

HOAN

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Lauren Feaster

"It's not mine to decide, we'll see where it goes."

Lauren Feaster is not worried, at all, about her future. Her focus, and her impact, revolves around what's happening right now. Everything else, she believes, will fall into place as long as the work is purposeful and intentional.

"I know that the work that I do is intentional, so it connects. It connects to a larger mission," she says. "It comes about in different ways and sometimes presents as more planned, or more spontaneous. I trust the process and I know that it's all for the right thing. When the goal is clear, moving towards it feels more natural"

Lauren, 33, has built a reputable career in the world of non-profit. She's spent the last decade helping grow organizations (and people) centered on leadership, education and equity. Each role she's undertaken has also helped her realize her own responsibility to advance her community.

For five years she worked, and matured, beginning her career as a young team leader with City Year Milwaukee.

"City Year exposes you to a little bit of everything," she explains. "That was my first introduction to leadership, setting a vision, having expectations, managing through inspiration versus rules and regulations, and understanding, getting introduced to, how systems work."

She then joined Teach for America - Milwaukee (TFA), where she led their development operation for four



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years before transitioning to Chief of Staff. It was at TFA that she refined her previous knowledge, understanding how to be effective, on a larger scale, in impacting the lives of people in marginalized communities.

"I feel like they (TFA) really expanded my thinking about what I really wanted for kids, especially kids that looked like me, and our community as a whole. I realized that change -- getting to a place of universal success -- requires a lot of different systems and a lot of different people moving as a coalition in their different spheres of influence," she says.

“ We all have the ideas and the vision within us, and those who benefit from power structures that limit others have a responsibility to remove barriers so that people can help themselves. ”

Lauren also found that reform of any normalized, yet inequitable, system brings about strife before it does reverence. But for her, the focus has always been on the people.

To feel the true impact of Lauren's story, it's vital to understand what actually sparked her path. Prior to City Year and Teach for America, she was destined for a career in healthcare. It was the moments in the back of an ambulance, she says, that made her realize her reach could go much farther.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Lauren spent her nights as an EMT in Milwaukee. A bit different from a paramedic, her role was to "get people to the hospital, in a stable condition with as much information as possible - basic life support, check vitals, ask questions and get to the bottom of what's going on."

Lauren ultimately found that many of her patients, for varying reasons, didn't have the knowledge to understand or care for their conditions.

"When you're an EMT, you see the system and you see the errors and flaws in the system. Because you see things, like, people calling 911 for things that aren't emergencies, that they don't know aren't emergencies... which costs hundreds and hundreds of dollars, but costs them nothing," she explained. "As an EMT, I learned that there were a lot of issues reported that never should've escalated to medical issues. They were coming from all these different other places."

In these moments, Lauren realized her patients needed education, and also access.

She felt many of these problems were preventable, and the systems that enabled them were fixable. She began

to explore K-12 education where she believes habits are formed. If she could start at the beginning, she felt she could uncover exactly where the disparities began.

"I realized during my time, that the biggest help that people need is help realizing that they can help themselves," she says. "We all have the ideas and the vision within us, and those who benefit from power structures that limit others have a responsibility to remove barriers so that people can help themselves."



More than a decade after leaving medicine behind, Lauren continues to break barriers in, and for, her community. However, this time her audience, and her sector of influence, is completely different. Now she's uplifting the voices of women.

Last August, Lauren became CEO of Professional Dimensions (PD), a leading women's association in Milwaukee. The organization is focused on women empowerment, networking, advancement and philanthropy.

"I feel like my job right now with PD, in a lot of ways, is to raise our profile and tell our stories, as women, trailblazers, and leaders because people need to know that we exist and we're making moves," she says.

Lauren is the second person to hold this newly created role, and the first Black woman to lead the group in its 43-year history.

She wants those outside of Professional Dimensions to consistently look to PD members as innovators and community advocates.

"When you come in contact with a PD woman, or whenever you're led by a PD woman, there's certain inherent characteristics and values that they're going to uphold," she says. "They're going to have strong character, (be) honest, trustworthy, equitable. They're going to know what racism is, know what microaggressions are -- they're going to be actively working against them. They're going to be committed to community, whatever that community looks like for them."

In life, Lauren believes that everything she's done is connected to a larger purpose. And while she continues to settle into her position at Professional Dimensions, her personal mission has not waived. Her influence on education and equity has simply ascended to its highest point, thus far.

As CEO of an organization boasting more than 400 skilled women, she's now exploring how to use her voice in new ways.

Lauren is the second person to hold this newly created role, and the first Black woman to lead the group in its 43-year history.

"It's not about me," she says. "It's about how to get the values that our members have, and the values that our organization has, out into the world. We know that the world is better when there are more women, when there are more Professional Dimensions women, when there are more Professional Dimensions women who are leading, and empowered, and in places making decisions for the masses."

