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SPEAKERS

Jerome Joseph, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Fowles

- D** Dr. Thomas 00:01
Black Social Capital, Black Social Capital. Today's guest is Jerome Joseph. Jerome is a first generation college student from a low income neighborhood. In fact, his zip code had one of the highest rates of incarceration for Black men in the state of Texas. This is the lens he is used throughout his career as he works to support people navigating really tough environments. Jerome graduated from Howard University. He began his career as a middle school science teacher and Teach for America core member in his hometown Houston, and he has also served as a Dean of Student Culture and academic deam and a coach for teachers. Jerome is currently serving as the New York Executive Director of America Needs You. Welcome, Jerome!
- J** Jerome Joseph 01:06
Thank you so much, Dr. Jaqui for and Dr. Theo, I'm really excited to be on the pod today.
- D** Dr. Fowles 01:12
I'm super excited to have you as well. I'm gonna jump in really quickly and just tell everyone that's listening, you're in for a treat. I'm excited because I've known Jerome around for close to a year now at this point. And one of the things that I know for sure is that he's a hands on, direct action, by any means necessary type of leader.

J Jerome Joseph 01:37
Appreciate that brother.

D Dr. Fowles 01:39
I got to tell the truth. Right? And I think the other thing about about you that I think is exciting, especially for our listeners is that you have a really good way about you in terms of keeping keeping the student at the center of everything that you do. A lot of time especially for K 12 and Higher Education, the further that you go up in your career, the less it becomes about that, that end user, in this case students, right? So right, you'll sit in in meetings and you sit at tables, you'll talk to funders, and you'll remind organizations, you'll remind the people in the room that the student is at the center of everything that you do. So, um, so this will come out in the interview, I'm sure. But I'm going to sit back, watch, take some notes along the way. But for now, I'll just turn it back over to Dr. Jaqui.

D Dr. Thomas 02:31
So we're gonna get started today with our Intellectual Capital segment. This is a discussion of a Black scholar's research, academic journey, or current events in the professional world. And that's what we're going to do today, we're going to talk about a current or about current events in the professional world. We will be discussing this article in Nonprofit Quarterly on billionaire philanthropy and education. So the title of this article is "One more reason billionaires might want to exit education philanthropy." So it's like, ut oh, right away. And the author is Martin Levine, he wrote this in 2018. And the premise of this article is that mega philanthropists like Gates and the Walmart family may be wrong thinking that they can improve education through funding. Levine pulls from multiple sources to put forth a few ideas like philanthropists have poured billions of dollars into K through 12 education, outcomes aren't improving, and that the reason for all of that is that there's passionate fighting for both sides on every single issue and that that causes everything to essentially be at a standstill. The article goes on to point out that the philanthropists themselves are sometimes guilty of having colonizer agendas by using their power as donors to dictate what education institutions should and shouldn't do. A final point that this is makes is that philanthropy can be effective when the donors listen to their beneficiaries in terms of how to address their specific needs instead of dictating the process of improving outcomes. So what are people's thoughts and initial feelings about about this?

J Jerome Joseph 04:19

I think for me to Jaqui that, it really hit home. Because so I, in my career, I worked in Newark, New Jersey. And this is around the time that Facebook Mark Zuckerberg donated I think, like 100 million dollars into injecting hundred million million dollars to the school district there. And I thought it was very interesting seeing how things played out there. I think that in education, it's like, you know, when you see one thing that works one place, people want to just take that thing up, and then place it in another place, right? But I think that the thing that people need to that people fail to realize is that every single place has its own unique culture, right? It's hyper local culture. Like I've worked in Brownsville, in Brooklyn, I've worked in Crown Heights and Brooklyn, geographically these neighborhoods border one another, but work in those communities was very different. Right? Even though that they're similar, they're in the same same place and similar populations, but still culturally, very different places. Right? And so I think that when you're thinking about donors, they're at that top, top top level, right? And they have absolutely no idea what's actually happening on the ground. And they leverage the they listen to the folks who are experts, and those experts frequently, if we're going to be honest, don't necessarily have a practitioners lens. And they've never worked in the communities that they've actually they're actually trying to impact so that they don't really that means they they're making educated guesses based on research that worked elsewhere, not necessarily there. And so I think that's the danger when you when when philanthropists are trying to throw money at a problem that they don't fully understand.

