

Mentorship Matters: Desmond Crosswell and LaShànda Barnes



Though mentee LaShànda Barnes (right) works 1,200 miles away from her mentor, Desmond Crosswell (left), she found his guidance to be invaluable. "Don't let distance deter you from building a relationship," Crosswell says.

Celebrating Black History Month

Black History Month was founded in 1970 to recognize achievements by Black Americans and their central role in US history. At NYU Langone Health, we're celebrating this year by highlighting exceptional staff members who are making a difference—not only for fellow employees, but also by supporting and advancing our mission areas.

To echo NYU Langone's theme for Black History Month, thank you for "making a history of excellence today."

The path to professional success is far smoother when a mentor guides the way—especially one who has a clear understanding of the unique challenges a colleague faces. That's why the Black Leaders Employee Resource Group (ERG) at NYU Langone Health recently launched a program that matches mentors with junior staffers. The goal: to provide guidance and encouragement and help mentees contribute to NYU Langone in more constructive and meaningful ways. When mentee LaShànda Barnes matched with mentor Desmond Crosswell, she was looking to grow her career within NYU Langone. Crosswell's advice paid quick dividends for Barnes and gave him a chance to refresh his own leadership skills along the way.

The Mentor

Desmond Crosswell, manager for clinical supply chain, is responsible for the day-to-day flow of medical and surgical products needed for operating room procedures at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn and the Joseph S. and Diane H. Steinberg Ambulatory Care Center—Cobble Hill. He oversees a team of seven coordinators and has been at NYU Langone for 20 years.

The Mentee

LaShànda Barnes, assistant manager at the NYU Langone Health Patient Access Center in Boynton Beach, Florida, directs a team of supervisors and phone agents who assist patients in scheduling medical appointments and routing messages to Faculty Group Practices. She has been at NYU Langone for nearly six years.

The Teaching Approach

Crosswell and Barnes were paired up in February 2023 and connected weekly via Webex, phone calls, and texts for several months. "I put together a game plan to focus on several elements of LaShànda's growth potential," Crosswell explains. He sent videos to view and documents presenting common challenges leaders face. "We'd talk them through and discuss what could make the interactions better," Crosswell says. "It only took a few meetings to see that LaShànda had the tools to be an even better leader."

Barnes says the lessons were invaluable. "Work in the Patient Access Center is fast-paced, with a variety of workflows and processes coming at you left and right all day long," she explains. "Desmond shared his years of knowledge and empowered me in many ways. We spent a lot of time on conflict resolution—how to keep disagreements from escalating while continuing to discuss each point of view and eventually reaching a collaborative conclusion."

Sound Advice

With Crosswell's guidance, Barnes made tweaks in her leadership approach. "Earlier

in my career, I may have come off a bit too stern," she says. "His lessons have taught me to be a better active listener, and not be so quick to respond." Another helpful element was the insight into managing different personalities. "People are unique," Barnes says. "When issues arise, some people are fine with receiving an email, while others need a one-on-one meeting." Barnes' adjustments made a big difference, and she was promoted to assistant manager in November 2023. She now oversees a group of up to six supervisors, each of whom oversees up to 15 agents.

For Crosswell, working with Barnes was a full-circle moment. Years earlier he had benefited from the mentorship of Jose Hernandez, vice president for nursing and patient care services at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn. "It wasn't an official program, but when I worked for him as materials management coordinator from 2005 to 2016, we resolved every issue that came up together. I passed on a lot of those learnings to LaShànda."

Going Forward

Barnes sees the Black Leaders ERG as a crucial part of her development. "I love the fact that NYU Langone offers an environment where Black employees are empowered to succeed through community support and professional development," she says. "I now have a lifetime partnership with Desmond. He's helped me build tools so I can do it on my own, but I know he'll always be there for me."

Crosswell is sold on the mentorship program, too. "It shows NYU Langone's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to being there for our staffers of color," he says. He sees the ERG as a valuable resource for all staffers experiencing uncertainty. "Sometimes people do not reach out when they're in need or lacking direction," he says. "This gives people the opportunity to discuss ideas with senior NYU Langone members who can serve as guides."

Working with Barnes gave him a chance to brush up his own leadership skills. "I've accomplished a lot in my career, but offering instruction to LaShànda gave me an opportunity to show her what it means to be a good listener and a good manager," he says. "It was a great refresh for me."

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