

## USAID Internal Newsletter iNreach, June 2008

SPOTLIGHT: 8(a) Certified Small Business Success Story

### **LTL Strategies: Combining Excellence and Ethics to Grow a Small Business**

LTL Strategies is an 8(a)-certified small business specializing in Economic Growth and Competitiveness, Conflict Management, Democracy and Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Communications. LTL Strategies holds a facility and security clearance. During a recent interview LTL Strategies founders and principals René Lake and Hillary Thomas-Lake shared their experiences with **iNreach News**.

#### **iNreach: How long have you been working with USAID?**

As a firm, LTL Strategies has been working with USAID for the past five years. Since becoming an 8(a)-certified firm in January 2003, LTL Strategies has won 9 Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IQCs) as a subcontractor-partner to larger USAID implementing partners like Creative Associates, the International Resources Group (IRG), Louis Berger International, and Management Systems International (MSI).



**René Lake,  
President & CEO**

In addition, LTL Strategies' principals, experts, and advisors have extensive experience working as top USAID executives, mission directors, and technical consultants on USAID-funded projects.

#### **iNreach: When did you get your first contract with USAID, as prime contractor?**

Two years ago. Our first contract as a prime with USAID was a 2006-2007 mid-term evaluation of the \$200 million Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA). The purpose of the evaluation was to review the structure of the IEHA program, review the program's activities, assess the activities' impact in terms of IEHA's objectives of developing greater food security and supporting business and value chain development for small farmers, and make recommendations for improvements that could increase the program's impact and achievement of the goal of cutting hunger in half by 2015.

The review assessed achievements and presented recommendations to improve the program's performance. IEHA is an 11-country, multi-year effort designed to rapidly increase agricultural growth and rural incomes in sub-Saharan Africa. This initiative has aligned US support for African agricultural

development with the African-led Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan (CAADP).



**Hillary Thomas-Lake  
is LTL Strategies  
Managing Director**

**iNreach: Have you done work with other U.S. Government agencies?**

Yes, we have been fortunate to work with other US government agencies like the Department of Interior and the National Security Agency (NSA), in addition to providing direct technical assistance to foreign governments, and to multilateral organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). We have also developed a very proactive partnership strategy, which has allowed us to collaborate with several small and large firms and organizations, including Chemonics, Lockheed Martin, CHF International, Creative Associates, the Development Gateway Foundation, the Development Innovations Group, DevTech, Louis Berger International, The Mitchell Group, IRG, Amex International, MSI, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), SAIC, etc.

**iNreach: How did you come to start your firm?**

We started our firm because our work on the promotion of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) revealed that there were many private sector companies in African and Caribbean countries that wanted to break into doing business with the North American markets, but did not quite know how.

**iNreach: You also have some private sector experience?**

Yes, LTL Strategies' founding partners have a wealth of experience working with the public and private sectors in Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. At the time that we decided to start our own company, we decided to bring our private sector development experience to bear, along with a capacity to work in 8 different languages.

**iNreach: What are those 8 languages?**

In addition to English, LTL Strategies has the in-house capacity to work in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Anglophone Caribbean Creole, Haitian Creole, and Wolof. We speak those languages at a native fluency level.

**iNreach: Were you both language majors?**

No, we've just both spent lots of time working on international affairs and living in different countries. René is a former journalist who has written books on media development, and did his post-graduate studies in communications and philosophy of language at the Sorbonne in Paris... And Hillary, who is a graduate of Georgetown University, has just completed her dissertation for her PhD in Conflict Management at SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies), here in DC at the Johns Hopkins University.

**iNreach: Do you find USAID to be a small-business friendly agency?**

We are seeing signs that indicate that USAID is moving toward having a more aggressive small business utilization strategy. We think that it is important for USAID to significantly increase its use of small business firms. We all need to remember that small businesses play a significant role in the United States economy. They employ about half of all private sector employees, and generate more than half of non-farm private gross domestic product. They pay more than 45% of the total US private payroll and, for the last 10 years, they have generated, every year, between 60% and 80% of the net new jobs.

In 2006, small businesses received \$77 billion out of the \$340 billion in federal government contracts. That represents 22.8%. This rate is an indication of how much effort USAID has to make in order to catch up with other US government agencies.

**iNreach: What is the most interesting thing you've done?**

Almost everything we have done so far has been really interesting. Because of LTL's wide range of expertise, we have been fortunate to be involved in several fascinating projects. LTL's M&E and strategic planning capabilities have opened doors in new fields for the firm in agriculture, public health, and education.

In 2007, LTL conducted a third party evaluation for a Gates Foundation-funded health-reporting project implemented by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMMF). The project was implemented in three countries (Botswana, Kenya, and Senegal) and focused on developing key African media houses into centers of excellence that would provide training in health reporting on HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis to budding African health reporters. Developing country media is familiar territory for LTL Strategies, so it was fun to be in contact with a variety of African media outlets, and to observe first-hand the impact that technology is having on urban and rural-based African journalists' abilities to report effectively on emerging health phenomena.

**iNreach: Any other work in the public health sector?**

Yes, another interesting project has been LTL Strategies' ongoing work with the World Bank's AIDS Campaign Team for Africa (ACTAfrica). In 2006 and 2007, LTL Strategies provided content development and workshop moderation services for ACTAfrica's multi-donor conferences on mobilizing the Francophone Private Sector in Africa in the Fight against HIV/AIDS.

It has been fascinating to observe the growth and development of the private sector in Francophone Africa, despite the fact many Francophone African countries' regulatory environments make it more challenging for private sector development. What has been even more fascinating has been to witness first-hand the ways in which the African private sector is stepping up to partner with African governments in the development and implementation of multi-sectoral national action plans to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Production factories, insurance companies, banks, and other private sector businesses across Africa are providing voluntary testing and treatment services,

and working to link urban-based companies with rural community associations that are trying to provide comfort, treatment, and moral support to people and communities living with HIV/AIDS.

This is truly the emergence of African indigenous philanthropy, and represents an important and [relatively] new development trend.

### **iNreach: Any advice for companies like yours?**

Keep a positive attitude and maintain very high ethical standards. The energy your positive attitude generates will help you come up with creative strategies for winning new business and growing your company. Also, we strongly recommend two books that can serve as ready references for a positive energy boost when things are challenging. The two books are Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman, and Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol Dweck.

Both books (each in its own way) challenge us to rethink our assumptions about our ability to get things done. Goleman's book asks us to reassess how we quantify professionalism, by inviting us to consider-and value!--the emotional intelligence behind someone's advanced degrees and work experience. Dweck's book challenges us to shift from a "fixed" mindset about our limitations to a "growth" mindset about our limitless capacities.

Finally, be true to your core company values, which are-hopefully-- inspired by your core human values. LTL's motto is "Excellence and Ethics Combined for Measurable Results." It guides every aspect of our work ethic from the types of projects we participate in, to how we deal with some of the less pleasant challenges of being a small business in a big business-oriented field.

At LTL Strategies, we believe it is important to choose a guiding concept, and a set of guiding principles, that will set the standard for the quality of work you produce, and the general culture of your organization.



For more information, visit [www.ltlstrategies.com](http://www.ltlstrategies.com)

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