

## **Key Features of Enslaved Entrepreneurship**

*(Entrepreneurship: pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled.)*

**Pursuit** implies the dedicated quest for something desired. Lunsford Lane and other enslaved entrepreneurs pursued their desire to be free by creating opportunities to make money with which to eventually buy themselves and their family members through the application of their skills, talents, and business acumen. Many were successful in both establishing businesses and liberating themselves and other loved ones.

**Self-Agency** is an awareness of one's power to take action to affect one's personal situation. When one is technically the property of another, one does not have legal control of one's self, one's family, or one's resources. In the American race-based system of chattel slavery, entrepreneurial slaves were acutely aware that their circumstances of enslavement were designed to destroy their sense of agency, but many resisted these restrictions and developed self-agency nonetheless. They simply refused to accept others' definitions of what they were capable of. They knew that revealing their self-agency could threaten the Master Class so they masked it in numerous ways. Some camouflaged the fact that they were making money by hiding it, buying little and even dressing in an impoverished manner. Self-agency was not universally shared by all slaves, but many African Americans developed this trait characterized by the attitude that they could create greater opportunities and even craft freedom for themselves and loved ones. To quote a famous black expression, they "made a way out of no way."

**Urgency and Stress.** *Urgency* is a strong need to act *immediately* or potentially suffer great negative consequences. *Urgency* is, according to the Harvard Business School's definition, characteristic of entrepreneurs because they "have a sense of urgency that's seldom seen in established businesses." *Stress* is a byproduct of the constant sense of urgency as well as the emotional strain and tension caused by very demanding situations. Enslaved entrepreneurs felt both urgency and enormous stress. Not only did they have to generate enough income to support themselves and frequently family members, but they also had to support the operating costs of the business and they had to pay their master a regular "rent." In addition, and they had to put a large portion of their earnings toward the purchase price of their own or a family member's freedom. Because enslaved entrepreneurs did not have any legal standing, their stress level could be especially acute because their Master could, at any time s/he wished, terminate the slave's money-making activities. Enslaved entrepreneurs also often lived with the constant fear that a spouse or child could be sold away before they could accumulate sufficient funds to buy their freedom from. The fear of a sale created enormous urgency and also enormous stress.

**Opportunity** according to the Harvard Business School, implies that "the offering is novel in one or more of four ways":

- 1) A truly innovative product is developed/pioneered (Lane's flavored pipe smoking tobacco was unique.)
- 2) A new business model is being created (Self-hiring was a model that evolved from "hiring out"; self-hiring became widespread and some self-hired slaves even became entrepreneurs.)
- 3) Creating a cheaper and even better version of an existing product (Most slave entrepreneurs undercut the price of goods and services provided by those who were free; slaves also tried to make their products distinctive and better.)

- 4) Targeting a product that already exists to new sets of customers (Lunsford Lane started out selling to state legislators but then expanded his operation by selling through distributorships to sets of customers throughout the state.)

***Growing up in Poverty*** according to Harvard Business School researchers, growing up poor is a common characteristic of entrepreneurs. "Having a lack of resources does not constrain them from pursuing an opportunity because they are accustomed to making do without resources." Enslaved entrepreneurs not only grew up impoverished in the sense of lacking material resources they were impoverished by lacking the basic legal rights and privileges of free citizens. They become aware that they are not free and that they did not have the resources the master class has; yet they learned to survive and even to "craft freedom" for themselves under circumstances that were very lacking in material resources.

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