

BUILDING REAL SUCCESS:

The Bonanza Contracting Story

Started from the Ground up

Bonanza Contracting wasn't built on venture capital or fancy business plans, it was built on hard work, early hand-on experience, and a deep-rooted passion for construction. Founders Lateef and Cyril Belfor were introduced to the trade at an early age, working alongside their architect father on job sites across New York City at the young ages of 10 and 12.

“ Our father would take us to visit his projects and give us small tasks,” says Lateef. “During weekends and holiday breaks, we’d assemble components before installation in actual homes and apartments.”

These formative years taught them the fundamentals of craftsmanship, discipline, and building with integrity. What started as weekend work evolved into helping neighbors with repairs and eventually into a legitimate construction business. Principal Kemar Miller shares a similar background, beginning his construction journey in his early teens, overseeing jobsite deliveries, managing material orders, and eventually handling quality assurance for his uncle's construction company.

Today, Bonanza operates as a 100% Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and family-owned firm, with capabilities spanning construction management, carpentry, taping and painting, signage installation, and architectural glass work. Their lifelong commitment to the craft has enabled them to successfully deliver projects across aviation, healthcare, museums, educational institutions, high-end residential spaces, and more.

The Certification Process: Worth It, But Not Easy

Getting MBE-certified wasn't simple.

The paperwork was extensive, the documentation requests seemed endless, and the scrutiny felt intense.

“At times, I couldn't help but feel unfairly scrutinized, almost as if I were being singled out,” Lateef recalls. “The process involved a great deal of back-and-forth communication, repeated requests for documentation, and detailed questioning that often felt excessive.”

But the certification opened doors. For contractors considering certification, Bonanza's experience offers a clear message: certification gets you in the room, but your work keeps you there.

“ Certification opens the door, but it doesn't guarantee success. You have to consistently deliver results, exceed expectations, and prove your value time and time again.”

This is particularly important for smaller firms to understand. Getting certified is just the beginning, it's what you do with that certification that matters. The most successful certified firms combine their certification status with aggressive networking, relationship building, and consistent marketing efforts.

First Major Break: DASNY

After certification, Bonanza landed a small project with the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY). That first job, though modest, proved crucial for building credibility.

// Successfully completing that first project opened numerous doors within the agency," Lateef explains. "Today, DASNY is one of our largest and most valued clients."

This progression, from small initial opportunity to major client, demonstrates how certification combined with solid performance creates sustainable business relationships. It also highlights an important reality of the construction industry: sometimes you need to start small to go big. That first project wasn't headline-making, but it established Bonanza as reliable, capable, and professional. Qualities that matter more than company size when it comes to winning repeat business.

To truly capitalize on available opportunities, you must be proactive —networking, building relationships, and continuously marketing your company.



Stepping Up to Larger Projects

Working with major general contractors pushed Bonanza to elevate their operations and adopt more sophisticated business practices.

// The first two projects we completed with a major GC were a learning curve, but they marked a turning point," says Lateef. "In the 'big leagues,' every company is held to the same level of accountability and performance, regardless of size."

This experience forced Bonanza to adapt quickly to the structure, procedures, and pace of larger projects. They had to establish extensive documentation systems, implement more formal safety protocols, and maintain the consistent

quality standards demanded by bigger players. The benefit wasn't just in meeting these expectations but in building operational discipline that improved all aspects of their business.

"Adapting to the structure, procedures, and pace of these larger projects allowed us to build stronger operational discipline, which we've been able to carry forward into every project since," Lateef notes. "Growth doesn't come only from your own missteps, it also comes from observing the challenges faced by other trades and applying those lessons proactively."

This practical education in project management, documentation, and meeting exacting standards became a competitive advantage that Bonanza has applied to all subsequent work, regardless of project size.

The Tough Leaf Advantage: The Bronx Museum Project

Bonanza's partnership with Tough Leaf directly led to one of their most significant opportunities: the Bronx Museum Project with Consigli Construction. This wasn't just about making an introduction, Tough Leaf provided concrete support throughout the bidding and qualification process.

// Tough Leaf demonstrated exceptional diligence and support throughout the process, which ultimately led to us being awarded the contract," Lateef states. "They helped us navigate the qualification requirements, understand the project scope, and position ourselves effectively during the bidding process."




The timing couldn't have been better. Shortly after project kickoff, Consigli acquired Lendlease Construction, effectively doubling their size. Having established a relationship just before this expansion positioned Bonanza with what became one of NYC's largest general contractors.

"Establishing that relationship early on positioned us well with one of the now largest general contractors in New York City," explains the founder. "It's a testament to the value of preparation, performance, and strong partnerships."

This experience highlights a key benefit of working with Tough Leaf, we don't just make introductions but help certified firms be fully prepared to capitalize on opportunities when they arise. For Bonanza, this meant having all documentation in order, understanding the specific requirements of the project, and being ready to hit the ground running.

How This Model Benefits Everyone

This straightforward approach Tough Leaf brings creates benefits for all parties involved:

 <p>For Subcontractors</p>	 <p>For General Contractors</p>	 <p>For Tough Leaf</p>
<p>Access to larger projects, guidance through complex bidding processes, and connections to major GCs. Many certified firms have the skills and capabilities to handle larger projects but lack the relationships and track record to get their foot in the door. Tough Leaf bridges this gap, helping qualified subcontractors demonstrate their capabilities to the right decision-makers.</p>	<p>Qualified MBE firms help meet diversity requirements while providing quality workmanship from contractors motivated to perform. Instead of scrambling to find certified firms to meet project requirements at the last minute, GCs gain access to pre-vetted partners who have demonstrated their capabilities. This reduces risk while satisfying increasingly important diversity goals on public and private projects</p>	<p>Building lasting connections between qualified certified firms and GCs creates a reliable network of partners for future projects. By ensuring a good match between subcontractor capabilities and project requirements, we've been able to build credibility with both sides of the equation, creating a sustainable business model based on successful outcomes rather than just making introductions.</p>

Practical Advice for Certified Firms

Based on Bonanza's experience, here are some straightforward takeaways for other certified firms looking to grow:

1

Certification is just the start.

Use it as a tool, not a crutch. Your work quality and reliability will ultimately determine your success.

2

Deliver on your promises.

In construction, reputation is everything. Meeting or exceeding expectations consistently is the best marketing strategy.

3

Learn from every project.

Each job, especially challenging ones, offers lessons that can strengthen your operations if you're paying attention.

4

Build strategic partnerships.

Organizations like Tough Leaf can provide the connections and preparation needed to compete for larger projects—take advantage of these resources.

5

Be prepared for the big leagues.

When opportunities with larger GCs come along, understand that expectations will be high regardless of your size. Have your systems, documentation, and teams ready to perform at that level.

Sometimes you need to start small to go big.



The Bottom Line

We aren't highlighting Bonanza's story for motivational fluff, we're shining light on it because it's about practical business development. Their experience shows that certification provides opportunity, but relationships and consistent quality performance drive sustainable growth.

For general contractors looking to work with certified firms, and for MBEs seeking larger projects, Tough Leaf provides the connections and guidance that make business sense for both sides. The construction industry benefits most when qualified firms can access appropriate opportunities regardless of size or background.

As Bonanza's founder Lateef puts it: "Establishing relationships early on positions you well with major contractors. It's about preparation, performance, and partnerships that deliver results."

In an industry where who you know often matters as much as what you know, creating pathways for qualified certified firms to demonstrate their capabilities benefits everyone involved in the construction process, from subcontractors to general contractors to the clients who ultimately occupy the spaces being built.