

STATE OF OUR UNION: BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS IN DELAWARE

Questions & Answers

Devonna - Can you share your experience in your business of selling art and how others can be as successful as you are?

I've had a number of experiences selling my art:

Selling crafts on consignment while a college student. I approached a number of shops on Main Street in Newark, and had agreements with several shop owners to take dolls, Afro-centric greeting cards. I also had an arrangement with the University book store. My business wasn't formalized but I sold works under my business name, devogo. I was a prolific acrylic painting artist and participated in a number of local art shows and sold paintings frequently. These art sales helped provide a means of support while I was in school. I continued to paint more as a hobby than as a business as my career took off in a different direction. I did continue to participate in art shows and sell my work periodically.

I formed a partnership business with another woman who was a writer of children's books and we formed a company called, Tales N Tots Enterprises. I illustrated books which were geared to K-12, focused on the ethnic market and health and wellness. I was also the business developer/marketing and we both spoke frequently on the topics. We were successful at receiving a distributorship in 7-11 stores for point of purchase sales in the regional area. We did lots of trade shows, fairs and libraries and handled bulk purchases and individual sales. This was a part time endeavor but very successful. The concept was ahead of its time and the technology was behind where we are today. We ended the partnership because we disagreed on how to fulfill and order of 30K books. Many lessons learned – the books are still in the libraries

While a corporate executive I began painting again more actively while on business road trips and I was invited to be a part of black artists who showed in the Philadelphia area. I worked with a well-known area art dealer and showed works in her gallery and with other artists on assignment. I did that for about 3 years.

In GWA, my management consulting business, I used my art talents to design the prototype for or very successful, globally selling "Spice of Life Diversity Card deck training tool. I hired a PR firm to do the actual design work.

I've recently created a line of clothing, scarves and bags on line – The Beautiful Life – using my art and photography. I hope to sell these items one day in a boutique....right now, I just don't have the time.

Where is Olin College located?

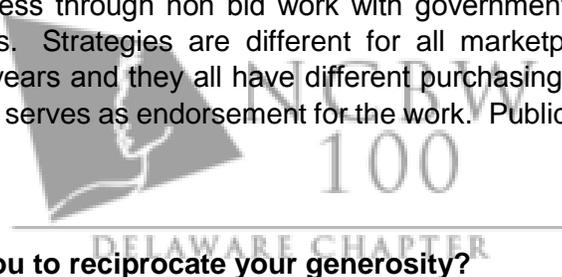
Olin College is located in Needham, MA. It was founded to radically change engineering education with the goal of fueling the technical innovation needed to solve the world's complex future challenges. In 1997, the F.W. Olin Foundation established the college with a visionary and unprecedented grant "to be an important and constant contributor to the advancement of engineering education in America and throughout the world." From day one, Olin had no departments or tenured faculty, allowing for true collaboration and integration of efforts. Olin instills passion and ignites innovation by focusing engineering students on the needs of people in the real world.

Devonna - How can Black women business owners position ourselves for procurement opportunities and other government and private funded resources?

Black women have much less barriers to entry than when I started my business. Opportunities are open to anyone who has a good idea that the market wants to support. In other words, you have to have a product or service where there is demand. Today, however, competition is the hardest obstacle to overcome to build a brand that people will support. Procurement opportunities are generally online but a personal contact is always needed to make things happen. Sometimes this is through attending mandatory bidders meetings, when responding to a competitive bid, or making a good impression when asked to present when your company is in the last group of A-listers.

You need to develop a capability statement and presentation that you can get in front of people who are the decision makers and a great 30 minute commercial that you can pitch in appropriate settings. That said, businesses need to have a clear focus so the offering or product is not confusing. Lastly, one must have a reputation that is known in the marketplace which helps build traffic and third party endorsements which is what ultimately will get businesses the work – especially service businesses.

I've been able to build my business through non bid work with government, referrals with nonprofits and reputation with corporate entities. Strategies are different for all marketplaces and industries. This is something I've learned over the years and they all have different purchasing cycles. A strong presence on line is also helpful and these days serves as endorsement for the work. Publications are also useful. There's so much more I can share here.



Is there anything I can do for you to reciprocate your generosity?

So nice of you to ask....I have little expectation for reciprocity but always enjoy opportunities to give back in any way I can through mentoring others. I've benefitted from mentors and independent business people I sought out in my early days for advice so I could shape my business. I am still learning every day and striving to contribute to society. That's why I am spending so much time with Delaware State University now – to give back and help others. Sometimes recognition is a way to inspire others. I would like more people to know my story, I suppose. I've always had so little resources for my business ventures, but made them work and I've made a great living. I often imagine what I would have done if I had greater financial resources.

As a Teensharpie, attending raising Kings week was mandatory. I noticed that this initiative for raising Kings would be so inspiring if us girls had one for ourselves. How would you go about starting this initiative for Black girls and their parents made by Black girls?

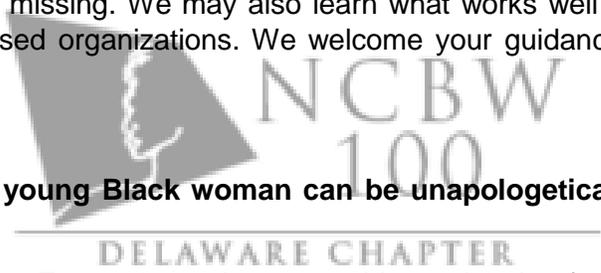
What an awesome idea. A first step might be talking with you and other Black girls to listen to your ideas, help Black girls organize and carry out your vision. The NC100BW-DE 100 Bridges Program for Black Girls would love to connect with you to bring this idea to life.

How can a Sussex County resident assist? Become more engaged?

Please visit www.ncbwde.org, pull down membership, complete and return an application. Also, we will include you on our e-news list to receive updates on the Chapter that will include engagement opportunities. If you would like to host a gathering of Black women in Sussex County this summer, we would welcome the opportunity to explore ways together to connect in Sussex. We are interested in hosting a briefing of the State of Our Union: Black Women & Girls in Delaware and could really use your help.

How do you see/suggest the faith community assist our young ladies transition from high school to adulthood?

A first step may be to activate ideas by collecting an inventory what faith based organizations are currently offering for black girls transitioning to adulthood. An asset mapping inventory would guide us in understanding how best to add value. Asset mapping is also a useful tool to identify where supports are concentrated and where gaps supports are missing. We may also learn what works well and how to build and expand best practices among faith based organizations. We welcome your guidance in identifying where to start with collecting information.



How do you suggest a young Black woman can be unapologetically for our people while being in politics?

This is a complex question. For starters, please consider registering for our new initiative Mary Ann Shadd Cary/Margaret Rose Henry Civic Engagement Training that will launch statewide in the summer of 2018. During this 13 week session, we will learn and uncover these strategies together by connecting with elected leaders and others with boots on the ground.

What effective strategies should we develop to advocate for the geriatric female population in our Black community? Urban and rural elderly are in crisis!

Thank you so much for raising your voice on behalf of our elders. The State of Our Union is our first effort and there are populations of black women we need to uncover critical information for to guide our actions. In the 2nd edition, we plan to take a deep dive into advocating for the Black elderly women. The state director of AARP is a NC100BW-DE chapter member. Along with AARP as one source, we desire to work with a range of groups to develop effective strategies to advocate for our elders. We could really use your help to identify and talk with geriatric black women and their families in our urban and rural communities.

Everyone, let's set up real time conversations to advance the discussion/actions around the questions posed. We invite each of you to e-mail us ncbwofdelaware@outlook.com. We are committed to our mission to partner with others to expand our volunteer coalition.