

# DyNAMC Future Leaders Talk with DR. VICKI BROWN

*In each issue of DyNAMC, we introduce our readers to some of America's future leaders. We strongly believe it is critical to develop leadership skills in our young people.*

*We must ask ourselves, "Who will take over and lead when I'm gone?"*

*Every issue of DyNAMC features students conducting an interview with our cover subject. We do this for several reasons. We want to give our youth the ability to develop interviewing skills, explore career interests, build self-esteem and self-awareness, and most importantly, we want them to become empowered.*



Dr. Vicki Brown

*Students gain as much knowledge about the cover subject during their interview experience as they do about themselves. We hope the opportunity makes them ask themselves how they wish to see their own career and life path unfold.*

*As leaders, we need to take the time to listen and connect with our youth. We can show them, by example, the importance of serving as a role model or mentor.*

**Participants:**

**Michael Barlow – West Point Academy**

**Janelle Bass – Graduate, West Point Academy**

**Kennedy Coopwood – Indiana University Bloomington**



**Michael Barlow Jr.** is a recent graduate of WestPoint Academy. He is 23 years old, born and raised in Atlanta, Ga with 8 siblings. Michael is a graduate of Henry W. Grady High School (2011), graduate of United States Military Academy Preparatory School (2012), is a 2015 Odyssey Scholar, 2016 Debate All-American, 2016 Debater of the Year and the only Cadet in the history of West Point to qualify to the National Debate Tournament four times.

Michael has achieved a B.S. in Sociology from United States Military Academy (2016) and is the recipient of the Coates Award for Most Outstanding in West Point Sociology Program (2016).



**Kennedy Coopwood** is a 21 year old senior currently attending Indiana University studying journalism — specializing in public relations, advertising and communications. She is involved with The Indiana Daily Student Newspaper, Public Relations Student Society of America, National Association of Black Journalists and other organizations on campus and in her community,

Kennedy is involved on a national level; currently holding positions such as Brand Ambassador for the Skimm in NYC and she serves on the marketing and public relations team at Leadership with Purpose and Passion LLC., where she handles all social media accounts and produces monthly newsletters.

Kennedy is also senior Editor at the Fredericksburg Guidebook Magazine in Virginia.



**2LT Janelle Bass** is 25 years old and was born in Germany and raised in a dual military household.

She is a graduate of Fairfax High School in Fairfax, VA (2009) and has served as a Military Police Soldier in Fort Riley Kansas in 2-1 BSTB.

She is also a graduate of United States Military Academy Preparatory School and has achieved a B.S. in Sociology from United States Military Academy (2016).

**Michael:** Hello, Dr. Brown, my name is Michael Barlow and we are happy to have you on the cover of **DyNAMC** Leaders for a Changing World Magazine. In selecting a name for the magazine, the word “**DyNAMC**” is an acronym from “**NAMCO**.” It is derived from the word, “dynamic,” which, according to the dictionary is “a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process; to be constantly changing or active;

positive in attitude and full of energy and new ideas; strong, energetic, empowering, inspiring, spirited, honest, powerful, bold, and vibrant.” The **DyNAMC** team gives a great deal of thought into who graces the cover and always selects individuals whose qualities, professionalism, and drive makes them a dynamic leader for a changing world. So, on behalf of everyone I’d just like to thank you in advance for this interview.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you.

**Kennedy:** Hi, I’m Kennedy Coopwood and I have the first couple of questions for you. Are you ready?

**Dr. Brown:** I am.

**Kennedy:** Okay, great. So, please, in your own words, what makes you a leader for a changing world and what is your leadership style?

**Dr. Brown:** Great question. In today’s world, change is unavoidable. I know that sounds cliché and people say it all the time, but it really is true. When you think about it, compared to fifteen or twenty years ago, today there is a far greater public awareness and concern around a range of global issues and challenges that we never thought of when I was around your age. I think this is especially true of the Department of Defense, where our leadership focuses on global issues every day. In the Department, we’re known to say that we are leading and operating in an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In the department, both military and civilian personnel are leading across agencies, across boundaries, and across countries.

