



Donna Buchanan- Theresa Spralling – Lana Wachniak

WIL HIGHLIGHTS for April 26, 2019

“Learning from Leaders Who Inspire Others: A Panel of Inspiritors” featuring Donna Buchanan, former COO of United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta; Theresa Spralling, Director – Diversity & Inclusion at AT&T; and Dr. Lana Wachniak, Professor Emeritus of Criminal Justice & Sociology at Kennesaw State University

Summary: Susan Hitchcock served as the moderator of this panel of three amazing leaders. Each was a very deserving nominee in the Inspiritor category for Turknett’s Leadership Character Awards in 2018 and Donna was the top award recipient. In total, their professional accomplishments are literally over the top, and the respect others have for them as individuals is beyond inspiring.

Donna, for example, has made a huge impact on two large nonprofit organizations, United Way and Jr. Achievement, and has positively influenced the lives of hundreds, actually thousands of people. Theresa is an “icon” in the field of diversity and inclusion at one of the largest corporations in the world and she’s known for removing obstacles while uniting people with overwhelming positivism. Dr. Lana Wachniak has won numerous awards and significant recognition for teaching and for leading numerous college and university departments, but her real passion is challenging the status quo and raising awareness for the underserved, the homeless, and those who can’t speak for themselves.

All three truly personify what it means to be an “INSPIRITOR.”

Background – Personal & Professional:

- Sharing her personal and professional journey, Donna Buchanan discussed: Growing up in NY and moving a lot. Being a kid in JA influenced her nonprofit career. She likes to start things from scratch. Important life lesson – admitting she didn't know the answer, learning to ask and to listen to others. She also worked in corporate but realized it wasn't for her. Believes strongly in INTEGRITY above all and likes to ask interview question: "Good day, Bad day" to see how the person handles the latter. Positivity matters. One very big challenge Donna successfully tackled at United Way was dispersing \$10M in 3 months to individuals in a highly complex, government oversight and audited environment.
- Lana Wachniak is at heart and by training a sociologist with a world view. She explained her path this way: South Georgia upbringing from a large family. Strong work ethic. She loves to teach and is herself a life-long learner who was mentored by one of the best leaders in higher education, Dr. Betty Siegel, former president of KSU. Becoming aware of the incredible problems homeless kids have in school (and the civil inattention that surrounds them), she created Homeless Awareness Week and became involved with the Orange Bag Initiative. Her vision is to start a scholarship for middle school students and a home/community center for foster and homeless youth.
- Theresa Spralling is a forceful and engaging personality and by her own admission, a "tall, outgoing, black woman." Her story includes: Being born in Chicago, raised in Tuscaloosa, AL and heavily influenced by her beloved grandmother, "Big Mama." Education was instilled in her as the means to level the playing field of race and gender. An engineer by education, she's taken her talent far beyond that to help others achieve more than they thought they could. Above all she respects people, understands the power of giving back, and shares positive messages everywhere she goes (e.g., the Four Agreements, outlined below.)

Key Lessons & Take-aways from Attendees:

- “The Four Agreements: Be impeccable with your word; Don’t take things personally; Don’t make assumptions; Always do your best.”
- “Don’t be afraid to say ‘I don’t know.’ “
- “There’s always someone in the room smarter than you. Find them, listen and learn from them.”
- “Make people comfortable with you.”
- “Become the leader you don’t see.”
- “Find the lesson in your mistakes, learn from them, but don’t let them define you.”
- “Understand the difference in dialogue and debate.”
- “Treating everyone with respect and value – THIS is inclusion, one step beyond diversity.”
- “Seek to understand others not like you.”
- “The skills you have are about the person you are, not the experiences you’ve had.”
- “Ideas without execution are just hallucinations. Implement your ideas.”
- “Find a need and fill it.”
- “Being non-judgmental and inviting will lead to dialogue rather than debate.”
- “To inspire is to be a better person.”
- “I want to die empty” – quote from Les Brown re doing all you can to share your gifts and talents while you’re alive.”
- “Women are the drivers behind philanthropic and social activism.”
- “Your opinions aren’t who you are. Just because someone disagrees with you doesn’t mean they don’t like you.”
- “Assume positive intent.”
- “The concept of sympathy is being sorry for others. Replace it with empathy which is feeling the sorrow of others.”