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00:00:06,786 --> 00:00:12,013

I started my career here at the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center in January

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00:00:12,013 --> 00:00:19,029

1973 as a cooperative education student from Alabama A&M University.

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00:00:19,059 --> 00:00:23,997

As a matter of fact, we are now in Building 4207, Central Communications,

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00:00:23,997 --> 00:00:27,677

this is the facility where I started my career. I spent the first fourteen

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00:00:27,677 --> 00:00:29,033

years here.

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00:00:29,033 --> 00:00:32,945

My first job here was a Telecommunications Specialist

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00:00:32,945 --> 00:00:37,384

where we helped provide administrative communications

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00:00:37,384 --> 00:00:44,009

for the agency, for the other NASA centers. That was my first job here

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00:00:44,009 --> 00:00:46,645

at the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center.

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00:00:55,296 --> 00:01:00,036

I initially started here in Telecommunications, but as my career

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00:01:00,036 --> 00:01:08,030  
progressed, I started doing other jobs.  
Initially I was a Program Analyst here

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00:01:08,030 --> 00:01:11,726  
in Telecommunications, then,  
eventually, I got a position in the

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00:01:11,726 --> 00:01:17,985  
Facilities Office as a Program Analyst  
Officer, then I came back here after

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00:01:17,985 --> 00:01:25,133  
Telecommunications and Computer Services  
Office merged to become the Information

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00:01:25,133 --> 00:01:31,993  
Systems Office. I headed up the  
Resources Management Branch. I did

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00:01:31,993 --> 00:01:36,463  
that job for several years. I eventually  
got a position as Director of the

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00:01:36,463 --> 00:01:42,374  
Business Management Office, which is  
now the Center Operations Directorate.

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00:01:42,374 --> 00:01:49,962  
After that job, the position for the  
Equal Opportunity Office came open. I

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00:01:49,962 --> 00:01:56,916  
was encouraged to apply for that  
position and was selected for it in the

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00:01:56,916 --> 00:02:02,719  
mid-1990s and I served in that position  
for about six and a half years.

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00:02:02,719 --> 00:02:08,903

After that, I was selected for the Senior Executive Service Candidate

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00:02:08,903 --> 00:02:14,221

Development Program, which was about an eighteen-month leadership development

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00:02:14,221 --> 00:02:19,500

program. After graduating from that program, I was selected as the Director

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00:02:19,500 --> 00:02:25,518

of Center Operations at Glenn Research Center. That's where I got into the

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00:02:25,518 --> 00:02:31,503

Senior Executive Service. I headed that organization for a couple of years and

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00:02:31,503 --> 00:02:37,393

the position for the position of Deputy Director for Center Ops came open here,

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00:02:37,393 --> 00:02:42,740

back in Huntsville, so it was an opportunity for me to get back home

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00:02:42,740 --> 00:02:49,434

here to Huntsville. I came back and ten months later, I was asked to go to

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00:02:49,434 --> 00:02:54,081

NASA Headquarters where I headed up the Institutions and Management Directorate

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00:02:54,081 --> 00:03:01,992

as associate administrator. I served in that capacity for seven months and then

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00:03:01,992 --> 00:03:08,083  
was selected as the associate deputy  
administrator for the agency. That

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00:03:08,083 --> 00:03:13,093  
position I held until retiring in  
December of 2010.

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00:03:21,430 --> 00:03:30,037  
I graduated from Livingston High School  
in 1971. I applied to Alabama A&M,

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00:03:30,037 --> 00:03:34,950  
which is where one of my sisters and  
one of my brothers attended, so it was

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00:03:34,950 --> 00:03:43,944  
just following the family tree. I got  
to Alabama A&M, really it was my first

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00:03:43,944 --> 00:03:51,239  
exposure to a lot of diversity. I grew  
up in an all African-American community

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00:03:51,239 --> 00:03:56,836  
in Sumter County. Except for my junior  
year in high school, I attended

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00:03:56,836 --> 00:04:03,241  
all-Black schools. My junior year, I  
attended basically an all-White high

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00:04:03,241 --> 00:04:08,111  
school; there were like eighteen Black  
students and several hundred White

