

Minority Business Annual

A Portland Observer Special Issue

Minority Business: A Reality Check

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

That is exactly right, "Reality". Its the reason I chose the title, "Real Minority Business" for the five-part series I wrote here from August 19 thru September 16. Directions for obtaining photocopies appear at the end of this article. They will be a useful and relevant supplement to this essay.

On October 10, 1990, my contribution in this area was an article in the Observer titled, "Whatever Happened To Minority Business?". A reprint is provided here. This essay describes a large-scale personal venture with a "qualified" success that may expand the horizons of some minority entrepreneurs beyond the "store front" format. Usually, my articles seek to point out the many pitfalls awaiting the African American who, without mainstream experience, capital or tradition (in most cases), seeks to find his way through a disheartening maze. Emphasizing that reading about business is one thing, "reality" is quite another.

Further major emphasis has been placed on "information retrieval," where my experience has indicated a major "how to and where to" gap in practical business knowledge on the part of both minorities and lower income whites. Those disabilities that were the result of economic or social background, I sought to remedy in both writings and in my Portland University business classes in a section labeled "Supper table input". That is, I wished to make both readers and students aware that the family circle into which one was born and reared has an awful lot to do with your so-called "smarts". You can catch up. It makes a big difference in your ability to deal with the system (especially the world of commerce) if you have that conversational and explanatory input about such matters from family members while you are growing up. I am saying that a world-be entrepreneur whose immediate and extended family includes owners, supervisors, foremen, professionals, administrators, salesmen, highly skilled craftsmen etc. will have quite different "supportable" input than the sons and daughter of laborers, truck drivers and civil service personnel.

There are exceptions, of course, but darn few. One group hears and learns about contracts, invoices, payrolls, mortgages, bills of sales, leases,

equities, torts, investments and the like. The other group learns how to deal with the system as a "wage earner"--and to be somewhat trivial, hears a lot about "how mean the boss is!"

I cite these facts so that when you read that series of business articles I hope you will obtain from us, you will understand that my advices are "real"--and that you will also understand my constant insistence on "information retrieval" at the public library business and periodical sections. The same with my frequent referrals to particular federal agencies and manuals and to certain publications, both texts and magazines. Included in your "packet" will be a listing of those organizations devoted exclusively to the enhancement of "minority" business.

Keep in mind, though, that "business-is-business" no matter who is trying to succeed at it. You break the rules or ignore the realities of the market place and you are gone no matter who you are--black, white, hispanic, asian, green, blue or a grizzly. No federal or state assistance can help you no matter the rhetoric or enthusiasm if there is not enough capital, equipment, merchandise, market research or self-discipline. This brings up another concern.

I'll bet you have never seen among those ads these agencies run in the classified pages for personnel a single one saying, "Wanted! An Experienced Business Person To Advise And Assist New Minority Entrepreneurs" and you won't. What you will see are requests for the academically prepared, mainly business degrees, nothing about experience in the knock down-dragout, ferocious warfare that is the business scene. People mean well (at the expense of the entrepreneur and the taxpayer), but how far and where to can the blind lead the blind? I observed many tragic circumstances while contracting with a minority business program during the 1970's.

I should note here as a relevant point that during this period, I was teaching at Portland State University--three courses accredited with the Business Department and Minority Studies. The business courses I taught were of my own design and structure, derived of 25 years experience in industry and my own enterprises. Though I was hired by the Black Studies Depart-

ment, Dean Parker, head of the Business School, had me attend all of his faculty meetings as well as those of my "home" department.

At First, my "Colleagues" from Harvard Business School, Stanford, and Wharton School of Finance gave me strange looks because they had heard I had nothing that even looked like a doctorate in business or finance. Dean Parker simply bided his time, waiting for them to "wake up and smell the roses". That didn't take long because each quarter that first year at the registration tables in the school gym, there was a line of white folks a mile long waiting to sign up under the "Black Studies" banner; "Minority Business, I, II, III or Black Economic Experience".

My "colleagues" soon found out the reason for that line of folks who were signing up for my courses instead of theirs which were actually listed under "business" in the catalog. I had people from Tektronix, Freightliner, Oregon Steel Mills, United parcel and other major industry. also there were "students" from finance companies and federal, state and city/county agencies. I had the only "real-time" business classes in the school and the people in the "real world", above, found it out and spread the word.

My "highly-degreed" friends in the business department had to redesign their own courses in order to compete or else face continuing to lose all those bodies to the Black Studies department (its called F.T.E. or Full Time Equivalent--all about money from tuition and professors, even departments, live or die accordingly). What I did without trying in the early 1970's was change much of the structure and approach of the Business School.

