

old, there was a falling out between my mom and my grandmother. My mom packed my bags and took me back to Liberty City but not to my grandaunt and granduncle. This time, to my biological father and his mother. Which raised the other 5 kids. I thought, wow! I'm being abandoned in my mind. How could you do this? You loved me and I love you. There was this argument. I stayed there and I graduated from high school. It turned out to be the best thing. Now, I look back and say, God had it all mapped out because I was able to stay at the same school. That didn't change. Going to school, forced me to then look at the people around me. There were 6 girls, I can't remember the age we were in. I knew them before. In the 9th grade, is when I really met them. By the 10th grade, I wanted to be a part of their click. I'm 15 years old now. They allowed me to be a part of their click and that was the best thing in my life because they all went to college. We all went to college. We all supported each other. They had no clue that I lived in Liberty City because I caught the bus to school. That group of young ladies that are so dear to me today, we literally text 7 of us every day. It's incredible from the 10th grade and 7 of us. To this day, we are sisters. Just like you and I. That was meant to be. They encouraged me to go to college. Went to college. Decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. That's what I wanted to be. My counselor said, Adrian I reviewed your transcript and your SAT scores, I really think you should take an accounting course. I said I don't even know what accounting is. Have you ever heard of bookkeeping? Yes, they have bookkeeping in my school. It's almost like bookkeeping, that's what I did. I took bookkeeping and I never turned back. I took accounting and I never turned back.

Nichols: Sometimes the people you're surrounded by, I think it's by Jim Rome, I believe that once said that you are the average of the 5 people you hang out with. You've got in with some girls that had ambition, had goals, character, all of those things. Isn't it so important? If you were just speaking to a young person, it matters doesn't it? Who you choose to hang out with.

Bracy: Absolutely, you have to surround yourself with likeminded people.

Nichols: That is so great. You went on to major in accounting. Tell me, during that time and of course obviously these girls were your peers. We talk a lot about mentorship. What I see and talking to women and women are just dying for people to build into them. You and I talk a little bit about this. I had amazing mentors. Tell me, how important is mentorship? How important is it as us women leaders to be reaching down to the next generation. Talk a little bit about that and what you're doing today.

Bracy: That's a very good point. Women especially, we're just energized and empowered by mentors. I started mentoring early on in my career. It wasn't even career at the time. I think I was in college. My nieces, I noticed that they were starting to get connected to the environment. When I graduated from college that was my purpose in life. To make sure that my nieces didn't fall into this trap. So I started mentoring them. One of them, I went to her school. She was a senior in high school and I spoke to the administrators and they said that she was very close to being kicked out because she had missed too many days. This is her senior year in high school. I was so upset, I went to her house she's in the bed. I pulled her out, I said pack your bags and she moved in with me and she never missed a day and she graduated from high school. I started early mentoring. It's just critical because especially today, there's just so many things pulling at our young women, our young people. Men too. So many ways to go. Like you, my mentors were men. I was in the NFL. I asked Jonathan Mariner, he was the CFO for the Florida Marlins with a new baseball team that Wayne Huizinga bought and brought in to the stadium at this time, I was a treasurer for the Girabi stadium. Jonathan was my 2nd mentor. My first mentor was my boss who actually hired me into the Miami Dolphins. Bill Duffy.

To this day, I keep in touch with him. It's been 20 something years now, they helped to guide me. When I look at mentorships especially today, it's more than just about 1 on 1. Nowadays, I'm hearing that they've gone beyond the mentoring. It's sponsorship now. That wasn't a term I knew about growing up. I didn't know what a sponsor was. Just a mentor was someone who would advise you and give you advice and coach you and be there for you. The sponsor is different. The sponsor is not the person that you're going to go to for advice. The sponsor is going to be someone in the company that sometimes that you don't even realize that they're paying attention to you. They will go to the bat for you for promotions. There are times when you don't even realize that they're there. That's why it's so important to always give your best. You never know. It's not always who you know but who knows you. That's the sponsor to really help promote your career and the mentor typically is the person for advice who guide you and coach you and lead you and steer you, hopefully in the right direction. Sometimes, not even give you any advice. Sometimes, a mentor may just be someone you need to talk to. Usually they do give you their experience like things that they've gone through in life that helped them that hopefully that can help the mentee. Mentorship is important. I am actually the mentor leader at my church. Whenever we have a new mentor, a new member join, our ministry assigns a veteran. Mentorship has always been in my life and it seems like, I guess that's what I'm called to do.

