

Purveyor

“Five ... four ... three ... two ...”

A grinning face appeared on the screen. It was a lean, mature face with chiseled features, a strong jaw and a luxuriant head of hair, graying around the temples. The face radiated confidence and energy. The grin was insistent, and the steely blue eyes pierced through the camera lens, the image sensor, wires, cable, antennas and out to millions of screens in living rooms across the country.

“And a very good morning to you all!” boomed a rich voice from the grinning mouth, tinged with a gentle Texas twang. “I’m Dr. Tyler Belknap and this is *The 120 Club!*”

Dr. Tyler Belknap’s studio operations were impeccable. Morning after morning his staff made sure every detail was in order. All Belknap had to do was show up an hour before the shoot, review his script, briefly meet his guests and, once the cameras were running, let his charm, charisma and grin ooze forth.

The 120 Club was the flagship of Belknap’s media efforts. It was really more of an infomercial than a program, as it generated new customers for his Wellness 120 Health Products, new students for his Wellness 120 Institute and new readers for his books. Without

it, sales would lag, and the enthusiasm of his followers would wane. People were not so much buying the products as they were buying Belknap. He *was* the brand.

“In a perfect world,” began Belknap, “you and I would enjoy 120 years of happy, abundant, prosperous life—just as God promised in Genesis 6:3—‘And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.’ After that, we would all peacefully fall asleep and pass into the light. That’s what God wants for every one of us—but we may not be working with him on this—and that’s why you all don’t live 120 years—that’s why you are sick—that’s why you are poor—and that’s why you suffer.”

It wasn’t easy to get tickets to be in the studio audience for Belknap’s show. Belknap insisted on having 150 people on the other side of the cameras, because he spoke with more conviction when he had a crowd in front of him. Applicants had to fill out a form and attach a recent photograph. The group had to be primarily young, enthusiastic and always fit and attractive—sending the message that his products and practices would make his followers fit and attractive. It was an unspoken rule that no disabled or unattractive people would be included (unless of course they were featured guests who had been, or needed to be cured of some problem). People of color were strategically sprinkled through the audience to show Belknap’s inclusivity. A few healthy-looking seniors were also important to show that people were aging well on Belknap products—but certainly no one who looked frail, weak or even uncomfortable.

It was time for Belknap’s sidekick, Sam Patrick, to prompt him with a question. Sam was a jovial middle-

aged fellow with a fine broadcast voice whose job it was to keep the conversation moving and be a bit of a comic punching bag for his boss. His receding hairline and slightly thicker waistline made Belknap look all the more trim and vital. Yet far from being a lackey, in real life Sam was Chief Financial Officer of Belknap's organization. "Good morning, Dr. Belknap! What a great day to be healthy. And may I say you're looking especially fit today!"

"Good morning, Sam! You're not looking too bad yourself. A little more of my *Weight-Off Elixir* and you'd look even better!"

"Ho ho ho!" guffawed Sam. "You got me there. I just may have a glassful for lunch. That stuff is gooo-ood! And it works! But you know, when you were talking about suffering, I was reminded that so many people believe suffering is just a part of this life. That you have to suffer. That you have to put up with disease, ill health and financial hardship. That you learn through suffering. And that's just soooo wrong, isn't it, Dr. Belknap?"

The technical director switched to a shot of a grinning audience, nodding enthusiastically—then in to a tight shot of Belknap as he spoke.

"That's right, Sam. Look," Belknap leaned into the camera, the grin replaced by an expression of intense sincerity, "you show me someone who's suffering, and I'll show you someone who hasn't kept all of *The Eleven Laws of Wellness!* But what if I could also show you how you could stop suffering and start living a real abundant life? What if I could show you exactly where you could get all the quality food and supplements you need to live longer and happier? What if I could show you a network of friends all across the country who will gladly come up alongside you to help you as you discover genuine wellness?"

The camera pulled back from the tight shot of Belknap to reveal a mature man sitting across the table from him, beside Sam. His hair was appliance white and his face revealed the character of advanced age, while seeming to radiate health and energy.

“I’d like you all to meet a dear friend of mine,” beamed Belknap. “Believe it or not, Harry Summers is 102 years old. Imagine that! How have you kept so fit and vibrant, Harry?”

“Well, Dr. Belknap, I actually owe it all to you.” Harry’s voice was not the shaky, hoarse intonation you would expect from someone of that age, but a rich, clear baritone—Belknap’s grin turned sheepish and he patted Harry’s mottled but strong hand. “I appreciate that Harry, but I have to give credit to God for the secrets that he has revealed to me. Harry, why don’t you tell us your story?”

