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"Corruption is only as effective as the corrupt
-Dieder

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Select Language ▼

- [Home](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Meeting Sandie"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Isabella's Lessons"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Acquisition"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Wedding Bells"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Nedra Roney"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Cognitive Dissonance"](#)
- [More Sample Chapters](#)
- [Romney-NuSkin Connection](#)
- [Romney Mormon Questions](#)
- [Romney Campaign Backers](#)
- [Updates](#)
- [Update Archives](#)
- [Lawsuit Documents](#)
- [Nu Skin Analysis](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Reward](#)
- [Nu Skins Padded Numbers](#)
- [NEW Padded Numbers list](#)
- [Contact Me/Leave a Comment](#)
- [Investor Questions](#)

Diederik van Nederveen



Trophy Husband

My time observing the 1% feeding on the 99%

Comment- This chapter shows how Nu Skin is promoted as a business opportunity rather than a product based company. This type of business model has been called a pyramid scheme in a class action lawsuit that Nu Skin had to settle out of court.

JANUARY-1995 Meeting Nathan Ricks

“Ladies and gentlemen, here is Nathan Ricks, the man who has redefined Network Marketing, he is a legend and leader that has been with Nu Skin since the early years. He's going to explain how you too can make it in this business.”

David had called me about this meeting at least a month ago. I didn't really want to go because it would take all night and I had a lot to do. Acting classes on two nights of the week and random auditions during the day required me to stay “on call” at all times. Besides, I had my job as a building manager that required my attention a few hours per day as well. To make it more complicated, I taught a coastal navigation class two Saturdays per month. To sit there in a West Lake, California hotel was not something I was excited about doing.

David, however, was visibly comfortable in his role, he even seemed proud to have brought me to the lion's den. He had been involved in this MLM (multi-level-marketing) deal for years, knew who everyone was, and possessed the perfect personality: approachable, likeable, unafraid of rejection, and determined. However, I wasn't easy; my opposing arguments forced him to spend a lot of energy convincing me before I would decide to become an “Independent Nu Skin Distributor.”

I had not signed yet, but whenever I spoke to people about skincare I did manage to sell the products. I didn't believe that it would amount to much unless I indeed actually signed up, and as everyone suggested, I'd need to invest heavily more time and money. Both of which I had little, but if I didn't “commit” and “go for it” it would never lead to anything. Most of my friends advised adamantly against MLM, urging me to learn more before taking a leap of faith.

Despite how good those brochures looked, I felt as if I was joining a religion and said so to David, who laughed and said, “Well, you got to believe in something, might as well be a religion that makes you money.”

On the surface it all looked beautiful, so clean and honest, sincere and slick. Empowered by observing me sell 12 bottles of a weight loss product to a voluptuous, very pretty, virtual stranger called Lisa D., a major banker, David felt I could “do anything.”

Lisa stood in front of me in line at the Koo Koo Roo restaurant on Santa Monica and Sepulveda Boulevard in West Los Angeles. I looked at her and told her she ought to buy my product. She smiled and said, “OK, give me all you've got.” David, looking on, got up and introduced himself, convinced because of my sales stunt with Lisa and my knack for acting I “could do anything.”

At the very least, I could get him in contact with many Hollywood actresses. He was right, some indeed bought the Nu Skin skincare products from me; most likely assuming the product had something to do with my flawless, God-given skin. I was lucky that way, but it was nonsense of course.

In order to get me to sign up as an “Independent Distributor” David pursued me for three months; at one point annoying me when he sold me stack of overpriced Nu Skin “IDN” protein bars. He was just irresistible; a true purebred salesman. He was life loving, charming, witty, relentless, and knew every possible rebuttal to all excuses anyone could come up with; and so I buckled and signed up!

Earlier that night, when we walked into the elegant hotel lobby, he immediately endeared himself to all the established distributors, looked around the room, nodded to familiar faces and smiled. I too scanned the room only to feel out-of-place. Most of the people present were women in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Men, most of them in their forties and a few young bucks that looked like skeptical car salesmen, were focused, seriously absorbing all there was to learn about this “Opportunity of a Lifetime.”

