

The Secret to My Success

Jim Dornan's business has succeeded beyond every expectation—but only because he stays grounded.

by Brian Mast

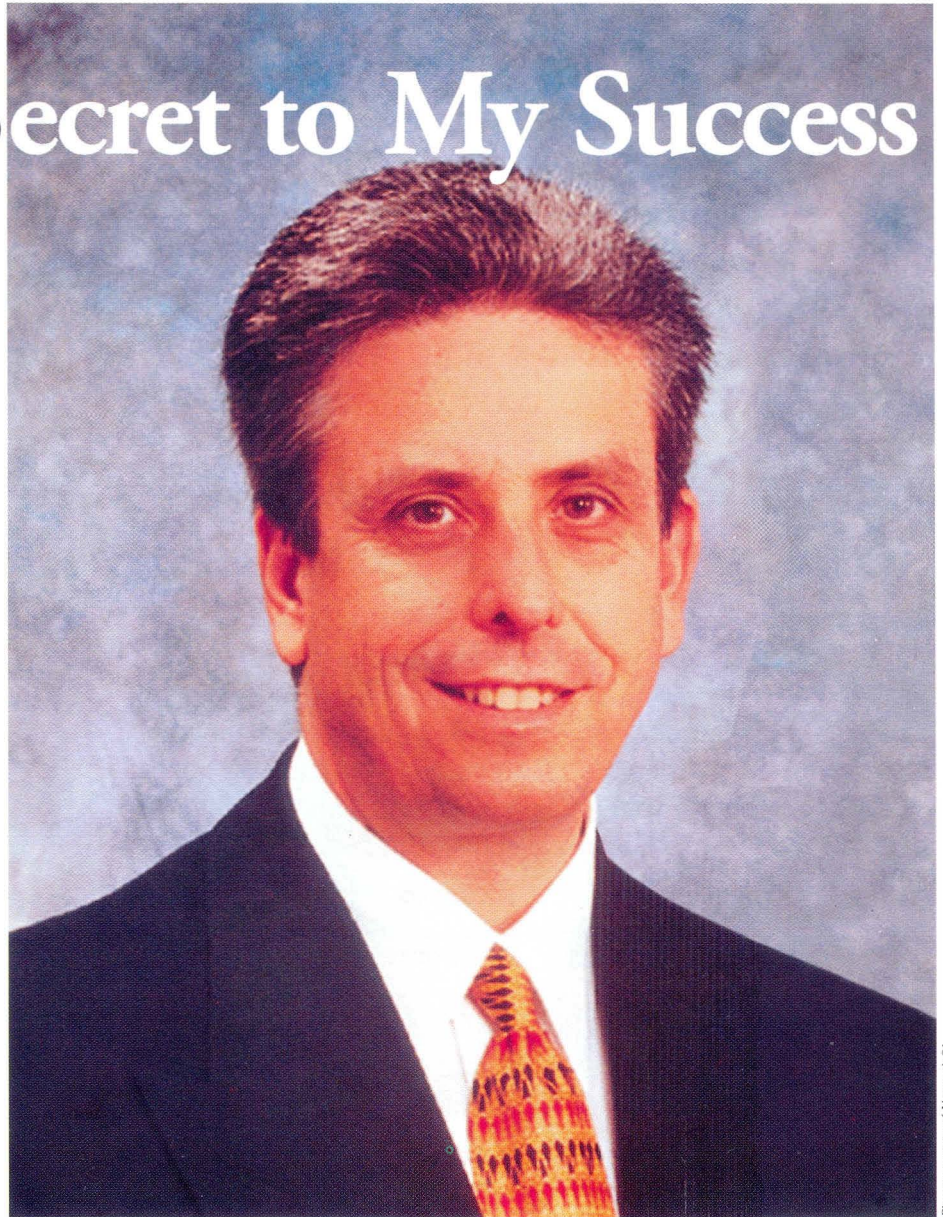


Photo courtesy of Network 21

“**W**e have been blessed with success, but we want significance, we want to make a difference, we want to make a life-changing impact in the lives of people around the world.” Jim Dornan is always making statements, whether by what he says or by what he does. About 4 years ago he learned of villages in Southern Uganda where nearly an entire generation of parents had died or were dying as a result of the AIDS virus. More than 13,000 children were in need of help—most were already orphaned—with at most a grandparent to care for them. Dornan was inspired to help, so he gathered other leaders in his business network and joined forces with World Vision. Together they set up a “Network of Caring” to raise money for the needs of these children and villages. Dornan and his business associates now send more than a million dollars a year to these small villages in central Africa. The impact of this was so great that the village leaders have suggested that they concentrate future efforts somewhere else. The Network of Caring is now helping children in India, where severe needs are being

addressed among 3,000 children and their families. Dornan simply says, "It's satisfying and fun to use your money and influence to help people."

