



Hello, everyone. Thank you for tuning in to WPP TV today. My name is Francis Carrero, and I am here with Ben Seinen, Chief Executive Officer of Pep Promotions, and Fatima Bodrick Account Executive at Pep Promotions.

Now, Fatima and I were both part of the Inaugural Elevate Programme which is WPP's leadership growth experience for Black women across our network and it was started by Judy Jackson. And Ben has been her sponsor throughout this entire experience.

And they are here with us all the way from Cincinnati in the New York City studios. How are you guys?

Doing well, doing, well Thanks Francis. [LAUGHS]

It's so nice to see Fatima face to face.

Yeah, I know. Finally, after all of these teams meetings, and this is very great to be here in person. And now, the reason we're here today is to talk about Elevate and the power of sponsorship.

And one of the reasons this programme was started was because Black women are the least to have access to sponsors, the least to have access to C-suite leaders, the least to get promotions in industries.

And within that, sometimes we leave within two to three years because we're not getting the type of development that we need. So Fatima, can you talk to us about why you joined Elevate, and why it was important for you to be a part of this program, and how it's helped your professional growth.

Absolutely. So Elevate came in the midst of a global pandemic, right? And it also came on, the heels of the murder of George Floyd. And this event was incredibly significant, and so much so that my client, P&G's My Black is Beautiful, we decided to take a brand meeting that we typically would discuss regular brand building activities and instead repurpose the meeting to have the conversation about the event and really just sit with the event.

When I received that invitation from Elevate, it was a breath of fresh air that I didn't even know that I needed. And it was one that I learned looking back, that I actually had to be very vulnerable inside of the experience in order to really grab the depth of the opportunity that it offered. And one that honestly I wouldn't have had Judy not been one to create that experience.

Inside of it, I had the opportunity to work with and to hear the stories of between 20 to 30 Black women across multiple WPP agencies, from junior level roles to senior executive level roles.

And what I recognise is that we all were happy to be understood, that we were happy to be acknowledged, that we felt seen, and that was a common thread throughout.

And when I mentioned vulnerability earlier, and tapping into that, I actually decided to ask Ben to be my sponsor. Through that point of vulnerability, I recognise that he's different from me in many ways, and he's heard me say this multiple times, but he is White I'm Black, he is a male I'm female, and he is the CEO of Pep and I'm the Account Executive at Pep. And so naturally there are many points of differentiation that we have.

And given the events of 2020, we had a lot to talk about. So I really I'm thankful for Elevate, and I think that Elevate equipped me with the tools to be able to have a conversations with Ben and really be able to build an authentic connection.

Absolutely. And I feel like with sponsors, sponsored relationships as a two-way street, you both learn from each other. And I just wanted to mention that one of the things you didn't say was there's also a generational gap between the two of you. I know Ben hate that.

But seriously, Ben for you as a leader within WPP as a CEO, why was it so important for you to be a sponsor specifically for Elevate?

Well, you just heard Fatima talk, and so it was a chance to spend time with her which was an easy decision. But when I think about just our community and our country and how segregated we all still are in that, it's so easy if you just follow the momentum of your life, the trajectory of your life, to end up with a network of friends and colleagues that's homogeneous, that everybody has the same experience.

And it's so easy to end up with a perspective that's narrow. And personally, for me I recognise that when I was growing up, my parents ran a homeless shelter, and as you can imagine it doesn't provide a ton of money for college. So I had some obstacles in getting a good education.

I even remember being jealous of a student of colour who was getting scholarships that I thought maybe I deserved, and that would help me get there. And as I went through life and I gained an education, I realised that, that was all I need and all of a sudden, I was part of a very privileged group of people and just beginning to understand and come to grips with the relentless, repetitive nature of racism and discrimination.

And that it's not a single indignity. It is one after another, after another. And we need change. And if this is one way that I can help become part of that change, then I was all for it.

Wow, thank you so much for sharing that story, for being honest, and being vulnerable. And I think that it's so important that you've mentioned that you recognise your privilege and you've taken that power and you're using it to elevate other people in this industry.

So on the subject of just being vulnerable, one of the things that you often talk about Fatima is finding your voice. Can you tell us about that journey, and how you found your voice through Elevate and everything that's been going on from 2020 until now?

Yeah, I learned that I significantly undervalued my voice. And so much so that I decided that I was going to play small and that I also was going to wait for someone to give me permission to speak or either ask for my opinion, which is incredibly disheartening.

It's something that does a disservice not only to myself, but to other people who might actually be able to benefit from the things that I have to say. But inside of that journey, I recognised that it wasn't that I didn't have a perspective, it was that I didn't know how to communicate that perspective and an effective way.

And being inside of Elevate gave me language to use, as well as gave me the tools through some of our sessions, like one of the sessions was about generative healing. And so let's say, for example, you may have been triggered in the workplace. You didn't get that promotion or you may have been overlooked for opportunity, although you have the results that prove that you can be someone to be in place for that.

You might have a couple of emotions about that, but what Elevate did was it gave us a way to advocate for ourselves, gave us language to share feedback about how do you promote yourself and make sure that other people know what it is that you're warning.