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00:04:08,111 --> 00:04:13,123  
students. The very next year, I  
attended the same school and there

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00:04:13,123 --> 00:04:17,373  
were several hundred Black students  
and two White students. All the White

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00:04:17,373 --> 00:04:23,152  
students transferred to a private  
school for that year. It is called

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00:04:23,152 --> 00:04:28,401  
Sumter Academy; I assume it is still  
there. When I arrived at Alabama A&M,

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00:04:28,401 --> 00:04:34,035  
although it is an HBCU, we had, and I  
believe still have, a lot of students

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00:04:34,035 --> 00:04:39,309  
from different countries around the  
world. That was really my first

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00:04:39,309 --> 00:04:43,326  
interaction with a lot of people  
different from me, actually. It was

47  
00:04:43,326 --> 00:04:46,264  
my first foray into diversity.

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00:04:46,264 --> 00:04:53,940  
Like most students. I needed funding,  
so one of my friends from Livingston

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00:04:53,940 --> 00:04:58,845  
High School, we were in college  
together, he stopped by my dorm room

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00:04:58,845 --> 00:05:03,656  
and said he was going to go down and  
apply for the co-op program. When you

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00:05:03,656 --> 00:05:10,979

apply, you dont know where you might get an assignment, so when the co-op

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00:05:11,024 --> 00:05:17,310

coordinator interviewed me, he said based on your background, we have two

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00:05:17,310 --> 00:05:23,099

possible positions for you. One of them, I believe, was in New Hampshire

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00:05:23,099 --> 00:05:28,318

at a submarine facility and he said the other one is here at NASA Marshall

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00:05:28,318 --> 00:05:32,764

Space Flight Center. Which one would you like to pursue. I said let me

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00:05:32,764 --> 00:05:37,084

think, I will take the one here. Having no idea what the position would be,

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00:05:37,084 --> 00:05:45,004

that is how I got selected. I checked in here; the personnel asked me to go

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00:05:45,004 --> 00:05:50,759

get a badge from security. On my way down, I saw this building that we are

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00:05:50,759 --> 00:05:56,388

sitting in now, Building 4207, and thought that looked like a neat

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00:05:56,388 --> 00:05:59,313

facility, I would love to work there. I went back to personnel and got my

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00:05:59,313 --> 00:06:04,086

assignment; it was in this building,  
Central Communications. It was a neat

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00:06:04,086 --> 00:06:08,813  
start and I really, really enjoyed  
working here because it was really

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00:06:08,813 --> 00:06:14,280  
on the forefront of advanced  
communications. I kind of marvel

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00:06:14,280 --> 00:06:19,779  
at the way things work, alternate  
telecommunications, routing, and

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00:06:19,779 --> 00:06:22,636  
that kind of stuff. It was a great  
experience and I never wanted to

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00:06:22,636 --> 00:06:24,160  
leave.

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00:06:33,954 --> 00:06:38,925  
A lot of mentors, but I did not  
really call it that because I

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00:06:38,925 --> 00:06:46,192  
did not realize that is what it was.  
A lot of people, for whatever

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00:06:46,192 --> 00:06:51,209  
reason, took an interest in me,  
a gentleman, Jack Palmer, who worked

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00:06:51,209 --> 00:06:56,752  
in finance, and Jim Jennings, who,  
at that time, was working out at the

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00:06:56,752 --> 00:07:01,889  
Kennedy Space Center, Clyde Foster,

was the EO Director here, my first

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00:07:01,889 --> 00:07:08,877

Boss, Charlie Brand, who was a retired Navy chief. As I reflect

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00:07:08,877 --> 00:07:14,848

back, it was a very good mentoring they were doing for me, but when

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00:07:14,848 --> 00:07:19,959

you are nineteen years old, you dont really see it as that. And as my

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00:07:19,959 --> 00:07:26,028

career progressed, a lot of people from around the agency, for

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00:07:26,028 --> 00:07:30,387

whatever reason, took what I now know is a special interest in me.

