

Is Amway a Cult? An Analysis

Before I begin, let me say that the word "Amway" refers to the corporation in Ada, Michigan. In this essay, I refer not to Amway itself, but to the line of distributors: the Amway Motivational Organizations (or AMO's). The question "Is Amway a cult?" can be answered "no." However, is involvement in the AMO's comparable to a cult-like environment? And do high-level distributors use mind control and psychological pressure without the consent of the people in their group? In all likelihood, the answer is "yes."

To start this section how do I define a "cult?" Broadly speaking, a cult could be any group of people who gather for a common purpose. This is not a bad thing in itself, but when the leaders of the group use manipulative or destructive means of control, or use the group members for their own agenda, then the situation becomes dangerous. Steve Hassan, author of *Combatting Cult Mind Control* (1988), writes, "Any group that engages in outright deception to pursue its ends, whether religious or secular in its apparent orientation, I define as a destructive cult." (Hassan, 1988) He further defines mind control as:

"a system of influences that disrupts an individual's identity (beliefs, behavior, thinking, and emotions) and replaces it with a new identity...Not all mind control techniques are inherently bad or unethical; for some, the manner in which they are used is what is important." (Hassan, 1988)

-and-

"[I]f mind control is used to change a person's belief system without informed consent and make him dependent on outside authority figures, the effects can indeed be devastating." (emphasis original) (Hassan, 1988)

Two questions can then be asked: "What are the AMO's ends?" and "Do the AMO's use cult-like mind control to pursue these ends?"

If you assume that Amway distributors are in the business to sell products available in the Amway catalogs, then the end result is money for both the corporation and the distributor. On the other hand, the AMO's are made up of individual distributors who are looking to maximize profit for themselves. The end result is then a second (and most likely, illegal) MLM business: the continued promotion and selling of motivational tools through the lines of sponsorship. Also, keep in mind that the Amway Corporation makes NO money whatsoever from the sale of tools- the upline distributors keep all of the money. As I will show below, AMO's use destructive cult mind-control techniques to achieve these goals.

In order for a group to be a "destructive cult," it must meet certain criteria. In his book, *Thought Reform And The Psychology Of Totalism* written in 1961, Dr. Robert J. Lifton describes these criteria as: (click to go to that section)

milieu control the cult of confession
sacred science loading of the language
doctrine over person

I would also add to that list:

offering a unique form of salvation lovebombing
cognitive dissonance charismatic leadership
the use of deception in recruiting involuntary service or exploitation
separation from friends and family suppression of critical thinking
the discrediting of outside information loss of independent judgment
phobias/ fears about leaving sleep deprivation, disorientation, and sensory overload

Many controversial groups could meet some of these criteria, but any group that meets all of the criteria is a group to be concerned about.

As an introduction, though, it is interesting to note that Amway itself has addressed this very issue on their website. Here are two questions and answers: (Click on the question to go directly to their page.)

From Amway's "Infocenter"- Questions, Page 13

Q: I've heard rumors that Amway is a cult. Is this true?

A: No, Amway Corporation is a business and, similar to other large and established companies, has a distinct environment defined by shared business goals. Shared business philosophies should not be misinterpreted as a cult. As a group of companies with fiscal 1998 sales of \$5.7 billion at estimated retail that manufacture and distribute quality products and services, Amway offers a business opportunity that is open to all, regardless of religious beliefs, race or gender. Amway really is a microcosm of the world, with more than 3 million entrepreneurs worldwide representing nearly every culture, ethnic background, and political and religious belief finding in the Amway business a way to meet their goals.

In the words of one Amway critic, "[Amway fails to distinguish] between [the motivational organizations (AMO's)] and [itself]. It is, after all, [the] AMO's that are the most visible as [cult-like] entities. This is in no small way a compelling thing. It implies that Amway believes AMO's are really part of Amway and consequently Amway has to contend that what goes on in AMO's really isn't [cult-like] activity."

From Amway's "Infocenter"- Questions, Page 14

Q: Why do Amway meetings appear to some people like a cult?

A: Amway meetings are full of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement - just like most sales motivation meetings - because this is a proven way to motivate people to sell AMWAY[-branded] products and build their businesses by sponsoring others. Some

people aren't accustomed to that. Yet, most successful companies know that enthusiastic meetings increase morale and boost results in any sales force. This enthusiasm motivates our distributors to help and support one another, and that builds sales. Amway distributors are like most sales people. They know that their enthusiasm can be spread - that it builds the confidence you need to succeed in any selling job. That is one big reason why Amway distributors are so optimistic and upbeat. From this statement, the Amway Corporation shows a distinct lack of knowledge about the characteristics of a cult group. As you read this page, you'll learn that there is much, much more to a cult group than just "enthusiastic meetings [to] increase morale and boost results."

In the words of the same Amway critic: "For Amway to have any credibility in making statements pertaining to alleged cultism, it would have to say that 'the Corporation' itself does not engage in any of the specific activities that raise accusations of cultism -it's the AMO's that do- but 'the Corporation' does not agree that these activities are signs of a cult. The truth is, however, even with a statement like this, Amway would be throwing up a smokescreen to eclipse the truth which is that Amway tacitly approves of the AMO method of operation (read: cultist exploitation) and goes to great lengths to protect AMO leaders and create a Amway/AMO interface that gives AMO leaders a certain amount of power to effect Amway policy. On the other hand, Amway conveniently disassociates itself from AMO's when being sued or getting bad publicity due to some egregious AMO-based transgression."

The first characteristic of a cult group, "milieu control," "tends to be maintained and expressed in several ways: group process, isolation from other people, psychological pressure, geographical distance or unavailability of transportation, and sometimes physical pressure." (Lifton, 1961) These pressures include: "peer pressure" from the members, pressure to attend an out-of-state, weekend meeting, or even physical abuse. "[This form of control] is achieved by immersing a person in a social environment where, in order to function, he must shed his old identity and adhere to the new identity desired by the group." (Hassan, 1988) In other words, a radical transformation begins to take place within the person: from an outsider to a member of the cult.

In the Amway business, the upline distributors apply psychological pressure to make sure their distributors conform to their "system of success": if you want to build the business, you'll purchase the tapes, attend the meetings, and then recruit others to do the same. When asked if the tools are really necessary, the standard, often-repeated, answer is: "The tools are optional, but so is success." It has always been Amway's corporate position that the tapes, books, functions, etc. are optional tools for building an Amway business. Already, the new distributor must choose: not purchase the tools as suggested by a corporation or purchase the tools as "taught" by the upline standing right in front of him. Before long, the distributor is purchasing tool after tool because he too wants to be "successful" like his upline- no longer caring about the tools' monetary cost or effectiveness. The new person soon stops his doubts and questioning

and becomes a "good distributor": one that follows his upline at all times and does what he is told.

This form of control is also expressed by convincing distributors that Amway's products are good and everyone else's products are bad. Since the end result is to get a larger bonus check, most distributors are coerced into buying items they don't really need, but will probably use. So what if you don't regularly use Chromium Piccolinate (a vitamin used to aid weight loss), it's an extra 25 PV. Besides, you could lose the extra weight! Regardless of the actual quality of the product, you are making money off it... and so is your upline: usually at a higher bonus rate than you. Some upline distributors will even tell their downline to "stock up" on items that month just so they can reach the next achievement level: 1000PV, 2500PV, or even Direct. (This is usually called "buying your way" since you did not sell the products or sponsor anyone, but purchased the items for your own use.) Again, in the interest of "being a good distributor," people follow these directions, sometimes straining their own financial and emotional state. As a side note, this "stocking up" on products could also be considered "front-loading" - which is one characteristic of illegal pyramid businesses.

