

The Magic of Youth

Blake Mallen: Breaking the Mold

By Josephine Gross, Ph.D.

Blake Mallen is cofounder and Chief Marketing Officer for one of the most dynamic network marketing companies in the U.S. market today.

A 30-year-old Gen Y, Blake got started as an independent distributor when he was a freshman in college. After building a successful business for five years, circumstances forced him to change course.

In 2005, Blake cofounded a new company with two friends, also in their mid-twenties, around a common vision to revolutionize networking marketing. Despite the high failure rate for start-ups, especially during the recession, their company has seen solid growth, thanks to its focus on technology and innovation.



Blake believes the changing economy and the evolution of the Information Age are forcing businesses and individuals to reinvent themselves. Technology, he says, is leveling the playing field by providing low-cost and high-leverage tools anyone can learn to use.

Blake's goal is to attract first-time entrepreneurs of all ages looking for a powerful vehicle to live their dreams. His commitment is, as he puts it, "to continue doing what works": investing in technology and listening to the young generation for evolving the networking profession.

Shifting Paradigms

Blake Mallen grew up in a strict, conservative household; his mother was a school principal, his father a policeman. The message he received early on was to follow the script: *go to school, get good grades, find a good job.*

Blake remembers stressing out about grades as early as fifth grade. He received achievement awards all through elementary and high school, and went to a top university where he graduated *cum laude* in three years. As he was advancing along this academic path, one day Blake's world flipped upside down when he received an instant message from an old high school friend saying, "Hey, interested in making some extra money?"

When Blake learned it was network marketing, he didn't really know what that was, but, being open-minded, he agreed to attend a meeting. He even grabbed a group of friends from his dorm to come with him, because it looked like it might be a fun thing to do.

"I thought we could all learn something and meet some great people," he says. "I was always looking to sharpen my skills and add something different to my résumé. I also thought, who knows, if it worked out, maybe it would help pay some of my college bills."

Blake followed his intuition and initially



With his partners Bob Goergen, Ryan Blair, Nick Sarnicola.

went with an attitude of "let's see what happens." But as he got involved, he fell in love with the business model and the challenge of learning something completely different from what he was used to.

"What inspired me was how this business could transform people's lives," he says. "All I had known since childhood was over-achievers focused on grades and building résumés. I quickly learned that entrepreneurs think differently, and I enjoyed the practical business and success education I was getting."

Blake continued attending college and simultaneously built his business. As he moved up in the compensation plan, he realized he was probably never going to need his degree. Yet, after all the money and time he had invested in school, he wanted to finish what he had started. He crammed his classes in so he could graduate early and do the business full-time.

Growing his business while increasing his course load required significant focus, discipline and commitment. It also took a lot of sacrifice.

"While my buddies were off to parties, I was attending trainings," says Blake. "While they were out drinking, I was reading leadership books. Whenever my car moved, a personal growth CD was playing. I was willing to sacrifice some of what many consider the best years of their lives, so that *my* best years would last for the rest of my life."



Blake and his girlfriend Karis on the private island of Nangyuan, Thailand as he points to a Thai symbol for "Good Luck in 2011" on New Year's Eve

By the time Blake turned 21, he had graduated from college and become a top earner in his company.

Overcoming Challenges

One of the biggest hurdles Blake experienced in his early days was the battle going on in his mind between what he thought he was supposed to do and what he felt inspired to do.

He remembers at his college graduation party family and friends asking him, "So what are you going to do now?" and their reactions when he told them he was going to build a home-based business.

"They thought I was off my rocker. Going against the expectations of everyone around me was a big challenge and I wavered back and forth many times, wondering if I was doing the right thing.

"I finally came to the conclusion that I had to break free from that script. I developed a personal philosophy that the moment you stop doing what you think you're supposed to do and start doing what you were truly meant to do is when that script ends and life begins."

Blake continued to follow his passion for en-

trepreneurship and applied the habits he learned in school to become a student of success. He ended up building an organization of close to 20,000 people, when all of a sudden a whole new level of challenges hit him and his partners.

"About five years into the business, we thought we were on top of the world. Being a surfer, I was living on the beach in Del Mar, California. My residual income covered my lifestyle and I thought I had made it—until my world turned upside down again.

"We were preparing a big event to take our team to the next level. We had just invested about \$100,000 in the website, sales tools and training materials we were launching. On the Wednesday before the weekend event, we received the phone call from our company owner that nobody ever wants to get. He told us the company had been losing money, the investors were done funding us, and he was closing the doors."

Blake and his partners were blindsided by this turn of events. Yet after investing five years of their lives into this company and creating a vision that thousands were following, they weren't about to give up.

For a while, Blake's old doubts started haunting him again, making him wonder if he should go back to the old script of relying on his degree to go down the traditional path.

However, he and his partners were emotionally attached and naively committed to what had been their first company. After much negotiating, they decided to acquire the company's assets, with the intention of running the company.