D

Dr. Fowles 06:04

I think that that's, that's spot on, I'm thinking about some of my initial thoughts on the article as well. And, you know, one of the things that I wrote down was, you know, a solution might not be the solution. You know, especially as the demographics and communities shift, right? So you might have, you know, a great program that that worked in 2018. But two years later, in 2020, you know, your demographics or community might have shifted, and so, you might, you might think that the solution, you know, in 2018 is going well, but if you even take a small poll of that community, in 2020, they might be asking for a different solution, based on on new circumstances, right? And so I think that that's something that when you're looking at, you know, top down philanthropy, and even when, when you depend on those experts, you know, if they're not reaching down as well to get that feedback, then then you have some of those issues where you don't see the results that you want.

D

Dr. Thomas 07:06

I have a lot of thoughts about and I also don't have as near the amount of expertise that you have Jerome or you have Dr. Theo, on, you know, working with philanthropy and you

know, that is that is absolutely your world. And I have not dealt with a whole lot of that. The philanthropists that you know, are mentioned in this article are typically white and none of them were Black. I think there was one philanthropist of color on one family mentioned. And I just think that, you know, we have to spend so much time unlearning, you know, racism and anti-Blackness specifically and, you know, there's there's almost this contempt for poor people right in this in this country. Especially among maybe our people, you know, who are more elite in the country. To have them be able to come in and say, Well, I know I want to help the poor kids or I want to help, you know, the kids of color or the Black kids specifically, and this is how it needs to be done. It's like, no, you're actually not the person to say like, this is how it needs to be done, right? Because, I mean, you really need to unlearn everything that you've learned about, you know, race, about class about socio economic status. And other people's cultures, like you can easily just come from a deficit model, right? And it's like, oh, well, the students don't have anything but you could have built on these students strengths, right? Actually tapped into and listen to the actual practitioners, like you said, and you didn't have to just listen to the person who's at the top right? Like you might only be talking to the principal or their head administrator who is also probably white or non-Black and just in thinks they understand well enough, or got briefed and just feels comfortable but they actually don't know. They don't know well enough to advise the philanthropist.



Jerome Joseph 09:10

Dr. Jaqui, I'm actually with you. I think that you do have to go. I think the core of the issue is is colonizer mindset, right? And and when I think about this kind of goes back to my point when that thought process and I'm pretty sure we've all heard this is that systems that our systems are not created with Black folks in a lot of times non-Black people color in mind, right? And so they're inherently going to be racist in in a lot of ways, right? And even the most best intentioned systems that are not created by Black people are eating people and other non-Black people of color are going to be racist. Like just straight up. That's just the way it is sometimes, you know, and I think that when looking at this, I think it's you what you talked about Dr. Jaqui is a sense of feeling sorry for people, right. And when you're doing this work, it shouldn't be about feeling sorry, it should be coming from a place of empathy. Right? And I think an understanding. And I think spending time if you're going to be a philanthropist, you should actually spend time and invest in a place over a long period of time and really get to know the things that are happening on the ground. And I think that and I have, in my experience with philanthropy, there are some people who are really good at just donating the money and getting out of the way and listening. I think that that's what you want to do. Right? And it's not there. They're like, look, I think that the best folk best people who are philanthropists, they're giving them money. They're holding you accountable. They're also letting you do it your way. Because you know, the

best. You're the expert in that that context, but I think that it can get extremely toxic and ineffective when the people with the money are trying to dictate policy about things they don't really know about, right? I think a great example of that if you look back at the work that the Gates Foundation did around Common Core. And so what I'll say about the Common Core from personal experience, I've seen it in action working in the schools that I've worked. And when I say that I saw third and fourth graders producing a quality of work that, like blew my mind. Right? But it was it was absolutely amazing, right. But it came at a cost. And it came at a cost of like, we're not really focusing on the arts and other things that are really important in the development of children, right? Like I think of when I think about development of kids, I'm thinking about the whole child, but this policy specifically placed a heavy emphasis on reading and math to the point to where science and history are almost don't like are put to the wayside. They're not considered as important. Right. And so, you know, to me, when I think about that we're losing out on a generation of scientists, right? We're losing out on a generation possibly of creative writers in the in the spirit of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou. Right? Or we're missing out on the next great the theatre actor, you know, from our communities, right? And so, those opportunities, the money from those programs are being taked and put in here because that's the best thing from top down. So I think that can be the danger of these things that are happening. So I'm with you hundred percent there.