As a side note, I have never heard of a distributor using any kind of physical force to coerce people into either seeing or joining the Amway business. On the other hand, I have heard stories about how Diamonds have threatened their Directs. The story I heard is that the Diamond, in anger, slammed the Direct into a wall (and verbally threatened him) since the Direct should have attended that week's Open meeting... despite the fact there was a blizzard at the time of the meeting. (Again, though, this is a story that was told to be by a reliable source. I believe it is true, but I have no proof to verify it.) As is the case with most Directs, this guy is in a "Catch-22" situation- if he quits, he would lose the money that comes from his downline, but if he stays, his must suffer this kind of abuse. By using psychological pressure, coercion, and deception rather than physical force, the new people and the "average" distributor, "on the whole, [respond] positively to what is done to [them]," (Hassan, 1988) without any kind of complaint (or without realizing the sinister influences at work).

The "cult of confession" refers to the idea that by confessing your sins you will become a stronger (or more spiritual) person. By confessing it, all of the "badness" inside you will be released. If you are a leader, this confession becomes a delivered, well-rehearsed, and well-practiced speech designed specifically to make you more relate-able to your audience. You are not really sharing a "dirty secret," but the audience believes you are. The more you "confess," the more "human" you become to the audience. Soon the audience begins to believe that, since the leader was once a "lowly person" like them, they too can achieve his position. On the other hand, when a new person is first introduced to the group, his confession "can and will be used against him" later. He will be shown that there is only one way to achieve his dreams and goals: becoming an active member of the group. "After all," the members say, "how have you achieved your goals so far? Our way is so much better than what you have."

At every function, Diamond distributors tell stories about their hardships when they were building the business. When the Diamonds say "we drove for miles and miles for that meeting," the distributors in attendance believe that if they "drive the miles and miles," they too will become Diamonds. The Diamonds also repeat over and over that, by using the tools, they became successful. Therefore, the same tools will work for you as well. Obviously, this should not be the case. Since every person has a different personality, how can someone say that what worked for the Diamonds on stage will work for you? Adding to this is the fact that most of the speakers on the stage built their business to the Diamond level anywhere from 5 to 10 years ago. There have been a lot of changes in society (and in the Amway business) in the past 5 to 10 years.

When you are first shown the plan, you (and the distributor) talk about all the dreams and goals you want in life. You discuss the wealthy lifestyle, the exotic cars, the big house, the college education for your children, and of course, leaving your "9 to 5" job. Without your knowledge, these dreams and goals will be used against you later. If you start to slow down building the business (or even think about quitting), your upline will ask such 'pointed' questions like: "Were you really serious about wanting all those dreams? Did you really want to give your kids the best college education? Were serious about spending more time with your kids before they grow up? Or did I misunderstand what you wanted in life?" What do you say then? The upline practically calls you a liar by placing you in the position of saying, "No, I wasn't serious about sending my kids to a good college." The logic is: if you want your dreams, you'll build the Amway business; if you do not want those dreams, why did you tell him that you wanted them in the first place? The only "answer" to this situation is to realize that there a number of other methods to achieve these dreams than by building an Amway business. But when the upline is standing right there, it is not easy for a person to think about any other solutions.

The speakers also tell many stories about how they became distributors because of a "thin thread," or a small glimmer of hope from their sponsor. This statement is meant to imply that the people in the Amway business are somehow "lucky" to have been sponsored by that specific upline (which relates to the charismatic leadership criteria). When you take a look at the process of contacting people, this statement becomes

either a complete lie or a complete fantasy. (Is this yet more deception or just a good story?). For a person to build the business, he first contact everyone he knows- family, friends, neighbors, etc. After that, he is to contact as many complete strangers as he can find (called "cold contacting"). The Diamond telling the story was simply the only person to say "Yes, I'll look at a business" and then build it to the Diamond level. There was absolutely no "thin thread of hope" or any other kind of "magic" whatsoever! In fact, the reverse can be argued: rather than a "thin thread of hope," keeping him in the business, it was psychological pressure and conditioning that kept him from quitting. On the other hand, the "thin thread of hope" story sounds much better than a story saying, "I stayed in the business because I was taught not to think about quitting. My upline conditioned me to believe that people who quit the business are losers."

The idea of "sacred science" is used by groups "[since,] in our age something must be scientific...to have a substantial effect on people." (Lifton, 1961) This refers to the fact that if the ideas of the group have worked for so many other people, it has become "science." This is the most important reason for not questioning: if the "science" works for others (but not you) then something is wrong with you, not the science (or its application). The group can prove their science works by showing the (multiple) successful examples, so you need to work harder if the science is to work for you too. This is also called the "blame the victim" mentality- "No wonder it didn't work for you, you didn't do exactly as you were taught. It's all your fault." It's not the person's fault at all, but the inherent flaws of the system itself.

In the Amway business, a person is taught that if he follows the steps (or "pattern/system for success") outlined by his upline, he too will become successful. No-one ever mentions the hard work that is actually needed to do this, or if they do, the work is dismissed in a statement such as "it was hard, but it was worth it." He is taught to contact X number of people and show the plan to Y number of people to sponsor Z number of people. Since Amway has been around for almost 40 years and has produced a number of multi-millionaires, their system HAS to work. (Until recently, it was always assumed that the millionaires made their money from product sales, when in fact a majority of their "Amway income" comes from the sale of motivational tools. Did they use Amway's "system for success?") The uplines teach, "If the "system for success" doesn't work for you, then YOU aren't doing what you need to be doing. YOU know what has to be done (or hear it again from your upline), so go out and do it." If a person starts to doubt his results, the upline will just tell him to "have faith" and "just keep doing what you're doing" until he becomes the type of distributor they want (meaning someone who is unquestioning). Only later, when he is "ready," (meaning properly conditioned and unquestioning) will he be taught that he could receive an additional income from the sales of tools to his own downline.

What the distributors don't talk about are the statistics inherent to any MLM business. See my statistics page for more information. Of course, some distributors do acknowledge the statistics... and claim that they will be the ones to "beat the odds" (which is either extreme optimism or extreme stupidity). If the distributor does not become a Direct in the specified time frame, it is always assumed that HE did not do the work that he was supposed to do. Again the uplines teach that he should know what has to be done (or hear it yet again from your them), so go out and do it. Forget the fact that the "Amway science" may not actually be applicable to everyone's personality. As with any business, there are going to be those people who just can't do it despite the fact that distributors repeatedly say "anyone who wants to go Direct, will." Are the vast majority of Amway's distributors not Direct because they just "do not want to go direct?"

"Loading of the language" refers to the idea that a group replaces common language with their own internal-group language. This new terminology also serves to replace complex thoughts and ideas with only a simple phrase. In other cases, a whole new list of terms and phrases is required learning for the new person to begin to understand the conversations of others in the group. "The [group]'s cliches, or loaded language, also put up an invisible wall between believers and outsiders." (Hassan, 1988) This "wall" further separates the group's members from the rest of society. "In reality, by incorporating the loaded language, they learn how not to think," (emphasis original) (Hassan, 1988) or learn to think in much narrower terms.

In the Amway business, there are plenty of terms for the new distributor to learn. (See the terms page for a full listing.) After a time, normal speaking becomes full of Amway terminology and phrasing. Fellow distributors can understand what each other is saying, but the rest of the public probably does not. This gives the distributors a feeling of sharing an "inside secret" or part of a "special organization." After a while, this further serves to create an "us & them" mentality: distributors versus the general public. In turn, this can lead to the belief that a person can only have financial freedom (or salvation) by joining the group, something the rest of the public can't get. In some cases, this replacing of language can cause frustration for distributors when talking to non-distributors. Since the distributor is using specific terms, the non-distributor may not understand what the terms mean. Unfortunately, sometimes the distributor can not express his thoughts any other way.