Whether they are driven by changes in technology, scientific advances, or changes in the law, it’s important to really garner buy-in from key stakeholders. For us, as a department, that includes our senior leaders, first-line managers, supervisors, employees, and even individuals who are external to your organization but still have an impact. I believe that what makes me a leader for a changing world is that I am adept at understanding both the interim motivators of employees and the external motivation of

Awesome. We know you genuinely care about people. In that regard, could you articulate, specifically, why diversity is important to you? Which projects do you support and focus on the most in terms of diversity and inclusion? – Michael



stakeholders. Over the years that I’ve worked for the department, I have established a solid reputation for developing and maintaining key relationships and networks that are integral in leading to the changing world that we are working in today. I think the second part of your question was asking about my leadership style? In all honesty, I think it varies with the situation. However, if I had to select one, and based on my experiences of working with different teams who have very different and diverse ideas and conditions, I would say that I am a servant-leader. I say that because, working with different people with different views, and different ways of doing things, can be very stressful. It can also be very challenging. As a servant-leader I

have worked well with a wide variety of teams, and as a single team, we have achieved great results. I believe that developing a sense of partnership is important to working together toward a common goal. I believe that my legitimacy as a leader is built upon developing those relationships and nurturing co-admissions, sharing information to the greatest extent possible, trying to push down decision making to the lowest levels, and, of course, continuous learning. To conclude, I genuinely care about people and I always look for ways to help others accomplish their full potential.

**Kennedy:** Thank you for that. My next question is what is one characteristic you believe every leader should possess?

**Dr. Brown:** That’s a hard question. If I had to pick one characteristic that I believe every leader

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should possess, it would be integrity. When I say integrity, I really mean the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. Doing the right things for the right reasons. I read in Forbes several years ago this quote, and it stuck with me, "Success will come and go but integrity is forever." I think the number one characteristic that I believe every leader should possess is integrity.

**Kennedy:** I agree. So, when talking about integrity and doing the right thing what do you feel is the biggest challenge facing leaders today. Is there, or should there, be a difference in religious leaders than a community or political leader, for instance?

**Dr. Brown:** I think all leaders should subscribe to the highest standards. That said, I believe the biggest challenge facing leaders today is probably they are not doing the right things all the time. It shouldn't matter whether they're a religious leader, a community leader, or a political leader. I believe that a leader can have vision, they can have focus, they can have humility, they can have any or all of the prevailing leadership qualities, but if they do not have integrity, who will be willing to follow them? I learned a long time ago that if you do not stick to your values when they are being tested, then they are not really values. As John Stewart would say, they are just hobbies.

**Kennedy:** Thank you for your response. So, tying into that, what is one mistake that you witness leaders making more frequently than others?

**Dr. Brown:** Probably, one of the biggest mistakes I see leaders make is that they do not fully embrace

the tolerance, the ambition, and the skills that everyone on their team brings to the table. People are generally very comfortable working with individuals who are like themselves. Whether or not that is inadvertent, they leave out a part of the work group that has contributions to make. Those leaders who are focusing only on those individuals who look like them, who think like them, who work like them, could be much

more successful if they were more embracing of individuals on their team who have different ideas ways of doing business, and who have a different perspective. That's one of the biggest mistakes I see leaders make.

**Kennedy:** Thank you very much.

**Michael:** Awesome. We know you genuinely care about people. In that regard, could you articulate, specifically, why diversity is important to you? Which projects do you support and focus on the most in terms of diversity and inclusion?

**Dr. Brown:** Having grown up as an African American in an all Black community, I didn't really have to worry too much about diversity. From a racial perspective, we were all the same. But, from another perspective, everyone in my neighborhood thought differently, they had different ideas, they had different ambitions, and they had different talents. When you look at it that way, it could be considered a very diverse neighborhood. I believe that diversity is much more than simply a respect for ethnicity, gender, age, origin, and education. I believe that individuals each have their own ideas, they have their own thoughts, their own ambitions, and they have their own perspective that must be honored. This, in and of itself, leads to a very diverse working environment. You can work together with people on your team who have very diverse ideas and perspectives, but, if you don't integrate them into what you're doing, you might have a diverse staff, but you're not maximizing that diversity to the greatest extent possible. You must have different people on your staff.

