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Trained and Ready to Move Up

By April W. Klimley

FOX News creates an Apprentice Program to help minorities get ahead; New mentoring model leads to success.

FOX News Channel has created a new kind of “apprentice” program. No, it’s not a cutthroat television series like Donald Trump’s dramatic *The Apprentice*. In fact, it is not a television program at all. It’s a merit-based, internal training program aimed at helping qualified minority employees move up the ladder into a more successful career path.

The FOX Apprentice Program is unique and very focused. It’s a proactive part of the company’s overall diversity initiative, and everyone who participates and completes the program is guaranteed a job at FCN, the number-one cable news channel in the United States.

So far, 13 employees have participated. All have gone on to better positions. Each one has moved from an entry-level job or non-professional position into a job with far more potential and pay: from security guard to viewer-services coordinator, from cleaning lady to make-up artist, from intern to assistant producer.

1. Cory Howard, Booker, *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*
2. Roger Ailes speaking to the third Apprentice Program class at their graduation ceremony. Also in attendance are their mentors and supervisors
3. Keith Hemmings, Tech Op Engineer, *FOX & Friends*, *FOX Live*
4. Fouzia Bouanane, Make-Up Artist
5. The 2006 graduating class, with Roger Ailes: Keith Hemmings, Mark Terry, Cory Howard, Codie Brooks, and Victor Garcia hold their Certificates of Achievement
6. Mark Terry, Production Assistant, *FOX & Friends*
7. Codie Brooks, Production Assistant, *Special Report with Brit Hume*
8. Victor Garcia, Production Assistant, *The O’Reilly Factor* and *The Radio Factor*

“We invented this program to retain qualified people who want to get ahead, but need more skills to do that,” explains Roger Ailes, chairman and CEO—the force behind the initiative. Ailes felt the number of minorities at FOX was not increasing fast enough, despite a very active summer internship program.

“There seemed to be a gap between bringing in our interns and taking on job responsibilities at a national network in the real world,” he says. “It struck me that a step was missing.”

The Apprenticeship Program receives funding

Ailes decided to fill that gap. He had watched talented minority employees at the company remain in positions that were not equal to their potential. One of these was Fouzia Bouanane, a Moroccan cleaning lady who worked on the executive floors. Bouanane had been talking about her desire to become a make-up artist for several years. Everyone discouraged her, but Bouanane began taking courses after hours despite the time constraints of being a single, working mom.

Ailes spotted her, admired her drive, and after talks with Human Resources, set in motion the new program in 2003. “Fouzia was our first apprentice,” says Maureen Hunt, vice president of human resources. “She was taking make-up classes after work and told someone about her dream to become a make-up artist.” To achieve that, Fouzia was moved into the make-up department and began intensive work learning all the necessary skills and being mentored by one of the top make-up artists. By the end of her 12-month “intensive” apprenticeship, she was ready to move into a permanent position as a make-up artist. Today, she is one of the network’s most sought-after make-up artists.

“Fouzia provides make-up for some of our top talent like Bill O’Reilly, who insists on using her,” says Hunt. “This apprentice program was the only way she could make the leap into the make-up department.”

Hunt points out that FOX—like many other broadcast organizations—likes to cultivate people from the ground up. “We’re really a homegrown group,” she says. When it comes to achieving a major increase in the number of minorities at FCN, she comments, “The only way we’d be successful on that scale would be to grow them internally.” That is exactly what the apprentice program sets out to do: identify high potential minority employees and then give them the additional training needed to move up.

Fouzia was joined by three other employees joined in the first apprentice class: Francisco Cortes, a production assistant who is now in charge of the graphics interfaces for 32 FOX news

shows nationwide; Kayleaser Moss, a freelance production assistant who is now an associate producer for FOX News Channel in New York; and Tisha Lewis, who is

now working at an NBC affiliate as a reporter. In 2004 the program consisted of another four apprentices, and in 2006 it expanded to five.

All 13 of the people who have gone through the program are still in the broadcast business: 12 at FOX and one at the NBC affiliate. All have worked their way up from their initial jobs, some from the position of production assistants paid \$12-per-hour to jobs with salaries ranging from \$40,000 a year to much higher.

