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BUSINESS

MAN OVER MACHINE

By Kenneth Hynes
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On July 22, Kingston-based Spatial Innovision, was named as one of 10 companies in the Caribbean to receive the US\$40,000 Pioneers of Prosperity (POP) Award. POP is a global awards programme that recognises dynamic small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging markets which can serve as role models of success for students, aspiring entrepreneurs, and other business owners.



Kenneth Hynes

At first glance, you may think it's the high-tech wizardry of what Spatial sells that made it a winner; with products like Photogrammetry Processing Workflow and Aerial LIDAR Imaging Systems, the company certainly sounds impressive. However, there's something more fundamental driving the success of this company and its recognition as a role model for others: its people. Owner and CEO Silburn Clarke actively practices the theory championed by sociologist and economist Gary Becker at the University of Chicago, that human capital is the only type of capital with the potential for unlimited returns. Human capital encompasses the skills, ideas, and energies we all possess to varying degrees.

Spatial Innovision was launched in 1998 to offer companies, NGOs, and governments in the Caribbean Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) solutions. Using satellites, GPS systems create reference points from which any position on earth can be calculated to within a few metres of accuracy. GIS integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analysing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information. Basically, Spatial Innovision's technology allows a client to gain an understanding of the physical environment which they are trying to manage. A thorough knowledge of the physical terrain is of great use to urban planners, disaster relief specialists, and yes, even the tax man.

Clarke entered civil service in Jamaica after finishing school. Once in government, Clarke recognised the potential of technology to change the way government serves its constituents, and became an active proponent of technology-based solutions to public policy and public works projects. Clarke subsequently acted on his conviction and launched Spatial.

It's easy to get lost in the technical aspects of Spatial's business, but Clarke's focus remains steadfastly on his people. He asserts people hold more ideas, insight, and innovation than any technology - no matter how advanced. "I see my role as more of a coach than a boss," commented Clarke. "My goal is to unleash the full potential of every individual in this firm." Clarke clearly believes in investing in his team. In addition to competitive salaries, incentives, and health-care benefits, Spatial offers interest-free student loans and invests in at least one international training opportunity per employee per year. Local executive education courses, seminars and conferences are a standard offering to all employees. To provide its staff with a greater sense of ownership over their work, Spatial operates as a federation of internal "mini-businesses", with front-line staff responsible for sales and client management.

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