

Pyramid Scheme

by **David Breitkopf** -- Contributing Author [[Email This Story](#)]

Sometimes we discover, in the nick of time, our true station in life. I am an Optional Customer Rep. I proudly admit it. But don't turn up your nose at me just yet. You may be one too. Let's see.

Recently, I bumped into an old acquaintance of mine, John, whom I hadn't seen in nearly two decades. He had aged quite badly, sad to say. I, on the other hand, have remained intact and unscarred by the swirling sands of time. After compressing our whereabouts and whatabouts for the missing years into a ten minute synopsis, he invited me to a "business meeting." I must say I was flattered. He obviously was a quick study of intelligence and business acumen. I scrutinized this potential business partner's features with renewed interest, amending my initial opinion of the sagging bags beneath his eyes as denoting vague fatigue to a look of deep world-weary wisdom. I accepted his offer with a firm handshake that promised more such handshakes to come.

The "business meeting" turned out to be an introduction to one of those so-called "legal" pyramid companies--this one happened to involve telecommunications.

As the business meeting date neared, I became more and more apprehensive. I'd been roped into a pyramid scheme introductory meeting once before, but my jaded sensibility saved me from seriously entertaining such foolishness. But John's offer happened to catch me at a provocatively vulnerable moment: I've been unhappy with my job and salary, and I've grown tired of living just above the poverty line, living check to check with no savings account to show for it. I was tired of living an artist's life, so to speak. I was ready, nay anxious to make more money, even as the pyramid rose its pointy head out of the desert sand. Thus, as I entered John's apartment I found myself repeating my mantra: keep an open mind, keep an open mind."

It was a smart, elegant Manhattan apartment on the upper East side. Japanese prints on the walls in the living room, a small cast iron female nude on a side table. The "video portion" was already in progress. There were a handful of people sitting on the sofa and in chairs. I sat down and

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listened to the remaining testimonials on the tape. As my mind and eyes wandered, I noted that everyone in the room was dressed in smart, elegant business suits except me. I was in jeans and sneakers.

Once the video ended, one of the men stood up and started part two, now using handouts and a magic marker board. Dick, a corporate lawyer, late 30s, handsome, was wearing a dark pinstriped suit, with a green beeper on his belt. He'd been nodding throughout the video portion as if he suddenly understood the enormous potential of these business ideas. He probably knew the tape by heart.

The first thing he did was get everyone's name in the room, Tina, mine, Alex, etc. and then he adroitly referred back to us again and again by name, dropping us into situations, asking me for example, "Kevin, if I told you I've a great deal for you would you be willing to listen..." I said, "Yes, of course." We all said yes.

His mouth was the oddest piece of furniture on his face. As he spoke his upper teeth would drop and slide precariously to the left. I felt at any moment he was about to bite his tongue, but he never did.

His tie wasn't traditionally conservative, but perfectly understated--a sort of casualness within the suit, so characteristically yuppie: we wear the suit, but we are not the suit.

Keep an open mind, keep an open mind! Actually Dick, awkward mouth and all, was quite persuasive. He said, "Even if you couldn't make much more than the minimum six customers, would \$1,000 extra a month be a problem to you, Alex?"

"Nope, not at all," Alex fatuously rejoined.

My indolent reptilian section of my brain was wide awake: I could be lazy and make an extra \$1,000 a month doing nothing, just collecting a percentage on someone else's phone bill?! My monetary glands salivated at the smell of it.

Dick noted that even though I'd arrived late, I'd still heard on the video that all important statement: Some people get into the game, some just watch the game and others don't know there is a game..." the group laughed. I couldn't resist: Are we in a game?" No one laughed.

When Dick made a point on the magic marker board, he'd exhale deeply with a sort of resignation, suggesting that other less-evolved people had been unable to grasp these trenchant points, but this small, special group assembled here before him understood the message: Look how much money you're going to make. It's a train in motion and you might as well hitch a ride and make a bundle because I sure am... and I want to help people. He said that a lot, "I want to help people." He also said, "Good question" whenever anyone asked an obvious one.

But Dick was also dripping with smug. "Look how successful I've become," he seemed to say. And nodding paternally at my friend John, he noted his "improvement" in the

company, which made John sit up a little straighter in his chair.

Then Dick went in for the kill. And you too can have my high regard, but only if you pay \$495 up front. Four hundred ninety five dollars puts you in the Field Trainer position on the pyramid. Dick was already two rungs above that--a Field Coordinator.

"People are calling me from Phoenix," he boasted. "I've never been to Phoenix."

There was also a quasi-shill in the room--an attractive, well-coifed woman, sitting on the sofa. She had been a corporate lawyer, wanted more free time to raise her kids so she left the law firm to get into the pyramid scheme. She also was a Field Coordinator.

"And do you have more free time?" Dick led the witness.

"Yes."

"And do you love it?"

"I love it," she said, peppery as hell, with a giggle exclamation point.

As I looked over the stapled handout sheets, I noticed Dick hadn't mentioned anything about the lowest rung on the pyramid--the "Optional Customer Rep." Ah, yes dear reader, the OCR. I brought this up to Dick.

"Good question," he said. "The reason why I didn't discuss the OCR level was because those type of people are the most skeptical and often quit early. They still pay \$79 to get into the company, but if they have a problem bringing others into the company, they chuck it. Hey, it's only \$79," and he shrugged his shoulders.

"But a Field Trainer with his \$495 has more at stake. He's made a commitment."

He looked at me earnestly, the only one not wearing a business suit. It must have flitted through his mind: This guy is an Optional Customer Rep., a seventy-nine-dollar loser.

Soon afterwards, I excused myself and left. I was the first to leave. I stood up, shook Dick's hands blankly, and I shook John's hand as well. He looked at me earnestly again, not for me, he knew he didn't get me, but for the others. He was still in the hunt for the others.

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