

In Their Own Words . . .

Ernest Jones

Tine Hansen-Turton and Nicholas Torres 06 January
2011

Ernest "Ernie" Jones is not a native Philadelphian, even though most cannot remember a time when Ernie was not part of the city's core group of leaders. Ernie spent the first part of his childhood in Georgia, but moved to Philadelphia when he was 10 years old, making him an adopted son of the city. Ernie attended Philadelphia School District schools and ultimately graduated from Temple Law School. During his broad-reaching career, Ernie has served as an Assistant District Attorney, General Counsel at Temple Law School, Executive Director at Community Legal Services, President of the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, and President and CEO of the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation. In December Ernie Jones stepped down as both President and CEO of the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation. He is working on a reduced schedule with Mark Edwards as he assumes his new role as President and CEO of PWDC.

How did you come to be part of the leadership fabric of Philadelphia?

In my law school days I had a peer group of leaders, including Nelson Diaz and Carl Singley. In those days

there were few black and female students studying law, so we formed peer groups to support one another. As a whole I wasn't aligned with any particular leadership group within Philadelphia. I did have the benefit of gaining some great experiences because, as my leadership was emerging, the existing, but older, leadership spent a significant amount of their time nurturing and training the next generation of leaders in Philadelphia; it was an expectation. I of course reached out to these leaders, but there was never a shortage of people who were eager to see me succeed. And because of that, I like to give back and always support younger leaders as they approach me for advice.

What is the largest challenge you see facing the current established leadership in Philadelphia?

The largest challenge is that the current city leadership cannot identify the emerging leaders within our city, even though we know they are out there and that we may lose them to other cities or states. Everyone is talking about a leadership gap in the nonprofit sector. In my opinion there is not a true leadership gap. The problem is there is a leadership gap between the generations. Just because the established older leadership cannot identify the next generation of leaders does not mean they don't exist. It is partly our responsibility to identify and connect with the emerging leadership and nurture them so

that, when we leave, the next generation will be ready to assume leadership positions. We all need to do a better job of that. And if the *Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal* can fill that void and create connections and shed a light on leaders, it would be wonderful.

What is the largest challenge you see within the emerging leadership in Philadelphia?

At the same time, the younger emerging generation needs to spend more time reaching out to the established leadership generation. I'm not sure if I would call it pride, but the next generation doesn't seem to find too much value in what experience has taught us over the years. In order to keep the city and region strong, we can't allow for the next generation to learn from their own mistakes, especially when there is the opportunity to learn from our—the established leadership's—earlier mistakes.

What's next for you?

I'm getting prepared to pull myself out of my leadership position and let someone else take the reins. My strongest value at this point is probably through the guidance of new leaders to ensure that our institutions continue to be strong. I expect that, some time in the near future, I will shift from being in charge of leading and managing [the Philadelphia Workforce Development Coalition] to consulting and helping others be successful. For good or bad, I have

lived my life to change the world, and now it's time for me to support others so that Philadelphia remains strong.