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Miami coaches map a spectacular jobs growth gameplan

By Michael Lewis

Sandwiched between the day American Airlines revealed huge job cuts and news of a three-year US unemployment low, a job-creation team took a long leap as it targeted seven growth industries for Miami.

The One Community One Goal step was spectacular — not its targets, but its methodical process to achieve more and higher-paying jobs that build on Miami's unique strengths for quality long-term growth.

If we don't craft and then follow a roadmap to jobs, a cockamamie idea is as good as anything, and is likely to grab the spotlight and suck up vital resources until the next gimmick surfaces. Success becomes random.

Focus can change that, leveraging our unique opportunities to build jobs that fit Miami and pointing us toward both excellence and full, well-paying employment.

I've long said I'd support any studied plan that wins broad community buy-in for a long-term jobs push. The seven targets coming out of the 55 One Community One Goal partner teams fill that bill.

Not that there's a thing wrong with the targets. They are a solid springboard culled from everything we have to offer that can differentiate us from the pack. Importantly, the list bears the "Miami" brand.

Still, my "spectacular" label does not attach to the categories — aviation, creative design, hospitality & tourism, information technology, international banking & finance, life sciences & health care, and trade & logistics — but the process itself, plus the fact that within each category we specify niches. Only via niches can we rifle in on the right targets.

Thursday's unveiling of targets was without fanfare at the headquarters of the Beacon Council, the county's jobs-creation partnership that spawned this second round of One Community One Goal.

A 1990s effort spearheaded by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce also developed workmanlike goals. Some aims succeeded; tracing success back to the goals team was harder.

A key difference now must be in follow-through to turn aspirations into an ongoing, adequately funded taskforce in the game for the long haul using — as University of Miami President Donna Shalala reminded the group — metrics to measure success.

Without the roadmap, we can hail any outcome at all, even if it creates few or low-paying jobs.

Without a gameplan — to be unveiled May 7 — the roadmap is a mere aspiration.

Without broad community buy-in, frictions will soon slow the plan to a crawl.

And without government aboard and its money fueling the plan, private efforts won't advance as far as this job-challenged community needs.

Pivotaly, County Mayor Carlos Gimenez is among the effort's three co-chairmen. He noted that the plan to enact the study must be realistic, with all stakeholders at the table.

That President Shalala, Florida International University President Mark Rosenberg and many other high-ranking educators were at the table last

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Reisberg and many other high-ranking educators were at the table last week was a link missing in the 1990s.

In that early effort education came as an afterthought. This time, school and college competencies are pivotal, because attributes of their graduates determine what jobs we can realistically expect to create and grow.

Indeed, Beacon Council CEO Frank Nero told the group he had just returned from a New York recruiting mission. The first question by his prospects: what are Miami's educational competencies?

Not that Miami wouldn't add jobs without a gameplan. We add them daily, mostly via entrepreneurs in small business, which is Miami's economic backbone. Jobs they add collectively can, in good years, outstrip anything a targeted job-creation effort could bring.

The point of the One Community exercise, it seems to me, is not to settle merely for natural job creation that's sure to come anyway but to spur more growth of higher-paying jobs and capital investment in areas targeted to be faster-growing than most, to capitalize on Miami's unique advantages and attributes and to position us for economic changes.

Think of the North's rustbelt, which brought in more and more manufacturing jobs that rusted away when the world economy shifted.

Or our own reliance on lower-paying tourism jobs and highly volatile construction work. We need more legs on our economic stool to prop up Miami when cyclical businesses cannot do it alone.

That requires strategic thought and targeting — just what the One Community One Goal effort is doing.

As another co-chair, banker Adolfo Henriques, told the meeting when some cited industries they didn't think received enough emphasis, "Targeted and focused means just that. We could add just about any industry group."

He's right: no project goal targets either real estate or construction, but whenever targeted niches grow, those huge areas of our economy benefit naturally — as will the rest of us.

You can, and should, read the 82-page analysis of targeted industries at www.onecommunityonegoal.com. It's an important step along the way to a community strategic plan for adding the right jobs.

The next big step, after a fine-tuning of the educational component, is a morning meeting May 7 at Miami Dade College to outline an action plan to actually add those targeted jobs. That plan, as President Shalala suggested, will contain metrics to measure success or failure.

But the most important step comes after the May meeting: action. An ongoing team must be forged, committed to enact the plan and keep it functioning day after day. Mr. Nero says a team will exist, though its shape so far isn't known.

Without that teamwork, One Community reports will gather dust. With follow-through, however, our entire community can focus admittedly limited resources on specific targets to add the jobs and investment we agree upon to build a stronger long-term economy.

Just days before the Super Bowl, Mr. Nero made the point clear:

The Giants and the Patriots beat other talented teams to go to the bowl not because of one or two players but because they had made and then executed gameplans better than anyone else.

That's what Miami must do to outperform the field in creating the best jobs. So far, we're following a spectacular gameplan.

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