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Dr. Fowles 12:11

I'm gonna play devil's advocate, right? So we talked about almost a savior complex, right? And especially of of, of white folks coming in with money, right and dispersing it, however they might feel that they think would improve the community. But I could use an example like LeBron James, who is becoming more philanthropic right now. Right? He has a whole school, right, dedicated to his his area in Ohio. But the the teacher in me is like LeBron, you play ball. Like, what do you know about the classroom right? And everybody can see through social media that he's really involved with the campus and they'll come back and do different things, but the one thing that I would point out is that he's not developing the curriculum, right? He is letting experts do those things. And even even now that he has money, right? His his, his mind frame has shifted, his perspective has shifted. Right? Even though he has an experience growing up in the area, he doesn't. He's not there with with students now. Right? And so, some of those dynamics, even there have shifted, right? His own children aren't having the same experience that he did, which is always going to influence what he's, he's thinking about and what he's doing. Right? And so when he's thinking about, you know, uplifting this community, he has to always go back to who is there now, right, because otherwise, it's no longer relevant, right? The reason that, that people are excited about it is because right now, in the way that he's doing things and the way that he's supporting is relevant. Right? You can you can see the final product in the

way that students are excited about the school, or how they're graduating or how the the teachers are responding responding to the principal. Right, you can see it in the culture that they build, which is something that you brought up as well. So I think that, you know, it goes into, you know, one of the final things that I thought about the article in terms of like, always be guided by your key state stakeholders, right? Mm hmm. No, and and and think about now, is the funding always related to those keys, key stakeholder, thoughts, feelings and expectations?

J

Jerome Joseph 14:43

Yeah, one thing I want to add there, it kind of goes back to my point of being hyperlocal. Before LeBron James started the I promise school. He's been doing work in Akron for years, for like near for like 10-15 years. And so he has a lot of context. He had a lot of relationships because we have been doing some work with the local public schools there before he even did that. So that's what I'm talking about being invested in the area and in doing it over a long period of time. And to build on your point, he's listening to the expertise not influencing the the education, no policy in that building, right. He's letting the experts decide the curriculum and things like that. And he's, he's providing the money and he's providing his his, his name, his name, image likeness, and all that to benefit for the students. Right? And I think that's, that's a great model for philanthropy. I think that um, you know, you have to be really careful about it is colonial in a way when you're putting you're putting down this policy and you're not taking the stakeholders views and listening to their voices because sometimes, you know, sometimes people don't want don't even want the help. Right? And what do you do if you're in a community, the people they don't, they don't really know you. They don't feel comfortable with your with what you're doing. And you know, and they don't feel like it's benefiting you. And then that's that colonizer mindset where you're like, I know best, I know better than you do. Right? And that's not I don't think that's helpful. I actually think that it can be counterintuitive in actively, you know, damage communities in some ways.

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Dr. Thomas 16:17

Do you think that there's a possibility that sometimes the philanthropist is actually the person coming into the situation with the right mindset, the right you know, the right heart and that they get someone at their site, who has the colonizer agenda? And that's their, like, their contact person, right? Because I think all the time, like I see in organizations that I've worked in or, you know, talk to my friends about because they tell me about their jobs, right? Like, I see organizations all the time where the person at the top of the you know, the organization structure is actually cool, but the person is advising them is the person that's causing all of the havoc



17:00

Yeah. Dr. Jaqui, I think you raise a good point. Because I think that, you know, when you're thinking about foundations, typically you have the family themselves and like the individuals who start the trust or are funded, and then you have the program officers, and those are the people who are helping make decisions. And who are you you're poi-interacting most closely with those grantees. And so I do think that person has tremendous amount of influence, right? And I think that, that they can have an outsized view on what's going on, because some for some people, they like some program offers, they may be like, Look, we're going to donate the money, you're the experts, we're going to go out of the way and let you do what you do. And you report back to us. And they're still but and, but I still think that those program offices are really important to hold organizations that are giving money to accountable, right? Because at the end of the day, you don't want to just throw like, I don't care what's happening. You don't want to throw money at something and nothing is actually happening. Right? And so I think that person, that accountability level is really important there, but I've also seen and heard of situations where those program officers are having an outsized influence on a situation and on things that they're not necessarily an expert on. And they're pushing for results in a way that's not sustainable, and, and can be damaging long term for the impact that they want to have.