"What hit us hard during this time was the realization that leadership comes with a responsibility to those who follow you," says Blake. "The people who believed in us counted on us to find a solution. Overcoming this challenge helped us develop the core beliefs that still guide us today, one of them being, "The greater the challenge, the greater the reward."

As Blake and his partners attempted to save the company, it became apparent that the business model was broken. For eighteen months, they tried to figure out what to do, living off their savings as they tried to hold their teams together while no one was receiving a check. As Blake says, proudly, "From those ashes, the company we own today was born."

Prospecting Secrets

Blake says he is often asked how he was able to build a sizable business and solid team out of his college dorm room. Reflecting back on those early days, he clearly remembers having a dual focus.

"As a network marketer, you are always wearing two hats," he says, "personal prospecting and training or duplication. How do you balance the two? The answer starts with *forcing a calendar*."

"Everybody loves the idea of time freedom and being one's own boss, but most people are poor employers of themselves. The best way to learn this is by filling up your calendar.

"The biggest challenge for the younger generation looking to build a network marketing business is learning to delay gratification. If you are always chasing what makes you happy right now, you will never develop the habits of doing the things you need to do in order to get what you want in the long term.

"Once you master delayed gratification, you can focus on the consistent activities that will lead you where you want to go.

"Whether you are a college student, a professional or retiree, everything starts with creating

your list of warm market contacts. If you don't feel comfortable talking about your business to the people closest to you, you are probably in the wrong vehicle. You should be so passionate about your product and opportunity that you would feel guilty if you *didn't* share it with the people you care most about."

Blake built his business by talking to his friends and continuously expanding his warm market. He calls it "lifestyling," the art of constantly building new relationships while going about his day.

"I am not an advocate of going out to try to recruit someone," he says. "I like to have fun and be social, and sharing what I do for a living comes as a natural part of that.

"Thanks to today's technologies and social media, the process of meeting new people and building relationships is easier than ever before. Facebook and Twitter are the most dynamic list-builders that have ever existed. Regardless of their age, networkers are missing out if they are not utilizing the tools they have at their fingertips. The same concepts that apply offline, work online—just a lot more efficiently."

Blake teaches that if prospecting were a three-legged stool, with the first leg being your list, the second leg is your system—a simple set of steps anyone can follow to get a result.

"Building a network marketing team is not about how good you are," he says. "If you make it about you, you will never build a large organization, because people cannot be duplicated. Only systems can. Focus on building a business that is system-dependent, not person-dependent, and a key element of this system should be the use of marketing tools.

"The best recruiters don't explain and are not into selling. It's not worth their time. Instead, they promote tools that can do the explaining for them. Marketing tools can be anything—websites,

magazines, videos or three-way calls—as long as anybody can use it anytime, anywhere."

Finally, the third leg of the prospecting stool is *consistency*. Blake was fortunate to learn this trait early on, as the following story illustrates.

When Blake was 19, his upline mentor put him on an accountability program that required him to talk to three prospects a day. One night his mentor called him late at night in his dorm room. Blake was about to fall asleep after studying for a test he had to take the next morning. His mentor asked, "Did you get your three today?"

Blake hadn't gotten around to contacting three people that day, and all he wanted to do was go to bed so he would be sharp the next morning. But he answered honestly, "No, I didn't. I only got *two*."

His mentor asked, "Are you willing to do what needs to be done to reach the goals you have set for yourself?"

After they hung up, Blake got out of bed, determined to contact his third person before the day was over. Walking around campus late at night wasn't going to work, he thought, so he turned on his laptop instead. This was before Facebook, but his university had a student directory with email addresses. Blake started clicking around and sending out messages saying, "Do you want to make some extra money?"

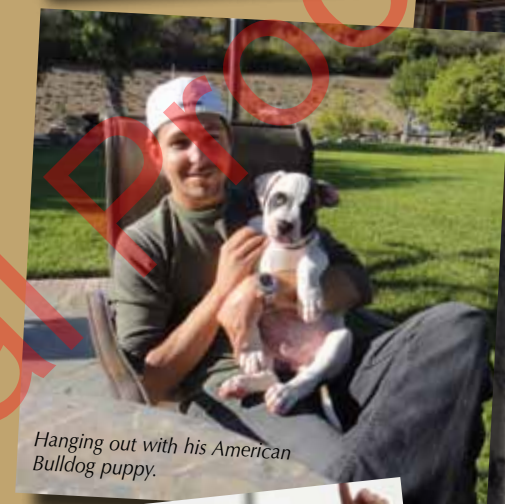
He kept cutting and pasting, until someone finally replied, "Sure."

By now Blake was *really* ready for bed, so he wrote back, "Okay, give me your number, I'll call you tomorrow."

The next day he called his new prospect and skateboarded over to his dorm room after class. This student ended up joining Blake's business and building his largest team in that company. He also *became* one of Blake's closest friends and later introduced Blake to the person who would become a cofounder and the CEO of his current company.



