

PERSPECTIVE ABOUT TPODMEP

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Larry H. Barkley, Sr.

PROFESSIONAL/ PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Tell us about your background.

I grew up in Salisbury, Maryland, and attended the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne from 1976 to 1980, with a major in business administration and a minor in pre-law.

My entire career has been in retailing. While I was in college, I worked part-time as a clerk at Sears, Roebuck and Company. After graduation, I accepted a job as a store manager for Montgomery Ward, advanced to district operations manager, and then worked in various management positions for Bradlees, Caldor, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Bulgari Corporation of America, Inc.

In 2006, I went to work for Georg Jensen, the Danish silver company, as president for the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean of Georg Jensen USA Inc.

In 2008, I joined Timex Group Luxury Watches as president for the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean. Through a licensing agreement, we manufacture watches for three luxury brands – Salvatore Ferragamo, Valentino, and Versace – and we also make jewelry for Versace. Our products range in price from about \$1,000 to \$280,000.

I have a staff of five sales professionals, an operations manager, and a marketing coordinator. Our sales team sells this product line to independent jewelry stores and watch companies throughout the region. The people who make the watches report to a corporate office in Switzerland, where my boss supervises the manufacturing operation. I'm responsible for liaison, providing watches to the stores in the region.

I joined Timex Group Luxury Watches in April of 2008, just before the recession began to affect us. The downswing really started in the third and fourth quarters of 2008. Even in a recession, we've got to continue to grow. The business is not growing as fast as we would like, but it's growing. We're holding our own.

PROFESSIONAL/ PERSONAL SUCCESS ASSESSMENT

How do you stay motivated?

It's primarily self-motivation and a Christian upbringing. I was always a very optimistic person. I've been blessed with that talent to always stay upbeat and positive.

As a devout Christian, I believe people are given the ability to motivate themselves. When you're the leader of a group or team, you're able to motivate and support people, no matter how bad the business outlook and projections are.

How do you keep yourself on track to achieve your goals?

I set realistic goals, and then formulate a plan to reach those goals – but I’m never truly satisfied to reach the first goal. I keep moving the measuring stick up another couple of rungs, even beyond the company objectives. I strive to reach goals and exceed them, as opposed to just reaching them.

What inspires you?

I’m inspired by the different challenges, religious or job-related, that people encounter and conquer – by committed, dedicated people from whatever walk of life who despite all the tough things in life keep driving forward.

What was the biggest mistake or failure in your life or professional journey?

Early in my career I was probably a little too gung-ho and overanxious, not realizing that could be a hindrance to my personal and professional growth. Instead of reading all of the signs in front of me, I would move forward. I’ve learned to slow down, to be very cool and calm in making decisions, even difficult decisions. Now I take my time and work methodically through the process.

What was your biggest success?

My family. My wife, Angela, and I have been married 23 years. My biggest success is to see my three children growing up and becoming part of the work force.

Q. Do you have any time-management practices that have helped you be more successful?

I’m very meticulous about getting back to people as promised. I try to return calls and emails within 24 hours.

Early on, I learned from my father not to be late for a meeting. I’m the guy who is always there 15 to 30 minutes before. I just have this gene that I can’t be late.

What are three personal philosophies that have guided you the most that might guide others?

First, under-promise and over-deliver.

Second, always be a leader rather than a follower, even if you’re in a non-management role.

Third, never be afraid to ask a question or say, “I don’t know. Could you explain it to me? Could you tell me more?”

What other living achiever in our society do you most admire?

I’ve been an avid fan of the Boston Celtics basketball team for most of my 50 years, ever since I started liking basketball. As long as they’ve been a team, they’ve never been about flashiness. They’ve been about the basics, playing basketball the way it’s supposed to be played. I admire people who stick to the basics, tell the truth, treat people the way they want to be treated. Anyone who comes to play for that organization understands it’s less about you and more about the team.

What defining moment set your ambition or philosophy for success in motion?

Coming out of college, I hadn't thought of retail as a career, even though I had been working part-time at Sears. I took the LSAT [Law School Admission Test] and thought I was on the way to law school.

Then I received a call from an executive I worked with at Sears who had gone on to a position at Montgomery Ward. He wanted to make me the youngest store manager in Montgomery Ward's history.

He asked me a simple question: Did I really want to be an attorney? He had his human resources person prepare this very elaborate presentation for me, stressing the loans I would need to pay for law school, and the difficulty of finding a position after graduating. I was convinced.

I started as the manager of a small Montgomery Ward store outside of Culpepper, Virginia. I was there for two years, from 1980 to 1982, and then became a district operations manager from 1982 to 1984, before moving on to Bradlee and Caldor – both discount chains that are no longer around.

Another defining moment was the opportunity that Saks Fifth Avenue gave me to move into the luxury retail sector.

Discount retail taught me about luxury retail. Many more people are vying for the discount pie, so you really have to be about customer service to keep customers shopping at your venue. Luxury forgot about customer service, thinking that their names alone would bring the customers in. I've pushed my staff very hard to provide top-notch customer service. The big picture is how customers feel when they walk in and when they walk out.

