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CGR

Exclusive interview with

Valeisha Butterfeild-Jones

#SMARTGIRLMAGIC

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VALEISHA BUTTERFIELD-JONES:

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From intern to CEO, Valeisha talks openly about her ambitious journey.

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'11 **VALEISHA BUTTERFEILD-JONES** '15**GOES FROM INTERN TO CEO**

Born in Wilson, NC, Valeisha Butterfield-Jones gained an appetite for success at a very young age.

In fourth grade, she recognized her passion for music which birthed her interest to work in the music and media industry. Making her dream a reality, she enrolled in Clark Atlanta University to pursue a degree in political science. Inspired by the success of a global rap group – the Wu-Tang Clan, Valiesha was determined to pursue her dreams of working in music. She walked several miles from her campus to the Wu-Tang store determined to convince them to give her an opportunity. It was that moment of fearlessness and determination that sparked the fire of her career in which she would later work with music mogul Russell Simmons and political power player President Barack Obama. In the midst of her demanding schedule, she shares her go to career advice, mistakes made and gives us tips on how to go from intern to CEO before 40.

CGR: How much do you value an education and how has it impacted your success?

VBJ: Education has been immensely critical to my success. College is a sound way out to explore the world and has opened my eyes to the possibilities for my career.

CGR: How did you get started?

VBJ: Ahhh, life is such a journey! I don't know where to begin. [giggles] Well, as a freshman at Clark Atlanta I got an internship with the Wu Tang Clan. They were a popular rap group out Atlanta and one day I just decided that I was going to go find them and convince them to make me a part of their team. So, I walked several miles to their store to introduce myself and after talking with them I landed an internship.

CGR: Wow, that's amazing. What are three ways to capitalize on an opportunity like that?

VBJ: 1. You have got to be willing to work – and I was willing to put my head down and get to work. As an intern, you have to be the hardest worker in the building. 2. Hold yourself accountable for what you don't know. You can't be so tough on yourself! You have to know what you don't know and be willing to grow in those areas. 3. Identify the gap in that business/organization and fill the void by helping to solve the problem.

CGR: As an intern, what is the important attribute to have when trying to advance forward?

VBJ: Relationship capital. You should be forming relationships from the doorman and up. It is so important! Don't just focus on the senior staff because everyone will see right through it and those are not the people that you will be working with daily. Make relationships with the assistants, the janitor and doorman because those are people who the senior staff listen to and work closely with.

CGR: As a CEO, what are three things you practice daily?

VBJ: Discipline is the main thing. Secondly, I would say prioritizing. You have to understand what matters and focus on those things. But the most important thing for me is passion. You have to love what you do.

CGR: What is your golden rule when doing business?

VBJ: This may sound really cliché but you have to treat people the way you want to be treated. Also, respect is a big one. You have to learn to respect people's time, money and passion. And lastly, I would say to always under promise and over deliver. It's always best to under promise all while planning to over deliver.

CGR: What is the most valuable lesson you've learned both professionally and personally?

VBJ: I would say professionally would be advice I received from one of my mentors which was to become an asset. As an intern you're a liability to the company you are working for and it is your job to become an asset. That's something that has always stuck with me. A personal lesson that always stuck with me was something my grandmother told me: "Get your education and career first and then worry about a man."

CGR: So many young women struggle to identify their worth professionally, what advice would you give them?

VBJ: Gender wage gap is a big thing in America partially because of sexism, but also because we [women] don't negotiate. It think it's because we are so eager to get a job and we know that there are 10,000 other people out there just as eager. But we have to know that men negotiate, understand that it's okay and that it's the right thing to do. When you negotiate it set's the tone for the kind of business woman you are, and the way they will embrace you as a professional.

cont'd.

CGR: What was your biggest fear and how did you overcome it?

VBJ: I would always feel like I wasn't enough but I had to learn to shed my insecurities because I am worthy of my dreams. I overcame it by taking risks and pushing myself to speak up. In day by day moments I had to challenge myself by being willing to take steps and be uncomfortable.

CGR: What defines you?

VBJ: My character defines me – I can trust myself and the people around me can trust me too.

CGR: What would you have done differently if you had a chance to do it all again?

VBJ: I made mistakes but I wouldn't change a thing because it made me who I am and helped me appreciate who I am.

CGR: When facing adversity, what keeps you motivated?

VBJ: A GOOD night's rest solves a lot of things! [giggles] Sometimes it's just that simple. You just have to take a moment to be still, go in prayer and go to bed.

CGR: What is one thing you wish someone would have told you before you begin pursuing your dreams?

VBJ: Timelines aren't real so take a load off. Still work and grind but recognize that it's a process.

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Proving that an education combined with hard work and determination can open just about any door imaginable, Valeisha has focused her energy into the Women in Entertainment Empowerment Network as CEO. WEEN is a non-profit committed to supporting, promoting and defending the balanced, positive portrayal of women in entertainment and society. When we asked her to describe her journey to success in one word she said, "Fearlessness". Fearlessness seems to be a reoccurring practice in successful women.

Consider whatever it is your dream is, and imagine that without fear? Looks good doesn't it?! Whether you're interning at your dream company or desiring to start a company of your own - we here at CGR hope to encourage you to declare war against fear with an education as your weapon.

Now that is smart girl magic.

To learn more about Valeisha and WEEN, visit www.weenonline.org.

Rock on.

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