

UNCORRECTED BOOK PROOF - NOT FOR RESALE

TWICE AS HARD

NAVIGATING BLACK STEREOTYPES
AND CREATING SPACE FOR SUCCESS

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OPEYEMI SOFOLUKE
& RAPHAEL SOFOLUKE

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In some cases, names of people and places
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To our parents, you have shown us that despite the hurdles, we are more than capable.

To our children, we do this for you. Never let anything hold you back from running your race.

To our siblings, we're in this together. Thank you for always being there.

We love you.

**The issue of race
is an issue we are
forced to deal with,
it is not our option.**

– REVEREND AL SHARPTON¹

LET'S GET TO WORK

"THE ROAD AHEAD IS NOT GOING TO BE EASY. IT NEVER IS, ESPECIALLY FOR FOLKS LIKE YOU AND ME, BECAUSE, WHILE WE HAVE COME SO FAR, THE TRUTH IS THAT THOSE AGE-OLD PROBLEMS ARE STUBBORN AND THEY HAVEN'T FULLY GONE AWAY."

– MICHELLE OBAMA ²

INTRODUCING... OPEYEMI SOFOLUKE

I'd like to start by asking you two questions. First, if you could do or be anything, what would it be? In other words, what is your true passion? Second, have you ever felt that the colour of your skin could present challenges on your way to fulfilling this goal? If you answered, "Yes" to the second question, you are not alone. For many of us, at some point in our lives we have been told: "If you work hard you can do or be anything you desire." Being the optimist that I am, I had always believed that working hard, being committed and striving for excellence would automatically equate to results. Yes, these qualities may have opened some doors of opportunity and have certainly helped me in my career. The reality is, however, that while we, as Black

people, can aim to achieve success on our own terms, so long as we work within a system historically opposed to supporting, promoting and advancing Black talent, then success requires more than just hard work. Essentially, environmental and systemic factors are more debilitating to Black people than their counterparts.

Growing up, my parents would often encourage me to aim to be the best. “Because when you’re the best, *they* have no choice but to notice you,” are words my Dad would often say to me. Life as a Black African man in the UK had taught him that expertise alone was simply not enough to make it. I recall evening conversations sitting around the dinner table when my parents would share the challenges they faced at work every once in a while and, more often than not, those challenges were linked to the issue of race. Experience had taught them that as a Black person, you needed to be ready to jump over excessive hurdles to reach your goals. Promotion was possible, but seldom was it a straightforward process. They were all too familiar with the practice of working twice as hard as their colleagues, just to meet milestones, and three times as hard to maintain them. When they were building their careers and launching businesses, there was no handbook available to them detailing how to navigate predominantly white environments as a Black person. All they knew was the importance of going above and beyond what was expected of them, a dedication that was instilled in me from an early age. Setting aside affirmations and personal encouragement of “work hard and you will succeed,” or, “you can do whatever you set your mind to,” what their experiences uncovered for me is that these statements do not address the fact that the world we live in does not reward a person

just because they’re good. No. For many Black people, there exists this overwhelming sense of responsibility to be great.

Repeating affirmations may motivate us to work hard but they fail to address that many of the environments in which we work do not operate on a system of meritocracy; such statements assume that all people will be fairly judged and granted access or opportunity based on their abilities without the influence of class, gender or race. But we know that is not always the case. The reality is that society consists of people, and, by nature, people are subjective. If you look carefully at the evidence you will see that we are not on a level playing field. For example, in 2005, research found that people with white-sounding names were nearly twice as likely to get callbacks for jobs than people with ethnic-sounding names.³ And sadly, fourteen years on, in 2019, the numbers only worsened. A study by experts based at the Centre for Social Investigation at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, found applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds had to send 80 per cent more applications to get a positive response from an employer than a white person of British origin.⁴ Consider these facts. How does it make you feel to learn that your name alone could hinder your access to opportunity? The fact that there has been no improvement reinforces what many of us have experienced and know to be true: racial inequality remains an insidious disease which is still very much alive and kicking across professional institutions.

Let’s return to the quote I shared at the beginning of this chapter from a speech Michelle Obama delivered to an audience of graduates from Tuskegee University, a historically Black university. Without trying to dampen their enthusiasm, Michelle Obama let the students know

that the journey ahead was not going to be easy. She kept it real, calling out the many inequalities prevalent across the educational, professional and social systems; addressing structural racism and the impact of it on Black hopefuls. As a Black woman, she could identify with the students and gave them the pep talk they needed to hear. In order to prepare them for the world they were about to enter, the pressure to perform was presented as something to be expected.

In a sense, many of us have been conditioned to accept that whether we like it or not, our race will play a part in how we are perceived and received. Until real change happens, the onus is on us to work “twice as hard”. We’re expected to be willing to push ourselves to the limit, exceed our own expectations as well as the expectations of those around us; and be twice as hard – developing our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual strength to persevere through challenges on top of distinguishing ourselves as individuals that display a level of excellence in our respective fields. While this pressure remains, I know hope is not lost and so my prayer is that this book equips you with knowledge, advice and helpful tools for navigating the working world, how it affects your personal life, and all things in between.

