

TAABA

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MISSION:

The Tuck African Ancestry Business Association (TAABA) is committed to enriching the value of the greater Tuck community by increasing the diversity of people, ideas, and activities.

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A Brief Glimpse into Tuck Executive Education: Growing the Minority Business to Scale

In today's soft economic climate, knowing how to take advantage of opportunities, understanding situations, and applying frameworks to make sound business decisions are transcendent across the business environment. For minority business entrepreneurs, the aforementioned skills are vital for our ability to grow our businesses to scale and achieve "true" wealth generation.

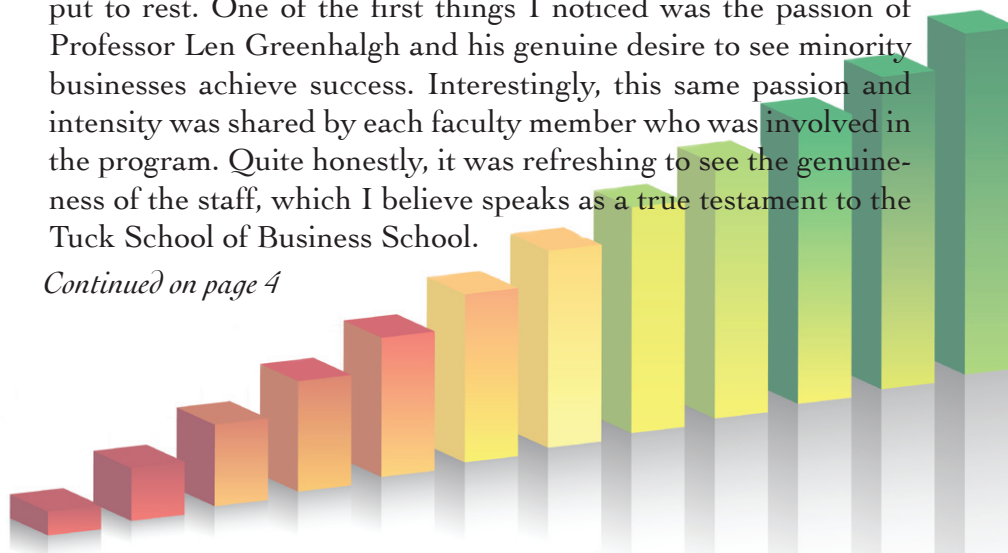
Prior to arriving in Hanover to participate in Tuck Executive Education at Dartmouth's 'Growing the Minority Business to Scale' Program I envisioned achieving three primary objectives, specifically, improving my ability to (1) utilize the information that would be presented to prepare myself for long-term sustainability within the company, (2) network and find synergies with other attendees, and (3) implement new methodologies to further advance our corporate objectives. I would like to share my experience during this executive education session and expound upon how our firm, ASW Global, can leverage this experience.

THE EXPERIENCE

On November 15, 2009, thirty-six executives from a variety of minority business enterprises spanning multiple industries descended upon the Tuck School to participate in a week-long collaborative learning process. During my two-hour-plus bus ride from Logan International Airport, I had butterflies, probably like many first-year Tuck students. What would the campus be like? Would we be the only faces of color on the campus? How would the professors relate to the different personalities? What types of information would be presented?

After the first full day of the program, all of my anxieties were put to rest. One of the first things I noticed was the passion of Professor Len Greenhalgh and his genuine desire to see minority businesses achieve success. Interestingly, this same passion and intensity was shared by each faculty member who was involved in the program. Quite honestly, it was refreshing to see the genuineness of the staff, which I believe speaks as a true testament to the Tuck School of Business School.

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The intense learning brought me back to my own MBA days, and I equated the experience to a semester crammed into a one-week session. Sessions included Business and Marketing Strategy for Growth, Financial Analysis, Strategic Growth, Operations, Mergers & Acquisitions, and several group case studies. Three of my most vivid memories about the event included the following: (1) we all arrived for the program as separate entities but left as a close-knit family that can turn to each other as resources; (2) the wonderful dialogue I had with my student business coach, Raïssa Tona, in which she provided some good insight into our web-centric marketing initiatives; I appreciated her willingness to share her own future business plans and objectives; and (3) the Sphynx Malls case study, which provided some lighthearted moments and some strong reflection on understanding collaborations and utilizing optimum and efficient decision-making strategies.

Additional themes that proved invaluable to me during this week-long experience included the need to collect and utilize the “right” information to make strategic decisions and monitor this through dashboards on a daily basis; the continual need to evaluate the value chain and determine where we can add value through additional services or acquisitions; and, finally, the continual need to develop strategic relationships and determine potential alignments.

LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES

The single most important aspect for the company was how we can tie the informa-

tion back to our business plan and leverage the opportunities from the Tuck School experience. One of the most important concepts I learned was the use of frameworks and how to apply them to the decision-making process. One such tool that was very useful yet simple was the value chain framework. As a class, we were able to work through this framework and then apply it to our businesses and receive immediate feedback from other participants. After these exercises, we were able to engage in conversation with several executives to see ways in which we could strengthen their value chains and the resulting value proposition we can help them bring to their clients. The advantage of the learning collaborative was that it provided an opportunity for us to learn practices, methodologies, and principles from each other. In addition, several potential acquisitions were identified as a result of the networking and personal relationships that were developed, thus allowing for further leveraging opportunities.

The Tuck School experience was definitely instrumental in helping me to continue to grow as a leader within the company. The school, the executive education office, and the student body exude class, integrity, and commitment. It was a privilege to be a part of this prestigious educational institution and to be able to participate in the Tuck experience. I wish all of you great success and hope you continue to be “change agents.”

—Andre Thornton Jr., MBA, MPH,
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