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Going International

International connections develop through the EoC

BY JOHN MUNDELL

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF OUR environmental consulting company in 1995, I always felt that, for those small companies like ours (a single owner), it was important to stay in contact with other Economy of Communion businesses. We were fortunate enough to be located in the same building as an EoC violin maker, Consort International, to order chocolates for our clients at Christmas from the EoC company La Festa, to obtain discounted prices on office supplies through a group contract set up by the EoC company, The Purchasing Department, or to order our first company t-shirts from the EoC uniform company, Harmony/USA.

These interchanges always gave me great joy, and I believed that one day, as the number of EoC companies grows, a global network of these interactions could begin to change the world. In April 2001, at an International EOC meeting in Rome, I met Luiz Colella from São Paulo, Brazil. Luiz was just about ready to leave his full time position with a multi-national corporation and become a full-time, active partner in the EoC company Rotogine located at the Spartaco business park near Mariapolis Ginetta, the Focolare little city located near São Paulo, Brazil. During the EoC meeting, Luiz introduced me to other Brazilian business owners who were part of the ‘Pioneers’ that began the EoC after Chiara’s first inspiration in 1991. Between talks and ‘after hours’ at our hotel, there was a true mutual sharing of our excitement about the EoC. We shared everything—the daily challenges we face, the successes we experienced in treating our clients and our competitors as we would like to be treated—it seemed that each of us was having a similar experience despite the miles that existed between us. I remember thinking at that time that I truly had some brothers and sisters in Brazil who were united with me in our vision of what the EoC could become. By the end of the meeting, Luiz and I had both agreed to stay in touch, and hoped that someday we would find a way of doing business together as part of the worldwide EoC.

That opportunity finally became a reality in 2003 after two years of staying in touch. One of our U.S. clients had requested our assistance on an environmental project near São Paulo, Brazil. Luiz helped with customs questions, local labor support and the purchase of a color printer for use during our stay. He even picked us up at the airport after our multinational client’s contact failed to show up on time! During the project, a Brazilian translator Luiz had found for us successfully negotiated cost savings on a subcontract. Our color printer produced high quality scientific printouts and helped to make our ‘international field office’ run smoothly.

During a dinner at the end of our work, our client asked us, “How does such a small company operate better than a multinational in a country where it should not be easy to work?” It was apparent that he not only was pleased with our results, but also with our ability to understand the culture and people we were working with on the team. We explained to our client something about the EoC; and also about how our translator, a Focolare youth, learned English at another EoC firm in Ireland, Language Learning International.

So successful was this first project that three more trips to Brazil were completed during 2003 and 2004, with the support of our Brazilian EoC contacts. This past summer, Luiz's daughter, a chemical engineer, came to the U.S. for one month for an intern experience with our company. It was a beautiful exchange for both us and her. We hope to continue with our Brazilian contacts, and are even considering the possibility of opening an office in Brazil.

So, what is next? We don't know exactly. I consider this communion among businesses as an integral part of the EoC —treating the other company as our own, helping each other become business owners according to the culture of giving, and encouraging each other to expand our individual "visions" as part of our collective "vision." □

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