

Wangui McKelvey: Be Proactive About Career Growth

By Ronald Gordon

Changing gears and getting up to speed on IBM's leading role in the hybrid cloud era is a challenge that Wangui McKelvey has had to meet head-on. As VP of Marketing for Open Cloud Technology, Applications & Ecosystems, McKelvey leads marketing for one of IBM's most strategic areas, and she is working to accelerate adoption of IBM's Public Cloud with a focus on ecosystem partners.

"As our clients enter the next phase of their digital transformation, and move their most critical workloads to the cloud, IBM is optimally positioned to help them on their journey," she says.

McKelvey is active in helping others succeed. She's a member of IBM's Black Executive Council and co-executive sponsor of the Atlanta Black Network of Employees Business Resource Group. She hosts a quarterly roundtable that brings together a dozen IBM professionals and executives in discussions on a range of topics. McKelvey has personally mentored 10 proteges and counseled many more.



"The best piece of advice that I received when I first joined IBM—and the best advice I can give new IBMers—is to find a mentor," she says. "Mentors are essential sounding boards to help you navigate any organization, especially one as large and complex as IBM. You should have mentors from both above and below where you currently stand in your career. That way, you get multiple valuable perspectives."

It also helps to have sponsors, which are different from mentors—although sometimes they overlap—because sponsors are more focused on helping employees with career progression and advancement. "Sometimes, people think that being a top performer is enough, but you also have to be proactive so that the right people speak up for you and help you identify opportunities for growth," she says.

"Ultimately, you have to manage your own career," she adds, "but if you are proactive about reaching out and making real connections with people you will get the help you need."

Take on Stretch Assignments

Outside of the office, McKelvey and her husband Walter are raising three daughters, ages 11, 8, and 3. "I'm fortunate to

work for a company where I can succeed professionally while being a working mother,” McKelvey says. Her husband teaches music in the public schools. “Like most working families we integrate work and life, and do our best to be present for our girls whenever they need us. And when needed, we get lots of help from our village of family and friends.”



The McKelvey family on vacation.

McKelvey encourages IBMers to invest in themselves. “Our industry is incredibly competitive and constantly changing. Take the time to increase your skills, take on stretch assignments or simply learn something new that will help you stay ahead of the changing landscape,” she says.

IBM offers educational opportunities, industry-recognized skills badges, international assignments and more to help employees adapt and advance. “It’s on each of us to keep our skills up to date,” she says, “and we should definitely utilize the resources we have to help us do just that.”

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