Some businesses are good, while others are great. The difference is found in the underlying qualities upon which the company is based. Jim Dornan and his wife, Nancy, business partners for the past 27 years, continually say, "We use our business to build people, not the other way around." Their business, in only three short decades, has succeeded beyond their wildest calculations. With offices in 22 countries and projections of hundreds of thousands of people becoming a part of their business, old goals and dreams are being replaced by greater revelations and responsibility. Today, Dornan says with conviction, "God has given us a vehicle and I am trying to be a good steward of the opportunity I have," then adds, "We are just getting started."

Getting Started

Jim Dornan graduated from Purdue in 1969 with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. He says, "I was not a people person. I fit as an engineer, mostly because I liked planes and was good at science and math." His career choice, he admits now, was not the result of careful planning. Within the year he and Nancy moved to California to "work for the highest bidder," another decision he now says was "not very thought out or prayed about."

Life settled into a routine as he began working as an Aeronautical Engineer for McDonnell Douglas and Nancy worked in the school system as a Speech Therapist. As their first child, Heather, was born (Nancy had quit her job to take care



You can't take it with you!

Jim Dornan candidly shares his views on money

"Running around the world holding seminars just to build my business and make more money is really very unsatisfying. How much money does one need? I wrestle with many of the things I have. How many more people could we help if I didn't have this house on the beach? Relative to our income, it didn't cost very much, but I try to keep well aware that when it's all over, I'm not going to say, 'I wish I spent more time at the office' or 'I wish I'd made more money.'

"You're going to look back and think, 'What have I left? Where is my treasure? Have I built it here or there? What am I doing that is eternal versus just for now?' I don't know where my business is going to lead, but I certainly don't want to get too attached to the financial aspects of it."

of the growing family), Dornan began to see his work in a new light. "My boss had been there 20 years and was driving the same old car doing the same old thing in the same old house and his wife still worked," he explained. With thousands of workers being laid off, the environment was "negative and depressing," and Dornan adds, "I hated it." The future was bleak, even after only one year in the industry, and Dornan began to ask himself, "Where am I going with this?"

Winds of Change

One evening, the unexpected happened. Nancy's old workmate and her husband had come over to introduce the Dornans to a business opportunity that might bring in a little extra income. Dornan was not raised to be a businessman. In fact, he says, "I never thought much about business." His father was a newspaper editor and his mother was a nurse. He couldn't relate to the products (laundry soap) and the

sales business, but Nancy was interested "as long as she didn't have to talk to anybody and sell anything." Finally, Dornan asked how much it would cost to get started. The price, approximately \$25, was manageable enough, and the Dornans bought. That night, the Dornans signed up to be Amway distributors.

Getting started in the business was slow going, but after 8 or 9 months, they found a few people who were serious and wanted to get involved. By the end of the first year their income from Amway was equal to his yearly income as an engineer, even with 8 or 9 months of almost nothing. Now Nancy was able to stay home like she wanted and take care of their newborn baby. After 2 years of the business part-time, Dornan notes, "we were making more than both of our jobs combined."

Then, as Dornan explains, he did what he previously considered unthinkable. "At the age of 25, I retired from the engineering business." The decision was not an easy

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one, but Dornan points out, "The thing that kept drawing us to it was the way the people who were successful were living and we wanted what they had more than I wanted

what the people at McDonnell Douglas had." Besides, Dornan wanted the freedom to spend time with his wife and 2-year-old daughter.