What I have tried to do here today is illustrate that you can achieve validity for your performance if you are resourceful, committed, innovative, determined--and willing to "retrieve information" necessary for the job or enterprise. And, by the same token, I wish you place the same value on that "Minority Business Series" you may obtain from the Observer. Send your name and address and \$3.00 to the Portland Observer, 4747 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, 97211. Or stop by after 10/19/92.

OLCC Seeks Nominees For Annual Awards

The Oregon Liquor control Commission is seeking nominations for its annual awards to people and organizations involved in projects or activities that reduce alcohol abuse.

"We welcome nominations of people and organizations who participate in activities that encourage responsible alcohol use and benefit Oregonians," said OLCC Administrator Chris Lyons. She said the OLCC wants to recognize the work of those who go beyond their normal work or activities to help reduce alcohol abuse. The awards presentation is set for Monday, Nov. 30 at the OLCC's main office in Portland.

"This year will mark the tenth year for the recognition awards," she said. The OLCC has honored more than 30 recipients including liquor business operators, moderation groups, colleges, community volunteers and liquor store operators for their efforts and programs since 1983.

Last year's award recipients were Jerry Casey, owner of the Gemini Pub in Lake Oswego; Mr. Formal, Portland tuxedo and formal rental company; Jerry Libbey, North Portland liquor agent; and Kappa Alpha Theta, Oregon State University sorority.

The deadline for nominations for the 1992 awards is Nov. 6. Contact the OLCC Public Affairs Office (1-800-452-6522 or in Portland, 653-3050) for nomination forms and information.

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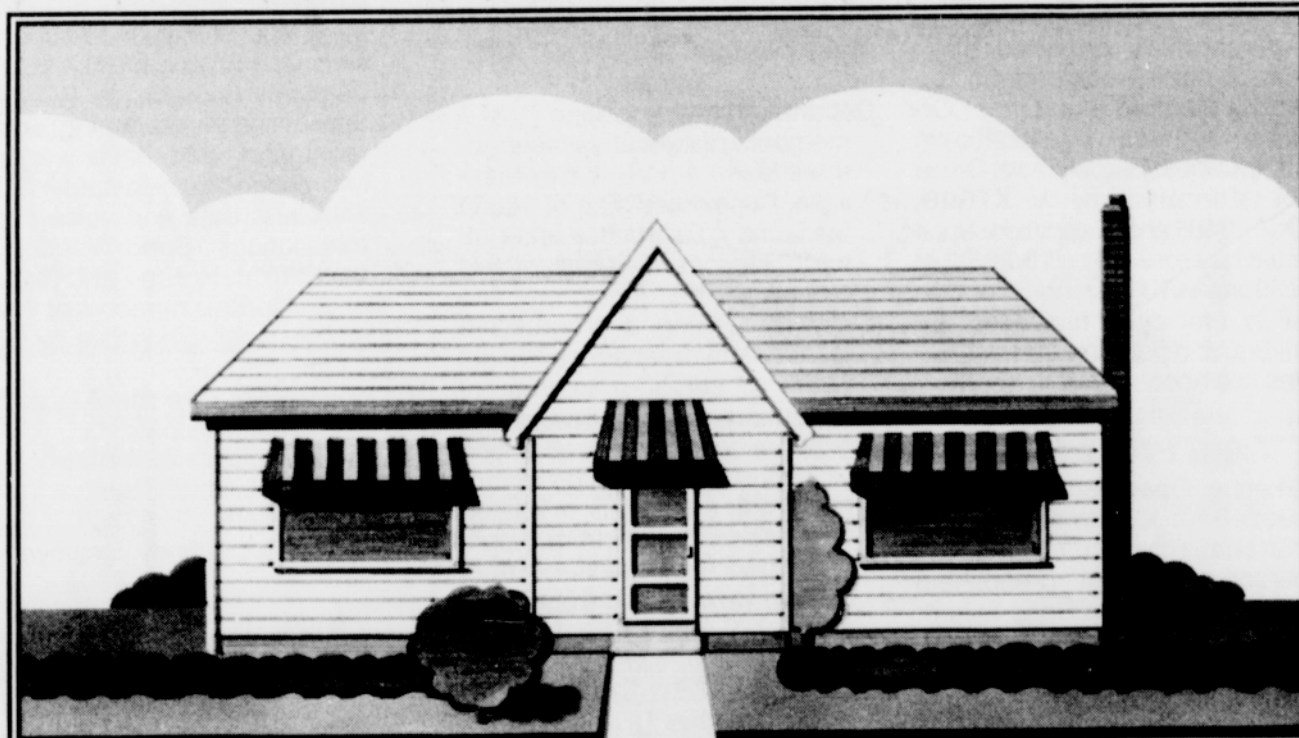
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