

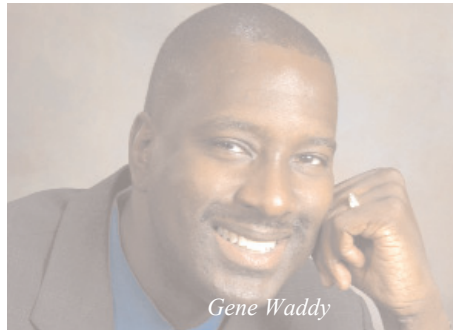
CEO OF LARGEST AFRICAN AMERICAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFFING AGENCY SHARES KEYS TO SUCCESS

By: Peter Cooper

Wounds still open from the economic recession of 2008 with U.S. unemployment rates nearly doubling since, reaching a head aching 9.1 percent as of August 2011. Black communities across the nation are hit extremely hard as homes fore-close daily and that small family owned business down the street gets boarded up while large corporations eye the property and lick their lips. Well, a success story exists amongst the rubble; a phoenix emerges from the ashes. Gene Waddy, native New Yorker, witnessed his company go from an entrepreneurial small business venture of \$300,000 gross to a nearly 100 million dollar enterprise and the largest African American IT staffing agency in only 7 years. Gene Waddy sat down with the Harlem News Group and shared his personal story.

Gene Waddy was born in the Bronx, New York. His mother Geanne Waddy (a native Harlemit) worked in the financial district of Manhattan as one of the first African American office managers in her company. His father, Henry Purnell 'Pickle' Waddy, (also a native Harlemit) was a window cleaner for some of the tallest buildings in downtown Manhattan.

The family moved to New Jersey soon after Gene was born and he grew with an older brother, two younger twin sisters, and a younger brother. He recounted on growing up in a blue-collar household in which conscious black thought, politics, and the 'Revolution' were often discussed. Malcolm X's photo could be found in a picture frame, traditional



Gene Waddy

African clothing was worn, words of Maya Angelou embraced his young ears, and jazz, drums, and traditional African musicians such as Olatunji reverberated from speakers. Crafting an interest in political thought and molding a love for his heritage at a young age.

Gene's father, Pickle, would often bring the children back to Harlem to visit his friends that he used to run the streets with. Gene remembered being wide eyed as he glared at the Harlem streets during the 70s and 80s. Even though the streets made 'Pickle' the man he was, he was careful not to glorify street life and instead instilled the value of education within his children.

Harlem also held a life changing experience for the now 9-year-old Gene when he went to visit a family friend - William 'Sonny' Burke, a.k.a. Uncle Sonny. Gene stepped into his office in Harlem Hospital and gleamed at Sonny's very own secretary, big desk, and crisp suit. Closing his eyes, he reminisced, "I will never forget that because I didn't know black men had jobs like that. I always

thought they all were blue-collar guys. This showed me the power of education." Gene was also moved with how Sonny never acted like he was better than his parents due to his position, admiring his truth and realness 'Sonny' became one of Gene's first role models.

Gene sat and laughed as I questioned how he became involved in Information Technology of all life paths. "I used to take apart everything in the house... I would get my hands on mechanical stuff and I could not rest before I figured out what was inside and what made it work." Blessed with an always-active mind and the ability to stick with a problem for an abnormally long amount of time. Naturally a night owl, he uttered that such 'blessings' turn to curses when business makes you become a morning person.

Gene obtained his mechanical engineering degree in 91' from Fairleigh Dickinson, becoming the first college grad in his family. His first mechanical engineering job proved to be slow, boring, and stagnant. However, when the first computer was ushered into the company in 93' he realized that all the old men in the company were too stuck in their ways to even go near it. However, curious Gene became fascinated and immediately fell in love.

Moving on to a pc warehouse job where he managed the inventory on a database allowed him to learn all aspects of Information Technology from the component side to the management side. Basically, Information Technology (most commonly 'IT') is a term that encompasses all forms of technology used to create, store, exchange and utilize information.

Gene contently worked in middle management in the IT field for the following ten years, until he was laid off in 2005 due to a company downsize. Left with no job, a house, a wife, and two children, Gene was filled with resent and left at a crossroad. Weighing the option of searching for another job versus starting something on his own. Gene chose the latter and with keen insight on understanding his personal skills he decided to focus on IT staffing.

Gene paused in the conversation at this point and admitted that he was scared and many sleepless nights were filled with his dad's advice reiterating over and over again in his head - 'retire from middle management, get the watch, and raise your family'. However he stuck with it and in 2005 jumped in with little capital and one partner and thus Diversant was born in 2005. The company's total revenue of \$300,000 the first year, which was discouraging but optimism prevailed in the accomplishment of landing a few big accounts.

In under 10 years, the revenue started to grow exponentially and reached close to 100 million in 2010, becoming the largest black owned IT staffing company in the country. With about 80 full time employees and over 600 consultants around the country. The fascinating aspect of IT staffing is that almost every corporation and business revolves around technology, so there is always a need.

Now even though the jump from a jobless husband and father to a CEO of a multi-million dollar company happened within a paragraph, don't think it was that easy. Gene shared with me some key components to his success. Gene had to be honest with himself in deciding if this was the right business for him. Commenting on a trend in the minority community of 'digging holes in other holes' and further expressed "If your goal is to make

money don't dig a hole in another hole, that doesn't make any 'cents'". Another was "getting the right people on the bus". Reiterating the importance of a great team of people around you that 'know what you don't know'. Gene also reassured that there isn't anything wrong with closing a business if it doesn't work, pointing out many minority entrepreneurs tend to hold onto a business until it implodes.

Many times life comes full circle and as an emerging entrepreneur Gene was faced with the decision of changing himself to fit in. Expressing quite honestly that "not being around black people in the career track made me feel very alone. I had to really make a decision about what type of professional I was going to be. If I was going to stay true to my background as a conscious African American or sell out and become a clown and leap frog to the top. My father always thought me 'be aware of your surroundings so you wont end up somewhere where you shouldn't be' I applied that to my business life, in other words I was prepared to work twice as hard and to have people question me because of what I looked like."

"To much is given, much is..." ok we all know that quote but Gene truly remembers how his parents molded his strong and respectable morals and stays loyal to his black roots, how Sonny mentored him, and how his father gave such value to education.

Gene stays true to his background by being proud of the 'minority owned' phrase latched on so often to black owned businesses and turns it into a positive by being at the forefront. Stays proud of his community by annually speaking to Harlem Entrepreneurs. Proudly attends the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference. Actively involved in fostering education through supporting charter schools in New Jersey. Proudly helps lift other minority members across the nation through specially crafted Diversant programs like Mosaic, Horizon, and Unity.

Gene has a mantra that he makes all his employees learn, "lift as you climb". "I do that out of deference to who I am, I am standing on the shoulders of people that came before me. I believe that you are supposed to spread those blessings and if you don't do that then they are going to be taken away from you."

Gene is the proud husband to Kim Waddy and is the loving father to Ashley Waddy (8) and Gene Waddy (5).

Gene Waddy ended the interview by stating, "Success is always inconvenient, if it was easy everyone would be successful".

Learn more at www.diversant.com



Gene with Rep. Charles Rangel at the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference Sept 21st - 24th 2011



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