

Baby Steps: Lessons Learned

It began for us like it did for many of you—with a good idea. For us, Baby Splendor was born from two overwhelmed, sleep-deprived new moms who wanted to make things easier for millions like us by creating a convenient way to purchase innovative baby products. This was our vision. It has since become our story. And the more we learned about the direct selling method of distribution, with its unique and personal way of selling, the more we knew that this was the best way to realize this vision and tell our story.

The old adage was, “If you build it, they will come.” We were encouraged when our first party brought in more than \$1,000 in sales. We also knew that there was a lot more work ahead of us. At many times it seemed daunting and overwhelming, and in those early months we often wondered what it was that we had ventured into. We had given up a successful public relations business, and it was sometimes difficult not to look back. We were greatly encouraged when Jim Northrop, President of Princess House, told us that while it’s a long climb, the rewards are much greater. This is not something one can learn at a DSA seminar, but only by traveling the path.

The purpose of this article is not to tell you how to navigate that path. That’s better left to industry experts, such as Alan Luce, and the many accomplished companies that grace our

annual meeting.” While this didn’t sound like the magical answer we were looking for, it was some of the best advice we have received. In life as well as business, it’s important to surround yourself with people who support you and can help you reach your goals, and the DSA offers this opportunity. There is so much that can be learned from others in the business, and one of the things that makes this industry so unique is the willingness of other companies to help newcomers. Alan and countless others were patient with our questions and honest in their feedback. It was also through the DSA that we first met Jim Northrop of Princess House. Northrop and his management team, including Dan Murphy and Glenn Allen, went on to become trusted advisors and that relationship has now flourished into a partnership that is supporting the growth of our businesses. The DSA brings together companies in such a way that anything is possible.

Use the resources available to you. For us, one of the exciting aspects of starting a new business is being able to see what is available to you and making it work. In the last two years, our basements became our warehouses, our cars our delivery trucks, our children our catalog models, our husbands our IT department, and a sister-in-law our invaluable bookkeeper. We raised

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industry. However, what we can share with you—from one pioneer to another—are some of the lessons we’ve learned along the way.

Join the DSA. When we first started out, we turned to Alan Luce, President of Luce and Associates, for advice. Alan said, “If there’s one thing you do, get yourself to the DSA

seed money from family and friends, and when we launched Baby Boost, our new line of immune-boosting baby products, we had to look no further than our backyard, where Princess House could support our impending growth spurt. Use the resources that are available to you today before deciding which ones you may need tomorrow.



Slow down. In her book about Creative Memories, Cheryl Lightle talks about operating from least to most. “Start slow, build as you grow.” This simple but wise advice has become one of the core guiding principles of our business. Like many young companies, we got caught up in fantasies of extravagant incentive trips, complex compensation plans, whiz-bang software systems and slick training videos. We rushed to arrange a fabulous incentive trip to a top spa resort that nobody earned. We printed a beautiful catalog that was so slick that our sales consultants couldn’t afford to hand them out to their customers. Not only did this force us to stretch beyond our means, but we risked setting expectations that we weren’t able to live up to. One of the great things about being a young, growing company is that you can do much more with less. Sales orders can be calculated in Excel and tracked in QuickBooks. Dinner at the founder’s house can be as exciting as an expensive incentive trip. By operating from least to most, we not only operate within our means but have the luxury of implementing new products or services only as we really need them.

Don’t let your sales force pressure you. In his course Direct Selling 101, one of the key messages that Alan Luce imparts is that direct sellers are a volunteer sales force. Our consultants are with us because they choose to

be, and it is our obligation to make business decisions that are in their best interest. These decisions can be difficult, particularly when you begin to attract more experienced direct sellers that may measure you against other opportunities. We sometimes felt pressured, and in doing so we had lost sight of what makes our opportunity so unique in the first place. As an emerging start-up, you offer something with unlimited potential—a ground-floor opportunity and a chance to shape the future of an exciting, new company.

