
LIGHTER MINDS

THE PROPOSITION

By J. Frederic Voros, Jr.

A young man sits behind a tidy desk in an executive office. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. The office is unremarkable except for its picture window, which directly overlooks the Lion House, and offers a panoramic view of the entire Salt Lake Valley. Judging from the view, the office must be nearly twenty stories high. The phone rings

Executive: Hello?

Caller: Hello? That's it? Just hello?

Executive: Oh, it's you.

Caller: Yeah, and have I got a proposition for you.

Executive: Amway, right? Count me out.

Caller: Close, but no cigar. Anyway, what's so wrong with Amway? It's a multimillion dollar company. You can't argue with success. Truth from whatever source, right?

Executive: I guess. So what's the deal?

Caller: I've figured out why President McKay's every-member-a-missionary program failed.

Executive: Failed? Are you kidding me? Since the inception of that program, the Church has experienced unprecedented growth. Geometric growth.

Caller: OK, OK, not failed. Why it didn't live up to its potential. The concept was great, of course, inspired. But how many people have you brought into the Church?

Executive: Well . . .

Caller: Right. Me too. Look, it's not Amway, I promise. But I am selling this diet plan, OK? Better than Amway, better than Herbalife, better—

Executive: Forget it.

Caller: OK, OK, but think about it. Obesity is a leading killer of Americans. Too much fat, your heart gets overworked, one day you wake up dead. Also, your clothes fit lousy, so you don't even look good at the viewing.

Executive: Yeah, I worry a lot about that.

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sale, but he can sell the product. Lose weight and make money, too. Now what have I done?

Executive: Lost a soul?

Caller: Replicated myself. Now I earn commissions on his sales as well as mine. And then if I'm really lucky—

Executive: He'll replicate himself.

Caller: You got it. I find five of him, he finds five, they find—

Executive: The power of duplication. I've heard this before. Where are we going?

Caller: Bear with me. I earn, oh, about ten percent off sales on my first level, eight percent off my second level, and so forth, down five levels. Sounds great, and sometimes it even works. Sometimes it works great. But how well would it do if the company kept the entire price of the product? Paid no commissions at all?

Executive: Chintzy company. Nobody in his right mind would work for it, obviously.

Caller: What about saving all those people from their fat? Wouldn't that be enough motivation?

Executive: Sure, if you're Mother Teresa.

Caller: Exactly. So that's it.

Executive: That's what?

Caller: That's the problem with the every-member-a-missionary program. To put it bluntly, we do all the work, and the Church gets all the money.

Executive: Come on, you're not suggesting—

Caller: No. Too strong a word. Observing, that's all. Observing that the Church's compensation plan is, well, a little too top-heavy to be very motivational.

Look, of every dollar paid for a can of Lite'n Up, the company pays out nearly fifty cents in commissions and overrides. And those people have earned it fairly. They brought the dollars in, after all.

So why not apply the same principle? Why not share the tithing with those who generate it? Why not actually pay commissions on tithing? I see a five-level plan, heavy payout in the lower levels. Encourage depth, stability. . .

Executive: I don't believe this.

Caller: Next important concept: maintenance. Unless I buy a case of Lite'n Up every month, I'm not eligible for commissions.

Perfect for tithing. Unless you pay a full tithe, you don't qualify for downline commissions. Commissions which, needless to say, are a much bigger carrot than a building program subsidy for the ward.

Especially considering the missionary

work that will be taking place. First of all, I'd never push another can of Lite'n Up. It's a great product. don't get me wrong, but naturally I'd rather be pushing the Church.

And, of course, if you compare the dollars people pay in tithing to the dollars they spend on diet drinks, well, let's just say the economics of the thing would virtually force me to switch to missionary work. And I'm sure I wouldn't be alone.

Think about it: we're talking about revolutionizing the Church. Talk about geometric growth, I'll show you geometric growth. This is big, maybe millennial.

Executive: Get serious. First of all, even if the whole scheme weren't a moral embarrassment, which to me at least it pretty clearly is, what makes you think the Church would settle for five percent instead of ten?

Caller: Are you kidding? The Church would drown in money. Half as much, sure, but from a hundred times as many people. Think of all the part- and non-tithe payers who would gladly pay a full tithe and do heavy missionary work if they were getting a percentage off, let's see, five times five is twenty-five, times five is one hundred twenty-five, times five is—well, anyway, the point is, more people, way more people, are paying in. Same as the Laffer curve in economics. Lowering the tax rate brings in less money, right?

