Blackonomics: Alliances Create Stronger Businesses

By James Clingman
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"We must demonstrate our capacity to cooperate among ourselves, before demanding cooperation where the resources of others are at stake. Business is the ultimate test of our ability to cooperate. Somehow we must learn this fundamental lesson. It will be costly; there will be some loss in the process, but we must keep it up until we have developed within the race a group of people of definite capacity and unquestioned integrity, who can lead the way to larger achievements for the benefit of the whole race."
R.R. Moton, President, National Negro Business League, 1928

It seems so difficult for Moton's message to sink in and be implemented by many of our business owners. You would think that during the last 82 years since he spoke those words Black folks, collectively, would have built hundreds of business associations, thereby commanding a much higher percentage of business revenues than we do today.

Moton, and others of his time, were passionate about working together, pooling resources, and cooperating with one another. They knew that if we would survive and thrive in this country as business persons, and if we would empower ourselves as consumers, we would have to work together in support of one another.

The same principle applies today, probably even more so. For example, all across this country Black people are battling to be included in construction projects in a meaningful and significant way. Despite Black tax dollars being spent to help fund building projects, e.g. stadiums, convention centers, highways, schools, Black construction workers and Black contractors have to fight tooth-and-nail just to have the opportunity to even bid on such projects.

Special policies have to be written, and strictly enforced, to attain even a modicum of Black participation. We always seem to be the "included" rather than the "includers." That reality speaks not only to closed-door policies, exclusion, and discrimination; it also speaks to what R.R. Moton was saying back in 1928: our unwillingness to cooperate among ourselves.

Unfortunately, some of our brothers and sisters operate in a scarcity mode rather than an abundance mode. Sadly, some of us are willing to sellout as front companies and pass-through companies, thus, allowing the "includers" to maintain status quo when it comes to the lack of meaningful "inclusion." Even worse, the percentage (payoff) received by the front or pass-through company is minimal and the Faustian deal to which these business owners agree contributes to Black unemployment and the continued lack of growth among Black businesses.

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Blacks in America are too far behind in the economic race; we are too near last place all along the economic continuum. We must establish and grow more businesses, invest in income producing assets, and form alliances with one another, in order to improve our lot both nationally and globally. Yes, we can brag all day long about our annual income of $900 billion, but those dollars will never make sense if we fail to aggregate them in support of true economic empowerment for Black people.

We can complain all we want about the lack of inclusion, which is a legitimate complaint in most circles, but while we fight against exclusionary practices we must also accept our own culpability in this issue. Much of what we fight against can be stopped by our own power to control ourselves. We always have the choice of doing the right thing or doing the wrong thing. I trust we will choose what is right, not only individually but collectively as well. If each of us would give more consideration to the collective rather than the individual, as Moton suggested, when the deal makers come knocking at our doors, rather than bending over, we will stand tall.

Design Leader

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"I took an assignment in Germany and I wondered if I would be accepted. I didn't have a place to get my hair cut so that was something to deal with but I love the cultural diversity…the challenges."

Today, Welburn says he has friends around the world. "And, I connect with them as strongly as I do with my old friends from Howard."

Welburn says the future of General Motors is in global collaboration.

"It is the future," says Welburn. "The development of the new Buick Lacrosse is a very good example of a collaboration of disciplines."

The car, sold in the United States and China is the result of German engineers, and U.S. and Chinese design teams. "It is far better than either team would have done separately…"