

Frontline: Two American Families Revisited

Work, Family Economics, and Entrepreneurship



Good work environments exist in the corporate and small business sectors but programs, such as PBS' *Frontline*, document labor policies and the reality many workers and their families' experience all too often.

From an entrepreneurial viewpoint...

In an attempt to earn money to pay mounting bills, Milwaukee resident, Terry Neumann, bought beauty care products for resale after her husband's high paying job was shipped out of the U.S.

Seemingly down-to-earth, an outgoing people person, viewers watched as Terry attempted to sell the products to a neighbor. It was sadly awkward. She later lost her investment on the products, according to host, Bill Moyers.

A stay-at-home mom initially, Terry took low-wage jobs to help pay the bills.

After finding a position, as a security guard, at one point, with higher wages and benefits, she appeared happy with the nontraditional work and seemed to enjoy driving a truck.

The Other Family: The Stanley's

Claude and Jackie Stanley took the entrepreneurial leap, even the children to some extent after jobs kept folding,

Jackie Stanley earned her real estate license and struggled in an industry with a color line.

Commission paychecks would often fall through if deals were not finalized, which seemed to happen often. The real estate industry in Milwaukee is riddled with policies based on race, an infrastructure that affects even her qualified clients attempting to qualify for mortgages.

It's a circumstance that lessens the probability of closing a sale and earning her fee.

Residential sales in upscale neighborhoods were closed to her because she is African-American, according to the film.

Jackie's passion and enthusiasm for the art of selling are evident but I saw nothing in the program that answered the question of why she chose real estate, other than it was what she had studied while she was still employed in the early 1990's.

After buying a building so that Jackie could open her own a real estate office, her husband, Claude, joined with her and opened a home inspection business, but the ventures were not successful.

Son Keith, 15, when *Frontline* first filmed,

started a lawn mowing business with his brothers. Now in his mid-30s, a college graduate with a government job, he continues with other sideline entrepreneurial pursuits.

The Stanley's passed their work ethic and strong values onto their children and their son Keith, who seems to have developed the ability from a young age to choose ventures that filled a marketplace niche. Insight not evident in the businesses chosen by his parents, which were highly competitive with no evident niche being addressed.

Had the couple started from home or opened in a business incubator, they would have at least trimmed startup costs and had the opportunity to test their ideas in the marketplace.

Jackie Stanley said she felt like a failure but she has strong managerial, sales, mentoring and communication skills. Skills that may not be the best entrepreneurial fit for real estate in Milwaukee, given her considerable talents.

Terry and Jackie both may belong in fields they have never considered or know little about, choosing instead traditional familiar paths, which do not allow for their full potential.

References

What's Happened to Two American Families?

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