

Dawn Billings Interview

June 28, 2012

ANITA: Today I am happy to introduce you to an amazing woman- Dawn Billings- Dawn is a multi-faceted entrepreneur, she is the CEO and founder of The Heart Link Women's Network, the founder of two highly searched online directories — TROVA business directory and TROVA Womens Business Directory. She founded Trova Business Networking, Heart to Heart Media Online Advertising for Women and now has a non-profit for women and children called Charitable Heart Foundation. Dawn is the inventor of the patent-pending parent tool called Capable and architect of the Primary Colors Personality Test, which is used around the world and in the military. In addition, Dawn has authored or co-authored over 20 books. Everything she does demonstrates her lifelong dedication to the benefit of women and children which is why we are thrilled to be speaking with her today. I am a great fan. I want to ask you some questions about how you do this. You are an inventor, author, speaker, success coach and entrepreneur — how do you manage it all?

DAWN: Well, I think it's so simple. I love to talk to people. I love to write. I love helping women live the dreams in their hearts, and when you put all of that together, they say when you do what you are passionate about — money flows which make me the entrepreneur and it works so perfectly altogether.

ANITA: I think that's sounds great. And it sounds as if you really love everything about what you do which is inspiring for all of us. How did you get to where you are today? What was that path?

DAWN: Well it's really been an interesting journey. I think when you look at people's lives and the stories behind their lives, you find there were so many wonderful things and maybe difficult things that motivated them, that taught them and that encouraged them. I grew up very, very poor. We didn't even have indoor plumbing, and I had no clothing and nothing. We barely had food to eat. When I was in second grade, I desperately wanted to be a Brownie, and there was really no way that we could afford the Brownie uniform and dues. And my second grade teacher, Mrs. Joanne Stone, contacted her sister who lived in the East who had a daughter that was one year older than I was and asked her for her old brownie uniform. She gave me a Brownie uniform and paid my dues and asked me a question. She said, "If I do this for you, will you do something for me?" I said absolutely.

She said, "Greatness is never an accident; it's a choice you must make daily, multiple times. Will you chose to be great and inspire everyone you meet to be great as well?" That was such a serious question to me as a little girl. She totally transformed my life, because I then wasn't just a poor piece of parsley, I was something spectacular — I was going to get to be a Brownie! And I really dedicate so much of my work to the heart of that woman. She taught me that women, doing what they do naturally — being so involved, kind, charitable, generous with their time, their talents, their gifts — transforms lives. And I just wanted to make sure that everything that I did in my life was in that direction.

So I was the very first girl to ever graduate from high school in my extended family or go on to college for a bachelor's or master's and then on to my doctorate work, and I remember my grandmother who

was very uneducated but a fabulous woman. Her husband died when her fifth baby was only three days old in the middle of the great depression, and she just got up and did whatever she needed to do to raise that family. She thought that I had been in school so long, she said that she wondered if I had a learning disability. I said, “No, Grandma. I have a 4.0.” She reached over and grabbed my arm and patted me and said, “Honey, in this family, 4 out of 10 ain’t bad.”

ANITA: That is a very sweet story. Thank you so much for sharing both of those with us. I think they are both so inspiring, and it shows how much just one person can make a difference in another person’s life in a very simple yet profound way.

DAWN: Absolutely

ANITA: And as you look at where you are and your success, what has been the advice that you have received as you started your business that was most helpful?

DAWN: You know, I think that the statement that I remember most was again from an early teacher and she said, “I want all of you to be little Edisons, and to know that your jobs — no matter how many times you fail — is to ultimately bring light the world.” It was so simple, so profound and what a great mentor to hold Edison up because he just kept trying to do what he was passionate about doing, and I live just like a little Edison.

ANITA: I love that. In the book that you had co-authored “Delegate or Die-12 steps to delegating successfully” you talk about how our lives are busy and if we don’t learn how to delegate successfully we will burn ourselves out very quickly. Without giving away all of the book’s secrets — what advice can you give our listeners about delegating, because I find in speaking to women all the time, this seems to be a tough one to get over.

