

Greetings from Ghana #33 Side Hustles and Watching Where You Step

I usually try to concentrate on one area or idea for these updates. Recently there has been a lot going on with the different things I am involved with here. I know of no one here who does not also have what they call a “Side Hustle.” It is almost a necessity if you are not in the upper class – and I am definitely not in the upper class.

The nontoxic pest control products company we started was originally targeting vets and the household pet market. We sold some but it does not take a lot to be effective. Sales were not enough to create a large volume without a major distributor. Then we went to agriculture and targeted goat and sheep farmers. Better sales but still nothing to write home about. Next we targeted chicken farms and egg producers. Sales were stronger because the egg producers and thousands of chickens and our product, EXO-X, kills chicken mites, deworms the chickens, and gives them stronger shells and lower cholesterol in their eggs.

Through the whole process I have been doing a lot of research and going through scientific studies. (Who knew all that science in college would someday pay off). When asked about diatomaceous earth, I was able to respond with in depth explanations and back it up with research and citations. Recently, I was invited to join a group that offers medical advice to pig farmers. When I asked why me because I am not a medical authority, I was told that my knowledge of the uses and applications of diatomaceous earth made me an authority on organic, natural solutions for swine maladies. And once I went there. . . business boomed.

We have been selling a modest amount of EXO-X every month, probably about 10 - 20 kg. Once I started working with the pig farmers the number skyrocketed. One farmer ordered 50 kg for his piggery. We were running out and had to go buy more from our supplier. He called again three days later and said he was impressed and ordered another 200 kilos.

It is a completely new product for these folks and I am not expecting a lot of initial acceptance, but we are steadily gaining customers and now have four distributors in the country.

Being unable to find a real estate company that would allow me to practice real estate centered on the client’s needs, I decided to start my own. In Ghana, if you are a non-native and want to start a business it used to be that you needed \$125,000 in a bank account for reserves before they would grant you a business license. That was changed this year to \$500,000. If you are a Ghanaian citizen, then as now, you need \$100 (1000 cedis). For that reason – and a few others — my business partner in the pest control venture is also the CEO of Blacklamp Realty - American Style real estate.

In Ghana, a listing exclusive is virtually unheard of. You may have permission to market a house, but so do several other agents and whoever brings a buyer gets the commission. That is not a good formula for making money. You spend money to market a property and someone else gets the commission. In my business model, I am the sole marketer of a property and

unlike typical Ghanaian real estate, I work all the way through the process to closing. I have one Ghanaian client right now, Cyril Commey, who is in London, England. He has no qualms with having an exclusive listing. He does not want agents calling him.

Back in the 1970's his father bought a piece of property and built a house. About 30 years later a tribal chief (who has since passed on) sold portions of the property in front of the Commey residence to two other parties. The problem with the transaction were that the people who bought never checked on the title for the property. Had they, they would have found out that the chief sold them roadway – public land he did not own. The purchasers ended up having to tear down the houses they were building (without permits) when the details of the transactions came to light.

They fought against the situation and took the whole thing to court. The court reaffirmed that they had bought land that was not able to be sold because it was public roadway and that they did not own any land. They were also informed that all structures were to be removed. The purchasers had set up a cement block wall around their property. When the houses came down, the wall stayed up. Now that Cyril is getting ready to sell his family's property, the roadway purchasers are asking for money or they will disrupt the sale. Their wishes are not being met and they are, to say the least, disgruntled.

I went out to the client's property on Thursday of last week because the "roadway" area was overgrown and took a crew to knock down the weeds and cleanup the area. While we were there the police showed up. There were about six of them including the station chief, who soon left, and a Criminal Investigations Unit officer. There was also a very tall policeman dressed in blue camouflage. He told us to stop and that we were not allowed to build on someone else's land. I explained that we were not planning to build and that we were cleaning up roadway. He said we had no rights to be doing anything on private property and because it was inside a wall it was obviously not roadway. The policeman was looking for an argument and I refused to challenge him, stating that we would immediately stop. He demanded we move all the concrete blocks we had stacked to go back. We obliged.

About that time one of the tenants of the house, wearing just a pair of shorts and flip flops, came out to the small crowd and asked the policeman in blue a question. The policeman said, "I am a policeman and you will treat me with respect. If you want to speak with me you need to be wearing a shirt." The tenant objected saying he lived there and he did not need to be dressed in any specific fashion to ask a cop a question. The policeman reiterated his demands in a less than melodious manner and soon there was shouting going on.

We tried to avoid the situation and all involved by busying ourselves with the cement blocks. There was a great deal of commotion and looking over I saw the tenant being forced to the ground by four people while the policeman put him in handcuffs before they picked him up from the ground and took him away. . . apparently for being improperly dressed and arguing.

I went back on Monday and met with engineers from the district assembly who inspected the area and said, "This is roadway." They are issuing a demolition permit for the wall. After they left and before we did, two very large men showed up and said they had heard that "He has come back and was trespassing on their land." John explained that we had not set foot on their land. And that the land I am concerned with is behind theirs and we were only on the driveway that leads back to the Commey's property. John explained that whoever called them apparently misinformed them. They grumbled and left.

And all of this is before the property is listed.

When the client in London learned what had happened he said he would arrange for protection for me the next time I go to the property. He said he would get the police to help. I explained that it was the police I was afraid of. Not all the police here are bad. I have met and been helped by several but the ones who go outside the lines of propriety do serious damage to any good reputation others try to establish.

If you are wondering which of the endeavours I have mentioned is the side hustle, I have no idea either. I am waiting for one of them to take off. In the meantime I step cautiously remembering that even though I am a kind soul here to do good things, some of these folks are not benevolent in their feelings toward white people.