**BUSINESS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DANA SUTTON**

**FINAL**

Hello everyone and welcome to this Minority Leadership Forum. You are here because, in a way, you may have betrayed yourselves... in the best, most empowering sense of the term... you see, people with extraordinary capabilities and potential find it difficult to remain in the background. They... **WE** need to “show what we got...” it’s important to heed that inner voice that tells you to show your team, your company, your industry and community, that you are willing to go **THERE**... to do the work and forge new trails to success. Each and every one of you in this room has a unique point of view and yet to be discovered talents and motivation... we’re here to clarify those points today in order to be able to harness that power you possess and use it for expanded growth opportunities. Madame C.J. Walker, one of the earliest **MINORITY FEMALE** leaders said, “I had to make my own living and my own **OPPORTUNITY**. But I made it!! Don’t sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. ***GET UP*** and make them.”

I’ve been with Enterprise for the past seventeen years. I started in the same place that you did... as an entry level employee. As I made my way in life and in the corporation, I had a lot of priceless lessons and invaluable experiences. I learned to show up, do my job, and at the same time, keep looking to see what was needed and wanted... what **ELSE** was there to learn? How **ELSE** might I get worthwhile training? What other valuable knowledge do I need to satisfy my thirst for excellence? I keep asking myself questions every day as a means to “check my systems” and as a way to find, not **IF**, but **WHAT** I might be missing in order to satisfy my own demands on myself to be the best employee... the best manager... and the best person I can be. I realized that by looking into the future... to literally visualize what that would look like... **from nothing**, it served to make me a road map. That visualization gave me intention, purpose, and focus. It showed me the way.

As I observed my surroundings... as I checked the working environments in which I found myself, and as I worked with higher ups while learning the ropes, I discovered the elements that would be needed in order to succeed in business and in life, and there’s an overarching theme on the path to leadership success.... I’m about to give you the “secret of life” in just a few words... so if there were ever a time to pay attention... It’s **NOW**!! (**Wait for the laugh**). **READY**?? Here goes.... you need **FOUR** identifiable elements for leadership success... of course if you can think of more, let’s discuss that... but for now, we’ll break it down to:

* **MENTORSHIP/ SPONSORSHIP**
* **MOTIVATION/DRIVE/VISUALIZATION**
* **PERFORMANCE**
* **BUILDING YOUR OWN PERSONAL BRAND**

Now, I want to say that these elements are not ranked in priority order, because they are **ALL** important and necessary in developing the character needed to be an effective, responsive, proactive, and respected leader. I think the best way I can illustrate these points is to tell you a little about myself.

When I was a young girl growing up in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I had this recurring picture in my mind. Even at a very early age, I had envisioned myself wearing a business suit to work.... every day. I even have a drawing I did of myself... I was in the **third grade** at the time, and the sketch showed me wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase as I explained to the teacher that someday, I wanted to be **the BOSS**. That visualization process took me through my elementary school and high school years. That feeling inside of me... to be a leader... didn’t abate or fade. It got stronger. In high school I honed in on marketing and by college, I decided to focus on sales and marketing.

(**Was this at the same time in the chronology? This is not clear**) At around that time, something happened that motivated me through adversity. In 1998, my father died suddenly.... I realized that I did not want to struggle for money... I wanted to give my future children more opportunities than I ever had.... I wanted to be able to provide for my family and most of all, I wanted to be a **strong, black, female** role model... for myself.... my family... my friends.... and my professional community.

I learned about Enterprise Rent A Car while studying for my BA at EMU. The company was written about in several of my marketing textbooks and I was intrigued by its dedication to customer service and its positive employee culture. With the support of my student center and career counselor, I focused on working at Enterprise as my first job upon graduating from college.

I was hired in GP20 in Ann Arbor Michigan in September 2001, eager, willing, and encouraged by the company philosophy of growth and advancement based on performance and not necessarily tenure. I was willing to do whatever it took to work my tail off.... and as a collegiate athlete, I had plenty of practice at that! There are no real shortcuts to achieve success.... it takes consistent hard work.... a sense of ownership and responsibility, and the willingness to do more, give more, and stretch beyond whatever we define as our “comfort zone.”

Over the course of my seventeen years at Enterprise, the scenery may have changed... I moved from Michigan to Canada, and back to the United States, but the drive, the willingness to learn and grow, the persistence to overcome obstacles.... and ladies... make no mistake... we STILL face challenges... the passion to continually improve and fulfill my vision did not diminish... of course, as I got married and had my children, my priorities shifted to having a healthy, productive loving family, and while I took some time off to dedicate to my husband and two young daughters, Alivia, now six, and Leia, now two, my focus became broader and more multi-purpose.... while, in the beginning of my career, I was intent to build a life and a strong, meaningful career, with the birth of my daughters, I knew I was being watched very closely.... I know what this world is like, and I know how few positive role models there are to inspire and lead us. Life **REALLY** changed after having two little girls... and I found myself paying more and more attention to the struggles that young black girls have to endure in life...racism... sexism... and other “isms” that threaten to challenge our every day existence. It’s funny, but when I was young, those thoughts didn’t really occur to me, but as I saw the world filtered through my daughters’ potential, it shook me up.