Don't undervalue yourself. The most successful entrepreneurs don't limit themselves by what history or people say to them. When we were first starting out, someone had once said to us "you're no Doris Christopher." True. However, the industry is filled with success stories, each one of them unique. That's what keeps the industry growing. We offer products that help parents raise happier, healthier babies. This is our mission. And our mission is what draws our consultants—most of them mothers themselves—to Baby Splendor. We also offer them the unique opportunity to become "Mompreneurs"—to have a career that is not only family-friendly, but family-focused. We are extremely proud of who we are and the unique opportunity that we offer. You should be proud of what you do, too.

Reserve the right to make mistakes. As a start-up, it's easy to feel that making a mistake at this early stage could trigger the downfall of your company. In the beginning, we were paralyzed by notions of perfection. As a result, we took cautious, measured steps. This sounds like a prudent strategy, but by taking such tiny steps we were actually inhibiting our own growth. A toddler learns how to walk by stumbling and falling. Stumbling and falling are not only

natural; they are positive, educational acts in business. Your best-learned lessons are often a result of mistakes you've made along the way. By learning from these mistakes we become masters of adjusting our course.

Be willing to change your course. Last fall we received a phone call from a group of doctors and scientists who had invented a new fabric technology. Based on the latest research, this fabric helps prevent babies from ever developing allergies and asthma—diseases that have become epidemic throughout the country, particularly in children under the age of five. Since we weren't focused on health-related products, we could have told them that they had the wrong company, and let them take their opportunity elsewhere. However, what better way to sell products like these than through the personal, one-to-one education that only direct sales can offer? One year later, Baby Boost has become our exclusive flagship product, and we have experienced tremendous interest from around the world. Our company has received international media exposure and opportunities have opened up that might not have otherwise. If we weren't paying attention and willing to be flexible, we could have easily missed that. Opportunities don't land in the laps of the lucky, but rather are seized by those who keep a watchful eye, and an open mind.

Don't be afraid of what you don't know. In life and in business, being the newcomer can be intimidating. It is easy to feel like everyone knows what to do except for you. However, there is no magic formula. We are all continually learning, and no one company possesses the magical recipe for success. There are many ways to get to the finish line, and you need to learn as much as you can so you can choose the course that is best for your company. Don't be afraid to ask questions. We are fortunate to be part of an industry where companies are more than willing to share their successes as well as their mistakes.

Have a sense of humor. When we accidentally mailed our telephone receiver with a party order, we were horrified. Then we laughed. When a baby puked on us minutes before a sales meeting, forcing us to present while wearing nothing but trench coats, we were humiliated. And again, we laughed. The business did not come crashing down upon us—in fact, we found that it helped. Not only are we having fun in



Baby Splendor Co-Founders Julie Gordon (right) and Kelly Majewski (left) with their children.

business, but we are fun to do business with. Remember, "Humor bridges the gap between the perfection we seek and the imperfections we're stuck with." It allows us to change our perspective, look at things differently, and take a detached view of situations that might otherwise overwhelm us. And that's a solid business asset. Take your *business* seriously, but not yourself.

Have patience. It's easy to get impatient or discouraged, particularly when you have put so much at stake to pursue your dream. Like many passionate entrepreneurs, we were overanxious—we wanted to do it all now, throw our business into high gear and become an overnight success. We had to shift our thinking from immediate revenue and customers to long-term stability. After all, we expect to be around for a while. With patience and persistence, you'll get there. We're still having fun getting there.

At the 2005 DSA meeting, we had pictures of ourselves taken in spacesuits. These photos currently hang on our refrigerators, where they not only entertain our families, but remind us that there are no limits to what we can accomplish. As a start-up, nothing is beyond your reach if you are willing to shoot for it. So cheers to our fellow astronauts—we'll see you on the moon. 🌕

Julie Gordon and Kelly Majewski are Co-Founders of Baby Splendor, a direct seller of innovative products for happy, healthy babies. The company's flagship product line, Baby Boost, is designed by leading doctors and scientists to reduce childhood allergies and asthma—a growing epidemic, particularly in children under the age of five. For more information about Baby Splendor, please contact Gordon or Majewski at info@babysplendor.com or visit www.babysplendor.com.



Baby Splendor catalog models and Co-Founders' daughters, Anna Gordon (left) and Isabel Majewski