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Longtime business owner Gloria Carter-Hicks dishes out advice for success



BY JACOB KIRN
Economic Development Editor, St. Louis
Business Journal

Diversity consulting is a growing job field, but Gloria Carter-Hicks has been at it for the long term.

After graduating from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the Alton native joined a J.C. Penney management training program, and followed that with stints at Safeco Insurance, the city of Clayton, McDonald's, General American Life Insurance Co. and Reinsurance Group of America.

Although she's had various responsibilities, human resources stuck.

"I loved it," Carter-Hicks said. "I thought to myself, this is amazing: training, hiring, listening to challenges, helping and coaching."

She launched her own business, Hicks-Carter-Hicks LLC, focusing on helping clients in diversity, equity and inclusion work, in 1999. It's worked with a variety of organizations around the region, including St. Louis Community College and Monsanto. It now has five employees, and another office in Cincinnati. Carter-Hicks also serves on the board of Previsor, a Columbia, Missouri, insurance company. She's also served on St. Louis County's workforce development board.

Starting businesses runs in your family. My grandmother told me before she passed away that she had helped my dad, when he was 13, set up a business. He was selling trinkets in the neighborhood. My dad started Carter's Groceries in Alton. He had a regular job but always believed that you needed to have financial security and that you couldn't always depend on that from a job. I worked there starting at 5, ringing the cash register, making change, stocking shelves.

What does that teach you? It gave me a great work ethic, and made me understand the value of a dollar. And dad always said your word is your bond, and if you say something you need to do it.

But you wanted to do something else. My dad died my second year in college. My mom asked if I'd help with the business and stay. I said, "No I'm going to

Gloria Carter-Hicks

Title: President and CEO,
Hicks-Carter-Hicks LLC

Residence: Wildwood

Family: Gloria and her spouse, Christopher, have one child and two grandchildren

Education: Bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri-St. Louis



go get a real job, where you're not working 24/7 and worried about running a business and get vacation." What I didn't know then, and learned over the course of many corporate jobs, is that in leadership roles, it's long hours, you don't always take your vacation, you have employees to be thinking about.

So you ended up an entrepreneur, too. I always wanted to do this. I knew that it would offer independence, it would be somewhat of a controlled destiny. And I wouldn't have to worry about layoffs or reorganizations. All the time, I was also thinking about what my parents told me about securing the future.

What's challenging to start? Capital can be a challenge. Before I decided to start Hicks-Carter-Hicks, I went on trips across the U.S., looking at purchasing a printing company, an employment agency, reading offering circulars for franchises. I knew those well, having worked at McDonald's, but the capital outlay could be hundreds of thousands of dollars. I even looked at mini grocery stores, to put inside senior living complexes. But that would've gone back to the same situation of 24/7 work. My business works.

It changed last year, right? I've done over 20 years of work around change management in diversity,

equity and inclusion. We recommend change policies, how to measure success around this topic. The work has noticeably picked up because of incidents in 2020: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, the list goes on. Consumers vote with their dollars and they want to see organizations that reflect what customers look like.

What advice do you give entrepreneurs? It's not really about the service you deliver, it's about the business that you run. When I'm coaching business owners, I talk to them about spending more time working on your business than working in your business, because you can be extremely good at what you do and go out of business. Have a good lawyer, a good accountant, understand that not all money is good money. Do due diligence on the customers you take on, the business ventures you get involved in.

How do you relax? I've been playing the piano since I was about 8 years old. All kinds of music, jazz, classical, pop. And my grandkids light up my life, two granddaughters, 2 and a half and 7 months. And I have a daughter who's also a chief human resources officer. My husband has supported me in everything I've done with my business. It's important when you're starting a business that everybody be on the same page.