

On October 11, 2016 I had the opportunity to attend the Empowerment Network's African American Leadership Conference. There, I had the chance to listen to and learn from some PHENOMINAL speakers. My day started with Keynote speaker Dr. Pamela Jolly. The title of her session was called "Taking possession of the Promise: Legacy & Wealth". As an owner of several businesses, she was teaching us about how to start and run successful businesses. She said a couple of things that caught my attention. In reference to owning a business: "BLACK: it's not a race, it's not a color, it's not a position. When a business is in the BLACK it is profitable". In her closing words, she said, "It's time to take ownership, own our legacy". Again, those words were inspirational for me to start and own a business of my own.

The next keynote speaker was Simon T. Bailey. His presentation was not only funny, but also motivational. The title of his session was called Ignite and shift Your Brilliance. Mr. Bailey worked at Disney World Resorts for several years and he shared his experiences about working in corporate America, and he also encouraged us to start our own businesses as well. I've heard this before but he reminded us that we should always have several avenues of income at all times. In his title he used the word SHIFT and he gave us an acronym to help us remember that we need to shift some things in our lives in order to accomplish the things that we are supposed to accomplish. **S- See, H-How, I-I F-Fit, T-Tomorrow.**

After the two speakers, we had a break out session. We were able to choose from several topics. I chose to attend the session called: Your Personal Brand: Building and Sustaining a Strong Personal Brand. I chose this session, because I was told several times that it is important to have my own business, so as I am preparing to brainstorm about what to do, I thought that it would be helpful to start learning about how to create a strong personal brand.

After that session was the Luncheon with the much anticipated, and well known journalist, Soledad O'Brien. She spoke about her life experiences being a Bi-racial woman growing up in New York and about her experiences as a Journalist. She also spoke about some upcoming documentaries that she has recently tapped, and some of the current issues that the Black Community is facing and dealing with now. Some of the big ones are the shootings of Black men (and now women) by police officers.

After the Luncheon, there were two more breakout sessions. The next one that I attended was called: Stepping Into Leadership Roles: This session was led by people who are young and currently holding leadership roles as their career. They shared some of their experiences (successes and challenges) and encouraged us to be bold and to step up and apply for positions that we may believe that we are "too young" to be in. The way this session was designed was that the speakers spoke and shared their information then they provided opportunities for us to engage in conversations about the topic. A couple of older adults sat in on this session as well, as a way to see how they could better work with us and prepare us to be leaders in the future.

The last breakout session had the most impact on me. The session was called Industry Roundtables. This session provided an opportunity for people who work in the same industry to meet and discuss successes and challenges within their field. The industries that were represented were: Education and Youth Development, Entrepreneurship and Business Owners, Government and the Justice System, Equitable Revitalization, Community Village Partners, Corporate Business and Health and Healthy Families. I attended the Education and Youth Development group. The room was packed with over 50 people from this area. It ranged from YMCA workers to a representative from the Department of

Education. There were educators from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and even some contractors from Washington DC, and EVERYONE WAS **BLACK!** We were given approximately 30 seconds to introduce ourselves and where we worked, then we held discussions about some of the issues that we face in the area of education and youth development in our city and across our state. Mr. Willie Barney, the founder of the Empowerment Network, took note on everything that was discussed. If you know anything about Mr. Barney, is that he is a man of ACTION. When he sees a problem, he rounds up a team of people they begin to address the issue. The hour flew by quickly and unfortunately, we were not able to get into in depth discussions, but Mr. Barney asked two things, 1- if we would be able to meet again, all parties said yes, 2- he requested our e-mail address so that he can keep us informed about upcoming events and so that he could call another meeting.

After this session, there were two other speakers who were just as motivational as the earlier ones. By the end of the day, I was EMPOWERED. I want to take a moment to thank Bridget Donovan, the OEA president for providing me the opportunity to attend this event and I believe that the information that I gained and the connections that I made will help me to become a better educator and leader in the Omaha community.