



# The Seeds Are Sown

**Gary Bloore and Ironbound dot.org**

I first met Gary in 2012 after being introduced to him by someone that I very much respected for her efforts to improve New Jersey's workforce. When speaking one day she told me that there were a few business people that I should definitely get to know. She placed Gary at the top of that list. When I first met Gary he told me and those present about manufacturing business ventures that he had successfully built and run. He spoke fondly of some of the people he managed and how, together with them, he created a team focused environment. He told me that he recognized the challenges that these employees faced; specifically due to the weakness of some of their academic and work-readiness skills. I learned that he was interested in building a new organization and his driving force was going to be building skills and creating jobs. Gary's enthusiasm and energy filled the conference room in which we sat. He shared his vision to create, model and lead a movement that engaged business people in workable coaching events that would eventually prepare thousands of students to have a positive impact in the workplace. Before leaving he reiterated that he had worked on other new ventures in manufacturing working with people from our community. His vision was not only to give back but to also create a product line where Made in USA was an underlying principle.

Gary wanted me to allow him to pilot a program for high school students that would better prepare them for success. He spoke about his ideas about personally facilitating learning sessions and involving business mentors to move students toward workplace success. His idea was to begin by creating scenarios that would give students the opportunity to think and act like owners of a company who need to build a brand. By starting with products that were of interest to and typically purchased by those in their age group they would have the experience of being the experts. His belief was that by having the chance to simulate the building and promotion of a brand this would lead to a learning opportunity to act more like an entrepreneur who looks after all aspects of a business rather than just a traditional employee that is usually only focused on a few tasks. His comments reminded me of some research that I carried out and wrote about several years ago. The topic was about what I called enterprise skills. These enterprise skills were associated not only with people who could hold a job but moreover become persons who are highly valued in the work place and early on become candidates for greater responsibility and promotions. I realized that Gary was interested in leading students in a direction that I had long prized. Finally Gary told me that he felt that donating his time pro bono was the right thing to do. His energy, kind offer and enthusiasm seemed so real yet my skepticism led me to believe that this offer was too good to be true. I had to check him out. I contacted the mutual acquaintance that had advised Gary to reach out to me. This conversation was memorable as she told me that Gary and I were very similar. She said we were both crazy with energy and a desire to improve the lives of young people. I made the leap of faith in 2013 and gave Gary the opportunity to work with one of the school district's teachers and students at Essex County Vocational Technical School's Newark Tech location. At the time I could not possibly realize that I was giving Gary the go-ahead to introduce what would become IronboundUSA.org,





driven by the I-P.A.S.S. enterprise skills method and enhanced by the mentoring of caring successful business persons.

My concern was very much misplaced. Gary never missed a beat. He invited students to think about how companies that appeal to their age group created, promoted and protected their brands. He afforded students with a rare opportunity to be looked upon as experts. They rose to the challenge as they were creative and thrived in the role of experts. The energy and response to this type of respectful treatment was quick and powerful.

Gary exceeded my expectations well beyond what he had promised during the planning stages. He not only gained the interest of students about creating and branding products but moreover he gently moved the focus using “the power commonalities” to using the framework for product branding to creating, promoting and protecting each of their own personal brands. Students began to recognize that a well-crafted resume, a poised interview and the effective use of social media were ways that their brands could or must be presented. Gary asked this first group of young people to create a resume for their “personal brand”, prepare themselves for interviews and recognize the importance of protecting that brand both in how they carry themselves in public but also how they present themselves in the digital arena. He arranged for the first IronboundUSA.org business coaches to facilitate and provide feedback to mock interviews. Little did I know that Gary’s quest to make this type of business collaboration possible for busy people would one day lead to much more. For example, this past year two of global advertising giant McCann Erickson’s top executives and branding experts agreed to teach from their office in California one hour video conference seminars with students at Newark Tech and St. Benedict’s prep in Newark, NJ where they interacted on topics such as media buying and the impact of social media. Equally as amazing as the seminars was McCann’s request to be invited to participate in future interactions because of their positive experience with the students and their belief in IronboundUSA.org’s mission and Gary’s commitment.

About one year after I met Gary I was a proud superintendent of schools when members of the first class of IronboundUSA.org were presented with IronboundUSA.com clothing and received framed certificates of completion and achievement. As that first chapter closed I had become used to students expressing excitement, learning and appreciation when part of the IronboundUSA family. Of course this day was no different from other days where I watched their growth nor was Gary’s continuing energy, enthusiasm and quest to Build Skills and Create Jobs through IronboundUSA.org and IronboundUSA.com.

Sincerely,

Michael Pennella, Ph.D.

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