



Episode #6: Black Stories by Black Voices for BHM

Host: Tyrell Comeaux

Guests: Sandra Evangelista, David Jones

Tyrell Comeaux:

My name is Tyrell Comeaux, Senior Director of Clinical and Support Services at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. Today is episode of "Engaging Our People." This is a special episode for Black History Month that is titled "Black Stories By Black Voices for Black History Month."

I have with us today two spectacular guests who I will now turn over and let them introduce their self. First, we have Sandra. Sandra, if you'd like to introduce yourself for us.

Sandra Evangelista:

Sure. Hi, I'm Sandra Evangelista. I'm the Nurse Manager of Meridian Park Family Birth Center. And I've been a Legacy employee for just over seven years.

Tyrell Comeaux:

And also with us today we have David. David, if you want to take the time to let the podcast world know who you are.

David Jones:

This is David Jones, Supervisor for Food Nutrition here at Emanuel Medical Center and Randall's Children's Hospital. I've been with Legacy for 17 years.

Tyrell Comeaux:

As I mentioned earlier, this episode, we are calling "Black Stories by Black Voices in honor of Black History Month." Just a brief little history about Black History Month for those who may not be aware... Black History Month was created in 1915 by Black Harvard educated historian and author, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, to acknowledge and honor the history and culture of Black people in America. February was chosen primarily because the month coincides with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Here at Legacy Health we prioritize racial equity, inclusion and anti-racism, which involves celebrating the rich history of all staff who work here. Bergstein, this Black History Month is mentoring. We're reflecting on our history and our experiences in the workplace.

Companies like Legacy can be inclusive by providing support and empowering talent to ensure all professionals, especially those from underrepresented communities, have access to resources and tools that enable career advancement.

According to vast companies, Black employees are more likely to leave their jobs than other underrepresented groups. This is often due to lack of mentors, role models and support. Black mentorship can help bridge this gap and create a more inclusive workplace culture.

After going over the information that I just provided, that leads me to pose some questions to Sandra and David in the same thought around mentorship. My first question will start off with Sandra and then I'll move to David. Do or did you have a mentor that played an essential role in your life?

Sandra Evangelista:

Yes. My mentor that I have right now is Mel [inaudible 00:03:04]. She's the NO, BP and COO over at Meridian Park Hospital. And it's interesting when you say the amount of folks that want to leave a job, I have felt like that.

I want to say 2020 was a rough year for everyone. And if it wasn't for Mel, everything that I went through over the last two, three years, I probably would have been gone. She's been extremely supportive. I have cried on her shoulder. She, even within her job, duties and there's times that I haven't wanted to reach out to her because I know she's busy... But many times she would tell me, "That's what I'm here for. Anytime you need me, you reach out. I will find the time." And she does. And she did and she does.

Yeah. Mel, she means a lot to me. She's helped me through some personal things and a lot of tough situations at work.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now thank you for sharing your story. That's great to hear that we have people within the organization, that although we per se don't have a formal mentor program, that are people out there that are actually doing this work currently. That's great for you to share your story because I think that's extremely important for those stories to be shared. Thank you.

David, moving on to you who I know David, I call him Mr. D.

David Jones:

That's right.

Tyrell Comeaux:

But to the podcast land this is David. So same question, do or did you have a mentor that played an essential role in your life?

David Jones:

I did. I had to think about this question and I realized I did. And I hadn't thought of them officially as mentors. But for me it's been Tresa Graham, who is catering manager here at Emanuel and Randall, and Andre Cole, who is executive chef here at Emanuel and Randall. Both of them have taken me under their wing and guided me, and brought me up the ladder rung here at Legacy.

And they saw something in me that I didn't necessarily see myself. They brought me over to the purchasing side of food nutrition. I did that for 10 years and eventually moved me over to the management side where I'm currently as a supervisor. They've both given me wonderful advice over the years. They've always pulled me to the side and whispered in my ear, "You would be really, really good

at this. And you were really, really great at that," and things that I didn't even realize that maybe I had skills in.

Like Sandra said, when I've had a hard times and just had questions and just concerns, they've always been a shoulder for me to lean on and a ear for me to just express my thoughts and feelings. And they help me out and guide me along the way, so I really appreciate those two.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now again, thank you for sharing your story. And again, it goes to highlight that although we don't have a formal process at this current time, there are a lot of people within the organization that's out here doing this work and pouring into people, as we like to call it... answering questions, being open and willing to listen and encourage people to see things in themselves that they may not be able to see at that moment in time.

