

Opinion

Gaining wealth is a conscious choice

It has been nearly seven years since the death of Ebony magazine founder John H. Johnson, and nearly three decades since the day I sat in his thickly carpeted, exquisitely paneled office as he quizzed me on the rudiments of operating a successful business as well as the inner secrets of wealth creation.

At his peak, Johnson's financial portfolio included publishing, cosmetics, television and radio. In 1982, he was the first African American to be cited on Forbes magazine's list of the 400 wealthiest Americans. Before Jackie Robinson integrated major league baseball, before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. marched on Washington, before Motown changed music, America had Ebony. During my interview, Johnson shared that he was in the business of inspiring people, heralding the achievements of other African Americans that mainstream magazines would never publish or would simply overlook. Although Johnson did not create the American media, he drew awareness to the black consumer market and eventually altered the media industry's color and content.

Born into poverty in Arkansas, he was the greatest salesman, entrepreneur and black chief executive of his time. As my interview drew to a close and I began to gather my notes, he asked his parting question: "Young man, why aren't you rich?" After nearly one hour, it seemed as if Johnson had waited until the time was ripe, preparing to hear my vague, sheepish answer and subsequently dismiss any excuse that I might offer. To put it bluntly, he would have none of it. Yet he was also quick to point out my inherent advantages and gifts that I had overlooked or failed to

consider. "Young man," he began, "with your youth and education, the opportunities that stand before you are beyond computation."

"There are no secrets to amassing a fortune," he continued. "As this process was taught to me, I enjoy sharing these keys with you. And it doesn't take volumes to explain these principles. Never before was there such a demand for the energetic, resourceful man or woman; the individual who knows no limits; who will master his or

her circumstances; who will never be satisfied with anything short of perfection; and who will manage his or her own business. Your hour of opportunity is at hand."

Mr. Johnson had made his point. Short of demanding an answer, he waited for my response, and it was only fair. After all, he had given me a portion of his day — nearly one hour of his most precious resource — time. Though we are blessed with the same 24 hours, it is not the hours of the day that concern the wealthy and successful, but how we account for our time that matters most. And within that time frame, Johnson's thoughts never shifted.

As he shook my hand and bid me farewell, this giant of a man found the time to teach me a valuable lesson:

1. He told me to imagine the life I wanted and decide to live it.
2. He urged me to discover my calling, to make it my vocation, and then devote my energy and lifeblood to its attainment.
3. He admonished me to set clear goals with a specific timetable for their completion.
4. He warned me never to quit in the pursuit of my goals.



VIEWPOINT
Dennis Kimbro

A needed service for those who served

On Nov. 11, 2012, the Superior Court of Fulton County announced the receipt of a \$750,000 grant from the Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to fund and establish a Veterans Court to serve the residents of Fulton County. The Veterans Expanded Treatment Service (VETS) program will be a component of the Accountability Court. Fulton has a long history with such problem-solving courts. Begun in 1997, the drug court in Fulton County is one of Georgia's oldest. In 2006, the Court added a behavioral health division. Judge Doris Downs and Judge Bensonetta Tipton Lane ably lead these two courts, which seek to make a difference in the lives of non-violent offenders who are otherwise plagued by substance abuse and mental illness.

Through the VETS initiative, the Accountability Court will expand the treatment alternatives specifically available to veterans who have entered the criminal justice system because of substance abuse and deteriorating mental health, often as a direct result of their military service. Eligible veterans will be identified through evidence-based screening and assessments. Rather than proceeding through the traditional court

system, they will be diverted into a non-adversarial program that has as its goal the restoration of the health of the defendant/offender. They will voluntarily participate in a judicially supervised treatment plan that will be developed by the court, health care professionals, and peer mentors from local veteran groups. The Court will actively manage and supervise the participants to ensure compliance and successful completion of the program through graduated sanctions

in lieu of more traditional punishment. The VETS initiative will also collaborate with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care networks, the Veterans Benefits Administration and other veterans' family support organizations. Accountability Courts, of which the new Veterans Court will be one, work. The research is indisputable that, properly administered, they can dramatically reduce the recidivism rate. Recognizing addictions and mental illness as the brain diseases they are allows such courts to craft sentences designed to apply principles of neuroscience learned in the last thirty years, and thus the way to best treat such behaviors. A recent statewide audit of such courts found that they do in fact reduce



VIEWPOINT
Judge Todd Markle

recidivism at much less expense than traditional criminal sanctions. Recognizing the efficacy of accountability courts, the Georgia General Assembly has been at the forefront of the effort to expand their use. Nationally, legislation is pending in Congress to authorize funding of specialized veterans courts like the one Fulton County will soon establish.

Fulton County is home to an ever increasing number of veterans, many recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps because of the stress endemic to their past service, many will succumb to alcohol and drug dependency, leading to unemployment, homelessness and worse.

By offering treatment alternatives specifically tailored to veterans rather than mere incarceration and criminal sanctions, we hope to return these offenders to a more productive, law-abiding lifestyle. It is the least we can do for those who have given so much for their country.

5. "Be persistent," he implored.

6. "See possibilities where others see problems; and remember, rules are made for those who will follow them."

7. Finally, he told me to live by the infallible rule: to whom much is given, much is required. Give back and give thanks.

Johnson believed that these seven keys would provide even the least of us with a road map to a life of more wealth, more freedom, and infinite joy and well-being.

As he walked me to his door, he closed by saying, "Never forget, until you are free economically, true independence will always be an afterthought. Today, so many of us can live where we want, eat what we want, sleep where we want, and send our children to the finest schools we so desire. But, for far too many, this form of freedom is difficult to express. Why? Because, in most cases, it is a freedom we cannot afford. Unless you are free economically and financially, you will never be free personally."

Due in part to my newly released book, "The Wealth Choice," I can unequivocally state that wealth is not a function of circumstance, environment, present conditions, luck or the cards you are dealt. Wealth is the result of a conscious choice as well as action, faith, innovation, effort, preparation and discipline. In short, you need not concern yourself with your current state of affairs. Don't settle for less than you can be. As I discovered during my seven-year study, the wealthy make money while others make excuses.

Kimbro is a professor at Clark Atlanta University and a bestselling writer. His fifth book is "The Wealth Choice: Success Secrets of Black Millionaires" (Macmillan).

Markle is a judge on the Superior Court of Fulton County and will be the judge of the new Fulton Veterans Court. Prior to his appointment to the bench, he served as executive counsel to Gov. Nathan Deal. Judge Markle chaired the Criminal Justice Reform Council in 2011 and remains a member by the designation of Gov. Deal.

35th Anniversary

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Atlanta Business Chronicle is a publication of

**American City
Business Journals**

120 West Morehead St., Suite 400
Charlotte, NC 28202

Whitney Shaw, President & CEO
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