

Carolyn E. Howell

A Wonderful Experience

One year following the desegregation of her school, Carolyn Howell was asked by her fifth grade social studies teacher, Mr. Contee, to come to the front of the class to recite a sentence she had written. The assignment was to use each vocabulary word in a sentence. Carolyn remembers that day saying, "I was so creative that I used all of my words in just one sentence. When I was finished Mr. Contee looked at me and said, 'You are smart and you can go somewhere and really be something.'" His praise caught her by surprise and sparked in Carolyn recognition of her creativity and efficiency that would prove beneficial throughout her life.

She had also found her voice and from that moment on she keeps finding a way to speak up and speak out on anything that she deemed important. Having a supportive a loving family, Carolyn was heavily influenced by her parents to look out for others, especially her siblings. Carolyn became the one who recognized the needs of others and worked to advocate for them. "My mother taught my siblings and I about respecting people and always according them their dignity." Between Mr. Contee's encouragement and her mother's influence Carolyn was armed with an understanding of the importance of considerate and collaborative relationships.

As the Founder, President and CEO of Events USA, Carolyn is still advocating for positive changes. Now, these changes are crafted through the events she creates that enhance corporate culture from the inside out. Carolyn says, "I always wanted to be a waitress, because when you go out to eat, your waitress should make your experience wonderful and be like background music that is oh so delightful," she says. "When I think of the corporate events I plan, I get to be that waitress making everything effortless and creating an experience that is special

and shows appreciation for their employees."

Events USA organizes and plans corporate events, seminars, retreats, picnics, and employee events with a focus on corporate culture. "Before doing an event I ask the "why" question to figure out what the company feels that they need and how we can accomplish their goal in an impactful way." "My mother always told me to do everything you can, every time," she recounts. Even the smallest details are critical for Carolyn and her team. Assessing and anticipating the components that make up the details and addressing those factors is what allows each event run smoothly.

She emphasizes the importance of working together with corporations to plan these events and explains that her leadership style is based on a collaborative partnership and an empathetic connection with her clients. For each event Carolyn personally meets with the executives of the company, their committees, and human resources directors to determine the reason behind each event. Then she and her team create a quality experience that focuses on what the employees need and how they can elevate the corporate culture. If the company needs to improve their communication between administrators and workers, Events USA customizes the event to include a communications expert as a seminar speaker. "Using a picnic as a bandage when morale is down will not work" she explains. "Maybe you need a retreat or leadership training and then when you're healthy we will celebrate." Events USA also works with dynamic Public Relations firms and Top Executives to create and produce socials events to "rebrand" their companies so that they are positioned properly in their industry.

Events USA is continually on the move and is now producing even more conferences and



seminars to help to position decision-makers so that they are continually on top of their game and in a position to manage their company with important knowledge and industry trends. Carolyn carefully sources speakers and presenters that are dynamic and talented in their fields.

Carolyn's work ethic and ability to connect with people began in her childhood. Carolyn was raised in a small farming community in Prince Georges County, Maryland as the oldest of six children and surrounded by an extended family. "Family was always the most important thing growing up," she describes. "I grew up being loved and supported by people who thought I was something special." Carolyn spent her summers playing outside and having legendary playtimes with her Aunt, Uncle, cousins and neighbors. "We explored, learned and had a blast. I can remember that when we really exhausted ourselves we would lay in the grass and count the airplanes," she shares.

Carolyn's father, Carl Bolden, was a government worker for the Navy Ordinance Station and was able to retire at age 54. She describes him as having a "warm country smile, always positive and happy." Her mother, Mary Bolden, one of the greatest influences in Carolyn's life, was a homemaker for her own family and when her children were old enough she became a day worker for other families. "My mother is a really good cook and handy, too," she explains. "That is why having a home of peace and rest is so important to me."

Until fourth grade Carolyn's school was segregated with her and her siblings being sent to a school in Clinton, miles away from her home. "At that age it never occurred to me that we were in segregation," she says. Carolyn reflects on the desegregation of her school saying, "I remember my mother telling me to join everything, do everything and be in everything." Her mother said, "Do not complain if someone does not want you there, just be glad you're there and make the most of being there." Regardless of the unrest and riots during the 60's happening in D.C. only miles away, Carolyn explains that she felt her small farming community was sheltered from it all. She explains, "Everyone helped everyone else, because as farmers you have to help each other." Carolyn's parents raised her to be respectful of everyone, and to lend a hand when someone needed help regardless of race.

