



HOW THIS CHAMPION FOR DIVERSITY OVERCAME ADVERSITY

by Mikell Worley

MONICA DIXON works as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion for Hershey Entertainment and Resorts Company. Monica felt an immediate connection when she first heard about *Women-CONNECT*, because it reflects the philosophy of her work. “The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is committed to developing a climate that recognizes and values the diversity of all Hershey and Resorts employees and guests.” Monica explains that the concept of diversity includes a broader set of qualities than just race and gender. “Valuing diversity means creating a workplace that respects and includes differences. It recognizes the unique contribution that individuals can make, creates an environment that maximizes the potential of the employees, and is welcoming to all of our guests.”

One of the many responsibilities of Monica’s job includes overseeing a Diversity Leadership Council. The council is committed to recruitment and retention, an emphasis on diversity, workplace awareness/community involvement, and communication.

These categories are very similar to the direction of *Women-CONNECT*. The magazine will attract and support diverse women who are interested in networking, workplace success, community involvement, and improved communication. A publication of this kind promises to provide other women with a wealth of resources and opportunities.

There have been numerous hurdles in Monica’s career. She recognizes that her role is unique as it relates to her age, color, marital status, and gender. “These cultural factors unquestionably present major challenges. But they also provide me with the opportunity to mentor other women who may not have reached this plateau.” Monica continues, “I frequently have to camouflage my frustrations with a smile and a sense of confidence. There are very few mentors who have the same set of cultural components that can provide me with mentorship as I continue up the corporate ladder.”

A recurring theme in Monica’s priorities is her commitment to supporting others. Monica has a passion for human relations. She strongly recommends that everyone

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actively seek out opportunities to encourage and support others. “First and foremost, as you climb the ladder of success, reach back and pull others up. Never get so caught up in your own success that you forget the struggles and barriers that you faced. It is critical that we help others who are dealing with those same challenges.” There is no doubt that if more people were willing to set aside competition in the work place, and instead work collaboratively, the benefit to the employees and the organization would be significant.

Her willingness to encourage and support others may well come from the strength that her family has provided for her. She notes with pride that her parents have been married for 33 years and “they are still going strong!” She has a brother who is four years older and their upbringing was structured and supportive.

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Monica refers to her mother as Mom (a.k.a “sergeant”). Monica sees her as a very tough military officer, who knows how to get the job done and takes no prisoner. “I have been fortunate to grow up in a home where there was stability, love, and God. This has given me an invaluable blueprint from which I can, and have, built my own life goals.”

Monica is the single mother of a 15-month old son, Dominick. “I find myself today as a parent, exercising some of the same values and behaviors that I experienced as a child. I see in myself now many of the valuable qualities that my mother directly and indirectly taught me.”

There were many lessons that Monica learned from her mother. “She taught us never to allow others to define who we are. We were taught to love and respect ourselves.” Spiritual learning was an important component of Monica’s upbringing. “Always have the Lord in the center of your life for only He can show you the path of true happiness.” Too often we look to external factors to define who we are. There is great wisdom in looking internally and to our higher power for our strength and direction.

Monica recognizes the value of taking care of herself first so that she can then care of others. “As a young mother, it is important to set the right priorities; namely, take care of myself first, my child next, and my professional self last. I cannot be an effective professional or a loving, competent parent unless I take care of myself first.”

In spite of many similarities with her mother, Monica has developed her own very unique and individual style. “I benefit from some of mother’s qualities; however, I have learned to draw my own blueprint for my own life, which is different from that of my parents.”

Blueprints, goal setting, discipline, prioritizing, and the drive to keep one’s self physically and mentally healthy are steps

that Monica notes as essential to success. “Plan your life’s goals very carefully and never set goals that are designed to impress others, for those goals will be washed away very quickly. The only person you need to please is yourself and those who are dependent upon you. Only you can define who you are and what you are. Never give people permission to discredit you or cut into your self-confidence.”

Balancing the roles of mother, friend, daughter, corporate executive, and involved citizen is tremendously demanding. “Time is always my biggest challenge. However, I have grown to recognize I have to put first what is most important. Then I am able to be flexible with my time. Again, my greatest responsibility is to my son, Dominick, and his health and welfare.”

“ Does it add value to your life? ”

Monica cautions that even though we may set very specific goals there will always be detours along the way. We may not always get everything we want according to the time line that we set. This can cause feelings of inadequacy and frustration. “When our life direction changes temporarily or permanently, it does not mean that we have failed. We need to have faith and understand that God has a different plan for us.”

“Does it add value to your life?” This is a question Monica recommends that we ask ourselves. It can apply to relationships, how we spend our time, or how we spend our money. This powerful question can give us direction throughout the day, for every decision—from what we

eat, to the books we read, and the shows we watch. If we use this question every time we need to make a choice, it will guide us to the right decision.

Monica has achieved impressive successes in all areas of her life journey, yet muses that although she has come a long way she is not where she wants to be. Monica’s quote parallels the journey of women throughout history: “We’re not where we want to be, but we’re not where we used to be!”

“We have undoubtedly come a long way over the years, but there is so much more opportunity for learning and growth. *Women-CONNECT* can provide the vehicle for women of all cultures and aspects of life experience to teach, support, nurture, motivate, and mentor each other to continue our journey with renewed enthusiasm and success.” ❖

Mikell Worley is the founder and president of Mikell’s Treasures. She has spent over 20 years designing and delivering self-improvement trainings, has had several cover stories in various magazines and recently illustrated her first children’s book. She is an advocate for women and children. She has two grown daughters.