



***Gwendolyn Chunn***

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Gwendolyn Chunn is the retired Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Institute, Center for Criminal Justice Research and International Initiatives, Department of Criminal Justice, at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). Before joining the Institute at NCCU, she held the positions of Executive Management Development Coordinator for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and Director of Youth Services (DYS), Department of Health and Human Services from 1989-1999.

Ms. Chunn has been a member of numerous civic and professional commissions, boards, and organizations. After serving as a member of the American Correctional Association Executive Committee for more than a decade, Ms. Chunn was elected President of ACA in August 2004.

Ms. Chunn is the recipient of many awards and honors, most notably, the E.R. Cass Correctional Achievement Award, ACA's highest award. She has served as a resource for the National Institute of Corrections' Training Academy in Aurora, Colorado for many years.

***What would you tell women who are contemplating taking the next career step and are seriously considering pursuing a CEO position?***

Make sure you want to devote the kind of time that is required by a CEO position. This is not a job you can take and try to balance with heavy responsibilities for family and friends. Unless you are willing to make the CEO position Number One in your life, do not consider it.

I was the first woman in the top position. Women are practical, they think about things like moving their children to another city. The top job takes so much of your time, there's no point in taking the position if you can't give it your all. Doing it well consumes your life. Women are not the only ones who feel this way. Men say the same thing. You are always looking on the horizon to see what's on the way. Sometimes you can't control a situation, you just have to manage it. You think about it all the time.

You have to be able to get people to work together. After the move to top management, a lot of people are not happy because staff members do not do what they said they would do. I was already happy, and I could rest easy and be calm – when the staff is uneasy about what's happening, they can't settle down, and when they are unsettled, they can't settle the kids.

If there had been no support and self-satisfaction, the job would have been too much effort and cost too great for the payoff. You need support for turning troubled young lives around, and often you never get it, from the parents, the kids themselves, the public or the press.

I believe that life has meaning, and I want to be able to live with myself. I was motivated by doing good; it was the right thing to do. You don't go into public service to get rich. There are things you can be proud of, but they are often on the back pages. I am fairly satisfied that I used my time and resources wisely and I am proud of being a good steward.

You can't ever afford to forget to be a hands-on executive. You better have a pipeline to the staff and remain hands-on; you always have to maintain a link and constantly stay in touch. You have to be able to look through the eyes of the lowest employee.

You are only responsible for what happens while you are there. You're in it 24/7 and it's hard to let that go. It's almost like having a child – you have to care about it, then you have to turn your back on it and move on. That is hard to do. The job is as much a part of who you are as anything else. After living it I had to recognize that it's not my job anymore. It belongs to the state, and you have to be willing to give it back.

***Why did you decide to step up to a CEO position – were you encouraged or mentored by someone?***

This was a divine issue - it's not something that I would have sought out. I did not want the responsibility. History never suggests an orderly sense of succession – it's usually so political. When there is constant turnover, the kids are put on the back burner and no one is paying attention.

This is the absolute truth: my clinical services director took me for a walk on the campus and she said that I needed to apply for the director position. I laughed uproariously! She said everyone would help me. She said that when she heard that the job was open, she

thought, if Gwen doesn't take it, we don't know **who** might come in. If they care about the kids, we can teach them what they need to know. If they think the kids are throwaways, they can't meet the mission. I decided to give it a try. I know what my strengths are, and I knew what needed to be done. I did it for the good of the agency. I decided I might as well give it a chance, but being the director is not something I would have sought myself.

I also knew, as a single mother, that I had to provide for my own children. Actually, it was almost heaven sent – I got the top job at exactly the right time and was able to put my kids through college. That's why I think there was a divine dimension.

***Is there a downside if you make the first cut but are not the chosen candidate for the job? Would you apply again in the future if that position, or a similar one, became available again?***

If I did not make the cut, yes, I would apply again. It's advisable to get feedback to find out what you could have done better. Try to get with the interviewing authority to see what you can do to strengthen your candidacy. Don't be ambivalent about investigating what you learn. Be open to feedback, and beware of people who tell you that you were perfect and that you walk on water.

You ought to get to know your own strengths. Look at what you do well and what you can do better and compensate for the weaknesses, achieve a balance.

***What do you, or did you, like best about being a CEO?***

I liked being able to model the values and beliefs that I thought were important to realizing the mission. I could be fairly pointed about that. I can be hardnosed about people being mistreated. You can't talk about appropriate behavior and be a responsible citizen, and treat other people in a different manner.

I will go to court with my staff if they need a defense. But there are things that are not negotiable. I will not stand for sexual abuse. I do not tolerate yelling at kids – I would tell staff “this is not the army and you are not everyone's mama.”

If you are going to “do different” - and this is the best part – you have to establish standards of behavior and interaction that are professional. No wild emotional outbursts – anger can lead to putting your hands on kids and being disrespectful. If I hear that you have done that, I'm coming after you. We cannot afford that kind of example – it's completely counterproductive.