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GRINDIN'

2 Entrepreneurs

CHANGING
the **GAME**

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JANUARY 2019



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**Grindin'
Two Entrepreneurs
Changing
the Game**





Marc Brooks
CEO
Hyde Park Hospitality

Hospitality, Tech and Non-Tech Ventures

It's a new year and people are back at it. Back at it, as in getting back to their routine after enjoying the holidays with family, friends, or chilling at home or on a beach. Your routine may be the typical corporate 9 to 5 gig, working out at the gym, making sure the kids get to school on time, or even driving an Uber. Whatever it is, I typically hear it referred to as "back to the grind" or, as some folks like to say, grindin'.

The Urban Dictionary's definition for grindin' is: "The act of working hard towards a goal or an achievement. Performed when more effort must

be applied then usually activities." In my circles, that term is often used, especially from those that are running their own businesses. When I think about grindin', I envision someone who's is very focused, determined, and relentless in their efforts to achieve their ultimate goal. Also, someone who inspires others and knows what it takes to be successful. I'm fortunate to have several folks that fit the bill in my business and social circles, but I'm shining a spotlight on two such Chicago entrepreneurs that are lighting a path to success within the hospitality, technology, and non-tech industries.



Marc Brooks

Marc Brooks is the CEO of Hyde Park Hospitality, a successful food and facilities service management company based in Chicago, IL. Marc learned about entrepreneurship early on from his late father and has taken those pearls and applied them to his own companies. He's connected and respected by prominent figures in business, entertainment, politics, and professional sports including, Michael Jordan, Rahm Emmanuel, Bill Clinton, Common, and Barack Obama. His accomplishments, especially as a minority entrepreneur, has not come without its challenges, and I was excited for him to tell us about he's grindin'.

DC. – Describe your journey from where you first started as a young entrepreneur to where you are today.

MB – My journey as an entrepreneur began as



an adolescent watching my late Father (Frank Brooks) operate as a CEO. His company, Brooks Foods, were food suppliers to the McDonald's system back in the early '90's. Watching him lead a small, minority-owned company back then was an invaluable experience. Everything from how he treated his employees, to how he interacted with his customers, to how he communicated the company's vision, all were

instrumental learning experiences that helped shape my interest in becoming an entrepreneur.

As a 2nd generation entrepreneur in the food industry, I take great pride in reflecting back on how his tutelage helped me become a CEO of my own business, Hyde Park Hospitality (HPH). Today, HPH has over 200 employees, and provides food and facilities service management, and has airport concession operations in New York/New Jersey, Chicago, Dallas, Denver and Los Angeles.

DC. – Tell me about your first taste of success and your biggest disappointment that you experienced as an entrepreneur.

MB - My first taste of success came back with my first venture as a retail distributor in the



wireless industry. Growing up in Chicago's Hyde Park community, I developed a strong following that crossed all boundaries, ethnicities and income levels. As a young entrepreneur I was able to exploit this gained popularity and I became humbly known as "the cell phone guy" of inner city Chicago. Back then large cellular companies such as Ameritech, Verizon and U.S. Cellular all had taken a very cautious and conservative approach to opening retail distribution channels in urban markets. Growing up in these communities I knew them well, and knew they offered huge opportunities because of their density, and strong household incomes, yet many of them lacked commercial retail. As a result, I pitched the senior management teams at these organizations, and eventually got the needed support to open one of the first inner city cellular retail locations in the late '90s. The activation numbers were staggering, and helped fuel my expansion from a single location in Chicago, to 26 locations across 3 states. I knew I was on to something after a ten (10) year run and eventually selling the vast majority of my retail portfolio to these same major corporations for a seven-figure sum.



My biggest disappointment as an entrepreneur happened between the years 2009-11. After the successful divestiture of my cellular business in 2008, I made a calculated move to redeploy some of this capital from my exit into the food industry. I (along with my partner) acquired nineteen (19) Burger King (BK) restaurants and quickly became one of the largest African-American franchisees in the BK system. Eighteen (18) months following the acquisition, I learned via a news feed that the BK brand was sold to a private equity outfit, and over the next 36 months life as a BK franchisee drastically changed for the worse. A significant drop in foot traffic, a major reduction of marketing support services, and competitive pressure and discounting all resulted in negative same store sales and cash flow.

Despite this turbulent interval, and an eventual sale of the business at a discounted value, the hands-on teachings from this tumultuous period were vitally important to my forming and shaping the strategic vision of Hyde Park Hospitality.

DC – Explain why you have an affinity for the hospitality industry and how Hyde Park Hospitality differentiates itself from your competition?





MB – My affinity for being in the hospitality/food industry came from my firsthand experience in working for a father that was an entrepreneur in the space. This experience coupled with my personal love of music, fashion and food led to my opening two casual dining restaurants in Chicago, and my acceptance and fondness for service and hospitality.

Hyde Park Hospitality differentiates itself from other airport concessionaires in that we have a business model that deliberately diversifies its service offerings, ranging from food & beverage management, to joint venture partnerships, to facility services oversight.

DC – Being an entrepreneur doesn't come without its difficulties, but describe other challenges you've experienced as a direct result of being a minority CEO?

MB – Being a CEO has natural challenges, but I would argue being a minority CEO, one can experience additional obstacles that aren't easy to overcome. Gaining access to capital, building a diverse workforce, and building C-Suite level contacts are constant challenges I face.

DC – There are certain qualities that I believe an entrepreneur must demonstrate in order to experience success. What 3 most important qualities have helped you to become a winner in business?

MB - Developing a corporate vision that others can understand and believe in.

Identifying superior talent.

A relentless work ethic and tenacity in seeing deals through from the ideation phase to contract execution.



DC - What are your 5 most useful tips for a successful "grind in business"?

MB - One, Set a daily schedule with assignable tasks

Two. Work Hard AND Smart; Although I believe in balance, there are no "full" days off for Entrepreneurs

Three. Develop a Business Plan and Pro Forma for each and every business venture

Four. Hire Right (Employees, Attorney, Accountant; and even your Customers need to be the right fit)

Five. Don't be greedy (or afraid to partner), 20% of something is better than 100% of nothing

