STORY | LEADERSHIP

Carolyn Wightman – Who Leads the Leaders

"What I love most about Network Marketing and my business is that I can stay committed to possibilities"

from **The Greatest Networkers in the World** *by* **John Milton Fogg**

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Carolyn Wightman says she grew up as plain vanilla. "I was just basic. I didn't come from a broken family. I certainly did not have a silver spoon in my mouth. I mean, I wore hand-me-down clothes and that sort of thing, but nobody was ever starving."

Carolyn was born and raised in and around Washington D.C.. The house that they lived in was right across the river in Virginia, and when the trees were trimmed, Carolyn would look out her window on a view of the nation's Capitol and the Washington Monument.

Carolyn remembers her father taking her to an Inauguration Day parade, sitting on his shoulders looking up at the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. She sensed the history all around her and Carolyn felt she was somehow part of it.

Her family moved from D.C. and she went to high school in Illinois. When it was time for college, Carolyn's parents said, "Don't look at where the college is and whether you can get a scholarship or not. Let's just make the decision and then we'll figure it out." Carolyn decided she was going west. She was able to get "a very expensive" Liberal Arts degree and somehow, it did get figured out.

At the time, California seemed like it was off the planet because it was so very far away. Things like long distance calls were really long distance. It took days to drive back and forth, and most people never had the money to fly.

Carolyn loved the idea that where she went to school was near the mountains, and near the ocean, and had the fabulous city of San Francisco around it.

There was such enormous variety and versatility, and a sort of open-mindedness that was very energizing to her.

In the middle of her college career, Carolyn made a deal with her parents that if they would give her the tuition for two semesters, she would go live in Italy as long she could afford to. That was in the days of “Europe-on-$5-a-Day,” and she did even better than that. Carolyn stayed for eight months.

The first thing she did when she returned to the States was to take a summer internship back in Washington. She was assigned to the office of a Congressman. They were short on staff, so Carolyn ended up with way more responsibility than a college intern normally was given. As a result of her efforts, the Congressman asked her to come and work, “as his congressional staff in the district” in the fall, which just happened to be in California where her parents her had moved.

From all her experiences Carolyn discovered that she had a real curiosity and passion for the political process.

She was especially fascinated with decision-making and leadership.

Carolyn married and she and her husband pioneered the first Peace Corps program in Polynesia. They were there for three years, returning to the States in 1969 and ended up in Southern California.

It was time for Carolyn to find work.

She had her experience in Washington, her Liberal Arts degree, she spoke a Polynesian language... what else? Nothing had prepared her for anything except getting more education and teaching— and she just couldn’t see herself in front of a classroom.

Get a job? Working for somebody, commuting in traffic every morning, getting home really late, working the day after Christmas. If someone comes in from out of town, you can’t take time off to be with them and

make it up later. None of that appealed to her at all.

Carolyn was home with her family for Thanksgiving and, dutiful daughter that she was, helped her mom with the dishes and laundry. Her mother kept telling her, “Don’t use very much of this now. It’s really concentrated, just a little tiny bit— and it doesn’t pollute.”

In Polynesia, everything was pure and crystal clear. In Southern California, you couldn’t breathe the air and you shouldn’t drink the water. That contrast was alarming for Carolyn even before the words “biodegradable, environmental, ecology” came into people’s vocabulary— and true to her Peace Corps roots— Carolyn was looking for a way she could be part of the solution, instead of the problem.

She asked her mom, “Where do you get this stuff?” Her mother said, “I don’t know. I think it’s one of those door-to-door businesses, and you’ve got to wait until someone knocks on your door.”

Carolyn lived 400 miles away from her mother’s door, so that wasn’t very helpful. Carolyn called the company and asked, “Where can I buy this stuff?” They connected her with someone who was nearby.

A woman came over to Carolyn’s house, dropped off a “confidential price list” saying, “…and maybe you’d like to be a distributor.” Carolyn told her, “I’m not interested in selling anything. All I want to do is buy these products.” The woman took Carolyn to the home of her sponsors.

“I had the sense that anyone who did this probably lived in a trailer park,” Carolyn says. “Probably had a rabid dog that was tied to a tree with a chain, and a couple of cars in the yard up on cinder blocks with bald tires.” That’s honestly what she thought.

“Who else would be in a door-to-door business except somebody who is really down and out?”

Instead, Carolyn was taken to a lovely home in Beverly Hills— the real Beverly Hills with movie stars up and down the street. The house was beautiful with a three-car garage that had an apartment above it where the Japanese housekeeper who helped raise the family’s four children lived. Both the husband and the wife were stockbrokers. Their home

office was in their oldest son's room. He was off at Harvard Law School. "This does not exactly fit the picture I was expecting," Carolyn thought.

"In this business, we think you have to be clever and be a really good salesperson," Carolyn says. "And you have to have a good presentation and be really persuasive. But their housekeeper spoke very broken English. She offered me a protein drink in a little crystal glass on a silver tray. I told her no, thank you very much, I just wanted the cleaning products. She looked at me and said, 'You feel good now. You use this, you feel better. You try.'"

