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Kennie Riffey

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FORM C
COLLEGE SCHOLARS PROJECT APPROVAL

Kennie Riffey Robert Kronick
Scholar Mentor

Constructing Change
Project Title

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(Minimum 3 Required)

Name	Signature
<u>Robert F. Brown</u>	<u>[Signature]</u>
<u>R. Scott Fray</u>	<u>R. Scott Fray</u>
<u>Michael L. Keene</u>	<u>[Signature]</u>
_____	_____

PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE SENIOR PROJECT TO THIS SHEET AND RETURN BOTH TO THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR. THIS PAGE SHOULD BE DATED AND COMPLETED ON THE DATE THAT YOUR DEFENSE IS HELD.

DATE COMPLETED 10/7/08

Constructing Change

Project Summary

Kennie Riffey

College Scholars

Senior Project

Defended October 7, 2008

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From the outside, 2320 E. Fifth Avenue in Knoxville, Tennessee looks like any normal renovation project. There is a locked storage unit in the front yard. In the back yard a plastic, orange porta-potty sits side-by-side with a dumpster full of rusty nails and rotted lumber. Close by are three large piles of bricks, and lumber lined up against the wall. But this is not just any construction project. It is unique because the focus is unique. This crew is not just renovating another yellow house with green trim. This crew and their project are creating positive change in lives, families, and neighborhoods. This crew is Constructing Change.

Some on the crew are single moms. These are the women who strive alone each day to cover the same list of responsibilities and activities as two-parent families. Many of these mothers are unskilled, work low-wage jobs, and live in or near the edge of poverty. The lives of these women and their children are shaped by the burdens of the constant emotional, mental, and financial strains that come with living near that edge. When people are given knowledge and opportunities, their lives and lifestyles can change for the better. Given knowledge and opportunities, single moms can improve the emotional, financial, and educational well being of their families. They can begin a positive transition by learning marketable skills to increase their earning power, and developing employment skills that will empower them to keep a good job.

I designed the Constructing Change training program to be one of those opportunities for people to develop highly-marketable job and employment skills. During the four-month course, an experienced carpenter teaches students how to build a new house or renovate an existing one. Through hands-on training, students learn, use, and reinforce the skills necessary to do the various tasks. During that time, everyone also learns the importance of developing good work habits and employment skills. On completion of the program, determined students will be

knowledgeable enough to work for someone in an apprentice or assistant capacity. By successfully completing the course, moms who have had limited earning power will instead have opportunities for better paying jobs, with excellent growth potential, and better working hours. Although originally designed with single moms in mind, the program is open to anyone who meets the income qualifications.

On September 17, 2007, after eight months of research, meetings, phone calls, and many hours and tasks of preparation, the Constructing Change program began. I had never had to design, develop, and implement anything of that magnitude in my life. In just a few short months I had gained knowledge and hands-on experience with nonprofit and for-profit business incorporation, corporate law and taxation, employment laws, contractors and licensing issues, subcontracting, interviewing, hiring and firing employees, taking a house apart, putting a house together, and knowing what rotted wood looks like. I cannot think of many other times in my life when I learned and experienced so much, in such a broad range of areas, and in such a short period of time.

The following project summary highlights a few of the steps I took to implement the Constructing Change program. Some of the names have been changed. Ultimately, the development of this program was a story of success. It may not have been what I originally wanted it to be. It may not have been what I expected. But I succeeded in giving life to my beliefs. I put my money and time into this program because I believed it would make a difference for people and communities. I know it made a difference for me.

II

Strong employees are essential for the day-to-day stability and long-term success of a business. Hiring people who will show up, put in the effort to complete the work, and be honest is critical. Finding those employees is a challenge for any company, but particularly for a small business owner. Larger companies can offer health care, paid time off, and other benefits that attract good people with strong work habits. Smaller companies can often afford less tangible benefits such as relaxed work environments and more flexibility. Although Constructing Change is a training program, the students are the employees that contribute to the business running smoothly every day. Choosing a bad employee or someone who does not fit the job can be a costly decision in both time and money.