Dornan never returned to engineering. After being in the business a little while and hearing co-founder Rich DeVos speak, Dornan explained, "I felt like I was home. The environment, the enthusiasm, and the opportunity for growth were very attractive, and the concept was so logical." Dornan realized that he was going to have to get good at something in his life, so he decided, "You might as well get good at something that rewards you the way you want to live rather than just show up for work everyday and take what comes." The Dornans have never looked back, nor have they a reason to look back.

Secret to Success

When Dornan retired from the engineering industry and began to work full-time in his Amway business, life was looking good. Nancy was pregnant with their second child, and Dornan was enjoying spending time with his family. He started going to church with his daughter—but Christ was still not a dominant force in his life. He was raised in a typical home where the church was more ritualistic than relevant. Quite simply, he admits, "Christ was irrelevant."

The birth of their son, however, brought every aspect of their lives into perspective. Eric was born with a severe birth defect—spina bifida. "All of a sudden," Dornan explains, "everything was upside down." Eric was immediately rushed to a nearby children's hospital where he had to undergo surgery to close up his spine. Within the week the doctors found he also had hydro-cephalitis and was forced to have brain surgery. Eric was in the hospital for 9 or 10 months and had 11 brain surgeries, not to mention seizures, hip dislocations, muscle imbalances, etc. "Life went from normal to 24 hours a day in the hospital," Dornan says. "There's no way to describe what a mess that was." The Dornan's fairly small and fragile business was put on hold out of complete necessity.

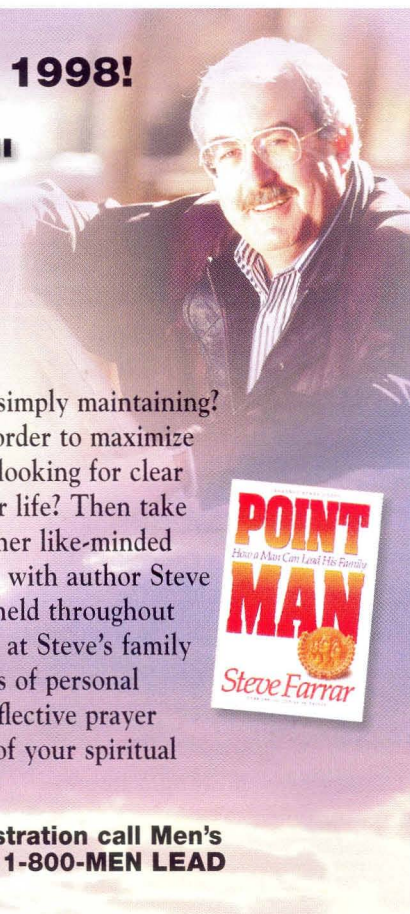
"For that first year," Dornan explains, "our whole priority was to try to figure out how to deal with one crisis after another and how to keep our five-year-old daughter from spinning out of control while we were running back and forth from the hospital." Eric was eventually able to come home, but with close attention and monitoring. Not only had their lives changed, to put