Dr. Fowles 18:18

So I'm gonna ask one more question. Just to wrap up the segment. Talk about the importance of how you brought the key stakeholders into board meeting rooms, right? How have you shared perspectives of key stakeholders in a way that's been meaningful for for funders, for philanthropists, tell us a little bit about that process.



Jerome Joseph 18:44

I think for me, it's storytelling. Um, we we as human beings at our core, can all relate to stories. Culturally, I don't care what culture you come from, at the at the earliest onset of it, storytelling was key to pass on those traditional those traditions. beliefs, values and all those things. And so when you have a story, and you tell it, and you deeply believe in it, it makes all the difference. Like it's easy for me to go into a meeting and talk about my students talk about my organization, because I'm so passionate about it, right? Because when I look at my, when I look at my students, I see myself, right? And I can talk to about Genevere. I can talk about Marvin, I can talk about Miriam. I can talk about all of them because I see them and I talk to them, you know, I'm not the kind of like the doctor do you mentioned earlier? I talk to my students like, if, like during this pandemic, I know I got a lot

of their numbers in my phone. I'm texting them seeing what's going on. How are they doing? I'm hitting them on Instagram. You know, I'm like I am I am. I am aware of who the participants of the students who have who they are in my program. So it's not like I'm asking. I'm not emailing anybody out. To get a story so I can tell. No, these are stories that I've gotten directly from the students themselves based on them, you know, based on me meeting with them. I like will, if a student comes to me during a workshop and they say like, hey, Jerome, I'm struggling with an internship, I'm struggling with this decision. I'm like, yo, here's my Calendly link. Let's schedule an hour. There- I will sit in an hour uninterrupted with one of my students, just to talk to them. Because at the end of the day, of course, my job as Executive Director is really important to be do fundraising and overall strategy and other things like that organization. But I think that I'll it'll be hypocritical of me, to not make myself available at any point to my students, because they are the reason why we're doing this work. And so who am I to say that my to be as self important to say that my time is not as valuable for you don't have access to me, right. And then also, I think it's really important and this kind of gets into some leadership things, but I think it's really important as executive directors, as senior leaders in any organization to really understand what's going down on the ground level organization because I think that I think both of you spoke a little bit about the perspectives as people get higher up. You know, I think as more and more layers come between you and what's happening on the ground level, it gets easier and easier to distance yourself from it and have like a kind of like a unrealistic view, of how things work down there, right? And so I like try to stay really close to what's happening on the ground level, and be as hands on as I can as reasonable. But I think that's what makes me when I'm in the room talking about the program talking about students that that's what makes it so effective, because it's not a second hand story that someone is telling me this is coming directly from students from my experience with them.

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Dr. Fowles 21:41

So that was a that was just part one. We're going to take a quick break, and we'll be right back.

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Dr. Thomas 21:53

Hey, are you rolling your eyes right now because yet another talented student is questioning their abilities

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Dr. Fowles 21:59

Well turn negative into a positive, with a No Deficit Model or a No Imposter Syndrome

Tee, check out all of our Black Social Capital swag and stay motivated by going to staymotivatedandrisetogether.com/shop. Alright, and we're back. So in our community capital segment, this is a discussion of a professional's journey, their best practices, lessons that they learned. Jerome, you told us that one of the things that you focus on is the story, right? And so, all this segment is doing is allowing you to share your story. So we're gonna start off with just your educational pathway. Tell us a little bit about yourself. You know, we you mentioned the, the method, Howard. Yes. Tell us tell us about your educational pathway and and how you ended up where you are now.