One example of this is the usage of a Diamond's name in place of a teaching technique. When I was in the business, distributors would commonly say, "How did I approach that guy? I just walked up and 'Bo Short-ed' him." (This refers to the speech/ audio tape, by Diamond Bo Short, in which he tells about the technique he used to approach people.) Rather than tell an entire story, the distributor limits his vocabulary. At the same time, though, the distributor that's listening understands this short phrase. Any new person would say, "What does he mean? Who's Bo Short?" This further reinforces a distributor-only culture.

Another way Amway distributors "load the language" is by their use of catch-phrases which involve a sort of circular logic. Some common phrases include: "If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll get what you've been getting," and "If you do what everyone else is doing, you'll get what everyone else is getting." A third phrase, used by the upline when questioned about a downline's own lack of progress, actually contradicts the first phrase: "Just keep doing what you're doing [and you'll be successful in the business]." These phrases are designed to separate the distributor from the rest of society: you don't want to be like the everyone else, do you? If someone is not building the business fast enough or is thinking about quitting, the upline distributor can use the threat of rejoining society: the distributor won't become wealthy, but instead, will "get what everyone else is getting." This further reinforces the distributor's phobias about quitting the business.

"Doctrine over person" refers to "[t]he internalized message...that one must find the truth of the dogma and subject one's own experience to that truth." (Lifton, 1961) This is related to sacred science since a person shapes his own experiences around the "science" of the group. Eventually, a person's entire emotional state is shaped around the group's "science." From there, the person learns to control his emotions so they comply with the with emotions of the other people in the group. Before long, "a member need not think for himself because the doctrine does the thinking for him." (Hassan, 1988) A person becomes happy only when he is with other members (such as in a meeting) and becomes sad when he is away from them (such as when the meeting ends).

In the Amway business, the most important experiences are those that help build the business. Over time, a person learns to express his activities in terms of how his business was built by those activities. Distributors are always trying to look good in the eyes of their upline, thereby receiving the upline's attention and help. Amway's corporate policies state that upline distributors may not withhold help from someone, but the reality of the situation is much different. Many speeches tell the true situation: distributors should only help people who "want it." (in other words, people who are being "good distributors"). If you want help, you'll behave like the upline wants you to behave, and express yourself the way your upline wants you to express yourself. After some time of expressing experiences based on how they relate to the building of their Amway business, distributors start to naturally ONLY express their experiences in these terms.

A visit to a friend's house is not "successful" unless the distributor showed the neighbor the plan (or at least talked about Amway). Even though a trip to the mall may be "successful" if the distributor purchased what he was looking for, it was not "successful" (in terms of the business) unless he prospected some people there. Success in the business is also measured along similar terms. Showing 15 plans a month is considered "successful" (the fact that no-one was sponsored is not the point-the person showed 15 plans!), but showing more plans is better and will get you more attention from your upline. Soon, everywhere you go becomes a place to prospect people... a place to schedule future plans.

Before long, distributors always have their "prospect radar" turned "on." Some distributors (including one of my upline) must talk about Amway with EVERYONE they see. No conversation (including ordering fast-food) is complete without prospecting the person. And yet, the distributor is oblivious to how this affects other people. My upline told me a story about how his doctor told him to find another doctor since she had grown tired of his constantly pitching the Amway business. He just laughed this off as, "Oh, that just means there's someone new for me to contact."

The idea of a group "offering a unique form of salvation" refers to the idea that if you are part of the group, you are somehow spiritually better than everyone else in society: you have "seen the truth" or "seen the light." Conversely, if you are not part of the group, you "have not been shown the way" or "have not seen the light." Group members approach people with the intent to show them that their group's way is the only way for people to "be saved." ("Saved from what" depends on the specific group's goals, but usually refers to the group's perceived evils of society.)

Like missionaries, Amway distributors go out into the world preaching that Amway is the way (in fact, the ONLY way) to "save yourself" from the coming dread of retirement and "financial disaster" as well as the only way to achieve your lifelong dreams. So what if your dream was to become an account executive for a major corporation. Wouldn't you really be happy owning a business of your own instead of working a job? (Of course, you are not really "owning a business of your own," you are an Amway distributor- bound by all of Amway's -and the AMO's- rules and regulations.) If you believe the information the distributor is showing you and become a distributor yourself, you are then considered to have "seen the truth" about the world. You have learned that you need extra income, which is provided by the Amway business, to have a good lifestyle (meaning a "happy life"). (Please ignore the fact that many people may be perfectly happy with their lives until someone comes along to tell them otherwise.) When retirement age does come, you will be one of the "saved" since you will have built a big Amway business and have plenty of money to live on. In reality, most people could achieve "financial freedom" with the help of a financial planner or a good investment program!

Upon closer look, most of the marketing plan is dedicated to asking people about their dreams and showing how the Amway business can help. This serves to get a person's dream, to get them into the cult of confession, to be used against them later. In the British magazine, Time Out, an ex-Direct distributor named Colin is quoted as saying:

"When you go out showing the plan, it's less about explaining the business and more about finding out what the person really wants out of life, then showing how Amway can help them achieve it. You tell people this can help their dreams come true. You explain that they are caught in a rut. That they will work 40 years and once they hit 65, they will be either be broke, dead or dead broke.

"If they are not money-minded, you put the emphasis on how much the money can help others - "you can give to charities and make a real difference; you can pay your parents back for all the work they put into bringing you up." Otherwise you just play on their greed. "You can have that big house in the country, the BMW, you can buy your daughter that pony for Christmas, you can take that two-week holiday in the Far East"." (Time Out, 1994)

As a distributor, if you were to run into a person who did not want to join the Amway business (as you eventually will), you are taught that "they just didn't see it" (or as one distributor I know puts it, "they're dead").

"Lovebombing" can be described as the act of over-affection by the people already in the group for a newcomer, usually occurring in the early meetings between the new person and the group members. This can mean a lot of compliments, attention, and physical contact (handshaking, hugging, or pats on the back) for anyone who is new. The attention serves as a bond for the new person: "This place isn't so bad, everyone here likes me." The new person comes to appreciate this affection and attention (which he may or may not be receiving elsewhere). Under the guise of "being friendly" or "being happy," this close physical contact serves to quickly draw the new person into the group. New people don't realize the "members are taught to suppress any negative feelings they have about the group and always show a continually smiling, 'happy' face," (Hassan, 1988) especially when new people are present.

In the Amway business, this activity is quickly apparent. At the meetings, you will see the men shaking hands with one another and the women hugging everyone. While hand shaking is acceptable in society, I can tell you from experience that people in other businesses don't hug the women they work with when they are greeted. This is one reason distributors have the reputation for being friendly people. But how much is genuine and how much is a show for the new people and the upline?

On most of the correspondence (such as postcards from Hawaii), the upline distributors close with "we love you". These postcards are usually mailed to everyone in the group: from Directs down to the newest of distributors. How can these upline distributors "love" someone they just met? (Or do they "love" the fact that they have another person in their group buying tools from them?) In fact, when a person does reach the Diamond level, I'm sure he loves everyone in his group- they are all making money for him. I suppose this is why so many Diamonds say, "We love you, we only want what's best for you," when they are making money off every single tool being bought by every single distributor in their group (and without the distributors' knowledge).

The argument can be made that distributors DO care for other people- as long as those people build the business (or makes a good show of it). To be fair, though, I am sure that there are some people that genuinely love the distributors in their group. But, chances are very, very high that when a person either stops building the business or starts talking about controversial issues, the attention (and friendship) will stop. That person has become "negative" towards the business and should not associated with!