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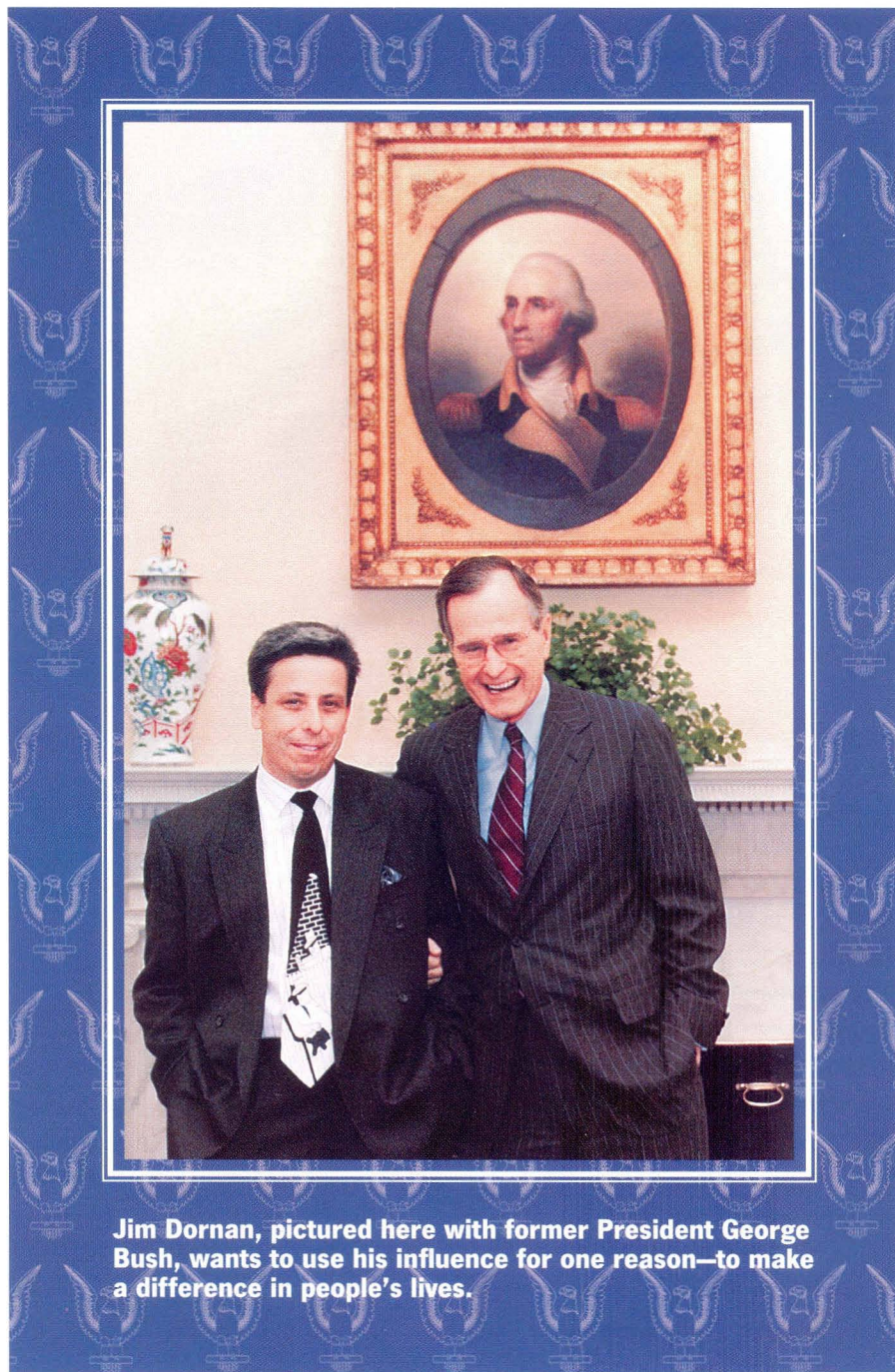
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it mildly, but the Dornans found that the way they viewed life itself had also changed. Dornan saw his values, priorities and perspective all undergo a severe alteration, and explains, "Some of the things we were interested in when we first got into Amway, how we could get rich and have all these things—all of a sudden we didn't care."

Eric's birth "jarred us," says Dornan, but it also made them understand two important factors in their lives. First, their eyes were opened to the fact that they needed Jesus to help them through the difficult circumstances they had faced and would have to continually deal with. Friends used to visit the Dornans and say, "Think positive, everything is going to be OK." Positive thinking offered no comfort, but one Christian couple did. They were Christians who "made sense," according to Dornan, and they helped Jim and Nancy deal with their many unanswered questions and unresolved emotions. Jesus Christ, they found, offered life and hope. The Dornans gave their lives to Jesus and, as a result, were able to surrender Eric and his situation. "It felt great to release it and to know that God was in control and that He had a plan and that He loved us." After that, Dornan explains, "Our experience with Eric was much different—he belonged to the Lord and he was entrusted to us."

The second aspect of their lives that Eric's birth "jarred" was their work. Their business in Amway, they realized, had supported them through the entire year. They had enough income to go to the hospital, Dornan says, but "I realized if we build the business big we would have some options that would be far superior to life poor and under



Jim Dornan, pictured here with former President George Bush, wants to use his influence for one reason—to make a difference in people's lives.

Photo courtesy of Network 21

government support for Eric's medical care." The Dornans made an unwavering decision to build their business, and within the next three years their business expanded dramatically. "I believe it was the Lord that blessed it," says Dornan, and adds, "We made a conscious decision and took everything we learned and did it right." As a result, their income increased many

times over.

