

BOOKS



Keith R. Wyche

sits down with *Savoy Professional* to discuss his new book, *Good Is Not Enough*

Q What was your inspiration for writing this book? How has your own experience as an African-American male in corporate America motivated you to write this book/career guide?

A My motivation for writing this book goes back to the early 80's when I was new to corporate America. There were not many minority executives in place, and quite a few of those who were in place were not very receptive to mentoring me as they viewed me as their "competition". Their attitude was, "I got mine, college boy, get yours." I promised myself that if I

ever got to a level of prominence in corporate America, I would not have that attitude, and would share whatever wisdom I had with those minority professionals coming after me. As my journey continued, I did see more minority executives, but for whatever reason, few, if any of them, had taken the time to chronicle the lessons of their journey. I felt compelled to share my experiences and wisdom with other minority professionals in the hope that it may help the next generation of minority leaders achieve their goals and reach new heights in their careers.

Q What were some of the adversities that you faced in climbing the corporate ladder to your current position as President of the U.S. Operations at Pitney Bowes?

A Pitney Bowes has been nothing but supportive as it pertains to my growth and development as an executive. They provided executive coaching, access to the board of directors and key senior leaders, and above all, provided me with opportunities to be "all I could be". However, prior to my experience at Pitney, I did have experiences where senior leadership was either threatened by my potential, or dismissive of my value. Fortunately, I knew my worth and the value I bring, so I never let those attitudes discourage me. But I did work to find a corporation that understood the value of a diverse workforce, and made certain that I maximized my performance, exposure and perception to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented.

Q Does a double-standard still exist today for African-Americans in succeeding and, better yet, being promoted to positions of power in corporate America?

A Yes, there still is a double standard for minorities in corporate America. But I suggest that rather than focusing on a double standard, it is more productive to focus on those ways that can make you the most attractive candidate for a promotion and negates the inequality. At the end of the day, corporations are less concerned with black or white, and more concerned with "green", or profit! The numbers still indicate that while women and people of color have come a long way in terms of gaining access to senior level positions, there is an imbalance when compared to the national averages. This is a central principle in my philosophy behind the book; minorities can achieve just as much or more than their non-minority counterparts by equipping themselves with the tools

needed to succeed despite any obstacles. However, as we become more of a "global economy", corporations are realizing the importance of having a diverse leadership team to better reflect, and take advantage of the opportunities that such an economy brings.

Q What are some common mistakes that minority professionals make that you classify as 'fatal' in today's corporate environment?

A The number one mistake minority professionals make is in not being able to define their “brand”, and document and articulate their “bottom line” value to their organizations. In difficult economic times, companies work hard to define their “value proposition” in the marketplace. Additionally, they identify those individuals within their organization who help them deliver that value. If you cannot describe in “real dollars”, your worth to the organization, you are at risk of being downsized, right-sized or outsourced! Additionally, most people focus only on performance, not realizing that in the corporate world, excellent performance does not guarantee promotions and greater opportunities; both exposure and perception among senior management can unlock the door and help you gain recognition of your performance and other talents.

Q You speak a lot about “dressing and acting the part” in the book as a major component on how one can succeed in securing that promotion. How vital do you think things such as style, manners, and etiquette can help sway the perception that many decision makers may have of minority professionals?

A Decision makers are always asking themselves, “How well does this person represent us with our customers, suppliers and other stakeholders”? “How well does he or she demonstrate our corporate values and what we stand for?” At the end of the day, your corporation has its own “brand” in the marketplace that it needs to protect. It is important that as a professional, minority or otherwise, that you exemplify that brand in word, thought, deed and appearance. The best way for one to exemplify the brand and values of your organization depends greatly on the culture and brand of the company you work for. High tech companies like IBM have one set of expectations, and financial institutions like Bank of America have another. It’s imperative for any professional to know what those values and expectations are of the company is, and determine if you can embrace this culture and truly feel that you can succeed in this environment?

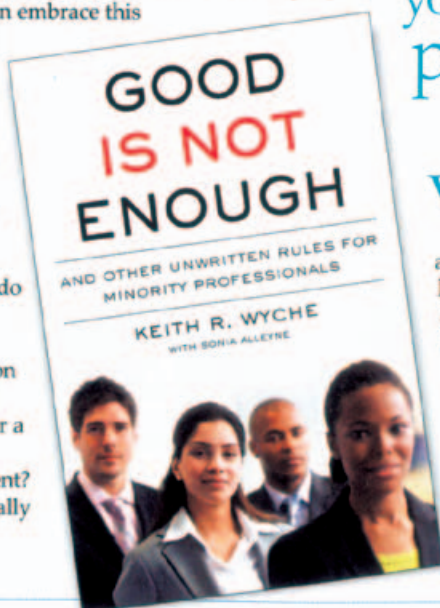
Q What are key questions minority professionals should ask when positioning themselves for career growth?

A ■ What am I willing to do (or not do) to get ahead?

■ Does the company reward or promote based on seniority or performance?

■ Does the culture foster a high-pressure or a more family work environment?

■ Does the company really embrace diversity at the senior level?



Q If you could only offer one piece of advice to a minority-professional starting his or her career in corporate America, what would it be?

A You need to have a “vision” of where you want to go and what you want to do in your professional life. The Bible states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish”. None of us would ever embark on a vacation with no idea of where we were going, and what mode of transportation we plan to use to get there? Your career is no less important than a vacation.

Take the time to create an initial “career blueprint” to help you determine what jobs or experiences you want during the course of your career. Over the course of your working life you will undoubtedly update, modify and enhance this plan, but it will help you to stay focused on moving your career in the right direction.

Q Since only five-percent of executives in corporate-America are African-American, the lowest among any minority group, do you think that the now very-real prospect of Barack Obama being the first non-white male to be elected President of the U.S. will help to dramatically change this inequality in corporate America?

A I think what Barack’s apparent nomination as the Democratic candidate proves is, we are moving closer to realizing Martin Luther King Jr’s dream whereby, people are not judged “by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character”. Not just for African-Americans, but for women

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and people of color as well. Having said that, we still have quite a ways to go before we have total equality in corporate America. We have made some progress, but not enough!

Barack has also demonstrated that if you have the education, the exposure and the willingness to persevere in spite of the challenges, you can achieve what seems like the impossible. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we are prepared mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves. **SP**