Harry did. Like thousands of others, he had heard Dr. Belknap on TV years before. In his 70s, he had begun to have a few health problems, which gradually worsened over the years—diabetes, gout, gallstones—even a couple of bouts with cancer. On top of all that, his memory was failing. He was discouraged—as he felt the end of his life was near. Then in his early 80s he had started using Dr. Belknap’s products, and his health improved—a little at first, then dramatically. His memory and mental sharpness came back with a vengeance. Since that time he had been active, golfing and jogging daily, and, having outlived his first two wives, was dating a spunky 72-year-old.

“Belknap grinned, chuckled and patted Harry’s hand again. “Ho ho ho ho ho,” boomed Sam. The director cut to the studio audience, who were laughing, smiling and gaping in awe at the incredibly healthy centenarian.

“Isn’t that just a wonderful story?” enthused Belknap. “Let’s give Mr. Summers a hand.” The audience joined Belknap in energetic applause.

“You know, friends, Mr. Summers here is easily headed toward 120. Easily. If you want to be like him—if you want to see your great, great grandkids—if you want to grow old without all the problems that we have been told have to come with age—I invite you to drop in to any of our Wellness 120 stores—or visit any branch of our Wellness 120 Institute in a city near you—or call the toll-free number on your screen right now.”

The director cut to a panning overhead shot of a cheering audience with Belknap, Summers and Sam still on the set, then cut back to the grinning Belknap, who turned to his sidekick.

“You know, Sam, the laws of wellness aren’t just for older people. They start applying to you from the very time you are conceived.”

“No question about that, Dr. Belknap. In fact, here at the Wellness 120 Institute we have great programs for young people. And today we just happen to have with us three outstanding kids, randomly selected from the big group at our Wellness 120 Institute in Cincinnati.”

Two boys and a girl, all well scrubbed, wholesome and 15 years old, stepped confidently onto the stage. Belknap motioned for them to sit on a couch. The audience thundered and cheered. Belknap invited them to introduce themselves and give brief bios.

“Three years ago when I was in middle school,” offered Meghan, “I felt like I was on a roller coaster all the time. I drank pop all day and maybe an energy drink. I would be wired for a while and then totally crash. I was feeling sick a lot. I had, like, complexion problems and I was depressed. I screamed at my par-

ents sometimes, and I was getting into fights at school. I just wasn't happy."

"And then what happened?" Belknap prompted.

"Okay, one day my mom started watching you on TV and she started changing the stuff we ate. At first I didn't like it, but then I started feeling a little better. Pretty soon I started feeling good. She took me down to the Wellness 120 Institute and there were a bunch of other kids there in these classes where we learned how to cook healthy food and take supplements and stuff. And now I feel great all the time."

"And where do you think all that stuff came from?" prompted Belknap, again.

"I dunno—from you?"

Lots of laughter from the audience. "Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho," intoned Sam.

"Well—heh heh," grinned Belknap, "actually, I was merely led to discover things that others had not seen before."

More applause and cheering from the audience.

"Sam, aren't these young people wonderful? You know," Belknap continued, "frankly, the trouble with young people we've had in this country since the 1960s can be laid at the door of poor nutrition—kids and their parents just not following *The Eleven Laws of Wellness*. And here, right before your eyes, is an example of what a big difference those principles can make.

"My friends, these young folks right here are literally the future of our country. Today, if you go to the fast food outlets and supermarkets to feed your family, you will get food filled with toxic chemicals, preservatives, pesticides and growth hormones. You will get unclean meat that God never intended for us to consume. You will get horrible *genetically modified foods* that God never intended humankind to eat. You and

billions of other unsuspecting people will have no resistance against the terrifying mutant disease epidemics that are coming.

“And make no mistake about it—refined and genetically modified food will cause your spirit to become *perverse*. It’s why so many people today are afflicted with and possessed by perversity of spirit! If you don’t believe me, just look at the world around you! Most of the world’s medical professionals, psychologists, politicians, scientists and even preachers and theologians don’t understand these principles!

“But here you see the results of Wellness 120 products—people of advanced age enjoying robust, abundant living and sharp, clear minds—young people whose bodies and minds are unpolluted by toxic chemicals and wrong-headed foods—people who are safe from the coming catastrophe because they have stocked up on our wonderful freeze-dried *Wellness 120 Survival Packages*—which can keep you and your family healthy during the perilous end times while everyone else around you is dying from the horrible pandemics that are just around the corner!

“And may I remind you that every last one of my Wellness 120 foods, products and supplements are one hundred percent organic, *one hundred percent sustainable and one hundred percent GMO free! As God intended from the beginning!*

“Do the people on this stage look like they have a spirit of perversity? I should say not! Good food has made them healthy, righteous and godly! And I guarantee you that some day young men and women just like these will be the ones to clean it all up and bring about a sparkling new world—mark my words!”