Blake sharing his vision with a few thousand people.



Hanging out with his American Bulldog puppy.



On top of Mount Whitney, highest mountain in the U.S (14,505 feet).



Competing in an Olympic Triathlon.



Elephant trekking through an Asian rainforest.

“My mentor taught me a valuable lesson about consistency and accountability that night,” says Blake. “You never know who will dramatically change the course of your business. I tell our distributors, you may be only one person away from that person. In my experience, it’s those times when you go the extra mile, even if you don’t feel like doing it, that end up making the biggest difference in your business—and your life!”

Training and Leading

Another question Blake gets asked a lot is how he acquired the leadership skills necessary to spearhead a large organization and a new company at such a young age—and whether he learned these things in college. This last question usually makes him laugh.

“I didn’t learn any of this stuff inside a classroom,” he says. “But I did learn a very valuable lesson from all my years of schooling: *I learned how I learn*. This lesson alone was worth everything I spent on my education. Because once I learned how I learn, I could apply this outside the classroom to more practical things such as leadership, communication, people skills and business.”

According to Blake, success and knowledge have little to do with age. Instead, he believes in the principle Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book *Outliers*: anyone can become a master at anything if he or she is willing to put in the 10,000 hours required to develop the skills and learn the trade.

Despite his young age, Blake has already logged eleven years of reading books, attending seminars and learning from the masters.

“Leadership can only be provided by example,” he says. “It starts by looking in the mirror and raising your own leadership lid. Leading comes down to asking, ‘How can I provide the most value to my team, my company, my profession?’”

In answer to this question, Blake and his leaders developed a comprehensive training program for their distributors to help create an environment of continuous education.

“We offer local, regional and national events focused on teaching people things like mindset, emotional intelligence, and practical skills and strategies for avoiding the potholes we all run into.

“We are big into using online video for marketing, training and promoting, or just to have fun. With people reading less and attention spans shrinking, we have found this to be one of the most efficient ways to communicate with our distributors, customers and prospects.

“In our back office system, we offer a success curriculum consisting of short videos, five to ten minutes long. Distributors can only watch the series suited to their rank level, and when they move up in our compensation plan, they can access their next training module.

“We purposely keep it simple so people learn only what they need to learn, when they need to learn it. This allows them to grow at their own pace and not get overwhelmed.”

Most of the training material is provided by Blake and his fellow cofounders, as well as their top field leaders.

“It’s been an interesting growth process,” says Blake. “Eleven years ago I started as a student, taking journals full of notes from the top income earners in the profession. The irony is that due to the momentum our company is in right now, some of these leaders have become our distributors. It’s a funny feeling to enter a room and see my mentors in the front row, taking notes.

“I still look up to them because they forever impacted me, and it also makes me realize that learning *never* stops, regardless of your success level. True leaders know they can learn something from everyone and never miss an opportunity to stretch and grow.”



Treating a few of his company’s leaders to a luxury vacation.

Valuing the Younger Generation

To build a thriving business, Blake strongly believes in partnerships between older and younger generations.

“If you look at all sectors, all businesses, all industries, we are in a time when the rules are drastically changing, and the younger generation can add value by bringing a fresh perspective.

“That’s not to rule out the insights and wisdom that long-term experience brings. We all benefit from working with people who come up with different ways of looking at things, even if they sometimes collide with our own views.

“What do Apple, Google and Facebook have in common? They were built by young people who revolutionized their space. I’m not saying young people know everything. It’s a give and take. In our company this works well: my two cofounders and I are in our early thirties, and we have partnered with a company that’s been around for nearly thirty years. We combine their slow, methodical, controlled approach with the perspective of the younger generation that challenges the status quo and is in tune with today’s emerging trends.”

According to Blake, youth refers to an energy more than an age.

“Everybody wants to feel young. We all want to have fun and be hip. The days of the old-school, suit-and-tie, stuffy sales culture are over.

“The culture we promote is one that says, *everybody* loves youthful energy. Nobody wants to sit around and feel old—especially not the baby-boomers. They want to hit the ski slopes until they are a hundred years old!”

Despite the young age of the company founders, the average distributor in Blake’s company is 45 and the average customer is 55.

“If you adopt the feeling that young energy brings and spread that to all demographics, you’ll find that you are not limited to any age bracket. Hollywood and traditional advertising figured this out a long time ago. They sell youth and trendiness to all age groups. That doesn’t mean that they are trying to attract only youthful, trendy people; it’s because those are the qualities that everybody wants to have and to follow.”

Even though Blake’s company is attracting people of all demographics, he listens first and foremost to the younger generation for bringing innovation and charting the future.

“When it comes to technology, social media, the Internet and all the trends that are dictating the new rules of business today, we have to look at the younger generation for guidance. No industry was ever revolutionized by the older generation. It’s only a matter of time before we see a major evolution in network marketing, and when that happens, I’m sure you will find younger generations leading the way.” ■