



CUP Leadership Gala 2014 Spotlight:

IN CONVERSATION WITH HAROLD FORD, JR.

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Why do you think diversity matters in the public and private sectors?

Well, as you think about solutions to complex problems, by definition complex problems require broader thinking, strategic thinking. And for that kind of thinking and the results you're looking for, you want a diversity of thinkers. And diverse thinkers can take many forms—people from all over the country, people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, men and women who are able to give different perspectives. And one of the things I like about CUP is the developing of those kinds of leaders. This gives the business community a vibrancy and in a lot of ways a larger sense of self by being more representative of the incredible mosaic of people who live here in New York and represent the world.

What do you think business and civic leaders should do to encourage top level diversity?

If you're encouraging finding the right answers and the best results and the best outcomes, any organization that thrives has to understand that change is a key part and maybe the most constant element in anyone's success. And by that I mean change in terms of freshness and new ideas and innovation. CUP is right there at the heart and core of helping to identify that kind of leadership for leading organizations across this city and for that matter the world because there are companies that are situated here that have global reach. I applaud CUP for understanding not only its role but executing its role in such a profoundly positive way.

What would be your top advice to those people who are starting out?

I'd say if someone wants to run for public office, first you have to know what you want to do and why and it has to be a substantive reason. And public service is about indeed serving the public and so if you're fortunate enough to win an office and if your goal turns out to be the wrong objective, well you've got to have the ability and the decency to say "You know what? It's about serving the public. I've got to do what's best for the people". And I'm not saying to go in to a situation lacking confidence, but if you're willing to listen to sides and willing to compromise—which is one of the traits and tendencies that I think is absent today—you need that notion of let's work together and let's compromise and give a little and get it done.

Have you had any mentors and how have they impacted you?

My toughest class I ever had, or maybe the 2nd or 3rd toughest class I ever experienced, was my 7th grade English class. I transferred from a public school to a private school in DC and that transition was not as seamless as I wanted it to be. It was the most challenging time I had and my 7th grade English teacher became a great mentor because he challenged me. Like I said, I look for mentors to not be helpful in a coddling way but to encourage and to challenge. And to not put too much on you, but to know what you're capable of doing and to put that on you and put those challenges before you and to help you along the way.