The large meeting room had never been this full; people were standing outside the door, creating the perfect sense of urgency, emitting a “need to act.”

This better be good, the last time I had been to an over-filled hotel room was in Columbus, Ohio a few months back, during the Arnold Classic. There the room had been packed with beautiful fitness models and body builders, some of which I worked with during the show. I was there to promote liquid chromium picolinate and do a few stand-up “Arnold-voice” gigs on stage for channel 13. The gig was riding on my ability to look and sound like him during a time when many controversial elements from his past were professionally squelched. Personally, looking and sounding like him wasn’t exactly a compliment but a great way to break the ice in an ego-riddled environment.

Back in LA I figured Nu Skin wasn’t such a stretch, I knew the health business well enough. However, I had no idea about the true nature of MLM so the most important part of the deal went over my head.

Nathan Ricks walked up, tall and lean, chiseled features, clean cut, and with the air of a college football athlete about to show off to a hungry crowd. He looked around the room, at first as if measuring up an opponent and he then slid into a disarming smile that had a twist of slyness. He took the mike and with a smooth swooping move flipped on a slide projector and leaped into a fast paced, aggressive sales pitch that I knew from late night TV infomercials, only letting off when he spoke of the past, a particular emotional moment when his brother-in-law, Craig Tillotson, called to recruit him; a tiresome process that drained all of Craig’s ample sales spiels, obliterating Nathan’s arguments against joining Nu Skin. Craig's final, insidious; “What is wrong with you, you need to do this!” broke down the last defenses and Nathan too switched jobs.

Craig assured that he wouldn't be alone in the battle. Craig’s mother Clara McDermott, Nathan’s mother-in-law, was already doing well with Nu Skin and he was already making a “ton of money.”

Extremely competitive by nature Nathan joined and went crazy. “There was no way I was going to let Craig beat me to it, for long; the idea alone that he would make more money than I would kill me.”

While at the time I missed the exact family relationship between Nathan and the Nu Skin founders and the implications of it, Nathan didn't miss a word. He never stumbled or let down. He had done this many times before and knew how to lay it on thick, draw out the accents when he painted this picture of a life of freedom in wealth and carelessness, only to drive home the urgency that I too should “get in” and “get going” and not waste another second!

He was on a roll and no matter what anyone would do he indeed “was going to beat you to it.” Nathan was then and still is one fellow who doesn't stop until he's ahead; perfect qualities for anyone in businesses, especially someone in network-marketing.

Most of us had no idea how it would work in reality. We wanted to “join his team,” naively taking it in hook-line-and-sinker, boiling with desire to be like him; to earn that 24/7 commission from our own “global Nu Skin market.”

It was mesmerizing to see all the slides, to hear his hypnotizing pitch, blinding me of the details that separated the masses from Nathan and the rest of the world. Yes! I too felt the itch; this was going to change my life. I just knew it!

Then Nathan slowed down to a soft dribble, speaking about how he lived in a home that was called the “castle,” right somewhere in Utah, not too far from Salt Lake; a place I had never heard of. He could have been speaking of Timbuktu and I would have been equally fascinated. During a moment of “reflection” he made clear how proud he was of his family and being from Utah. After that it took him about twelve minutes to explain why Nu Skin was so much better than all other opportunities... not one word about the products yet.

Those, I thought, would be the main reason we were there. Sure, he dribbled over them by telling us about this or that soon to-be-launched “hot item,” or about some scientists that claimed a “breakthrough” but he soon went back to the compensation plan; how good it was and how it worked. That was exactly what made me wonder. Prospects and newly signed distributors couldn't help but think that they too would keep sales going until long after the Australians and New Zealanders turned off their lights. All they needed to do was find that “gem,” that one worker-bee who will go nuts and help fill their pockets while they napped, just like Nathan.