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00:07:30,387 --> 00:07:35,205

Dr. Julian Earls from the NASA Glenn Research Center, Dr. Woodrow

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00:07:35,205 --> 00:07:41,004

Whitlow, who is also at Glenn Research Center, talked to me about

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00:07:41,004 --> 00:07:45,118

various opportunities and things I needed to do to position myself as

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00:07:45,118 --> 00:07:50,218

opportunities became available during my NASA career.

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00:07:59,048 --> 00:08:04,223

Actually, I am very encouraged about

the state of STEM education,

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00:08:04,223 --> 00:08:10,288

particularly from a NASA perspective.  
One thing about NASA, even when I

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00:08:10,311 --> 00:08:16,147

was a NASA employee, NASA did not  
leave the development of the STEM

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00:08:16,147 --> 00:08:22,808

pool up to the education system,  
so to speak. NASA was always involved

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00:08:22,808 --> 00:08:28,745

in growing the STEM pool of young  
graduates, young people, because

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00:08:28,745 --> 00:08:33,067

they knew eventually that is what  
it would take to sustain the agency.

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00:08:33,067 --> 00:08:41,981

NASA, still today, has a lot of  
outreach even at the elementary stage

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00:08:41,981 --> 00:08:47,121

throughout high school and college  
in encouraging STEM education. When

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00:08:47,121 --> 00:08:51,642

I worked here, NASA invested a lot  
in minority education for STEM

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00:08:51,642 --> 00:08:57,016

students. I remember a lot of students  
who attended Morehouse and Spellman

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00:08:57,016 --> 00:09:03,290

Colleges that earned dual degrees

from Georgia Tech and Spellman and

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00:09:03,290 --> 00:09:08,326

Morehouse. The agency actually did not hire a lot of the graduates,

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00:09:08,326 --> 00:09:14,994

but they were in the engineering and science community that was

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00:09:15,039 --> 00:09:20,955

available for NASA to consult with or bring in as time and funding

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00:09:20,955 --> 00:09:22,299

permitted.

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00:09:22,299 --> 00:09:32,062

Today I am still encouraged. We dont see a lot in the news cycle

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00:09:32,062 --> 00:09:36,696

about a lot of students who are pursuing STEM education, but I am

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00:09:36,696 --> 00:09:40,445

highly encouraged. Alabama A&M, where I attended, their new school

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00:09:40,445 --> 00:09:46,076

of engineering is producing a lot of STEM students as well as

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00:09:46,076 --> 00:09:52,954

doctoral students, particularly in physics. I think it is better

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00:09:52,954 --> 00:09:55,475

than it used to be and it continues to improve.

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00:10:04,664 --> 00:10:09,918

There were definitely challenges.

The pool of minority employees

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00:10:09,918 --> 00:10:18,222

were very small, but the thing

you focused on in those days is

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00:10:18,222 --> 00:10:23,376

just doing your job and doing it

as best you could do it, as well

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00:10:23,376 --> 00:10:27,938

as you could do it, to take that

excuse off the table in terms of

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00:10:27,938 --> 00:10:33,977

growth so when opportunities did

become available, that excuse was

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00:10:33,977 --> 00:10:39,062

eliminated. You focused on your

job. At the same time, you talked

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00:10:39,062 --> 00:10:44,272

to people in the community about

letting them know when positions

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00:10:44,272 --> 00:10:50,837

would become available and encourage

people to apply. There were

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00:10:50,837 --> 00:10:57,065

instances where I thought people

might have been unfair due to

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00:10:57,065 --> 00:11:02,942

non-merit based issues. Again,

you did not focus on it. You

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00:11:02,942 --> 00:11:05,982  
continued to focus on your job  
and to do it as best you could

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00:11:05,982 --> 00:11:17,856  
and to help other people navigate  
the difficulties they may encounter

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00:11:17,856 --> 00:11:21,724  
here. But, for the most part, it is  
a highly technical community, most

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00:11:21,724 --> 00:11:28,085  
of the people who worked here were  
not from here, so that helped a lot.

