



Book Black Faces in White Places

10 Game-Changing Strategies to Achieve Success and Find Greatness

Randal Pinkett, Jeffrey Robinson and Philana Patterson
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Recommendation

African-Americans face singular obstacles. To succeed, often they must be twice as good at what they do as nonblacks or nonminorities. Business consultants Randal Pinkett and Jeffrey Robinson direct their clear advice to black professionals, entrepreneurs and others who want to build success and leave the world better than they found it. The authors’ counsel proves universal for anyone in the workforce and can make a difference at every career stage. *BooksInShort* recommends this manual as a valuable career resource – crucial for, but not limited to, its targeted African-American audience.

Take-Aways

- African-Americans experience “Black Faces in White Places moments” when they confront obstacles solely related to their skin color.
- Blacks must master and redefine “the ever-changing game” of business.
- Ten “game-changing strategies” help blacks navigate “the four dimensions” of “identity, meritocracy, society and opportunity” to achieve personal and career satisfaction.
- African-Americans must determine whether race will be the defining factor of their lives.
- Understand your “personal” and “social” identities, and control how they interact.
- Achieve excellence by harnessing your “gifts, passion, discipline” and “beliefs.”
- Build “developmental relationships” that help you gain wisdom.
- Create networks that extend beyond your zone of knowledge or comfort.
- Join or form communities that support a cause.
- To share what you have learned and achieved, give back to your community.

Summary

“A Black Face in a White Place”

When Donald Trump declared author Randal Pinkett the winner of the US television show *The Apprentice*, Trump posed a question that the tycoon had never before put to a participant. He asked Pinkett, who is black, if he should hire both Pinkett and the second-place finalist, a woman who was white. Pinkett said no, because the show’s name was *The Apprentice*, not *The Apprenti*, so Trump named him the sole winner. Pinkett had faced an archetypal “Black Faces in White Places moment.” Pinkett’s confident response kept Trump from using race as an excuse to change the rules of the game after the author had played and won.

“The reality for black people is that race and ethnicity continue to be among the most salient of...social identifiers in 21st-century America.”

African-Americans must play “the ever-changing game” in which they strive to meet ambitious goals in their business and personal lives but encounter unfair obstacles and unwritten rules. Black people should learn to use their skin color and traditions as “assets, not as liabilities.” Doing so means “mastering the game.” Black faces working in white places deal with professional issues in four dimensions:

1. **“Identity”** – Does society see you only as black? Is that how you would also define yourself? Blacks often must choose between how they view themselves and how society views them.
2. **“Meritocracy”** – Will race always characterize your accomplishments, or is your success based on your unique talents and gifts?
3. **“Society”** – America has made progress, but obstacles to black equality still exist.
4. **“Opportunity”** – As a black person, can you craft a path toward your highest goals?

Ten Strategies

To navigate these four dimensions and find “a path to greatness,” African-Americans can use 10 strategies to “redefine” the game and change America’s culture for generations to come:

1. “Establish a Strong Identity and Purpose”

A strong identity and purpose give you self-assurance and help you know what roads you’re taking and why. Your identity has three components:

1. **“Personal identity”** – How you describe yourself. Your parents, teachers and others in your community affect and develop your personal identity.
2. **“Social identity”** – How you view yourself vis-à-vis your milieu. Your social identity encompasses your gender, citizenship, religion and career.
3. **“Identity negotiation”** – How your personal identity interacts with your social identity. Because your personal and social identities can be at odds, you must determine whether to “assimilate” or “negotiate” who you are. Seek to balance what the seminal African-American author W.E.B. DuBois described as African-Americans’ “warring souls – one African and one American.”

“Playing the game” means accepting the rules of the game as they are stated. “Changing the game” means modifying the rules for the better. “Redefining the game” means restructuring the systems that once defined the rules to ultimately bring an end to the game itself.”

Your purpose is the reason that you are alive; it can be “individual” or “shared,” and your natural talents will help define it. Be guided by the principles of Kwanzaa: “unity; self-determination; collective work and responsibility; cooperative economics; purpose; creativity,” and “faith.”

2. “Obtain Broad Exposure”

Step beyond the world you know and delve into areas that “discomfort” you. Highly accomplished people continually push themselves into their “growth zone.” Over time, you will gain “cultural capital” – knowledge that will help you succeed in a “global context.” The advantages can help you resolve difficulties, diminish bigotry and better serve your neighbors.

3. “Demonstrate Excellence”

To navigate the shortcomings of the US meritocracy, strive to be the best at all times. Excellence encompasses four factors: your “gifts, passion, discipline” and “beliefs.” Everyone has gifts; they can be word-based, mathematical, religious, artistic or athletic. Your passion is what you most enjoy. When your gifts and passion diverge, discipline yourself to refine them. This requires working hard and calling on your beliefs to help you make wise choices.

“Establishing a strong identity can be the difference between thinking that people who look like you can succeed at anything and knowing it to be the case.”

Apply these elements to attain “congruence” – the point at which you become “the very best you can be.” Once you achieve excellence, few obstacles can hold you back or divert you from your goals. Excellence is your most important partner, and you must sustain it.

4. “Build Solid and Diverse Relationships”

You will be a formidable player in the game if you actively seek “interconnectedness” by nurturing relationships, employing the Kwanzaa principle of unity. While people are most comfortable around those who are similar, you will be better served by developing a varied circle of associates. To craft these relationships, fortify what writer Stephen Covey described as your “emotional bank account.” Investing in relationships fosters trust because it helps you help others. Follow the Golden Rule – Do unto others as you would have them do unto you – to create a profitable network.

“Seeing color in our society helps us see the full beauty of our society.”

