

The power of small beginnings

Written by Timothy Houston
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"Do not despise these small beginnings, (Zechariah 4:10 NLT). This month my personal barbershop, Johnson's Barbershop located at 5257 Chicago Ave S. in South Minneapolis celebrates 16 years in business, which is a major accomplishment worthy of recognition. I remember the first day I walked through those doors and the owner Mike Johnson (Big Mike) welcomed me in. Although I was new to the city, I felt like I had found my barbershop home. A couple of years later when my book "Men are Dirt" came out, Johnson's Barbershop was one of the first places that openly supported and promoted my book.

I have been a loyal customer to this Black owned business for almost 10 years, and from time to time, I find myself reflecting on the fact that although I am now more that 30 minutes away, I still make that trip 3 or more times a month. After much reflection, I realized that I go for two primary reasons. First, I go because the atmosphere, camaraderie, the always insightful discussions, and more importantly the people (Big Mike, DJ, Little Mike, Quan, Jacob, and Greg). Secondly, I go because I know how important these types of small businesses are to our community. In 2007, Black businesses in Minnesota generated almost a billion dollars in gross revenue.

Black owned businesses have filled the job gaps that existed during the recessions, lean years, and economic down turns. In 2007, there were 12,454 Black owned businesses operating in Minnesota, an increase 58.9 percent from 2002. These businesses provided thousands of much needed jobs. These findings come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 Survey of Business Owners (SBO) and were collected as part of the 2007 Economic Census. It is clear from these statistics that Black owned businesses are on the rise, but there is a need for even more.

With the advances in technology, changes in health care, and the gap that exist due to the limited diversity in the types of Black own business, the need for entrepreneurs is even greater. Although starting a business is a tremendous amount of work, there is help. The Black Chamber of Commerce is a great place to start. I have had two meetings with Lea Hargett, President of Minnesota Black Chamber, and they are positioning themselves to help new imaginative businesses and existing successful businesses looking to expand. Visit their website at www.minnesotabcc.org

. They can also connect you with other organizations that can provide you with valuable business development training and help you develop a business plan. A business plan is a key

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ingredient to gaining finance.

Support Black owned business. We have the power to use small businesses to stabilize our communities, and build a positive future for our children. We should never despise small beginnings. Our parents and forefathers were masters at doing much with little. As we move into this new decade of change, let us look at what goods and services we can provide and / or purchase from our community. We need you to help by changing the way you shop. Go out of your way to do business with a Black owned business and watch our community grow. Congratulations again to Johnson Barbershop for the jobs that you have created and for the families you have impacted.

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. To get copies of his books, or for questions, comments or more information, go to www.tlhouston.com.