

TRANSFORMATIONS



Building an association opens unexpected doors in Honduras

PELLA, Iowa—As he neared retirement, businessman Ken Van Zee decided to volunteer fulltime for two years straight. Seven years later, he's recruiting more people to join him.

In 2005, Van Zee started using his management experience in the production industry to mentor entrepreneurs in Honduras, including Miguel Javier Zuniga, a carpenter and business owner in the rural town of Catacamas.

"He's a really sharp business guy," says Van Zee about his mentee, who he connected with through Diaconia Nacional, the local business affiliate of Partners Worldwide that offers business training and loans. "Every time we go, he asks when we're going to visit his shop. He's growing and employing more people each time we visit."

Despite his craftsmanship and experience as a business owner, the biggest challenge Zuniga faced was finding wholesale mahogany wood. Purchasing small quantities made it nearly impossible for carpenters to meet Honduran national forestry laws for environmental sustainability. "They wanted to do things right, and they wanted to do things legally," says Lee Talma, who has mentored alongside Van Zee from the start. Other carpenters in the area wanted to commercialize their high-quality furniture, doors and windows, but couldn't find raw materials and powered tools at an affordable rate.

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Van Zee and Talma, along with other businesspeople in their network, advised their Honduran partners to start a carpenters' association. "Partnering was a newer concept," says Van Zee. "It took time for them to develop trust that they wouldn't lose their competitive edge working with others in the same region."

As a result of the association, Zuniga and more than 30 other carpenters now focus on their strengths and specialties, and have seen improvements across the board. Together, they employ over 120 people. Some owners, including Zuniga, employ up to seven.

This year, the association achieved legal certification to purchase larger volumes of local mahogany at wholesale price. They also meet each month to mentor one another.

"What's amazing is that they are a competitive group," says mentor Talma, who brings years of experience in window product lines in the U.S. "They're all in business, trying to make and sell a product, but they're willing to share ideas with one another."

In addition to local peer-mentoring, the cross-cultural relationships have been fulfilling on both sides, says Van Zee. "We're careful to listen to our Honduran partners first and learn from their culture," he says. "Some of what we cover is just basic business concepts. Some of it is just sitting down and listening."

Once the relationship grows, months and even years later the mentors delve deeper with other questions: Have you considered this strategy in production? What do you think of this business model?

"God has blessed our partnership over the past seven years," says Van Zee. "We are still in need of more U.S. partners to join us in prayer, funding or business mentoring on future trips," he adds.

As he searches for more people to get involved, he says, "Come along with us. Come and take a look. As international as we are with email and Skype, it's not that difficult to join in."



Diaconia Nacional staff member Lety Tejeda (center) join Partners Worldwide's David De Young, Lee Talma and Ken Van Zee on a visit to carpenter Luis Velasquez (front right) and his wife Reina (front left) in their shop.

Partners Worldwide President Doug Seebeck at the East Africa “My Business My Mission” conference in Nairobi, Kenya this August.



Isaiah 42: The Lord’s Servant Brings Justice to the Nations

Partners Worldwide President Doug Seebeck spoke on Isaiah 42:1-3 at the Partners Worldwide East Africa Conference in Nairobi, Kenya coordinated by East Africa Regional Facilitator Martin Mutuku. Below are a few highlights from Doug’s talk titled “The Lord’s Servant Brings Justice to the Nations.”

1. When you provide jobs you are bringing justice! The spiritual foundation of Partners Worldwide is our belief that each person is an image bearer of God, uniquely created for His glory.
2. When you create, operate and grow businesses, you are bringing justice! Every businessperson—whether a CEO of a multi-national firm or the owner of a small company—can serve others. Services should benefit not only yourself and your shareholders, but also the planet and other people.
3. When you find business solutions to address systems that are broken—high unemployment, gang violence, charity dependency—you are living out God’s plan to bring justice!
4. When you practice servant leadership in your workplace you bring justice that is unstoppable, from generation to generation, and person to person!

When you do these things, you are answering God’s call on your life—indeed God implores you to be an ambassador of reconciliation, to restore all things in heaven and on earth. Yes, until Justice is over all the earth, until God’s kingdom is established in every square inch and corner of God’s world.

COMING UP

Partnership Summit
October 12-13, 2011
Grand Rapids, MI

Partners Worldwide is hosting the Partnership Summit in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This event occurs every other year (opposite of the Partners Worldwide International Business Conference) and seeks to strengthen the emerging and existing Global Business Affiliates (GBAs) of North America .

Details and registration available on our website:
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