Climbing The Corporate Ladder

Making The Right Moves

By Cynthia Renee Hightower-Jenkins

Racism is not always the determining factor in African-Americans not getting the contract, the promotion or even the job. For far too long, enough emphasis has not been given to the very important factors of protocol, professionalism and business etiquette.

During my work with many women entrepreneurs, I have found they share a common ground of communication deficiencies and protocol inadequacies. In short, many of these women suffer from the "George Jefferson Syndrome."

While they look the part of the business-oriented, these African-American women entrepreneur's communication and actual business protocol-related skills are in dire straits.

Like George Jefferson, these women do great until they speak. They are at a disadvantage because a great percentage of business is conducted in social and formal settings — settings which those suffering from the George Jefferson Syndrome are not equipped to successfully compete.

A step in the right direction for business women who feel they might lack some of the necessary social and business skills to get them up the corporate ladder or ahead in the business world, is to acquaint themselves with other women who are successful. Another option would be to invest in the services of a professional protocol consultant.

Below are several points women in the business world may consider as they move to get ahead:

Power Dressing

Power dressing for women does not mean dressing in oversized jackets with pleated slacks and a tie. Your dress, however, should reflect an authoritative, in control, assured and most importantly, a feminine aura.

Your business wardrobe is a real investment. It should reflect your personality, physical make-up and should conform to your profession.

When women were first introduced to corporate boardrooms, they exhibited reservations concerning their attire. Women interviewed said they often felt as though their clothes should be passive — not stand out or draw attention to themselves.

This attitude I call the "woodwork dress." It allowed women to blend into the boardroom's woodwork and fixtures. Women now realize their place in the boardroom and are taking special note of their attire making it powerfully appropriate yet feminine.

Business Protocol

It is unfortunate but all too often the atmosphere of many African-American owned and operated businesses is less than professional.

The attitude displayed by front office employees may be less than friendly, helpful or competent. Their dress may not reflect a place of business. The radio may be blaring and food smells and cigarette smoke at the desk fill the office.

To be taken seriously and to establish desired credibility for your business, office or position it means you often must structure a new level of professionalism. It is quite possible that the conduct of those employed by you have caused you to lose actual and potential business.

Model Cheryl Sampson epitomizes the young corporate woman on her way up.

This may have happened without your knowledge. Take care in hiring your staff. It is vital to find efficient, business-conscious staff — they could determine the fate of your business.

Cynthia Renee Hightower-Jenkins

Below is a formula I use. It is the armor one should don daily.

H — Make yourself **happy.** The best way to do that is to prepare to look your very best.

E — If you have prepared to look your very best, you become **enthused.**

L — If you are happy and enthused, you become **labor-minded,** ready to get the job done.

P — If you are labor-minded you are **productive** which yields recognition and success, creating happiness and the cycle continues to repeat itself continuously.

Points

1. Never dress in clothing you

(Continued on page 14)