



BET Founder Wants More Minority Entrepreneurs to Get a Shot

BET Founder Bob Johnson speaks at Fuqua about his career and challenges facing entrepreneurs

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Bob Johnson didn't mince words. He believes minority entrepreneurs don't have access to the money needed to get businesses off the ground. "We are a population that is growing faster than the general population in numbers, but not in wealth creation," Johnson told prospective, current, and former Fuqua students during the Duke MBA Workshop for Minority Applicants on November 16th.



Johnson knows a thing or two about the business world. As the founder and chairman of The RLJ Companies, Johnson owns or holds interests in businesses operating in hotel real estate investment; private equity; financial services; asset management; insurance services; automobile dealerships; sports and entertainment; and video lottery terminal (VLT) gaming. Prior to founding The RLJ Companies, Johnson was the founder and chairman of Black Entertainment Television (BET), which became the first African American owned company publicly, traded on the New York Stock Exchange. In 2001, Johnson sold BET to Viacom for approximately \$3 billion and remained the Chief Executive Officer through 2006.

In his keynote address at Fuqua, he told the group how he started BET, backed by telecommunications giant John Malone. Malone gave Johnson 500 thousand dollars to start the company in 1980. Malone retained a 20 percent share, leaving Johnson the other 80 percent. Malone never tried to buy more equity in the business, believing that individuals work harder for themselves than for others. Johnson says Malone's faith in him was his driving factor to make BET a success. Ultimately, Johnson says Malone received 700 million in Viacom stock when BET was sold. Johnson credits Malone with giving him a shot to build his dream, "I fundamentally believe if there were more John Malones in society, there would be more Bob Johnsons."

Johnson says minority success isn't just a matter of finding more capital for minority entrepreneurs. He wants to see businesses commit to a voluntary model of interviewing at least one minority candidate for high level positions and at least one minority firm for contract work. Johnson says that model worked well when implemented in the National Football League as the "Rooney Rule." Johnson calls his idea the "RLJ Rule."

Johnson also gave advice to entrepreneurs saying, "Make your friends before you need them." He told the crowd an entrepreneur needs to be a visionary and stressed the importance of forming relationships and selling your idea. "As an entrepreneur, you are always on stage," he said. In addition, he encouraged the group to take advantage of the power of the internet. "The internet is an open opportunity for the person who can build the best mouse trap," Johnson said, referring to the power of marketing a product online.

This was the 30th year Fuqua has hosted the Duke MBA Workshop for Minority Applicants. The event is designed to provide prospective MBA students information about the admissions process, financing, and career resources. Fuqua alumni also come back to share their insights and perspectives. This year, a record number of alumni and prospective students attended. Student members of Fuqua's Black and Latino MBA Organization serve as hosts for the three day event, which is also organized by Fuqua's Admissions Office.

http://www.fuqua.duke.edu/news_events/feature_stories/727220/