As an older child, Carolyn started to notice the racial divide being created by society and constantly in the news. The equity that she saw created a desire in her to work for or fight for social change. Carolyn laughingly says that she personally wanted to "Free Angela Davis". She remembers sitting in her living room with Myona Nicholas, a Jehovah Witness that stopped by to talk to her and her siblings about the Bible. When Carolyn confronted the visitor, a tall blond woman, with a question of whether whites were superior to blacks, Ms. Nicholas responded by reading her Acts 10: 34-35 that says, "God is not partial but in every nation the man who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him." Carolyn says, "In that moment I realized that I did not need to fight or question this matter anymore. Learning this simple truth and reading it directly from the Bible caused my whole mindset to change. If God felt that I was equal as one of his children then I could move forward and live my life as an equal with my goals centered on God's purpose."

As a young person in school Carolyn describes being involved in many school activities including Brownies and Girl Scouts, plays, pageants, French language classes, and even playing the trombone. In ninth grade Carolyn and three of her peers ran for student body president. "The four of us decided to form a coalition for the election and we won," she says. "It was modeled after the Rainbow Coalition." She also worked part time as a pharmacy clerk and then later a sales associate at a shoe store. "I always knew I wanted to graduate high school and get a good job," she says. She continued to be an active student and during a school awards ceremony she was chosen for the distinguished Principal's Award and "Most Talkative" in the yearbook.

When entering her senior year of high school Carolyn started her first job as a bank teller at Peoples National Bank. She reflects saying, "I can remember my grandfather dropping me off at work at People's National Bank and he saw me unlock the bank door. The next day my father said my grandfather was so proud because I had the keys to the bank." After graduating high school in 1974, Carolyn met Ben Howell. Although she did not believe in love at first sight, she fell victim to this connection and within the year they were engaged and then married. Carolyn and Ben are still very much in love today after 43 years and

have had three children together.

Carolyn continued working as a bank teller with a zest for making every customer interaction positive. However, Carolyn soon discovered that when a teller's drawer was short there was no method to determine the error. Thanks to her inventive nature she created a system to track her teller transactions throughout the day. When her manager saw this he encouraged her to train the other tellers and she was quickly promoted to head teller. She would continue working for the bank for four years until 1978 when a customer, Robert "Bob" Reiver, asked her to come work for him. At this time she was expecting her first child. Then after her maternity leave she started working as Mr. Reiver's assistant at his law firm and eventually she became his executive assistant.

In 1997, Bob decided to sell his firm and buy a piece of property to open a golfing range. He asks Carolyn to come with him as the company Vice President and Managing Partner even though she said she had never golfed before. Together they decided to start planning events for companies. "Bob knew I could create something out of nothing and he liked the way I thought so he gave me the liberty to be creative," she says. They were hosting events for many companies and in time decided to separate the picnics from the golf activities. By the end of 2011, Carolyn was ready to move on as the CEO of her own business Fun Company Events.

In 2017, she rebranded as Events USA and continues to be the sole owner of the company. "In doing this for many years, I realized that companies need a lot of help in showing appreciation," she explains. "I like creating corporate events that really make people feel valuable."

Carolyn's enthusiasm for service and community does not stop with Events USA. She still volunteers weekly as a Bible teacher and serves on a number of Boards—Wolf Trap Associates Board, the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Directors of "O" Museum and the

Fibroid Foundation Board.

In May 2018 Carolyn will be the recipient of the DC Chambers's Women in Business Champion of the Year. In 2017, Carolyn was recognized as a Top 100 Minority Business Enterprise, was awarded 2016 Sterling Woman of the Year and was named the Minority Business Leader by the Washington Business Journal in 2010. Carolyn is also a member of the Women Presidents' Organization (WPO).

As an advisor to persons entering the workforce today Carolyn encourages them to seek values that have real substance beyond material accomplishments and prominence. To really work at being a success as a person of principles. She encourages young leaders to think about what they really want in the future and to strive towards a goal that matches what will bring them joy. "Success is a level of contentment that you imagine for yourself," she says, "I am an accidental business owner, the work that I do, while important is still a means to an end. My goals and objectives have always been very clear for my life, everything I do revolves around having a life of meaningful purpose, to be of service to others and to get home to my family."

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— By **Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®**

About Gordon J. Bernhardt
President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).