And I think you guys both spoke in your own individual way on the why mentorship is extremely important to be a part of the recruitment and retention strategy for any organization. And I think you guys both articulated very clearly on why it's very important to have these type of programs in place.

All right, moving on to the next question. We'll go in reverse order, so I'll start with you David. Were you involved in a formal workplace program or an informal one? And some of it may be redundant, but you can answer the question that you haven't already answered, if that makes sense.

David Jones:

A work program as far as what? Mentorship?

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah, were you involved in a formal workplace program or an informal one?

David Jones:

No. I guess it'll be informal, nothing super formal. It was really like, "Hey, you, I got something to tell you, and this is what I feel like you should do." So I guess, look, that's about as informal as you could get.

Tyrell Comeaux:

After hearing what you said, you were quote, unquote "part of an informal mentorship program."

David Jones:

Yeah, yeah.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Okay.

David Jones:

But it would be nice if we had more of a formal mentorship here. Because we're like the Big Brother Big Sister program that you have or SEI.

Especially working here, I've been here a long time, it's nice to see faces like us in roles that you can aspire to. And it wasn't like that when I first got here. And over the years it's definitely gotten better.

And you see, maybe I want to be a nurse or maybe I want to do PR or do what you do... or Terrell who has a new job every two weeks, you blink for a couple seconds, you CEO or something.

It's nice to see that and to know that you can reach out and say, "Hey, if I wanted to get into this field, what could I do?" I think it'd be important for us to have more of a formal system here. Yeah.

Tyrell Comeaux:

I guess for me, for you, David, I got two follow up questions, kind of sort. First one would be in seeking a mentor, does race matter to you? Right? Because I think we got to be honest that some people may prefer to have a mentor that looks like them. Or some people may not care and they just want the information. So whoever provides you with the information, they're like, "Great, I will take the information." That's the first question. Maybe that's the only question I have, my apologies, so that question.

David Jones:

I would say no and yes. No race doesn't matter, but yes it does. Because, look, we understand ourselves way different than somebody else might. And so A, is this a good move? Is this a good move for me to make? Is this a good vertical? Is this is a good horizontal move for me to make get to a different place?

And I think with us we have a way of being honest with each other that, like I said, just helps just figure out your path in life a little bit better. It's a little bit more authenticity when it comes from us, and yeah, that's what I got.

Tyrell Comeaux:

As you were answering that question, I did remember my second question, I'm sorry.

David Jones:

It's all right.

Tyrell Comeaux:

You're trying to make this... We want people to hear this and get high numbers. When you said that things have gotten better, can you explain in your own words what do you mean by that? Because I hear that a lot, right? I've been with the organization going on 13 years and people are like, "Oh yeah, things have gotten better." But to me that's abstract.

From your perspective, your opinion, when you say "things have gotten better" as far as seeing more... And I didn't even want to put the words in your mouth. I would just like for you to explain, what do you mean by that things have gotten better? Because I'm curious.

Sandra Evangelista:

Well, Legacy has always been diverse. When I got here I was meeting races and nationalities that I didn't even know existed. And it's been really cool to just tap in to other cultures and see, hear other people's individual stories.

But when it comes to upper management, you didn't necessarily see a lot of brown and Black people. Over the years you're definitely seeing a lot more of that. And that's definitely helped as far as giving you something once again to aspire to know, "Oh, okay, so there is a..." It gives you the feeling that there could be a spot for me there, not, "Oh, I could be there. I might be the token or I might be the only one," and it may not last that long.

But when you see people go, especially when you see them move up the rankings, you realize that, "Oh, Legacy could actually be a home for me, a long-term home for me too, and not just a stepping stone to lead the organization to come be around somebody, be in an organization where there's more people like me."

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now thank you for explaining what that meant, right? Because I always challenge people when people make these kind of abstract to really dial that in to really make sure. And kudos to the organization as well, that lets you know that things are moving in the right direction. But I don't want us to bring out the champagne quite yet. We still-

David Jones:

We still got work to do.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah. We still got some work to do, but I think things are going in the right direction. And it's glad that... You're seeing it too because that's important. We all got to see it, can't just be the five of us over here, "Man, oh yeah, things are getting better," and the rest of the 95% is just like.

