

Summer Entrepreneurs - The Joy Factor

It was June, 2002. Bob Lupton had just finished coloring in the material on Community Capacity Building for the Chicago group with his stories of bringing about change in Atlanta. When Gerald Smith left the workshop, he went home and shared what he had learned with his wife Dorean. Gerald is the Assistant Pastor at the New Hope Bible Church on the west side of Chicago and enjoys working with the youth there. Most of the youth he works with are youth from the church. After talking about their church's role in its community, Gerald and Dorean felt challenged to find out more about what was going on in the lives of the kids from the neighborhood that never came to church, but they weren't at all sure where to start.

Since school was almost out, they decided to begin by hanging out in the neighborhood getting to know the kids and asking them questions about their summer plans. Not surprisingly, most of the kids had no particular plans other than to hang out and enjoy the summer. The seeds of an idea began to take hold for the Smiths. Dorean had gone to training with a faith-based youth business training course called Entrenuity. Entrenuity was started by Brian Jenkins in the Chicago area and provides curriculum and resources to teach students successful business techniques and how to develop a godly perspective on business in the daily marketplace. The curriculum is targeted for teens between the ages of 13 and 18 and teaches them how to manage their resources - time, talent and money. Gerald and Dorean decided that by the next summer, they would help the kids in their neighborhood become entrepreneurs in a business of their own creation. The idea became the basis for Gerald's breakthrough plan for the DeVos Initiative.

They began in March of 2003 by inviting about 25 kids ages 11-18 to come every Saturday to play business simulation games. These games are a part of the resources of Entrenuity. They include having to deal with stores, banks, bills, credit and questions like; "What if my business fails?" Those Saturday afternoons provided lots of interactive fun but also helped Gerald to begin to get an idea of which kids would have the best potential for working together in starting a real-life business. Dorean and Gerald then told the teens about their idea for starting up a business for the summer. They invited those who were interested to meet with them for an interview and selected 7 young men and women as their team.

The next step was to decide what type of business they should form. Gerald encouraged the youth to brainstorm, and at first their ideas were really big and pie-in-the-sky. When they began to talk about how they would get started, they realized that they had to think of something that everyone in the group had the ability to do successfully. That was a lot harder. On Gerald's part, he was looking for something that he called "the joy factor." He looked for something that would make an impact on the community as well as the kids; something that would show the community that kids are willing to work hard if you give them the chance.

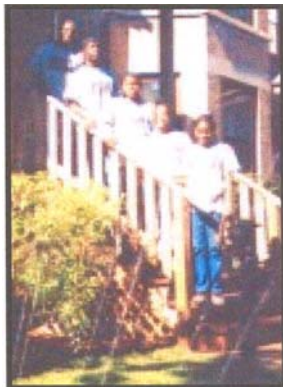
Finally, they all agreed on a landscaping business. They began to make plans with lots of enthusiasm about what tools and supplies they would need and how they would get started. They picked a name, Jet Lawn Landscaping, and borrowed money to have T-Shirts made. They decided to focus on one block where some of the youth lived which had a lot of potential for being fixed up. With little or no grass, and trash and paper strewn all over the place, it seemed like a good place for the youth to get started and to take ownership. But like most small business starts, there were some unexpected obstacles.

They surveyed the neighbors to see whether they would be interested in paying for lawn care, and if so, how much they would be willing to pay. Most of the neighbors had little or no interest. They were spending their dollars elsewhere. Next, the kids priced out tools at Home Depot and the cost was way more than expected! How would they purchase the materials needed, and once they had everything, how would they convince the neighbors of the value of their services?

They were able to get together a little capital. They received a small grant from Home Depot to buy some tools and \$1,000 from the DeVos Initiative grant that Gerald had applied for. The group came up with the idea that they would put some resources into landscaping one yard as a model to show the neighbors what the possibilities were. They chose the home of one of the youth, borrowed tools, bought sod and some shrubs and flowers, and put a lot of muscle into making it beautiful. They quickly learned that landscaping is not as easy as it looks! Neighbors walking by began to admire their handiwork, though, and that did a lot for their self-esteem. But still there were no orders for landscaping any of the other yards on the block. Gerald felt it would be important to start with one customer from the neighborhood, someone who wasn't part of "the group."

In the meantime, they tried to think of creative ways they could market themselves to the neighbors. The city has a program called Clean and Green which encourages communities to clean up their own neighborhoods by sponsoring volunteer work weekends and providing tools. The Jet Lawn team decided to volunteer their time at the next Clean and Green weekend so the adults would know they were willing to work hard. This provided a good opportunity to teach the kids about working with others. They also went to a meeting of the local block club to tell them about their business. Gerald took a few of the kids along and explained what they were trying to do. Unfortunately, most of the people at the meeting talked down to the kids, but afterward, one lady said she was willing to give them a try if they would work for "cost". She became their first real customer.

It wasn't long before people began to notice their work and they started to get jobs. When the summer was over and it was time to get back to school, they were able to say, well, they really didn't make a lot of money - but the block was greatly improved. The youth got lots of satisfaction in return for their hard work. They had gotten to know some of the neighbors, they had earned the respect of the block club and adults in the neighborhood, and they had learned some valuable lessons about planning for and running a business.



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Entrenuity provides faith-based youth business and character education resources. Their vision is to equip educators (home school included), pastors, and youth workers with entrepreneurship as an outreach tool to those within the community and as a stewardship training for youth. You can find out more information about Entrenuity at www.entrenuity.com

