



It depends on each one of us

By Carlos Toro, President of Oscar Super Cash and Carry

When we talk about economic development we often do it as a reference to something that is sought after, something that depends on others or requires waiting for others, usually the local and federal government.

I argue that economic development is something we forge every day, every businessman, every entrepreneur, every worker, every consumer, and every government worker. We set the stage for economic development when we create the right conditions for the consumer to receive good services and good offers, when the micro, small and medium entrepreneur puts all their efforts and receives fair treatment from its suppliers.

And when the stronger entrepreneurs can recognize that, as we create favorable conditions for the smallest in the supply and distribution chain, more opportunities will become available to move forward and move the country. Just look around to identify all that exists to join efforts to move forward. Look at our immediate communities, municipalities, and regions. There are potential allies all around: local authorities, academia and the nonprofit sector.

In my company, our credo is: "We do not compete with the retailer". I propose to take this one step further: to give a boost to these businesses. Convinced of this, we have begun develop a project that allows us to provide tools and support to microentrepreneurs and small and medium businesses. They are our primary clients. If we do not have a solid base of small businesses, everything else breaks down. That is what sustainability is all about.

Everyone can contribute to making small entrepreneurs - the great majority of them Puerto Rican companies - strong. They are the ones that contribute most to the economy, up to four times more than the big chains, whose capital mostly leaves the Island every night.

What we seek is to support the efforts of the Caguas municipal government to provide advice to microentrepreneurs and SMEs. We know who they are and where they are. We have made our company's facilities available to organizations that promote microenterprise development so that they offer technical workshops and guidance together with us. We also aim to establish an alliance with the cooperative sector, whose principles set the course for a just and solidary society.

This is in addition to an initiative that we started in 2006 with the purpose of joining small retailers from the food industry, who share promotion, specials and bargaining power with large distributors. And soon, for the eighth consecutive time, we will open our premises for an event in which the suppliers offer and guarantee for a month their best products at special prices.

In every chain, every link is important. To keep the country going, entrepreneurs need to ensure that all links are strong. For every microentrepreneur that gets ahead in Puerto Rico, we distance ourselves one step further from the culture of dependence that has eroded the foundations of our country. Every small business owner has the potential to grow and generate new employment opportunities. This keeps the distribution chain active. This way we all win.

Ignoring, or even worse, pushing down, smaller businesses will only break the chain. Puerto Rican entrepreneurship has at this moment a unique and precious opportunity to demonstrate their spirit and their commitment to Puerto Rico.

The answer is not outside or off-Island. It is in each one of us.