

PCC Small Business Management Student Turns Adversity Into Profits

When Helen Mirsky of Beaverton fell victim in 1981 to staff cutbacks at the software firm for which she was a top sales representative, she could have gone to work for a competitor. Instead, she decided to go in business for herself.

The former resident of Zambia was familiar with the protea, a flowering shrub as common to much of Africa as rhododendron is to the Pacific Northwest.

"Protea has a very exotic flower that, as far as I knew, was unavailable in the United States. With Americans traveling more, there's a growing interest here in unusual flowers from abroad," Mirsky said. (Later she found protea also grew in California and Hawaii).

She asked some florists if they would be interested in buying fresh protea flowers from her, since she had contacts among potential suppliers in Africa. "They said they'd be interested, provided the quality was good and the price was right."

Mirsky ordered a sample box of fresh protea blooms. It arrived by air in New York about Thanksgiving, 1981, but lay waiting for clearance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and by customs. "Finally, after two weeks, the box arrived in Portland, and the flowers were half dead," Mirsky recalled.

Undaunted, she showed the samples to a florist who gently pointed out there was a good market for dried flowers, and perhaps she should go for that instead of attempting to import the fresh variety.

Thus, on shaky ground, was Sidney Mirsky's Associates launched. Mirsky named the firm for her husband, Sidney, who works as a technical consultant for Culligan Water Conditioning in Hillsboro.

Four-and-a-half years and thousands of hours of work later, entrepreneur Helen Mirsky said the company's gross has doubled each year she has been in business. The amount of storage space she needs has grown from 50 square feet to a present 4,000 . . . and that may soon be too small, said Mirsky, who is thinking of adding more features to the operation soon.

The company started by selling to wholesale florists in Portland, Seattle and the San Francisco Bay area. Now, Mirsky has ten manufacturer's representatives covering the entire United States.

And from the inauspicious beginning, with a box of wilted protea flowers from Africa, she handles more than 200 varieties, mostly from Australia, but also from Africa and the Northwestern United States. All are wild-growing plants.

Pictures of the exotic blossoms and pods are contained in full-color catalogs she sends to wholesale florists throughout the country. Mirsky advertises the business in florist and related magazines.

As the company grew, Mirsky felt a lack of management background was catching up with her. At that point, she enrolled in the Portland Community College Small Business Management Program at PCC's Rock Creek campus.

"I had been blissfully carrying on without knowing what kind of profit I was making," she said. "One of the first things I learned in class was that break-even and cash-flow analysis are vital to planning . . . and planning is vital to success."

"For example, my major competition has been around for 75, 80 and 90 years. In 1985, I decided I had to do something to enter their category. So I spent a great deal of money with an advertising agency to become better known. I achieved the results I wanted, but if I had known about cash-flow and break-even at that time, I'd have cut my advertising budget in half," she said.

William M. Geiger, small business management instructor at Rock Creek, is helping Mirsky and students from about 30 other businesses learn how to make a business plan, to project future business, to analyze their cash flow and become proficient in other facets of sound operation. The class meets once a month and Geiger visits the participating businesses monthly, as well, said Mirsky.

As she spoke from her office in the Koll Business Center in Tigard, Mirsky was thinking ahead to an April visit to Australia . . . her first . . . to see flowers she



Helen Mirsky sells more than 200 varieties of dried flowers and pods to wholesale florists through her fast-growing business, Sidney Mirsky's Associates. Her products are grown in Australia, Africa and the Pacific Northwest.

(Portland Community College photo)

will later import growing wild in the countryside.

She has the usual number of printed axioms adorning her office wall. One that has a prominent position is a quote from Andrew Carnegie, who also started business on a small scale. It seems to sum up Mirsky's conviction since she joined the PCC small business management class: "It marks a big step in your development when you come to realize that other people can help you do a better job than you could do alone."

Minorities Lose Ground In Medical School Enrollments

Princeton, N.J. — The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation became a national philanthropy in 1972. Since that time, the Foundation has made grants totalling more than \$20 million in support of programs to increase minority participation in the health professions.

Intervention programs that improve medical school enrollment opportunities for minorities help, but other factors are causing an overall decline of Black and Hispanic students going to medical school, researchers from Educational Testing Service (ETS) report.

The team, working under a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, found that benefits gained in intervention programs are offset by a lack of career models, inadequate counseling in high school and college, poor performance on standardized tests, lack of preparation in the sciences, declining institutional interest in affirmative action, and other factors.

"Black enrollment has declined from a high of 7.8 percent in 1974-75 to less than six percent of the 1983-84 entering class," noted Joan Baratz, project director and head of ETS's Education Policy Research and Services Division.

