INDUSTRY | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | WOMEN

From Israel: Network marketing & women in Israel

Special correspondent from the Middle-Eastern front -
by **Esti 'StraightArrow' Allina**
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Netanya – Women in Israel are no different than women anywhere else who have been presented with the unlimited opportunity that is network marketing. However, unlike the in U.S. and most English-speaking countries, women here do not enjoy 'equal pay for equal work' making network marketing the perfect equalizing opportunity for women here who would otherwise have to settle for at least a salary 15% lower than her male counterpart.

In a society in which women and men serve side-by-side in mandatory army service, one would think that gender discrimination would be all but non-existent. Yet women's 2-year service as opposed to men's 3-year service, already hints at gender discrepancies if not outright discrimination.

To understand the significance of network marketing in the lives of Israeli women it's important to understand the economic reality and the cultural framework.

A two-income household is absolutely essential to make ends meet in this economy if one is to maintain even a basic standard of living. Women get a 3-month paid maternity leave, and can take another 3 months leave and her job will be waiting for her. When she goes to work the baby is often cared for by a private child-minder or put into daycare. Often the salary barely covers the cost of daycare, but many women do it to maintain their tenure and/or to get out of the house. Professions such as teaching and banking offer women convenient hours that allow them to be home by mid-afternoon to look after the children. (Banking hours here are 9-1, then 4-6 on certain days.) Families tend to be larger here, especially among

the religious sect. In fact, in our neighborhood, our family of 6 is considered an average to small-sized family!

It's a very difficult economy in which to make ends meet. For example, my husband works in computers at a university and brings home less than $2000/month. Relative to earnings, the cost of living is high. Though, in absolute terms or for those in high tech, medicine, law, upper management, or earning an American scale salary, it is very affordable. Even if I were to work full-time (in a conventional job) we would not have enough to live on.

We are fortunate to have the generous assistance of my parents to be able to send our children to music lessons and in general, maintain a reasonable standard of living. This is a huge part of the reason I work a network marketing business – to finally create financial independence and eventually financial freedom for my family. It is my highest priority to be home with my 4 boys and raise them myself; network marketing allows me to be there for my boys while helping to support the family.

A woman choosing to enter the conventional work force has many obstacles. It is illegal, yet still common for a young woman to be asked in a job interview what her marriage and family plans are. A good friend of mine, a mother of 4 boys like myself, was interviewing for jobs and was asked if she planned to have anymore! I myself encountered problems with a female manager who hired me to work from home part-time, then had a change of heart explaining, "I don't believe a woman with young children at home can do the work." If only she could see me now!

As you can see, there are many compelling reasons for a woman to avoid the 9-5 type scenario here! It's a jungle out there!

Some interesting observations from many in the network marketing industry with whom I spoke to gather information for this article:

- at least 10 or more network marketing and direct sales companies operate in Israel;
- these companies began operating in Israel in the mid-late 1980's;
- almost all of these companies revolve around health and beauty products;
- Distributors are mostly women (about 80%);
- the Russian immigrant segment of the population are hugely successful in these businesses;
- Arab women are involved, but there is no integration between the Arab and Jewish distributors – each works in their own communities;

What Israeli women have in common with their foreign counterparts is their reasons for entering network marketing. Rachael Wel noted that the flexibility built into this kind of business was perfectly suited to women working around the demands of home and family.

> ***A woman is in total control of her network marketing business, "choosing people according to the hours she wants to work," Rachael points out, adding "women have excellent communications skills and connect to others.***

Women are natural networkers. In the business world, women get stuck under the glass ceiling. In network marketing there is no glass ceiling." Rachael also observed that here in Israel she sees more couples working the business together than in other countries she's visited. Rachael and her husband, Mordecai, are 18-year veteran networkers with Sunrider who travel the world for their company and conduct trainings. Rachael and Mordecai have built their global business while raising 7 children!

Keep in mind that Israel is a small country, about the size of New Jersey with most of the population concentrated in the center of the country. We

are part of the European Union only where trade is concerned while our population is quite a mosaic: immigrants from Arab countries – Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya; immigrants from the former Soviet Union are a large majority here; Ethiopians – who have not yet caught 'network marketing' fever; Europeans – many French are fleeing the anti-Semitism in France; and tens of thousands of English speakers from the U.S., Canada, England, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. This is not a comprehensive list of the countries represented here, just those whose groups stand out the most.

We have a free-market economy, albeit with very high taxes including a 17% sales tax, but the opportunity to improve one's situation exists.
My friend, Susan, a distributor in a health-related company explained the tremendous Russian success in network marketing here,

> ***"They do what they're told. They follow the system. English-speaking networkers are always trying to reinvent the wheel – they always know better."***

The pitfalls of freedom! I think this speaks volumes.

For women in particular, it is an opportunity to "realize her potential, do something outside the home, make new connections with other women, improve her self-image and self-esteem, develop interpersonal skills and help support the family," says Rivka, a distributor for Energetix jewelry, adding, "many women realize abilities they didn't know they had. I think it's a very positive thing for women" [to be involved in network marketing].

Each company operating in Israel has its own system and training. No gurus have created followings here yet. There are no generic trainings. Also, when I spoke to several marketing managers or public relations directors of the various companies, none of whom had heard of any of the resources that networkers in America and around the world have come to rely upon to hone their business skills, build their businesses, and train their downlines.

Ever since my first day as a new immigrant in Israel in 1987 I've been told, "It's not what you know, but who you know – 'protekzia' – Vitamin P."

I found that to be true when I was looking for my first job, or needed a little help greasing the wheels of bureaucracy. Networking is, and always has been, part of the fabric of this tiny country. It's taken networking to build this country into the great country it is and to survive the constant threats. Networking used to belong to the 'old boys' club', but no more.

Despite the above, the lack of job security evident in watching many of our friends re-enter the job market every few years, and the challenging economic climate, the masses surprisingly have not caught on to the benefits of network marketing. Orly, a business leader in Nature's Sunshine Products-Israel, explained, "It's the Israeli character to always be asking 'Where's the catch? How am I being taken advantage of?" The biggest fear an Israeli has is being made a 'sucker'.

Self-employed business women have, on the other hand, grabbed networking by the horns and made it their own by creating a networking group who communicate via an email list (the 'Devas'), unselfishly sharing knowledge, resources, and employment opportunities. Yet, few, if any, of these professional women are part of a network marketing company. We do not see as many women leaving a corporate environment for network marketing, as we do in the States.

Network marketing has opened a new venue for the otherwise stay-at-home moms to create a life of purpose outside of the home and develop in new exciting ways within a network of like-minded

women and make the glass ceiling an irrelevant reality for her.

Esti 'StraightArrow' Allina is an American living in Israel and currently building a business remotely – she lives in Netanya, Israel while building her Shaklee business in the States. She plans to be instrumental in bringing this company to Israel in a few years. Esti's background is in Special Education and Elementary Education, and has a background in holistic health, having studied reflexology and iridology when her first son was born to be at home with him; later joining a health and wellness network marketing company to incorporate into her holistic practice with a vision of creating financial security in the difficult Israeli economy. She is a stay-at-home networking mom of 4 boys, and wife of the very supportive, Dan. She can be reached at: 1-866-820-3431 or success@estiallina.com .