"That's how I got in the business, and that was four decades ago"

In the beginning, Carolyn used a few products, gave some more away as Christmas presents, but that was pretty much it. Then her sponsors invited her to a meeting. Carolyn didn't want to go, but did so as a courtesy. All the while wondering, "What am I doing here?"

The man presenting the meeting talked about what the business was like for him. All Carolyn heard was he'd just gotten a new car. He and his family had just earned some exotic trip to somewhere. He had just made $2,000 in that past month... That got her attention. $2,000 back then was a lot of money to Carolyn.

"Frankly, he wasn't particularly inspiring," Carolyn remembers. "I looked at him and thought, 'If that guy can do it, I ought to be able to do half that — and it certainly beats working for the phone company. Maybe I ought to give this a shot.' That's how I backed into the business."

Carolyn had no idea what she was doing. Her mentors gradually brought her along, "on their apron strings," she says.

This was 40 years ago. There was no Internet, no conference or three-way calling. Long distance phone calls were too expensive to make during the day, so Carolyn only made calls after 11 at night when the rates went down. Occasionally someone would record a cassette tape and she'd share that with people.

So Carolyn built her business sharing stories and through word of mouth. She didn't have a map or a model. People asked her how to do the business and she'd say, "I don't know. Just find something you're

enthusiastic or passionate about and tell people."

One sale at a time... One new business partner at a time... Over time, Carolyn watched her business ever-so-slowly grow.

"The thing I did best,' she says, "is I didn't quit."

Carolyn was never motivated by money. Her purpose in the business was really to connect with people and give them some choices in their lives.

She did realize that money may a big motivator for some people, and since you couldn't make money in her business without having products that would make you healthier, and support the planet, and get some of the toxins out of your life, Carolyn's mission was going to be accomplished, regardless. That's what was really important to her. Still is.

Carolyn always makes sure that the objectives people are looking for fit and match what it is that she has to offer. If she has to tweak some things to make it work, she can do that.

Carolyn stopped trying to fit square pegs into a round holes long ago. She's certain that the approach of, "This is the way it is, do this and that and this," is a very limiting way to do business and simply doesn't work. Carolyn focuses on finding the win-win. Even more, she's out to create win-times-win. Win2.

The kinds of people Carolyn finds most attractive and are the most successful, are people who see themselves as leaders. Leaders are willing to take responsibility for their behavior and also for their results. Leaders are people who are not blaming someone else or some other circumstance for what it is they do. Leaders are looking for a challenge that allows them to live in integrity with their life and values, and also to be rewarded for that as richly as they choose.

Carolyn always looks to see who leads the leaders.

"It's all about Possibilities," Carolyn says. "I go back to my old Peace Corps roots: If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."

“There are so many problems out there that anyone can see, whether it has to do with our life or economics or finances or how we deal with our children or health or all of these things. I think that it’s easy to get on a bandwagon and go, ‘Oh, I don’t like this,’ and ‘Oh, I wish that had happened,’ or go out and take a flag and march down the street for some cause. That by itself does not create solutions.”

“What I love most about Network Marketing and my business is that I can stay committed to possibilities; possibilities for financial education, possibilities for being able to live a life with vitality and energy.”

“It’s being able to see solutions and not just problems.”

“To actually have something that if people are in a conversation about, ‘Oh, I don’t feel good, Oh, this doesn’t work. Oh…’ whatever it is, to know that I actually have a choice I might be able to offer them.”

That doesn’t mean that Carolyn has the only choice, and it doesn’t mean that others have to do it her way.

“To be able to offer someone the possibility of a solution and not just living in a problem, I find very emancipating— for both of us,” she says.

“That provides an inspiration for people. If they like living being unhappy, then God bless them. That’s fine. But if they want to do something else, let’s keep exploring some ways that Network Marketing can make that happen.”

From ***The Greatest Networkers in the World***

John Milton Fogg is an author, editor, speaker and coach. His books and audios have sold over three million copies worldwide.

www.TheNetworkMarketingMagazine.com

He is the founder and former Editor-in-Chief of the highly regarded publication Upline®... was a Contributing Editor to SUCCESS magazine... the founder and former Editor-in-Chief of Network Marketing Lifestyles magazine... founding editor of Networking Times... the founder of GreatestNetworker .com... co-founder of TheNetworkMarketing Magazine.com and is the creative force behind TransformingMLM.com. You can connect with his writings on a regular basis at TheFoggBlog.com and learn more about what he is up to by going to http://JohnMiltonFogg.com

John is the author of the best-selling industry classic *The Greatest Networker in the World,* which has been read by more than two and a-half million people around the world and he has edited and contributed to far too many books to be mentioned here.

He has spoken around the globe, through out Canada and the United States, in Australia, China, Costa Rica, Crete, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, Trinidad and the Ukraine.

John is married to Jekaterina (Katyusha), has a daughter Rachel 28, son Johnny 23, daughter Eleonora Milena (Ele) who's 7 and Anais Polina (his 'last child') was born in March, 2006.