A few years later, their third child, David, was born. About the same time the Dornans were also able to pay off Eric's remaining medical bills and purchase a new home. Business was booming, but for the Dornans, life did not revolve around the extent of their income. "For a period of 15 years or more," Dornan explains, "we'd

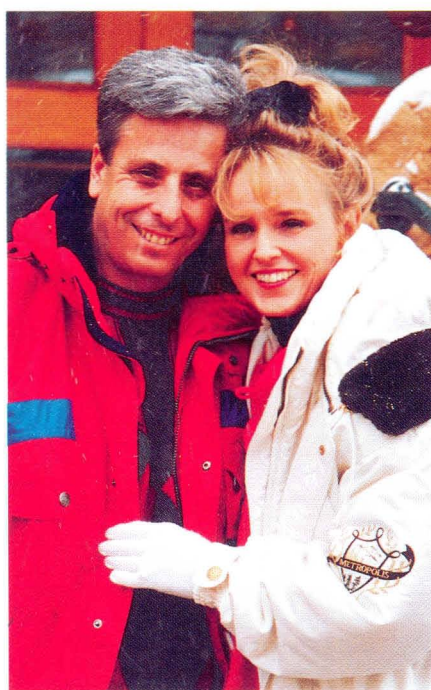
be out minding our business and we'd get a phone call that Eric had some emergency and we'd have to rush to the hospital—and it happened all the time.” Medical check-ups became common place (Eric had 30 brain surgeries in a period of 10 years), as was the revelation to be continually grateful and thankful for life.

“Eric is our secret weapon because he keeps us grounded,” Dornan says with a smile. As a result, the Dornans have developed a perspective about what is really important. “It is hard to get worked up about dumb little things—petty things—when you are just thankful your kid’s not in the hospital,” Dornan points out. Eric’s impact on the family is more than a blessing in disguise. “When you continually have to face the challenges,” Dornan explains, “it is easier to have a great day all the time.” In the area of finances, Eric’s influence is even greater. “If it wasn’t for Eric’s presence in our lives, we would fall into the trap that many other people fall into: no matter how much money you make, you get grumpy and complainy and feeling sorry for yourself or you’re mad at this guy or this person treated me bad and you get all wrapped up in this petty stuff.”

For the Dornans, their secret weapon helped put them on the road to success, both spiritually and financially.

Business Expansion

About seven or eight years ago, Dornan got a vision for the international aspects of his business. Amway was expanding and he wanted to be a part of it. People in other nations, he says, “were desperate for someone to believe in



“If we keep on our knees and really do it right, I think we’ll have an opportunity to do some wonderful things.”

them and to tell them what to do and how to prosper.” Taking what they had learned over the last 20 years of business and life, the Dornans jumped into the international market, offering a great business opportunity and using their personal beliefs to make a positive impact. “These emerging countries were great opportunities to share our faith and our business,” he points out. Practically speaking, however, business must come first since it is the key that enables them to work effectively in the country. Also, as he explains, “If you are overtly evan-

gelical, you negate your efforts.” The results, he says in amazement, are “beyond description!”

Eastern Europe was the first area to prove successful for their business. “We have been so phenomenally blessed that I don’t even know how to figure it out except to give virtually all the credit to the Lord,” he explains. In one country, 10,000 people began attending their monthly meetings, all within the first year! In two short years over 100,000 people have joined their enterprise in Hungary, Poland and other former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Building a business, according to the Dornans, means building the people first, and that is precisely what they have done. “It is leadership development and training,” Dornan says. Many qualities, such as trust, honesty, integrity and communication, are taken for granted in the United States, but in many of these nations, they have needed to start over with the basics.

In one European nation, the minimal cost to get started was equal to a month’s wages. Individuals would divide the cost between several family members just for the opportunity to break free from the control and restrictive thinking of their nation’s previous leaders. In this nation alone, several thousand people are joining the business—each month!

Individuals from many nations in Asia and Southern Europe are joining the business at an amazing rate: 15,000 a month in one nation, 25,000 in another. “They are being attracted because they want to make some money,” he explains, “but underneath everybody has the same pain and emptiness and confusion.” Dornan is offering more

Photo courtesy of Network 21



The Dornans, (Clockwise) Jim, Eric, Nancy, Heather and David, stuck together through thick and thin—and have exceeded in every area beyond all expectations.

