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Black Business Spotlight: InGensa, Inc.

by Gino Terrell August 18, 2023

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Jacquie Coleman Photo by Chris Juhn

Breaking down barriers in a White-male-dominated field

Growing up, Jacquie Coleman remembers being called "bossy," which in her grandmother's parlance meant "sassy." In hindsight, Coleman realized that when she was younger she had a habit of asking questions, taking charge and embracing challenges.

The Minnesota transplant, and South Side Chicago native, has been and continues to be a difference maker. She's lived in the state for 20 years and has led her business, InGensa, Inc., for 10 years as owner, president and CEO.

In layman's terms, InGensa is a firm that helps school districts renovate and rebuild their infrastructure, property, and educational facilities.

"It's a lot more complex than that," Coleman notes in explaining InGensa's business. "I work with school districts [to] develop, plan and execute those projects. I manage [the projects] as well."

In addition, there are lots of moving parts that InGensa juggles to achieve the end goal to "help clients achieve optimum learning environments."

Recently, InGensa helped a client in central Minnesota, Browerville Public Schools—a K-12 system—rebuild in April 2023 after the roof of the school's gymnasium collapsed under heavy snow accumulation.

She understands that schools are a critical part of the community, especially in a small town. This motivates her to continue the work she does leading InGensa.

Her company serves schools in rural areas in greater Minnesota and the Dakotas, so she's no stranger to hitting the road for hours to attend conferences and meetings.

She is not just the only Black woman leader in her space; she's also the only Black leader in a White-male-dominated field. With a relatively small firm, she makes it her mission to wear "many hats" to make ends meet.

"I want to get all these hats off so I'm not working until 11 o'clock at night," she says. However, the long hours are what have led to Coleman's success in leading InGensa.

Prior to starting her own business, she worked for a Fortune 100 company in the same field. Being limited to a corporate-specific template for client solutions and ever-present time constraints meant that she had to sacrifice some of her best ideas.

"When you're passionate about what you're doing, and trying to service the clients, it makes it really difficult. I was limited in what I could do," she says.

Her work leading InGensa for a decade didn't go unnoticed by MEDA (Metropolitan Economic Development Association). They named Coleman their 2023 Resilient Entrepreneur of the Year.

"It was a surprise," Coleman says of receiving the honor. "I have been working with MEDA since the start of the business. They took me on as a client. They watched me grow," she adds.

Beyond personal accolades, Coleman finds her work to be more rewarding compared to when she worked in a corporate structure. At InGensa, she has a hands-on approach to working with clients and developing solutions together.

"It feels liberating. I feel seen. I'm able to be myself more. I'm not a robot in a corporate structure," Coleman says. "A lot of companies are concerned with their bottom line. Don't get me wrong, we are not a nonprofit. But for us it's bigger than that."

"If we are servicing our clients to the greatest satisfaction, then the bottom line will follow," Coleman says.

In addition to being a business leader, Coleman is a mentor. "It's a goal of mine," she says of her desire to become a mentor. "I want to help at-risk young African American women."

Throughout her career, she says she's had people who showed her what was possible and, in turn, has a desire to do that for others. Early on in her life, one of her mentors showed her the value of education, which was one of the reasons why she pursued higher education.

She took a liking to the programs at the University of Illinois and saw her older sister's experience at the school, which played a part in inspiring her to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees.

There are a few traits she'd like to instill in her mentees. "Confidence is key," Coleman says. "There will be obstacles. But you have to have the confidence to keep going and be resilient."

"Lean on your support system. Build your network and have people around you. You are going to need them, even if you think you can do it all by yourself."

Coleman currently leads by example for her 13 nieces, two nephews and, of course, her colleagues. Her desire is to branch outside of her family and give Black girls in her hometown of Chicago someone who can show them a path to success.

Success has a different meaning for Coleman now. "When I was younger I thought it was about career and money," she says. "Now, I feel it's about being happy. Whether that's being happy in my career, financially comfortable, happy with family and friends—success to me is happiness."

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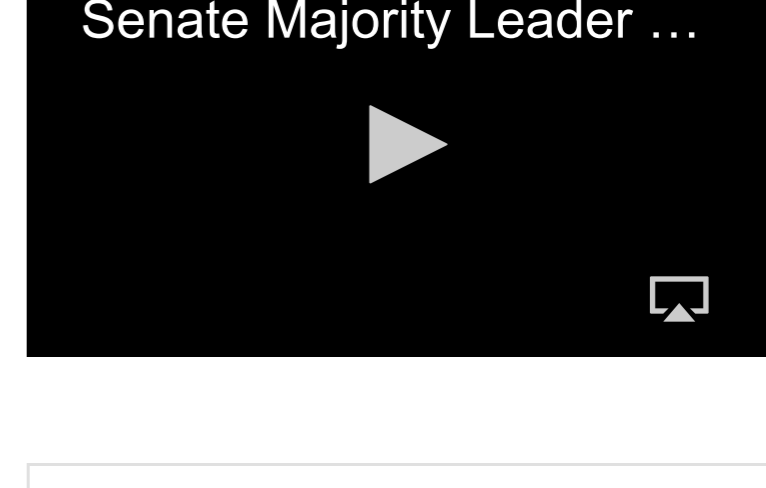
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