

Sarrah Tajo Johnson's Story

Written by Angela Newman

I have had the pleasure of knowing Sarrah Tajo Johnson for four years while working with her at Renal Advantage Inc., a dialysis company which provides services for patients with End Stage Renal Disease. She was recently promoted to division vice president in the company because of her overall contribution and talent. I asked if I could share her steps in climbing her career ladder from a patient care technician to vice president for the third largest for-profit dialysis company in the country. I was glad she agreed to let me tell her incredible story.

Sarrah grew up in Africa with her family and lived there until the age of seventeen. Her father, a successful physician, provided more than her basic needs as a child. Because of his upbringing in a very poor environment and his desire to provide a better life for his family, he taught Sarrah a special appreciation for everything around her. He told Sarrah to be aware of her surroundings and never forget about the families that were less fortunate. He instilled his work ethic in Sarrah at a very young age which has stayed with her throughout her life. He taught her to work hard, be fair and honest, and always appreciate what she has. She said, *"My dad always told me I could do anything I wanted and that I had nothing to prove to anyone."*

Growing up in a home with a physician Sarrah was surrounded by medicine and at the age of ten she trained as a volunteer for the Red Cross which she continued for three years. Her father's aspirations for her were to be a physician, but her desire was to be a nurse and someday work as a nurse executive/consultant for the United Nations. At seventeen she moved to the United States and started college. Initially focusing on economics, she soon realized that her passion was indeed, healthcare.

It was in the U.S. that Sarrah learned about hemodialysis; a procedure used to treat end-stage kidney disease. *"I was fascinated with hemodialysis because I had not seen my father practice this type of medicine neither had I heard of it in my early years growing up in Africa. This*

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curiosity led me to a career training school for hemodialysis technicians in Maryland. Following my training I was placed with Fresenius Medical Care as a Patient Care Technician (PCT)."

Since that time Sarrah has achieved so much in her career. She started working as a PCT and then obtained her nursing degree with a certification in nephrology. She worked her way up the corporate ladder to a management position over a dialysis center which eventually led to a regional management position overseeing several dialysis centers. Today she is responsible for multiple regions and centers as the division vice president. In addition to the work involved with climbing an impressive career ladder, she will soon be graduating with her Master's in Business Administration.

It's not easy to accomplish so much in life and still have a balance of family and career. Sarrah says her children and her loving husband are the support system that has motivated her to accomplish so much. She also attributes her success to being self driven and having a resilient personality. Having worked with Sarrah, I know first hand her dedication to the company and her desire to do and be the best. Her attitude is positive and optimistic and expects a lot from herself and others. *"Self motivation has been the key to my accomplishments. I knew what I was capable of accomplishing early on as a child. I was an honor student and finished high school at age 15, so I did not think much could stand in my way if I really had the desire to do something."*

But true success is generally an exercise in patience and persistence. When asked what her challenges have been while climbing her pink ladder to success, Sarrah said, *"Oddly enough, my challenge has been my opportunity, overly self confident and resilient, sometimes to my detriment. I am learning how to remain confident and know my limitations. I am realizing that I do not always have to finish the race; that most of the time it's okay to hand it over to someone else and let them make the finish line. There have also been times in my career when I persevered to get things done even when there may have been signs all over indicating it's not possible. Sometimes I have invested that perseverance into situations that have been fruitless. It's hard for me to give up but sometimes it's the right thing to do."*

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Although Sarrah's goal is no longer working as a consultant for the United Nations, she does aspire to an executive or political role in Renal Advantage. Once she has completed her MBA, she is not planning on taking any time off from expanding her knowledge; she will be seeking out opportunities to volunteer on Capitol Hill to learn more about the making of healthcare policies.

Her advice to women starting to climb their career ladder, *"Have self confidence, yet be humble and true to yourself."*

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