**Michael:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Brown:** There are a couple of things that I'm working on that are supportive of diversity and inclusion. The first is the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. This is a national survey that is given to all federal employees across the government. It measures how organizations are doing when it comes to employee engagement, global satisfaction, diversity and inclusion. Each year, we take a look at those scores and see where there is room for improvement. Those then become the projects and policies we try to put in place in an effort to ensure that the rest of the department is reaching out and being more inclusive of the entire DoD workforce. My job is to make sure that the survey is conducted, that we get individuals to participate in that survey, and then we make sure that leadership puts into play some kind of action to improve our diversity and inclusion. There is another project that I am working on, peripherally. We have a national security council that has established a very comprehensive diversity plan. My part of that plan is to look at all of the training and education programs for which I am responsible to see how we're doing from a demographic perspective. For example, are we reaching out to women? Are we reaching out to minorities, including Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and Hawaiian Pacificers? If we're not, then my job is to reach out to the folks who are responsible for training and together determine what we need to do. Do we need to look at the way that we're advertising? Maybe we need to look at the way information is being presented and who has access to it. The Department of Defense has 800,000 civilians that work in about 400-plus occupational specialties. It's a very big population. The Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, the Reserve, the Guard, and all of our components are each doing their own thing. One project I'm working on is trying to determine how to consolidate and bring some of that to DoD headquarters so that individuals have one place to go for information. A lot of people don't participate widely,

Wow. Interesting. Your decision to support the military is very inspiring. What inspired you to take such a leadership and active role? - Janelle

for two reasons. They don't know about it and/or they're not encouraged. So, first we need to get the information out to them so they can make a choice about whether they want to participate. It's not a choice if you don't know about it. So, part of my job is to make sure that we are resolving these very diverse challenges within the department. In the Department of Defense only 30% GS-14's and GS-15's are women, and the numbers are even less for minorities. We need to do a better job targeting outreach toward women and minorities. We need to make sure the messages we're sending resonate with a more diverse population.

**Michael:** In that regard, what are your thoughts on it being important in terms of community building, inspiring, and bringing up the leaders of the next generation?

**Dr. Brown:** I think it's extremely important. We have to remember that our institutions are really microcosms of our communities. What we do in our institutions generally translates to how people respond and react to their communities. If folks don't feel engaged, if they don't feel satisfied, if they don't feel empowered, they usually don't get involved in their communities. I believe that increasing engagement and empowering individuals within the institution helps toward the community. To get to the second part of your

As the Chief Learning Officer, I also conduct an emerging leader program for the Department of Defense, so this means I can give you a couple of recommendations that might be worthy of thinking about. - Dr. Brown

question regarding future leaders, I think it goes without saying that diversity and inclusion clearly goes hand-in-hand with the next generation of leaders. From my experience, millennials, or younger individuals, view diversity much differently than we do as baby boomers. They see diversity much like I do. It's blending different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within a team. It's important to them. Diversity of talent is essential. I see that they are energized by this diversity on the job. We have to be able to capitalize on that with our next generation of leaders. I did find this quote that I think is applicable, "Millennials are refusing to check their identities at the doors of organizations today and they strongly believe these characteristics bring value to the business outcomes and impact." I think we have to play on that. I think we have to encourage that as needed in organizations.

**Michael:** I think that brings up a pretty interesting point. I think millennials have a dilemma with which they're dealing. Maybe you can speak to this based on your experience. How does a young millennial deal with refusing to check their identity at the door while pursuing success within an organization? Sometimes, there is a professional cost to refusing to "check your identity at the door." So, how does one reconcile that?

So, what's next for you? What should we look out for? - Kennedy

**Dr. Brown:** What's next for me? Well, one, I want to continue to learn about my role as the Chief Learning Officer so I can contribute better, I want to become a thought leader in the learning and leadership and employee engagement community space. I want to publish. I actually want to take my dissertation and the stories of those spouses and publish a book. I'd like for it to become a mini-series. For me, that would be the ultimate next best thing. - Dr. Brown

**Dr. Brown:** That's a great question. I think it's a matter of choice. Not only do millennials refuse to check their identities at the door, but, individuals inside the organization often don't know what to do with millennials when they do arrive. I caution millennials about two things. I understand their independence, I understand the need for them to work on their own terms and, again, not check their identity at the door. I think, however, they also have to understand that those kinds of transformative changes in organizations take time. If they don't stay with an organization, they can't help that organization transform. If everyone there is a baby boomer, then business will continue as usual. The organization will need that influx of new ideas, but the millennials have to be patient enough to wait for those changes to happen. That's the one drawback I find with millennials. They think, "Okay, this is not happening for me so I'm going to move away." They move to the next spot and find it's not happening there, either. You can teach an old bird new tricks, but you have to stay long enough to help them understand what the new trick is. Millennials also have to be receptive and willing to receive advice and recommendations from individuals who have been on the job for some time. I think it's a dual problem. It's not just with millennials and it's not just with baby boomers.