Program selects talented people

How does the apprentice program work? Executives identify promising minority employees who have demonstrated talent, drive, and potential. It’s clear that what they need is mentoring and training to move up the ladder, and that is what the program can provide. Once the employee is nominated and joins the program, he or she spends 12 months as an apprentice, either in one department or several areas. The apprentice works alongside the rest of the staff doing a variety of tasks and taking on increasing responsibility. Apprentices are welcomed because they are an extra pair of hands in a very time-pressured business. Also, they are paid out of a different pot of money.

Each apprentice has a formal mentor (frequently the apprentice’s supervisor) who meets regularly with the apprentice to provide feedback, ideas, and coaching on how to build skills and move ahead. Sharri Berg, now senior vice president of news operations for the FOX Television Stations Group, was mentor to Franky Cortes, one of the employees in the first apprentice class. Cortes says that the mentoring he received from Berg was critical in his ability to move ahead from the freelance work he was doing when he entered the company to his present position as a manager. Cortes met like clockwork with Berg regularly each week on Fridays.

The key is good mentoring

“We shared and talked about issues and problems,” says Berg looking back. “I gave him my advice and take on things. How he could step up and take more responsibility. I



Roger Ailes, Chairman and CEO, wanted to create a program that helps talented minorities move ahead in his company. “I call it a unity program. It gives opportunity to people who should have it. And one day each of these people will reach back and pull others along.”

also talked about his future. I told stories about the beginning of my career and tried to explain how I responded to different situations.”

Cortes recalls the meetings the same way. “We talked about things that came up in the news and pressures of handling things,” he reminisces. “Sharri gave me advice on all that.” But then he adds, “She really has all the knowledge in the world about this business.”

The apprentice program provides other benefits to participants. It has offered seminars on supplemental skills such as how to present yourself in business situations. And with Roger Ailes’ support and encouragement behind it, the apprentices have had unusual access to upper management and advice from senior executives.

The graduation ceremony

This year the largest class ever graduated from the program—four African Americans and one Hispanic employee. FOX held a graduation ceremony on September 27 for the class in one of its corporate dining rooms. Roger Ailes was there along with FOX News senior staff, each apprentice, and their mentors. Ailes addressed the entire group and his remarks were followed by comments from each apprentice. Those at the event say that two apprentices, Victor Garcia and Keith Hemmings, gave particularly moving speeches. Each graduate received an engraved crystal star from Tiffany, a certificate and a check worth \$500.

Even more important, all five now have jobs with more responsibility and potential than they started out with—thus fulfilling the aim of the program. That is an impressive track record for a new program still in its pilot stages. It suggests that traditional internships and diversity programs should be supplemented with a combination of practical training and proactive coaching—a good way to increase minority representation in broadcasting.

However, some might say that the apprentice program is only a drop in the bucket. After all, it has only graduated 13 people. Or they might point out that more minorities are already enter-

Greta Van Susteren

FAME AND SUCCESS DOESN'T STOP THIS ANCHOR FROM BEING A COMMITTED MENTOR



For generations, men have mentored men. This has usually meant white men mentoring young white men—an activity which conferred great advantages on the participants, and left women and minorities out in the cold, even as they were entering the work force in larger numbers.

Now, that paradigm is changing. As more women and minorities climb the corporate ladder they are reaching back and pulling women and those of color along with them. A case in point is FOX News Greta Van Susteren. Yes, Van Susteren is a hard-nosed news anchor, one of the most prominent, tough, and insightful anchors on prime time television with her own show, *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*. But she is also committed to diversity in the newsroom.

“There are still too many white people in the media,” she explains. “We need diversity. We don’t want to look at the news through only one ethnic background.”

Most recently, Van Susteren helped change that mix by encouraging her own assistant, Cory Howard, to get out of her “comfort” zone and advance. She describes Cory as “very capable and unflappable” and says she wrestled with the possibility of losing her. Finally, she decided to push the young woman up and out of the nest.