What do you most want to be remembered for?

Being a person who was always upbeat, loved his family, and delivered on his promises.

Please talk a bit about giving back to society-update us on your activities and the importance for other successful people to give back.

I love young people. I'm always trying to teach valuable lessons to my children and other children. Whenever I get an opportunity to talk with young people, I encourage them to set an example. Young people watch what adults say and do, and whether they live up to what they say they're going to do.

Right now I'm on the board of the Madison Square Boys & Girls Club in New York City, but my involvement with young people dates back many years.

When I started in college, I noted a need inside the Somerset County, Maryland, school system, where many children from low-income families were not receiving direction from a guidance counselor. I wrote a program, Counselors Acting for Transition, that would bring back to high school recent graduates who had gone on to college, the armed services, or the world of work.

I submitted the program to an organization, which could not fund it. Then one of my guidance counselors saw it and asked me to make a presentation to the Maryland Youth Employability Branch. The state hired me to administer the program I wrote and paid me to work on it part time. I did that the whole time I was in college, in addition to working part-time at Sears, and

As part of that program, I was responsible for finding summer jobs for young people when they became 16 years old and eligible to work. They needed a work permit and family permission. The state paid the salary, and they were required to attend classes a couple of times a year. For those interested in the armed services, the program brought the recruiters to them, and helped them get their paperwork in order. For those planning to attend college, the program helped to ensure that the applications were filled out and submitted in a timely manner.

It was a very good give-back program. I understand that elements of it still exist today.

LEADERSHIP

From your experience perspective- what specific leadership skill sets are vital for young professionals to obtain and master- coming out of college- that will equip them to excel in today's highly competitive corporate and business climate?

Exercising patience is the key. Many of today's young people want instant gratification. They want to be the boss now. They come out of school and think they should be in a management position immediately.

They also need a good work ethic and a high level of commitment. Working hard and making sacrifices is part of the requirement to get ahead. When I got into this retail business, whatever had to be done, I did it. I wanted to be the guy somebody was reporting to. My aspiration was always to rise as high as I could within the different organizations in which I worked.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINORITIES AND WOMEN

While we've seen definite growth with minorities and women in key decision-making roles, on board of directors, serving in key executive positions and steering companies as CEOs, as well as doors being opened nationwide to discuss and implement important issues on diversity and inclusion, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

What immediate steps need to be taken to ensure that diversity and inclusion is not just a flash-in-the-pan topic, but something that is built upon each and every year, in the corporate and business society?

If companies really want to develop and show diversity, they need a strategy:

- 1. Recruit for entry-level positions. They should make sure that historically black and heavily Hispanic campuses are on their recruitment list, to expose themselves to these groups. At Bulgari, we printed applications in both English and Spanish, allowing Spanish-speaking people to enter that workforce.*
- 2. Break down the barriers that exist within companies. When a recruiter first called me for a position at Saks Fifth Avenue, I declined. I wanted to stay in the discount realm. I thought luxury retail was out of my reach.*
- 3. Promote people inside the company and the products outside. If you want everyone to take advantage of your business and purchase your product, you need to reach each one of them. Once you've identified, recruited, and exposed minority staff members to your company, you really need to promote the company and its products to minority groups.*

Many companies don't encourage the African-American community to purchase their products. They don't advertise in publications that African-Americans read, such as Black Enterprise, Essence, and Jet. Start ad campaigns in those publications to put yourself out in front. Also Hispanic publications. When I was with Bulgari, we advertised in Ocean Drive en Español.

MENTORSHIP

In today's highly competitive business and corporate climate- how important is it to have a mentor that can guide and groom you through the professional process?

Mentoring is very important for those who really need a role model. African-American children living in rural areas who never see an African-American airline pilot or doctor or lawyer will never aspire to those careers when they grow up.

Did you have a mentor or mentors that guided you through the professional process? and if so what are the key characteristics that you learned from your mentor/ mentors?

One very important person was my older brother, Mendel Gayle. While I was in school, I watched my brother work several different jobs and followed in his footsteps with a few of his employers. Currently he is a division chief with the Census Bureau in Suitland, Maryland, and I am extremely proud to be his brother and call him my mentor.

Later in life I encountered other mentors. They were very committed people. They tended to be great listeners, listening to the whole story. They managed their people as a collective, soliciting ideas from the group and gaining the buy-in of the group to move their agendas forward. They had the characteristics of a leader, one who listened and then took responsibility for making sure the process moved forward.

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY MENTORSHIP EXCHANGE PROGRAM

As you know- this program- The Power of Diversity Mentorship Exchange Program is a program, designed to groom productive leaders from the college level via the application of cultural competence skill enhancement, comprehensive training, educational development, skill assessment, self awareness, experiential engagement, character refinement and real-world preparedness.

In your opinion and from your perspective- how important is it to have a program, such as this- grooming and preparing college students to excel in leadership roles in today's corporate, business and civic arenas?

I think it's extremely important. It exposes people who have the characteristics to be successful leaders – CEOs and chairmen – to people who have made it, giving them sound advice on how to succeed in life.

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