I think it's, partly, bringing them together to work toward a common goal. I think patience is important.

**Michael:** I definitely believe there is some merit to that. But then, I would ask the question, what is the balance? What's the line between, one, being patient and waiting for someone to understand them and who they are, and, two, having to convince someone that your identity ought to be accepted. When do you say enough is enough?

**Dr. Brown:** Oh, that's a great question. Because I'm not a millennial, it might be hard for me to answer that question.

I think everybody has to internalize that for themselves because "enough" is a personal thing. My caution to millennials, however, is to at least give it a chance and, then, when you think that you can't do any more, when you've reached your limit, then it's time to go. Don't go because someone is pushing you out the door or you feel someone is not accepting you. That organization can benefit tremendously by you being there.

**Michael:** Absolutely. The final question I have is fitting, I think, since we've been talking about millennials, our generation. When you were younger, say eighteen or so, who would you say was influential in your life?

**Dr. Brown:** Oh, wow. Let's see. Eighteen or so. Can I remember that far back? [Laughter from all participants] I think I probably had two people that were influential in my life. One was not so positive and one was much more positive. So, can I give you both of them?

**Michael:** Oh, absolutely.

**Dr. Brown:** Okay. Well, I think from a not so positive perspective, when I was growing up, Blacks were really not encouraged to go to college. So, when I was in high school, I had a counselor who recommended that I take shorthand and typing because, in her opinion, the best I could hope for was to graduate from high school and get a secretarial job. That was what she told me. That was her counseling advice to me. Her reluctance to nurture a sense of learning in me really pushed me to not only excel at typing and shorthand, but to also excel in pre-college courses. Upon graduation from high school I was awarded three academic scholarships. I really believe that her reticence in pushing me the way I really wanted to go helped me to achieve. That's an impact,

When you are finally able to retire some day, what do you hope to explore or expect to have accomplished? What do you want your legacy to be? - Janelle

I think I hope my legacy would be is that people would look back and say, "You know, Dr. Brown made a difference in my life." That I inspired them to continue to learn and continue to grow and to continue to expand their horizons. I think that's what I really want my legacy to be. That I made a difference to someone's life. - Dr. Brown

but it's not quite a positive impact. Now, there is someone who had a very positive impact on me when I was about eighteen years of age. Believe it or not, this person was my elementary school principal, Miss Mary Snow. She was the very first black principal in my county and she was probably the first black principal in the State of West Virginia. She and I stayed connected for many, many years, and all through high school she was my mentor. She was my advisor. Miss Snow really pushed me to embrace education. She instilled in me a love of learning and the desire to give back to individuals who were more disadvantaged than I. Now, remember, I grew up in a small, very poor, all black community, but I always felt there were other people who could benefit from my help. It was Miss Snow who was really was my leader and the teacher who taught me to do that.

**Michael:** That's a powerful story.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you.

**Janelle:** Well, ma'am this is Janelle and I was wondering, being an emerging leader, myself, what are a few resources you would

I think those are three powerful words that everybody can aspire to. On behalf of all of us, I'd like to thank you, again, for your insight into leadership, diversity, and inclusion. We appreciate your time and enjoyed listening to your story and outlook on these critical issues. - Michael

recommend to emerging leaders that will help them to gain insight into becoming a better leader?

**Dr. Brown:** I do a lot of workforce development, and things like that, as the Chief Learning Officer. I also conduct an emerging leader program for the Department of Defense, so this means I can give you a couple of recommendations that might be worthy of thinking about. The first one I recommend is a self-assessment. A self-assessment is really to help you gain a better understanding of yourself. While we think we know ourselves, but until you sit down for a little bit and really reflect on it you'll probably be able to learn additional things about yourself. Next, I recommend training in areas such as team building. In team building we talk about power, we talk about social influence, and we talk about how to maximize those things. Many emerging leaders think that power comes with time and position in the job. That is not necessarily true. The good thing about team building and learning how to use power and social influence is that you understand the value of that at an earlier age. Also, learn about leadership styles. There are multiple leadership styles and you will find that how you lead in an environment will change depending on the situation, who you're leading, who you're working with, what needs to be accomplished, and what you're most comfortable with. There will be times when what you're most comfortable with may not be the style you need at a particular time. So, learning about different leadership styles helps you move from one style to another. I think it's also important to understand emotional