DAWN: Well, one of the things that I think is most important, and the reason that I developed the Primary Colors Personality Test, is first of all, we need to understand who we are and what our strengths, gifts and talents are. So many women, I find, are concentrating on the wrong things. They are concentrating on their weaknesses. Oh I am so disorganized. Oh I can’t get this done. Or oh that just doesn’t make any sense to me. And what we need to understand is that we were born with a set of talents. Focus on those, and then find people who were born with the talents that you weren’t born with and work with them and delegate to them what they love and that you don’t love. One of the magical things is that with a very few people you can accomplish miracles. My team with The Heart Link Network is a group of five women. We have over 220 locations in the United States, Australia and Canada. We just opened in the UK. We sponsored Baby Entrepreneurs, Women in Paksitan, Indonesia and Costa Rica. All five of us have very, very different strengths, and we depend on one another to simply do what each one of us is good at. Because if you will just focus on your strengths, you will be happy, you will be hopeful, you’ll feel competent and never inadequate. And then you’ll be surrounded by people who are picking up the pieces and who love picking up the pieces that you don’t like.

ANITA: I think that is tremendous. That is such good advice and such a good way of looking at it. We also hear a lot from women about this constant struggle and pull between work and life, especially small business women. How do you balance your work and your life?

DAWN: Well now it is so much simpler, because my sons are grown and have gone through college and have their own lives. I can tell you that I feel for the women who are raising their children and attempting to work and attempting to develop and grow a business while raising their children. It can be very, very complicated. One of the things that I did that I am so grateful for, is that I took little plastic rocks that you sometimes use in your yard, and I decorated them with my two son's [names], and they each had a rock, and we called them 'talk rocks.' And I said, "Any time that you think that mommy is distracted, or you think I'm not hearing you, or you need something from me that you think I'm not available for, you bring me this talk rock — hand it to me — and I will *know* it is time for me to listen deeply and with my heart." And I'm telling you, that little symbolic rock, oh my goodness, it saved us so much grief! There were times when my older son, Tony, when I was going to school, he really had to be very patient with my studying and all the different things — I was working while I was going to school — and he would bring me that rock, and put it in my hand, and he would say, "I want my mommy now." I want you to stop being a student, or I want you to stop being a businessperson. I want you to be my mommy right now. It was helpful, because we get focused, narrowly focused, and sometimes the things in our periphery, they get blurry. But when your little child brings you this rock and says its time to be mommy right now — it really brings you home

ANITA: I think that is such a great story. I love that idea, and that way you are able to deal with it, and you know when you see the rock it's time to get serious about that. That's very cute. I love that story.

I noticed that in 2008, you won a place in the first ever O-White House Leadership Project, which was the partnership between the White House to unite leadership of women in business and politics and the *Oprah* magazine. That is very exciting to have been selected among 80 women out of over 3000 candidates that is pretty remarkable. From that experience what was it like, and what was the take away from that?

DAWN: I'll tell you, I was so inspired by a couple of things. I was inspired that there was that much out-of-the-box, amazing creativity now all together. Creativity feeds [off of other's creativity.] Everyone became even more creative when we got together. The other thing that I was just astonished and excited about, was that out of all of those 80 women, 75 or 80%, came with non-profit ideas. And it confirmed for me what I believed in my heart to be true about women. Women are driven to make a difference. We are driven to find solutions, solutions to the world's problems. We are different than men, in the sense that men can sometimes get caught up in power or who has the power. And in that process of hitting the power ball back and forth across the net, they can lose sight of the solutions that need to be found that are sitting on top of that net. Women however, get in a room, no matter what their differences, and they focus on the solutions. And they can do amazing things and come up with extraordinary answers to difficult problems — and do it on a budget, because women are used to living on a budget. So it's very exciting when I think about the things that they were bringing to the table, the ideas that they had and the problems that they were all focused on. It was extraordinary.

ANITA: I think that is an incredible opportunity and an amazing event to be a part of. I also see that you do a lot to get the word out about the various organizations that you are involved with or started. You do a lot of social media. How do you decide the best way to get your message out?