Another huge media campaign was coming down

the pike. Dave Whitman could feel it. As Creative Director at Wellness 120, he had worked his way through scores of them over the years. Again and again, Whitman had seen Belknap get a bee in his bonnet—a Big Idea that would grab the public interest, increase sales at retail outlets, galvanize his followers and sell more of his books. And nine times out of ten, Belknap was right on target.

As usual, this one was consistent with Belknap's style, forged during his years as marketing director for a powerful Los Angeles media company. *Where did your health go? What happened to all the energy and good looks you had in high school? Did you know there's no reason why you can't stay fit, healthy and energetic until you're 120 years old? You can—if you know the ancient health secrets revealed in my book! You won't find them anywhere else!*

Belknap would expect visual concepts within a week along with copy for print, Internet, radio and direct mail—as well as storyboards for TV ads. Whitman asked his assistant Velma to set up a time for an initial brainstorming meeting with his art directors and copywriters.

And then there was Clifford Bartlett. Whitman always liked to have Bartlett along for the ride, because he always brought a new perspective to the table. An African American, Bartlett was probably the best scholar in Belknap's organization—an advisor and resource for several departments, Academic Dean of the Wellness 120 Institute and member of the Board of Directors. Since hiring on to Belknap's group some 15 years ago, he had earned two PhDs from Columbia University. Belknap's credibility was bolstered when his staff had that kind of credentials. Bartlett seemed dedicated, although he certainly didn't fit the mold of the

organization man. To Whitman's way of thinking, Bartlett was a genuine Christian.

But sometimes Bartlett was hard to read. Occasionally, and privately, he had been known to express doubt about some of Belknap's ideas. Yet he always took his well-aimed shots in an enigmatically non-threatening way. A cleverly designed ambiguity often makes the best duck-blind.



In 1991, Marcia Whitman was dead tired all the time. Some days she could barely get out of bed. She had used up all the available sick leave at the mortgage company where she was beginning a promising career as an underwriter. She hadn't been to work in two weeks. Had she been three or four decades older, maybe she would have chalked it up to aging—but she was only 22. She and Dave, a young and ambitious graphic designer, had been married only a year. She wasn't pregnant. So far, her doctor hadn't been able to identify any reason for her debilitating lack of energy. In the early '90s a few enlightened physicians understood this to be chronic fatigue syndrome, but the causes were not clear and the disease was only beginning to be accepted by the mainstream medical profession. Marcia had begun looking to alternative healing sources for answers.

Not that her husband wasn't concerned about her—he was. But he was also immersed in his work—and Marcia tended to be more proactive about health matters. One of the Portland, Oregon UHF TV stations was big on health infomercials and programs. For a week or two, Marcia had dragged herself to the living room at 8 am to glean what she could from these sometimes-bizarre teachers. Then one day a new infomercial was added to the mix—*The 120 Club* with some guy

named Tyler Belknap. At first Marcia distrusted him. He looked a little too robust. Worse yet—he seemed to have a strong Bible-based component to his ideas. Marcia, like her husband, was a nominal Christian but she didn't want to get involved with any kind of oddball group. Still, she tuned in day after day to see what Belknap had to say.

Health, he said, was a matter of obedience to a set of laws he had discovered in the Bible. Once you understood and obeyed those laws, you could claim the promise found in Genesis 6:3 and live a vigorous, robust life until the age of 120. Because humanity as a whole had not lived in obedience to these laws, explained Belknap, everyone was sick—and big trouble was coming soon. Toxic chemicals, preservatives, pesticides and processed foods along with new and frightening mutant diseases would combine to bring catastrophic epidemics. Those who survived would be those who had lived in accord with the Bible's wellness laws. They would be on the ground floor of a healthy new world—a world of vibrant men, women and children living life to the full.

Dr. Belknap, a mere 61 years old, had accumulated a small group of remarkably well-preserved seniors—living testimonials for his products and teachings—the “Methuselah League.” These loyal men and women, all approaching or over the age of 90, happily endorsed everything Belknap said or did. He trotted them out as often as he could on his show and infomercials.

Marcia wasn't sure about the new world thing, but Belknap's ideas about health seemed sound. And she had nothing to lose by trying a few of his products. His *Methuselah Tea* seemed interesting, as well as his *120 Blood Cleanser*. She would give it a month. If noth-

ing happened, she would resume her search elsewhere.

