



Education Committee

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How to do Business with Corporate America

by Angela K. Walker

Relationships, relationships, relationships. Just as location is important in real estate, building relationships is essential in doing business with corporate America. It is, in fact *the* key dynamic in creating a successful business enterprise. Building relationships affords you an opportunity to plant the seeds of growth in order for your business to survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive environment.

Taking the time to build relationships is only one aspect of growing your business. There are several to consider when approaching corporate clients. The critical ingredients needed in winning corporate clients are; *relationships, research, preparedness, patience, and delivery*. It takes a mix of these five ingredients to create a successful recipe for your growing business.

Relationships

“People buy from people they like - who they feel comfortable with,” said Clifton Carroll, Chief Executive Officer of **Logical Integrations**. Incorporated in 2000, Logical Integrations is a minority-owned services firm that has successfully worked with several corporate clients over the years. Carroll understands that developing relationships is critical to the

growth and success of his company. “Relationships are key – it takes a long time,” said Carroll.

His first major client, AT&T was won through relationships he developed while doing training at Georgia Tech’s Incubator. Another corporate client he wanted to do business with was Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc. (CCE). It took over two years of communication with them before he secured a contract. Logical Integrations was able to secure the CCE contract because of its “competitive pricing, exceptional service, quality products, and by providing CCE with innovation.”

Carroll’s strategy was to learn or research as much as he could about CCE. He also understood that the more you know about a company; its products and services, its customers, and its goals, the more you can add value. Every week, he pulled news articles about CCE, and kept a binder of information about the company. At various functions he would talk with CCE about their business and how his company could provide a value added service.

Carroll also learned the value of developing a relationship with someone within the organization who was able to

steer him in the right direction. Finding a person within the organization, such as an admin-



istrative assistant, purchasing personnel, end users, or suppliers will go a long way in helping you secure a contract. “You have to be patient, spend time with building a relationship with any entry into a company,” added Carroll.

Elayne Leathers-Hill, Chief Executive Officer of **Prestige Design Group, Inc.**, wanted to do business with United Parcel Service (UPS) for eight years before securing a contract. She also understood the value of building relationships.

It is “the number one thing -- you can’t just walk through the door,” said Leathers-Hill. Before securing the UPS contract she elicited the help of several people including George Lotier, President and CEO of the GMSDC, who helped her solidify the decision to shift from an embroidery business to a full service uniform business.

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GMSDC has the largest number of certified and ethnically diverse MBEs in the Southeast region. Atlanta, Georgia ranks number three among U.S. cities with the most Fortune 500 headquarters.

Doing Business with Corporate America, cont.

Leathers-Hill secured the UPS contract through a majority/minority relationship with a company by the name of Riverside.

Once Leathers-Hill successfully worked on the UPS contract, she was given the chance to work on other 1st and 2nd tier contracting opportunities. “They [also] need to know you can handle the project,” added Leathers-Hill.

For Barbara Brunetti, President of **Fast Signs**, in Norcross, Georgia, “building partnerships” is what she believes has contributed to her business success. Although she has been in business for eighteen years, it took more than two years before she secured a purchase order contract from the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). By the time she won the contract, she had extensive knowledge of the contract requirements and she was able to explain how her company would bring added value to the project.

Courting a company is a time honored tradition that can take up to two years or longer before winning a contract. A couple of ways to keep your company on the minds of corporations is by talking with them at various events, through correspondence, or by sending birthday cards or holiday cards. If you think about the relationships you’ve developed over your lifetime, some of the common denominators present were *time*, *nurturing*, and *trust*. These are some of the same factors needed when building relationships with corporate America.

Preparedness

So, how can you best be prepared to do business with corporate America? John W. Burgess with CCE, offers four steps to take in order for you to have an opportunity to do business with CCE;



1. Provide a product or service that we purchase,
2. Understand the beverage business and how their product/service adds value to our supply chain,
3. Certified M/WBE firms register at www.cokecce.com/supplierdiversity,
4. Submit a competitive business proposal.

Being prepared also means understanding the corporate culture, its values, and needs, and being able to match those requirements with how your company can provide added value. “Being prepared - you really don’t know when an opportunity is going to come,” said Clifton Carroll. Carroll recommends having a two-minute elevator pitch prepared on your company’s products or

“Building relationships should be an integral part of any growing business’ long range planning.”

services. It’s also beneficial to use your two-minute pitch when networking with prime contractors. However, even before you make a pitch, “ask for an objective opinion,” said George Lottier. “You want to make sure that the customer can visualize the benefit of your service,” he added.

