



THE BRIEFING ROOM

By Business. About Business. For Business.
May 1, 2013

Immigrant Entrepreneur's American Dream, Now Weighing In on Immigration Reform

*By JR Planas**

Small-business owner takes on hard road to success, boasts passion for a better America

Today, "May Day" as some call it, much of the nation rallies yet again for immigration reform. This year may have more positive overtones than in the past because Congress and the White House look and sound serious about achieving comprehensive immigration reform.

Two weeks ago, the "Gang of Eight"—a group of bipartisan senators leading the push for reform—introduced the *Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act*. So begins an arduous process to refine this overhaul with high hopes of enactment, by some estimates, this summer.

As both an immigrant and an entrepreneur, John Pinnington has a very unique, front-row seat perspective on American immigration policy. I sat down with John for an interview. In this two-part series, we tackle a few of the big questions most relevant to the business community both now and as the national debate continues to rage.

**All responses are views and opinions of John Pinnington only. Neither the Urban Chamber nor the author espouses or endorses these statements.*



John Pinnington is owner of AA Printing Service—a business he started with only \$4,500 as initial capital. With great networking and product quality, he has been able to grow his business to hire a handful of employees and is now considering opening a new store this year. Here is his story: (Part I of II)

JR: Let's start with the basics. Where are you from? When did you immigrate to the United States and why?

JP: I was born in Belize City, Belize (formerly British Honduras). Because we were a military family, we got to travel a lot. We moved to England when I was 10 years old, and we lived in Germany as well. In 1995, I moved from England to Los Angeles. My dream, like most people, was always to come to America one day and live the American dream. My parents supported me in that. So, I moved to Los Angeles to stay with my grandmother until 2001, then moved to Las Vegas, where I am today.



THE BRIEFING ROOM

By Business. About Business. For Business.
May 1, 2013

JR: When you say “live the American dream,” what does that mean for you?

JP: The movies *Grease* and *National Lampoon’s Animal House* were what got me to love America as a kid. I wanted to live in America! The Hollywood sign, the big houses, the flashy cars, the life that you want to live. For people on the other side of the world, in other countries, we see America on TV and that’s what makes us hungry to come here. That was my motivation. I’ve always said I’m going to live that life. I’m going to live the American dream. And the American dream is achieving what you want.

JR: When would you say that you began your journey to a successful entrepreneurship?

JP: I felt the spirit of entrepreneurship when I was only 14 years old. I told my teachers and everybody, “One day, I’m going to be rich and famous.” America is different than other countries. America is a bright light to everybody because America gives anybody the opportunity to be creative and achieve success in whatever you want. Coming to America, I already knew I wanted to own my business. Over the years, everything that I did was a stepping stone to get me to where I want to be. From trying several different businesses to restarting a venture crushed after the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks. You get knocked back once and you can get up, dust yourself off, and go again. That’s a great opportunity! That’s what’s great about America!

“America is different.... America is a bright light to everybody because America gives anybody the opportunity to be creative and achieve success....”

~John Pinnington

JR: With a front office filled with recognition from the local community and public officials, would you say you are rich and famous now?

JP: [Laughter] People think someone who owns a business is rich! I don’t see it. But, the people that I’ve known throughout my life, they tell me, “You don’t see it, John, because you’re in it. But, from when I met you and all the stories you’ve told me and what you wanted out of life, you’ve achieved your American dream!” To them, I am rich and famous. To me, I’m still a struggling business owner.

JR: As an immigrant, why would you open a business? Would it help you get a change of status? Would it help you get your citizenship?

JP: I wasn’t looking to start a business as a way of getting my citizenship because they do have programs for those like the EB-5 visa. I wanted to become a citizen because my heart was in America now. She has been good to me and has given me so much. I’m proud to have been naturalized in 2011.

JR: Currently, immigrants who want to come to the U.S. for the purpose of starting a business can apply for that EB-5 Immigrant Investor visa. Some of the requirements include a minimum \$1,000,000 capital investment (or \$500,000 in a high-unemployment or rural area) and within two years, be able to create at least 10 full-time jobs. Should the U.S. grant a new kind of visa to immigrants who want to start their own small businesses?

JP: The idea is good. But, once you get these visas in place for someone to come here to start a business, how are they going to be policed? It costs money to make sure they’re not hiring all of their family and



THE BRIEFING ROOM

By Business. About Business. For Business.
May 1, 2013

they're not just putting the money up to get in the country, start a business, and then close down.

JR: *The current proposal by Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) is a fixed pool of 75,000 "startup visas" for immigrants already in the U.S. on an H-1B or student visa. They must register a business that hires "at least two full-time, non-family member employees, and invests or raises capital investments of at least \$100,000" in the first year of being granted the visa. If this were enacted as proposed, does it have the potential to be cost-beneficial to Americans?*

JP: Absolutely! I want these immigrants, who have already invested into this country either as an H-1B foreign worker or a student at one of our colleges and universities, to stay here and expand. The startup visa is a good incentive for these people to get something out of the system. As a worker or a student, they can decide that they want to open a business and a startup visa will work to move them forward.

JR: *Critics of the proposal argue that these entrepreneurs cannot afford to be caught up in "visa limbo." They cannot miss market opportunities because of the delay in processing their visas. Would we need to solve the problem of visa backlogs before implementing a new startup visa?*

JP: We can't have entrepreneurs-to-be missing that window of opportunity. They can't come up with their business and have to wait 6 months, 8 months, or 9 months for a visa. Then, the moment is gone! They should be able to show a business plan—show that they can support themselves and carry the business for 2-3 or 5 years. The program should be set up so people can get through it much more quickly.

JR: *Given the current economic conditions, a years-long sustained unemployment rate above 7.5% and the lowest labor force participation rate since 1979, should legal immigrant workers be paid at the same rate as U.S. citizen workers? Should the U.S. even accept more legal immigrant workers?*

(Economic data current as of this interview.)

JP: Well, in America, we can't discriminate against immigrants. In other countries, they do, but we shouldn't pay immigrants differently from U.S. citizens. The way things are right now, it's easy to say "no" to accepting more immigrant workers. But, we still need skilled workers. We can't say, "Well, we are having a little problem right now. We have a lot of people sitting around doing nothing. We're going to stop you from coming in, but you are qualified to be here." We want the best of the best. So, if we have that opportunity to get the best of the best, then let's take them!

Next in Part II, John will discuss why the "best of the best" is important, how we should solve the country's illegal immigration problem, and some of the impacts of immigration on businesses.

Connect with John Pinnington and AA Printing Service online:



[facebook.com/aaprintingservice](https://www.facebook.com/aaprintingservice)

aaprintinglasvegas.blogspot.com



twitter.com/aaprintingnow

www.aaprintinglasvegas.com