*Kizzy Maitland on Ursula Burns, CEO of Xerox*

*Ursula M. Burns became CEO of Xerox in July of 2009 when outgoing CEO, Anne Mulcahy, handpicked Ursula to be her successor. In that moment Mrs. Burns set two records: becoming the first African American woman CEO to head a Fortune 500 company and the first woman to succeed another woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company. With sales approaching $23 billion, Xerox is the world’s leading enterprise for business process and document management.*

*Ursula Burns defied countless odds to achieve the success she enjoys today. Born to Panamanian immigrant parents on September 20, 1958, Ursula was raised by a single mother in the Baruch Houses, a public housing project on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Her neighborhood was a tough, drug-infested ghetto—one that few escaped long enough to finish high school, let alone to attend college and graduate school.  Yet, Ursula acquired a BS in Mechanical Engineering from Polytechnic Institute at NYU and an MS in Mechanical Engineering from Columbia University.*

*When she arrived at NYU in 1980, Ursula felt ill-equipped and out of place.  The public and parochial education she had received did not prepare her to compete in college.  Many expected her to fail.  However, Ursula refused to give up on her dream of becoming a mechanical engineer, a field that was (and still is) male-dominated. She worked hard, secured an internship at Xerox in 1981, and never looked back.*

*Upon joining Xerox, Ursula worked in product development and planning for several years, then went on to lead several business teams from 1992-2000.  She was named Senior Vice President in 2000 where she worked alongside Anne Mulcahy, and was named President in 2007. Shortly after being named CEO in 2009, Ursula made the largest acquisition in Xerox history--the $6.4 billion purchase of Affiliated Computer Services.  In May 2010 she was named Chairman of the Company.*

***Total Leadership Principles in Action***

*Ursula Burns embraces the Total Leadership principles on many levels.  She is a firm believer in being real, and acting as your authentic self at all times.  For Ursula, this means not being afraid to ask for help.  For example, when she arrived at NYU and realized she was struggling in certain subject areas, Ursula immediately sought out all resources available, and put in the extra time to quickly get up to speed.  When asked what has kept her at Xerox for 33 years, Ursula often references the importance of discovering long ago that Xerox was a company that would accept her for who she is without taking away from the person whom they had hired.*

*Ursula also embraces the principle of being whole, and acting with integrity.  In fact, she often advises young leaders to pay close attention to the attributes that define a company’s success beyond the P&L, such as great leadership, ethical business practices, sound governance, and values-based decision-making.  According to Ursula, these are the attributes that will matter most long-term, and if they are not in alignment with your own, one should not stick around.*

*Finally, Ursula Burns fully embraced the principle of being innovative and acting with creativity to transform Xerox’s business.  According to Ursula, “as the world changes, if you don’t transform your company, you’re stuck.” This was her driving mantra as she transformed the 105 year-old Xerox from a copier company to a business services and IT outsourcing company. Ursula’s innovative-thinking positioned Xerox to be able to manage the infrastructure of EZPass and the camera system that issues tickets to drivers who run red lights—services that many would never imagine are managed by Xerox.*

***Four Way Wins***

*Ursula Burns has managed to integrate the four Total Leadership domains, although she admits it hasn’t been easy.  Key to her success in this area is her refusal to place unrealistic and unnecessary expectations on herself.  As such, she is fine with not making it to every one of her daughter’s volleyball games, as long as Ursula’s daughter knows that she can count on her mother to be there at the most important times.  Ursula also believes in being selfish sometimes, and “checking out” occasionally to focus on one’s physical and mental health.*

*In the family realm, Ursula emphasizes the importance of finding the right life partner.  For her, this meant marrying a man 20 years her senior, someone who had already gone through the “growing up stuff” and could be around for their two young children when Ursula’s job required frequent travel.*

*Ursula integrates the community and career domains by dedicating her time and resources to causes that she is passionate about and that also align with Xerox’s goals and values. For example, she serves on several boards dedicated to improving education in science, technology engineering, and math.*

***Key Learnings***

*Above all, I admire Ursula’s authenticity and comfort with imperfection.  She is a hard worker, a survivor, who believes in learning from one’s mistakes and moving on to accomplish bigger and better things.  I have a greater appreciation for the importance of being able to ask for help, to be vulnerable—a personal leadership challenge coming into this course. And, like Ursula, I intend to learn how not to take life so seriously and have more fun.*

*I also appreciate Ursula’s boldness and intuition: her ability to block out the “noise,” follow her gut, and recognize when others truly have her best interest at heart.  For example, in 1990, after spending nearly 10 years with Xerox, Ursula was offered an Executive Assistant position for Senior VP, Wayland Hicks.  Many told her that the offer was an insult, that she should leave the Company.  However, Ursula ignored the naysayers. One year after assuming the Executive Assistant position for Wayland, she became Executive Assistant to then-CEO, Paul Allaire.  That exposure to Paul, and mentoring by him, was the beginning of Ursula’s ascent to the executive ranks.*

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