

The Boss With a Big Heart

Dynamic African American businessman Al Hollingsworth is using his money to help youngsters achieve their dreams

Then Al Hollingsworth was a young man newly enrolled at the University of Colorado, he had no idea his future would be decided more by a few minutes on the football field than by four years in the classroom.

Big and broad and an up-and-coming NFL prospect, Hollingsworth played guard and tackle for the college football team. During a game against the University of Oklahoma, he was hit hard and knocked unconscious for about 10 minutes.

It was just long enough for God to ignite Hollingsworth with a sense of purpose that would change his life—and many other lives—from that day forward.

“God spoke into my life while I was unconscious ... that I would be a successful businessman,” Hollingsworth says. “I stopped taking the ‘dumbbell courses’ and began to study psychology and speech pathology. I went from a 1.7 GPA to the honor roll.”

Today, at age 61, Hollingsworth owns Michigan-based Aldelano Corp., a multimillion-dollar packaging company of 1,000 employees spread over five states with clients that include Kellogg’s, Procter & Gamble Co. and General Mills. If you’ve ever found a fresh product awaiting when you peeled open a Pringles can or ripped into a Pop-Tart bag, thank Al Hollingsworth. He probably packaged it for you.

Indisputably wealthy now and being at a retirement-friendly

age, Hollingsworth could be filling his Day-Timer with anything but corporate appointments—such as tee times for golfing at pricey country clubs or blocked-off hours for sipping fruity drinks at blue-water resorts. Instead, he's hard at work (in addition to running his company) teaching Christian young people and adults about the power of purpose, the benefits of hard work and how they can, just as he has, see their dreams change from vision to reality.

Meeting a Need to Succeed

Hollingsworth does this through a pair of educational programs he and his wife, Hattie, founded. A program for youth, called “Building on Spiritual Substance”—or BOSS the Movement—trains young people ages 7-19 to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, public-speaking ability and godly business skills. A similar program for adults, called Vertical Leap, uses biblically based success-training seminars to achieve the same results.

The programs are a fulfillment of the purpose Hollingsworth says empowered him when he awoke on that college football field some four decades ago.

“That’s really the heartbeat of where [we] are vested,” Hollingsworth says about himself and his wife. “We are kingdom entrepreneurs.”

When it comes to young people, he says the church must prepare them for the economic challenges life will throw at them as they grow up.

“We’re telling [kids] to ‘have faith and hold on.’ But if you

take a look where the young people are moving toward and running toward, they're attracted to economics. In order to stay potent, we're going to have to be able to address that in the lives of our young people," he says.

Hollingsworth asserts that it's important for the church to convince young people that God is relevant in meeting their needs for success.

"They don't have to go to the secular world or the underworld to learn the principles of success," he says. "They're in God's world."

BOSS comprises 20 weeks of classes held in two-hour blocks after school and on weekends. Class subjects include poise and leadership, motivation, godly principles of business and economics, and entrepreneurship and finances.

Young people are taught to replace negative thinking habits with positive ones, have strong Christian character by applying God's Word to their lives, create business plans and engage in Internet entrepreneurship. They are allowed to earn income from products they sell through Internet businesses they set up. They even are issued ATM cards to allow them to access their earnings.

Many of the youths are fatherless, poor and natural fodder for urban gangs. The 20-week training sessions are designed to prevent them from succumbing to the poverty and powerlessness so prevalent in inner cities. Hollingsworth insists the church has to address the new mind-set among urban children.

"They've seen so much success in rap and drugs and the

underground and so forth [that] they've found ways to succeed. The question today is how do you succeed? Do you succeed by dominating and devouring the environment around you?

"You see that in gang warfare—the strong killing off the weaker ... taking advantage of a younger generation with drugs. Do you succeed by taking advantage of others, or is there another way?"

The ABCs of Success

At the BOSS program in Watts—a once-notorious, underprivileged community of Los Angeles—kids are being taught "another way." A "greeting" exercise, performed by the students, teaches them to develop a firm, businesslike handclasp; strong eye contact; and self-confidence.

Students who don't project themselves must repeat the process before they hear the desired, "One, two, three, yes!" from classmates, which indicates they have performed well.

Another exercise requires students to pair off, hold hands and maintain eye contact. They can move only when they hear "God's" voice.

"God" in this case is master trainer Earl Muse. His wife, Terry, walks between them and reads God-affirming statements aloud. The students must stay focused, and they must plan: Who will they partner with when "God" tells them to move?

When another BOSS leader, Eugene Johnson, walks up unnoticed and shouts, "Change partners!" several students drop hands and

head off.

Others laugh—because Johnson’s voice wasn’t “God’s” voice.

“What were you guilty of?” Muse asks one of the offenders.

“I lost focus,” the boy answers.

“Give an example of someone in the Bible who lost focus,” Muse says. A girl tells about when Peter took his eyes off Jesus while stepping onto the water.

