



PROVEN TIPS, TOOLS, AND TACTICS FOR REAPING PROFITS FROM WHERE MINORITY BUSINESSES ARE STANDING

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It is important to remember that in business, just as in life, we are not in this world alone. There are multitudes of people of various cultures and origins willing and ready to do business with us. But how often do we overlook this golden stream to the well?

Just because people from diverse backgrounds and disabilities (usually and incorrectly referred to as "minorities") don't necessarily speak and shop the way we do, let's not forget that they are just as willing to shop in our place of business or sell to us, for that matter. It might even be possible to partner with them and create a profitable win-win situation for both parties.

It is also important to remember that minorities don't necessarily see and do business "our way". Whatever that means? Nevertheless, such individuals might be the source of our business' survival. For this to work effectively for both sides, it is also important to see the world from where the minority businessperson is standing. This point was brought home to me when I went shopping with my eldest daughter who was about two years old at the time.

As I stooped down to tie her shoelaces, I immediately realized the reason she had become so irritable. She could not adequately see the toys that were displayed on the shelf above her head. At that point, I decided to pick her up and continue my shopping with her in my arms. The pleasant changes in her mood and behavior were both refreshing and welcomed.

This shopping experience taught me two extremely important lessons that I wish to pass on to you:

- In dealing with children and persons (shoppers) of different cultures and/or disabilities, we will do them (and subsequently ourselves) a great service when we take time to listen to them, genuinely answer their questions, and develop an understanding of their situation from their very special viewpoint.
- Developing this emphatic attitude means listening, really listening, on a daily basis to what people say to us. It means listening to and understanding what our family, neighbors, friends, customers, co-workers, and employees are saying. (Many times understanding is reached only after asking a series of questions.) It's like the song says, "Walk a mile in my shoes."

One of the best ways to breach this communication barrier is to look for and partner with minority businesses. Many times such partnerships mean the difference between winning and losing a government contract. But where does one look for qualified and certified minority business? Not far. There is an arm's length list of resources one can utilize.

Every major city has one or more of the following or can refer us to a relevant source. What are these sources of minority businesses that are ready, willing, and qualified to do partnership business with us? Look no farther than your federal government office of:

- E-Business Institute, also know as the Small Business Training Network;
- The Small Business Administration District Offices;
- The Small Business Development Centers (SBDs);
- The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE); and
- Women's Business Centers (WBCs).

Another source right at your fingertips is online business directories where minorities businesses are listed. One such directory is <http://www.blackxchange.com/> and its sister blog located at <http://www.blackxchange.blogspot.com/>

If I were looking for local or qualified businesses by specialty in my field, first I would turn to these directories. Even if I could not find a fit, it is quite possible that the directory's manager would adequately refer me to relevant sources.

So, rather than complaining about not being able to find a qualified minority business, why not utilize the tools that I highlighted? Oh, it would be so refreshing to see both partners smiling all the way to the bank.

Remember: When you maximize your potential, everyone wins. When you don't, we all lose.

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