As I continued to advance in my career at Enterprise, my targets, goals, and choices became “committee driven...” I had collaborators... my family, and my career path was then mapped by what would work for all of us. While opportunities presented themselves, we had to assess what made the most sense for the family. And while some chances were passed on, my vision that had evolved... that constantly evolves.... served my ever adapting purpose. I was still relentlessly determined to keep looking to find my place in which to grow and contribute while nurturing and encouraging a strong and happy family.

Along the way, and especially now, I remember those four non-negotiable elements needed in order to be a success. There is no substitute for integrity, sincerity, teamwork, and dedication.

To break down those elements, let’s take a closer look at each one....

* **MENTORSHIP and SPONSORSHIP**: No one goes through this life alone. No one is autonomous, and **NONE** of us knows all that’s needed to know... especially when we start out in the business world. Through high school and college, we had teachers, career counselors, and people that supported us in assessing our assets and intentions... they also pointed out the parts that need work... and make no mistake... we are **ALL** works in process!! Throughout my career at Enterprise, there have been people that have taken me under their wing and shown me the ropes, and in turn, I have done the same.... from my first guides and mentors back in Ann Arbor to my most current colleagues and advisors, **NONE** of this gets done alone. My most recent sounding board was AVP, Mike Guadagnoli, who worked with me, and had many meaningful and productive conversations with me as I made my choice to move to GP41. I have to say that no matter where we find ourselves in the Enterprise hierarchy, the collegial support we get is invaluable.... and thanks to the collaborative culture we are all so fortunate to be a part of, it’s natural that all of us are encouraged to do the same. I cannot emphasize enough the value of mentorship and partnership... when you have questions... when you’re struggling with how to achieve a work/life balance, when you’re wondering how to handle more delicate situations, there’s a good chance that someone in your Enterprise circle has been through similar trials. It’s important to have multiple mentors for different purposes as needed. Some will guide you through different lessons while others can support you in networking and meeting the people that will strengthen your outreach. Remember... you are **NOT** alone... you wouldn’t be able to do any of this alone, and part of your success is being able to include and bond with your co-workers. Vernon Jordan said, “You are where you are today because you stand on somebody’s shoulders. And wherever you are heading, you cannot get there by yourself. If you stand on the shoulders of others, you have a reciprocal responsibility to live your life so that others may stand in your shoulders. It’s the quid pro quo of life. We exist temporarily through what we take, but we live forever through what we give.”
* **MOTIVATION/DRIVE/VISUALIZATION**: As I’ve told you, I knew from an early age what I wanted and where I was going.... and what I was packing.... (**Wait for the laugh**)... in fact I’m trying to remember if I visualized what, If anything was in that briefcase... a power lunch of peanut butter and jelly? The third grade interpretation of “What Color is Your Parachute? Crayolas or cartridge pens? I don’t know, but I think I was probably the only one of my friends that dreamt of briefcases! I used the circumstances and events in my life... like my father’s death, and turned each issue into a motivating moment. I may have started young, but there is no wrong time to begin to be inspired and focused and to set and aim for future goals. Every moment we have the opportunity to commit and recommit to our well being and our purpose in life... **NO MATTER WHAT** curveballs are thrown our way. Leah Busque of Task Rabbit reminds us, “I wake up every morning and think to myself, ‘How far can I push the company forward in the next 24 hours?’
* **PERFORMANCE**: There is **NO SUBSTITUTE** for hard work, accountability, ownership, and collaboration. There are no shortcuts to experience. The only way to gain experience is by **DOING**. **EVERYTHING**. You cannot expect to be an effective leader if you aren’t familiar with properly doing and completing every function on your team.... and there are **NO EXCUSES**. This is non-negotiable. There’s no flubbing this one. It is your willingness to show up, take responsibility, and do everything with an entrepreneurial spirit that will prove to be the most personally satisfying and professionally worthwhile. Neither life nor business is a dress rehearsal.... **YOU’RE ON**. And on top of that, as a member of a minority group, performance is key... just to get a seat “at the table.” Estee Lauder, the cosmetics mogul, teaches us, “I never dreamed about success. I **worked** for it.”
* **BUILDING YOUR OWN PERSONAL BRAND**: Enterprise is a big company, but there’s only **ONE YOU**. How do you distinguish yourself? By being **YOU**. Be true to yourself. Speak up when needed, but make sure you listen...**ALWAYS** listen... observe... take notes... and proceed in such a way that your personal value and “brand” is unmistakable.

It’s been said that “The path from dreams to success does exist. May you have the vision to find it, the courage to get on to it, and the perseverance to follow it.” You’re here because your skills and talents have been noted. Who you are got you in the door and found you a desk. Now it’s up to you to really “show your chops.” Those intangibles that you bring with you will distinguish you. Of the thousands of applications received by Human Resources, only about three percent are hired.... and there are definitely qualities that need to be discovered in order to make that cut. **YOU** possess those qualities.... and even if you think you’re on the first rung of the corporate ladder, someone is looking up to you for guidance. Never forget that through it all, you are a leader...and that’s **NOT** someone that bosses people around. A leader takes people where that thought they couldn’t go... and then encourages them to produce positive results. The climb will get steeper. The challenges will get tougher... but the rewards will be worth it, and in those challenges you will discover your greatest and most valuable lessons. Just know yourself, be willing to put in the time, effort, and extra something. Be flexible, open, and prepared to do what’s needed for the good of the company and yourself, and you, too, will be an excellent example of leadership at Enterprise. I look forward to working with you and hearing great things about each one of you! Thank you all!