“I told her she couldn’t stay so long as my assistant,” Van Susteren says. Soon after that Cory was asked to join the FOX Apprentice Program, and move to New York from Washington, D.C. to take part in it. Now over a year later, Howard is back in D.C., where she is an associate producer/booker for *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*. Van Susteren is delighted to have her back.

“You get so bound up in work that sometimes you forget you need to take time to bring people up through the ranks,” Van Susteren says. “Now I get to watch them win.”

Inspiring graduates

Francisco (Franky) Cortes,
PRODUCTION MANAGER AND GRAPHICS PRODUCER



Franky Cortes started out as a freelancer in the overnight tape department. His first day of work at FOX News coincided with the Columbine shooting. Instead of deterring him, the event made him more committed. Franky became part of the first apprentice class of 2003, and that experience helped him move ahead quickly. Today, he leads a team of nine people and is responsible for the graphics interfaces with 32 FOX news shows nationwide. His advice to others: "You have to have a work ethic. You can't expect the door to open for you if you don't have a positive attitude."

Fouzia Bouanane,
SENIOR MAKE-UP ARTIST



Fouzia Bouanane inspired the Apprenticeship Program. For seven years she worked at FOX News in the cleaning department on the executive floor. Although she started taking courses to train herself as a make-up artist, her dream of changing careers seemed far away. But things changed for this Moroccan single mother and when Roger Ailes himself noticed her, and, soon after, FOX created the Apprenticeship Program and asked her to join it. The training she received enabled her to land a good job as a senior make-up person. Her advice: "You should follow your dream. It's not easy, but when you like something it's worth it. You have to be good at your job, show your supervisor respect, be on time. If you want to move on, this is a great company to ask about it."

Cory Howard,
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER/BOOKER,
ON THE RECORD WITH GRETA VAN SUSTEREN



Cory Howard joined FOX News as an intern in Washington, D.C. right after graduation from Howard University. Her talent and drive were recognized almost immediately and she soon became assistant to one of FOX's most prestigious anchors, Greta Van Susteren. Then she was asked to join the Apprenticeship Program which required a move to New York, so that she could be part of the formal program and gain experience there. Now she's back in Washington working for Van Susteren as an associate producer/booker for *On the Record with Greta*

Susteren. Cory's advice: "Take advantage of opportunities like this. Put yourself in a position to jump start your career, and follow your mentor's advice." [See Van Susteren box on previous page.]

Keith Hemmings,
TECH OP ENGINEER FOR FOX & FRIENDS AND FOX LIVE

At Boston College, it looked like Keith Hemmings was headed for a football career. But when an injury cut those hopes short, he decided to major in communications and seek out a broadcasting career. He joined FOX 5's training program and was then invited to join the 2006 apprentice class. After stints in several departments, Keith graduated in October, and is now a Tech Op Engineer for *FOX & Friends* and *FOX Live*. His advice: "Once you are in a good place, you make your own path. It's up to you what direction you want to go in. A lot of people don't understand this or see the big picture. That's what I see right now."



"You want to have some success that lives beyond you. I'll be very proud of it for the rest of my life."

- ROGER AILES

ing newsrooms in entry-level, internship-type positions. These critics might also take a swipe at FOX News, since it is considered a very conservative in its news coverage.

Roger Ailes takes issue with such thinking. He is very clear about the need for this type of program: to provide greater opportunity than summer internships or entry-level jobs. He wanted to create a program that helps talented minorities of different ages and backgrounds move ahead in his company. And, in fact, when people ask him about his "diversity" apprentice program, he shoots back, "I call it a unity program. It gives opportunity to people who should have it. And one day each of these people will reach back and pull others along."

Ailes believes the program could be a model for other companies. "I believe that private industry has to step up. All progress is made by some individual who follows through," he observes. "This program could one day be a model for American business. You wouldn't need so much government interference."

Clearly, Ailes feels strongly about this program on a number of levels, and that is why he stays so involved. It may be surprising for someone who has already achieved so much as a top broadcast executive and influential political advisor. But the Apprenticeship Program is close to his heart. "You want to have some success that lives beyond you. These kids are smart. I'll be very proud of it for the rest of my life," he explains.

