

Welcome to China!

Shawn Gray: The Joy of Going Global

by Josephine Gross, Ph.D.

Shawn Gray is a network marketing leader focused on building a worldwide organization. He currently lives in Beijing with his wife and son, and is loving every minute of it.

"Fortunes are going to be made from international expansion in the coming years," says Shawn, "but many Americans don't think about it. The truth is, anyone can grow an international business today, even from home.

"The next five to ten years are going to be a very exciting time, because commerce and communication are going to integrate globally. Technology has changed a lot even in the past five years, which has made the world an ever smaller place. Imagine where we are going to be five to ten years from now. People will be able to video conference and have almost instantaneous translation. This is going to make our business even more fun, more open and more borderless."

While Shawn believes networkers should focus first on building a strong home team, he also encourages people to open their minds to international expansion, especially into the BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India and China. His goal is for everyone in his organization to have a down-line report in a language they can't understand.

The Call of Network Marketing

As a child growing up in northern Minnesota, Shawn always wanted to be a commercial airline pilot. His grandfather was a pilot, and Shawn thought it would be a great, fun career: you could be mobile, see the world and make a lot of money.

In the mid-nineties he moved to North Dakota to attend one of the top civilian aviation training schools in the United States. After borrowing the better part of \$100,000 in student loans, he got his business degree and commercial aviation degree and became a commercially-rated pilot and certified flight instructor.

"I was just doing the things you're supposed to do," says Shawn, "go to school, get an education, get a good job, go to work for somebody and work hard.

"My last semester of school, I had twenty-one credits of 400-level classes, I was working thirty hours a week at two different jobs, and I was president of a social fraternity on campus. I had a new girlfriend, Carmen, who is now my wife. We met at a Mexican restaurant, where she was the head trainer and I was a server.

"One day another server came up to us and said, 'I found a way for you to make some money in your spare time.' I said, 'Like take a long walk off a short plank? I'm not interested. I'm busy.'

"But Carmen said, 'I'm going to see what it's all about.' She sat down with our coworker and took a look at the business."

Seeing the opportunity for a great part-time income, she shared it with Shawn, whose mind

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wasn't very open—he had different plans for his future. The only reason he was willing to take a look was because Carmen asked him to.

At first, neither Carmen nor Shawn saw the big picture. The business concept made sense and it was something they could do together as an additional way of creating income.

"I saw how I could mold it around my life of going to school, maintaining a relationship and two jobs, and presiding over the fraternity. I could fit it in for five hours a week and make \$300 or \$400 a month. To a broke twenty-year-old college kid, that's a lot of money."

As a kid, Shawn had seen his parents do network marketing with moderate financial success, and he didn't think it was a direction he would want to go. But what started out as a way to make his car payment turned into something much bigger about four months into the business, when he attended a company event.

"I went to a two-day regional training with some of the best field presenters," says Shawn. "What opened my eyes to a career in networking was meeting people who drove nice cars, lived in nice homes and didn't seem to have stress in their lives. They didn't talk a lot about money, because it was not an issue for them. They spent time with their kids and they played golf on Tuesday mornings. They didn't go to the grocery store on Saturday, because why would you ever go on Saturday, when everybody else goes?"

"Their lifestyle really intrigued me, and my

mind got hooked on the possibilities. I graduated from college in May and attended a global conference that summer. After that event I called my dad and said, 'Dad, you know all those school loans you cosigned for me? I'm not going to do that. I'm going to do network marketing instead.'

Beginner's Challenges

Shawn and Carmen have been full-time network marketers ever since. Initially, their parents were shocked, but as the money started coming in, they became very supportive. Three years into the business, Shawn faxed his dad a copy of his monthly check, which was higher than any check his dad had ever earned from a job.

Today the Grays have been networkers for fourteen years. Thinking back on their early beginnings, Shawn muses:

"It doesn't matter what career you choose, everybody goes through an apprenticeship. Some people do it in a first job. Others do it in the military. We did our apprenticeship with our first company. We spent our first five years learning, experimenting, struggling and doing everything wrong. Eventually we found some mentors we could trust and follow. And ultimately, if you have a plan and you stick with it, you find enough people who see what you see and want what you want, and that's when our business really took off."

Shawn ended up having some connections in Western Europe and started doing quite a bit of business in Germany and the U.K. He and Carmen earned their first million dollars in network marketing before they turned thirty.

