

THE MOST SEEN MAN ON TV & HIS NOVEL NOTION ON GIVING

As we plan each issue of *International Opulence*, I propose philanthropically inclined individuals who are not only newsworthy but who have touched me with their honesty, spirit and faith. Mike Lindell, a Minnesota-born CEO of the privately-held company MyPillow (which has sales exceeding \$1 billion) came to mind in an instant. Seldom do I meet a person who embodies all these qualities. Combined with generosity, kindness and an abundance of enthusiasm, Mike won my heart at a handshake.

The evening we met in New York, he openly shared with me how he managed to overcome an addiction to cocaine and alcohol. He then handed me one of his famous "My Pillow" pillows. It was tangible proof that one can change for the better despite two failed marriages, a handful of odd jobs and a prolonged inability to conquer one's demons.

"Does this Q&A have a luxe component to it?" asked my Editor in Chief, Robin Jay.

"Sleep, like money, is only unimportant when you get it. How many people do you know who wouldn't give anything for a good night's rest?"

We chuckled, but sleep disorders cost Americans an estimated \$63 billion annually in lost productivity. These facts were not lost on Mike Lindell, who in 2004 sank his entire savings into developing an all-American-made pillow, which millions, myself included, swear by. He spends approximately \$1.8 million a week on advertisements, production for which he directly oversees, on TV, radio and in newspapers.

Called the 'most innovative marketer in home goods,' Mike has broken sales records at QVC and recently won the coveted "Product Concept of the Year" award. He is



Mike Lindell

said to be the most-seen man on American television and has dominated the marketing field with his advertising strategy.

AVA: Mike, you said, "I was an addict in every sense of the word." When did you hit rock bottom and what was your turning point?

MIKE: Do you remember the days before flat-screen TVs, when you turned off the television and the picture reduced to a tiny dot? I felt as if my life was being reduced to a point of nothingness. That's when I knew I was at the end of my rope. In 2009, I went to bed in the early morning hours of January 16. I asked God to remove the weight of addiction from my shoulders. The next morning, I woke up and felt literally unchained. I touched my arms and body because I couldn't believe the sense of freedom I felt. But it was very real. I was freed that day, and by God's grace, I am still free.

AVA: Why pillows?

MIKE: I could never get a good night's sleep growing up. I didn't have much money back then, but I'd spend whatever I could spare on different types of pillows. Nothing worked. So I began to reverse-engineer my ideas of what a pillow should be. I started with the result I wanted and worked backward.

AVA: Your four children, along with some 1,500 other personnel, have worked at MyPillow. What role have your kids played in achieving success?

MIKE: When I started the company, my four kids were all in their teens or 20s and became my first employees. They played a pivotal role. They're great kids. They never lost faith in their dad. They were with me when I was hand-packing custom foam into my first prototypes. Today, I look at all

of my employees as family. It is also very important to me to keep the production of MyPillow within the confines of my great home state and that all parts of the pillow are made in the USA.

AVA: A former down-pillow addict and now a MyPillow convert, I can attest that your product is special, but how did you manage to corner the market already saturated with similar products?

MIKE: MyPillow was a solution to an age-old problem, and the industry was really a one-size fits all marketplace. MyPillow solves the problem of keeping your neck straight at night. Other pillows bend, twist or conform to you as you move in your sleep. Everyone doubted our print ads, our infomercials, but it came down to the product being one of the best products in history. Yet, I kept getting turned down from stores. I decided I'd bring it right to the people. I didn't realize that most infomercials fail! I just believed that mine would be amazing because I was just so passionate about this product.

AVA: Part of the MyPillow sales fund the Lindell Foundation, which is dedicated to addressing inner-city blight, especially as it affects young people, veterans and others who are susceptible to addiction. Tell us about it.

MIKE: I saw that one of the main issues with big-time charities was their own corruption or waste. When someone donates money, they don't exactly know how and where those funds are being allocated. Does the young orphan really find a home, or are the donations paying some director their huge fee? As I did with forming my company, I went the reverse-engineering route to better construct the notion of giving.

First, I started by looking at what I wanted in a charity. Highest on my list was to find real needs that we could help. The second priority was assurance that the money would

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Ava Roosevelt is the author of The Racing Heart. She is also a Palm Beach philanthropist and wife of the late William Donner Roosevelt, grandson of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

go directly to where it was supposed to go. Finally, I wanted to know the results of the donation; did the orphanage in Cambodia get their roof repaired, did the 20 kids in India get the glasses they needed? With Lindell Foundation, donors are assured that 100 percent of their money makes it to the needy because MyPillow is covering the foundation's overhead. The money donated actually goes to the little kids in need. MyPillow has donated millions to get this off the ground. We are now focusing on the needs in America. We will have a rotating grid of "need squares," and when you see a cause you like, you can help it immediately with as little or as much as you wish.

AVA: Tell us about your friendship with Stephen Baldwin and the film production company you formed together.

MIKE: Stephen and I have both overcome considerable obstacles in life. We met at a radio station and really clicked. We were driving through Times Square and I said, "Stephen, I have a book coming out about my life and I'd like to make a movie about it some day." He said, "Why don't you and I make the most amazing faith-based movies ever?" Light Beam Media was born. We are already on our 3rd project of faith-based films. Our first film is a comedy titled 'Youth Group.' Stephen is a featured star, as are his brother Billy and sister-in-law Chynna Phillips, Billy's wife. I have a one-line part at the end of the film.

AVA: Mike, in a couple of words, what do you believe defines who you are?

MIKE: Faith, loyalty and integrity.

AVA: Thank you Mike. I am proud to be able to call you my friend. God bless you.