David Jones:

"No, it ain't."

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah so, all right. All right Sandra, same question, were you involved in a formal workplace program or an informal one?

Sandra Evangelista:

Mine was informal. As a matter of fact, how I ended up in the manager's role, I was the A&M Educator at Meridian Park. And because a lot of things that were going on, I wasn't going to apply for that manager's position, but Mel encouraged me. She actually had reviewed my resume and suggested some changes. I made those changes and here I am today. She has supported me.

And every interaction that I have with her, I learned something more, whether it's the one-on-one meetings that I have with her or if I'm in a room where she's leading a meeting or presenting something in a meeting, I learn something from her all the time, all the time.

And to answer your question, as far as should a mentor look like us? I don't think that's necessary. I just think it has to be the right person who really believes in you. And yes, like you say, it's still nice to see people of color in higher places so that you do have something to aspire to. But just thinking about a mentor, I don't think in terms of necessary color of skin. Is it just the right fit? Yeah.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah. And I'm in agreement with both of you. How I view mentorship, it's a people thing. You got to find your person, someone that's invested into you that has the time to answer your million questions you may have and not give the impression that you're bothering them or... I think that's something we probably need to speak on too about.

Some people may initially want to be a mentor, but they don't understand everything that comes around with a true and authentic mentorship. And they may be like, "I don't really have time no more." I look at a mentorship as a lifelong thing, per se. That is somebody you can always reach out to. You can be in different organizations, they can be on the other side of the country. You can send them an email and that they will respond to your email or give you a return phone call and listen and provide wise counsel on whatever you got going on career wise. Or if your mentorship is one that you have a professional mentor and a personal mentor, sometimes you can have one mentor that fits both roles. That's how I view mentorship.

And that may be too much to ask of someone honestly. I'm in perfect agreement with you Sandra that it should be about you finding that person that aligns with where you're trying to go within your career and in your life and-

Sandra Evangelista:

Exactly.

Tyrell Comeaux:

That should be the only thing that matters, in my opinion. All right, moving on to the next question. We'll start with you, Sandra, this time. Have you ever served as a mentor?

Sandra Evangelista:

I do. Many times, and even currently my new A&M, I feel she reminds me of myself a little bit. She was really nervous, scared getting into the A&M role, but she's doing a fantastic job. But I do hope to... I want to be part of an official mentoring program at some point. I feel like I am getting there because of all the mentorship that I've had.

But yeah, I do believe in we should always mentor others. And I don't think anyone's too young to mentor or whether it's work related, life related. I consider myself a mentor. I like helping people in life.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now that's great. David, pivoting to you, same question. Have you ever served as a mentor? And is that something you may be potentially interested in one day?

David Jones:

I've never thought about it being a mentor. I know a lot of my coworkers make jokes that I'm the counselor of my department. Everybody come to me with their problems and their concerns. I think because I don't have any judgment and I take the time to help them.

I think, like you were saying before, sometimes we get so caught up in representation and it mattering, and it does. But there's another step to that as far as what are you doing for the people that's coming behind you, what are you doing for the next generation? And like Sandra said, I'd just love to help people. And I love to guide them and not necessarily follow my path, but encourages them to follow their own unique path and within Legacy or not. I think that's important.

After sitting in this podcast, definitely be interested in being more of a formal mentor to others. Yeah, I could get into that.

Tyrell Comeaux:

All right. This news flash, you guys done put it out there. If we see random emails coming into your inbox, you guys put it out there that's your open. I just want to forewarn you. Don't be deleting emails, be like, "I didn't never get that email."

David Jones:

I will sign out immediately.

Tyrell Comeaux:

All right, next question. I'll start with you David. How did you meet and get connected with your, I guess, your mentor, right? You mentioned Tresha Graham and Andre Cole. How did that informal mentorship begin?

David Jones:

Well, like you guys were saying earlier, it's about building a relationship. And once you have that camaraderie with somebody and you can tap into their abilities and their unique skills, that's where a mentor/ mentee, is that the term, terminology? That's where something like that can manifest can grow from.

It was more like that, just talking and having conversations off to the side. That's where those relationships for me came from.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now that's great. Same question for you Sandra, how did you meet or get connected with your mentor? Which is Mel, you said Mel was your mentor. Walk us through how that relationship started again.