"It was a lot of fun," says Shawn. "We were #19 in the money-earner list, out of 600,000 distributors. And then, on a Monday, five years ago, just as I was about to walk into an opportunity meeting with sixty people in the room, I got a phone call from one of my friends in Dallas who said, 'Hey, I just came from headquarters. They're

filing for bankruptcy this week. Our last paycheck is Friday.'

"It was one of those defining moments in life. After the call, I walked into the room and made the shortest opportunity presentation I ever did. I talked generically about networking and running your own business, and that you really need to be your own boss. I showed Kiyosaki's 'cashflow quadrants' and how much sense it makes to own a home-based business. I said, 'By the way, those of you who are signing up, bring your applications to me tonight,' because I didn't want people to go sign up online with a company that wasn't going to be in business.

"It was an almost surreal situation—but it's actually what brought us to where we are today. Our first company had to go away for us to be able to open our minds and find our new company. Our first company sold telecommunications and our story was, 'We don't sell products.' We moved to a product-based company and we had to make a complete U-turn in our minds in the way we approach prospects.

"It was challenging, but today I think it's the best thing that ever happened to us. Every winner or leader I've ever read about or met has had something similar or dramatic happen to them, and this was it for us. It eventually put us in a stronger position."

Starting Afresh

The Grays were introduced to their new company through the former CEO of their first company. She had been talking to the new owner of their current company, who said, "Why don't we invite a few of your leaders to my house?" Shawn and Carmen didn't know anything about the new company and weren't interested in selling "lotions and potions," but they attended the meeting out of curiosity. Once they met the owner, they got excited about the company's nutritional and

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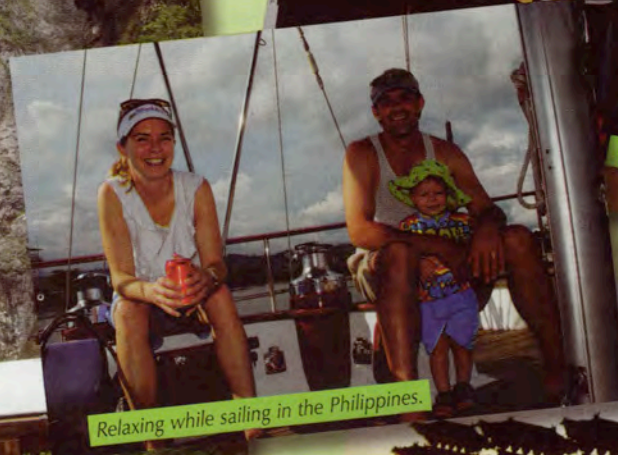
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Shawn & Carmen at Taroko Gorge near Hualien, Taiwan.



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environmental programs, and within a month they made a decision to join.

"We needed to find a new home for our team," says Shawn. "We told them, 'Here is where we are going and why. We respect what everybody else does. But anybody who wants to come along, we want you to join us.'"

The Grays had developed strong relationships over the years and several of their leaders followed them, but they lost their entire consumer base because of the difference in products. Also the new company culture was very different, so they went through an adjustment period. On top of that, the company needed a lot of revamping in every aspect, from corporate structure and products, to packaging, compensation and internal systems.

One of the things that attracted the Grays to their new company was the fact that it was one of the last great "icon" network marketing companies—as far as longevity goes—to significantly expand internationally.

"We started building in the U.S.," says Shawn, "but we liked the life experience of international travel. We had spent a lot of time in the U.K., Ireland and Germany with our previous company. With our new company we knew we would be involved in helping to establish an international presence, and it felt kind of fun to be leading that charge."

The Grays started to expand their business internationally by asking every customer, every prospect, every referral, every distributor, every friend they had a simple question: "Hey, this is a shot in the dark, but you don't happen to know anybody who is from China or that part of the world, or does business there, or travels there, would you?"

"Two thirds of the time you'd get, 'No, I really don't,'" says Shawn. "But maybe twenty percent of the time, people would say, 'Oh yeah, I work

with a gal from there, and she moved to the U.S. and has family back there.' Or, 'As a matter of fact, my buddy's friend married a woman from Taipei,' or something like that.

"We also teach everyone on our team to get in the habit of asking this question, and when the answer is, 'Yes, I do happen to know somebody,' you say, 'That's really cool. My business is expanding into Asia,' or into whatever market it is you're interested in. 'I would love the chance to chat with them, even over the phone, and get their opinion on culture, which business approaches work and which ones don't, hear their experience, get some advice on how to do business in that region, how to open that new market, and maybe even have some connections or contacts that they could point me to.' This is exactly how we started our Asian business."

