

Driven to Be the Best

Lorenzo Smith III is vice chair of Success Academy (SA) Charter Schools-NYC and a banker with J.P. Morgan Private Bank. Smith agreed to be interviewed by *Directorship* as the first newly certified director for this inaugural column. His relentless pursuit of self-improvement began at the US Military Academy at West Point. Following his traditional military service, which included a deployment to South Korea, he participated in the 2006 Olympic Games on the US men's bobsled team. He gave up sledding to earn his MBA at Columbia University and joined J.P. Morgan seven years ago.

"MY ENTIRE LIFE HAS BEEN ABOUT GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT. I saw certification as a way for me to continue that journey in a rigorous, multidisciplinary fashion. The goal is not just to be a board member—it's to take advantage of the seat to make a difference. As vice chair for Success Academy, it's important to set the tone. Trustees and management learn every day, and that feeds down to our kindergarteners.

"I MET THIS KID ON THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL [at SA]. I asked him, 'What are you most excited about this summer?' He said getting to reading level Z, the highest. I thought, here's a place that's creating lifelong learners, where self-improvement does not end with the school year. Success is not a final destination.

"IN A FOXHOLE, it's self-preservation, so just give me the best team possible. If you focus on that, and everyone has a fair shot, everyone has access—there's a low probability that everyone comes from the same background or school of thought. No one said, 'Hey, Lorenzo, you're an Olympian and you're trying to win a gold medal. Would you like a diverse team?' Rather, they scoured the country for the best talent and diversity was the inevitable outcome. We had an army soldier, an engineer, a decathlete, and one individual who was diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease. We were driven by one goal: to be the best in our craft." —Interview conducted and edited by Mandy Wright

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