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No Brothers Left Behind

By Kim R. Wells

If you are a career-savvy student, you are probably already involved in one of the diversity recruitment programs on your campus. Yet, though some of you may have successfully connected with an employer through a diversity initiative, it appears that many collegiate Black men could still benefit from a little more "corporate diversity love." With graduation rates of collegiate Black men slipping to only 35 percent, it is obvious that both corporate America's goal of authentic diversity and Black college males' dreams of success may be slipping away. But in today's world of instant messaging, Blackberries, satellite radio and robotic rovers on Mars, we know that in America we can always find a way to connect when we want to. With increased educational alliances and targeted corporate communication aimed at collegiate Black men, we can ensure that no brothers are left behind.

In an effort to provide insight into some of the educational and career development experiences of collegiate Black men, we would like to share some excerpts from a recent roundtable discussion with seven collegiate Black men at Howard University.

Kim R. Wells, Director of Career Services and facilitator: What are some of your career goals after graduation?

Derek Butts: Junior Insurance and Actuarial Science Major in the School of Business: I am interested in working for a major or growing corporation within the insurance industry.

Abbey George: Junior Political Science Major in the College of Arts and Sciences: I am interested in going to law school and afterwards pursuing a career in politics.

William J. White: Junior Fashion Merchandising Major in the College of Arts and Sciences: I would like to be a fashion producer and specialize in producing fashion shows and photo shoots.

Dennis B. Rogers: Ph.D. candidate (2008) and Political Science Major in the Howard University Graduate School: I am interested in being a university professor and an entrepreneur.

Jordan Cuby: Senior Psychology Major (Pre-med) in the College of Arts and Sciences: I am interested in attending medical school in pursuit of a joint MD/MPA program specializing in epidemiology.

Martell Covington: Sophomore Hospitality Management Major in the School of Business: I



have a few interests. I would like to produce Hip Hop and R&B music. I am also interested in owning a sports bar/restaurant and possibly a chain of hotels.

Lawrence Spires: Junior Information Systems and Decision Sciences Major in the School of Business: I would like to be a business analyst. I am also interested in pursuing my MBA after graduation.

Kim R. Wells: Who are some of the professional Black men that inspire you?

Jordan Cuby: Dr. Cornel West. He is very inspirational in speech and action; Bill Cosby because he is an educational scholar and entertainer; Jesse Jackson because of his great leadership in national politics; and Sean "Diddy" Combs.

Dennis B. Rogers: Dr. Na'im Akbar because of his research and commitment to uplifting men of color, and his ability to maintain a business while serving as a professor at Florida State.

Martell Covington: I would have to say my stepfather, Rashad Byrdson, I also admire Earl Graves, Bob Johnson, and Sean "Jay-Z" Carter.

William J. White: I admire Black males that have become prominent in the fashion industry like Stephen Burrows and Sean "Diddy" Combs.

Lawrence Spires: I admire Denzel Washington and Michael Jordan; they both always seem to strive for the highest standards of success, and both are also willing to give back to others.

Kim R. Wells: How many of you have mentors? (Three of the seven young men raise their hands. But all commented that they would love to have one.)

Lawrence Spires: Some of my close friends' fathers have acted as my mentors. I feel like I connect well with them on issues such as career advice, and advice on life in general.

Jordan Cuby: I don't have anyone I would consider as a mentor at the moment. Many professional Black men seem very busy and don't seem to have a lot of time.

Dennis B. Rogers: I don't have any one person that I would consider a mentor, but I do have a number of people that I would consider personal advisors. Unfortunately, in the past some Black men I have gone to for support have pulled back on their promises or commitments which has been disappointing.

Martell Covington: My stepfather is my mentor; we talk several times throughout the week. We talk a lot about various things in life.

William J. White: My mentor would have to be one of my professors, Dr. Reggie Ray, who is a renowned costume designer at Howard.

Kim R. Wells: In considering your future career, what are your thoughts on the job market for Black men?

Derek Butts: I believe the job market is improving. There are increasingly more opportunities. There still is a lot of competition, but there are a lot of opportunities out there to be found.

Lawrence Spires: I feel that things are improving to some degree in the job market. More opportunities are out there than in years past, but only if you are willing to put in the time and effort to achieve your goals.

Dennis B. Rogers: I personally enjoy watching young entrepreneurs succeed in the marketplace.

The advent of Google, Facebook, My Space, Sean John Clothing, and other ventures all began as the result of young professionals and upstarts. This affirms the need for new creative companies in the marketplace of ideas.

William J. White: The job market seems to be doing better, but I still believe that the accessibility to opportunity for all people, particularly people of different creeds and colors, is still at a deficit.

Kim R. Wells: What are some of the career development and academic challenges you think Black men experience in preparing for the workforce?

Abbey George: Just having the right mindset to succeed. I don't think some Black men take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Derek Butts: Some need to become more aware of how to dress and act in different business situations.

William J. White: It is difficult at times to just maintain who you are as a Black man. I have also had to learn the difference between when it's time to fight for an issue or leave it alone.

Dennis B. Rogers: I have found that the simple act of obtaining credible information from sources that are trustworthy has been very difficult. It is hard sometimes to know who and what information you can trust these days.

Kim R. Wells: Have any of you experienced any form of discrimination while working at internships or other work experiences?

Derek Butts: Yes. I had a situation once with a co-worker at an internship that challenged the credibility of my education at Howard versus his background from Penn State. But needless to say this individual proved to be an inexperienced and ignorant professional that I learned to ignore.

Dennis B. Rodgers: I have experienced both silent and vocal discrimination in work settings. In one situation I had to deal with a supervisor who would praise me verbally but would not put it into writing where it would've benefited me.

