



Affinity News

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Greetings:

Greetings to all on this Eve of the United States' 232nd birthday. I'm regularly impressed with the system of government we have in the U.S. The three branch (Legislative, Judicial, and executive) model has proven quite durable over time. The framers of our constitution were some pretty smart individuals. And you've got to admit: creating an opportunity to celebrate with picnics and fireworks at this time of year was a stroke of genius.

The feature story in this issue focuses on the business started by a woman from Sierra Leone, Africa. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn, and relearn, some valuable lessons about creating value in the marketplace. The story is an example of the power of creativity and determination. While Yainkain wasn't born in the United States, she provides a great illustration of what we used to refer to as "the American dream".

As always, let me know if I can help,

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Mission, Methods & Tools:

The mission of Affinity By Design, LLC is to help organizations meet their goals by overcoming obstacles. The method for accomplishing this mission is the intentional bringing together of a community of people to pursue a common interest based upon

mutual trust and understanding. The primary tools employed by Affinity By Design, LLC are founded in the disciplines of group facilitation, Systems Theory and project management.

Feature: Opportunity Costs

I've been working with an organization to help develop entrepreneurship among African women immigrants and refugees. I recently had a chance to meet Yainkain Fofana and learn about her company, AMJ Services. Yainkain's Company doesn't do anything too glamorous, but they do things very well.

When Yainkain decided to start her business, she looked at what she could do without much investment in equipment, fixtures, and facilities. The result was a residential cleaning business. What started out as a small family business is now a residential and commercial cleaning operation and a concierge service.

As I listened to Yainkain, I realized she has a wonderful entrepreneurial spirit. She doesn't charge by the hour. She charges by the value she delivers to her clients. In fact, very little of what AMJ Services delivers has anything to do with cleaning. Yainkain delivers excellent service, reliability, and trustworthiness. She does this so well her business continues to grow almost exclusively from word-of-mouth referrals.

Lessons Learned:

The first thing I learned from Yainkain is that the phrase "Aw, shucks" crosses cultural experience. While Yainkain presents herself as if she were plucked from Mayberry, Sierra Leone, she is clearly an astute business woman. It was a joy to listen and learn from her.

I'm always intrigued by the role culture plays in our perspective on the world. Yainkain's approach to business may be a result of her heritage. It's hard to tell. Even if it is, I'd be a fool to make a generalization about others from Sierra Leone.

As I look at Yainkain's approach to her business, I am curious as to how she evaluates the feasibility of her ideas. As a Project Manager I learned to look at the technical, operational, and economic feasibility of projects. Technical feasibility (Can it be done?) and economic feasibility (Is it cost effective?) are pretty straight-forward questions. Operational feasibility (Will the organizational culture accept a new way of doing things?) is often a more complex question.

Applying The Lessons:

Yainkain's business philosophy was the biggest take-away from the meeting. After nine years in business, AMJ Services still focuses on delivering high value with little invested capital. The business has accumulated capital in the form of customer loyalty and trust. These assets are

harder to come by than fixtures or specialized equipment. On the other hand, once loyalty and trust are accumulated, they go a long way.

By avoiding technology and large capital investment, Yainkain simplified the questions of technical and economic feasibility. While operational feasibility can be challenging there is little, tangible investment in meeting these challenges. Yainkain simply decided any technically and economically feasible idea would automatically be operationally feasible. Could things be that simple? Apparently, yes.

If we take operational feasibility as a given, the number of opportunities to deliver value without incurring high costs increases dramatically. Here are a few things to consider in examining opportunities:

- What delays (either staff waiting for a customer or customer waiting for staff) exist in the process of delivering services?
- What skill sets do we possess but are underutilized?
- What additional services could be provided at the same time as our current services are being delivered?
- What would cost nothing but cause the customer to place a higher value on the services they receive?

A few examples from AMJ Services include: flexibility in service times, discarding outdated products in the refrigerator, replenishing household supplies, arranging for maintenance/service work on behalf of the owner. Nothing too exciting, just things Yainkain's customers find highly valuable.

Add your comments:

The story above has been published on the Affinity By Design blog. You can become a part of the story by going to: < <http://affinitybd.blogspot.com/>>. You'll also find web-only content there.

Speakers Corner:

Dan Lococo regularly speaks to groups on a wide variety of topics. Here are a few of the presentations Dan has done for groups in the recent past.

- Vision to Action: On how to move from high-level goals to the small steps it takes to get the job done.
- Having Skin in the Game: A light hearted look at the difference between volunteering and volunteering to navigate for a blind driver in a race car.
- Living our Spirit: On the ways we give ourselves to the world.

- Learning from Plan B: On the gifts that come when things don't go as expected. (Co-presented with Helen Lococo)

If your group or organization needs a speaker, let Dan know how he could help.

How Affinity By Design, LLC can help:

Is it time to do some analysis of what's effective and what's not? This would be a great time to look at how your organization can bring its best to the table. You might be surprised at what you'd find. You'll also be surprised at how Affinity By Design, LLC can help.

Dan Lococo brings many years of experience in business process analysis, finance management, and group facilitation to Affinity By Design, LLC.

There are a number of ways your organization can take advantage of these skills and experience as it becomes more effective in the delivery of its mission.

- ✓ Group presentations: As an experienced public speaker, Dan Lococo can address your organization or professional association.
- ✓ Structured brainstorming: A facilitated brainstorming session can help your organization reach a consensus on how to measure what is most important.
- ✓ Model building: A business model can quickly and effectively communicate important information. The integration of analysis tools and graphics allows for the communication of sophisticated information with a minimum of data collection.
- ✓ General consulting: Affinity By Design, LLC can provide a customized combination of facilitation, analysis and consultation to meet the special needs of your organization. General consulting engagements are based upon a mutually agreed upon project charter.

Why You Received This Message:

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