ball!" Deal the cards. The kickoff. Nine innings... 00.00 on the clock in the fourth quarter... You own hotels on Boardwalk, Park Place, Marvin Gardens, et al and all and everybody else is broke... Lance crossed the finish line in front of you *again*....

'And speak to us of winning and losing....' Yeah, that one. Well, ALL games have to have a winner and losers.

Interesting: Only one winner, but most always lots of losers.

We keep score, count strokes and times and points and runs and hands and game, set, match... all to 'decide' who wins and who doesn't. If it's a game, you've *go to* have winners and losers.

Given all the above, what about playing this MLM Game?

What are the *rules*... what's the *structure*; the playing field, bases, goal posts, sidelines, out of bounds... and equipment like bats and balls and clubs and spikes... what's the *start time* and *end time*... and of course, how do you know if you *win* or *lose*...?

Is it even possible to play a game with (mostly) no rules and regulations, doesn't have any real structure, does not have a beginning and ending (except perhaps if you quit playing) and has no clear way to know if you won or lost...?

That's the MLM Game. And how many tens-of millions of people are playing it all around the world...? Fascinating.

And this bit:

All games are voluntary. You don't have to play if you don't want to. So, why do you play any game?

Challenge— sure.

To improve your skills, get better at it, a personal best— yes.

Compete— yup.

And to have FUN! Absolutely. That's why we play any game— isn't it?

So, are you having fun playing the MLM Game...? (I'm tempted to apologize, but I'm really not sorry for asking.)

When I 'played' tennis, I never— after a very little while— played a 'real' game. It wasn't about avoiding winning or losing. It just wasn't *fun*! All that starting and stopping. What I loved was the hitting and missing, the slamming it into or getting it out of the corner, serving and being served, clipping the line (or being clipped by it), drop shots, volleys, base-line rallies, back-hand winners... all of it. I loved ***playing***. I didn't care about game, set, match. I just loved *playing* tennis.

Back to Carse:

An infinite game has no fixed rules or boundaries. In an infinite game you play with the boundaries and the purpose is to continue the game.

The purpose is to **play**.

Playing the MLM Game just to **play**.

There's a concept.

— JMF



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