On a personal note, I became good friends with one of my upline when I was a distributor. He also considered me a "close friend" (his own words) and we spoke on the phone almost every other night. When I brought some "negative" information to his attention, I then heard less and less from him. And if he did talk to me, he would continue on about how he will be "building the business big this month." (This was the same talk he has been saying ever since I met him, with little results to show for it.) When I became frustrated with his boasting, I told him to visit this website. He took one look at the title page, did not even read anything else, and quickly hung up the telephone. This was in the second week of January, 1998. I have not heard from him since. Has his friendship disappeared since I decided to quit the Amway business? I would say so. So much for me being his "close friend."

Cognitive dissonance is the term used to describe what happens to a person when he accepts multiple, conflicting information at the same time. Rather than have to deal with conflicting thoughts, a person almost "separates" himself from reality. He starts to deny anything is wrong and continues to tell people, "Everything is fine. Just wait until I get there. Then you'll see I was right." In reality, this leads to both a further detachment from reality and a further attachment to the group's values. And if a person were to question the conflicting information presented to him, he would probably be told, "Your question means you don't understand the material. Continue learning and then it will become clear." This "separation" occurs at about the same time that a person starts to lose his critical thinking.

Adding the two (cognitive dissonance and the loss of critical thinking) is a dangerous combination and what is commonly known as "brain-washing." For example, if a person was told by the group's leaders, "For you to be successful, you must believe that $2 + 2 = 5$." From then on, the person will think, " Gee, I'm not successful yet, I guess I don't fully believe that 2 and 2 is 5." Rather than realizing he is denying the reality of the facts, a person tells himself to believe the "new reality" of the group. Before long, it will be he who is arguing to other people, that 2 and 2 really does equal 5. And if a person is in this belief system long enough, leaving the group may require "deprogramming" to get a person out of these beliefs and back into reality.

In the Amway business, distributors develop this trait after they stop thinking critically about the business and become conditioned to accept what the upline is teaching as being "the truth." When this teaching comes into conflict with the rest of the person's belief system, he is too conditioned not to think that the information could be wrong. He simply says, "I know it may be rough now, but I'll build this thing yet," or the upline tells him, "You may not understand it now, but it will become clear when you're successful." The distributor completely denies the reality of what is happening to his life and to himself.

This is also how distributors can believe two conflicting statements from audio taped speeches. One tape might say, "What is your job? Your job is promote the next function," while other might say, "People didn't get into this business to have another job," or "This business isn't a job, it's a lifestyle." Which statement is true- the first one or the second two? If you can "separate" yourself, both are true at the same time. The reality is, the Amway business starts as a part-time "job" which, if you stay in it long enough, can become a lifestyle. And if a distributor were to ask his upline about conflicting information statement such as these, he would probably be told, "You're over-analyzing it. You'll understand when you go Diamond." In other words, the upline completely dismisses the issue. In the meantime, what happens to a person if he can believe multiple, conflicting information without a sense of logic? How does this affect his everyday life?

"Charismatic leadership" refers to the idea that the leadership of the group has special powers or knowledge that the rest of the group does not have, or that the group wants to attain. The leadership has the ability to practically issue orders that are followed by the group without a second thought. This is related to sacred science: if the leaders have done something, the followers should do it as well and expect the same results. The leaders can also control a member's emotions by teaching that "Loyalty and devotion are the most highly respected of all." (Hassan, 1988) To question the leadership is to be disloyal.

In the Amway business, the Diamonds have more than their own share of charisma. For many people, the Diamonds "have lots of money, so we should listen to them." This charisma becomes all too apparent at the functions, where the speeches motivate thousands of people. These speakers continually stress that if the distributors rely on the teaching of the Diamonds, any distributor can become a Diamond. This is completely contrary to the statistics of any MLM business, but when you see and listen to one of the Diamonds' speeches, you can't help but be motivated to try to be successful. Since these functions attract large numbers of distributors in attendance, big-name professional speakers such as Zig Ziglar and Les Brown are PAID to motivate distributors to build the Amway business! Is it any wonder distributors leave weekend functions excited to sponsor everyone they meet? Then again, a good speech-giver can manipulate an audience to do just about anything. If Jim Jones can persuade 911 people to kill themselves in Jonestown and Hitler can persuade the German people to murder millions of Jews, why can't an Amway Diamond persuade his group to make some money?

Distributors are also taught to edify their leaders in the business. This means that distributors should always respect their upline- no matter how new or how ignorant the upline may appear to be. This unconditional respect causes a person to become unquestioning and paves the way for a loss of critical thinking. As people begin to edify their upline more, their reward is to spend more time with the high-level Directs: usually Emerald and Diamond distributors. So what if their upline is a complete jerk? The distributor gets to spend time with his "successful" upline and learn some information straight from the source. I would say that the information a distributor receives in this "special meeting" will simply be restated material he would have heard over and over: buy more tapes, get more people listening to tapes, attend more functions, get more people to attend the functions, etc. As always, though, the distributor feels "privileged" to be spending this time with his upline.

The use of deception in a group can take on many forms: there can be lying about the organization's affiliation, lying about the size of the group, lying about the success in the group, or lying about other group practices. There can also be deception about what the end results of the group really are. Sometimes, the deception is in the form of a hidden agenda by the leadership: an agenda to make money for themselves, sometimes at the expense of the group. Because the group is offering their own form of salvation, the deception is rationalized because the end goal justifies whatever means are necessary to achieve that goal. As Steve Hassan writes, "As long as [the people in the group] believe that what they are doing is 'right' and 'just,' many of them think nothing of lying, stealing, [or] cheating ..." (Hassan, 1988)

In the Amway business, there is plenty of deception- from the new distributor all the way up to the Diamond level. When the new distributor starts to build the business, he is taught to contact people about "building a business," not about "building an Amway business." Why can't the distributor say it's Amway? (The typical response is "Sure you can, but it's better not to mention the word Amway.") Has Amway's reputation become so terrible in the last 40 years that the distributors can't tell people upfront? The deception continues whenever the distributor gives out his business card. Usually printed somewhere is the distributor's company name or a euphemistic motto such as "interactive distribution" or even "providing quality opportunities to quality people" (yes, this is really printed on one of my upline's business cards). This gives the impression that the distributor is in another business, not Amway. Maybe this form of introduction is not exactly "deception," but more of an implied misrepresentation. The deception then continues into the Sales & Marketing Plan itself: distributors don't actually say the business is Amway until they are more than halfway through the plan (after the prospect is thinking about their dreams and has been confused by the bonus payment scale). Maybe there is some truth when distributors say "people wouldn't see the plan if you told them it's Amway."

The second level of deception is that practiced by the Profit-Sharing Direct distributors (PSD's) and above. Here is where the "hidden agenda" comes in. These distributors make a profit on every tool sold in their group, including: audio tapes, video tapes, and function tickets. When confronted about this issue, my own Emerald claimed this profit was to help "re-coop his business losses." (And all along, I was under the belief that Emeralds wouldn't need to further supplement their income: they should be making a few thousand dollars a month from the sale of Amway products!) Since the PSD's make money for themselves, their priority is to impress on new distributors the importance of the "system for success." This way, if a person quits before selling any products or before sponsoring someone else, the upline has received money from the person. Upon looking closer, it is easy to see through the lie perpetrated by distributors who say, "we don't make money unless you make money." These Directs make money off new distributors almost from day one. In fact, when people purchase their Amway Business Kit (to legally become a distributor), they are "encouraged" to purchase a box of tools: audio tapes, video tapes, and other materials (total cost: about \$150.00-\$200.00). And while this money-making happens, every distributor below the PSD level (including other, non-Profit-Sharing Directs) believes and 'duplicates' the "we don't make money unless you make money" statement. In

fact, entire downlines may join and quit without ever realizing their upline made money off them.