Nichols: Very good. I think it's important. You kind of touched on a little bit, tell us how you got into the NFL. You were at the Dolphins and you were with the Arizona Cardinals, the Rams. You had a sporting background. But you didn't play football.

Bracy: I didn't play football but I have 3 rings, who cares but that's okay. Sports has always been a part of my life. Especially growing up in a black community that's just something you do. Growing up, it was different. You can play football outside until 7 pm. There was no need to be afraid today where kids can hardly play outside. Sports was a part of my journey. Played flag football as a girl. I ran 440 track in high school. I was on the track team. Then I went to college, I was actually in the athletic department. I worked for 4 years in the athletic department. Here I am again, in sports. I ended up moving back home to Miami, for Baltimore. I went to college in Baltimore. I'm working at an aviation company that I love. I'm just really happy at this point. I joined a national association that's called the national association of black accountants. NABA. I volunteered as the student affairs director. I took it very seriously. One day, the chapter president asked me out for lunch. I said okay sure. Adrian this is a secret. Don't tell anyone. I said okay no I'm not. I interview for the controller's position for the Miami Dolphins. I was so excited. He said, I used Brian Haycrisson as the reference. I said okay. Brian is a great guy, he'll give you a great reference. I get back to my office. I get a call from Brian. Hi Adrian this is Brian. I just got a call from the Miami Dolphins for a reference for Twiman. I gave him a very good reference. I said, before you decide to hire twiman you should interview Adrian. I said okay. I did. They called me the same day, I interviewed for the Dolphins and that's how I got the job. I got the job through networking. Networking is also important to young people. I said it's not always who you know, it's who knows you. I didn't know Brian but he recognized how much I was so dedicated to what I was doing even though it was volunteer I was so passionate about that. That was my in in the NFL through networking. 18 years later.

Nichols: Lots of things in that that we can unpack but we're going to take a quick break and we'll be back with Adrian.

AD:

Nichols: Welcome back! I want to talk about this. This is really important to me. This is really important to you. In 2006, you were honored as a YMCA leader distinction. What I think is so funny is a few years after that you found yourself as a CEO of that organization. Talk to us about that journey of leaving NFL and then coming to a non-profit.

Bracy: Even before 2006, I was on the board of directors. 1997 to 1999. I was a board member of the YWCA then a leader of distinction now, the CEO. It's been a full circle journey. At the time, the CFO for the Arizona Cardinals. Not happy with my job. Not happy with Phoenix. A board member for the YWCA came on vacation to Phoenix and took me out to dinner and she said, how are you? I said, Tony I'm miserable. I miss STL so much. She said, we'll get you back. In the meantime, in the interim between 8 months or so or a year, I took a Stephen Covey webinar on writing your personal mission statement and included in that was enhancing and inspiring the lives of women and girls. That had nothing to do with YWCA at the time, it's just something that I loved. I've always mentored young women. I don't know, 8 months later, Tony calls and says Joy Burns, CEO of YWCA is retiring. Send me your resume. I said, Tony I'm a CPA, I know nothing about running a non-profit. She said, we need a CPA. I sent my resume that was 2009. I started my first job with non-profit, Aug of 2009 as CEO of YWCA. Over 9 years now. It has been a great journey. As business, it's not all easy. It's had its challenges but right now I'm having the most fun I've had in 9 years.

Nichols: You are fulfilling your personal mission statement.

Bracy: I look back at that. 2008. I read the mission statements like wow, this is amazing. How I am doing. I remember taking Oprah came to STL, and she had the O class and remember going to that. I remember her saying that, if you follow your passion, you'll find your purpose in life. I remember her saying, sometimes the money doesn't always show up at that time but if you're in the purpose driven life type of thing, you'll find your calling. That's where I am right now. I'm an example of that.

Nichols: Wonderful. I love that YWCA. You love the YWCA. So many people love the YWCA. Not to be confused with the YMCA, we didn't teach swimming lessons. Talk to us because some of our listening audience may not really understand all the things, the YWCA does a lot. Can you tell us some of those basic tenants of the YWCA and what they do?