Your network will consist of those with whom you have either “strong ties” or “weak ties.” Your strong-tie people might be your family members or closest friends. Your weak ties alert you to opportunities, because they provide fresh information unknown to your strong ties. “Bridging gaps” in your network – introducing the people in your circle to one another – helps you advance more quickly. Three different types of networks – “dense, sparse” and “borrowed” – help you at different times. Dense networks envelop a few “tightly connected” people. Sparse networks are made up of many people who are loosely affiliated. A borrowed network, in which you make connections through other people, matters because those links help perceived “outsiders” like minorities expand their circles.

5. “Seek the Wisdom of Others”

You have five reasons to seek wisdom: 1) Other people have experiences that you don't; 2) you'll develop an appreciation for the gaps in your own knowledge; 3) failure can earn wisdom and teach you more than success; 4) wisdom helps you develop your own counsel; and 5) once you gain wisdom, you can share it with others.

“We believe reshaping 21st-century America necessarily requires combining an identity-driven agenda with an issue-driven agenda.”

People share wisdom in “developmental relationships,” which provide “career and psychosocial support.” Both are valuable. Seek a mentor, and strive to become a mentor yourself to either an individual or a group. In “reverse mentoring,” a younger or less-experienced person imparts wisdom to others who are older and more experienced – for example, teaching computer skills or social media usage to older people. When mentoring – be it as a counselor or a protégé, “formally or informally” – strategically choose the right partner at the appropriate time. Do not avoid the issue of race. Teach one another about your backgrounds.

6. “Find Strength in Numbers”

People can cause change when they band together. Unified efforts come from six kinds of groups: “family, friends, inner circles, teams, partnerships” and “organizations.” These are typically dense networks. When they join to work as one, they rely on “bonding social capital.” Inner circles, teams and partnerships generally are smaller groups, but they can lead to larger ones such as “collaborative organizations” in which the members consent to undertake a mission together. These organizations can be based on religion, family, professional level or politics. African-American groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League and the National Black MBA Association are examples. Choose your affiliation with such organizations strategically.

7. “Think and Act Intrapreneurially”

Entrepreneurship means employing your gifts to make a difference in your sphere and to “create value in the world.” “Intrapreneurship” means doing the same inside a single group. Both entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs pursue profits and do good work in the community – thus fulfilling “the double bottom line.” Some go further and pursue a “triple bottom line,” also seeking to benefit the environment. Inside a firm, intrapreneurs can work to ensure that equal opportunities exist for African-Americans. You can accomplish this in one of three ways: “fight” by actively campaigning for change; “take flight” and penalize the firm by denying it your talents; or “forgo” – that is you let the issue slide for now but take it up again later. Applied strategically, these methods will totally change your firm. Encourage your employer to play a greater part in solving your community's problems, an effort which eventually can repay the company with higher profits.

8. “Think and Act Entrepreneurially”

African-American success – or any community's success – depends on “wealth creation,” and entrepreneurship is the key to creating wealth. Starting a successful business can help you and your community both prosper. You can embark on two types of business: either “lifestyle ventures,” which are single-location operations that provide the owner with an annual income, or “growth ventures,” which can expand to multiple sites and draw outside investors. If you pursue a growth venture, your goal should be to create a “business enterprise” – a large company that becomes an important, lasting player in the business world. Lifestyle and growth ventures operate to make money, but you can also be an entrepreneur “for a purpose” by creating a nonprofit organization that addresses a certain cause or a for-profit enterprise that tackles social issues.

9. “Synergize and Reach Scale”

The previous strategies help you play, change and master the game; the elements of this strategy will help you redefine the game. People and groups need to work together to effect change. Diverse individuals must cooperate and collaborate, and they should value and celebrate their dissimilarities. Synergy can occur spontaneously, but deliberate efforts also can produce it, such as in “training, leadership retreats, strategic partnerships” and “facilitated dialogues.”

“It is a waste of your precious time on earth to do everything you do – personally and professionally – and not leave something behind that makes the world a better place.”

While beneficial on their own, such endeavors achieve a greater impact if they can grow – in a smart, businesslike fashion – to encompass a wider audience or a broader service area. This additional scale or “expanding scope” enables your venture to provide additional services to more people. The African-American community faces challenges that demonstrate the importance of this strategy. For example, the civil rights movement would not have succeeded if it hadn't achieved synergy and scale. The Sustainable South Bronx, Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions and the Harlem Children's Zone are black for-profit and nonprofit enterprises that achieved both synergy and scope.

10. “Give Back Generously”

Giving back by helping fellow humans ensures that you leave a meaningful legacy in the world. Giving back has three important components: your “love” (through serving your community), your “life” (through the results of your work) and your “light” (through the way you touch other lives). With its emphasis on family and spirituality, the African-American community has always put a high value on giving. You make a memorable impression by offering your “time, talent, treasure” or “touch.” All four gifts underscore your identity and purpose in life – the foundations of your first strategy.

“Greatness”

Employing these 10 strategies will help you thrive, but do not pursue them only for your own sake. While personal success alone is a worthy goal, you also should seek greatness, which has four elements: 1) Greatness is about what you do for others, not just for yourself; 2) it is about changing other people's lives; 3) it is not about “where you are” but about “how far you've traveled”; and 4) it does not focus just on you but, more important, on others. Attaining this kind of greatness will help “reshape America.”

About the Authors

A Rhodes Scholar and frequent public speaker, **Randal Pinkett** is chairman and CEO of the consulting firm BCT Partners. The author of *Campus CEO*, he holds five degrees including a PhD in media arts from MIT. BCT co-founder **Dr. Jeffrey Robinson** is a professor at Rutgers Business School.