Is the goal of the AMO's, then, to sell Amway's products, or sell enough tools a distributor (before he quits, that is) to make a profit for themselves? If it is the latter, this would explain why the teaching stresses the tools to such a high degree and the selling of products to such a lesser degree. In almost every speech, the speaker talks about the importance of the various tools and how the distributor shouldn't be concerned about selling the products. Rather, he should concentrate on getting more distributors buying tapes and attending the functions. Could this be the true reason why the tools are promoted so heavily? So the AMO's can make more money for themselves? And what happens to Amway's revenue if distributors purchase tools rather than products? Keep in mind that the distributors produce the tools and functions, not Amway. Therefore, Amway receives NO money from the sale of tools- the AMO's keep all the money.

On a personal note, I (as well as my sponsor) came to believe the "no one makes any money off the sale of tools" statement (my sponsor's actual words when I questioned the cost of the audio tapes). When I read the SA-4400, which states that "...some distributors are compensated for their efforts outside of the Sales and Marketing Plan...", I was told that those were just "legal statements" and even "you shouldn't have a problem with [them making money] since you'll get that money as well." (actual quote from my upline) What I did have a problem with was the systematic lies that we were told. Such as: 1) nobody in the group knew about the profits to be made from the sale of tools. And, 2) the speakers kept saying "The tools are 100% optional, but they are 100% necessary." (an actual quote from an Emerald speaking at a November 1997 seminar in Lakeland, FL which is 100% contrary to Amway's corporate position which states that tools are optional) No one in our group knew if we would, indeed, be able to receive profits from the sale of tools when we reached a certain level. (Although there is a "tools bonus payment schedule," there is no legal contract explaining the actual payment of bonuses. Payment is strictly at the whim of the upline and whether you were a "good distributor" or not.)

"Involuntary service or exploitation" occurs when the group's leaders take unfair advantage of the other members of the group: members work for little or no pay for long hours at a time. When questioned about the low pay and long hours, members claim they are rewarded by their own "personal growth." Whether or not this "growth" is measurable by outside sources can be debated. As long as the members of the group spend their time working to achieve the next level of "success," the group controls them. "The leaders know...that if they command behavior, hearts and minds will follow." (Hassan, 1988) In other words, as more time is spent doing the group's work, the more the person believes in the work, and the less he will question the work being done. Also, the constant work keeps a person busy so he will not have time to think about the reality of the situation.

In the Amway business, distributors work for many, many hours showing many, many plans for a relatively small bonus check. This is rationalized by saying "you work more on the front end, but get lots of money at the back end." When exactly is this "back end"? Could it be when the distributor starts to receive Amway's bonus check at the Direct level, or is it when the distributor starts to receive money from the sale of tools? How many plans will the average distributor have to show just to make 1000PV or a \$150.00 per month bonus check? Despite overwhelming odds and small pay, the distributors keep showing plans, often on little more than the dream of becoming a Diamond. Of course, people don't dream to be an "Amway Diamond," but they dream of having the "success" of a Diamond. Again, when will a distributor achieve this? Since there is no "regular paycheck," each distributor must rely on his downline to do the same thing he is doing: building the business to get a dream. With little or no income being generated, how many people would knowingly continue to do something for only the far-away dream of being a Diamond? And when you factor in all the business expenses (whether legally deductible by the IRS or not), many distributors lose money every month. In fact, a recent IRS audit showed that a number of Direct distributors in the Mid-West United States were actually losing over \$ 900.00 a year to their Amway business! Shouldn't they be making money from an Amway business, especially at the Direct level?

In fact, the non-Profit-Sharing Directs probably get exploited more than the new people. They have worked themselves into a "Catch-22" situation: they spend money to attend the functions so they can receive their tools bonus from their upline. If they don't attend the function, they don't receive the tools bonus. But, if they do attend the function, chances are good that they will be placed in the "honorable" position of being unpaid ushers. The entire function is spent working, rather than "learning." Adding to this is the fact that Directs are encouraged to spend more money on material things that will impress the group and show-off the "lavish lifestyle" that can be achieved at the Direct level. In reality, most Directs DO NOT make the \$2,100 a month that is shown in both the plan and the SA-4400. To make this money, a distributor would have to sponsor people according to the 6-4-2 arrangement. Unfortunately, according to one ex-Direct, a more accurate picture of many Directs' businesses would be a 3-1-1 or 3-1-2 model. This means that the Direct has sponsored 3 people who are building the business, and who have, in turn, sponsored one person who is building the business. How much money is this Direct making? Obviously it varies from person to person, but the amount could range from \$800 to \$1,500. To

keep from losing money in the Amway business, a majority of Directs begin to rely on the tools bonus. And, unknown to the Directs, the upline knows this situation well enough to continue the exploitation.

The upline distributors continue to use every distributors' hard work/ low pay to their own advantage. Every time one of their downline sponsors another person, their group grows as well. Every new person means more income from tools, as well as the potential to get more new people. (Again, even if the person quits the business, the upline has still received some money for tools.) This group-growing process is taken a step further: when a new person is sponsored, he is told to make a list (on carbon paper) of all the people he knows. A copy of the list is given to his sponsor who can then contact those people for him. If the person quits the business, the sponsor now has a larger list of people to contact, which in turn, means more people buying tools, more people attending the functions, etc.

In any group that demands your loyalty and obedience, the first thing that occurs is to separate the new person from his friends and family. The friends and family members serve to remind the person about his values before he joined the group, as well as give an outside opinion about the group. As more time is spent with people in the group, the more a person begins to absorb that way of thinking and believing- including abandoning relationships with people not in the group. The old friends are considered a "negative" influence on the member: they want the person to leave the group. This is related to the topic of sacred science, as the new member is taught that his old friends have not "seen the light" as he now has.

In the Amway business, new distributors are taught to approach their close friends and family members first. This way, if he gets "no's," the distributor will have "built up an armor" against negativity. If these people are negative to the distributor, the distributor is taught to move ahead without them. At the same time; however, the distributor becomes cold towards the friend's negativity and further alienates himself from that person. The teaching claims that the distributor will prove that he is right about the Amway business by building a huge group. Then, the friend or family member can come back and will want to build an Amway business with the now-successful distributor. In reality, the distributor may never become successful and may permanently damage the relationship. As this occurs, the distributor spends more time with the upline and less time with family and friends- the very people who would be able to give an objective opinion about the situation.

As time progresses, distributors start to lose contact with friends and family members who were once close- close, that is, before the distributor joined Amway. There are many, many stories about people being approached by their distributor friend, saying "no" to the business, then never hearing from their "friend" again. From the distributor's standpoint, he no longer wants to associate with his previous friends. It is his belief that his friends either don't think the same way (meaning they are not fellow Amway distributors) or are too negative in their thinking (compared to the distributors' way of thinking). When asked how many friends they have outside of the business, a great number of distributors will answer with a vague "a few." When pressed, though, it is doubtful that these distributors have even one or two friends that they see on a regular basis. Even after a distributor quits the Amway business, how long will his friends continue to regard him as someone who wanted to only "talk Amway" with them?

When applied to a marriage, this "separation" tactic becomes very, very dangerous. If the husband is excited about the business, but the wife is not, he is told to "move on" without her. In fact, there are a number of audio-tape speeches by Diamonds that tells how a husband should be "man enough" to build the business- sometimes against the better wishes of his wife. What happens to their marriage in the meantime? What happens if there are children in the family? Do they start to see Mommy and Daddy fighting? Or do they see promises of grand vacations never fulfilled because one parent is "being negative" so they can't "build the business properly?" Amway distributors have even created a their own term: when people quarrel over the Amway business, it's called an Amafight. Now, the fighting (no matter how extreme) can be

reduced to a simple phrase. What is the upline's usual advice for this? Just keep building the business (and listening to tapes and attending the functions).