As I looked around the room I saw how pupils became dollar signs and people's arguments became opportunities to counter, persuade, and conquer. Jokes and smiles were tools to build up rapports that could lead to “closing the deal” and by doing so transfer the greed factor and fuel the utopian fever.

When I realized that all the money generated from my first level sign-ups, before becoming an executive distributor, would go to my “up-line” or sponsor, in my case fellow actor David Christian for his effort of “coaching” me, it didn't make that much

sense to me. It merely told me that Nu Skin didn't believe in me until I had burned up my warm market and I would only be paid a commission from anyone they signed. Nathan made it crystal clear; he'd not take any of us serious unless we got in at "a thousand points."

"Why would I take you serious if you don't take Nu Skin serious?" He blurted in the microphone. With one point to equal one dollar, it was for most of us a lot of money to invest in something that had not made much sense to me and several others who shared their concerns with me later. Nathan, aware of the deflating murmur traveling through the room said, "Remember, look at what you are getting; a company, products, a 'hands-free,' seamless compensation plan and awesome leadership... for only a small investment."

Obviously Nathan's talent was (and still is) to create "sense," out of the whirlwind of data and stories that spoke of a different world, a promised land where all dreams come true; but on the other hand he was "all business" and if I invested that much money I wanted to actually like the guy that I was giving it to. Despite how it would not all go to him I decided right then and there I was only signing up to be "active" and for David's sake; for all the time he invested chasing me around.

David wasn't the first one to pursue me; a woman before him had tried. She prospected me when I was cashing a check for \$2,000 for my work on a film at the bank. She stood behind me and leaned over, looked at the check, and said, unblushingly, "Two grand? Uh, well, I know a deal that can generate that kind of money every week."

I hadn't come to Hollywood just to "make money," instead I saw the film business as an adventure. However, a little extra income couldn't hurt and I promised to meet her on Saturday evening on my way back from teaching my class in Marina de Rey. When I walked into the restaurant I had just made \$500 teaching two guys how to sail, anchor, and navigate along the California coast. Having the money to pay bills took the pressure off a bit until I saw her sitting at the bar in a mini-skirt and push-up bra. I knew I had to be on my guard.

Women do not meet men in mini-skirts for a business meeting unless they expect whatever it is they're after will require their "assets" to be thrown in to get it. They know what the basal, fatal attraction can do to our mostly primitive, one-track male minds. She turned around, smiled, grabbed my hand, pulled me in, and laid it on thick using the subtle separation of her legs to get me off-guard when she kissed me on my cheeks accompanied by, "Don't you Europeans do it this way?"

I smiled and asked her to get to the point as I was on my way home after twelve hours bouncing around on the Pacific Ocean in the unforgiving California sun.

Everything about her told me to leave. She grabbed my hand again, asked me to sit down and explained the Nu Skin basics and pulled out her field tested "doe-eyed" look and said, "Dietrick, this is a great deal, just sign up with me. Come on, it will be

great. We can work together, you and me, and go out there and get people signed up everywhere we go.”

I looked at her and wondered how many other guys had fallen for her sexy charm and joined Nu Skin just to see her run around in her minis—crazy.

Besides being unprofessional, I didn’t feel that I was anything more than a warm body in her mind. I decided to leave. “I really need to think about it. I will call you once I’ve made up my mind.” I got up and walked out. She followed me, asked me where I was heading, as in, *I need a ride*. She said, “My car is down a few blocks; couldn’t find parking.” I instinctively looked around at all of the free spaces... women never cease to amaze me.

“OK, get in.”

The moment she climbed in my car she looked around and said, “You really need this Nu Skin deal; you could buy yourself another ride.”

“I love this car, no need to get rid of it... it is my way of understatement,” I joked.

“Right, is that what you tell all of the women who dare to get in?”

“No, only those who ask for a ride. Is this where I drop you?”

Months later she complained that I had signed up with David. She felt he “stole” me from her. I told her that he didn’t need a mini-skirt to get me to sign up; just a better sales pitch without flashing underwear. She didn’t let up and even called Nu Skin about it. No one cared.