The first employee I hired was the lead trainer. Although Rod's work history was primarily building and moving shop areas within factories, he had put a one-room addition onto his own house. When I first spoke to him over the phone, he seemed genuinely interested in and enthusiastic about the program. He even offered to start immediately so he could help me get the program up and running. However, during the formal interview, several issues came up that could potentially be cause for concern. Although I hoped Rod would ultimately work out, I continued to look for someone with more renovation or residential construction experience. Rod and a second person could then work as a team.

The first ad I ran in the newspaper was for a carpenter to teach in a nonprofit program, and interested parties were to submit a resume. That ad netted exactly three applicants. Someone later joked that the response was so low because carpenters do not write letters. One applicant was looking for another job because he was tired of working for \$12.00 an hour building sheds. I spoke with him for about half an hour, and he seemed to understand the

program and like the idea of being a trainer. I asked him to follow up with me in three days. He never called back.

The applicant who looked promising was Jason, and his qualifications were strong. From his letter and resume, he sounded organized and professional. He had a web site, and had been renovating the houses that were listed for sale on the site. Jason was a fully-licensed general contractor, and said he would allow me to pull building permits under his contractor's license number. That would have solved a big problem because, at the time, my contractor's license was limited only to certain types of construction. Although he interviewed well, and I felt positive about him through the entire discussion, I wanted to put his skills to a practical test. I hired Jason to consult with me on whether a particular condemned property would be a good, viable renovation project for the Constructing Change. As we walked through the house, he pointed out many things that needed to be done. He never spoke down to me, or acted like I would not understand what he was saying. At that point, I began to feel that I had found an excellent candidate for the trainer position.

However, as we sat in the office and discussed the results of the walk-through, my impression of Jason began to change. He was tired of contracting because of the customers and insurance, and just wanted to work for someone else. He had foster children, but did not like them. His credit was bad. One of the phone numbers on his resume had been disconnected. Most importantly, I checked on his contractor's license, and learned that there was an unresolved complaint against him. Of all of the issues, the complaint was the greatest cause for concern. If I pulled building permits under his contractor's license number, it might appear to someone that the complaint was actually against Constructing Change. For that important reason, I did not hire Jason.

I renewed the search for a second trainer because I still wanted someone who had experience actually building or renovating houses. The CEO of a large, Knoxville construction firm explained to me that a job site supervisor or superintendent is usually someone who started out as a carpenter, and worked his way up, doing each job along the way. That person would generally be experienced in all aspects of residential construction. Based on that conversation, I placed another ad in the newspaper, this time looking for an experienced supervisor. That ad generated a multitude of responses, including one woman.

During each initial phone interview, I explained the Constructing Change program, and emphasized that the position was for an experienced carpenter who could train others. I also explained that the initial program would be only three or four months long, and that if funding was not forthcoming, the program would not be renewed. I wanted to be up front with people before they took their time, and mine, to come for an interview. Some of the men were not interested because they did not want to be trainers. Others had never really built a house, and were jobsite supervisors who only had experience supervising. A few small contractors responded thinking they would bid the job to be the supervisor, and then bring in their own crew to do the work. One applicant had built a million dollar house on a steep slope, but lost his business to a lawsuit when the house started sliding off. The only woman to apply had been a commercial contractor, but had lost everything in a divorce, and could not afford to purchase the bond required by the state.

I asked several of the applicants to come to the project house for the interview. As I walked around the house with each of them, I asked him or her to identify obvious problems, and then explain how he or she would do the repairs. The skills and personalities were all over the spectrum. John F. barely spoke while he was there. Regardless of what I asked, he just nodded.

At the end, he told me he thought he would be great for the job. Ted was selling vinyl siding, but wanted to get back into construction. He had not framed a house, but said he had done a bit of most everything else. Joshua raised excellent points while looking very extensively at the problems with the house, but he smelled like booze. He later explained that he had been drinking that day because he had dropped by for the interview on the way to taking his uncle Jimmy fishing. He assured me that he never drank on the job. As much as I hated to, I scratched him off the list because I did not want to deal with the potential problems he represented.

