



BLACK CHARM

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Life has had a way of recalibrating itself for me every ten years or so. Late in 2012, I began to contemplate my career; I knew I was grossly underpaid for my skill set, yet I couldn't land a solid position outside of my company. Based on what I saw at companies I interviewed with, I certainly did not fit the mold of what a Senior Information Technology Program Manager looks like. I am not bubbly, full of shit, nor will I claim to be able to come and save the day. All I wanted to do was to come into a new situation, analyze what wasn't working, learn the individual personalities of team members and start making recommendations for improvement. As a young Black woman with a visually masculine appearance and a demeanor that didn't fit this mold, I simply couldn't sell myself.

I was constantly telling myself all the "right" things to do in those interview scenarios. After jumping through hoops just to get a first interview, then there were also the series of interviews that followed if I jumped successfully, because someone really liked me and wanted me in, but that someone had to convince the others of my worthiness (now often masked as "cultural fit"). So I said FUCK EM! If you can't appreciate my value I will stay with the place that I know at least shows appreciation and has provided me with opportunities and the flexibility to focus on things I wanted to do outside of work.

After deciding to stay at the job I had at the time, I got in contact with an old colleague and friend, and was immediately hired into the next big thing at the company. I knew I needed to prepare myself for the rest of my life, and I had to do so in an unfamiliar space with plenty of issues to fix. Upon arrival I

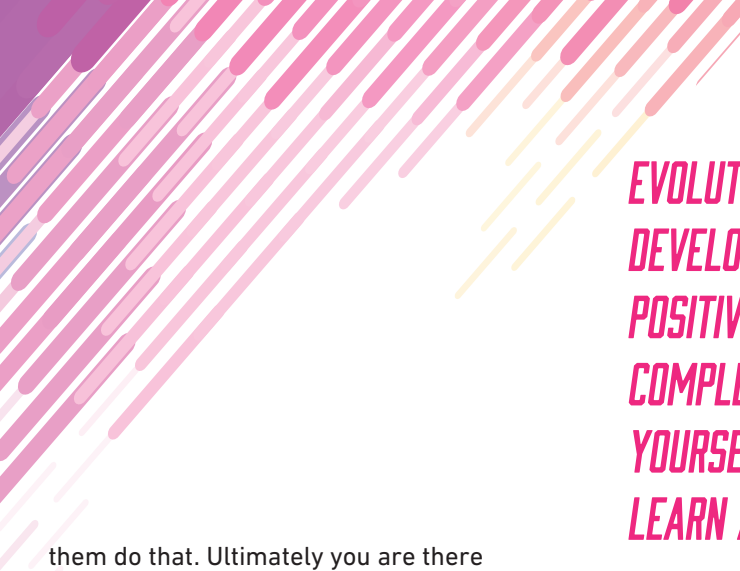
wanted to sit back and gain the trust of my peers and their immediate supervisors, while at the same time learning their strengths and weaknesses. I am a seasoned vet in learning people now. I don't play corporate politics and I understand how far a night of drinking with coworkers can really go...

THE ART OF SCHMOOZING

Speaking of drinking...I have learned the art of the schmooze. Technically, schmoozing is informal chat, with a motive to influence the other party. And when it comes to company happy hours, schmoozing is almost always accompanied with a drink or three.

Schmoozing in a workplace should be done with executives around and you should absolutely know your limits as well as the limit of others you drink with. You do NOT want to be considered the lush's lush buddy, or the person who readily drinks with that one coworker who is consistently drunk. But you also don't want to appear as the prude out "drinking," but not actually drinking, because then you just look like a spy or like you are trying to fit in and really don't. When it comes to drinking with co-workers, start easy but bold; if they're drinking hard liquor, maybe take a shot, then just sit back and chill. Watch how things go and always listen four times more than you talk. For every 30 minutes of conversation, your chat is seven minutes or less. People who drink talk more; people who talk more tell more; and with work being a huge part of people's lives, it will be discussed, so you want to pay attention.