Kim R. Wells: Why do you gentlemen think the numbers of Black men using the Career Services office and attending career programs is lower than the participation of Black women?

Dennis B. Rodgers: That is a good question. Maybe most men see the trees and not the forest of trees. Maybe men on campus don't know the office exists because they are preoccupied with other issues.

Derek Butts: Men sometimes lose focus. We have a lot of distractions such as the number of women who outnumber us on campus (laughter). I don't think many of the men on campus really take the time to understand the benefits of the career office.

Abbey George: Black men have too much pride, and sometimes are afraid to admit we need assistance. We sometimes get caught up thinking we need to make everything happen on our own.

William J. White: Black women are much more optimistic about their careers and more willing to take advantage of opportunities. Black men have been through much more oppression and aren't as enthusiastic about potential opportunities.

Kim R. Wells: As far as you gentleman are concerned, what could employers do to better

connect with Black men on campus?

Derek Butts: Many companies don't articulate the tangible and intangible benefits of working for their companies. If Black men knew more about them, they may have more interest.

Lawrence Spires: It would help to show the diversity throughout the company and how they believe their companies can assist candidates in creating change.

Jordan Cuby: Companies need to do a better job of targeting Black men outside of the school of business. Most companies don't seem aware of other students on campus.

Dennis B. Rodgers: I believe companies need to do a better job of investing their research and development dollars in knowing how to connect with Black males. This would help them in better understanding the universal stories and language of young Black men.

Kim R. Wells: Do you believe that diversity initiatives are leveling the playing field for African-American men?

Jordan Cuby: Yes and no. Diversity initiatives can only assist us in getting in the door, but moving ahead is up to us.

Derek Butts: Yes, diversity programs are working because they are moving things in the right direction.

Dennis B. Rogers: I am not sure. I really don't know enough about the results of diversity programs.

Kim R. Wells: What parting words of advice would you offer other collegiate Black men?

Abbey George: Make sure you are taking advantage of all of the opportunities around you; many Black men simply don't do that.

Derek Butts: Don't be so prideful all the time; ask for help if you need it; otherwise, you will miss out on many opportunities on campus and in life.

Dennis B. Rogers: Don't give up! Always remember your reasons for being in college.
Lawrence Spires: Always stay focused, and strive for excellence. Seek assistance from others around you when necessary.

Jordan Cuby: Without support, especially from those around you who can help, you will go nowhere.

Words of Wisdom from Successful Black Executives

For generations collegiate Black men have defied the odds to advance in their educational endeavors and careers. Below are timeless words of wisdom shared by successful African-American executives to encourage collegiate Black men.

Mitch Thomas

Disney Worldwide Services, Inc.

Manager, Diversity Staffing Strategy

"Gain as much practical work experience as possible through internship opportunities. Companies want graduates that have company culture exposure and can hit the ground running with a minimum amount of training."

W. Frank Williams, III

Bank of America

*Senior Vice President and Senior
Client Manager*

"Find a mentor and/or advocate. A mentor is someone that can give you career guidance throughout your professional life. There are times when you may have to take a leap of faith to leave a job, start your own business, or head down a different career path. The key is to have someone senior to you to bounce thoughts and ideas off of."

Garnett R. Stowe, Jr.

Raytheon Company

*Vice President, National
Intelligence Programs*

" 'Luck favors the prepared' is an example of an old saying that endures to this day. Team leaders or managers today are obsessed with schedules, coordination and task completion. Successful team leaders quickly assess which team members are dependable and, of course, which team members are not. As a new team member with a freshly minted baccalaureate or master's degree, you will probably receive a team assignment well below your capability, at least in your mind. Remember initially that you are an unknown quantity and the team leader has several ways to test your capabilities."

Hardy Brown II

Wilberforce University

Director, Cooperative Education

"Learn the art of Schmoozing. This is the lost art of noticing people, connecting with them, keeping in touch with them and benefiting from relationships with them. Schmoozing is about connecting with people in a mutually productive and pleasurable way; a skill that has taken on new importance in our fragmented, harried, fiber-optic- laced world."

Chris Tabourne

Enterprise-Rent-A-Car

Corporate Diversity Manager

"The ability to communicate effectively across all cultures is a very important asset in the workplace. In today's work environment, diversity is not just about women and African Americans. Now diversity takes on many cultural dimensions, such as age, sexual orientation, language, religion, etc. In fact, studies have indicated that most employees leave jobs as a result of a bad relationship with their boss or co-workers. Often, these workplace conflicts start because of a lack of cross-cultural understanding. So the more effective you are in being able to build respect, trust, and confidence with people across cultural lines, the more effective you will be in reaching success in whatever career you choose."

Eric Douglas Keene

Keene Advisory Group

President

"Invest time in understanding what is important as compared to what is simply interesting or impressive. Of course, this metric can change from one company to another, but it's your job to figure it out; no one is obliged to tell you. We all know individuals who focus on the latter two at the expense of the former. Every generation has names for the people with big titles, preposterous claims and larger than life stories who at the end of the day aren't about anything. Over time those who focus on the important win."

New Feature of Interest



[The Professional Edge Blog with Kim R Wells](#)

Career issues, tips and straight-talk from an insider's view, with **Kim R. Wells**, noted career columnist and director of Howard University Career Services

Kim R. Wells is the Director of Career Services at Howard University, President-Elect of the Maryland Career Development Association, and Chair of the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) Diversity Advancement Committee. Mr. Wells is also an experienced human capital and strategy consultant.

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[\[top of page\]](#)

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