During the interviews, I learned a lot about how other contractors and construction workers operate. One small contractor responded to the ad, hoping to get the job as supervisor, and then use his own crew to complete the work. He told me that the best way to put a new roof on is to “hire a bunch of Mexicans” because they are cheap and fast. I actually heard that type of comment from several people. It seems that the phrase is commonly used in construction to describe groups of Latinos who are piled into vans, speak little or no English, and work for low wages paid in cash at the end of the job. These men and women are not covered by worker’s compensation insurance, and do not have unemployment, social security, or Medicare insurance paid on their behalf. Contractors take advantage of these crews as a way to increase their own bottom-line profits.

Also from the interviews, I learned how some contractors avoid paying employee taxes. One applicant explained that he always hired people, such as laborers, and treated them as independent contractors. By handling his employees that way, he did not pay social security, unemployment, or Medicare insurance for them. He was able to save almost 13% in employer taxes. In addition, he withheld a percentage of their paychecks to cover his cost for their worker’s compensation insurance. By law, the employees he referred to were actually direct

employees of his company, and could not be considered independent contractors. He was legally responsible to pay all of those taxes. Although operating this way is outside the legal guidelines, I heard this same suggestion from a number of applicants. Learning what employers do to avoid paying taxes and wages was certainly an interesting byproduct of the interview process.

After two tries, I finally hired a second trainer. The first try was to hire Jonathan. He had both new construction and renovation experience, and he communicated well. However, just a few short hours into his first day, we realized there was a fundamental difference between our business philosophies. We parted ways on good terms, and the search for a second trainer was on – again. I called George, who was one of the better candidates. My first conversation with him had been over the phone, and lasted about 45 minutes. Although he had only a few years of experience constructing, he identified many of the problems at the project house, and offered appropriate solutions. I was not convinced of George’s qualifications, but I hired him because I felt like I was running out of choices.

No applicant really seemed to fit, or be qualified for the position of trainer. Although most claimed extensive construction experience, few offered photos of their work or actual addresses of projects they had worked on. Many were in construction-related occupations, such as selling vinyl siding or mass-producing sheds. Although they professed extensive construction backgrounds, many seemed uncomfortable even to squat in the crawl space. The solution I settled on was that the lead trainer, Rod, would team with the secondary trainer, George, to form a completely knowledgeable, carpentry training team. Rod would be responsible to teach the floor to ceiling renovations. George would be responsible to teach the above-ceiling and below-floor renovations.

Throughout all of the interviews, it was clear that very few people really understood what their role would be, the mission of Constructing Change, or the function of the training program. To most of the carpenters, laborers, and supervisors who applied, it was just going to be a job. For them, the importance of the position was how much they would be paid, and how many hours they would have to work. Realistically I was not going to find one person who was an experienced carpenter, supervisor, and trainer, and had a heart for the mission of teaching women how to build houses. Developing that understanding and that heart would have to come with time. After so many interviews, and the concerns I had with both trainers, I was not sure my choices were good. I did not know if my apprehension was legitimate, or simply because the entire process was so new. Regardless, it was time to move on because class was about to begin.

Selecting students had not been nearly as difficult as finding a trainer. Because part of Constructing Change's mission is to provide safe and affordable housing for families, I hoped to attract applicants from the community. So, in addition to putting an employment ad in the newspaper, I delivered flyers to churches in the area. To my dismay, I had no responses at all from anyone local. However, I was able to put together a student team of four people who fit the profile, and had the potential to be successful. Because only one man responded to the ad in the paper, the first students were all women. They had basic job skills, such as cashiering, and had limited work histories. All were unmarried, and two were moms. Each of the women had done some type of construction around the house or as a volunteer. For example, one woman had renovated her bathroom, and another had helped her boyfriend make repairs to a church.

Three months into the program, I hired another student. As we worked at the house each day, people noticed the activity and were curious. Occasionally, someone would stop in and ask for a job. Many were just looking for a quick way to earn a few dollars. But one very persistent

man stood out from the crowd. The first time he stopped by, I told him I did not have anything available, but to check back later. He actually did check back – two times. Because of his persistence, I gave him a chance, and he was the first male student hired into the program. I also hired neighbors to help temporarily. One worked as a laborer for a couple of days, and another took care of the lawn.