J

Jerome Joseph 22:56

Yeah. So I was born and raised in Houston, Texas And my grandmother raised me, she did not go to school pass a third grade. So education was really important to her. Education was really important to my mom. I grew up in a house with my mom, my brother and sister, my grandmother, my aunt and her three kids. So all of us is in this space together in my older cousin, Crystal was someone who I really looked up to she, like, was a straight A student, and I'm like, man, I want to be like her. And from a young age, my mom really instilled in me that my mom was a teen mom, too. So she really instilled in me the importance of education. And so I was really good at school. And, you know, life was kind of terrible in at home at times. And so school was my escape, and I was good at it. And I really focused and honed in on it, and I, I loved it. I loved learning. And, you know, from a very young age in kindergarten, I actually had a seizure, and rode in an ambulance and that was when I decided I was going to be a doctor. And that this that me want to be a doctor. Actually. is a thread that connects all the way through my educational journey because that's what kind of like helped me be tunnel vision like this is my goal, no matter what is going on around me I'm going to focus on this thing and that's what I that's that was a big contributing factor to what got me helped me raise above my raise above my situation because I don't want to proliferate like even though I'm from low income community I don't want to say I don't want to use language get out because I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about my community and deficit based mindset because, you know, there's nothing wrong like community it's just been systemically this between systemic racism and oppression. There have been things that happen over a long period of time that caused the neighborhood to be what it is, right? And so I viewed my role as to get educated and help dismantle those systems that that caused those things to happen. So I got really good at school. I pushed all the way through high school. And just like my big cousin in Crystal I graduated valedictorian in high school, and so I like I said, I wanted to be like her and I used to go visit her in Austin at University of Texas. I'm like, I'm going to UT I'm going to UT. And then something happened. I went to Howard University the summer after my junior year. And honestly, I had never been around that many smart Black people before in my life. You know, and like I'm, I was born and raised in

Houston, I didn't leave the state of Texas until I was like 16 on a plane or leave the South. And so doing that, it really opened my eyes up to what was possible when I saw that and I saw that Black intellectualism. And like that Black excellence I was like, man, I really want to be a part of this. It's something about the the Mecca. The the spirit just drew me there. And so that was after I had that experience that summer. I told everybody look, I'm going to Howard and the crazy thing about it is is that people- my counselor, I'll never forget my counselor in high school told me that I wouldn't make it. Like this is a person. Yes, no, I'm legitimately- she told me that I wouldn't make it. I had I I remember when I went to Howard, I had a teacher who told my mom, he's not going to make it. And you know, and that's part of the reason why I am who I am as an educator, because I don't ever want, I would never, I can't even fathom telling a student that you're not going to make it right. And so that those like moments like that actually, are fuel to me to be the person, the educator, and be the leader that I am because that's just not how you treat people. But I went to Howard, and honestly, it was the best decision I could have ever made in my life. Because being from the south, I think that I was viewed as growing up because I was smart and Black in a low income community. I was held up on a pedestal in a in a way that's very uncomfortable looking back on it now. And I needed to go and experience Blackness in another way, right? Because there's only you know, in where I grew up if you're smart and you're Black and gonna be a doctor or you're a lawyer, right? And then going to Howard and being exposed to the black diaspora in its fullness. I didn't realize that there were so many different ways to be Black in America, or to be just not in America, but just to be Black in the world. And I think that was a really pivotal, pivotal experience for me because it opened my eyes up to what's what else is out there, right. So I met folks who are from the, from the West Indies, from the Caribbean, from all countries around Africa from all over the United States all over the United States. My roommate, both his parents were doctors, right? That was like some Cosby show stuff to me. So it just showed me a different view. And then also, I think that if I'm being honest, I didn't really understand and respect my Blackness. I was ashamed of where I came from. And I was and I think it was part of that internalized racism that we have, that we were taught to be like, the things about ourselves that we were taught, you know, and I had to unlearn all of that, and I unlearned it at Howard and I came to be super proud of being Black and became super proud of attending an HBCU. And I want to say this here very unequivocally HBCUs are important institutions of higher education. And they will remain important institutions of higher education. I think that if anything, if we look at what's been happening the last few months here, it shows why HBCUs are still relevant, and are still important bastions of Black excellence, and that we have to protect them. And they must keep going. Because for some folks, though, like, I've never felt, that is the safest space I've ever been in my life. And it allowed me to build the ultimate confidence when I step into a room. I think I'm the best thing since sliced bread in that room. But part of that is because of the the confidence that was instilled in me at Howard, by my professors. Honestly, I had never had