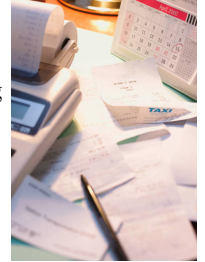
Another important aspect of being prepared is doing your research on a company. There are several ways to obtain information about a company. You can find information from their SEC filing, or go to their website for their annual report; you can also go to Google, type the company name to see recent news or information; become a member of a fee based website, www.hoovers.com to obtain invaluable information such as statistics, executive names, and biographies, or you can create custom lists of companies and industries.

These resources will help you to evaluate whether your company would be a good match, or even if it is a company worth pursuing. Instead of going after the major players in any given market, consider their competitors; you may be able to get your

foot in their door. The thing to remember is, the more you know about a company, the more you can add value.

In addition, you may consider the following efforts when approaching corporate clients;

- SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) In other words, know your business; what is your value proposition? Are you willing or able to fill the gaps within your organization in order to grow your business, i.e. hiring sales personnel, or professional coaches, etc.?



- Build relationships, attend functions, write articles, speak at events, and join business/social/professional organizations.

- Create strategic alliances and partnerships in order to bid on larger contracts.
- Go to corporate America’s websites and register your company online.
- Be prepared at all times and stay within your company’s ability when bidding on contracts.

Another valuable element in being prepared is following up on a delayed or denied bid or proposal. “If I didn’t hear from somebody, I would follow-up,” said Barbara Brunetti. Finding out the reason for your delay or denial can reveal information to help you win your next contract. Call to find out the reason for your delay or denial and ask if they could put you in touch with the 1st tier contractor/supplier for a 2nd tier opportunity. Again, even if you are not

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Doing Business with Corporate America, cont.

securing 1st tier contracts with corporate America; you may be able to secure 2nd tier opportunities by networking with prime contractors.

Winning Contracts

Increasing your chances of winning corporate clients requires a multi-faceted approach. Utilize the services of the GMSDC, mentor-protégé programs, training opportunities, 2nd tier opportunities, and by creating strategic alliances or partnerships in order to maximize your chances of survival. Also, contact the supplier diversity personnel at these corporations. In most cases, they will assist you in making contact with the right people within their organization.

Building relationships should be an integral part of any growing businesses long range planning. It is a critical business strategy that will help grow your business. Remember, once you get your foot in the door, the way to get invited back

is by providing a quality product or service, offer competitive pricing, and by continuing to nurture the relationship.

Finally, always keep in mind; dealing with corporate America requires both *patience* and *persistence*.



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Course Calendar

February 28, 2006

Managing Cash Flow. Protect your company's most important asset—**CASH FLOW**—by learning simplified techniques for planning, budgeting, and monitoring cash flow. Explore the causes of cash flow problems and how you can keep your business healthy.

The course will be offered **Tuesday, Feb. 28th, from 10 am to 12:30**, at Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., CNN Center, One CNN Center, Atlanta, GA 30303, in the Large Conference Room, 9th Floor, South Tower.

March 13, 2006

Netweaving. Author Bob Littell, creator of Netweaving, shows you how a “Pay It Forward” form of networking, works for your business. Based on the Golden Rule of and the belief that what goes around DOES come back, Bob will show you how to incorporate the 3 skill sets of Netweaving into your daily life and your business, and how they ENERGIZE everything else you do.

The course will be offered **Monday, Mar. 13th, from 9 am to 11 am**, at 55 Park Place, NE Atlanta, GA 30303. Training rooms are on the right hand side of the

April 11, 2006

How to Talk So Your Prospects Will Listen. Dynamic Speaker Brian Hilliard will show you:

- How to get more business by creating your very own Unique Selling Proposition.
- 3 surefire sales questions to help you stand out from the crowd.
- Turn a “suspect” into a prospect by mastering the sales progression.

All participants will receive a free book and audio recording from Brian Hilliard.

Georgia Power, 9:00am-12:00pm



GMSDC
Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council

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● **YOUR VITAL LINK**

The mission of the Georgia Minority Supplier Development Council, Inc. (GMSDC) is to foster and expand mutually beneficial economic opportunities between certified minority business enterprises (MBEs), corporations, and government entities within the state of Georgia; and to help build a stronger, more equitable society by supporting and promoting minority business development.

EVENT SCHEDULE

Business Opportunity Luncheon

Thursday, February 16, 2006
Maggiano's of Buckhead

Management by the Numbers

Tuesday, MARCH 21, 2006
Turner Broadcasting System, Inc.
CNN Center, One CNN Center

Business Opportunity Expo

Wed. & Thur., May 17 & 18, 2006
Georgia International Convention Center



Mark Your Calendar!