III

What should have been a first day of celebration and achievement actually turned into a week filled with conflict. The morning started at 8:00 am at the office. One trainer arrived on time, and the other arrived late. Three of the students were on time, and one was late. Because Constructing Change was a new program, we went through the paperwork together in case there were any problems. That exercise took about 45 minutes. I then moved on to explain the program and how the training would work. Before we went to the house to begin the hands-on, George laid the groundwork by delivering a training session on House Building 101. For a first day, there really were not many problems, but the atmosphere in the office felt more apathetic than enthusiastic.

After we finished at the office, and before going to the job site, I heard nothing but complaints. There were complaints about George's presentation on building a house. At least one person thought it was too difficult to understand. Another person felt it would be better to actually be at the house. There were complaints that there was too much paperwork, it took too long to fill in, and some employees felt they were being asked to provide too much information. Various people also reported that the air conditioning was too loud, and the temperature too hot or too cold. Some of the complaints were legitimate, but paperwork had to be filled in, and the focus of the program was not to provide comfortable office space. Constructing Change was an exciting, new, on-the-job training program. Yet, there was only one student who seemed to understand the excitement and possibility that this day represented.

After the preliminaries at the office, we went to the house to begin work. After we were there a while, the students did become more interested and enthusiastic. The first task was a simple one. We removed the window trim in order to gain access to fix the broken weights.

With that exercise, we learned to gently use a hammer and pry bar to remove wood trim in one piece so it could be reused. We learned how to remove nails from wood whether the nails were straight, bent, or headless. Rod pointed out that if we numbered the windows and labeled the trim, the pieces could then be reattached in their original locations. This information was important because most of the windows were slightly different sizes. He showed us the hazards of laying tools on top of a ladder, and the importance of wearing gloves when working with glass or wood. He insisted we always wear safety glasses, and suggested hard hats for head protection while working in the basement. In this simple first lesson, Rod did a great job of telling us what to do, and watching and correcting us as we performed the tasks.

Although the training exercises were going well, Rod was creating an atmosphere of tension and conflict through his comments. When I was working away from the class area, he was very vocally critical of me and the program. His stream of negative comments was making the environment unpleasant for everyone, and some of the employees complained to me about it. At the end of the day, I talked with Rod and raised my concerns about what I heard. He recognized and understood the problems he was causing, so we agreed to start fresh the next time he was on site. At the end of the conversation, Rod raised his concern that I was trying to help in the training. He asked that I step back and allow the trainers to do their jobs, and I agreed. In fact, I had already discussed that issue with Paul Crisp earlier in the day.

Paul Crisp was head of the YouthBuild project in rural North Carolina. Paul's company had received a \$400,000 Department of Labor grant to teach the twelve-month, GED prep/construction training program. In his YouthBuild program, people with no job or employment skills learned how to build houses through on-the-job training. The target employees were high-school dropouts and troubled youth ages 18-24. I hoped to learn from

Paul's experience of putting together a construction training program for at-risk groups, and handling people who were marginal employees. For \$200, plus travel expenses, he agreed to act as a consultant, and observe on the first day of Constructing Change.

As we sat on the porch at the end of the day, Paul and I compared notes. My primary concern was that my staff and I were not presenting a unified front. Oddly, Paul showed me his notepad with the words "not unified" written in the problem column. His impression of the management team was the same as mine. His strongest recommendation to me was that I step back, and let the trainers do their jobs. He explained that he had been in construction for 25 years, and lost two good people early on in his program because he would not stay out of it and let them handle the training. Following Paul's advice, I planned to give the trainers the space and time to establish themselves.

After all of these discussions, it was not too long before both of the trainers left the program, and for completely different reasons. The first to leave was George. He was assigned to do all the training for the remainder of the week, so Rod was off until the following Monday. In the morning on day two, George called to say he would not be in. Each day after that, he never showed up or called. George finally did call at the end of the week to say he quit because the distance to travel to work was too great. The program had obviously been slowed down because of his absence, but the students had stayed busy all week. They did simple tasks including removing window and door trim, and baseboards.

