

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Wake Tech STEM podcast where we highlight diversity in STEM as well as explore the multitude of career options within STEM. This podcast is a production of the Math and Science division. Please join me as we explore STEM through the eyes of our speaker.

MARSHA MCCOY: Greetings, Wake Tech Community College and family.

I am Marsha McCoy, Associate Professor of Communication in the Communication Department.

And I'm excited to collaborate with the STEM department and we have a special STEM podcast just for you.

Joining me today is director Dawayne Whittington.

And we're gonna learn more about what STEM has to offer in various classes.

Welcome, Doctor Whittington. How are you?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: I'm doing well and it's just mister.

MARSHA MCCOY: Oh, it's just Mister?

Right, I know a director, tell us a little about yourself.

What exactly do you do?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Yeah. So I'm Dawayne Whittington.

I direct an external evaluation team that just focuses primarily on STEM training grants, and that's anything from the K-12 space to higher ed space.

MARSHA MCCOY: Nice... very nice!

How long have you been doing that?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: So in terms of running the company that I started, I put doing that since 2002. In terms of the evaluation, we're all in general, since 1998.

So that puts us at about 23 years of this type of work in the education space.

MARSHA MCCOY: Congratulations, 1998 shouldn't sound like a foreign headline.

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: I'm sure it does, but to the folks that may be listening to this, I'm sure it may, but that's fine.

MARSHA MCCOY: So, what drew you towards your chosen career path?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Yeah, that's a good question.

So I actually started this path as a middle school mathematics teacher in Chicago.

So a Chicago native... was teaching middle school mathematics and was looking for something that was a splice between the day-to-day teaching and then learning about how to do it better and stumbled on the space of education evaluation which gets you close enough to the classroom at the time I started and left the classroom close enough to it, but still involved.

So I'm still in a lot of classrooms. I'm still in it... I guess interacting with students in the STEM space as well as educators in the STEM space, but I'm not directly responsible for day-to-day instruction, and that seemed that was a good fit for me at the time.

You know, I was making the decision more than 20 years ago. You know, as I moved from the classroom to what I do now.

MARSHA MCCOY: Very insightful... Thank you.

What achievement, professional or even personal, stands out as most impactful.

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Yeah, I um. You know, this one gets difficult cause nobody likes to brag on themselves. So I'll go with strength stats, right?

So, one you know, my background's mathematics and stats. My undergrad degree is in mathematics, but they would say pure mathematics but not applied mathematics, just the straight kind of theory of math with a focus on probability and statistics.

So in that regard, one, that accomplishment alone was more difficult.

It was easier said than done, right?

So if I had to rewind back to my undergraduate life, it was easier to say... Yeah, I like math enough that I wanted degree in it.

Uh, the road was hard and I'm sure we'll talk about some of the difficulties a little later, but in terms of accomplishments, just starting my own business like setting out to start my own business without much training, right?

I didn't. I did not go to school for business. I just wanted ahead of desire to have more control of my own schedule. More control over the clients that we dealt with, I really wanted to move into

the space of doing this work for historically black colleges, minority serving institutions and the place that I was at prior to starting my own business... That wasn't their focus.

And so just thought, maybe let me let me give it a try... and the worst thing I could do is fail, right? Because actually I don't do failure as a negative, it's just another piece of information set out in 2002 to do this.

And so I would say my greatest achievement is that here I am, 18 years later, instead of just being a one person consultant, it's a company of about eight of us right now, so in terms of size, we've grown eightfold.

And you know the stats say that this thing should have been imploded.

It should have... the labor of statistics say that what half of the businesses fail in their first five years and ten if you then say, well, let me take that half and see how many of them last like 10 or 15 years?

Then you even half of that. So technically by statistics I've defied the odds of having a business that was an idea that has lasted 18 years.

So that's the probably in terms of legacy, my biggest achievement so far it if you know most folks would say that's not an achievement. Today, we're gonna call that an achievement.

MARSHA MCCOY: With every pun intended.

Probably.. Probability... Yes.

Well, you know, I think about a hurdle, obviously an obstacle and you even mentioned the word failure. I love your perspective.

How it's not truly failure, but just another piece of information.

Or what is the biggest piece of information that you're willing to share with this?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Yeah... this road. Yeah. I assume you're asking about the failures, right?

I got at least what I can share with you. You know.

So I'm gonna take you all the way back to one day. It's still, it's still that.

Yeah, it's still present if you ask it's it's the one that pops up even though it's more distant.

And that was kind of my run through undergraduate real life.

Like so, I come out of high school as the valedictorian and it's so I'm thinking I could be one of the smartest on Earth, right?

That I that's what I'm really thinking.

And I'm not joking to you like, because I hadn't seen in my little small world, you know, going up on the South side of Chicago, that's where I'm really from.