We also had a session about connection and allyship, which Ben is an amazing ally, right? So I think ultimately what I was looking for is to be understood. And I think that most people want to be understood. I think that brands want to be understood, I think that clients and consumers want to be understood.

And when you learn that language of understanding and know how to effectively communicate, you're able to really bridge a gap, and that's what Elevate was, it was like it was a gap, a bridge to help close the gap. And I'm really excited for the opportunity, and it's one that I will really cherish and appreciate.

Wow, thank you for that. And Ben as a sponsor, what has been your role in elevating Fatima's voice in spaces that she may not be in?

I mean, nothing. I mean, that is all her. If I did anything, it was just listen to the great insights that she has. And that's where I think the true benefit of a programme like this is, we make better decisions when these things happen.

When I didn't communicate with the company after the Derek Chauvin verdict and Fatima challenged me on that, that made me better for the next time. And if we can find ways to build these relationships and build the pathways for people to communicate these insights, that's when it starts to get exciting.

That's so powerful. Fatima you talked about P&G's My Black is Beautiful. And they recently featured you in an article and in that article, you mention holistic wellness being mind, body, and spirit. Talk to us about that and how Elevate has helped you fulfill that holistic wellness, personally and professionally.

Having Elevate and also my sponsor Ben, helped me to release toxic mindsets and behaviours. And the first being the biggest being that I didn't think that my voice was important. That's toxic all right?

And I think that in terms of holistic health mind, body, and soul, when you actually tap into who you are and your gift, and for me I'm learning that's my voice, but other that gift might be something different for someone else, you actually honour yourself and honour others when you tap into that and when you develop it, and you build it and you cultivate it.

And so having Elevate and having been really allowed me to practice using my voice, and it helped me again to release things that just didn't serve me, like it doesn't serve anyone to be quiet. It doesn't serve anyone to play small, it doesn't serve the communities that were in the families that we want to build, the world that we want to create.

So I think it's a lot deeper and I'm very appreciative. Once again I will continue to say this, I'm very appreciative to Elevate and all of this is giving me.

Wow, that was the whole word. So thank you for sharing that. And on the topic of sponsors, can you tell us a little bit more about just being a sponsor? What is that like? What does that even mean? And the difference between a sponsor and a mentor?

Yeah, well, obviously it was an opportunity to get to know Fatima and learn from Fatima, and see the way she has this humble ambition to her that is something that you just want to feed into and something that you want to emulate.

For me I think the big thing that I learned was, or that I'm starting to learn was how to actually be an ally. I think so many of us are well-intentioned, but when something happens or you see something you don't know what to do, and so you either do nothing or even worse sometimes you expect the discriminated person to explain to you what to do.

And I think through this process of learning how important and how beneficial these real relationships can be that by spending time and sharing experiences, you really do begin to have a heart for it and to desire the change and to want to talk about the change. And if we can create opportunities for more people to do that, I think that's when we really start to move the needle.

Absolutely. Fatima, what has been something that you've learned about yourself throughout this process and that you've learned about Ben? And what advice can you give to others that are in sponsor sponsee relationships?

Yeah. I learned that Ben is an amazing person right? If I know he's like Oh my gosh, he is though. And he's beyond someone than Pep's CEO. He's also as a person an amazing father, and amazing husband, and he's one that everyone that I least know look up to. And he's one that I respect. Have a tremendous amount of respect for.

What I've learned about myself is that my voice is powerful, and it's so powerful that it's one of those things, it's powerful because I am willing to tap into vulnerability, which can be like a curse word to some people to say vulnerability inside of the profession.

But I also I'm willing to hear other people's perspective, and I'm also willing to give voice to unpopular, or things that are uncomfortable and but also relevant. And so that's something that I've tapped into it's being OK, with traveling the path that people may have not traveled before. And so that's what I've learned about myself.

How about you Ben, what have you learned?

Well, I just think, if there can be one message to people that we can't let this programme go away, we need to do a second, third, and fourth time because the payout for what you invest in it as a sponsor, as a sponsee, the return is phenomenal.

And that if we can as an organisation as Pep, as WPP, if people can buy into the idea that we are better if we're diverse, that we make better decisions, that we are more innovative, that we service our clients better, and that we perform at our best.

If we can truly be inclusive, we've all been opportunities where you don't feel like you can be yourself, if we can create that environment then, really there's nothing that can stop us.

Absolutely. And one thing that I just want to add is, we have to remember that this is not just a US problem, this is not just something that's happening in the US, and that we need to elevate the voices of Black women, Black people, people of colour in the US, this is a global thing that we need to talk about, that we need to continue.

And for that, I also want to add that we are launching a North America Elevate chapter, where we're going to have the United States and Canada coming in the fall.

Nice.

Great.

So thank you so much for just really setting the stage for what this programme should be in the next iterations that are to come. And thank you guys for being here all the way from Cincinnati. And it's a pleasure to meet you in person. Thank you so much.

Thank you Francis. [LAUGHS]

And thank you all for tuning in. And for more information about Elevate and our other Learning and Development opportunities, take a look at the People tab on inside WPP.