

BUILDING BLACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP

*a cooperative project in
St. Louis inner city by
business, education and government*

Common business savvy, often so elusive to the uninitiated, today is within the grasp of an increasing number of black people in St. Louis' inner city. It is being gained through a singular combination of tutorial help from the worlds of commerce and higher education, backed by the rigorous support of neighborhood organizations.

The general aim is to contribute to the economic rebuilding of the city, particularly those sections of the ghetto abandoned by white business. Members of the black community are stepping in to provide an economic base for the endangered communities.

The pivotal element of this cooperative effort is Washington University's School of Continuing Education. It all falls under the general classification of community service and continuing education programs supported by the U.S. Office of Education under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965—a national involvement, incidentally, of some 500 colleges and universities and nearly half a million persons who are participating in this widespread attack on community problems.

In St. Louis, where the urban affairs program of Washington University is already in its fourth year, the new black businessmen are now less inclined to make the typical mistakes that have plagued the ventures of so many others—black and white—in the small business field. In sessions of 12 consecutive Monday nights, they have the opportunity to delve into the myriad of problems encountered in the operation of one's own firm. Through a training program for minority business managers, they receive two courses in small business management. The first, designed as a survey course, focuses on management fundamentals applicable to new businesses of all kinds. The second course gets down to such nuts and bolts as bookkeeping, accounting, tax deductions and other matters in financial recordkeeping and money management.

As a result of these instructions, many new St. Louis black businessmen are

able to avoid the common pitfalls of ownership. Instead of plunging emotionally into a venture, they now usually find it feasible to measure their potential market before choosing site locations. They give consideration to such diverse items as parking facilities and the advantages and disadvantages of setting up as a corporation. They are also smart enough to seek long-term, as well as short-term, credit—hitherto a bugaboo for many small-business owners in depressed areas when faced with unexpected delays in collection.

In fact, many of these black businessmen even undergo psychological testing to see if they have the true business temperament. At the St. Louis campus of the University of Missouri, educators such as Stanley L. Sokolik, Douglas E. Durand and Richard W. Beatty have specialized in this facet of black entrepreneurship, using all the modern tools of achievement motivation measurement to point out potential business leaders. In these programs, blacks are also being taught how to move beyond entry-level jobs into supervisory positions and are provided with consultative follow-up advice in the solution of specific business problems.

INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

Throughout the training on both campuses there is a realistic merger of specific business know-how and business educational theory and practice. Successful black and white business executives are guest speakers at the courses and most of the staffers come directly out of the schools of business administration.

Nationally, the \$9.5 million program under Title I is administered by the U.S. Office of Education in cooperation with 53 states and outlying areas. It reflects a search for the best procedures and most promising arrangements for bringing the educational, technical and intellectual resources of higher education to bear upon the problems of American communities.

A strong supporting force in St. Louis is the assistance offered by various local

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organizations These include the Interracial Council of Business Opportunity (ICBO), which aided in the planning of the early courses, the Small Business Administration, which often provides teaching assistance as well as financial help, and community-operated economic development groups such as Union Sarah (named after two boundary streets in the St Louis ghetto) and Yeatman District Economic Development Corporation The technique is broad community involvement and the goals are the sponsorship of black business, housing and jobs

Sparked by William J Harrison, director of Washington University's Office of Urban Projects, emphasis is placed on pipelining the classroom directly into the community Students help in the planning of the curriculum, and teach-

ing guides include case studies and problems of small business in the inner city

DIVERSE STUDENTS

This marriage of theory and reality has attracted a wide variety of students to the Washington University courses, ranging in age from late teens to early sixties, in education from the eighth grade through college Numbering around 45 to a class, they have come with dreams of owning service stations, barber and beauty shops, grocery stores, plastic plants and even magazines

Some of the students have been in business for years, but still feel the need to sharpen their knowledge Perhaps they are ready for expansion but don't quite dare to make the leap without additional consultation Or they seek

help to learn how to divert their business from a general to a specialized line Others may come to the classroom in the hope of conquering some ancient bookkeeping problems

Still other students are employed by firms but wish to strike out on their own One might be a young man with ideas about a record shop Or a girl hoping to start a novelty store The businessmen lecturers, the staffers from the graduate schools of business administration, the representatives of the community organizations are there to point out the pitfalls and guide the students toward realization of their dreams

