

President's Message "Door-Blockers": Challenge to Black Business Growth

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A hindrance to obtaining real purchasing opportunities from corporate representatives is that too often management views black-owned business as having no relevant value to their operational requirements. This is occurring in the face of our association members' constant pursuit to grow effective and efficient enterprises in all areas of service, retail, wholesale, construction and manufacturing industries.

There appears to be a practice among purchasing outreach specialists that has reduced their role to that of "door-blockers" to opportunities. The counterproductive manner in which these representatives are functioning stems from their lack of understanding of the relevance of black business development outreach events and the perceived impropriety of black business for corporate inclusion and supplier engagement processes.

"Door-blockers", as I describe them, can dissect trade and outreach events and black business expertise to the point that they become perceived as meaningless relative to corporate core values. These alleged door-blockers restrict the flow of open-access when they view their participation at outreach events to have limited outcomes, while the BBA emphasizes to the contrary that the most appropriate place to conduct outreach is wherever black business owners are to be found.

The irony of this ill-conceived corporate strategy of blocking access is that small business owners take into account which major corporations have

relevant programs of inclusion, and small business owners have recognized which "door-blockers" stop the flow of communication to engage meaningful dialogue regarding real procurement opportunities. Thus, California black business events are suffering from corporate apathy and marginal attendance due to all parties thinking that there is limited relevance from participation.

There are many areas of discussion with regard to sound event planning, but the greatest concern remains that black business enterprises have challenges to accessing purchasing opportunities. Relationship building is still moderately low for black business owners and procurement management personnel, with the outcome being directly reflected in the low annual spend with black business enterprises reported by most public and private organizations.

The BBA is the business association that is in place to facilitate effective relationship-building processes. The mainstream-accepted Chambers of Commerce have attendees from a large variety of businesses and major corporate representatives that see value to participate in such programs. The BBA has the same outreach model for networking and information exchange, so why are we increasingly disconnecting between the identification and recruitment of black business owners?

On November 14, 2007, the BBA will host a one-on-one information exchange outreach for all California utility firms, telecommunication firms and other corporations to meet with black

businesses from a variety of product and service disciplines. We hope that everyone, including door-blockers, will see that participation in this outreach can achieve improvements in their annual spend.

The quantity and type of contracting opportunities are changing everyday and the standard methods of purchasing are vastly different than they were just five years ago. Likewise, the operational requirements of products and services are changing just as rapidly, just as telecommunication and green initiatives are changing how we all conduct business. Relationship building is now more important for smaller companies if they are ever expected to be part of open access programs.

Every effective corporate business inclusion program selects outreach and internal specialists that practice maximum acceptance of all people. However, unless corporations periodically check the activity of their representatives, they could be losing business opportunities just from turning away and discouraging black business candidates. Likewise, a business blocked from entering corporate doors ironically also creates a block to future revenue for that corporation.

The Black Business Association is a door-opener for black businesses. It is up to African American entrepreneurs to take full advantage of the opportunities created by the BBA to enhance their growth and development. Take advantage of the door-opening opportunity being brought to you by the BBA on **November 14th – the Utilities Procurement Summit**. Also take the time to participate in the annual **Black Business Day Awards Luncheon** in recognition of outstanding African American entrepreneurs. ♡

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