teachers like I had a few teachers that believed in me, but like I had never had so many adults believe in me so wildly in my life. And that that is freeing. And it is so liberating. And it like that's why I don't put a ceiling on what I can do because people didn't do that to me in college. So and I don't do that to my students. Right. And so that is that's literally how we're gonna liberate each other. But like through by having mindsets like that, right. But yeah, that's how that's my kind of my journey I started out, being a doctor wanting to be a doctor. So I studied biology and undergrad. But around my junior year, I actually started to volunteer. I worked at a summer program for students and I work with students from third grade all the way to 12th grade and I was like, man, I love teaching. And so how I decided to get into Teach for America. I got cursed out when I told my family I was gonna be a teacher. I think that that's the first lesson I want to say to the students out there is that you know, when you are when you're a first generation college student, I think there's a lot of pressure economically to support the family. And you're forced to make a decision and do some things that you're not always that you don't necessarily want to do. And what I'll say is sometimes you got to stick to your guns and do what you think is best, even against what your family is saying. And that this goes to all my folks out there who are first generation college students. You're first generation American. You know, I know it's tough, but you have to do what you believe is best. And I'm going to tell you like, even me starting out as a first year teacher, I made more money than my mom ever did. Right? And I was still able to help my family. And that was a springboard for me to get to the point that I am right and I'm not hurting for money, transparently, I do well, right. But there's a pathway to it. But if you if you only go at it for money to me, that actually puts a ceiling on what you can accomplish, right? When I do things I have to, and I've learned my lesson that if I don't do things that based on what I value, it's not gonna go right. When I when I make a decision, I go after something based on my values of family, of people, of community, then that's when things end up most effective, right? And so I think that's how I ended up in edge in that in the education field, and I've stayed the since since I started my career.

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Dr. Fowles 31:03

I appreciate that I think I think building upon your values is super important. And it really shapes you know, everything that we do moving forward. Right? That, you know, I've been in and out of the classroom. I've been in nonprofit I've been in, in K 12. I've been in, in higher ed, but the the through line is know what are these values that are transferable from place to place? What are the skills that are transferable from from organization to organization? And, like, that's why you can step into a boardroom, give them the business, and then get back to work. Right. That's that same business that you were just talking about? Right? So I think that that's really important. Can you take a moment to, to really hone in on on what you do now. Right? Because your title is Executive Director right? For a

nonprofit organization, one, did you ever see yourself in a leadership title like that? And tell us what you do on like a day today in this role, right, because there's gonna be an executive director hopeful out there, and we want to make sure that they have all the nuggets that they need.



Jerome Joseph 32:23

So as the Executive Director of America Needs You. We're a national nonprofit. We're in New York, New Jersey, LA, and Chicago. And I run our New York site, which is our largest site. And so we have we serve approximately 300 students every year and each one of our students work with a mentor that's a professional in the city. So we have around 600 participants and our program, budget is over a million dollars a year. So it's my job to fundraise 60% of the budget every year and that's through, through corporations through family found- through foundations and other sources like that. Creating partnerships with companies to support our students to find pathways into careers that are that are emerging such as the stem and tech fields. Also, I lead our program operations strategy around those things. And yeah, and so I have a hand in every everything that's going on with the program. So when thinking about our fundraising, I'm intimately involved in that. I'm intimately involved in the program operations. And I facilitate on Saturdays with our workshops, and also thinking about opportunities to expand our program as well. And so did I. The second part of that is did I ever think that I will be executive director? That I'm going to say that? Yes, and no, because I think that the first I didn't know what an executive director was until I met my boss at Teach for America in New Jersey. Her name was Fatimah Burnam Watkins, someone who I look up to immensely to this day, and she's one of the people like when I saw when I saw her, I'm like, Yo, I want to be like her. When I grew up, I want I want her job one day. And you know, to her credit, I felt like she really invested in me. And keep in mind that, you know, at this point when I started there, I had been, you know, I was maybe three years out of school because I shifted from the classroom into TFA working in the office there. And I felt like she really, like invested in me a lot, you know, and spent a lot of time he gave me a lot of insights that she just didn't need to. You know, and I think that she saw something in me, and she like, encouraged me, you know, and to this day, she's something that that just her, I think that she is one of the people who I I try to be like as a leader because you know what's funny, I worked there in two for a year and a half from 2013 to 2014. I still keep in touch with that entire team. Like we have a group chat and like we for like two months everybody's all over the country like we like found a day to meet up like so we can have a reunion, right? If you don't, that's it's something in the water like that. That's leadership as real leadership. But yeah, so I think that it is something that I'm really I love my job, I think it's great. I think that I want to see more Black people serving as executive directors, particularly I want to see more Black men serving as executive directors of not a nonprofits. I think the thing

about it is that we need to diversify in all layers and I think that nonprofit executives themselves need to invest in the talent and in like growing that talent, because I think that a lot of people leave the sector before they get to this point, right? And sometimes people leave and come back like I started at TFA. And then in like, working, did a great job there. But then I went back into schools and then I came back as executive director, but I think that the point is, how do we keep the talent in the sector and nurture it as it goes up?