DAWN: I think that is a great question. In today's society, I feel like we have to be two things. We have to be high touch, which is why we created The Heart Link Network for example. One of the things that I recognized in working with women was that no matter how brilliant you are, no matter what kind of great business plan you have or idea, if you are not connected with other women to help you accomplish this idea, no matter how great the ideas are, they don't get accomplished. Things really get accomplished when women are standing heart to heart and marching forward to make whatever they want to happen happen. So we created the Heart Link Network, so that we could put women in a community together, women who wouldn't naturally know each other, and put them in an environment that is really supportive, encouraging and inspiring. Where they could really be women, where their endocrine systems work. Where they could release oxytocin, the body hormone. Where they can raise their neurotransmitters both serotonin and dopamine. And in that arena, what you do is create relationships that are so fabulous and strong that you feel like together we can do anything. Which is really, really powerful.

That's the high touch, but if we're only high touch, then we're really lost in today's society. So we also had to figure out how to be very high tech. I think that women have to communicate high tech-wise in two ways. Social Media, which is basically a coffee shop online: "Hi, how are you doing? Oh my gosh, look at that wonderful photo. Look at this cause, Help me with this. Go here. Learn about this. This is something that we need to pay attention to." Which is wonderful. And we have a very large Facebook fan page where we use our fan page a little bit differently than some people use theirs. On Wednesdays we have what we call "Share The Love," which means that we want any woman who knows a woman in business that she loves, admires and trusts, to come and talk about her. Send us her link, tell us why they love her and tell us why she is spectacular. On Fridays we have "Shameless Self-Promotion Fridays," which is wonderful because women are taught their whole lives to not be arrogant or not try to hog all of the attention, and we want them to have a place where, we feel, that they can come and promote what they are passionate about. Tell us what they are up to, what they are doing, the products and services that they represent, the causes that are dear to their hearts. So that is the social media side.

But then we realized that when people are looking for things, they are looking on the Internet, so if you don't understand inbound marketing and how to get complete strangers to be able to find you and what you are doing, then again you are losing a huge opportunity. And that is when we created our directories — the TROVA Women's Business Directory and the Trova Business Directory. And we are at the top of every search engine. And we help women get found under their products or services. Let's say I do healthy coffee, and I live in Orange California. Well, my dream would be for someone to type in healthy coffee Orange, California, and there I am in the top 10 of the first page. Or at least on the first three pages because no one goes beyond the first three pages. So we have been very successful at

creating a vehicle to really showcase women entrepreneurs and give them the kind of spotlight that they need in order to be successful and be found on the Internet

ANITA: I think that sounds great, and it seems like you are getting such great support for it, and women connect with the idea so much.

DAWN: And they do, because I think that women, especially, when they know that you really care about them, then they begin to care about what you are doing. So I think with the Heart Link, the directories, our Facebook, everything shows our heart. That's why we named it the Heart Link Network. And once women know you care then they are on board

ANITA: That's great, and with so much going on in your professional life, it certainly sounds all-consuming, what do you do in your down time?

DAWN: In my downtime, I adore my family and any moment that I get to spend with my sons and my husband and my dogs, I simply adore that. We are movie people. My youngest son is a filmmaker who is finishing a documentary right now to help end childhood obesity called, "Bite-Size Movie." And these are young professionals who got out of USC film school, who are incredibly brilliant, who have won all kinds of awards and have no money, no resources, and are flying with the passion that's in their hearts, sleeping in their cars, doing whatever is necessary in order to accomplish this great, enormous feat, which is to do this extraordinary documentary on how we can help end childhood obesity. So we love movies. We are passionate about movies. So in our down time we love to go and enjoy escaping into those beautiful places that movies can take us

ANITA: That sounds like a great way to spend some free time. Well Dawn, I have so thoroughly enjoyed speaking with you today. It has been enlightening and inspiring, and I look forward to keeping in touch with you.

DAWN: Thank you so much. It has been a privilege and my great honor to speak with you today.