



2017 Lead 360 Summit

Overview

There are too few African Americans in senior-level corporate positions. Reasons include lack of access to opportunities, lack of organizational support and professional development, lack of networks and mentoring, and politics and bias.

Addressing these challenges requires strategies and actions focused on preparing more African American middle managers to be ready to ascend to senior positions. Keys include identifying capable talent early on; readying this talent by developing the necessary skills, competencies, and social networks; and getting talent placed in good opportunities. Important steps including getting D&I on the agenda of corporate boards, presenting a business case showing the value of developing diverse leaders, and holding senior leaders accountable for developing a pipeline of diverse middle-management talent.

Through this Summit, ongoing leadership development activities, and a planned Summit in 2018, the National Leadership Consortium is providing tools, resources, and networks to develop talented Black middle and senior managers.

Context

The 2017 Lead 360 Summit was held in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 22. National Leadership Consortium CEO, E. Wynstin (Eric) Walton, shared the vision for the Summit and framed the discussion.

Author and speaker [Dr. Shirley Davis](#) led an exercise focused on identifying commonalities among participants. Chuck Vivian of [Cogency Group](#) facilitated a discussion about challenges facing African American business leaders, and Carly Vivian—also of Cogency Group—orchestrated solution discussions to identify strategies to address these challenges. Scarla Gilbert, COO of National Leadership Consortium, outlined plans for a 2018 Summit and described other NLC offerings and opportunities.

CEO's Remarks

Eric Walton is inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois, who focused on striving for the greatness of spirit and looked at life in terms of future possibilities. His mindset was to understand what's going on and to do something about it. Like Du Bois, everyone at the Lead 360 Summit was committed to being part of something larger than themselves.

In looking at *what's going on today* a few themes are:

- **Too few senior jobs.** Only 1 out of 100 CEOs of major companies is Black.
- **Everyone has a story.** Every Black business leader has a personal story about their journey and experiences. Some stories make you clap and some make you cry. Every story needs to be fully understood and appreciated.

- **Too much fear and too little courage.** Black leaders feel isolated because in most organizations there are few Black colleagues at comparable levels. There are few people to turn to or share with. While Black leaders of previous generations were bold and fearless, today Black executives have become cautious and fearful of losing good jobs. “The courage of Black leadership is challenged at this particular moment.”

If that’s what is going on today, the question is *what can we do about it?*

The opportunity and the focus of the National Leadership Consortium is to *bolster, support, train, network, and connect with those in middle management to create a strong, more formidable pipeline [of Black talent] to change the number of jobs.*

“The work is in the middle.”

– Eric Wynstin Walton



Eric Wynstin Walton

With this focus on developing a robust pipeline of middle managers who are prepared to ascend to senior positions, *this Summit is not a destination, but an ongoing journey.* This journey begins with thought and requires planning. The journey must be strategic and purposeful; it is not just an event, but a system. The National Leadership Consortium’s system is a continuous learning experience that

includes roundtables, virtual meetings, mentoring, networking, and various forms of content and development.

“We are focused on being resources for middle managers and senior leaders.”

– Eric Wynstin Walton

Common Experiences

Dr. Shirley Davis led an interactive exercise where Summit participants reacted to a series of questions about various life experiences. These questions and responses showed that Summit participants shared many similarities and common experiences. Many participants have:

- *Experienced some form of racial discrimination* in the workplace, and many have even *sued an employer*, which was a very difficult, uncomfortable experience.

- *Left an employer* because they felt the employer had done something wrong and they no longer wanted to stay in that environment.
- Had a *sense of fear, insecurity, and uncertainty* about being a senior executive. Many individuals had *some form of personal self-blame*.
- Become *overly protective and risk averse*. Having succeeded in climbing the corporate ladder, successful Black executives are extremely cautious and don’t want to take risks that could in any way threaten their career or result in a step backwards.
- Unintentionally *compromised their values* to get ahead. Based on self-interest, individuals may have been overly cautious and failed to speak up or take action that may have been seen as controversial.
- Had an *important mentor who was not an African American*. Several stories were shared of mentors who had the courage to provide blunt advice that helped Black leaders continue to advance.
- *Experienced uncomfortable competition with other African Americans*. Believing that there are a limited number of opportunities at the top for minorities, individuals have experienced an unwillingness of African Americans to mentor or support others in the same organization.



Dr. Shirley Davis

Dr. Shirley Davis emphasized that we have all had experiences that shape us. And, while Black leaders may feel isolated or fearful, everyone is stronger when talking and acting together as part of a network.

Challenges & Solutions



Chuck Vivian

Chuck Vivian led a discussion about key challenges facing African American corporate leaders. The main challenges identified by participants prior to the Summit were lack of access to opportunities, lack of organizational support and professional development, lack of networking and mentoring, and politics and bias.