Sandra Evangelista:

Well, I initially met her when I interviewed for the A&M role. And I would have periodic meetings with her. But she wasn't my immediate boss, but I would have periodic meetings with her. And early on I felt that I could tell her anything and talk to her about anything.

And so then we fast forward, the manager that was there had left. And like I said before, I wasn't interested in applying for that position but was encouraged. I did and I would have regular meetings with Mel just going forward. And I just can't say enough great things about her.

She's just been extremely supportive. And she has helped me find my speak up voice in this corporate world. Because I can say anything to her and never was worried about any retaliation, or if it was something that I was really uncomfortable with it getting out to anyone else. I just felt really safe and secure with her.

Just by being the A&M there and her encouraging me to apply for the manager's role is how everything... the mentoring began.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah, and I think thank you for sharing that again, Sandra. I think one thing you highlight very well is the unspoken influence of mentors. You said you wasn't even interested in applying for a leadership role. We would've lost a great leader if you decided to lead an organization. I think that's also-

Sandra Evangelista:

That's right, say that again, great leader.

David Jones:

That's right.

Tyrell Comeaux:

I think that's also the other beautiful part of mentors, right? They're able to nudge you and be your personal cheerleader, right, per se, to be like, "No, you'll do great at it. Don't overthink it. Hit the apply button."

Because let's be honest, a lot of probably people currently now may have all the tools and the skillset necessary to be a great leader, but they may not have that right mentor pushing them out there. You need to be like, "Hey, you got to be uncomfortable. You got to go for it."

Sandra Evangelista:

Right. Yep, agreed.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Because I need... As a mentor objectively looking at you, have all the tools and the skill sets to be a great leader. And I think you both mentioned that a lot of times our mentors can see things in us that we may not be able to truly realize at that moment in time. And sometimes that can be a career hindrance for you because you think you don't have any opportunities or you think you can't grow. But I think that's probably because you don't have the right mentors around you to be like, "Hey, stop doubting yourself. You can do this."

Sandra Evangelista:

You can do this. Yep. Right.

David Jones:

Right.

Tyrell Comeaux:

All right. Next question, we'll go back to David. How has having a mentor helped you and your career and navigating through life?

David Jones:

The advice that I got has definitely given me the confidence, like you said, just apply for jobs and pitch myself to know where your skills lie, know where your greatness lies... and not be afraid to reach out and talk to somebody who may be upper administration when you need something, when you need anything.

I think that's what the mentors that I've had in my time here at this organization has definitely instilled in me is just instilling some confidence.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now that's awesome. Same question for you, Sandra, how has having a mentor helped you in your career?

Sandra Evangelista:

It's taught me it's okay to not always have the answer when the question is posed to you. It's okay to say, "Let me get back to you on that," and also to listen, just sometimes just sit there and just listen, which I've gotten a lot better at, just sitting here and listening.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Great answers by the both of you. But I think we have about three questions left. So I'll go to the next question and I'll start with Sandra. Do you have a favorite memory with your mentor or a moment that stuck with you?

Sandra Evangelista:

I had lost my dad to COVID. And I had taken some time off and I came back to work. And I got on the unit and I was having a hard time. I wasn't on the unit anymore than a couple minutes and I heard Mel's footsteps coming up the hall. It was almost like she knew I needed support at that moment and she just showed up. I cried like a baby on her shoulder, I did.

And she really supported me. I ended up going back home, of course. But in that moment that's where it's like no matter what I know she's going to be there to show up in that moment. There's some great moments too where we've laughed at things. But that's the one that comes to my mind first.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Yeah. No, and before we move on, sorry for your loss, you have my condolences to you and your family. We'll be remissed to gloss over that. Thank you for sharing that and I'm glad that you had a leader, authentic leader, to be that support for you at that moment in time. Because those are truly the things that keep people within organizations. Right?

Sandra Evangelista:

Exactly.

Tyrell Comeaux:

We can think about is money, which that definitely holds a lot of weight too. But knowing that people value you as a person first it's extremely important.

Sandra Evangelista:

Yes, it really is.

Tyrell Comeaux:

To I would say most of everyone.

Sandra Evangelista:

Yep.

Tyrell Comeaux:

All right. David, same question for you. Do you have a favorite memory with your mentors or a moment that stuck with you that you?

