

The Diverse Business Dialogue

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Businesses Earn the Right To Win: If they can't, nothing we do can help

by Melvin J. Gravely, Ph.D.



I've been thinking. There is a significant difference between the right to try and the right to win in business. There is a fundamental market place premise. Businesses, all businesses, earn their right to be. And they are earning their right from the very start. The business plan is either good enough to become a real business or it isn't. The execution of the business plan is either good enough to get a first customer or it isn't. The growth strategy is either good enough or the business doesn't grow.

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Don't get me wrong. Everyone does have a right to try. Our economic system has thrived on the right to entrepreneurship. More people trying entrepreneurship is good for everyone. The myriad of benefits that come along with minorities engaged in entrepreneurship is the strongest business case for any focus in this area. But the right to try is far from succeeding. Only the business (the strategy, activities, execution, etc.) can earn the right to win. So setting goals and creating programs is actually about establishing the right to try. The right to try is important and worth our effort. An entrepreneur's right to try should be unencumbered by the historical baggage of race, gender and discrimination. And not just the issues diverse firms deal with in the current environment but any of the vestiges of how our nation has handled these issues in the past. And the residual effects of our history on minority businesses are significant.

We cannot right the wrongs of the past but we can operate in a manner that recognizes how our past has impacted much of the current positioning of these diverse groups. There are a number of tangible and intangible elements that are leftovers from years of discrimination and lack of access. But that's it. Positioning minority firms despite the challenges is all we can expect programs and goals to be able to do.

Earning the right to go to the next level is a combination of planning and executing. Supplier diversity and other inclusion programs can't help with either. The spending goal might create some interest but to expect anything more is problematic. When "the program" is responsible for creating success we lose the real opportunity to grow market competitive diverse organizations. I believe in minority business programs and the impact they can make but I also know their limitations. Only entrepreneurs with strong strategy and a focus on execution create thriving businesses. Programs and goals are there to support entrepreneurs in doing so. No, I'm not letting "the programs" off the hook. I'm just bringing attention to the reality. Businesses earn the right to win. That's what I think. What do you think? Email your comments to Dialogue@entrethinking.com.

Learn more about how businesses earn the right to win in Mel Gravely's new book, *What Is the Color of Opportunity?* Get more information at www.ColorOfOpportunity.com.



  