

From "Living City," February 2004

Half a world apart, yet very united

Finish Line partners share the latest developments of their business.

By Tom Rowley and Joan Duggan

Sometimes "big" things start with a simple act, a simple courtesy. Trying to treat the other person as you would like to be treated, when attempted, can extend to every part of your life: into family, friends, community and business relationships. But never could we imagine where it would take us.

We are Finish Line, an educational services company located in Hyde Park, NY. We provide tutoring, workshops and evaluations for students, teachers, parents, schools and businesses. In response to the launching of the Economy of Communion,¹ we opened our doors in May of 1991 and have been running ever since.

In September of 2001, we received an e-mail asking for assistance. It had come by the most circumspect route, weaving its way from one person through another, until it landed at our door, our computer door that is. The e-mail originated in South Korea—a company was looking for some type of English language assistance. We stopped to ask ourselves, "What could Finish Line do?" Certainly ignoring the request was an option. After all, the task was very unclear. Yet that didn't quite hit true—how was that in keeping with our desire to treat the other person as we would like to be treated? In our return e-mail we introduced ourselves and asked some questions to help us better understand the request.

After four months of e-mailing back and forth, to our surprise we discovered that Finish Line really could help. The South Korean company, TEFOW (Tests of English for Open Worlds), established five years ago, was trying to find an American connection to help provide English language input. Its plan was to create a new English proficiency test as an alternative to the current TOEFL² and TOEIC³ tests. The new test would have five levels of competence, involving reading, writing, usage, speaking and listening components with tests appropriate for both educational and business purposes. TEFOW's philosophy would enable a gradated testing within a real-world context. The TEFOW Commission, which suggested the new tests, is comprised of ten prominent English educators from nine universities in Seoul.

Initially Finish Line spent time editing a manual that outlined the structure for the series of tests. After the publication of the manual, TEFOW asked for continued assistance with additional English language services within its educational framework. Since then Finish Line has been providing English writing, editing and recording services and has produced 10 audio CDs for the listening part of the various levels of the test. "With the addition of the speaking and writing sections in TEFOW," John Kim, president of TEFOW, explained, "the test's reliability will be ensured, and it will be recognized by the public as an important English assessment tool."

"The Far East, especially Korea, has a desperate need to revise its English educational curriculum," Kim told Living City in commenting on the new venture. "I had started e-mailing a large number of U.S. universities two years ago, but had never received a response. I felt as if the last leaf on the tree was about to fall. Then the reply from Finish Line came, giving TEFOW a possibility to find a new core element and to be born anew.

"Unity bridges all differences regardless of geographical distance, race and culture. We will continue working together, bringing to life the vision of TEFOW," he stated.

TEFOW continued developing, and soon it was time to unveil it to the Korean public. Last October, TEFOW held a seminar in Seoul entitled, "A Plan for Advancing International Communication Abilities." It was attended by government officials, human resource managers of major Korean businesses and scholars. A Finish Line representative presented the work. The education section of a Korean newspaper⁴ covered the event, explaining how "the tests were developed in conjunction with a US-based service, Finish Line, and therefore the language style will be familiar to those who want to study or work in the US. With the integration of the speaking and writing sections, which was always a weak point in the current US-based tests," the article continued, "TEFOW's comprehensive test evaluation system will be better able to determine an individual's English ability."

In this era of globalization, in which distance is no longer an impediment to communications, this project continues to be an amazing experience of cooperation in education beyond borders. Crossing language and cultural lines has been a very rewarding and interesting experience, one from which each company has been enriched.

1) Economy of Communion in Freedom: also known as the Economy of Sharing, is an innovative economic proposal launched by Chiara Lubich in 1991, which brought about immediate developments all over the world. At present there are close to 800 businesses worldwide following its guidelines, which include sharing part of their profit to help those in need and to foster the growth of the structures and programs of formation for the spreading of a culture of giving. See LC July 2001 and August 2003 for an overview of the Economy of Communion or read the book by Luigino Bruni, "The Economy of Communion," New City Press, 2002; 2) Test of English as a Foreign Language; 3) Test of English for International Communication; 4) "Jo Jaewoo," Education Section, A21, Hankookilbo, Oct.22, 2003.

Finish Line, an Economy of Communion tutoring business, opened its doors in 1991 in Hyde Park, NY. It currently serves approximately 300 students a year in almost every subject. Finish Line's 17 teachers book approximately 4000 hours of tutoring services per year.

A rewarding change in plans

By Joan Duggan

October 5, 2003, found me scraping the back deck of Finish Line. This year, for sure, the railings needed to be painted. I had it all figured out. Scrape today, and then spend two hours each day for the coming week. After that, the deck would be done, and the last task of fall complete. Or so I thought.

The next morning, there was an e-mail. It was from Korea asking if it was possible for Finish Line to be present at the seminar to be held in Seoul, on October 15th. Also, TEFOW would be very happy if Finish Line could make a presentation. They understood if this was impossible on such short notice, but everything was moving ahead more quickly than expected. So, throw down the paint brushes and bring up Power Point: a new plan began!

We worked like fury that week, trying to put ourselves in TEFOW's place, creating a presentation that spoke about Finish Line and the alliance that TEFOW and Finish Line had forged in the past two years. Burn that CD, hop on a plane on the 12th, arrive the night of the 13th, have one day to meet, plan, revise and finalize the presentation; give the presentation; hop back on the plane on the 16th.

A challenging itinerary to say the least! Yet the whole experience was delightful. There was even a three-hour break for sightseeing—just enough to ensure that we go back to see more!

The seminar was a success and the presentation turned into a real work of collaboration and team building. Now the bond between us is stronger.

All in a day's work

By JoAnn Rowley

In trying to provide pools of potential questions, editing, and audio recording services for TEFOW's consideration, Finish Line has reconfirmed that working in an atmosphere of reciprocity is the only way to go. The work gets done; it is brought into the realm of fun and, as an outstanding result, a better product is produced.

In the recording portion of the work, which produced 10 audio CDs, six people were involved: 5 voices and a sound engineer. We all have heard so many horror stories about this kind of job, with conflicting egos, lack of communication and so on, but during this phase of the project we had some of the best moments of our working together. Each person involved tried to make the experience the best it could be for the others; the end result was to experience among us a dimension of family. Not only was the product well received at TEFOW, but it became a gift for us as well.

In the written text, we wanted to offer this attitude using also articles drawn from Living City, as well as from other stories and experiences that reflect our values and our vision of life. When the pilot testing was completed in Korea, the participants specifically mentioned that they had liked the stories and it had been fun taking the test.

This experience has been, and continues to be for us, a reflection of how the spirituality of unity, through one of its expressions in the Economy of Communion, carries within it a new way of working together.