"That's an alarming statistic when you consider it occurred at a time when White applicants declined by some 20 percent; medical school fees increased by \$2,500; and Black applicant performance on the Medical College Admission Test improved."

Special efforts also must be directed to historically Black colleges, which produce almost a third of the Black candidates for medical school, Baratz says.

"These schools are the major source of undergraduate production of Black scientists, yet intervention programs reach only about 10 percent of this particular group."

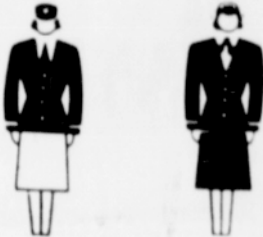
ETS researchers also noted that, in addition to historically Black colleges such as Howard University, Morehouse, and Xavier, some predominately White undergraduate schools consistently produced successful Black candidates (notably Stanford, Harvard, the University of Michigan, and Brown).

When Baratz and her associates looked at the array of factors affecting minority enrollment in medical colleges, they found:

- Students who participated in summer intervention programs and/or worked as lab assistants significantly improved their chances of gaining admission to medical school;
- Black students had more access than Hispanic students to these intervention programs;
- interventions should occur earlier, particularly at the junior high and high school level.

According to Baratz, the intervention experiences of the applicants to medical school in 1984 suggest that the following must be done to assist minorities in gaining entry to medical school:

- Resources must be targeted to successful science- and health-related programs on historically Black college campuses.
- Post-secondary intervention programs are most successful when resources are targeted at students with higher achievement levels than many of those currently participating in such programs.
- Strategies of undergraduate institutions that attract talented minority students and make them competitive in the applicant pool must be understood and disseminated to other colleges.
- Medical colleges with a poor record of minority enrollments must examine their recruitment, admissions, and financial decision-making procedures, as well as their institutional environment, in order to remove barriers to the admittance and graduation of minority students.



Author of "A Black Elite: Graduates of UNCF Member Institutions", Profiles New Book

Graduates of UNCF institutions are not elitist because they think they are better than everyone else, but "because we have done more to help other people than any other group of people in our (black) community," noted author and educator Dr. Daniel Thompson said recently.

Speaking before the opening session of the Clark College Alumni Association's 16th Annual Fall Conference in New Orleans, Thompson, who taught at Dillard University for 38 years, previewed his soon to be released book, "A Black Elite: Graduates of UNCF Member Institutions."

Thompson's theme setting address kicked off a three-day conference that also featured a "state of the college address" by Clark College President Dr. Elias Blake Jr., as well as an address by Clark Chairman of the Board Carl Ware, the vice president for Urban Affairs for the Coca-Cola Company.

Citing a myriad of findings from his 320-page book, Thompson said his three-year study proved that UNCF graduates have guided the reins of black progress just as a pioneer W.E.B. DuBois predicted nearly a century ago.

"When I use the word elite, a lot of people think about the snobbery of the upper class black society where they look down their nose," said Thompson, a 1943 Clark graduate. "That's not the kind of elite I'm talking about. I'm talking about W.E.B. DuBois' 'talented tenth'. They did not inherit money. They did not inherit status and they did not inherit leadership. But they became citizens in this society which this society could not do without," he said, mentioning Alpha Phi Alpha General President Charles C. Teamer, New Orleans public relations pioneer Bob Tucker, and Clark College Vice President for Development Charles Stephens, who served in the same position at Dillard for three years, as examples.

Several interesting facts Thompson uncovered include:

- UNCF institution grads are "joiners". Most belong to two or three organizations and 70 percent belong to five or more.
- 500,000 belong to greek fraternities and sororities in some 5,000 chapters.
- 85 percent claim regular church at-

tendance, as opposed to 50 percent of overall population, according to a Gallup poll. However, less than one-fourth of one percent reportedly join a predominantly white church.

- Almost 87 percent of all UNCF grads identified themselves as middle class in terms of education, income and occupation, while three percent said they were upper class.

- Unlike in other ethnic communities, virtually all UNCF grads have higher incomes than their fathers made; nearly all have greater social ranking and can gain entry into organizations their parents would never have been allowed into.

- Most UNCF graduates are, essentially, the first generation of black middle class.

Although black fraternities and sororities and other groups are often seen as simply seeking fun and games, that is a distinct misnomer, Thompson contends.

"If you think of them as purely social groups, you've missed the boat," said Thompson, rattling off a list of book-mobles, blood drives, medical clinics and voter registration drives groups

sponsor to aid their communities. "We have done much more than meet and eat."

Rebutting all those who say black colleges have outlived their usefulness, Thompson said "what they don't know is that we bring them in and we do

things to them that no other colleges in America do. These colleges take students from all socio-economic segments — many from the wrong side of the tracks — and send them back as leaders in their communities."

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