

Heavenly Fund Raising

John Hessell and Paula Grey
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Left to right MFT'ers: Front Row: Paula Grey, John Hessell; 2nd Row: Helen Koepke, Pam Lee, Diane Jones, Claire Baum, Kathy Nelson; 3rd Row: Kass Ericson, Eoywn McKenna, Kate Hunt, Pam Stockwell; 4th Row: Mary Ann Viscardi, John Oldham, Randy Berndt, David Hill; Back: Richard Copland, Kevin Kelly, Ray Mas, Fred Goble

Almost a year ago the American family initiated its first national fund raising drive-the Belvedere project. With that came the beginning of the first national fund raising team, known as the Mobile Fund Raising Team or MFT. Since its inception in August 1972, we have been team leaders, watching it grow from 12 to 36 members, from one team to three. After sharing in its evolution up to this point, we'd like to convey some of our experiences and insights. We spent four months selling candles full time in New York City. Because of this we were asked to lead the first MFT.

We were quite excited because here was an opportunity to give 100 percent of our time and energy in an unprecedented way. Our schedules, goals, and lifestyle were then geared to demand all that we were able to give. The entire pattern of the MFT lent itself uniquely to this kind of total involvement since its purpose was so single-minded, its goals so tangible, and its results so visible. The harder we worked, the greater were our results, and we worked harder.

As time passed, we grew-not only in practical knowledge of the functioning of the team, but in quality and depth of heart. Though we longed to do spiritual work, we saw that candle selling was far from one-dimensional, but was also an effective means of spiritual training. Young members were soon forced to face their personal problems and overcome them. Some came to the MFT incapable of witnessing because of their fear of people, but were soon able to outgrow that. Quite a few younger members consider themselves raised by the MFT.

Candle selling, though considered financial and not spiritual work, demands that you give your heart in order to be successful. Because of this constant and intense giving, each candle seller receives energy and love from God in return. As we worked each day we felt God at our side, not just in our prayers, but in our actions. Our prayer time was not spent searching for God because He often felt so near. Our greatest lesson has been that whatever work you do, if it's done with your whole heart, He will be there. Though we've heard these words before we've never felt them so concretely.

The work was hard, and our days long, so we quickly developed a deep respect for each other's sacrifice. We discovered a kind of love within the team, not resulting from friendships or horizontal ties, but from seeing each other give himself completely. Teams have changed and people have been rotated, but certain memories have stayed; memories of those who worked the hardest and gave the most. Being in the leadership position, we could truly feel God's love for these sacrificial individuals. As members of the team we all felt a love that became the fiber of unity, giving us the strength and determination to succeed.

In the past year, there has been a steady increase in our totals; teams and individuals are constantly making new goals and breaking them. When we began the MFT, setting a goal was not an incentive, as it should have been, but a limit. Once we reached that goal, we said, "I've done my share."

But then as results constantly improved, and we repeatedly raised our goals, we realized that goals serve as guidelines for our work, but not as limits to our responsibility. How can we be satisfied with one day's results· with an entire world to restore?

Putting such a limit on ourselves doesn't just confine us; it confines God's ability to work through us. Herein lies a lesson for success. God desires to use us as His tools. Our responsibility is to become clear channels, and not block His path with our own pride, ego, or fear. The secret of the nation's top sellers is this: First, you must be so united with God's will and His mission for you that you would be willing even to die in order that the goal might be reached. With this must come a deep humility, working only to further God's will, drawing no attention or glory to yourself.



Lewis Burgess sells a candle in one of the first candle selling ventures

By doing this the energy of your success is returned to God, its source, and is then given back to you; so the cycle continues. Those who excel must realize that they have been given a gift-to keep it they must learn to use it properly. This whole idea applies not only to candle selling, but can be used to succeed in all aspects of our work.

An obvious example of this is found in witnessing. It's very easy for some to draw people through their personal charm or magnetism, but the quality of that contact and experience is so much higher when you allow God to speak through you. How much better to have a spiritual child attracted to God's love rather than to yours.

Even the most successful sellers have to deal with the pain of rejection. To be able to respond to each rejection with true love is the most difficult, yet most rewarding, of lessons.

Instead of returning the pain and hurt that you may feel, you must learn to convert negative energy into positive. In responding with such unconditional love, you've begun to understand God's heart. One girl used to smile and say "God bless you" at every door, even if she may have been refused.

At first it was difficult, but then she was able to say it with a sincere heart. After one bitter refusal she smiled, asked God's favor, and then continued down the street. Half an hour later, she was surprised to see the same woman drive up to her. That one seed of goodness planted as she left had transformed the woman's heart. Though the lady bought three of them she gained more than candles that day. This isn't at all an unusual experience, most sellers have seen this at one time or another.

One of the most consistent qualities about the MFT is its mobility. In our MFT days we've traveled from Hartford to Dallas, from Orlando to Akron. We're sad to leave each city, for we leave behind many hours spent with businessmen, students, and housewives. When we hear the names of cities like Newport News or Philadelphia, thousands of images come to mind, that collectively ignite a warm glow in our hearts. We have developed a love for America and Americans compiled hour by hour, door to door. Now more than ever we can understand God's love for this country and see how He's poured His blessing upon its people. We've also seen the tremendous misuse of this blessing and the suffering and pain that Satan has caused throughout the nation. Seeing both God's love for this land and the suffering of its people, we now long to give ourselves for the salvation of America.