Why does this happen? From the very beginning, distributors are taught that the upline has a "vested interest" to help the distributor succeed. They are taught that the upline doesn't make money until the people below him make money (which is a deception itself). Doesn't the person's family have a "vested interest" in him? The teaching stresses that distributors should only listen to "people who have been there, people who are successful." Therefore, since the distributor's family is not helping him make money and they are not as successful as the upline (in the Amway business), he should not listen to his own family's advice. The teaching further stresses that, unlike anything the distributor's family may tell him, the upline will only give the distributor advice that is good for his business. Unfortunately, every person is different, so what might be in the best interest for the upline may not be in the best interest for the distributor. When you add the further fact that distributors are taught to never question anyone upline, the situation worsens. Before long, the only friends (and maybe the only family) a distributor may have are other distributors: usually their sponsor or someone in their downline. (The downline distributors who are building the business, that is.)

Many times, Diamonds tell stories about how they became best friends with their sponsors and now spend all their time together. This is meant to emphasize the "friendliness" aspect of the business. Of course Diamonds spend all their time with their Diamond-sponsors. Who else has the time and money available to fly off to Hawaii any weekend they please? Then again, no one mentions the fact that they may be going to Hawaii as a paid speaker or on a Amway Corporate trip. None of their "outside friends" (if they have any) or any of their downline can afford to go with them. And when they get there, the Diamonds send postcards to everyone in their group, wishing everyone was there, and as usual, ending with "We love you."

By "suppression of critical thinking," I refer to the idea that a person's ability to critically analyze information becomes impaired or even non-existent. Under the guise of "you are new, so can't handle all the information at once," a new person is taught not to question the procedures. After all, if a person wants to succeed in the group, he can't be questioning it. As time progresses, the thinking becomes, "Stop worrying about it. It'll all work out, you'll see. You'll learn everything eventually." And in order to keep new people from thinking too critically, older group members learn to answer questions with "unanswers." If a controversial issue is raised, the older member may say, "You know, I used to think like that, but then I got the facts straight," or even, "How can you think that way? I thought you were more intelligent than that." Before long, a person practically stops thinking altogether.

As a person learns more and more about how the Amway business operates, he learns that he is to never, never question his upline, his upline's judgment, or his upline's advice. He is taught not to question the workings of the business, usually because "it will become clear when you go Diamond." Time and again the audio tape-speeches tell stories of people who claim "when we stopped questioning, our business really took off" or "as soon as we started doing what [John] said, we really built this thing big." (actual quotes from audio tapes) After repeated stories and lectures about this point, a distributor soon realizes that the only way to build a successful business is not to question what is being said or done. This unquestioning can sometimes taken to great lengths.

In some speeches (which are then recorded onto audio tapes), Diamonds may talk about their own personal views of the world: about women, about gays, about other races, about other religions, etc. In everyday society, some of their remarks would anger or outrage an audience. In the Amway business; however, if a person were to speak up about what the speaker was saying, the common reply is "Oh, you can say things like that when you're as successful as he is." This completely ignores the issue of the actual comment itself and instead tells people that the comment is okay since the person is successful. I would wager to say that if a president of a company started to talk about his own agenda in business-related speeches (like some Diamonds have been known to do), he would be severely criticized by the news media.

Along the same line, upline distributors have even passed along their personal views in the telephone-network, Amvox. Do downline distributors really need to hear a speech from Dexter Yager about Jesus Christ or the Bible on a "business communications tool?" Do distributors really need to hear a political message from Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, during an election year? And what about the numerous messages passed down telling distributors that the poor economic state of the world is due to the welfare system? (So now both religion and politics are passed through Amvox. Do these messages really help a person build a better Amway business?) If they question the purpose of the message, distributors are told, "when you get to that level, you can change the system." Again, this completely avoids the issue and instead tells distributors not to question their upline!

Since Diamonds don't have public stockholders to answer to, and since their audience is looking to emulate them, they have no one in the audience to critique their

speeches. It becomes "if you want to get where he is, don't question what is being taught"- no matter what your personal feelings might be on a subject. Before long, you learn not to question anything at all from your upline. This is closely related to the idea that the leadership's charisma is not to be questioned.

As a distributor, you are always taught to direct any questions to your upline. You are never to ask outsiders business questions: after all, you need to learn from "people who have been there." This completely ignores the fact that there are legitimate business and accounting questions that other people could better answer. Directs are quick to point out that you shouldn't ask your brother about the Amway business if he was never a distributor. But your brother has known you your whole life and is much more qualified to give you advice than someone whom you just met recently. The same holds true with your parents: they have known you far longer than any Diamond distributor. Of course, when you do ask your upline a question about the business, you will usually get a well-rehearsed line, a line repeated from an audio tape, or even a well-taught "unanswer, or even a remark designed to discredit the source of your question. Distributors also like to "third party" advice as well: "You know, John said that, when he was in your situation, he did this..." The distributor is supposed to then learn from this example and do what the other person did. This seems like a rather good way to get out of taking responsibility for any wrong advice the upline might give. If a distributor was to persist in his questioning, the answer would finally result in a "this is not a normal business, trust us it works" answer. In other words, "Shut up and do as you're told."

If a distributor has a question about the actual mechanics of building the business, he is usually told to listen to an audio tape. The upline is quick to point out, "Who would you rather learn from- me, or a guy who's already a Diamond?" So, the distributor listens to the tape (sometime multiple times), but does not find the answers to his questions. When he returns it to his upline, he is given another tape and an excuse: "I'm sorry, I meant to give you this one." The distributor then listens to this second tape. The same thing may happen over and over- there is no answer to his question on any of the tapes his upline has given him. After a while of doing this, the distributor may have forgotten his original question, but he has now listened to the "teaching" of these tapes- something he may or may not have done on his own. Now, the upline has told him which tapes to listen to- tapes which may be specifically geared to stop the distributor from asking his upline so many questions.

As a new person begins to learn about the Amway business, he hears people saying that distributors "need to be teachable." What does that mean, "teachable?" In these terms, it means someone who does not talk back; someone who does not ask any controversial, critical, or "hard" questions; someone who does not question what is happening; and someone who blindly follows what is being taught. The upline distributors are looking for people that they can shape and mold into distributors that will follow. Is this really "looking for leaders in the group," as many distributors claim? Or is it just a matter of finding a distributors' "hot buttons" so they will stop questioning and follow orders, like so many sheep.

Similar to the previous section, suppression of critical thinking, "discrediting outside information" causes group members not to listen to unbiased or negative information because those sources are "wrong." Most of the time, the only reason these sources are "wrong" is because they are not promoting the group-accepted view of the world. If you "deny a person the information he requires to make sound judgments, he will be incapable of doing so." (Hassan, 1988) And "if you control the information someone receives, you restrict his free ability to think for himself." (Hassan, 1988) In turn, this further places a person under the control of the group's leaders. Discrediting a source of information is usually easier than trying to debate the truth of the issue. Why even discuss the issue when the entire source is wrong? The group now has complete information control.

In the AMO's, information is controlled fairly strictly by a number of different methods. For one, a distributor is prohibited from talking business with anyone who is crossline without a common upline present. Why? The stated reason is that the two distributors may be receiving different information from their shared upline since their groups may be structured differently, so they shouldn't share this information with one another. Let's assume that both distributors are attending the same meetings, listening to the same tapes, and reading the same business literature (assuming they are both trying to build the business). Is the point of the upline, then, that the two distributors are now individuals and the advice given to one may not work for the other? In contrast, fellow salespeople in the corporate world often share both good and bad ideas with one another, with the end result being more business and better sales strategies for all of the company's salespeople. Could it be that the upline is afraid that these two distributors might discover some negative information or start to doubt the upline? Instead of risking something good coming from a crossline distributor meeting, the AMO's forbid such meetings. Upon closer look, though, there are a number of "upline-approved" meetings where crossline-distributors can talk about the business, but these meetings usually have an admittance fee.