After having no trainer for a week, we were looking forward to learning something new when Rod showed up on Monday morning. But a new lesson was not going to happen with him either. About two minutes into the work day, Rod became infuriated that I had not purchased a folding staircase to install for access into the attic. Although there were at least forty other tasks

we could do, he could not be flexible. For that reason, I knew that he was not a manager. He shouted for several minutes, walked off the job, and has never spoken to me since. For many years, I was a project manager for a software company. In all those years, I worked with many different types of people, at many different levels of business. I had never experienced employees who behaved either like Rod or George. From the beginning, I had questions and concerns about both of them. With their departures, they answered those questions and confirmed those concerns.

I had exhausted the pool of good applicants from the first ad, so I placed another ad in the newspaper. Although a few of the same people responded, there were some fresh faces. From that group, I hired Mike. During my interview with him, Mike was easy going and knowledgeable. He was not afraid to go into the crawl space, and was able to explain the problems and potential fixes. Mike was extraordinarily patient, and clearly explained how to perform each task. Although we had been without a trainer for three weeks, he brought a depth of knowledge and skill that enabled us to make up that lost time quickly. Unfortunately, he was in the union, and had been laid off. It was only a matter of time before he would be called back to a job, so I hoped we could work hard and fast to complete as much as possible before that fateful call came.

As soon as I finished dealing with the trainer situation, I was faced with a growing list of employee issues. One of the students proved to be too slow, so the others were picking up the slack. One was chronically late or absent, and one was just chronically late. With such a small team, the absence of one person caused a significant slowdown in work production. Another employee developed ways to slow down or stop the work effort in order to get additional breaks throughout the day. As the bad work ethics came to the surface, fighting against project delays

became a daily occurrence. In addition to project delays, I had to deal with the potential loss of a key employee. This employee had developed a series of health problems that were unrelated to work. Because the person could only perform light duty, or on some days was unable to work at all, I had to step in to fill the role. While I was on site working construction, I did not have time to administer the program. By day, I worked construction. By night, I purchased materials, processed weekly payroll, filed quarterly tax reports, tracked expenses, and petted my dog.

This employee's health issue actually became the toughest employee situation I had to resolve. When this person left the program, I lost someone the business had invested in heavily, and planned to rely on in the future. At that point, I had no one else in the organization that believed in the mission of the program, and could lead the work effort. If I did not step in and fill the role, all of the information gained during the daily work activities would be lost. I had no choice but to permanently stop administering the program, and instead work with the team to learn all of the tasks of renovating a house. I simply carried on with construction by day, and processing paperwork by night. The loss of this key employee was a factor that contributed to cost and time overruns in the project.

Over the course of the program, I learned a great deal about interviewing techniques, listening to my intuition, managing and motivating employees, identifying the real priorities of an employee, seeing bad work habits, and recognizing malicious behaviors. It is interesting to me that I can look back to the morning of the first day, and see that everyone behaved in a way that indicated the type of employee they would eventually be. One trainer was late, and the other was constantly criticizing something. Those students who were late on the first day, came in late most other days. Those who were slow filling in paperwork at the office, were slow performing tasks at the job site.

Early on, I tried to be understanding with employees who had behavior issues, but at the same time offer guidance. For example, when an employee was repeatedly late, I would ask him or her to explain the situation. If the problem seemed unavoidable, I did not pursue any disciplinary action. However, the same types of problems came up as the excuses every time. From the interaction with my employees, I learned to be much quicker to stop bad work habits, and less accepting of bad behavior. I am much quicker to outline specific attitude or performance changes, and less likely to simply make suggestions that a person could choose to ignore. Ultimately, these changes in management style would benefit the students in the program because people learn to be strong employees only when they learn how a strong employee performs.

