



Speaking out in her own style

All her life, taking the lead came naturally to **Independent National Sales Director Robin Rowland**. She held key positions throughout her school career and then became an account executive for an advertising agency. Her ambition was as forthright as her leadership savvy. “I was a determined, hard-working young woman who wanted to ‘make it’ in corporate America,” reveals Robin. There was just one problem. “I felt isolated because of my values and principles. I just wasn’t willing to compromise my integrity, and that left me feeling like an outsider on many occasions.”

A pink paradox

Robin’s mother, **Independent Senior Sales Director Beverly Melton-Ashley**, accepted the opportunity when Robin was a junior in high school. As an impressionable teenager, Robin tagged along to skin care classes, absorbing an early taste of the business. “Even back then, I was completely comfortable with the principles Mary Kay stood for,” she says. “Growing up on ‘God first, family second and career third’ made the outside business world harder for me to stomach!”

On the flip side, however, other aspects of the Mary Kay world felt foreign, and her first years in the business presented moments of discomfort. “In the beginning, I recoiled from the recognition, the high energy, the ‘high spiritedness’ of the unit meetings,” Robin shares. “And when the unit members started singing ‘Mary Kay Enthusiasm,’ I wanted to bolt for the nearest door! I did *not* want to participate.” Then there was the hugging. Although Robin attended a small women’s college where togetherness was common, her background kept her

Most of us can identify: Through school or work or the “latest statistics,” at some point we’ve felt we were being lumped into a category. Who hasn’t thought, “But I’m different. That’s not me”? The wonderful truth is that Mary Kay Ash recognized and encouraged the individuality of all women, even those who shy away at first from “Mary Kay enthusiasm.” So what happens when those women accept the opportunity? Here’s insight for anyone who feels she doesn’t quite fit in.

somewhat distanced. “Our family was fairly undemonstrative,” she explains. “While we were close, we were not touchy-feely. I’m the only girl between two brothers and grew up playing football, hockey and baseball in any empty field we could find. Consequently, seeing myself as a ‘Beauty Consultant’ wasn’t easy!”

But over time, comfort levels can change, and that’s what happened to Robin. “I’ve come to love the hugging and the intense emotional connection – the bonds we share in Mary Kay.”

Secrets behind the scenes

As a student at a women’s college her first two years, Robin discovered many opportunities to shine. “Going to a girls’ school was a wonderful prerequisite to owning a Mary Kay business,” she says. “I was voted ‘Who’s Who Among Students’ in American junior colleges and was a member of my college honor court and judiciary board. I also quarterbacked on the powder puff football team! The combination of being around women while developing my leadership skills prepared me for the role I enjoy today.”

Still, Robin had a secret, one she successfully hid through sheer ingenuity. “I was deathly afraid of public speaking,” she says simply. “My fear was so great that for a college speech class, I chose energy conservation as my topic so I could turn out the lights and talk in the dark! Now that’s fear!” she laughs. Later, at her first skin care class, she was so intimidated about standing in front of six women that she conducted the class seated the entire time. “Getting up in front of a group at our weekly unit meeting was more than I could handle. I never allowed myself to

think beyond the moment. If I had ever imagined I might have to speak in front of 10,000 people at Seminar, I’m not sure I could have endured it. I dreamed of being successful, but I compartmentalized my thoughts. I just didn’t ‘go there!’”

So how did she overcome her obstacles? “I took one small step at a time and grew strong in other areas of my business,” says Robin. “Eventually my confidence grew, and I was able to imagine myself being more comfortable at the front of the room. Plus, I was determined that nothing was going to stand in the way of my success. But my fear was huge. No one can fully understand the pain I endured. I even experienced major, debilitating panic attacks.”

Robin remembers her first Seminar speech, when her unit was No. 2 in the Pearl Seminar. “I was crying backstage and someone asked if I wanted to just not make the speech,” she recalls. “I knew I had to get through it, and it turned out to be one of the hardest things I ever did. But you know what I learned from that? I learned that in doing the hard things, we grow. I grew a lot that day.” A few years later, her unit was No. 1 in the Pearl Seminar, and her improved speech was a sharp contrast to the previous one. Was she “cured”? “Hardly!” she laughs. “My feelings onstage continue to vacillate between the excitement over achieving the challenge and the underlying feelings of ‘What am I doing up here?’ I often feel like I’m a

spectacle! It would be fine with me if they’d just hand me my award backstage!”

In time, however, extreme discomfort evolved into the desire to help other women like herself achieve their full potential. When she reflects on how far she’s come in the past 31 years, Robin turns fondly to the woman who made it all possible. “Seeing Mary Kay at Seminar, hearing her inspirational messages, were moments I’ll always cherish,” she says. “She was such a wonderful example. I’ll be forever grateful that I knew her. Mary Kay inspired me to become who I am today.”

Hesitant to speak in public? There’s hope! Robin offers these pointers:

- **Nurture** your “public speaking self.” You may never like it, but you can become more comfortable than you are today.
- **Remind** yourself that public speaking is a common fear, even though it seems everyone who’s successful likes to speak in public!
- **Accept** the challenge to speak in public, even though you feel awkward. Welcome the opportunity to “practice.”
- **Focus** on your strengths, not your weaknesses. While you’re growing your strengths, your confidence in those areas will compensate for areas that still need improvement.
- **Embrace** your uniqueness. It’s OK to be different from everyone else!
- **Give** yourself permission to tell your audience you’re uncomfortable. Honesty relieves you from the pressure to perform and provides a safety net if you “mess up.”