Rather than debate controversial issues, the upline is quick to point out the negativity of different media sources. My own Emerald distributor once told me, "I don't watch the TV. You can't believe half the stuff anyway." Of course the upline doesn't want people to believe half the stuff on TV- the negative stories would cause them to snap out of the positive-slanted mindset of the typical Amway distributor. And, while there is nothing wrong with thinking positive, how long is it until a person refuses to even hear about anything "negative"? What about reading the newspaper? No, that's considered negative as well. A distributor should only be reading positive business material- preferably books that support owning your own business. Or, better yet, books that speak positively about the Amway business. Or, best of all, read a book written by one of the DeVos', VanAndel's, or Dexter Yager.

What about information found on the Internet? Up until 1999, distributors were taught to never, ever go there. The Internet is a place where "anyone can put up a site for free, so treat their opinion with that much value," as my own Diamond was fond of saying. To translate: there are too many critical sites and too many critical issues for the upline to try to deal with, so stay off the Internet. This way, the issue will never be raised in the first place. Then again, this was before the September, 1999 launch of

Amway's online "sister" business, Quixtar and all of the accompanying distributor sites. And what about the companies whose products are in the Amway catalogs? Should distributors treat all of those sites with almost no value? I'm sure MCI, or Disney, or Coca-Cola would have a fit if you told them their Internet marketing campaigns were worthless.

It is interesting to note that the Corporation itself is waging its own battle to discredit information found on the Internet. On their corporate website, they had published a Statement on Free Speech, on the Internet, and on Sidney Schwartz and P&G to positively slant the critical information which argued that people had the right to free speech... as long as they didn't talk about Amway. (Please note that this "statement" was revised once and then later completely removed from their site. This link is to a page where I have posted a copy of both versions.) Second, Amway has purchased "banner ads" on search engines such as Metacrawler and Excite!. If a person searches for the word "amway," he is greeted with a flashing logo and slogan... leading straight to Amway's website. And, in February 1999, Amway (falsely) contended that their biggest competitor, Procter & Gamble was paying, or supplying information to, critical websites (such as this one). Amway issued subpoenas to a number of people to get proof for its version of the "truth." As the subpoenas were executed; however, the "truth" did come out- no evidence was found to support its claim. Unfortunately, in the process of answering the subpoenas, the website owners spent thousands of dollars to have proper legal representation. In the end, who won? The AMO's will tell their distributors "See how Amway is hunting down these critics." And, without doing their own research, the distributors will believe this version of the story. And the critics have spent their time and energy trying to protect their rights and property from being trampled on by a billion-dollar corporation.

"The loss of independent judgment" refers to the idea that a person becomes virtually dependent on another person to make a decision for him. Over time, a person has one of the group's leaders make all his decisions for him. This may eventually encompass a person's entire life, or at least all of their major life decisions. A person's transfer of judgment is closely related to a person's loss of critical thinking abilities. Before long, a group completely controls a person's way of thinking.

In the AMO's, a distributor's judgment is quickly replaced by that of the upline's judgment. For a distributor to "really build the business," he should not think for himself. In fact, just the opposite is true- when he does what the upline tells him to do, "things will fall into place" (actual quotes from audio tapes) for the distributor. Numerous stories have been told by Diamonds about how they tried and tried to build the business, but nothing seemed to work. When they started "doing as they were told," their businesses started to grow.

In other speeches, distributors have told how they wanted to buy a house or car and went to their upline for advice. The upline would usually tell them to wait until they reached the next level of achievement before making a purchase. In theory, this is good advice: a person should wait until he is financially able to purchase an item before buying it. But, what happens when the person needs air conditioning for their van in the middle of a Florida summer? How long should he wait? Until he can afford it with Amway bonus checks or until someone gets sick from the heat? When the reverse situation arises, the advice is different: if a person needs to make more money, upline distributors will usually make sure that person is in attendance at the next function. (The upline rarely mentions the fact that distributors can make more money by selling products to customers, a process called "retailing.") Does this advice seem contradictory? A person is struggling with their finances and they are told to spend money to go to a function? There is a possibility, that, in a few years, the person might make thousands of dollars, but what about affording this month's mortgage payment? As for right now, the upline is the only one who is making money: they profit from the sale of the function tickets. I would suppose the upline gives this advice because they want their "tool money" before the distributor decides to quit the business due to poor results.

I personally witnessed the devastating results of this faulty advice. When one of my upline was struggling with a heavy debt load, he went to our upline Emerald for advice. (As a side note: a lot of his debt was from another business, but his involvement in the Amway business further increased his debt load.) Due to a second mortgage, he was forced to move his family out of their home and into an apartment. Now, there is nothing at all wrong with an apartment, but when your family (including two teenage children) have to move from a modest house to a cramped three-bedroom apartment, adjustment can be difficult. And the situation was made even worse when they had to give their daughter's dachshund to a relative since the apartment complex would not permit pets. And while he struggled with this situation, his upline Direct still tells him and his wife to attend the functions! For two people, the costs of a function can be over \$500.00 (for tickets, travel, hotel, etc.). Wouldn't this money be better spent paying off some debt? Not according to our Emerald. My

upline still believes he will be "going direct anytime now." He can pay off the debts then. All he has to do is "have faith in his upline's advice."

It can be argued that a new person should be able to learn from the mistakes of others, but when does this learning replace his own decision-making abilities? How long is it until a person can't make decisions for himself (above the most basic) without "checking upline?" The argument is that whenever a distributor makes a decision, it will affect his entire upline, which in turn, affects the upline's business. Therefore, it is in the upline's best interest to make sure their downline distributors DO NOT do things without "checking upline."

If a distributor's decision-making capacity is replaced by that of his upline's, where does that leave his children? Chances are good that the upline will tell him (and his wife) to leave the kids with a baby-sitter and go show a plan. Repeat this 6 or 7 times a week to really "build the business big." What about the kids who see their parents leaving them every night for just a promise that "one day soon" the parents will actually raise them, instead of the sitter. Will this continue for the next 3-12 months or 3-5 years or longer until the parent's Amway business is built? What do you tell the children then? On the other hand, Diamonds commonly argue, "Well, parents leave their kids all the time when they work their 9-to-5 J-O-B." And now the parents are "leaving" their children again in the evening to build an Amway business. With the pressure to be successful, and on the advice of their upline, have these parents lost their ability to choose what is in the best interest of the children?

Want to marry your girlfriend? Check upline. Want to buy a house? Check upline. Want to change your approach to contacting people? Check upline. Want to buy a new car? Check upline. Want to take a vacation? Check upline. Want to have children? Check upline. Want to get a pet? Check upline.

In most groups, members are quickly taught that there will be serious repercussions if they were to leave. When negative images about leaving the group are combined with suppressed critical thinking, guilt and fear is created in the member's mind. They start to think, "I don't want that to happen to me. I can't quit." In fact, "today's cults know how to effectively implant vivid negative images deep within members' unconscious minds, making it impossible for the member to even conceive of ever being happy and successful outside of the group." (Hassan, 1988) Unknown to the members in the group, this fear is completely irrational: no disasters will happen if the member were to leave the group.

