

Ellis N. Liddell Article
Entrepreneur of the Year (Detroit, Michigan)

“THE REST OF THE STORY”

Ellis Liddell’s journey from a rural town of eight hundred residents in Central Mississippi to the large Metropolitan city of Detroit has had many twists and turns. Knowing that the person who gave Ellis his birth name migrated from rural Mississippi to Detroit in the late 60s, it would appear as though Detroit and Ellis were destined to cross paths. Ellis’ life story is one that is delicately intertwined with moments of fate, destiny and sheer determination to create greater wealth for his family and his community.

The same can be said of my chance meeting with Ellis Liddell my sophomore year of college. Our relationship of more than twenty years has evolved from a mentor relationship to friendship to spiritual brothers. I’ve learned many invaluable lessons from Ellis. He has provided tremendous reinforcement of the courage to be an entrepreneur, as exemplified by his life example. Most importantly, I’ve learned to never be afraid to ask for what I want.

This was most clearly demonstrated the summer of 1990 days before I departed for a study abroad experience in Spain. Student loans would pay for the bulk of my expenses, but, I only had \$100 in spending money. Ellis, without my asking, offered to chip in. When he arrived at my house, he abruptly seated himself and leaned forward. He looked me directly in my eyes and asked, “How much money do you want?” I immediately felt a strong sense of discomfort and replied, “Man, I can’t ask you for money.” Nevertheless, Ellis persisted and asked me once again, “How much money do you want?”

I finally summoned the courage and said “\$1,000.” Ellis sat back in the lounge chair with a startled look on his face. After a few moments, he gathered himself, leaned forward again and said, “I can’t give you \$1,000.” I can give you \$300.” After handing me the check for \$300, he told me that the reason he asked me how much money I wanted was that he never wanted me to be afraid to ask God or anyone for what I want. “Regardless of the reason you’re asking for the money, you have to learn to put out to the universe what it is that you want it to produce for you. If you don’t expect great things to happen, then, nine times out of ten, it won’t happen.”

Ellis has always lived his life in such a way as to never be controlled and dominated by fear – the fear of failure or the fear of success. Instead, he constantly studies and self-analyzes to learn better ways to strengthen his mind and to build his courage to set new goals and to face new challenges. As a natural visionary, he believes that if he can see his success in his mind then it must be attainable.

It’s often taken for granted that successful people become successful overnight. But, Ellis would be the first to tell you that success is a process. “You first have to change your thinking to believe that you can accomplish anything you set out to accomplish because the power is already within you.” He would also say that “an individual has to surround himself with other successful individuals to learn how to practice what it means to be successful. And, it’s your Wisdom Team that helps keep you grounded and balanced.”

All successful people have a story to tell. But, too often, when we hear stories of success, we don’t hear enough about the failures experienced along the way to achieving success. The story generally emphasizes the achievements without providing an in-depth view of the hardships, struggles and adversity the individual overcame to achieve their success. To meet Ellis now, it would be hard to imagine the defeats, challenges and major disappointments he’s had to overcome. Yet, Ellis is a living example that the success of the individual many times is born from the life events that have shaped and molded them.

Raised by a blended family, and being the oldest of thirteen siblings, additional responsibilities and pressures were placed upon him. He, however, fully embraced the role of being a big brother to his younger siblings. And, he always maintained a giving spirit despite his family's extreme financial hardship and the personal sacrifices he had to make being the oldest.

Ellis knew at a young age that he wanted more out of life than he was born with. He also knew that, with all of the success he dreamed of achieving, he wanted to share his wealth with others. In his own words, he says that as a child he used to dream of being a philanthropist.

Ellis loved his family, but he hated being poor. He became intensely focused on becoming self-sufficient so that his parents wouldn't have to take care of him. Due to his strong work ethic, by age twelve, he had accomplished his goal of becoming self-sufficient. During the summer months, he worked for his grandparents on their vegetable and fruit farm. And, when he received a call from a neighbor, he was willing to accept additional opportunities to work. In addition to providing him with a sense of self-sufficiency, these miscellaneous part-time jobs also were Ellis' first lessons in sales, money management and the value of a dollar.

Earning a track scholarship to Mississippi College was a pivotal moment in Ellis' life. It provided him with an opportunity to see how big the world really is. He was discovering that there were many paths to success and to achieving the lifestyle he so greatly desired. Equally important, while attending college as a student athlete, his sense of discipline and strong work ethic were more finely tuned.

