

The Glass Is Half Full

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The glass is half full. That is the attitude that has allowed me to achieve the small victory that I have, earning a paycheck while working from home. That attitude, combined with prayer and hope has allowed me to transform my life, as well as thousands of others.

My name is Joanne Pauloz. I am owner and Vice President of Fred's Legs, Inc. My husband Fred was made an amputee at age 18 because of a car accident. Later, he went to college and now he is a certified and licensed prosthetist who makes limbs for other amputees. When we met, I was working as a bookkeeper, office manager and executive secretary to the owner of a small business. Later, when we moved to Florida, I landed a job as an auditor, but eventually became unhappy. I helped nobody except my corporate boss. I started praying every day on my way to work, that God could show me a new career where I could help needy people. That was 10 years ago.

One day, as he was driving, I looked at my husband's artificial leg and it looked very dirty to me. I asked when he was planning to laminate the socket with that cool looking spandex fabric we had bought 2 years before. He explained that a socket lamination can only be done when a prosthetist is making a new leg, and he didn't need a new leg. Then, I decided to sew a covering for the prosthetic leg with that bright colored spandex, just to cover the dirt.

Well, that started something wonderful that still amazes me to this day. When Fred put a bright colored spandex cover on his prosthesis, it seemed that everybody wanted to talk to him. People told him that his leg looks cool and some wanted to know how he lost the limb. It made Fred feel good to know that people care. As I observed all this, I decided to try to sell prosthetic covers to other amputees. Wow, there are about 6 million amputees in this country; if each one buys one cover, I'll be a millionaire, I thought. But, it wasn't that easy.

I had no money to start a business with and I couldn't just quit my job. But I had a product that amputees might want. Nobody else in the world sold a similar product, so it had potential. At first, I attended various classes to learn how to start a small business. I found a magazine that agreed to give me a free ad for my new product. I sold a few covers, using my cell phone as a business phone. My husband sold his boat so that I could go to part time work, and part time Fred's Legs. I got a new, personal credit card with a \$5,000 limit and used it to buy fabric and to advertise in magazines specific to the amputee community. In the first year, I sold \$2,500 of products, priced at \$25 each. The second year, my sales jumped to \$7,500. Last year (2009) was almost \$80,000.

I've been in business for 9 years now and have taken educational classes in HTML, image processing and various specific computer programs. I wrote and now update the website myself and create my own flyers from images that I've captured with my digital camera. I learned to be self sufficient, even designing and printing my own business cards. As the business grew, I started taking small paychecks and in 2006, I convinced my husband that I could quit my part time job because Fred's Legs could give me that small paycheck.

Well, yes indeed the paychecks are small but the payback is huge. Once the feedback started coming in, I knew in my heart that this is what I needed to do with my life. People sometimes would call me on the

phone screaming with delight about the new SleeveArt® they just pulled onto their leg. Others would wait a few days, and then contact me about the amazing reaction of the people they encountered. The positive comments from my customers have empowered me to continue. Many people have said that wearing SleeveArt® on their prosthetic has changed their lives. After hearing the personal stories of many people, I felt certain that this is my God given mission in life.

I guess that I've achieved some degree of success. I now get my paycheck from my home business and I love my job. It makes me happy to hear that my product has brightened the life of a hurting person and that empowers me to continue. But, it's not without sacrifice. I calculate that over the past 9 years, I've lost about \$200,000 of wages that I could have earned, had I stayed at my auditing job. Was it worth the risk? I think so. I have a good feeling about the future of Fred's Legs.

So, why have I made it even this far? Many small businesses fail within the first 3 years. Well, I'm offering a unique product that people want. It makes them feel good and it doesn't cost too much. Next, I have the full support of my loving husband. I thank God every day that he makes a big enough paycheck to keep us comfortable while I work to grow this business. Another ingredient is God. I am constantly asking for direction and wisdom. Every morning, as I walk my dog in the nearby park, I ask the Lord 'what would you like for me to do today?' For me, putting God first makes everything else fall into place perfectly.

My advice to others? Your career should be something that makes you feel good. You need to enjoy your work. When you plan your new business, include a plan B, in case plan A doesn't work out. And don't forget to ask God for guidance. Our heavenly father wants us to succeed, we just need to ask.

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