AN ANNUAL LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

2026 Chairman's Perspective

Ken Anderson
Chairman



To our community, members, business owners, sponsors, partners, and teammates:

As I reflect on 2026, I keep coming back to the responsibility that comes with building something.

When you build a business, people begin to depend on it. Your family. Your employees. Your customers. The neighborhood you serve. What started as an idea becomes part of someone else's life, and the decisions you make begin to carry a different kind of weight.

I understand that responsibility as a business owner. As Chairman of the Tampa Bay Black Chamber of Commerce, I also think about our shared responsibility to make building a business more achievable for the people who are ready to do the work.

That is the work guiding our next chapter, and it is the meaning behind our new tagline: Where business builds the future.

Businesses create jobs, develop people, strengthen neighborhoods, and help families build a foundation for the next generation. Our Chamber has to stay close to that real, everyday work. As we close 2026 and look toward 2027, that is where my attention belongs.

The state of our Chamber is one of renewal, with important work ahead. We are sharpening our purpose, refreshing how we present ourselves, and building clearer ways for our members to turn relationships and resources into progress. Our new branding gives that direction a recognizable identity. The responsibility now is to give it meaning through the experience people have with us.

Membership should be useful in the everyday life of a business. A person working on a first business plan needs a different kind of help from an owner preparing to hire a team, pursue a contract, or enter a new market. Both should be able to come to this Chamber and find a practical next step.

Our responsibility is regional. Tampa Bay's business community extends across city and county lines, and so must the relationships we build. We need owners, employers, educational institutions, public partners, and community organizations working together around opportunities that move businesses forward.

When I think about Black business growth in Tampa Bay, I begin with a belief: the talent is already here. The ideas are here. The willingness to work is here. Our challenge is to help more of that talent become durable businesses that can serve customers well, manage their finances, employ people, and grow through change.

Starting a business deserves recognition. Staying in business deserves sustained attention. An owner can look successful from the outside while privately working through cash flow, pricing, taxes, staffing, or the pressure of making every decision alone. We need room for honest conversations and trusted relationships before those pressures become a crisis.

For me, growth also means helping owners pursue larger opportunities, build capable teams, acquire assets, and think about succession. It means making ownership understandable and attainable for the next generation. The question I want us to keep asking is whether more businesses are becoming stronger and better prepared for what comes next.

That work belongs to the broader business community, too. A purchase, a referral, sound guidance, or a thoughtful introduction can change the direction of a company. Our role is to bring preparation and access together so that an opportunity comes with a realistic path to pursue it.

Education is central to that effort. Through our new and developing educational programs, we are focusing on the decisions owners actually face: understanding financial statements, improving operations, preparing for financing, evaluating contracts, building a marketing plan, and leading people. Capital & Capacity and Supplier Readiness give us ways to organize that learning around business needs, while Next-Generation Leaders connects emerging talent with mentorship and a clearer view of what business leadership can become.

I want us to judge that education by what someone can do afterward. Can they ask better questions? Understand their numbers? Improve a process? Recognize what they need to prepare before approaching a lender or a potential customer? Learning should leave people better equipped to act.

That same thinking is behind Business Builder, a program designed to help people work through the foundations of starting and strengthening a company. We will help business owners develop business plans, navigate forming LLCs and corporations, prepare to pursue financing, understand business tax structure considerations, and strengthen marketing and social media.

Those decisions are connected. The structure you choose affects how you operate. Financing requires preparation and a clear understanding of the business. Marketing works better when you know your customer, your offer, and your numbers. Business Builder is about helping owners see those connections and work through them with practical guidance and the appropriate professional expertise.

Whether someone is starting with an idea or revisiting the foundation of an existing company, there should be a place to begin. I know how easy it is to become so busy doing the work that you postpone building the company around it. We want Business Builder to help owners make time for that essential work.

Looking ahead, I am also introducing the Chairman's Business Initiative, coming in 2027. Its purpose is to encourage the creation and growth of businesses throughout the Tampa Bay area, bringing focused attention to what it takes to build companies that can last.

My vision is to connect the ambition of entrepreneurs with the practical support, relationships, and preparation that help a business move forward. That includes people preparing to launch and owners ready to strengthen or expand what they have already built. We will shape this initiative with business owners, community leaders, sponsors, and partners, and share more as the work develops.

To our members, thank you for trusting this Chamber with a place in your business journey. To our sponsors and partners, thank you for investing resources, relationships, and expertise in this community. To our board, teammates, and volunteers, thank you for the care and follow-through that people may never see but that make the work possible.

To the business owner deciding whether there is a place for you here: bring your questions, your experience, and your ambition. We need to hear what is working, what is getting in the way, and where the Chamber can be more useful. I am proud to serve as your Chairman, and I am still listening, still learning, and still looking for ways to serve better.

I close 2026 hopeful about what we can build together, and mindful of the work that hope requires. Stronger businesses, better preparation, trusted relationships, and a clearer path for the next generation are worth our continued effort.

Let's get down to business.

Ken Anderson
Chairman
Tampa Bay Black Chamber of Commerce