Below: Jim and Nancy Dornan, business partners for the past 27 years, have seen their efforts rewarded, especially since going international only 7 years ago.



Photos courtesy of Network 21

than a business opportunity; he is using his influence to make a difference in people's lives. New business associates spend time with people who they begin to love and respect, and who also happen to be Christian. Then, as he points out, "they begin to ask questions."

In the course of business, several of Dornan's leaders have become Christians during an optional worship service. Hundreds often go forward to accept the Lord for the first time or to recommit themselves. "They have a hunger for life," Dornan says with excite-

ment. "We share our faith privately with some leaders and publicly with groups, but not too much so as to be offensive. These people joined a business, so our opportunity to share our faith must be used with wisdom. Many governments in these countries are cautious about any organization of people so unified. We want to be viewed positively for our long-range goals. Our lifestyle often wins them over." But with financial breakthroughs and spiritual awakenings happening in countries around the world as a result of his business involvement, and with plans to soon target nations in Africa and Asia, Dornan now faces new challenges. "We have a huge responsibility, in my mind," Dornan explains, "because right now, outside of the United

Seize the day!

If you have influence, you also have a responsibility!

Jim Dornan could go to numerous countries and have 10,000 people show up to hear him speak. Such influence, indeed, is a responsibility, and Dornan is careful how he uses his influence and economic clout. Dornan honestly says, "I just pray I'm up to the task." Dornan has come to view his business as a mission at the core that teaches business on the outside.

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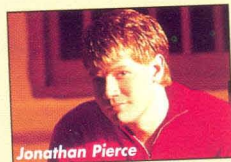
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States, well over 100,000 people attend our monthly meetings. If we are careful and sensitive and watch the timing, I think we can have a huge effect." Huge, in this case, is no exaggeration.

The Next Level

Today, Eric is 23, doing fine, though he still needs 24-hour care, and living in Florida with one full-time caretaker and two other helpers who focus on increasing his independent living skills. Though he has some brain damage and will probably not pursue a career, he has graduated from high school and learned Spanish and German. "We try to make his life as full as possible," explains Dornan, which has meant going to Europe, Australia, Hawaii, several cruises and his favorite sporting events, such as Laker and Dodger games. Eric goes skiing every year in the Rocky Mountains and has mastered the sport on a special bi-ski, which is adapted for individuals with special physical conditions. "He's just a blessing and loves the Lord," Dornan says, and adds, "He is happy and content and inspires us and those who interact with him."

Eric's full-time attendant, Fernando, and his wife, go with Eric when he travels with the family. "The conditions under which most families with a handicapped child find themselves are awful," Dornan notes. "The stress is unbelievable and 85% of marriages, even Christian marriages, break up from the stress, both emotional and financial." The Dornans have paid the price to keep their family together, at a cost they consider more than worth the effort.

The Dornans have moved to the next level, thanks in part to Eric's

influence. In fact, Dornan says, "We ask ourselves how long it would take if Eric were instantaneously healed until we would begin to complain about something, feel sorry for ourselves, or be mad at somebody. No matter what the Lord gives you, we get off the track. Eric is the grounder." In essence, the Dornans have the upper hand.

In regards to business, Dornan continues to feel that they are just beginning to see what they can do. Not only has their business expanded rapidly across the nations, but so has the opportunity to help others. Dornan and his business associates try to pick a project each year in each country that they can be involved in. He has also recently co-authored *Becoming a Person of Influence* with John Maxwell and serves on the board of directors for Maxwell's EQUIP Foundation. EQUIP (Encouraging Qualities Undeveloped In People) provides leadership training and concepts in international markets, inner cities and schools. Dornan's motives are evident when he says, "If we keep on our knees and really do it right, I think we'll have an opportunity to do some wonderful things."

With financial blessing and influence comes the opportunity to affect the morals and ethics of an entire nation. "One of the things I fear is that on the final judgment day I will have to answer for what I didn't do," says Dornan, who is continually striving to be a good steward in his position of influence. In regards to his influential role, Dornan points out, "I know in my heart that what we are really there to do is to contribute positively to their life." The world would do well to catch the same vision. ■