After Nathan’s presentation I walked over and asked him what my chances were without having any family members living in the US, or many friends to introduce the business to. He took a second, looked me over and said, “That is the great thing about Nu Skin, for anyone willing to work, it is an even playing field.”

“So, I can do what you do and get this going?”

“Well, yes, if you really, *really* want to get this then you can. I am no different than you are.”

“That sounds good... I’ll discuss it with my sponsor.”

David was happy I signed up. “D, you are going to be awesome at this.” Yes, I could sell a lot of stuff to strangers as long as I believed in it. I could talk to anyone, and everyone always talked to me. During the trip home, reflecting on all that took place, we felt that Nathan gave us all the catch-phrases to satisfy any questions or doubts and help us become better distributors. We were devoured by excitement and infused by his smooth MLM recruiting talk.

David said, “The company has been around for about ten years, they are beyond the danger zone. It is a good deal, D; it will work out well for you. Just do what I do and keep talking to people about it, take them to meetings and get them in front of Nathan and things will take care of themselves.”

David had a point. Nathan was a man on a mission who was on the hunt for people who were very serious and able to do this business; but what did it really take to do it? None of the biographies of the leaders we spoke to mimicked my own in the slightest;

that Nathan too lived on a whole different level of wealth was clear, but at the time I had no idea how different his reality was compared to my own. When he spoke of making hundreds of thousands a month I was thinking of getting my next acting gig to stay afloat in a town that consumed people that didn't constantly push themselves in front of the camera.

When David dropped me off, different ideas about business and earning possibilities had been instilled; yet I had no clear idea how to really get going, and I speculated about what Nathan's day might look like. He had projected images on a whiteboard and said whatever it took to impress us, and one of the things he showed was his house, after apologizing that the landscaping wasn't done. It was a huge home, at the edge on top of a hill, overlooking the Salt Lake Valley.

He seemed so hyper and restless, how much time would he get to spend there with his family? I doubt he was home much. Then again, I didn't spend a lot of time at home either... but I didn't have a family to take care of.

Back in my apartment, I looked out the living room window at the apartment of an Iranian couple across the garden who fought like cats 'n dogs. Below them lived a friendly gay couple that hated the students that filled most of the apartments in my building for the constant stream of abuse they'd cause. My rent was due the coming week and I still hadn't heard back from my latest audition. This life, this world of mine, was so far removed from that of Nathan's. I leaned my shoulder against the window frame and let my mind float off in a daydream; a future void of financial worries and the ability to help my loved ones in whatever way they needed.

If there ever came an end to the constant stream of movie roles I had been able to secure, maybe then, indeed, Nu Skin could be my salvation...

[Top of page](#)



Janette Bullick *Apr 14th, 2012 @ 06:58 PM*

You're a very talented writer. This made me laugh, so spot on with your observations. Mormons are creepy, they breed like maggots to ensure the strength of their cult. Forced to tithe 10% makes the Mormon church very rich and powerful. I never met a Mormon who was a good person. And the saying 'the love of money is the root of all evil' definately applies to them. I know first hand how manipulative and evil Mormons are...

I admire your gumption. May seem like a futile effort, but eventually it will make its way to the right person and they will be exposed for what they are. Make sure to

send a copy to 60 Minutes 😊

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[Back to top](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Meeting Sandie"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Isabella's Lessons"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Acquisition"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Wedding Bells"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Nedra Roney"](#)
- [Sample Chapter: "Cognitive Dissonance"](#)
- [More Sample Chapters](#)
- [Romney-NuSkin Connection](#)
- [Romney Mormon Questions](#)
- [Romney Campaign Backers](#)
- [Updates](#)
- [Update Archives](#)
- [Lawsuit Documents](#)
- [Nu Skin Analysis](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Reward](#)
- [Nu Skins Padded Numbers](#)
- [NEW Padded Numbers list](#)
- [Contact Me/Leave a Comment](#)
- [Investor Questions](#)

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