IV

Attorneys know where to look to research the law. Attorneys have a better chance of interpreting the words the way judges and other attorneys would interpret them. Attorneys have access to the resources that bring precedent to their fingertips. But attorneys cannot always answer a business question without extensive, expensive research. For that reason, people who start a small business should have a basic understanding of the laws that will impact them, and have the ability to do simple legal research on their own. Otherwise, legal costs can consume resources that are much needed elsewhere. Setting up Constructing Change presented numerous opportunities for me to learn the law.

I was familiar with some of the legal requirements for incorporation of a nonprofit. To incorporate, a business files a Charter with the Secretary of State. The document is just one page long, and there is a fill-in-the-blank version on the state of Tennessee website. However, that on-line version cannot be used to incorporate a nonprofit organization. The reason is that, before the IRS will consider granting tax-exempt status, the organization's Charter must show how the profits will be distributed and used. That on-line Charter does not include the required explanation.

I spoke with three different attorneys about the complexity and importance of the wording that would be included in the Charter. All three suggested that I have an attorney complete the document for Constructing Change. They cited the IRS wording requirement as the reason. Cost estimates ranged from \$500 - \$750 to do the incorporation, plus \$100 for the filing fee. Bizfilings.com would file the incorporation documents for \$130, plus the \$100 state filing fee. I completed the task for the cost of a how-to guide, 39 cents postage, and the \$100 filing fee. To ensure that the wording was correct, I just copied it directly from the IRS website.

Although it sounds simple enough, I did spend hours reading and researching before I began. If a business has limited staff, it can be more cost-effective to pay the experts to handle what they do best, provided the cost is within reason. However, in this case, I believe that the research I did was worth the time and effort. I gained a much greater understanding of incorporation and the responsibilities of corporations.

In addition to including the right words in the Charter, a nonprofit organization actually has to apply to the IRS for tax-exempt status. Through the application process, a business requests that the IRS not charge any income tax on the money the organization makes. After Constructing Change gets tax-exempt status, donors will be able to make tax-deductible donations to the organization. The attorneys I spoke to quoted from \$1500 to \$2500 to complete the application to the IRS. I know that I could fill in the blanks on the application form, so I plan to complete that task myself. Doing so will reduce my costs to just the paper, postage, and filing fee. Interestingly, the attorneys I spoke to said that the IRS will take anywhere from 14 to 21 months to confirm the application request. When I called the IRS, the agent told me they would have to practically be shut down for it to take more than about 6 weeks to 2 months to get a response. With the law being so complex, every attorney cannot know everything.

Every corporation needs an attorney who can be contacted on a moment's notice to answer pressing legal issues that arise in day-to-day business. I interviewed three attorneys before selecting one. The first works for a large, downtown firm, and I got his name from the Internet. He used to be a CPA, and is now a corporate attorney, which seemed like a powerful combination of knowledge to have access to. At the initial consultation, he asked extensive questions, and took pages of notes about Constructing Change, its set up, and purpose. The initial visit was free. The second attorney works for another large firm, and I got her name from

one of the partners that attends my church. That consultation was free, she did not ask many questions, and took no notes. "Call me anytime," she said, as she whisked out of the room. I did, but she took days to call back. The third attorney is in a smaller firm, and we spoke only over the phone. I chose to use the first attorney because of his experience as a CPA.

Early on in the project, I had to resolve an important legal issue. The first hint of the problem was when I spoke to the newspaper about placing the ad for women to apply for the Constructing Change program. The woman who took the information told me I could not word the ad the way I wanted because it would be discriminating against men. We came up with alternate wording, but it did not click with me that this problem was not just with the ad in the newspaper. However, it did dawn on me very quickly when a man responded to the employment ad. I explained that the program was designed for single moms, and he countered that he was a single dad. He pressed the point, and wanted to know who he had to call to get into the program. Paula Williams, from the UT Law Clinic, had raised this issue when she and I discussed how the program would be set up. At the time, my response was that the heart of the program was for women. I was so focused on helping a group of people I thought were marginalized, that I never saw that the program would be discriminating against the remaining, non-marginalized group.

