

A Model for Success

By Michelle Mielewski Baum

Robert Wallace writes, “If you have no power in America, then you are invisible.” And when this happens, he reflects, the social and economic policies of the society in which you live begin to reflect your invisibility.

The social freedoms gained by African American and other minorities, he argues, have to be built on a solid economic foundation. Without it, “it’s like building your house on sand.” To that end, he not only has built two successful companies of his own but has also written a series of books designed to give minority business people the tools they need to achieve entrepreneurial success.

His first book, *Black Wealth Through Black Entrepreneurship*, grew from research done while he was involved with Tuck’s Minority Business Executive Program (MBEP) during his student years. Wallace began thinking more about why minorities and women were not better represented in the business community. He decided to ask questions of the people who had made it, who had overcome the obstacles of racism, sexism, and classism, “All the case studies in that book came from people I had met in or through that program,” he says.

Although that book – and its follow-up, *Black Wealth: Your Road to Small Business Success* – were in Wallace’s words, “from the left side of the brain,” his newest effort, *Soul Food: 52 Principles for Black Entrepreneurial Success*, uses the age-old technique of storytelling to drive his points home. The book uses personal stories, culled from meetings with thousands of minority business people he had met through his workshops and lectures, to illustrate key entrepreneurial principles.

Wallace has found that it’s not enough to gain only practical business knowledge, although that is very important. “You need to have the correct mindset,” he asserts. In his books and training workshops, Wallace uses both success modeling and success profiling. Success modeling takes successful people who have done something other might aspire to and studies in detail how they accomplished it. Success profiling takes that a step further, telling the story of the whole person, where they came from, their family background and what their struggles were.

“People need role models,” asserts Wallace – especially those people in our society who often encounter more negative perceptions of themselves than positive ones. “People’s behavior is most influenced by what they believe about themselves,” he says. “If you believe you’re no good, you will turn out to be no good. But if you’re grounded in a strong, positive identity, you’re more likely to behave in a positive way.” As his father used to say, “Free your mind, and

your behind will follow.” Wallace explores this concept more deeply in his upcoming book *Rainbow Economics*.

He credits his own strong sense of self to his deep Christian faith and to his parent, who believed in his ability to succeed. Raised in the gritty projects of Baltimore, Maryland, he learned firsthand what it meant to keep your focus when the world around you wants to hold you down. Knowing the value of education, his parents sent him to a high school for gifted and talented children that was a two-and-a-half-hour bus ride away from home and supported his efforts at the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering and applied mechanics.

Wallace is the founder and CEO of the BiTH Group, Inc. an information technology firm, and Entreat, LLC, an e-learning web portal that provides learning services primarily to minority and female entrepreneurs. He spends much of his time on the road, lecturing and giving workshops, and appearing on radio programs. He does try to limit his time away from home as much as possible, however. “I’m a family man,” he laughs, referring to his wife and five children. “The need me too.”

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