

## Introduction

As a young African-American man, I know first hand how desperately young brothers and sisters want to be successful. For years, I have watched and listened to the increasing number of visual and auditory images that appear on television, radio, and in print media showcasing how African-Americans are attaining success and creating lives people never imagined.

I have also spent hours talking to young brothers and sisters about the new influx of visibly successful young, African-Americans emerging on the American landscape. People like Master P – President and CEO of No Limit Records; Laila Ali – professional woman's boxer; and tennis greats Venus and Serena Williams have and continue to be at the center of our discussions about African-Americans and their achievement of success. Although the accomplishments of these individuals and the accomplishments of other young, African-Americans with well-publicized stories of success are best known, this does not mean that all successes are or have to be achieved at this level. Success comes in all shapes, sizes, and formats. True beauty, insight, and peace of mind comes to those who study and appreciate the kaleidoscope of noteworthy accomplishments achieved by all African-Americans. By exposing ourselves to all our stories of success, we confirm the belief that you do not have to own a multi-media conglomerate, make millions of dollars, or set world records in order to be considered successful. And through this process of enlightenment, we destroy the taboo that an individual has to sell their soul to accomplish visible achievements or to accumulate large sums of money. Through the more than

forty interviews that I have conducted with the successful, young, African-Americans you will soon read about representing a variety of professions, beliefs, and backgrounds, I have discovered that we (young, African-Americans) have an assortment of beliefs about success. Although our backgrounds are different, success-oriented African-Americans all agree that success is more than just money or material possessions. This consensus, however, does not put an end to the curiosities that people have surrounding individuals who have achieved certain types of successes. Regardless of the people I've talked with or who the discussion is about, each conversation always seems to end with the same probing questions or thoughts about success: How did he or she do it? And, more important, how can I do that myself?

## Taking The Right Steps

People who are unfamiliar with what it takes to be successful tend to believe there are secret passageways or secret societies that automatically open the doors to achievement. Their theories are muddled by thoughts that all successful men and women have known the “right people,” have been blessed with the “right looks,” or have come from the “right families.” While these views do explain certain types of successes, they definitely do not account for all. It appears that the people who buy into these notions typically come from environments where successful individuals with success-oriented mindsets are hard to find.

Many people can clearly tell you what they want in life (i.e. drive luxury cars, own their own businesses, become more spiritually enlightened, make a million dollars by the age of thirty, and etc.). However, when you ask these same individuals how and when they are going to achieve their goals, their answers become quite vague – even illogical. For example, I have talked with high school counselors who have told me stories of students who shared with them their grand plans to become doctors or lawyers. However, when these advisors took the time to ask these students when they were going to study for or were planning to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Testing Assessment (ACT), many replied that they were not prepared and/or were not scheduled to take one of these essential exams. The notion of becoming a doctor or lawyer without taking or preparing to take the SAT or ACT

clearly demonstrates the lack of understanding held by certain individuals concerning the steps needed to accomplish specific goals.

First, every practicing doctor or lawyer knows that in order to enter their profession, a person has to achieve the minimum score on the SAT or ACT needed for entrance into the college of their choosing. Second, one must be accepted into that college and be successful academically in order to graduate. But, the process does not stop there. Next, the future doctor or lawyer must start the admissions process again in order to gain acceptance into a medical or law school. Upon completion of the coursework, the medical student must complete a residency and the law student must pass the bar exam. It is only after completing these steps (a process that takes anywhere from six to ten years upon graduating from high school) will the individual become a doctor or lawyer.

Unfortunately, many students do not have a detailed understanding of the steps required to enter a profession. Consequently, as with the college admissions process, the lack of understanding about the process of achieving specific goals in life (like becoming a doctor or lawyer) prevents many from accumulating the levels of success that they truly desire. Perhaps the root of this ignorance stems from a multi-generational lack of knowledge. After all, parents cannot teach their children the process of achieving goals if they, in fact, have not been taught themselves.

In an *Ebony* magazine interview with multi-platinum recording artist, Erykah Badu, the Grammy award-winning artist revealed her awareness of the steps required for success. When asked about her plans for raising her son

Seven, Badu replied, “We want to give him the hard truths at the beginning of life, so he won’t have to be like me and (his) daddy, unlearning a bunch of crap that messed us up as human beings.” She went on to say, “We intend to give Seven the straight truth about life with no sugar-coating, no fairy tales. That way he can go ahead and start being the beautiful person that he is...” From her comments, it is evident that Badu is has already begun mapping out her plans for Seven’s future.

While Badu’s comments might seem insignificant in the context of her recording career, they give tremendous insight into her strategy for ensuring the success of her son. She understands that you have to plan!

Case in point: If you were preparing for a summer road-trip with your family, would you load up your car and your kids without a clear idea of how to reach your destination? Or, would you use tools (like an atlas or a map) carefully developed by experts who have already traveled the same path to navigate your way, thus making your trip more accurate and direct?

Just as the atlas assists the long distance road traveler, ***Live Life! Be Young, Black, and Successful*** will help you, the success-seeking, young, African-American, navigate your road enabling you to more swiftly and accurately attain what you desire.