

Just Over Broke (J.O.B.)? Then hire yourself

By Farrah Gray
Special to Sentinel-Voice

We often forget that behind every unemployment statistic, every number, there are real people, trying to keep body and soul together. One realistic option, aside from a J.O.B, is to hire yourself, using skills you already possess.

Recent findings report the unemployment rate around 4.5 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a branch of the U.S. Department of Labor responsible for collecting and distributing data about the current job market. Labor Department findings indicate small employment percentage increases nationwide. However, these minor increases represent little real movement in the job market or additional "food on the table" for people who remain unemployed.

Research suggests that African-Americans, most typically, suffer from the downturn, and the income gap is not narrowing. Current unemployment numbers are staggering.

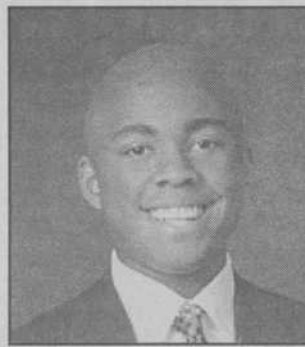
The idea of building "personal economy" around a job is naive and obsolete, especially when the belief is that the job will provide a permanent means of earning a living. This misunderstanding can lead to personal and economic collapse.

I meet many individuals at events around the country who classify themselves as "unskilled" or "semi-skilled" because their jobs require limited technical skills; yet, those same individuals make renovations on their homes, repair their cars, service appliances for friends, and mend toys for their children. These skills far exceed those required on their respective jobs. In short, it is ridiculous not to utilize the wealth of untapped abilities and vocational interests that one already possesses.

I have contended for years that the best way to explore these beyond-the-job skills is to provide opportunities to use them in a self-employment enterprise, where one's earning potential is vastly increased.

The sky is the limit for the earning potential of an entrepreneurial enterprise. A person working a job for an hourly wage may quickly increase their earnings through self-employment. No matter how good a salary is, it usually isn't open ended; whereas the potential earnings as a self-employed person are virtually limitless.

In short, financial potential is much



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greater in a personally run, smaller business than in a salaried job. Naturally, success in self-employment requires tremendous effort — and we all know that there are risks involved.

As an entrepreneur, I appreciate how difficult it is to transition from the workplace to being self-employed. If individuals are accustomed to working for someone else, they've learned to take instruction and follow other people's rules and regulations. They are seldom recognized for taking initiative.

In becoming self-employed, one must assimilate new concepts and ways of doing things. They must learn a great deal about people, and how to penetrate the marketplace successfully.

Very often, these kinds of skills and insights differ greatly from what it takes to fulfill the requirements of a J.O.B. — "Just Over Broke" position.

Being successful in business requires a realistic understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses. You must be willing and able to take an honest look at yourself. This self-assessment should include, but not be limited to, what you have learned or done on prior jobs.

Many persons possess a wide range of skills developed outside of the workplace.

The worker who performs simple job tasks at work, such as drilling three holes in Plexiglas, can be found at home on weekends rebuilding an automobile engine, refinishing furniture, making lamps, making clothes or cooking gourmet meals.

I tinkered in the kitchen and developed the ingredients of a real, money-making business — producing my own products and procuring over a million dollars in contracts selling "Farr-Out Foods Strawberry-Vanilla Syrup" — as a pre-teen entrepreneur.

I hope that I can encourage those who are unhappy with their jobs — or those who have lost jobs and lost hope — to begin looking carefully at inner resources and strengths. There are so many hidden vocational skills and interests that people never seem to pursue.

It is time to rediscover latent skills and reactivate old interests. Believe it or not, you have all you need to put yourself to work. If you are seriously seeking employment in this current economy, why not consider hiring yourself?

Once the decision is made, it's only a matter of working out the details. I hope my forthcoming articles provide the guidance and inspiration necessary to help make this change possible.

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Nicotine

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eral cigars per day, have an increased risk of coronary heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Cigar smoke contains the same toxic and carcinogenic compounds identified in cigarette smoke. Cigar smoke tar appears to be at least as carcinogenic as cigarette smoke tar."

Yet, tobacco products of all kinds entice teens every day.