Bracy: This is a great time to just share this. We are going through a strategic plan and we will be talking about 3 s that we provide. Safety, Security, and Stability for women. You will say, how will you do that? We have 7 programs and those programs will fall under 3 pillars of Safety, Security, and Stability. I'll just name the 7 programs. Currently we have the Sexual Assault program. We have the domestic violence program. We have housing for homeless women. We have a women empowerment program. This program is for women who are single mothers, typically their salary is either at poverty level but they want to get education and STEM or

nontraditional careers like construction, automotive, engineering, all of that. That's what this program is for. We give them a stipend to help them overcome some of the barriers, the financial barriers, that they have in going to school like they rent, child care, car repair, utilities, tuition, books, you name it. If there is a financial obstacle for them, we step in to help them. We want them to graduate and the success rate has been astounding. These women are really serious and they said to us, the main reason that they can really continue is because of coaching. We supply them with coaching and we meet them. Mentoring and coaching is so important. Then we also have a teen's program. A leadership program for young girls during the summer and it's called future leader. As you remember, we do honor 1 future leader at our big leader lunch event. We also have head start which is our largest program. That's a program for families who are at poverty level once again. With children 0-5 years old. We give them the building blocks to success. So when they graduate from head start at 5, they're ready for school. We prepare them from school readiness and then our racial justice program and that's a program that is very complex because it's called witnessing whiteness. It's a program that only whites only can learn they go. They go through a 10 week course and they learn about culture competence. Things that you won't learn in school that you've never heard of, you get to understand what other minorities are going through. Those are the things that we provide that people don't know about. If you don't need the services, chances are you probably will never know about us. That's been our obstacle. Branding.

Nichols: I'm hoping our listening audience will get excited about what they're doing and tell their friends and hopefully get involved. If they wanted to get involved, if something struck a chord with someone, Adrian, what would they do?

Bracy: First of all, there are a couple of ways they can reach out to YWCA via telephone. They can call 3145311115 or they can go on our website YWCASTLOUIS.org or they can just google YWCA ST Louis and everything is right there. We do have volunteer opportunities. There's a lot of volunteer opportunities.

Nichols: I just appreciate the work that you're doing. There is a new initiative that you've got coming up, talk a little bit about that. You're wanting to start a for-profit arm for the YWCA and it's mainly for sustainability.

Bracy: Financial sustainability is the key, you just don't know where the funding may be cut. You just have no clue. That saying that if you feed a man a fish, you feed him for that 1 day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. That's kind of where I'm going with this.

It's a way for the YWCA to generate earned income. There has to be a product or service that we can sell and offer to the public. I am actually excited about it because it's something that I know is going to happen. It's just having the right idea or the right model for it. The right service.

Nichols: We talked about girl scouts, they have their cookies that they sell. It's a great model.

Bracy: Goodwill, they have the retail stores. YMCA they have the gyms. Those are all earned income. They get donations from corporate America, they have that generated income. Right now, YWCA are largest funder outside of the federal government for head start is United Way. We're so grateful to the United Way but I just feel that it's important that we become financially sustainable. Self-sustainable like you said. That's the biggest thing. That's when I knew strategic plan and it's exciting. I am hoping that if any of the listeners would like to reach out to me, please feel free. You can call the YWCA number 3145311115 and you'll be directed to me.

Nichols: If there's any people out there that this really resonates with and you have great ideas. I know Adrian is going to be excited to hear what those are.

Bracy: I would love to hear from anyone.

Nichols: I do want to talk to you. This is something extra. We've talked about that a little bit. Tell us Adrian, this can be something extra that you feel like every leader needs. If there is somebody in your life past or present that you want to highlight, what was the something extra in them? I happen to believe this too, every person was uniquely made and every person has value. Everybody has something extra to give the world.

Bracy: That's a hard one, because when I think of characteristics of a good leaders. There's just so many. One honestly, I feel that confidence is something extra that when I see people with confidence. I'm not talking about arrogance. There's a difference. Growing up, I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself. Although people thought I did because I always I act as though I did. Deep down inside, I really didn't. I think you really have to have faith in yourself and believe that confidence that you can do it. Even when you don't feel like you can. That's one thing. Compassion, a lot of leaders lack compassion. I think being able to have that empathy to see yourself maybe, you've never been to that and it's even hard to even imagine. To at least try to find a way to understand and have some compassion and influence is always good.

Nichols: There's an old saying that people don't care what you know until they know how much you care. It's so true. Your people need to believe that you truly care about them as human beings. That they're not an object, an asset. That they're humans.

Bracy: I'm sure you've heard how it's been said that people quit jobs not because of the money but because people. You said, making people feel appreciated is so important and caring. Those are something extra that I like and I think it's just important.

Nichols: I hope a lot of our listeners will go the website because I love the YWCA and love the mission. It's important work that you're doing.

Bracy: Thank you for this opportunity. We love you, thank you for the opportunity.

Nichols: We love you too!