Comments about these challenges include:

Lack of Access to Opportunities	Lack of Organizational Support and Professional Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to opportunities is about more than just knowledge, competency, and skills. It is about personal relationships and sponsorship. • To know about and be steered toward opportunities it is important to have sponsors and champions who are credible and have “juice” in the organization. • Access to opportunities is a result of having a well-developed social network. Looking back, many Black leaders were not initially aware of the importance of social networks, didn’t know about or understand what a social network was, and didn’t actively cultivate a social network. • At times a lateral move is a good opportunity if it results in gaining skills and experiences. • Access to opportunities is about helping pull others up. <p>“Advancement is about more than knowledge and skills. It is about social habits.” – Participant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In many organizations the push for diversity and inclusion has focused on gender and sexual orientation. • There has been an “Obama phenomenon” where there is a misperception that because we have had a Black president “we are good” and no further efforts are required. • There must be an organizational value proposition for race and ethnicity. • If organizations lack systems and support for professional development, individuals must be proactive and take initiative. <p>“For training, just sign up and go yourself.” Chuck Vivian</p>

Lack of Networking and Mentoring	Politics and Bias
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals can’t sit back and rely on mentoring. Each person must understand how the firm makes money. • Individuals need to take initiative and “put themselves in the game.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We all have unconscious biases and fears. Sometimes these biases and fears get in the way and cause us to stop helping others. • Overcoming politics and bias requires persistence and tenacity.

After identifying and briefly discussing these key challenges, Carly Vivian laid out a process that participants followed in four breakout groups. The process included:



Carly Vivian

- Step 1: Identifying today’s current reality
- Step 2: Clearly envisioning the future state in 2020

The difference between the future vision and today’s current reality is “the gap.”

- Step 3: Developing specific strategies to close the gap.



CHALLENGE: LACK OF ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Today's Current Reality	2020 Vision	Strategies for Moving from Current Reality to 2020 Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Americans represent 16% of director-level positions, equal to the employee population. • African Americans account for just 6-8% of VPs and EVPs, which is not on par with the employee population. • Among the reasons for this gap at the VP/EVP level are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Lack of organizational focus and programs —Biases and apathy —Inadequate pipeline of prepared, ready talent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 2% increase in African American VPs and EVPs. • Having a pool of capable, ready talent that is prepared to ascend to senior-level positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify capable talent early on. One idea: participants in at the Summit the National Executive Forum can identify 25 people to groom for senior positions. • Develop talent by creating greater readiness for senior management. Develop key skills like business knowledge, emotional intelligence, communication skills, and more. • Placement of talent by creating and leveraging networks to help work with corporations and facilitate placement.

CHALLENGE: LACK OF NETWORKING AND MENTORING

Today's Current Reality	2020 Vision	Strategies for Moving from Current Reality to 2020 Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks today are fragmented. • There is a lack of awareness about existing networks. • There is fear and uncertainty about networking. Introverts find it hard to network. Extroverts don't necessarily know how to network. • Other groups, such as Jews, Asians, and Hispanics, have built strong, successful networks that African Americans can learn from and seek to emulate. These networks aren't just based in workplaces; they are social networks that begin early in life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future vision is a diverse networking system with multiple access points; an ecosystem of interrelated activities. • The vision is for networking to be both inclusive and focused. (The vision is for a network largely of African Americans, but African Americans alone can't drive ascension. Others must be included.) • The vision combines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —People – including influencers, mentors, partners, and recruiters —Processes —Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a high-level roadmap to implement a networking and mentoring plan (Summit participants involved in this discussion plan to reconnect to do so). • Adopt an existing networking technology, such as LinkedIn.

CHALLENGE: LACK OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Today's Current Reality	2020 Vision	Strategies for Moving from Current Reality to 2020 Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and support is fragmented. • There are limited resources. • There is “check the box” mentality for development. • Some development groups and efforts are not effective. • There is a need for more leadership training programs; access to current programs is limited. <p>“In times of change, learners inherit the world.” – Participant</p>	<p>In the future:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development will be very intentional. There will be intentionality in identifying talent and providing development to ensure this talent makes it to the top. • D&I will be integrated into the business. People will be held accountable for D&I through measures and scorecards, which will include measures related to the development of top candidates. • Development will be provided to more than just high potentials. It will be broad, with a culture of learning. 	<p>The gap closure plan for the next 2.5 years will have 2 strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create conditions to improve development for existing and potential leaders. This includes redefining “must have” competencies for leaders. 2. Intentional selection of the next generation of leaders by developing and shaping criteria for selection of future leaders. <p>Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold current leaders accountable for development • Reward courageous leaders • Make sure there is a clear value proposition and business case for development • Have clear measures of the impact of investments in development (and the losses that occur to the business without investments in development) • Identify learning and organizational measures for effective development • Identify best practices • Identify where organizations need partners to assist with development <p>It is anticipated that these actions will take an entire year.</p>

CHALLENGE: POLITICS AND BIAS

Today's Current Reality	2020 Vision	Strategies for Moving from Current Reality to 2020 Vision
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a great deal of political polarization in companies.• In light of the divisive political climate, a boldness has infiltrated the workplace with people speaking out in ways that weren't previously seen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heightened awareness of unconscious biases.• D&I is on the agenda of Boards of Directors and part of annual board retreats.• There are more influential African Americans on boards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a business case of the value of D&I tied to financials that is shared with the board.• Have a pipeline program where senior executives are measured and rewarded or penalized based on their performance in developing African American leaders.

Looking Ahead

The National Leadership Consortium is planning a Summit on April 20-21, 2018.

The issues raised in this Summit will form the basis for an ongoing dialog, focused on growth and development, and action plans. The 2018 Summit will include TED Talk-like sessions, a focus on financial literacy, an emphasis on managing globally, and deep dives on various subjects. There will also be a focus on development activities for Millennials and youth, with concurrent youth sessions.



Scarla Gilbert