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Excerpts from

*“An Immigrant in the C-Suite: From the Journey, Lessons for the Business Community”*

Francie, Anthony’s sister, enrolled him where he was only the second black student at the school, and where he began to understand the pervasiveness and impact of racism. He received a final grade of D in American History but believed he should have received a B. A conference with the principal and the history teacher supported his argument for a B. During the conference with the principal, Francie and Anthony, the teacher shouted to the principal, “He’s from Honduras; What could he possibly know about American history?” Ironically, one of the topics addressed in that class was Dr. Martin Luther King’s activities combating prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, bigotry, and racism.

Anthony, Francie, and their mother, Jeronima, were reviewing Anthony’s financial situation when the conversation shifted to their mother, but she seemed shy and uncomfortable talking about her own finances. Mom was nearing retirement age, and no one was worried; everyone assumed that since she had worked for the wealthy McDougals for her full 16 years in the U.S., that she was secure. It later became clear that for all those years, they paid her a meager amount of cash weekly, periodic bonuses, free housing for her family, and assistance with obtaining green cards for her children. Anthony already had been collecting paychecks and knew the implications of a retiring person not ever having paid into Social Security. He and his family were devastated for Jeronima but understood her sacrifice and were honored that it was now their time to take care of the woman who always had sacrificed everything for them. In true immigrant fashion, she worked as a cook until age 77 getting up at 3:30 every morning to take the bus to work so she could earn Social Security benefits.

Prior to beginning his new position, Anthony was asked to accompany a friend to a courthouse ceremony at which his friend would become a citizen. Anthony was honored to be invited because he understood the sacrifices required, difficulty, cost and meaningfulness of the occasion and, most importantly, the actual feeling of taking the oath and ultimately becoming a citizen of the United States. When Anthony arrived at the courthouse and approached the ceremony hearing room, he felt a mood among participants of reverence and contained enthusiasm. Anthony was surprised at his own level of emotion to once again be in the presence of imminent U.S. citizens from over 60 countries all about to experience a dream by raising their right hands and taking the oath...one many natural-born Americans take for granted. As the judge and newly minted citizens completed the oath, there was an eruption of emotion. Anthony sat at the back of the room smiling as he witnessed hugs, tears, and unconcealed exuberance. Those wishing to speak were allowed two minutes each and the line grew instantly. Speakers detailed their struggle, mentioned loved ones left behind, and some chose names as American as apple pie. Anthony only wished those who question how much immigrants love America were able to witness that raw emotion with their own eyes.



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Another unique chapter of Anthony's personal journey was the wedding of his niece, Marie. She, her mother, and siblings are Catholic, Marie's father is Muslim, and her then fiancée, Eric, is Jewish. Marie and Eric were married in a Catholic church with a priest and rabbi performing the ceremony together. The family swelled with pride that they insisted on their day being theirs rather than dictated by doctrine or others' idea of what they "should" do. Unfortunately, a few years later, Marie's father passed away. Anthony, his nephews (Marie's brothers), and Eric respectfully knelt in the mosque honoring Anthony's deceased former brother-in-law. Meanwhile, Marie (an attorney), her sister (a small business owner) and her two sisters-in-law (a chemist and nurse practitioner) were not allowed in the mosque. However, out of respect, those four professional, strong women wore hijabs and insisted on being present, albeit on the steps of the mosque during inclement weather. Anthony was incredibly proud to be part of such a selfless family, to witness such extraordinary events in which many would not agree to participate, and to realize that none of them allowed religious differences, hubris or adverse emotion to prevent them from displaying unconditional family support, class and unselfishness. In Anthony's mind, these are examples of how all races and ethnicities ideally would interact with one another personally and professionally. An admirable goal for our next generation of leaders.

Anthony rapidly rose through the management ranks, specifically moving from director to assistant vice president to vice president in four years. This led a few staff members to take notice and express skepticism about justification for his promotions. One day, Anthony mentioned to his colleague Susan, that she looked nice, and he wondered whether there was a special occasion. Susan replied that all her jeans were dirty, so she had to wear a dress. A few days later Anthony was summoned to human resources, and much to his surprise, he was accused of sexual harassment; however, within two days he was cleared of any wrongdoing. He learned that it was not Susan who contacted human resources; instead, it had been Susan's supervisor, Peggy, who overheard Anthony's comment and thought it inappropriate. Following the quick closure of the complaint, Peggy confronted Anthony with accusations of being the president's pet to gain promotion, and that Anthony should ensure others more senior than himself also get promoted.