intelligence and what kinds of things people bring to the workplace or the team, or whatever environment you're in. Two additional things I think are important are conflict management and having difficult conversations. Young emerging leaders spend a lot of their time in a virtual world, but there is going to come a time when they will need to sit down and have a conversation that is not

going to be easy. The sooner they learn how to have those difficult conversations, and to manage that conflict, the more successful they will be. I also think emerging leaders must understand the financial world of the environment in which they are working. Unless you are a business major, that tends to get overlooked in all other types of occupation. If you don't understand the money and if you don't understand the system that is put into place to make it work, then I think you're going to be at a disadvantage. Another thing I would recommend is think about your brand. A couple of years ago Tom Peters produced a really great article about developing your brand. Who are you? What's important to you? What are those things that you're willing to sacrifice and to give up for those things that you think you want? My last recommendation is to find a good mentor, or even a couple of mentors, who can advise you and help you navigate the waters, whether it's career, social, or whatever. I think that the most important resource for all of our emerging leaders is to learn how to focus on their whole self. Their mind, their body, their spirit, as well as their career, because you've got to have all four of those in some kind of balance so that you can contribute one hundred percent.

**Janelle:** Wow. Interesting. Your decision to support the military is very inspiring. What inspired you to take such a leadership and active role?

**Dr. Brown:** Well, I firmly believe that, as a society, we should all be honored to support our military. Our military men and women put their lives on the line every day. They give up their personal

freedom to protect our way of life. They defend our nation because they believe in something that is much greater than themselves. For that, I am eternally grateful. Without them, we would have so much more chaos in the world. You know, initially, as a young Army spouse, supporting the military was convenient. It was what my soldier did, so I did those things that spouses did. Later, after my soldier passed away, it became a matter of service for me. The military has a very strong core, and if we, as civilian employees, can make life better for our soldiers, we all win. My father was a soldier in the Korean War. My brother was a soldier in the Vietnam War. My first husband was a captain in the Army, and my son was a Captain in the Army. He recently medically retired because of injuries to his right leg he incurred during his second deployment to Afghanistan. I just don't think society understands that going to war is easy. Coming home is hard. I think that, as Americans, we have to ensure our military members are supported, whether or not we believe in the war. That is a totally separate issue. I just think we need to support our military members.

**Janelle:** Yes, ma'am. So, what has been the best experience in your professional journey, thus far, or the most rewarding?

**Dr. Brown:** I've had great jobs over my career, and

all of them have been professionally rewarding, but I think the best experience of my career, so far, has been that I was recently able to complete my dissertation about spouses of wounded warriors. Our soldiers make a great sacrifice, but so do their spouses and I think people forget about that. I had the opportunity to interview fifteen spouses of soldiers who were wounded in combat in support of the war on terrorism. The purpose of my study was to get an understanding of the essence of their transformative experiences. How did they move from women who are dependent on their soldiers to become the heads of their households? How do they make meaning of their new life circumstances because of these dramatic changes? What do they need from society to better support them? Spending time with these fifteen women, listening to their stories, and hearing their experiences really touched me, probably more than any job that I've had in my 37 years at the Department of Defense as an employee.

**Kennedy:** So, what's next for you? What should we look out for?

**Dr. Brown:** What's next for me? Well, one, I want to continue to learn about my role as the Chief Learning Officer so I can contribute better, I

Thank you for your response. So, tying into that, what is one mistake that you witness leaders making more frequently than others? -Kennedy

Probably, one of the biggest mistakes I see leaders make is that they do not fully embrace the tolerance, the ambition, and the skills that everyone on their team brings to the table. People are generally very comfortable working with individuals who are like themselves. Whether or not that is inadvertent, they leave out a part of the work group that has contributions to make. Those leaders who are focusing only on those individuals who look like them, who think like them, who work like them, could be much more successful if they were more embracing of individuals on their team who have different ideas ways of doing business, and who have a different perspective. That's one of the biggest mistakes I see leaders make. -Dr. Brown

want to become a thought leader in the learning and leadership and employee engagement community space. I want to publish. I actually want to take my dissertation and the stories of those spouses and publish a book. I'd like for it to become a mini-series [Laughs]. For me, that would be the ultimate next best thing.

**Kennedy:** Thank you so much, Dr. Brown. I have a question that isn't so hard-hitting. There is a great deal of easily accessible information about you regarding your accomplishments; but, we want to know what you like to do for fun that people might be surprised to know.

