



Leadership Spotlight with Google's Nelson Boyce

The business leader shares insights about leadership, being an influencer, and career development

By **Fatimah Gilliam, CEO, The Azara Group**

Business leader Nelson Boyce is the Director of Agency Business Development at Google, where he oversees the Publicis Group Holding Company of Advertising Agencies. A Harvard alum, Boyce has also served as the president of The Westchester Clubmen and is a board member of the New Rochelle Fund for Educational Excellence. Fatimah Gilliam, Founder and CEO of The Azara Group caught up with Boyce to talk about his background.

continued on p. 32

1. What attracted you to your chosen field and profession?

I'm a "Type A" individual who loves interacting with people. I started my career in investment banking in PaineWebber's mergers and acquisitions group to get experience and pay off my student loans. It was a great education in understanding how businesses operate and how companies are structured. But I grew up surrounded by media, so it's not surprising that I eventually landed at Viacom and Google. After banking, I found that media ad sales was my calling.

2. What person, opportunity, or game-changing moment had the biggest impact on your career?

The moment that most impacted me was when I was working for *Vibe Magazine*. I was asked to shadow founder Quincy Jones at a concert and to take care of anything he needed that evening. I took full advantage to pick his brain and learn from him.

"I go above and beyond so I can chip away at unconscious biases. It's through this effort that I hope to make it easier for others coming up through the ranks behind me."

—Nelson Boyce

I asked him how he became the mogul that he was. He said that he started out wanting to be a trumpet player, but not just any trumpet player. Quincy wanted to be "the best" trumpet player. He shared his insights on how you always have to do your best work because people can't help but recognize your contributions. Quincy stressed how you have to create your own destiny, and how many opportunities came to him because of his approach in always trying to be "the best" at whatever he was doing.

This encounter was one of most impactful moments in my professional life. It shaped how I see myself, the world, and success. It changed my framework.

3. What is the biggest challenge you faced professionally? How did you overcome it?

When I walk into a room, I don't just walk in as an executive. I walk in as a black executive. I know I have to prove and reprove myself because of my race. I've never felt like someone was purposely looking to do me harm, but there's

always an unconscious bias that's unavoidable. It's difficult to get people to see you for who you are versus what they might perceive you to be based on what little information they have or what they are socialized to think. It's a challenge that is difficult to quantify, but I know that it is there.

That said, it fuels my drive. So I always make sure I'm trying to set the standard. I go above and beyond so I can chip away at unconscious biases. It's through this effort that I hope to make it easier for others coming up through the ranks behind me.

4. What tools or tactics do you rely on in being a more effective leader and team member?

Empathy is always at the forefront with me. I try diligently to understand the motivations, passions, and fears of people on my team. I want to understand the people who work with me, and I allow myself to be somewhat vulnerable at times to build trust and a sense of cohesion.

Also, when I lay out a plan for my team, I make sure they have some say so we're all working towards a collective vision. They need to have skin in the game so they feel we all have each other's back.

At Google, we practice psychological safety — an approach where teams are safe for interpersonal risk-taking. We promote openness and encourage people to share their ideas even if someone comes up with an unpopular idea.

5. Share a story about an interesting or difficult negotiation and how you were able to gain more influence and leverage as a result.

I execute complex large-scale deals with ad agencies. Effectively negotiating goes back to the notion of a value exchange. I try to highlight the value of the relationship to the client and what it means for their business. I back this up with a joint business plan with milestones, demonstrating that I'm there to support them in their business endeavors.

When I was at Nickelodeon, they were looking for new business models. This was before they were in radio, and I saw there was potential to partner with a major digital music streaming company for Nick Radio.

But the biggest challenge wasn't with negotiating a deal with iHeartRadio. It was selling this new concept internally at Nickelodeon, since this required buy-in from many departments. We had to make the case that the investment would pay off. Once we built a coalition of internal support, we targeted iHeartRadio because they didn't have any content for kids at the time. They could provide us with additional distribution that Nickelodeon lacked.

I got the deal three quarters of the way there before I left for BET. I presented the concept, and I got people aligned at Nickelodeon by showing people the value in the idea and how it could help key stakeholders in their respective areas.

6. What do you see as your unique value proposition, and how has your personal background prepared you to excel?

I'm comfortable dealing with ambiguity. I went to three colleges in four years, lived in four areas of the country when I was growing up, and I've often been placed in positions that were totally new. I've learned how to adapt and overcome.

I try to embody what my father taught me about growth and not being stagnant. He pointed out that it's better to be a stream versus a pond. A stream is always changing and never the same. It moves, adapts, and shifts its path. But a pond — you can return to it 20 years later, and it will be in the same place. I prefer to be like the stream because it represents energy and possibility. It's on the "can" side of the equation and not the "can't" side of things. I incorporate this into my approach to success.

7. What is your proudest achievement?

My son is my proudest achievement. My wife and I see our son as a miracle to us. He fuels my drive, and makes me aware of what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. I want him to see the importance of being a proud, strong, responsible black male. If he sees opportunity to do more than what I've done or my father has done, then I have done my job.

To view the original version of this article, please visit: theazaragroup.com/march-2017-thought-leader-spotlight-nelson-boyce/. To learn more about Fatimah Gilliam, Esq. and The Azara Group, visit www.theazaragroup.com