D

Dr. Thomas 35:55

So you told us what to do. Your job is super important. You have a whole lot of responsibilities. Probably, you know, you got staff, you got 600 participants, how are you? How are you organized? I feel like this is like one of those job interview questions, right? How are you organizing yourself where you are able to spend time and talk to students where you are able to check up on students, you know, text them and, you know, dm or, you know, speak with them on social media, right.

J

Jerome Joseph 36:26

Yeah, I think that honestly, Dr. Jaqui, I'm gonna be real with you. And this is for all the students out there. I am. organization is not one of my strong points. And I think it's really important to know what you're not good at. Because that part of it when you're as a leader, or just as a professional, when you're, you know what you're not good at, you can surround yourself with people who can help help you out with that, right? And I'm gonna be honest with you, I wouldn't be without my team, you know, I'm gonna bleep that out. You know, because I hadn't really shown team to help me keeps keeps me on track and I have people I have a strong team who will set boundaries And say, Jerome this is not what you need to focus on right now, if you focus on this right? So I think that's the number one. One thing that I do like to do, I'd like to I have a this, this planner that allows me to break out break down my day, by time by hour, because the thing about being an ED, I have a lot of meetings I manage, I have a team of, of eight people. And so I check in with, I check in with all eight of them over the time, I have at least three check ins with the people that I manage directly, have bi-weekly check ins with other people that I don't manage directly to check in with my, the CEO of organization weekly. And that's not to that's not including any meetings around fundraising events, any meetings with potential donors, current donors, potential and current partners, new partners. And so, one thing that's been a lifesaver for me is Calendly. It's a software that allows you for folks to find the time that works for them and schedule meetings on your calendar. I found myself spending a lot of time going back and forth via email, trying to find a time that works. Instead, I can now I just say, Hey, here's my time link, use it schedule a time. And it's gotten, I've gotten really efficient with it, I downloaded the app on my phone. And so now I can just like copy and

paste the link there in emails when I'm on the move. Also, I think that the other thing is, here's what I'll say about people. Like, I'm going to say this people matter. And that's one of the things that I the way I lead. That's the way I live my life and just work as a team member, right? And so you show people, how you value them by how you spend your time. And so I think that one thing that's really important to me, as coming in as an Executive Director, I feel like because of my educational background as a teacher, you know, programming is a strong point of mine, right? I wasn't as strong on the philanthropy side, the development side, that's something that I've been steadily working to improve. And I want to shout out my- our CEO Mariana, and our Chief External Affairs Officer Emily for working so diligently with me and being so patient with me on that on that side. But, you know, program students are something that value and so I gotta put my money where my mouth is with my time. And so to me, I think that I mean, I'm meeting I'm not meeting with like 15 students at an hour, right, but who I feel like I'll be hypocritical of me if I have a student who really wants my time, who says like, hey, Jerome, I really want to talk to you about this. And I can't give them an hour in all the hours all the time. That's, that's that that's not real to me. Right. And so if they, they can do it, I'm gonna make time for them. Right? And then also, I think I'm like, also one that will actively seek out a student, right? I let them like, I give them my cell phone number. They have my email address. I don't restrict access to my to me, right. And I think that a lot of leaders kind of put up layers between themselves and other people. That's just not who I am. Right? And they don't and there are some downsides to that. But I think that when you are trying to build a program when you're trying to build anything, culture is important. And one thing I've learned about I learned from working in schools, culture permeates from the top down. And if you don't set culture, culture will set itself. And you have to be intentional about the, you know, when I think about culture, I know what I want to be what I want it to be, I have a vision for it. But in order if I really as a leader, if I wanted to that culture permeate throughout the organization in the way that I want to do, I have to live, what i what i in and live what I preach. I can't just say this is what we're about, and I don't do it myself.

D

Dr. Thomas 40:41

I just feel like people are going to listen to this podcast and they are going to get so much from what you just said right? To be an Executive Director and to be able to, you know, give your students unrestricted access. Actually, like follow through, right? Because it's one thing to be like, yeah, here's my number. And then but you don't have to respond, right? You can always say, Oh, well, I have this thing with this donor, I don't have time to talk to you today, but you're not doing that. You're making time.