INTRODUCING... RAPHAEL SOFOLUKE

Entrepreneurship is not only important for creating wealth for individuals, but it often drives change in society through innovation. Garrett Morgan, Shirley Ann Jackson and Frederick McKinley Jones are three Black individuals who have played major roles in shaping our world today.

Respectively, they are the creators of the three-light traffic signal, the technology behind Caller ID, and refrigerated trucks. These names may ring a bell to some of you, but for many readers this will be the first time you have heard of these groundbreaking entrepreneurs. This is the case with many Black innovators throughout history. Today, things are a bit different; we are more aware of “successful Black entrepreneurs”. However, as highlighted by the Toigo Foundation, a US career advancement organisation for underrepresented groups, the rise of prominent Black entrepreneurs and leaders in the US, such as Oprah Winfrey, Barack Obama, Robert L. Johnson and Michael Jordan creates “the illusion of inclusion”.⁵

Leila Janah, founder of Samasource said, “Talent is equally distributed, opportunity is not,”⁶ a phrase which resonates with many Black entrepreneurs and professionals. This is not to say that Black entrepreneurs and professionals can’t progress in the working world, rather it highlights that the rate of progress and the number of Black people who actually make it to the most senior corporate positions is far slower and lower than some of their non-Black peers. With the rich array of successful Black entrepreneurs and professionals coming to the forefront in the UK, such as Edward Enninful OBE, Lewis Hamilton OBE and John Boyega, just like in the US, it’s easy to be under the “illusion of inclusion”. We only have to look at the diversity numbers of the executive boards in the UK’s largest companies to see that despite all the talk of increasing and improving diversity at the top level of organisations, there are no Black chairmen, chief executive officers or chief financial officers in any of Britain’s 100 largest companies. Therefore, it is clear that there must be many instances in which invisible

barriers have kept Black people from rising to senior levels; a phenomenon often described as the “glass ceiling”.

As a football enthusiast and Liverpool FC fan, I would describe entrepreneurship for a Black person in the same way as starting a new season. At the beginning of the Premier League, twenty teams begin on 0 points, however before a ball is even kicked, there are favourites to win the league. The favourites are normally based on previous league performance, transfer market activity (how much they have to spend or have spent), manager’s ability and how good the crop of first team players are. Although it appears that when a match starts eleven players get on the pitch against eleven players and it is an equal contest, there is unfortunately a lot of activity off the pitch that generally determines the score of a match and the final league position of those two teams.

As a Black entrepreneur, it is often difficult to get access to finance to spend on resources such as marketing and product investment, which in the football world would equate to transfer budgets for top players. Lack of access to the right mentors and advice can also be an implication of not having the right budget and this, in the football world, equates to being able to pay for a top-flight, inspirational, world-class manager like Jürgen Klopp. It is also worth mentioning that regardless of how mentally prepared or fit a team of eleven players are, it is very hard to compete with a team who has the financial backing to acquire the best players or resources.

Think about this in relation to entrepreneurs. As you can see, on the surface it seems that at the start of the season all teams have an equal chance of winning the league, but this is not the case; when other clubs have more

money to spend on better resources it generally has a direct implication on the final result. It is also clear that no matter how hard a squad of players trains (or an entrepreneur works), it’s very difficult to compete with others who have stronger financial backing.

In 2017, I launched the UK Black Business Show to inspire and connect Black business owners and professionals working in various industries, but also to highlight some of the amazing Black entrepreneurs and professionals in the UK. Now the biggest event of its kind in Europe, the UK Black Business Show is an annual conference which attracts attendees who come to see business role models from the Black community. Representation creates an ecology of role models who in turn enable increased representation. From my experience, the more I have seen the range of Black entrepreneurs and professionals in the UK and US, the more I have felt that I can achieve such greatness.

So, what differentiates Black professionals who are successful from those who aren’t? How have they overcome workplace stereotypes to be the person they are today? For me, mentality is the key to everything, and fortunately for us, a positive mentality is something that can be built up and learnt. Oprah Winfrey famously said, “The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.”⁷

Working “twice as hard” can drive many Black entrepreneurs and professionals to great heights. Yes, we have challenges and obstacles we must overcome, but with the right attitude, perseverance and determination, there is nothing we can’t achieve. I truly hope that there will be a time when Black professionals and entrepreneurs will be on a level playing field with everyone else, and it is down to

us all to not only inspire the next generation, but to call out injustice and discrimination in business and professional spaces. May this book inspire you to do that.

INTRODUCING... TWICE AS HARD

This book explores the struggles, barriers and successes of Black entrepreneurs and professionals in order to inspire a change of attitude, while showing others how to be better allies to their Black peers. Through interviews with leading Black executives, professors, innovators, influencers, musicians, sportspeople, comedians, actors and more. we will draw on our own personal experiences and those of other successful people to explore and share advice about how to establish yourself as a major player in your industry. By considering essential topics, such as personal branding, networking, mentorship, navigating white spaces, growth, money, mental health and allyship, *Twice As Hard* will become the perfect guide to help you navigate your career and elevate your achievements to the next level.

For far too long, people and organisations have shied away from discussing and tackling racism. Within our communities and organisations there is still so much change to be made, but there has never been a better time to do it than now.