LISA GORDON

By Kamille D. Whittaker

Besides her Virgin Island cultural upbringing which imparted truths about a barrier-free life, Lisa Gordon's ultimate lesson about self-governance and professionalism came when she was shortlisted for a job she hadn't even applied for — the high-ranking position as assistant to the county manager in Broward County, Fla. "At the time I thought I was at least two promotions beneath what would have been the third highest ranking position in the county. I hadn't even met the county manager so I was shocked and curious to know how my name came up." The hiring manager explained that he'd asked several people for recommendations for the position and Gordon's name came up five or six times. "I talked to him for about 30 minutes and he asked if I could start the very next day. I was only 30 at the time, so I learned quickly that age and leadership aptitude don't always equal."

And that was only the beginning. Gordon is now the chief operating officer for Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. charged with overseeing the operations and implementation of the Atlanta BeltLine, one of the largest, most wide-ranging urban redevelopment projects currently underway in the United States. Along the way she served as a cabinet member for the Honorable Mayor Shirley Franklin and as a deputy COO for the City of Atlanta. She also served as the first African-American female city manager of the City of East Point, Ga., from 2004 to 2007.

The lesson? "If you strive for excellence and do good work, people notice it and it leads to opportunity."

Insider Tip

When negotiating my starting salary, I asked if they could start me a little higher. I reasoned that I was going to be doing a lot more work and putting in more time. He agreed and I got thousands more than the initially quoted salary. Any time you have a promotional opportunity, value yourself, and ask to see if there's more that can be done. That's what I've done ever since.

Moonlighting

My husband and I wrote a book ["Love Legacy: Spiritual Renewal for Your Marriage"] about strategies for how relationships can grow positively and be preserved. I've always enjoyed writing. I get lots of stories and a lot of lessons learned from the many people I meet. I can't really call it a "side hustle" though, since I've given away more books than I've sold! (laughs)

Advice to Her Younger Self

I often didn't know who was the appropriate person to ask to be my mentor — I thought that they should generally be someone I didn't know but who was a high level person in some visible department; but I probably should have asked the people that had already indicated an interest in me to be my mentors. Those are natural mentors.

Favorite Saying

"Do it. Do it right. Do it right now." People need to take action, be accurate and professional and don't delay. AT