Building Internationally

In Shawn's experience, first- and second-generation immigrants are very open and willing to talk about their homeland culture and help with referrals. Here is how the Grays first significant connection with Asia took place.

"I was sitting on an airplane next to a wonderful lady who was obviously Asian-American," says Shawn. "We had a four-hour flight from Minneapolis to San Francisco, and we started talking about life and business, health and nutrition, and more.

"At one point, I asked, 'Ruth, if you don't mind my asking, what country is your family from?'"

"She said, 'I was born in Taiwan, but I've been in the U.S. for fifteen years.'"

"I said, 'That's really cool, because our company is opening there in about six months. I would love to get your advice or see if you know anybody there who would be able to help me out with some advice and suggestions, who could help me learn about the culture and how to do business there.'"

"She said, 'My aunt lives in Taipei, and I think she used to do something like this. She's a VIP and she knows everybody. You should talk to her.'"

"Ruth referred me to her aunt Nancy who lives in Taipei. Carmen and I became great friends with her and got her started in the business, which grew to 400 distributors all over Taiwan in less than a year. That was in January 2007."

Shawn made an initial seven-day trip to Taiwan with his mentor and upline, Pat Hintze, to experience the culture. They had talked to a number of prospects they wanted to meet in person while the company was still in pre-launch.

The Grays went back together to spend time with Nancy and fell in love with the country. As soon as their company opened Taiwan, they decided to make consistent trips and live there half of the time.

"When we started building in Taiwan," says Shawn, "we knew it was a launching pad into mainland China. Once we moved to Taipei and Nancy's business took off, we started some other downlines there and prepared for the fact that our company was eventually going to expand into China."

"Our grand opening in China came almost two years later, in March 2009. Now, we visit Taipei periodically to work with our Taiwanese groups, but our base is in Beijing."

As much as Shawn loves building abroad, he warns people against going to a foreign market without having a substantial leadership base at home.

"You can spend a lot of time and money without any results to show for it," he says. "It's one thing if somebody says, 'I'm from Beijing and I want to go back anyway to be with my family. I'm going to move and start an organization there.' It's a whole other thing to say, 'The company is opening in China? Cool, let's go there!' Just because you step off an airplane and your company

is new in a market doesn't mean people are waiting for you on the tarmac saying, 'Oh good, this is what I've been waiting for.'"

"You've got to have a solid bridge to your foreign market in order to make it work. If you do have those connections, you can actually build a leg in a foreign country without going there. In our case, we've got a number of groups in the U.S. who are getting paid off Chinese volume, because they asked the question we mentioned before and created the connections. They've never been to China, but they have a Chinese leg in their organization."

Operations Abroad

Shawn teaches his team members to find the bridge and build connections to the foreign market in the home market. Even as people start building abroad and move to the new market for periods of time, he emphasizes the importance of continuing to support the teams at home.

"While living in Beijing, we spend eighty percent of our effort here and twenty percent of our effort at home," he says. "I do leadership webcasts and opportunity webcasts for my home team three nights a week, when it's morning here. It works out great, because I can take three hours in the morning for individual calls with leaders, strategy sessions and opportunity presentations via GoToMeeting.com."

"Today's technologies make it very easy to videoconference with leaders. What also helps is that we have established leaders at home who are experienced and don't necessarily need us. But you can still provide coaching, mentorship, leadership and partnership when appropriate."

The rest of the day, Shawn and Carmen focus on building their business in Beijing.

"Interestingly, much of it is office-driven," says Shawn. "In the U.S., most distributors never go to our home office, which is not really a base of

operations. When expanding into Asia, companies will set up offices as display areas and training centers that Asian distributors will work out of. One of the reasons is that many families here live with several generations in a small apartment.

"We occasionally do home meetings, but we don't do hotel meetings. The Chinese law prohibits us from holding large public meetings, so for our trainings we use the office in Beijing."

The Grays fill their meetings with prospects they encounter as they go about their day—walking their four-year-old son to pre-school, meeting other parents, grocery shopping or just socializing with the Chinese they already know. They also work with other leaders on their team and connect with their networks.

"Our prospecting message is that we can't help people unless we get to know *their* people, unless we find out who it is they know. We go to a lot of local networking events: Rotary Clubs, English-speaking clubs; clubs for people who want to learn English. In Beijing alone, there are millions of people who want to learn English. Those are all candidates waiting to talk to you—and that's only one avenue of meeting potential partners."