In the Amway business, distributors are taught that there is virtually no other lifestyle outside of the Amway business. The speeches teach that a distributor will only be happy when he reaches the Diamond level- and he should not even try to be happy in any other type of career. A distributor quickly learns that if he were to leave, he would be labeled as someone who has "lost their dream," or even worse, be labeled "a quitter." This completely ignores the fact that many people become disgusted with the business when they discover either the lies or the uplines' true source of income. The AMO's use the belief that people would rather continue to do something unsuccessfully than be labeled a "quitter" by their peers (meaning fellow distributors). There is also the irrational belief that, once a distributor quits, he could hear about how his downline went on to make thousands of dollars in the business. How often does this happen? I don't know if there are actual statistics, but when a Diamond tells how his own sponsor quit, distributors don't even think about quitting. Distributors may also be taught that if they leave the business, their spouses will divorce them or their children won't respect them anymore. Many Diamonds tell stories about how their own children would become disappointed by their slow rate of building the business. The way to cheer up the children, the Diamonds say, is to build faster and "go diamond!" After hearing enough of these stories, distributors who have children start to absorb this message and feel they can't disappoint their own children. In turn, this means they won't quit- even if they are working long hours to show the plan, leaving their kids, or if they aren't making much income.

Distributors may also fear that if they leave the business, they will not have as much "personal growth" as they would have in the business. Again, many Diamonds tell stories about how much they have "grown" as a person since they built the business. Stories range from the introvert who can now speak in front of an audience to the 'ignorant' person who has come to love everyone in the world. Some distributors learn that if they just keep building the business, they too will become a better, friendlier, etc. person. They never realize that the tools they are using actually limit the amount of choices available to them: distributors can only "grow" according to the AMO's guidelines. This relates to the topic of "doctrine over person" where a person must shape his experience (in this case, personal growth) to how it relates to the group. The only "growth" will be in areas that relate to the Amway business: being more personable, being a better businessman, and of course, being a more skilled liar (to tell people "I'm only successful when you're successful" while making more and more money from the sale of tools). I have yet to hear a story from a Diamond who claims he "grew" so much that he "out-grew" the Amway business!

Sleep deprivation occurs when activities relating to the group begin to replace normal sleep time. Disorientation and sensory overload may occur at about the same time-when either too much information or too many sights and sound overload a person. "[P]ut a person into a situation where his senses are overloaded with non coherent information, and the mind will go 'numb' as a protective mechanism. It gets confused and overwhelmed, and critical faculties no longer work properly." (Hassan ,1988). This is what renders a person more susceptible and less critical to the information being received.

In the Amway business, all three take place at the weekend functions. While holding business functions is not necessarily a "cult activity," in combination this with all of the other criteria, it is one more sign of a dangerous mind-control environment.

At the functions themselves (which start around 7:00pm on Fridays and 4:00pm on Saturdays), distributors listen to Diamonds' speeches. These speeches come in two varieties: 1) "our story"- this is when the Diamond tells the audience the story of how he became a Diamond. The point to this story is to teach the audience that the Diamond was once "human" like they were. This is related to the idea of the cult of confession. And, 2) "teaching" type- this is when the Diamond shares the "secret techniques" he that helped him become a Diamond... implying that the same techniques will work for the audience. And, yes, the "teaching" is not much more than "read [and buy] more books, listen to [and buy] more tapes, and attend more functions."

During the middle part of the evening (around 9:00pm or 10:00pm), the audience is given a "break" from the speeches when a live band comes on stage to sing a few songs. After the audience has practically become "numb" from the information they are trying to absorb, the band serves to further disorient with its loud music and flashing lights. After the band is finished performing, the speeches continue. At most functions, these speeches last well into the morning hours of 1:00am, 2:00am, or later. There are even stories about how Dexter Yager has been known to hold small, private meetings with people until 6:00am or 7:00am the next morning. Remember that these same people have to get up to eat the included-in-the-function-ticket breakfast served at 9:00am... and to attend the morning session at 11:00am! As a side note, most of these people who stay the night with Dexter usually claim that Dexter's speech "made more sense than anything I've heard in a long time." (actual quote) Then again, if anyone listened to one person lecture for 8 or 9 hours non-stop, they too would think it was "the best speech" as well!

At some point in the evening (around 11:00pm or later), the speakers on stage would yell, "Is anyone tired yet?" The response, of course, is that the audience wants to hear more. Saying you are tired is not acceptable, and if a distributor left the function to go to sleep, he would be labeled as someone who wasn't serious about building the business. And if your upline believes that you are not "serious," this would, in turn, lead to less support. Around 2:00am, people are so exhausted and overloaded with information that they would agree to almost anything that is being said. After the entire weekend is over, most distributors are pumped with so much information that

they are ready to sponsor everyone they meet. Are they excited that they just learned some great, new "sales technique" for selling Amway's products or are they excited about getting more people to "a function like this one?"

Of course, there is nothing wrong with motivating people at a weekend function, but do those people have to receive sensory overload from the combination of speeches, the live band (complete with flashing lights and loud music), and more speeches? Could the same amount of information be given in less amount of time, so people could analyze the material received? Or is the information not to be analyzed too deeply? Would the people in attendance find that they have heard the same information many times before on many of the audio tapes or other functions... and not have paid to attend this function?

Even though the AMO's can be seen to fit the criteria as a destructive cult environment, how do they grow, even when so much negative information is available? Most people don't "get the whole picture" as distributors tell them- they only get the positive-slanted material from the distributor. Additionally many people are looking for ways to make extra income, so the Amway business begins to look appealing. Louise Samways writes:

Because of their situation [people] are often extremely vulnerable emotionally and Amway uses this mercilessly. A typical recruitment pitch would include the phrases "Do you have the courage to make significant changes in your life?", "Do this for your children's sake," "Our only failures are quitters," and "Doesn't your family deserve what Amway can give them [materially]?"

Such highly charged language, when aimed at vulnerable people in large groups and backed up with a constant stream of audio tapes which "those who are truly committed to success will use conscientiously and diligently," can be extremely effective. (Samways, 1994)

Steve Hassan warns, "Perhaps the single most important thing to realize in dealing with destructive cults is that we are all vulnerable. The most we can do to protect ourselves is inform ourselves thoroughly about the ways in which destructive cults operate, and be "good consumers" when approaching any group we might be interested in joining." (emphasis original) (Hassan, 1988)

By playing first on people's dreams, then on their emotions, then on their greed, distributors can almost continuously bring in new people. Sometimes it seems like a distributor only has to find a person's "want" and that person will join the business. On the bright side, 59% of all distributors are not what Amway considers "active," so it is still a challenge to get people to distributors the business once they've joined. Are the majority of the distributors then "quitters" or have they come to their own, realistic, conclusions about their chances for success?

With the Internet growing more and more, access to information about Amway and the AMO's has never been easier... should a person choose to educate himself. In the past, this kind of information was broadcast on TV or printed in a newspaper. The Amway-controversy would come to people's attention and then fade away as soon as another big story was created. With the Internet, people are publishing all kinds of information: from their own opinions, to actual MLM statistics, to old newspaper articles, to new online-magazine articles, to transcripts of past interviews. People also now have easier access to the many lawsuits that had previously been buried in the court system: the continuing Proctor & Gamble "satanic symbol rumor spread by distributors" lawsuits, the Brig Hart "correct tool money percentage" lawsuit (in Jacksonville, FL), the Morrison "tampering with our business" lawsuit (in Houston, TX), and the growing list of others.

But the most "damaging" information is becoming more widespread: the responses and opinions from ex-distributors or current distributors. With so many websites offering either an online "guestbook" or a "Readers' Response Page," readers can finally start to piece together the entire Amway "puzzle." The distributor may say one

thing to the prospect, but how accurate is that information if so many people have posted (via the Internet) their first-hand knowledge of the exact opposite of what he is saying? How can a distributor be correct when so many other people's experiences say otherwise? And how will the distributor react when confronted about these experiences... especially when he, himself, may not have reached the same level as the people posting the message.

Even as the AMO's and Amway itself try to stop the spread of critical information, there are too many people (and too many experiences) to keep quiet. As distributors have been known to say, "Would you have looked at it if you knew [this] was Amway?"