

I got my first promotion and was transferred to the Windy City known as Chicago. Chi-town was very, very good to me. I was single and in good shape with my military physique still intact. It was competitive to me to win the prettiest girl in the room. We would go to the Playboy Club and I would come out with a bunny. I earned the nickname “Killer”. Besides that the skills I learned in the grocery distribution and product marketing business from Detroit came in very handy. My team was constantly hitting “homeruns” from the western suburbs. In ten months I was promoted again and transferred to Buffalo, NY.

Upstate New York was totally different from Chicago or Detroit. I was there a year and hated every minute of it except for a few great jazz clubs in Buffalo and the proximity of Toronto. When my boss asked me if I would be willing to go back to Detroit, I jumped up and started dancing. Now my career was back in stride again. The Chaldean store owners were equally happy. They never had a representative of a major corporation, like Johnson & Johnson, treat them with respect and true friendship.

The only major chain to stay in inner city Detroit was Farmer Jack and it was a great decision. The Chaldeans and Farmer Jack were growing big time as they filled the void left by stores like Chatham, Kroger and Great Scott who gave up on the Black communities of inner Detroit. As their business rolled so did ours. The national average market share for Johnson & Johnson Disposable Diapers was 8.5%. In Detroit, we had a share of 42%. We were the leaders and the predominantly white managed division of this Fortune 100 company was perplexed. I had five sales reps and four were Black and the white sales rep wore an impressive Afro. We were blazing the trail thanks to Farmer Jack and the entrepreneurial Chaldeans.

Most corporations would entertain clients with dinners, plays or baseball games. We would take our clients to a Thomas Hearns boxing match or a Pistons basketball game. They were as much “street” as us and we were almost like family. They enjoyed giving us more store shelf space and bigger displays along with more newspaper advertising. We were on first name basis; knew the names of their wives and children and would always let them know that we gratefully appreciated their businesses. After all, they made us look special to our upper management.

Each Chaldean store was like a clan. All the stores together became one great tribe. When challenges would appear they would come together and deal with them directly. A fine example is when Allied Food Distributors filed for bankruptcy. Its rival, Grosse Pointe Quality, made a daring move. It upped the costs of its services to all Chaldean stores without fearing the

Chaldeans had any options. The tribe thought it through. They went to the fragile Allied and cut this deal: All Chaldean stores will immediately do all business with Allied if they would meet this attractive cost. This would swell their business and get them out of bankruptcy (pleasing their stockholders). Allied agreed and soon they were out of bankruptcy. On the other hand, Grosse Pointe Quality's business fell through the "floor" and it was them now in bankruptcy with little hope for the future. The tribe told Allied we were glad to help you and let's be friends forever. Then the tribe did something that was absolutely bodacious. They went to the bankruptcy court and bought out Grosse Pointe Quality Foods. Now they owned their own distribution center which meant they can now buy goods at factory price and deal directly with the manufacturers. Their future became most bright. Keep in mind this success story was possible because the Black community of Detroit could not figure out how to sell groceries to themselves (lack of entrepreneurship). The white man's "ice" was colder and the Chaldean "ice" was the coldest.

The Chaldean community did not rest on the above success. They took their profits and started expanding their business ownership of inner Detroit. Gas stations, dry cleaners, real estate offices, etc. They created an entrepreneurial kingdom right there in the hood. All the while, they started moving their families to the northern suburbs such as Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham, etc. Their children were applying and being accepted to the University of Michigan, University of Detroit, Michigan State University and other prestigious schools. Soon their lawyers, doctors, dentists, accountants, etc. will be members of the tribe. Oh yes, their political PACs are the most respected by local elected officials. The Chaldeans now have great political clout. They followed the four principals of Booker T. Washington and became a great American story.

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