Because the Grays often work with prospects who don't speak enough English to understand a business presentation, they employ a full-time assistant who does all their written and spoken translation—and who has also become a business leader on their team. Some of their new leaders are bilingual, so most presentations are done in English and Chinese. The Grays also put systems in place to help support business partners all over China, even if they don't live in a major hub such as Beijing or Shanghai, and even though most don't speak English.

Cultural Differences

Carmen, Shawn and their young son currently

spend two months out of three in China, returning home to North Dakota every third month.

Comparing the American and Chinese cultures, Shawn emphasizes the Chinese's tremendous yearning to better themselves.

"The Chinese are very eager to learn and understand everything, and they work very hard to achieve this. Once you recruit people into your business, they want to attend all the trainings and study all the materials, and they want you to show them exactly what they need to do to succeed. They are methodical and detail-oriented and love systems, such as the four personality colors for prospecting.

"At the root of this trend is the fact that Chinese people need and want opportunity. There are tens of millions of unemployed college graduates in this country. From a business perspective, the Chinese economy is one-third the size of the U.S. economy, but it's growing, while the U.S. economy isn't necessarily. For every American who graduates from college to enter the job market, there are ten Chinese who graduate, which means ten times more people entering the workforce than in the U.S.

"The Chinese are still figuring out how to manage all these changes. The government is taking a lot of environmental initiatives, and the idea of going green and being responsible with planetary resources is omnipresent. At the end of the day, *people are people*, and they want the same things here that we want in the U.S.: security, sustainability, prosperity and upward mobility. They want time with family, they want to earn more money, they want a nicer car, they want to be healthy, they want to lose weight, they want to stay young.

"Twenty years ago, the Chinese didn't have opportunity. It didn't matter how good you were or what you did, you didn't have a chance to achieve these kinds of goals. Today, when they see

an opportunity they can throw themselves into and goals they can work towards, such as network marketing, this is a really attractive proposition.

"At present, network marketing is a well-known concept all over the world. Even in China, you will run into people who have misconceptions about it or have run into a distributor who gave them a bad impression. So you still have to overcome those obstacles, just as you would in our home country. But the Chinese are definitely open to opportunity and once they get started, their work ethic makes the Midwest work ethic look almost lackadaisical.

"People here are very focused on improving their health, looking and feeling younger, and staying thin. When you walk down the street in Beijing, you may see one out of ten people who are overweight, as opposed to seeing seven out of ten people in the U.S. From a health standpoint, we can definitely learn from the Chinese. They believe in prevention, which makes marketing nutritional products that much easier. Moreover, they are hungry for quality American products from reputable companies, and their buying power will only continue to increase, so our opportunity is going to get better and better."

A Bright Future

For the Grays, the best part of building an international business is developing lifelong friendships all over the world.

"Today we know people in Beijing and different cities all over China, as well as in Taiwan," says Shawn. "Many are close friends and some will become lifetime friends. To be able to create those relationships at the same time that you establish and build a business that gives you the lifestyle and the income to be able to do so is the best of all worlds.

"For most people, going to China is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. As professional network-

ers, we have the ability to earn a great income by building our business in a foreign country. While learning the culture and getting to know the people there, we still have our roots, our team and our friends at home, and we can continue to work with them.

"We can write off most of our expenses as tax deductions—because it's the cost of doing business—and we get this amazing life experience for ourselves and our family.

"It's been a fun experience that certainly has helped us open our eyes, our minds and our hearts to the world. We know there is opportunity all over the world and we live in a time where people can choose whatever they want to do, if they just put a plan together and go do it.

"Our future, as we imagine it, will definitely include other countries. When our son reaches school age, we will have to juggle some schooling at home and some abroad. Yet despite the challenges of this balancing act, we believe nothing is worth more than the educational experience of learning a foreign language and experiencing another culture at such a young age."

For the immediate future, the Grays want to stay in China because it is a huge market and their business is still young there. They want to have their leadership base completely established before moving to another part of the world.

"We love China," says Shawn, "because it has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, while it also has an ancient culture spanning five thousand years of documented history. According to statistics, in the next ten years China will see more people enter the middle class than currently live in the U.S. All these people will for the very first time have the opportunity to create prosperity for themselves and their families.

"Being able to be part of that paradigm shift by offering some of them our business opportunity is a truly exciting perspective." ■