IMMEDIATE APPLICATION

Occasionally the students have an opportunity to put their classroom knowledge immediately to work Mr and Mrs



By coincidence Carl and Gail Cunningham opened their gasoline station the same week a training class for business managers began at Washington University Mrs Cunningham attended the weekly sessions while her husband took care of the business The course is part of the Black Entrepreneurship Management Development Program supported by the US Office of Education

Gail Cunningham, for example, happened to open a gas station on the corner of Skinker and Delmar four days after they started their weekly night course at Washington University

"I signed up for the course as soon as I heard about it," said Mrs Cunningham "My husband would have also but we figured he had to be at the station "

The Cunninghams embarked on their business venture after counseling from ICBO and after receiving a loan from the Small Business Administration Mrs Cunningham added, "To me the course was valuable because my husband and I had never been in business before It brought out a lot of things that were helpful It helps you to respect the businessman when you realize some of

his problems and what he's going through I never really knew what went on behind the scenes To a customer it looks so easy but, man, there are so many things I never really thought of before "

Friends of the Cunninghams, Jacquelyn and Leonard Parks of Philbrook Street, are also considering striking out on their own Mrs. Parks, an accounting technician in Mobility Equipment Command, and her husband, a test engineer at Emerson Electric, plan to start a business to manufacture small items

We're trying to find out all we can about what we can do," commented Mrs Parks "You look at one business and think it's lucrative, but now we're really seeing what is really involved. I

felt sorry for some of the people in my class who were failing in business It must have been heartbreaking for them to see some of the mistakes they could have avoided The course makes people who are failing see how it can happen, and help others avoid some of the problems "

PROGRAM CONTENT

Through his Office of Urban Projects at Washington University, Bill Harrison has been a driving force in making the courses pertinent to the needs of the community He has energetically recruited participants, personally spreading information about the courses throughout the ghetto, and has even registered applicants in his living room



Computer assisted "business games" involving problems related to the operation of a supermarket and smaller community stores are features of the Black Entrepreneurship Management Development Program Other games, such as the ring-toss exercise above, are also played to help students analyze attitudes and behavior that can help or hinder successful business management. Players include three teacher-trainers Dennis Shea (far left) of Washington University's School of Sociology Douglas Durand (second from the left) from the University of Missouri--St. Louis, and Karl Jackson (third from right) formerly of Washington University and now with the University of Nebraska

In his revision of the courses, he has made it a practice to build from the reactions of the previous participants "One of the first things I did," commented Mr Harrison, "was to cut down on the time dealing with business overview. In talking with the students I learned they were eager to get more of the nitty-gritty--bookkeeping, financing and other routine items that often prove such stumbling blocks to the newcomer in business "

In addition to uncovering and tutoring latent talent for the black business community, Title I funds are also being utilized to provide leadership training for the development of community centers and neighborhood economic organizations This is being done through the use of workshops, conferences and special training sessions A key person in this overall program is Malcolm Van Deursen, assistant dean for conferences and community programs at Washington University.

BLACK BUSINESS INPUT

Representatives from the black business community who have lectured at the various courses include Eddie Lang, president of Arway Furniture Company, Lee Lanier, president of Deville Pharmacy, Leon L Mitchell, manager of Central City Foods, and John Seay, director of ICBO

"An important point in running a business," says Mr Lang, "is to make a fundamental choice as to what the market is I started with a large furniture store and big product lines It took me two years to learn that this was the wrong approach Now we have narrowed our product line and the store is a speciality furniture shop for the prosperous middle class Negro "

Most of the graduates of the courses agree that the black consumer is no different from the white consumer--he wants the best product for the best price. One graduate said, "We shouldn't think of everything on a racial basis That's what we're trying to get away from. We have to look at things for what they are."