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00:11:36,893 --> 00:11:44,026  
I knew of him, I knew some of the  
great work he was doing in helping

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00:11:44,026 --> 00:11:51,425  
EEO and, as importantly, diversity,  
because those two things are

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00:11:51,425 --> 00:11:57,472  
different. One, EEO helps you get  
into the workforce, diversity

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00:11:57,472 --> 00:12:02,867  
helps you manage a more diverse  
workforce, and Clyde was certainly

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00:12:02,867 --> 00:12:07,303  
on the forefront of that.  
As I grew here in the first five,

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00:12:07,303 --> 00:12:12,509  
ten years, I got to know him a lot  
better and we would have conversations.

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00:12:12,509 --> 00:12:18,228

Again, it was pure mentoring and sharing some of the things he had

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00:12:18,228 --> 00:12:23,250

experienced here in the early 1960s when he started working here. But

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00:12:23,250 --> 00:12:29,480

yes, he was a giant in the NASA community.

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00:12:29,480 --> 00:12:36,047

James, he was and is and always will be a giant in the NASA community,

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00:12:36,047 --> 00:12:43,142

really forward thinking both strategically and tactical thinker.

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00:12:43,142 --> 00:12:56,185

He helped hundreds of people of all stripes, so to speak. He shared his

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00:12:56,185 --> 00:13:00,606

experience; he talked about things you need to do and are difficult.

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00:13:00,606 --> 00:13:07,112

He is also one that would encourage you, dont hesitate to take

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00:13:07,112 --> 00:13:13,065

different jobs whether here or at any other NASA center, knowing

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00:13:13,065 --> 00:13:18,254

that it may be difficult family-wise, but figuring out a way to do it to

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00:13:18,254 --> 00:13:23,968

help build your resume. He is a giant. If there was a NASA hall of

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00:13:23,969 --> 00:13:26,949

fame, he would be in it.

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00:13:26,949 --> 00:13:34,041

First, you have to work at it. I can recall talking to managers about,

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00:13:34,041 --> 00:13:38,320

well, they would tell me the difficulty they were having in

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00:13:38,320 --> 00:13:42,483

finding minority candidates for positions and I would ask them where

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00:13:42,483 --> 00:13:48,010

were they going to recruit. Auburn, Mississippi State. Well, you get

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00:13:48,010 --> 00:13:53,046

great engineering students, but you have to look beyond that. I think

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00:13:53,046 --> 00:13:59,458

NASA does that now and it does that quite well to go out and look in

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00:13:59,458 --> 00:14:06,981

different places and find excellent students in the STEM world. NASA

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00:14:06,981 --> 00:14:13,805

does a good job to send engineers out to talk to colleges and

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00:14:13,805 --> 00:14:18,906

universities, even programs where  
NASA employees actually go out and

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00:14:18,906 --> 00:14:24,466

teach, and sending employees that  
look like the students they are

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00:14:24,466 --> 00:14:32,066

trying to recruit. Those things  
are tremendously helpful. I am also

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00:14:32,066 --> 00:14:40,935

encouraged in that the NASA education  
group at NASA Headquarters keeps

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00:14:40,935 --> 00:14:48,138

the focus on where managers need to  
go to recruit, keep the focus on developing STEM

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00:14:48,138 --> 00:14:54,053

candidates, identifying where they  
might be and taking managers there

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00:14:54,053 --> 00:14:59,965

to talk to students. NASA is very  
involved and I am highly encouraged

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00:14:59,965 --> 00:15:05,135

that they will continue to be the  
leader among government agencies in

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00:15:05,135 --> 00:15:07,976

STEM education.

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00:15:07,976 --> 00:15:19,012

There is one thing in hiring diverse  
employees, there is another in managing

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00:15:19,012 --> 00:15:26,046  
diverse employees. The leadership  
theory used to be the same, which

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00:15:26,046 --> 00:15:31,977  
does not work because people are  
different. When you have a diverse

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00:15:31,977 --> 00:15:37,409  
pool of employees, you need to  
understand what motivates them based

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00:15:37,409 --> 00:15:42,491  
on their own background and where  
they come from so treating everybody

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00:15:42,491 --> 00:15:49,160  
the same just does not work. I would  
highly encourage all leaders to get

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00:15:49,160 --> 00:15:53,366  
to know their employees and find out  
what motivates them. It takes a lot