

# Thought Leader Spotlight

March 2017

As part of The Azara Group's monthly newsletter, we select a business leader to share insights about leadership, being an influencer, and career development. Our objective is to help support your ability to flourish as a leader and share what makes people thrive in business.

## Nelson Boyce

*Director of Agency Business Development, Google  
(Oversees the Publicis Group Holding Company of Advertising Agencies)*

**Education:** Harvard University (B.A. in Government)  
Rockland Community College (A.A. in Liberal Arts)  
United States Military Academy (West Point)

**Previously With:** BET Networks  
Nickelodeon  
Various magazines – Blaze, Honey, and Heart & Soul  
Vibe Magazine  
Time, Inc.  
PaineWebber (now UBS)

**Interesting Details:** Started college career at West Point when was considering a career in the military and graduated from Harvard; President of The Westchester Clubmen; board member of New Rochelle Fund for Educational Excellence; father was a journalist and newspaper editor; born in Chicago and spent childhood in the San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta, and New York; lives in New Rochelle, New York with his wife and son.



### 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 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.

I like helping clients solve problems through the use of media. It's a dynamic environment where you have to cultivate relationships while using your assets and resources to connect where clients are and ultimately where they want to be by building a bridge based on value and trust. I like seeing my hard work and that of my team manifest itself in an ad placement.

Media is an exciting business. It's always changing – presenting new challenges and problems to solve for clients and consumers. I'm continuously learning in an industry that's frequently adapting, and pushed to grow as the industry evolves. It's critical to understand user behavior and content consumption on our platforms, and how these relate to people's habits and ultimately purchasing decisions. Today, everything is mobile so technology also fuels this ongoing flux and need to quickly understand changes with consumers.

I see my work as constantly negotiating a value exchange – leveraging resources, assets, time, and relationships – to build that trust that I mentioned. I embed myself with a client to understand their business and needs, and how I can effectively help them move the needle to achieve their goals. In turn, I help clients build connections with consumers. Advertising Sales is very stimulating and rewarding.

## 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 its founder Quincy Jones at a concert, and to take care of anything he needed that evening. I spent three hours with him. It was a great opportunity. I took full advantage to pick his brain and learn from him. I made my time with him count.

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 talked about tenacity, empathy, passion, and being consistent in executing well. It’s good to have a plan, but he talked about how you have to be “in the now” and focus on what you’re doing in the moment. He shared his insights on how you always have to do your best work because people can’t help but recognize your contributions. He said delivering results at a very high level leads to opportunities. 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. I didn’t know I wanted to be an ad sales executive, but it was a natural progression from where I was and what I was diligently doing. By striving to do my best work, I ended up in new business ad sales at Nickelodeon and going on to run ad sales for their digital business, and then ad sales strategy. I later moved to BET to manage East Coast media sales. Now, I lead Google’s U.S. Agency Development for Publicis.

I didn’t map all of this out. It flowed from striving to be my best and creating opportunities for myself through my work. Quincy’s mentality and approach to success has worked for me. If I’m honest, transparent, empathetic, and come from a place of good intent – leaving everything on the table – then I only need to worry about the judge upstairs.

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

There are always unspoken challenges. 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. I’m sure that other people of color, women, and people in the LGBT community face similar challenges. 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 don’t believe there’s only one solution to a problem or one solution for all people. 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. This allows people to feel heard, respected, and that their opinions matter. My team also knows that I’m not scared to get my hands dirty, and I will get in the trenches beside them to tackle problems and find solutions. This encourages them to try harder to put forth solutions before coming to me with problems.

A former boss of mine at BET showed me the importance of asking questions – teaching me to “inspect what I expect.” If you pause to ask “why” along the way, you can get right to the core of an issue. You can’t take for granted that someone is doing exactly what you asked them to do. So you have to get into the weeds. This can be uncomfortable and takes work, but it can illuminate your blind spots. It can help you figure out solutions and work with others to arrive at solutions.

**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. Someone always wants to get the most they can get for the least amount. 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. I wanted people to see the value of what we could do, and we backed this up with data and research to show a win-win for those involved.

But the biggest challenge wasn't with negotiating a deal with iHeartRadio. It was selling in this new concept internally at Nickelodeon since this required buy-in from many departments – like marketing, creative, ad sales, and talent management. 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. We just needed to bring fully curated content, and they could then surround it with the appropriate music, furthering the Nick brand on a new platform.

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. The interesting thing with negotiations is that sometimes your internal negotiation is bigger than the one you need to have externally in closing a deal.

**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 feel that I can thrive anywhere because I can figure out where there are obstacles, and what touchpoints to use to my advantage. I work with the tools that I'm given to be successful and get results.

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. It evolves and has power. 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.

Also, I always try to put my best foot forward and be true to myself. I am who I am in and outside of work. I embrace my full self to the extent that I'm able. This allows me to sleep well at night.

**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's such a good kid. 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.