J

Jerome Joseph 41:13

You know what the other thing Dr. Jaqui I'll say is that, honestly, as much access as I give students to me, I may have like, I can count- there have been what. At any given time, with around 300 students in the program, there may be 15, taken advantage of it, right? So honestly, I think it's more important to be open because not everybody's gonna use that time, right? But it's much more important to make yourself available. Because if you say, and then follow through to your point, because if I say it, and I don't do it, then people are gonna start talking like Jerome, ain't actually doing what he says he's gonna do. But when people see me doing that, like my- then volunteers are more willing to give their time and all like it's a trickle down effect, I think is really important. And as it's something that's really important as leaders to think about because that's one thing I learned about teaching- being in the school and working with students like the way you lead your classroom, it goes like, like, students, if you don't do what you say you're gonna do, they're not gonna believe you, they're not gonna trust you right? At the core of every single relationship when you're in relationship with people, at the core of it is trust. And if you don't have trust, you don't have anything because, you know, if people trust you, they'll run through a wall for you. Right? And that's how you make and that's how transformational change happens, right? And then you're when you're in relationship with one another, and you show people it's not about telling people, right words are empty, but it's about having putting the action behind the words and showing them. I'm going to show up here, I'm going to do what I say I'm going to do, right? And I learned that by cutting my teeth, looking at my thinking about the students I've worked with in Brownsville, I told my students, hey, I'm going to come pick you up on a weekend we're going to go hang out so I can get to know you better. And they thought I was bs-ing them. So I showed I showed up in the projects knocked on their door like What's up? Let's roll out. What are we doing? We going to Chuck E Cheese? Bet. Let's go.

D Dr. Thomas 43:01
Chucky cheese.

J Jerome Joseph 43:03
Wanna go to Applebee's after? All right then we're going to Applebee's but like, you get you get two things. That's it.

D Dr. Thomas 43:12
Bring your school appetite. Bring your school appetite.



Jerome Joseph 43:17

Can I say one more thing? Dr. Theo



Dr. Fowles 43:18

Go ahead, go ahead



Jerome Joseph 43:21

The world has been crazy. The last for just 2020 has been crazy period. But for all the students that are out there, I just want you all to know that this is your time. Right? The world is not going to change if we don't apply pressure to it. And the norm, the way that we were traditionally taught years and years ago to just put just to assimilate, go into spaces and and just work til you die. That's not what that's not what's gonna bring change about right? And so students when you walk into spaces, no one gave you that opportunity you earned the right to be there. Then when you walk in there, I want you to show with excellence. And then I want you to work your way up. And then I want you to work to actively dismantle the systems that are in place, and help improve the situation and improve it for the next people will come back behind you. Reach back to those people who are at your colleges who, you know who, when you were a peer mentor, you know, those younger people giving advice on how to tackle these things. Because that's the only way these systems are going to change. It's the only way things are gonna get better if we have we work in community in community with one another. And so I just want you to know, I don't know who needs to hear this, but I deeply believe in you. There is no ceiling and what you can what you can imagine what is possible. Just go out there and do it. You won't fall in your face. That's fine. Get back up and do it again. And please, please, please don't try and do it on your own. There are always people out there who can support you. Find mentors, I wouldn't be where I am without mentors. There is a black man named Paul E. Rodney, he's the reason why I'm the Executive Director today. If he didn't tell me, he helped me believe that I can do this, right? And so it is my it is now I view it my responsibility for the next young Black man who wants to be Executive Director for me to instill that same belief in him. And that is how I'm that's how the world's gonna change. That's how it is going to get better. If we all just care a little bit enough about everybody. Our own success is really important. But our own success doesn't mean anything if others aren't successful. And I'll leave you with a personal mantra of mine. Ubuntu I am who I am because we all are. If my brothers or my sisters is doing well then I'm doing well. If we all keep- work to have that mindset, then the world will be a much better place.



Dr. Fowles 45:41

Look, if if you didn't get out, show your pen and paper,



Dr. Thomas 45:45

right



Dr. Fowles 45:46

Your tablet, your phone. I don't know what you was doing. But you're gonna have to go ahead and replay this episode and go ahead and take those notes. With that it's a wrap. We'll see you all on the next pod. And we out.



Dr. Thomas 46:02

Bye.



Jerome Joseph 46:03

Thanks everybody.



Dr. Fowles 46:06

We hope you enjoy today's show. Remember, the way we build social capital is to build self and build others. You're sure you got some notes on your tablet, computer or even using a pen and paper. leave us a review. continue the conversation on social media @blacksocialcap and share the show with someone you know. Until the next episode, stay motivated and rise together.



Dr. Thomas 46:29

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