



MR. KNOW-THEM-ALL

RAYMOND LEWIS CONNECTS PEOPLE & PROJECTS

WORDS: YTASHA L. WOMACK

Raymond Lewis knows everyone. An expert relationship builder with a knack for creating incredible events, Lewis can connect like-minds for strategic wins with a mastery that others crave. His lists of produced events are as varied as they are star-studded.

“One of the highlights of my career was producing the Red, White and Blue Ball for President Obama’s second election,” he says. He produced the 95th and 97th birthday galas for civil rights icon Dr. Dorothy Height; coordinated the launch event for the General Motors dealership in Harlem; produced the Latin Food Festival in East Harlem; produced the 50th wedding Anniversary affair for the Rockefeller’s spiritual guide, Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr.; and coordinated 10 of the American Black Film Festivals. “Half were in Acapulco,” he notes. He’s also a champion of black media.

Lewis even made his television debut this year as a chef. He appeared on the reality cooking show “Southern Chefs” that aired on ABC in 65 markets. “I got a great response. I would love to be a food demonstration specialist,” he says.

While running his New York-based firm RPL Consulting demands that he appear to be seemingly everywhere his familiarity doesn’t detract from a certain mystique that surrounds him. “Everyone always asks me ‘what do you do?’” he says. Clearly he’s a multi-hyphenate entrepreneur. He defines his business as “a combination of engagement marketing, public and community relations and relationship marketing. I have strong relationships. I consider myself one of the best planners in the country. I do a lot of volunteer projects. I work with the NYPD doing outreach with young people,” Lewis explains.

There are certain attributes that Lewis has and lessons he has learned over his career that

enable him to be successful. “I have a strong background in entertaining, I’m a people person. I value relationships and I stay in touch. As we stay in touch, we stay connected. I like to think I learned that from publicist Terrie Williams. Her book, *The Personal Touch*, had a big impact on me. Always know a name, always know a face and keep the lines open. A lot of times those relationships help you to close contracts and maintain contracts.”

Lewis who attended Morehouse initially went to school to be a doctor. His love for cooking and entertaining came naturally. Once he found his joy for putting together events he just went with it and left behind any thoughts of becoming a physician.

“I always reference my grandmother who entertained a lot... all kinds of people, church people, business people. So I learned how to move through different personalities through her. In any given day there were three generations in that house. That’s the message I try to convey to younger people is just because you have a master’s [degree] at age 22 does not mean you know everything on the planet. Those life experiences count and you should treasure them,” says Lewis.

He found early success with a huge corporate win – a Pepsi contract. He held it for seven years and what started with small events expanded into managing their multimillion-dollar diversity budget with *Black Enterprise Magazine*.

Lewis quickly added media director to his resume. Not only did he leverage media buys

with cultural events he found ways to support publications with strong corporate advertising. It was a win-win. “The corporations got exposure and they got the community value [they] needed,” adds Lewis. In order for Black-owned media to be successful in these relationships he advises that, “The media outlets must know the corporations’ goals. That’s how you design your request.”

His secrets to success are simple. “I’ve been around over 20 years. My relationships are my pearls of value. I’ve never had a website. I’ve never advertised. But I have a firm and word of mouth travels. I attend a lot of events that bring value to the work I do. I do a lot of work in women’s markets. Linda Spradley Dunn has the Odyssey Media Group. She is a mentor. I worked with her to do one of the number one women’s events in the country. Through building those relationships you go from one project to the next.” Lewis continues, “The average person can’t pick up the phone and call a CEO. People who want to get to people who are really important call me. They ask can you get to the head of UniWorld or the consul general of South Africa? If I call and say you need to talk to someone, they trust me.”

Ytasha L. Womack is author of Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi & Fantasy Culture. Her film “Bar Star City” debuts in 2016.