In the next month, Marcia gave it the best she could. Dave was busy with several projects, so he didn't have time to participate. But if it made Marcia feel better, he was okay with it. She avoided white flour, sugar, coffee, chocolate, pork and shellfish. She ate raw kale, and snacked on whole organic barley. She walked five miles a day. She read as many of Tyler Belknap's books as she could get her hands on—including *Five Things God Really Hates About You and How You Can Fix Them*, *Deadly Pandemics Are Coming—How You Can Escape*, *Make God Happy by Obeying His Health Laws*, *How GMOs and White Sugar Will Pervert Your Spirit* and *You Can Live to Be 120!* She consumed his products and supplements.

And then an incredible thing happened. She felt better. Not just better but really, really better. Her energy returned. Her mental acuity was better than it had been in months. She believed she had been healed because of Tyler Belknap.

Whitman couldn't help but notice the change in his wife, but he tended to be more skeptical about alternative medicine, herbal remedies, faith healers and the like.

"Aren't you being a little hasty?" queried Dave. "There are half a dozen other variables that could have contributed to your feeling better."

"Dave—I know my own body—and I just have a strong feeling that these remedies somehow made a difference, and that Dr. Belknap knows what he's talking about. And you know that problem you've been having with allergies? Why don't you try Belknap's *Anti Allergy Answer* for just two weeks and see if that helps."

"Marcia, I don't think..."

"Dave..."

Whitman could never pass up a challenge—especially from his wife. “Okay. You’re on.”

He ordered a bottle of the little green capsules—and diligently popped them for two weeks. To his surprise, the sneezing and watery eyes that had bothered him were gone.

Marcia and Dave devoured Belknap’s books as well as his supplements. They began attending classes at Belknap’s Wellness 120 Institute—classes about biblical calisthenics, godly food preparation, yucca fasting and a timetable for the coming apocalypse. The people seemed helpful, supportive and down-to-earth.

One day an instructor called Dave aside. “You know—there’s an opening for an art director at Dr. Belknap’s headquarters. You should apply. It’s right here in the Portland area so you won’t need to relocate. And I know you’ll feel like you’re part of something much bigger than yourself.”

Whitman frowned. His ad agency job was going really well. He was proud of his work—had even won a couple of industry awards. But maybe it was time to get into something more meaningful—something that would really make a difference.

The next week he got an appointment and showed up, portfolio and resumé in hand, at Belknap’s impressive headquarters overlooking the Columbia River east of Vancouver, Washington. After a brief meeting in HR, he was ushered into the office of the VP of Operations, Carlton Vance. Whitman had been in ad agencies and other companies many times larger than Belknap’s—but he had never, anywhere, seen a desk the size of Vance’s. With the addition of a couple of Pratt and Whitney jet engines, the desk looked like it might be airworthy. And the man behind it had the crisp demeanor of an experienced Dreamliner pilot. Vance

leaned across the polished teak expanse to shake Whitman's hand.

"I understand you're quite the up-and-coming designer. I see some big clients on your resumé."

"Yes, thank you sir. I've had some excellent opportunities and some good teachers," answered Whitman, with efface.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Dave, because if we make an offer and you accept, you have to realize that we have our own culture and style here. You may have to unlearn a few habits you formed out there in the world's advertising business."

"Um—the world?—well, I guess I sort of assumed you would be making your decision based on my experience and qualifications, which as you can see are..."

"I'll be frank with you Dave. When we hire 'professionals,' we aren't much interested in their creative opinions and ideas about what our promotions should look like. Dr. Belknap has plenty of experience in that regard. He knows exactly what he wants. What we want is your nuts-and-bolts abilities to produce clean, attractive pages that let the Belknap style shine through. You need to understand that right up front."

"Certainly, and I..."

"We'll pay you a salary that is consistent with what you made on the outside—maybe even a little more. We value loyalty. And we value flexibility."

Whitman had expected more of an examination and discussion of his portfolio. But it was clear that this was a different kind of company. It sounded like they wanted him to shut up and work—for a higher salary than he was making at the agency. He didn't quite understand how a relatively new organization like Belknap's could afford to pay better than what he was making at the agency, and for that matter he could-

n't understand why they were spending so darn much on office appointments and desks. But they must be doing something right. What was the worst thing that could happen? His portfolio might suffer a bit—but if it got too weird, and if it became evident that he was not developing as a professional designer, he could always quit and jump back into the ad business.

Whitman accepted the offer. That had been twenty years ago. Whitman, and later his staff, had taken the “Belknap style,” and morphed it into a sophisticated, clever and trendy media presence envied by the best advertising professionals. When they all moved into the new office building, Carlton Vance had gained an even more impressive office. And Dave Whitman, as Creative Director, was sitting in his own posh office behind that huge flying desk.