“We must learn to hear and recognize God’s voice,” Muse instructs the 17 students. “The only way we can do this is to spend time with God.” While the exercises can be fun, they teach youths the importance of discipline, patience and staying focused.

Gillian Brunetti Smith recently encouraged her 13-year-old son, Lorenzo, to enter the BOSS program.

“Before Lorenzo took the class he wasn’t getting really good grades. He was getting C’s and D’s. I was concerned,” Smith recalls.

It was after her son enrolled in the program that she noticed a change in his actions. “This whole last year Lorenzo has become an honor student. And he has stayed focused enough to play his athletics.”

Not only did the teen practice with his regular baseball team,

but he also began practicing his pitch on his own. Lorenzo says of BOSS: "It's a real good class. It teaches you how to act right, control your emotions and be a businessman—make your own business."

Today, scouts are looking at Lorenzo, asking questions about him and about his baseball skills. Smith's actions, as well as those of her son illustrate why Hollingsworth believes Christians should not be timid about standing up for things God has given them.

"The reason the world is succeeding so aggressively above us is that they're taking more risks than we are. We are to be the major risk-takers," he says. "Risk is walking by that which we don't see. The body of Christ calls it faith."

Succeeding ... and Failing

After his experience on the football field, Hollingsworth went on to graduate from college. He turned down offers to play football professionally and opted instead to take a scientific job in Seattle, but he eventually changed his career and entered the paper industry.

After gaining some experience, he started his own company and built it into a successful multimillion-dollar business. In the process, however, he let his relationship with Christ slip away.

During a time of soul-searching, he and his wife gave their lives back to God. "Lord, whatever You don't want in our lives, please take it away," they prayed. God dramatically answered the couple's prayer by allowing their company to go

bankrupt.

Devastated, Hollingsworth began to seek a new dream. “I was dedicated to, ‘Find God or die,’” he says. “So for months I would go out on the hills, seeking the Lord for a dream, a vision, an idea of where He would want me to go next.”

It was then God taught him a lesson about desire. “I began to recognize that when my heart was pure I could trust what I wanted because it wasn’t for my own personal needs and glory. It would be to build His kingdom,” he says. “That began the training program that He put in my heart, to touch a generation with kingdom economics—training young people to let God put His finished mind in them.”

The experience was the catalyst that birthed the BOSS program, which he and his wife founded in Los Angeles in 1985. After the bankruptcy, things turned around for the Hollingsworths.

“God got us back on track, setting us on the course that has turned our finances to where we’ve become more wealthy than we were the first time.”

After getting BOSS off the ground, the Hollingsworths founded Vertical Leap. The seminars are held monthly during evenings or weekends at BOSS the Movement headquarters in Chino, California. Hollingsworth also shares his ideas through his book, Vertical Leap: How to Birth Your Dreams, Visions & Ideas Into Reality.

Ideas: Free Yet Priceless

Sharlyn Crump has experienced the benefits of Vertical Leap, albeit indirectly. Four years ago her husband attended the Vertical Leap seminars because he was having challenges at work. Their son was an infant, and the couple had decided Sharlyn would be a stay-at-home mom.

As a result of the family's single income, Sharlyn's husband started to become depressed and feel as if he wasn't fulfilling what God had called him to do.

It was while her husband was at a Vertical Leap seminar, Crump says, that God gave her an idea for an invention.

"I was limiting God because I thought ... it should be [my husband] who gets the vision," she says. "I started going to Vertical Leap. To make a long story short, I now own a diaper bag company. Pregnancy magazine just featured us as one of the hottest new products on the market."

Vertical Leap opened new doors for Crump. She says it taught her that "many times we sit back and think if the Lord wants us to do something He'll show us what to do. That's true, but there's also something we have to do."

Hollingsworth believes success stories like this will be duplicated tomorrow in those who know how to turn ideas into reality.

"Technology is not driven by money, it's driven by creativity," he says. "The billionaires of tomorrow are going to be those with ideas and dreams and visions. That always has existed in the midst of poverty—ideas."

“We teach [people] how to birth the invisible into the material. It’s a process. It’s not hocus-pocus.”

This year BOSS will launch about 40 programs in Los Angeles and take three-day seminars to New Jersey, the District of Columbia, Alaska and the Bahamas. Programs in Japan, Germany and France have seen success similar to that of the U.S. programs, and BOSS currently has expanded to every continent except South America.

Hollingsworth also has plans for some 50 conference centers similar to the one he founded in 1992, when he and his wife bought 121 acres in California’s San Jacinto Mountains above Palm Springs.

The tract of land includes the former filming location for the Bonanza TV series and now is the site of their Alhatti Private Christian Resort, which doubles as a conference center.

As he closes in on retirement age, Hollingsworth still burns with the same sense of purpose that redirected his life as a college student. Only now, many years later, it has become a philosophy that defines his life.

“Work is not a job. Work is purpose,” he says. “Working is not something that I do because it is a task. I do it because it is a love. I work hard, and I have great joy—the joy of purpose.”

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