Executive: I guess.

Caller: Wrong. Lowering the rate creates incentive, which creates production, which creates wealth, which creates more tax dollars. Just think of this as supply-side evangelism. Believe me, the money will flow. Talk about the windows of heaven opening up!

Executive: Did you say "heaven"? Or "mammon"?

Caller: I sense an objection.

Executive: You can't see it? How can it be right to take money that is given to the Lord, through his appointed servants, and pay commissions with it as if you were selling used cars?

Caller: Hey, who pays your salary? The work you do for the Church is necessary and everything, but let's face it, you're not saving souls. Directly, I mean. What sense does it make to pay people who tabulate records or whatever but expect those who actually bring people into the

fold to work for nothing?

Except blessings, of course. Which, I might add, the Church is already splitting with us . . . well, not us personally, as it happens, but you know what I mean. Anyway, how different is this?

Executive: But why shouldn't blessings alone be sufficient motivation? It's morally repugnant that someone would even expect to be paid money for preaching the gospel. We might as well join the electric church.

Administration is one thing, it's got to be done, but receiving pay for doing what we should be doing out of love is—well, in a word, prostitution.

Caller: No. It isn't being paid that makes the prostitute a sinner, it's that the act itself is intrinsically immoral. If she had, oh, shined his shoes you wouldn't think any the worse of her. Where, like here, the act is intrinsically moral, it's simply a matter of paying your money and taking your choice, so to speak.

I call it the "Marriott Principle." Marriott could have donated to BYU anonymously, not letting the left hand know what the right hand was doing, right? Earned blessings in heaven. Fine. Fine, if you trust God's taste; he gets to pick the blessings. You might like them a lot, or you might think they are pretty well disguised. You know, like his blessings here. Plus you have to wait to get them.

Executive: Right. Die, in fact.

Caller: Exactly. Definitely a downside. Or you might think, what the heck, the glory of men is fleeting, but at least you know what you're getting. And you get it now. That's worth something, right? Everybody discounts for cash. So Marriott pays his money and takes his choice. With, I might add, the Church's cooperation—blessing, in fact

The main thing is, BYU's Marriott Center got built. Sure, it was named after a business guy instead of a prophet or something, but the Brethren go down there now and speak to 23,000 people.

Executive: Assuming they fill it up.

Caller: Sure. The point is, the building is there to be filled up, regardless of Marriott's motive.

Same with this. Better, obviously, that you bring people into the Church out of the highest possible motive—love, or whatever. But that's not the choice. The choice is the present program, where they trickle in, or my program, where

whatever its faults they will flood in.

Putting aside for a moment the purely egocentric issues of motivation and reward, what about the elect out there who aren't being reached?

Executive: But would you want to be brought into the Church by someone who did it just to get a cut of your tithing?

Caller: I'd rather that money plus a certain amount of righteous desire got him to talk to me than go to hell because the righteous desire alone wasn't enough to motivate him.

As it is, he's more likely to sell me some skin care or herbal toothpaste or something that's got a decent compensation plan. Hey, even the righteous gotta feed their kids.

Executive: Too true.

Caller: Pure dynamite, isn't it? And best of all, it's a win-win thing, nobody loses. Nobody. The Church gets more tithing than ever, 'cause five percent of a zillion beats ten percent of some normal number. More temples, more chapels, more bureaucrats like you. more—

Executive: More of everything money can buy.

Caller: Exactly. The member wins, 'cause, well, first of all he paid his tithing, right? So he gets those blessings. But if he's at all excited, his commissions will cover his tithing anyway, and more. This guy's really glad he's a member.

And the guy on the end is still paying ten percent, he doesn't even notice there's a new program, except that the member who is now somewhat motivated contacted him and sponsored him into the Church.

Otherwise he'd be, you know, believing in grace or reincarnation or something. Something definitely worse than the Church.

Executive: Yeah, that's true. I guess.

Caller: There's something to it, isn't there? A power. Too bad it couldn't actually be, you know . . . Hey, you don't think, maybe—

Executive: No way. Absolutely not. No way.

Caller: You don't think maybe just one of them, if it was presented, you know—

Executive: No way. There is no way. Believe me. Think of what you're saying.

Caller: Yeah, you're right. I guess. Too bad, though. There's so much you could do if it just wasn't a church.

Executive: Yeah, keep reminding yourself. And call me next time inspiration strikes.

Caller: Naturally. Keep smiling. Bye.