

(Plan Your Career) Look to grassroots enterprise to increase customer base

Written by Julie Desmond
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America's economy depends on spending, driven by employment. But jobs are not all that America is missing these days. Innovation and invention is where we came from. "A decade of new jobs – all gone" read a recent headline, explaining that the U.S. has fewer jobs now than it had a decade ago, even though the available workforce has substantially increased. But my question continues to be: what are we going to do about it? Yes, you and I, as individuals. If you are an employer, glad to have your products moving, it might be time to consider creating opportunities to expand and hire. Creating: making something out of nothing. If you have a viable product, you have a chance to make something out of something. Look for new needs occurring within your current customer base. If you are not sure what I mean, ask your customers. Everyone has a list of "if onlys" that would improve their use of your product. For example, if you sell knitted sweaters, consider the obvious, selling hats and mittens. But be open, too, to the idea of a "sweater of the month" club, or embroidering a name or message into the sweaters you sell.

If you are unemployed, you have time on your hands to daydream. What new products or services are you wishing for? Sitting at a ballgame last week, a friend came up with two viable business ideas – improvements on existing products. Are you the kind of person who comes up with great ideas and never acts on them? I asked her. Yes, she replied. Adding, It's tough to get a business loan.

Tougher than ever, it seems. So getting started might require some ingenuity on your part. Look into Small Business Association services, along with organizations that might have an interest in your product. If financing is impossible, consider the resources you already have. Countless entrepreneurs make exceptional use of a kitchen table, a computer and a cell phone.

Healthcare, renewable energy and information technology industries are expected to grow over the next decade. Adapting your current products or creating new opportunities for yourself in these industries will help you get ahead, and maybe earn some recognition for yourself, as well. Black Enterprise Magazine at its annual conference honors the best African American run small business, innovator of the year and, with its B.E.Next award, the best young entrepreneur. Try something. New technology, products and services start somewhere. Why not with you? Send career management questions to Julie@insightnews.com.