

The Seacole Group: The Leadership Journey of Cedi Frederick

My story started before I was born in 1957. How so? Well, my parents came from Grenada, in the West Indies in 1955, during what could be described as phase 2 of the Windrush Generation. My father arrived first, and my mother followed 6 months later. Like many who arrived during that period, my parents felt honoured and privileged to be here and despite the many daily challenges they faced and through sheer hard work, they built a very good life for themselves and us, their three children.

I've described my father many times as a 'Sunday afternoon philosopher' as Sunday was THE family day, when we attended church together, eat together and the one day of the week when we children were allowed into the front room. Sunday was the only day of the week that my father would allow himself to have a scotch, sit in his chair and share his thoughts on life, the universe and everything with us!

His messages to us of 'Get a job, keep a job' and 'Being as good as (a white person) will not be good enough' and 'You have to give back and make a contribution to the country that took us in' were oft repeated, reflecting his world view and values. Without doubt his words shaped my career path and my life.



My career started in the London Borough of Camden's Housing Department where I stayed for 14 years, progressing to a 3rd tier senior management role. Not quite my Dad's 'Get a job, keep a job' approach, but staying with the same employer for 14 years was pretty close! But after 14 years, I knew I had to leave as the spectre of becoming a 'Local Authority Lifer' was starting to loom large on my horizon.

However, by this time, I was totally committed to public service, and 'giving back' as my father described it. My next career move was becoming CEO of a BME housing association and then social care organisations, all were in the 'Not for Profit' sector, where the term 'shareholder value' has a very different meaning to that within the private sector.

Bringing together the 'Giving back' and 'Being as good as...' mindset lead me in 1989, while working for a north London local authority, and living in Hertfordshire with a young family, to join the Board of a small south London housing association. That opportunity led to a 30+ year 'career' as a Non-Executive Director sitting on the Boards of housing associations, universities, charities, NHS FT and non FT Trusts, sporting National Governing Bodies to finally become Chair of an NHS Trust.

I'm convinced that my executive career would not have developed the way it did, leading to over 25 years working as a Chief Executive without the



experience gained as a Board member. It's arguable that I would not have been appointed as an NHS Trust Chair without that experience. Yes, it was hard work and sometimes very challenging, but it was hugely rewarding because I knew that I was challenging stereotypes, and contributing to improving people's lives.

Looking back on my career, I can now see that the 'Being as good as...' mantra from my father led me to becoming a workaholic, the result of a subconscious belief that I had to keep proving myself, to the point that for many years, my role became my identity. I saw myself as a CEO first and foremost, above being a husband, father, brother and son. Work was everything to me.

Then, in early 2016, my wife almost died and my whole world, along my view of what was important changed! She recovered, but since then, my life has been all about balance, priorities and listening to my heart not my head, which has led me to a portfolio career of remunerated Non-Executive roles, culminating in becoming Chair of North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust, running my own consultancy and coaching practice. Yes, I earn a lot less money than I did as a CEO, but I'm happier, more relaxed and more complete. I spend more time with my wife, family and friends. I enjoyed my CEO life, but I love my life now. I love coaching as I'm able to help people be their own difference makers. Coaching is perhaps the most personally rewarding of what I do now.



If I was to offer one tip to aspirant NHS NEDs and Chairs it would be:
'Keep patient safety at the heart of everything you do'.

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