An important payoff to students of the course is the later exchange of information among the graduates Many of them now meet regularly together as a business group Charles Harris, general agent for Pyramid Life Insurance Company, defines the group's purpose as "obtaining and exchanging information and patronage "

STATE INVOLVEMENT

Since the Title I fund grants are made through the State Department of Community Affairs, Robert Gunter, state administrator, occupies a key position For fiscal year 1970, the statewide program received \$197,785 in federal funds Based on state priorities, some \$31,796 of this amount was funded to Washington University for its project

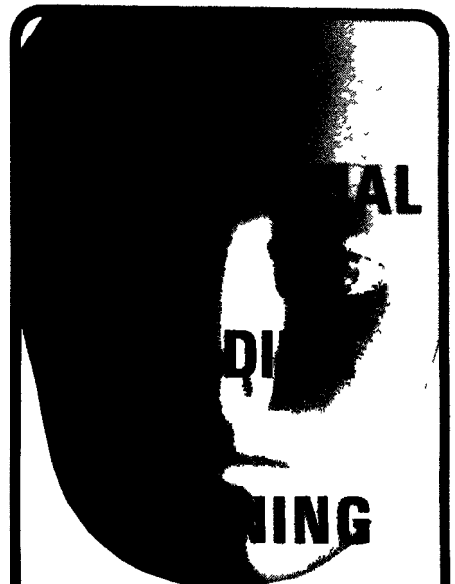
Mr Gunter has been particularly concerned with seeing that the courses and seminars are conducted on a realistic basis and that they fall on target The target in this specific case, of course, is primarily the lower income black residents from the west-central city limits of St Louis to and including the Carr-Central District, which forms a corridor of contiguous residential and commercial neighborhoods

Mr Gunter has also worked to stimulate interest among both white and black business leaders of the city An example of the fine work being done in this capacity is the help given to the students by James Hurt, who is prominent in construction and real estate Mr Hurt not only personally visits the class, but often brings along his assistants, ranging from accountants to carpenters

Another business leader, Joseph Sparacio, is working on a training program for printers Eventually he intends to donate a press to the black community

FOLLOW-UP

There is follow-up all along the lines in the program Graduates of the course are not left to flounder later in their own businesses Advisors--graduate students from the School of Business Administration--continue to make personal



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visits to offer their aid. Wherever possible, the teams are composed of a black and a white advisor, and are chosen on a first and second-year basis, so that as one student graduates, there will be another remaining to carry on the continuity. Black businessmen are free to request these services of the Graduate School of Business Administration at any time.

Arrangement of one-day conferences, often attracting hundreds of people, is another means of helping the black community of St. Louis. The School of Continuing Education, for example, sponsored a one-day "shirt-sleeve" conference under the title "Sharing for Action." The objective of the conference was to bring together people from the community and representatives of community organizations and agencies actively concerned with urban problems. Panelists were set up as problem solvers in such basic areas as crime, education, housing and employment. Throughout the day, long theoretical

discussions were avoided, instead the panelists concentrated on such down-to-earth questions as "How can I be safe in my house and neighborhood?", "Down-town and/or community control of education?", "How can I fix up an old house?" and "Are the employment systems really working for us?"

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

To get at the basic problems haunting the ghetto, Washington University's School of Continuing Education is drawing faculty from the Schools of Social Work, Law and Engineering, as well as from Business Administration. Courses and conferences are being developed and offered for the purpose of providing specific short-term learning experiences in the areas of organizational development, interpersonal relations, leadership, marketing, business economics and law, inventory controls and product distribution.

Behind these courses, one-day conferences, weekend retreats, and other

methods of translating book knowledge into direct action is the long-range goal of developing a continuing program of community education to produce widespread awareness of urban problems. It means, among other things, bringing to the residents of the inner city an appreciation of such comparatively new techniques as computer operations and other refinements of automatic data processing, and to acquaint them with the expertise of social planners, economists, attorneys, architects and urban designers.

The basics for the building of the ghetto community, however, remains firmly anchored to the achievements of the hundreds of blacks now venturing into their own businesses.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP

Raymond Hilgert, Washington University professor of business and early academic coordinator of the management training program for potential minority business owners and managers, has some affirmative words to say about the future of inner city residents.

"After dealing with these people," says Dr. Hilgert, "I realize that there is a strong leadership basis in the Negro community that is trying to solve its problems. The participants are not in complete agreement as to what direction they should go, but they are all eager to help in building their community. These people are committed to the American system and they want to prosper within this system. They all recognize that there is a long way to go, but they also realize that there are new opportunities for the black man within the free enterprise system."

Dr. Hilgert also has some advice for the small black businessman.

"The black entrepreneur should begin by building his own business in his own neighborhood and do a good job serving those people. As the business grows the owner can reach out. He can compete on the basis of his location and service doing a better job for his people than the large guy is going to be willing to do."

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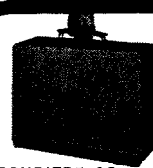
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