"There are an estimated 1.6 million African-Americans under the age of 18 who will become regular smokers if current trends continue, and about 500,000 will die of smoking-related illnesses," according to the National African-American Tobacco Prevention Network or NAATPN.

Teens are largely enticed by images of independence, says Ashe.

"It's this weird time between the ages of 12 and 17 where teens are trying to exercise some measure of control over their lives. So, traditionally, what happens is sort of rebellious behavior," says Ashe. "The tobacco industry, over the years, has used that to their advantage."

Vuledma, 15, also hanging out at City Place, tells how: "I see it in movies and commercials and stuff like that. They'll show it as being cool," she said.

Sixteen-year-old Iyana, hanging out with Brian,

agrees.

"TV, movies, music videos," she names the places where she encounters the cigarette lure.

And people who teens admire, such as actors Morgan Freeman and Bill Cosby, basketball star Michael Jordan, and singer 50 Cent, have — perhaps unwittingly — made cigars appear glamorous as teens are already pitched tobacco from every direction.

"Even on some signs. I've seen signs," said Apollo, 16. A non-smoker, he says his friends wouldn't even listen to reason.

"I can't say nothing to them because they're grown," Apollo said. "They don't listen to their parents. So what can I say?"

It's the tobacco images that they often see and hear louder than voices of reason, says Ashe. That's why parents and anti-smoking advocates have to be wise.

"Teens are going to rebel. It's going to happen. So, if we are going to attempt to supplant tobacco as a tool for this rebellion, knowing that decades of advertising, millions and millions and millions of dollars have poured into these brands, we have to give them something powerful to identify with. And that's sort of the premise of Truth," Ashe said. "What Truth does is really seeks to pull the curtain back, so to speak, on the tactics of the tobacco in-

dustry. Instead of having the teens to rebel in general and take up smoking, we want them to rebel and not take up smoking as a result of being fully informed."

Truth, according to Legacy, is the largest national youth-focused anti-tobacco education campaign, designed to expose tactics of the tobacco industry.

It is a monumental task. The tobacco industry has spent more than \$12.5 billion dollars over the past five years to market its brands to susceptible groups of people, such as Blacks and teens, according to the Federal Trade Commission, Legacy reports. Through concerts, counter-images, advertisements and promotions, specifically designed to reach teenagers, experts believe the Truth strategy is making a dent.

"All we have to do is present the facts. And the appalling nature of the facts speak for themselves," said Ashe. "So our hope is that a teen sees that and hears that and chooses not to fall prey to that promise that's communicated through the tobacco industry."

Iyana is at least one who appears to get it.

She says defiantly, "I don't want no cancer. I don't want to be sick. I don't want to be stinky."

(NNPA withheld the last names of the teens in order to protect their privacy.)

Obama plays down race

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrat Barack Obama said Sunday he was reluctant to ask for Secret Service protection this early in the 2008 presidential race.

"I'm not an entourage guy. You know, up until recently, I was still taking my wife Michelle's grocery list and going to the grocery store once in awhile," the Illinois senator said.

Obama acknowledged that some of the threats against him were racially motivated.

"You know, I don't spend a lot of time thinking about it or considering the details of this, but just to broaden the issue, are there people who would be troubled with an African-American president? Yes," he said.

"Are there folks who might not vote for me because I'm African-American? No doubt."

But Obama said that if he doesn't win, it will not be because of the color of his skin.

"It's going to be because I didn't project a vision of leadership that gave people confidence. It's going to be because of something I didn't do as opposed to because I'm African-American," he said.

On affirmative action, Obama, a Harvard Law School graduate, said he

thinks that someday when his two young daughters apply to college, they "should probably be treated by any admissions officer as folks who are pretty advantaged" and there is nothing wrong with that.


"I think that we should take into account White kids who have been disadvantaged and been brought up in poverty and shown themselves to have what it takes to succeed," he added.

"There are a lot of African-American kids who are still struggling."


Obama said that "if we have done what needs to be done to ensure that kids who are qualified to go to college can afford it, that affirmative action becomes a diminishing tool for us to achieve racial equality in this society."

His comments came in an interview broadcast recently on "This Week" on ABC.

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