

NAAAHR Tampa Bay Chapter Founding Member Hosetta Coleman Awarded Lifetime Membership

NAAAHR Tampa Bay founding member Hosetta Coleman started the chapter in 1999 during an eight-month stretch where she took a year off from working. Fast forward almost 20 years, Hosetta was recently awarded the prestigious Lifetime Membership Award. Despite her busy schedule, Hosetta took time to chat about a range of topics including the history of the chapter, her personal journey, and she also offered some great advice for HR professionals!

Why was it important for you to start the Tampa Branch of NAAAHR almost 20 years ago?

I took a year off of work and spent 8 months working with a team to build the organization. We wanted to offer jobs as well as growth and networking opportunities for African American HR professionals. And we realized that starting a chapter of NAAAHR in Tampa would be one of the best ways for us to do that. I was aware that while SHRM and other organizations were great—and I was and am a member of them—there would be a synergy that African Americans would get in NAAAHR through our commonality. I also knew that we would discuss some topics among ourselves that were not relevant or relatable in those other settings.

What changes have you observed for African Americans since you began your career in HR?

The competitive landscape has changed. At one time, we were the flavor of the month. Now that flavor of the month is more diversified. Even when you consider the Florida market the growth of the Latino population and other ethnic groups creates an even broader competitive landscape. So perfecting one's skillset is critical so that a person stands out of the crowd. The viability of NAAAHR is even more important today than it was several years ago because it helps all HR professionals realize that they can't hire someone just because they look like them.



Talk about mentoring. Why is it so important to you? Did you have someone who mentored you?

Mentoring is a part of giving back and it is a part of fulfilling the dash. We all have a responsibility to improve the world. My first job after the year that I took off came from an NAAAHR member who was a mentor for me. He already knew I had a strong work ethic, but he worked with me and coached me to ensure that I would get a role that he knew was available. I'm now in the position where I do the same thing for other people because I had a lot of people who took chances and who invested in me.

You graduated from Tuskegee University. How did the HBCU experience impact you?

The HBCU experience set the groundwork for my strong belief that we are all here to “fill our dash,” meaning we are supposed to fulfill our purpose from the time we are born until the time we die, other known as the dash on a person’s grave marker. I earned good grades in high school and could have gone anywhere, but I *chose* an HBCU.

At Tuskegee, I was afforded a lot of leadership opportunities so my involvement in regards to affecting change in my environment started there. Because of Tuskegee when I walked into my first job, I already had good leadership skills, budget management skills, and had experience with public speaking. My self-awareness and identity was shaped by attending an HBCU. I still go to Homecoming, and even though it’s been 35 years since we pledged, my line sisters and I still get together every two years. I personally know that the connections that are made at an HBCU are worldwide and lifelong.

What does being awarded the Lifetime Membership Award mean to you?

I was excited and honored, particularly because of my strong belief in NAAHR. I travel a lot, so I haven’t been as visible as I was in the early years, but anyone who knows me knows that NAAHR has always been very important to me. I want to make sure we have perpetuity in the Tampa chapter. We *all* have that responsibility for the longevity of our organization. To whom much is given, much is required. Your dash shouldn’t symbolize you only working, coming home and watching television all day. We each have a responsibility to help our family, our friends, our colleagues and the generations who are following after us.

With all you’ve accomplished, what are some your goals you have between now and the end of your career?

I believe you have to always build successors, and I’m very invested in doing so. It’s important to never stop growing. I also think it’s important to strive to be in spaces where you’re not only

exposed to HR practices. At FAMU, I was Vice Chair of the Investment Committee and I chaired the Development Committee for the Foundation’s Board. Those roles are outside of HR but they’ve given me investment and portfolio experience. I’m looking to continue looking for opportunities to expand my skillset. It’s also important to build processes that don’t just work for you, but that benefit others too. That way when I leave, the next person can pick right up where I left off and continue to move ahead.

You mention different boards and are currently on one at Florida A&M. Why is this so important to you?

If people do their research, they’ll see FAMU has one of the largest endowments of any HBCU. I sit on the Foundation’s board, and the board oversees the management of these endowments. People who give money to the Foundation trust us to invest in students and act with integrity and ethics. Without FAMU, the African American middle class in Florida potential would not be what it is now. Nothing compares to what HBCUs have been able to do to contribute to Black economic growth and generational wealth. Sitting on that board is very important because as board members we’re stewards of a greater good, which focuses on helping students get money to go to college. Supporting HBCUs is in my roots. One of my daughters graduated from FAMU and the other one graduated from Bethune Cookman University (BCU). My husband went to FAMU and both my parents went to HBCUs. There is nothing wrong with traditional schools, but for us, HBCUs are a family tradition.

If you could give African Americans one piece of career advice, what would it be?

Never leave a room without letting your voice be heard. Many times we’re at the table and ideas are thrown around and we might think to ourselves, “I’m not going to say anything because they won’t listen to me anyway.” But that only means that you need to be prepared for the meeting and you need to understand the dynamics of what’s happening in the dialogue so that when you *do* say something, it is impactful. I didn’t come up with this idea but I’ve practiced it for a long time: in order for people to

remember you when you are in the room, especially for long meetings that last for more than an hour, make sure you speak at least three times in a meeting. You want to make sure that when people leave the room they will say that you were engaged and that you contributed. If it's an hour-long meeting or shorter, you can get away with only speaking once. But if the meeting is longer than that, you need to speak up at least three times. And what you talk about doesn't always have to HR-related. Learn the business aspects behind what is going on in the meeting and make valuable comments about those items. Take notes and make sure to follow up in the next meeting about something the business referenced in the last meeting. It will make all the difference in the world for you and your colleagues.

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