

Old myths dispelled

Avon calling for soft-sell door-to-door sales pitch

By Michelle Brence
Of the Emerald

Avon representatives often have been characterized as lonely housewives going door-to-door to catch up on the latest gossip. Carol Tucker, who visited Eugene Friday, is out to change this image.

Tucker, one of Avon's five national managers for products, beauty and public relations, stopped by Eugene and Corvallis to offer advice for those entering direct-sales.

Emphasizing a soft-sell approach, Tucker said in an interview that self-motivation and consistent follow-through with customers are vital to successful direct selling.

"I think there is a myth out there that people need to be hard-sell in order to be successful," Tucker said.

"We teach people to just be themselves," she said.

"We talk to them about looking their best and dressing the part. It doesn't mean you have to be gorgeous. It means looking as good as you can look and having self-confidence," said Tucker, who began selling Avon 22 years ago to put her son through nursery school.

Avon representatives meet in a group once a month with a district sales manager to receive tips on grooming. They also are told about incentive programs, which include prizes for exceptional sales and a sponsorship that awards additional commissions to representatives who recruit new Avon salespeople, Tucker said.

Representatives cover between 100 and 200 households in their assigned territories, and they receive a 35- to 50-percent commission on their sales and 5 percent on the sales of representatives they have recruited.

Tucker said those who work full-time can earn up to \$30,000 a year. And because representatives can set their own hours, the job is ideal for college students.

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Before Avon salespeople can tally up their profits, however, they must shell out \$30 for initial supplies and training. They also must continue to buy sales booklets, samples, order forms, gasoline and the decorated paper bags for delivering the products. The company encourages salespeople to order additional samples and demonstration products.

The average Avon representative makes just more than \$2,000 a year, Tucker said.

Mary Stuck, a Eugene-area representative, has sold Avon for more than 11 years. She said purchases about \$50 worth of supplies for each two-week campaign, except during the Christmas season when she buys up to \$150 of supplies to meet increased demand.

Working 40 hours a week to supply her 120-household territory, Stuck receives a 45-percent commission on her \$9,000 average yearly sales.

"You really get to be close friends with your customers," Stuck said.

Avon originated in 1886 when David McConnell, a door-to-door book sales person in New



Carol Tucker

York, began giving out vials of perfume to prospective book buyers. McConnell discovered that women were more interested in the perfume than in the books, and he began to manufacture fragrances.

By 1905 McConnell's California Perfume Company became a national organization, employing more than 10,000 representatives.

In 1939 McConnell changed the name of his manufacturing company to Avon Products Inc. because he admired the English countryside where the Avon River flows, Tucker said.

Avon is the world's largest retailer of fragrances, cosmetics and costume jewelry, Tucker said.

Today 1.3 million representatives, including 484 in Eugene, peddle Avon products in the United States and 33 foreign countries. They generate more than \$2 billion in sales each year, according to the July 2, 1984, issue of Business Week.

In the past few years, however, Avon's stock prices have fallen from \$140 a share to just more than \$20, according to the same issue of Business Week. This is in part due to the flux of women entering the job market, because the majority of women can no longer be found at home during the day.

Avon also has seen a decline in its representatives. In the beginning of 1984, Avon had 600,000 representatives in the United States, Business Week reported. Avon currently has 425,000 salespeople in the United States, Tucker said.

Avon is testing direct-mail and telephone sales in specific areas in the United States in an effort to increase the number of representatives and boost the value of Avon stock. The company is using sales parties and direct-mail sales to do

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