

Atelier Jean-Gilles | Josué Jean-Gilles, owner

Mentoring Guide | Prepared following the November 2011 visit by Dale Vernezze & Evan Keller (author)

Information Gathered:

1. His address is: Leogane Chatuley #29. Phone is: 3468-9916.
2. The raw rocks he buys are as big as 2'x2'x2'; the finished products in inches average 6"x10"x1" but are as small as 3"x7"x1".
3. He is interested in the pedal-powered grinding wheel saw that Don Rilea is willing to build for him at cost. He wants a summary of those costs. It will use wheels that range from 14" (with 12" cutting capacity) for \$7 to 4.5" for \$3. This should drastically reduced the hour it takes to cut a 7"x12" rock with a hacksaw. Water (not running) is available from an onsite well. It can double as a sander when a sanding wheel replaces the grinding wheel.
4. He is very enthusiastic about the mock fliers Evan and artist Ramay Lewis produced for him. (To add dignity to this transaction, Ramay should be paid with a stone carving.) Each includes a logo, photo and paragraph targeting a particular market segment (separate fliers for souvenir shop owners, funeral homes, and individuals). With his feedback, we are making improvements before he has them printed by a local printer he knows.
5. He is enthusiastic about the local mentor program, saying that investing in others is his passion as demonstrated by the apprentices he's trained.
6. Jean-Gilles had three salesmen before the earthquake but has handled all sales since.
7. He has plenty of excess capacity: inexpensive raw materials and trained workers.
8. Local mines have an ample supply of "granite" (off-white and inexpensive) and "mica" (dark gray and a little more costly).
9. He often displays his wares at art trade shows.

Observations:

1. Outside of Jean-Gilles home, eight or so young apprentices lean over small tables furiously carving or sawing stone. Two female employees were carving stone for him. Haitians told us this was unusual for this type of industry.
2. The limits on his production are easily overcome. He could find a way to produce much higher volumes if the market would sustain it.
3. His 40% profit margin should give him plenty of room to reinvest in his business in the form of sales and marketing and tools.
4. Jean-Gilles is intelligent and has built one of the more profitable businesses in RED. His products are unique and are of higher quality than the vast majority of Haitian souvenirs. His products appeal to Haitian businesses, residents and non-Haitians alike, giving him many potential market niches to explore.

Questions:

1. What challenges are you currently facing in your business?

2. What do you hope your business will be like in two years? How many new jobs do you hope to create? What positive impact would you like your business to have on the community?
3. Have you been participating in the RED training classes? How have they affected your business?
4. How much does the stone cost? How often do you purchase it and in what quantities? Do they sell on credit? Are there multiple suppliers competing for your business?
5. How much would it cost to rent a storefront in Leogane (an idea he shared with us)?
6. What other costs would be involved in a potential move? Would employees be able to travel to the new location?
7. Is the average Leogane passerby a key part of your target market? If not, would it be more beneficial to relocate next to a funeral home or other businesses which are (or attract) your target market?
8. Is there a trophy or awards industry in Haiti? How can you make connections with top souvenir shops in the country (in Labadee or at the airport)? What would it take to interest PAP art dealers in selling your work?
9. Would a key employee or two benefit from attending some of the training classes with you?
10. Do you have people you trust who can shadow you on sales calls to explore their candidacy as salespeople? Are they fearless, self-motivated, and good with people?
11. What is the Church of God of Leogane like? Are there business people there you can invite into RED? Is your pastor supportive of RED? Does it have facilities that would be suitable for RED training events? How many people attend there?

Recommendations for Mentee:

1. Increasing sales should be your top priority. To do so, you should identify your target market, aggressively reach out to them with a significant portion of your own time. You'll need to utilize some marketing materials and enlist the help of others.
2. Hire and train salespeople.
3. Create a business card with your new logo, also including your personal name, phone & address.
4. It was suggested that seeing employees carving would be an attraction to potential customers if a store was located in a high foot traffic area. So a combination workshop/showroom would be recommended if the right location was found at the right price.
5. Find more chairs and tables and another rain tarp to expand your employees' workspace.
6. Make nameplates at discount prices for the other businesses in RED to expand your exposure.

Recommendations for Mentors:

1. Oscar, Brunel and Daniel should work to get Jean-Gilles a display table at the January 26 local business conference in Port-Au-Prince. Daniel has agreed to introduce him to Eveliene of Maxima at that event to explore funeral home connections she may have for him.
2. Keep sharing best practices on packaging fragile items (as the stone he works with is very soft).
3. Dale should help him determine how much increased sales would be needed to cover the cost of salespersons' salaries and storefront rent.