Ellis had decided to major in Business and Education. After graduation, he worked for a number of years as an Insurance Broker. He, simultaneously, pursued a career as a professional track athlete. He came one race short of qualifying for the 1984 Olympic Team as a 400 meter hurdler. This was Ellis' first taste of things beyond his control. He would use this as a guide for the rest of his life. Having a degree in business made for an easy transition from an aspiring Olympic athlete to an Olympic businessman.

Ellis' sights were now set on obtaining his Stock Broker's License. Working in corporate America provided Ellis with a greater awareness and understanding of the broad opportunities for wealth creation in America. Ellis knew that hard work would prevail in training for the Olympics. He just needed to apply the same work ethic to an area in which he was even more talented. So, he continued to search for a path or an avenue that he could passionately pursue to create and build the wealth he so greatly desired.

A fortuitous meeting in 1983, with Dr. Naim Akbar – a dynamic, yet unheralded public speaker - would shift Ellis' life in a totally new direction. Ellis donated a fish aquarium to a new school that was attended by Dr. Akbar's twin sons. Dr. Akbar was impressed by the excitement and enthusiasm his sons repeatedly expressed about having met Ellis. He, soon thereafter, contacted Ellis and asked if they could meet. They quickly formed a friendship and shared their goals and aspirations. Ellis suggested to Dr. Akbar that he make being a guest on "The Phil Donahue Show" his primary goal. Ellis believed that being a guest on the show would give Dr. Akbar the national exposure he needed to showcase his talent and to propel his career.

The chemistry and synergy between Ellis and Dr. Akbar was so strong that within weeks of their initial meeting, "The Phil Donahue Show" called Dr. Akbar's office. They wanted to book him as a guest on their show. When the phone rang, Dr. Akbar had stepped away from his desk and asked his assistant to take a message. When he returned to his desk, he was shocked to hear that the call was from "The Phil Donahue Show." Even more amazing, before he could return the call, the phone rang again. This time, with great anticipation, he answered. It was "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

Five years later, Ellis Liddell Enterprises was the largest African-American owned Speaker's Bureau in the country with a roster of high profile speakers and scholars. His company

was the first to book Spike Lee and later booked other notable speakers such as Les Brown and Maya Angelou. The height of Ellis' success as the owner of Ellis Liddell Enterprises was in 1993. His company sponsored and organized the "African-Centered Energy in Motion" Conference in Atlanta, Georgia which featured Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan and the late Dr. John Henrik Clarke. 1,500 registrants from all over the United States attended the conference setting records for one of the largest conferences ever to be held exclusively featuring Afrocentric and Pan-African lecturers.

There were many indelible lessons that Ellis learned from being a central figure in the Afrocentric Movement for nearly a decade. In discovering his gift as a visionary, he learned about the power of self-knowledge and how ideas can be used to transform the lives of individuals and communities. He also began to see more clearly that, without wealth creation and wealth building, individuals, communities and races will always be limited in their personal power because of their lack of resources. Thus, Ellis began to shift his focus back to financial services so that he could become more empowered to help others.

Ellis was determined to apply his recent entrepreneurial experiences to a new venture as a financial advisor and owner of a financial investment firm. ELE Wealth Management (ELE Family) was formed December 26, 2000. In just 10 years, ELE Wealth Management has established itself as one of the premier financial investment firms in the metropolitan Detroit area. And, the company has diversified its portfolio of companies to provide insurance services, mortgage services and property management. So much has happened in ten short years. But, the company's founder and C.E.O. is not resting on his laurels. He is vigorously planning to further expand its satellite office in Houston, Texas as well as establish new offices in other major metropolitan cities such as Atlanta, Georgia and Charlotte, North Carolina.

The next decade is a chapter of Ellis' life that he looks forward to with great optimism. As a high achiever and goal-oriented person, he has always viewed his life journey as one in which he needs to find balance. Ellis dreamed of being a philanthropist as a child, and he remains passionate about fulfilling this dream. It stems from his desire to want to live his life in a way in which "you live beyond yourself."

It's amazing how some things come full circle. Among his family and friends, Ellis is not only seen as a successful entrepreneur but as a humanitarian. There are countless stories of him helping and providing assistance to others in a time of need with mentorship, spiritual guidance, and even financial assistance. Ellis continues to be committed to giving back. He fervently lives by a strong belief in "reciprocity", that we must maintain a mindset of giving back what has been given to us. And, more importantly, "We should only ask of others what we are willing to give ourselves." And, now you know the rest of the story.

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