David Jones:

I know for me a moment that stuck out for me that was like a aha moment for me was Andre and Tresha, in different ways, basically telling me, "Hey, you need to stop being the... You're a great support, but stop being the supporting player in your own life. Be the lead role." And I had never thought about it like that. At first I was a little offended, "What you trying to say?" But I realized like, "Oh, you're right." And once again, it gave me that confidence boost to apply for jobs or reach out to other people, and just not be so timid and shy about things and just know my worth.

And that was, yeah, that's something my therapist, who I spent a lot of money on, had never made me realize. It was really cool. And once again, especially coming from my people, that was a special thing for me to realize.

Tyrell Comeaux:

So I hear David saying Tresha and Andre, he owe you some money because he was paying his therapist and they wasn't able to. He said that check-

David Jones:

Look, look, send me the bills, send me the bills.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Going to be in the mail for the both of you guys. Yeah. Now I think going back to what you said, David. I think mentors have the ability to be honest with you, right? Because we live in a world where people think things are happen overnight. I can look inward into my own stories how many times I've applied for jobs and I didn't get the jobs or no. And people may see me at this current state but they don't see all of that, the applying for jobs, you're getting denied. You apply again, you get denied again.

The mentors are the ones for you to be like, "Hey, keep trying don't give up. If it's meant for you it's going to be for you." I think that's the other unspoken things about mentors. They're able to see you at your vulnerable and weakest moments and build you back up to go out there and face it all again.

David Jones:

Yep, yep.

Sandra Evangelista:

Amen to that.

Tyrell Comeaux:

All right. This is going to be our last question. Why do you think mentorship is essential for Black employees at Legacy? And we can balloon it out to include all people, right? I think we're really focusing on Black people because this is Black History Month and that's the context. But if you want to talk about the micro and the macro, I'd be interested to see and curious to see how you guys view that question. We'll start with Sandra.

Sandra Evangelista:

What was the question again?

Tyrell Comeaux:

Why do you think mentorship is essential for Black employees at Legacy?

Sandra Evangelista:

It lets us know that we can aspire to be whatever we want, to be more, that we don't have to just settle in that. Someone does believe in them and support them and will help them reach whatever their dream may be.

Tyrell Comeaux:

David, same question for you. Why do you think mentorship is essential for Black employees at Legacy? And like I said, you can expand on that if they include all groups, all race and ethnicities, so the micro and macro.

David Jones:

I think Sandra said it best. And really just for everybody, not even just for Black people, sometimes you just need that guidance, that whisper in your ear, that advice that a lot of times we like to pretend like we know ourselves and we know what we're doing. But oftentimes we don't. And like I said before, other people can see things in us that we didn't even realize we had. And so I think that it's important whether it's formal or informal.

Tyrell Comeaux:

Now thank you both. I couldn't have said it any better. As we are closing out this special episode for Black History Month, "Black Stories by Black Voices," I have some more data points I would like to share with the listeners.

40% of Black professionals believe mentorship, career coaching opportunities will help lead to a more equitable workplace culture, yet many professionals don't currently have access to these programs.

Mentoring can build trust in organizations for Black professionals. Those who don't currently have mentoring cited a lack of confidence in people in their organization. And many are uncomfortable asking for help which can be a barrier to success.

We believe mentoring can help strengthen bonds within the organization's leadership, foster growth, and retain employees by creating strong mentorship and sponsorship opportunities.

BERG hopes to work with our human resources department to make mentoring and other career growth programs more formal and structured at Legacy, to assist not only Black employees but all employees.

Want to thank our guests, Sandra Evangelista, David Jones for sharing their mentoring stories. I want to thank you for listening to the special Black History Month episode of Engaging Our People podcast called "Black Stories by Black Voices."

As with our podcast, and I'll double down on this, we want you guys to respond because we want ours to be the number one, throw that out there. We value you and your feedback. Please take a moment and drop a message at podcast@lhs.org and give us feedback. Or tell us about your ideas for stories to engage our people better.

Also, if you want to join BERG, we hold our monthly virtual meeting on the first Fridays of every month from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM. And the email is going to be BERG@lhs.org. Again, I'm Tyrell Comeaux, Senior Director of Clinical Support Services at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. And thank you all for listening today. Take care everyone.