



The Advisor

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Time For A Change?

For direct sellers, dwindling excitement, income could be signs that it's time to try something new

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kelly Johnson](#) Staff Writer

Most small-business owners experience a day now and again when they don't have that fire in their belly about their company. But if that passion continues to wane, how do you know when it's time to move on to another venture?

Finding the right fit and then maintaining a zeal for one's business is one of the keys to a successful small business, no matter the industry type. It's especially true for direct sellers — the people who have their own businesses selling manufacturers' products directly to consumers, either through parties or person-to-person, in such categories as home decor, jewelry and beauty supplies.

Some of the better known names are Avon, **Mary Kay** and The **Pampered Chef**. These individuals don't have a storefront or staff, and have to generate sales on their own day in and day out. There also are more of them these days, as people search for new business opportunities for full-time or side work during the recession. As of 2008, direct retail sales in the U.S. totaled \$29.6 billion, with 15.1 million salespeople, according to the **Direct Selling Association**.

The Sacramento region has "a couple thousand, easily," said Louise Umeki, an Elk Grove woman who is Northwest chapter coordinator for the Direct Selling Women's Alliance. "This is a very strong area in direct sales and network marketing."

With unemployment high and pay cuts common, direct sales are booming as a career choice, she said, because startup costs are low and sellers can do it as a side job.

Prospective direct sellers, though, must be wary of teaming up with unproven brands and overstated promises.

Umeki, a direct seller herself, knows when it's time to move on: "If you are

*"Nobody can go back
and start a new
beginning, but anyone
can start today and
make a new ending."*

~ Maria Robinson



“There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction”

~ Winston Churchill



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not excited about your business every day, if you don't attend meetings, if you don't share your business with everyone everyday with a smile on your face.”

Tough Decision

Sherry DuFault, 53, of Natomas, was a direct seller for a home-products company she thought she'd be with the rest of her life.

“I had a team that I loved. They were my family,” she said.

But she had become less than enthusiastic. Consumers could buy the brand-name product through other channels in addition to direct sellers. The brand wasn't leading-edge. It didn't offer any new technology. Its durable products last for years, meaning she couldn't count on too many repeat customers.

“It was a hard job convincing people that they wanted the product,” DuFault said. “You want (to sell) something that everyone wants.”

She was selling \$10,000 in product each month.

“I knew something wasn't right. I couldn't work harder,” DuFault said.

She agonized over the decision to move on to another direct sales company, and felt guilty for leaving people who relied on her. She researched the company she was thinking about switching to, with hopes of finding that it wasn't as good as it was portrayed.

“Honest to God, I sat at my kitchen table and cried,” she said. “It was very much like getting a divorce. It was a very difficult, very emotional transition for me. It was horribly painful.”

For 13 months, DuFault has been direct selling for **Nu Skin Enterprises**, which produces personal care, nutrition and technology products focused on anti-aging. She's making more money, and she has a glow about her, not only from using the products, but because she found the right fit.

Now, she said, “I'm on a journey that I'm supposed to be on.”

Moving On

Jolene Scanlon, 44, of Granite Bay, had been a direct seller for a home-decor company. She was doing well financially, earning 13 free trips around the globe and making enough that she bought her husband a BMW. She was passionate about it — until the company changed owners.

Unlike DuFault, Scanlon found the decision to leave easy. “It just felt right,” Scanlon said.

Now a direct seller for jewelry company Stella & Dot, Scanlon said this product is “an easier sell because I'm wearing it,” and she figures she can take home an additional \$1,000 a month with this company's better compensation plan.

Selling Stella & Dot, she said, allowed her to “get excited again.”

Another direct seller, Magda Nordahl, is **Cookie Lee** jewelry company's No. 1 consultant in recruiting and No. 8 in sales. She had stand-out sales in her

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first year with Cookie Lee, which was five and a half years ago. Nordahl's experience was different than that of Scanlon and DuFault. The Yuba City woman, who does a lot of selling in Sacramento, owned a Christian bookstore and was still passionate about it, even after 18 years. She had no plan to sell the thriving bookstore, which had been in her family a decade before she took it over.

She was going to buy some Cookie Lee jewelry from a woman she had met, and was blown away by her staff's response to the jewelry they saw in the catalog.

"My little entrepreneurial side kicked in," Nordahl said.

For six months, she sold Cookie Lee on the side while still operating her bookstore. But after six months, her take-home pay from selling Cookie Lee part time was the same as from her longer, harder hours running the bookstore.

"Every month it was growing exponentially," she said, adding that it "was the easiest job I've ever had."

She sold the store.

"I felt very safe forging ahead," Nordahl said. "A lot of factors made it easy," including the money — "I'm making three times my old pay" — as well as recognition, independence, and helping other women feel beautiful. She's amazed, she said, that this new opportunity, which she also has a passion for, has come into her life.

Is your small business still a good fit?

Ask yourself:

- Are you still excited about the business?
- Financially, are you getting what you need and want?
- Is it fulfilling your personal goals?
- Do you believe in the product or service and feel it has potential for growth?



***"Life is change.
Growth is
optional.
Choose wisely."***



**INTERNATIONAL
ACQUISITION
GROUP**

**1925 E. Beltline Rd.
Suite 503
Carrollton, TX 75006**

**Phone:
866-498-6445**

**E-mail:
info@intltag.com**

**We're on the Web
www.intlag.com**



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