The simple reality was that with a mission to help a specific group, I was excluding other people who could use the help, too. The program had a heart. It was a noble gesture. But, according to the federal and state guidelines, if left unchanged, it would be a discriminating program. Although several people had asked me about this potential problem, I just never thought of it like that. In a panic, I called my attorney, but he responded only with a preliminary answer. He went on to suggest that I do the remaining research myself, because it would be very expensive if I used him. I called the director of the EEOC for the state of Tennessee, and he

clearly answered the question. Technically, any business with fewer than eight employees is exempt from the rules. However, as the director of the EEOC said, “No matter how noble your gesture, it is still discrimination.”

From that moment, Constructing Change has been open to anyone who meets the income requirements. I called the single dad who had originally sparked the question. I wanted to let him know that he was welcome to apply. He never returned my call. This program started because I had a heart to help women who struggle alone to raise a family. My vision was to offer moms an opportunity to develop work skills that would improve their lives in many different ways. My vision was to make a difference in children’s lives by giving them moms who would be role models of success. But I do not discriminate. I would certainly not be willing to accept any construction program that taught only men. I will not accept any less from myself.

IV

Today, the yellow house with green trim at 2320 E. Fifth Avenue sits closed and empty. No significant progress has been made since June of 2008. Beginning in the early part of the year, the pace of work had slowed significantly. One of the employees was absent at least one day every week, which reduced productivity by 1/3 on each of those days. With the slow down, each task took longer to complete, so each one was costing more. For some tasks, it made more sense to hire a subcontractor than to use the Constructing Change team. For example, in one day the team hung five pieces of sheetrock for a total of just under \$500. Three different sheetrock finishers bid \$2500 to hang over 60 pieces and do the finish work through the entire house.

I remember how excited I was when I saw women working at Habitat for Humanity, and how it felt to work side-by-side with them on a house. Because of that experience, my expectations of the women were sky high when this program began. But there were significant differences between the Habitat volunteers and Constructing Change employees. Those differences greatly affected the work effort. Habitat workers are volunteers, people who are motivated from within themselves because they want to contribute to the success of a just cause. They feel good about their role of helping others. Constructing Change employees worked because they had to in order to pay the rent, or because they were forced to in order to keep getting state benefits. In addition, although Habitat volunteers work at a casual pace, there are many of them, so the tasks are completed on schedule at no additional cost. When the Constructing Change employees worked at a slow pace, or were absent, there was no one to step in to pick up the slack. The longer it took to complete a task, the more we simply fell further behind schedule. There were no more resources to put on the problem.

I learned a great deal from my employees. The most important lesson, and the biggest surprise, was that people who need help do not always want it. All of the employees were unskilled, and living on poverty-level incomes before beginning this program. Yet, instead of seeing this as a way to improve their lives, they looked at it as a way to make a little bit of money without putting in a huge effort. It was job to them. Although I paid over \$15,000 for a trainer to personally teach them construction skills, their focus was never on making the most of that opportunity. Almost as surprising was to learn that many women still work only as a stop-gap measure until they can find a man to support them. Three of the women said that they really wanted to be a stay-at-home mom or wife.

The burden and responsibility for this project rests with me. As I dealt with the employees, subcontractors, inspectors, attorneys, laws, lenders, material providers, and countless others involved in this project, the course of the project changed. Almost every day I ran headlong into a brick wall. Whether it was a trainer whose behavior was out of line, a lender who raised the interest rate just before closing, or a plumber who switched to a lower quality of pipe, every day brought more issues. Some resulted from ineffective or bad decisions. Others were just the usual problems that come up when dealing with employees and other businesses. I have spent way too much money and way too much time on many of the wrong things. But, I learned. I learned to more quickly identify what was important and what to let go. I learned to more quickly recognize a problem, fix it, and walk away. Although there have been many issues to overcome, I still believe in the ultimate goal of providing opportunities. However, there is the additional caveat that the program will be offered only for those who have already proven that they want to help themselves.

On March 3, 2008, I let the last two employees go. In May, I closed the project, and will not begin again until fall. Although the team is now me working alone, the house will be completed by the end of this year. My goal is to finish most of the tasks by the time winter sets in. Although the implementation was difficult, the heart of the program continues to be right. I know that there will be another yellow house with green trim in my future. It just won't look the same.