

WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?!

by Kristin Friedrich

SHE'S NADINE THOMPSON Founder and CEO of Soul Purpose



Nadine Johnson always liked potions and lotions and herbs. She hung around the beauty counter at department stores and smelled the jars and bottles. She worked at Avon in her late teens and learned how to sell the idea of pampering.

But life happens the way it happens: For years, it took a different course. Nadine received a master's degree in social work from Massachusetts' Smith College. She married the Rev. Robert H. Thompson, the school minister of Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. She had two kids, worked as a counselor and eventually became Exeter's dean of multicultural affairs.

The genesis of inspiration and ideas

The idea for a beauty product business sparked from a conversation with a former classmate of her husband's, who had purchased a small line of herbal products and was trying to market them. Since one of Nadine's life missions was to empower women (she was trying to do that already through her psychotherapy practice, social work and counseling) it

sounded like a good partnership.

She had strong ideas about the new company, even though plenty of people doubted a social worker could succeed in the business world. At Avon, the most important lesson she had learned was to establish relationships with older women and mothers who were at home during the day. "Many of the older women seemed to really look forward to my visits with them," Nadine said from her New Hampshire office. "I learned that the relationship was key to being a good salesperson. And sustaining that relationship was key to success in direct sales."

But her biggest inspiration was Mary Kay Ash, and a quote from the Mary Kay founder that said her company had created more female millionaires than any other corporation in the U.S. "If she can do this for women, what's possible for African-American women?" Nadine thought. "I could create a product line that was more cosmopolitan for the urban woman who wants to pamper herself, but may not want to pay Nordstrom prices."

In any drugstore, there are products for the mainstream consumer. Women of color tend to have drier skin, or more specifically—our dry skin is more apparent against our darker color. "We need products with more moisture, so as I developed my hair, body and skincare products I made sure that they were made with a moisturizing base, as opposed to water, and a lot of rich oils and shea butter."

Nadine spoke about her products from a broader perspective: "Women need to be pampered regardless of race, but I do believe that due to high levels of stress, for a variety of obvious reasons, women of color need to care for themselves a little more and do what is needed to decrease stress in their lives. Pampering is key to stress reduction."

"I lost everything ..."

When the company called Warm Spirit launched in 1999, the business had six items. With Nadine's work in product development, that number grew to 250. At its highest point, the company was earning \$2 million a month and employed 30,000 men and women throughout the country. Warm Spirit changed the direct