Drinking with people you work with can build trust and give you insight into your coworkers. Do not talk about home. Let



EVOLUTION, BY DEFINITION, IS CONSTANT DEVELOPMENT—IMPROVEMENT IN ITS MOST POSITIVE FORM—TOWARD BECOMING MORE COMPLEX. YOU MUST ALWAYS IMPROVE YOURSELF AND ALWAYS BE WILLING TO LEARN AND GROW.

them do that. Ultimately you are there to mingle, so master the basics then schmooze your heart out!

BLACK CHARM

There is something about Black women—and Black people in general—that attracts others or at the least intrigues them to want to know more. It's a mystique, and I call it Black Charm. Black Charm is the result of generational perseverance and unwavering belief in one's self. I don't take credit for it; it is part of who I am and what African-descended people emanate, naturally. You can use it to your advantage if you learn to use it. Don't allow you being the only one in corporate spaces to take away from your Black Charm. Learn to love yourself and do not let your insecurities or other people's discomfort block the power that is in you.

I have worked in the technology sector for my entire career and I have almost always been the only Black person and the only woman in the room. I didn't realize until I was "the only" that this Black Charm stands out and becomes a focal point—directly or indirectly—of others. I had to get comfortable with that

positionality and power. I learned to lean into and finesse Black Charm to my best advantage.

Embrace your Black Charm, and maintain your humility while embracing it. Sometimes it may feel unreal to hold so much power, but it is the truth of who you are. It is that thing that differentiates you/us. Be that woman amongst men, and that Black person amongst others. When you are a Black woman thriving in corporate structures for any length of time, you've got that Black Charm. The same Black Charm that made jazz. The same Black Charm that makes people appropriate and mimic Black women daily. That same Black Charm that propelled hip-hop to a culture. Being Black is hip; being a woman is powerful; and being both is a blessing.

NO ENEMIES

You must not ever make enemies. Corporate America—or any work environment that requires interactions with diverse peers—provides unique experiences to get to know people outside of your normal ways of doing so. Oftentimes you are forced to play nice with people you may have otherwise never acknowledged in life, which is both challenging and informative. My business courses taught some extremely valuable lessons: cultural differences, globalization, cyclical business, and evolution of business.

People are different. And different countries abide by different cultural structures and beliefs. You must

acknowledge such differences in the global work environment we currently live and work in. The truth is people don't have to be from a different country to have completely different cultural beliefs. It's important to understand that a person's upbringing and experiences often mold them into the adult they become. No matter how arrogant, ignorant, oblivious, self-centered, egotistical, racist, etc. one may be, there is likely at least one thing about them you can relate to, no matter how minuscule. So even if you can't stand a person, they shouldn't ever be able to tell. Business is cyclical and you can run into people again, especially if you stay within the same company and/or industry for any amount of time. It doesn't pay to make enemies, and doing so is a waste of energy. You only have to be around them for a finite amount of time. Make sure that everyone you work with has at least one nice thing to say about you.

EVOLVE CONSTANTLY!!!

Evolution, by definition, is constant development—improvement in its most positive form—toward becoming more complex. You must always improve yourself and always be willing to learn and grow. In any specific profession, there will always be advancements to keep up with. If you do not evolve with them, you will eventually be left behind, making yourself less marketable.

But more than any professional evolution, the evolved Black female professional state of mind is likely one of the most powerful on Earth. Understanding of the myriad struggles endured and conquered reveals the dynamic evolution Black women have gone through—and continue to go through—and illustrates that Black women have the capacity to do things our minds never thought we could.

Push. Desire more. Never fret. Let whatever higher power in which you believe lead you to the self-actualization you were meant to attain. Evolve constantly, sistahs, as we are the rock of the nation's wealth. This nation would not have nearly as much of a legacy had it not been for the sacrifices, extreme endurance, and teachings of Black women as slaves, civil rights activists, educators, mothers of mothers, and so much more. Find peace in all you do and enjoy each moment as if it were your last.



BLACK FEMALE PROJECT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR / FERN STROUD

A gifted musician and tenure of IT Software Development Project Management, **Fern's life work is to bridge the gap between business, art, and community.** Her vision has been realized through successful partnership, board service, and other initiatives including production of [Black Vines - A Toast to Black Wineries and Diverse Art.](#)

Fern earned a B.S. in Computer Information Systems and completed a software development internship at National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in Palo Alto, California. She currently manages Big Data-related efforts in Silicon Valley.

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