**Dr. Brown:** Fun? You mean people really have fun? [Laughing] Well, let's see. First of all, my husband and I are great movie buffs, so we go to the theater whenever we can. I'm hooked on The Fast and the Furious movies, I'm hooked on Riddick, I'm hooked on any of these big, global movies. I mean, I really love them. I love spy movies. My husband and I love to dance, so it's time for us to take up salsa dancing again. We love wine tastings and pairing different wines with different foods. For me, a perfect evening out would be to attend a winemaker's dinner where the chef and the winemaker have already paired the food with the wine. For me, that would be way too easy. It would be great fun. So, that's basically what I do for fun.

**Kennedy:** Thank you so much.

**Janelle:** When you are finally able to retire some day, what do you hope to explore or expect to

have accomplished? What do you want your legacy to be?

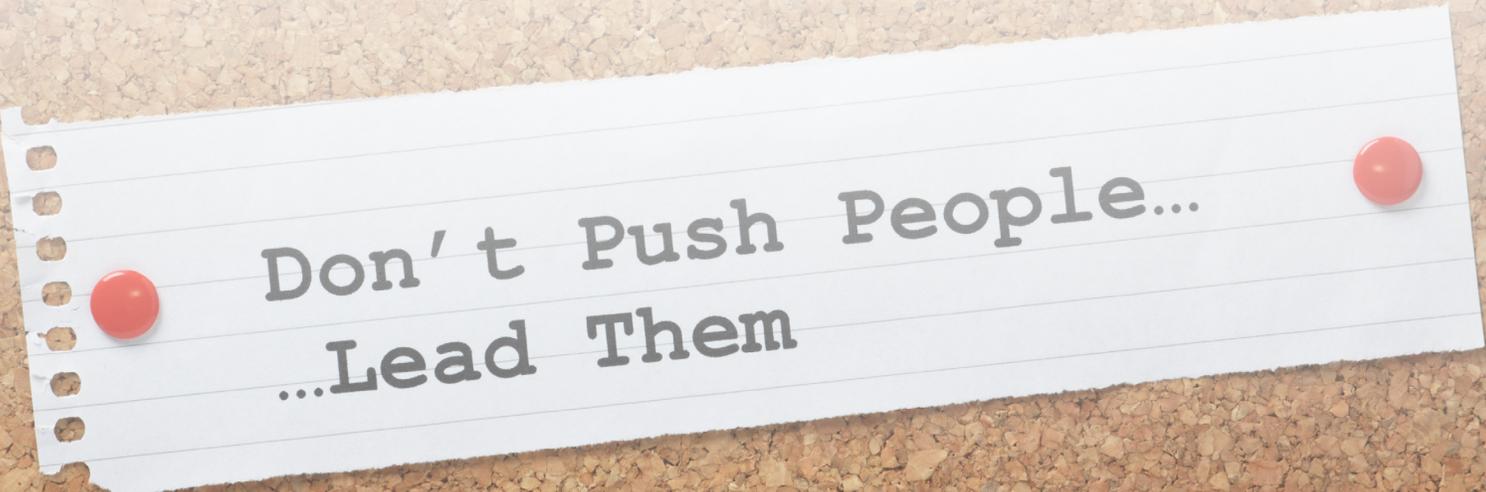
**Dr. Brown:** I think I hope my legacy would be is that people would look back and say, "You know, Dr. Brown made a difference in my life." That I inspired them to continue to learn and continue to grow and to continue to expand their horizons. I think that's what I really want my legacy to be. That I made a difference to someone's life.

**Janelle:** Lastly, could you give us three words to sum up "Dr. Brown?"

**Dr. Brown:** This is probably the hardest question you have asked me, so far. I am who I am. I just try to be the best I can be. I'm about getting the job done, I'm about pushing my team to get the job done, but they know that I'm going to be in there with them while we're working on whatever project it is we're tackling. I hope the last one would be inspiring. It would be great if people would say, "Wow, Dr. Brown did this, so maybe I can do that." So the three words I would choose are authentic, committed, and inspiring.

**Michael:** I think those are three powerful words that everybody can aspire to. On behalf of all of us, I'd like to thank you, again, for your insight into leadership, diversity, and inclusion. We appreciate your time and enjoyed listening to your story and outlook on these critical issues.

**Dr. Brown:** You're welcome.



Don't Push People...  
...Lead Them