Uh, I hadn't seen anybody kind of get in a classroom, work as hard and get the same results that I was getting, right?

So therefore, since I was used to getting A's, then I took that for granted and when I got into undergraduate space. Uh, they.

I started seeing every grade that was meant to put on a report card on my term report cards, and I also started seeing them in mathematics, and this was like unheard of... Like what... What is this I'm looking at?

Because, one... I don't get those type of grades. And when I say those type of grades, I'm talking about those type of grades, alright?

MARSHA MCCOY: I understand.

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: So just this is not just an A student that's giving us C and settling at a C. I'm I'm getting straight B's and F's in some of my interim courses like Calculus II, Calculus III and yeah right.

You know what I'm saying?

At this point, I've gotta actually... this is a failure. Like I... it's such a big failure that I don't even think that I belong at the university.

I'm starting to second guess my major.

I actually looked into switching majors and so it was a level of failure that is still present in my mind today.

I have friends that are watching that, and that turned out to be a mistake. But watching their trajectory and they weren't struggling like I was.

And so yeah, it was a real point of kind of reconciling. Was I an impostor? Right.

And I'm gonna bring this up either later on.

So there's this thing in the states called Imposter syndrome, which is, you know, you, you don't think you're quite fit for the space.

It was my first moment, even though I didn't have the terms for it.

Was my first moment of thinking I was an impostor.

I have fooled this university into letting me in and now I can't perform... and my teachers told me I was been in math and I'm not good at math. And that was... those were real struggle points for me. And life-changing struggle points, because I had to learn a little bit about myself and move from that.

MARSHA MCCOY: It's amazing to think about the grades you're used to making coming into college.

It's a new experience seeing grades you're not used to making, and thankfully you still made it to the successful level that you on.

Do you have a favorite quote or song that keeps you motivated?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Ah, I'm gonna go back to one that somebody told me... Who, I'm gonna forget to give credit to, but they know my heart. Somebody told me years ago that to remember something that folks commonly says they don't know, which they don't care what you know until they know that you care.

Alright.

And as I was in the classroom with many different challenges, many different students.

I mean, these folks are these young people are 11 to 13, 14 years old, but that fact that I knew all these mathematics... It was irrelevant in terms of how they approach me daily. It was them knowing that I cared about where they were going in life that really made my five years as an instructor.

I think fairly strong ones. Now, if you fast forward to where I am now, that same dynamic is still true for my team members, right?

So they don't care how well this business has been or how successful has been... And what I know about where the space is until they really know that I care about them as people and individuals and where they're going and what their family, kind of drivers are.

And so that and then the clients that we take care of, it's been true of that. Like at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill doesn't really care that I got all of these great evaluation tactics and I

know that most relevant statistical procedure until they know that I even care and understand what they're trying to do for their students.

And so I think wrapping back... that was way more profound when it was told to me like in 90-something then I ever knew it to be... Now that we are like 20-some-odd years later, it's one that I still hold on to.

MARSHA MCCOY: Very nice. The caring aspect. Well, you almost answered my last question.

But I'm gonna be official to ask it in the clear anyway.

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Alright. I'm an over achiever, right?

MARSHA MCCOY: Mission accomplished.

What piece of advice would you give to Community College students today?

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: I think be aware of how easy it is to emerge and be the biggest enemy, the biggest obstacle to success that you yourself, personally are to your own self.

I think self-doubt is very dangerous and so working on... kind of how you accurately view yourself like realism is still important.

Being realistic is... is important, but there's oftentimes you will get up in the morning and doubt yourself... there... I mean, there's even times... like, I'm still wondering why in the world you'd be interviewing me for this this series... like this like self-doubt is real.

Like I don't... There's gotta be somebody better to do this podcast than than like this guy here, right?

So every morning, no matter who you're probably looking at whether you're looking for a Community College student and for one of the best kind of kind of... achieve Bill Gates type thing lens... Barack Obama lens. Everybody probably gets up with that potential of being so critical of themselves.

So doubtful of their own skill set that they that they indeed for that day, at least... become the biggest critic. And thus, the biggest obstacle to get beyond because you're, you know, you're talking to yourself all the time.

You're the only one that get up with yourself and go to bed with yourself and so that that level of input that you got to sell is really important.

And so to be that doubter and to have that voice 24 hours a day, you gotta begin to learn how to check that voice in a realistic way.

MARSHA MCCOY: Nice. That was powerful.

Many thoughts do go through our mind... is STEM the right one for me.

Would which angle do I take? Where do I go?

But putting self-doubt in check is a very powerful tool and it takes each and every one of us individually.

While director Dawayne Whittington... I wanna thank you so much for joining us for this STEM podcast and everyone else out there in Wake Tech land.

And we look forward to seeing you on the next go around. Have a wonderful day.

DAWAYNE WHITTINGTON: Thank you, Marsha.