

-Angela Mayfield

Unequal access to educational resources is a significant issue in my community that I would like to make a positive impact on. Children cannot decide into which family they are born, or the level of access to education they will have. Unfortunately, without access to a good education, opportunities for higher education and employment become severely limited, causing poverty to continue in a generational cycle. Last year, I was invited to a fundraiser for Reading Partners and a shocking statistic from the National Assessment of Educational Progress was shared, stating that “nationwide, only 20 percent of low-income students, and 34 percent of students overall, are reading proficiently by the fourth grade.”¹

As a business leader, access to education is important because of its impact on workplace diversity. For most, it is human nature to gravitate towards people with similar backgrounds. This can create homogenous organization, where fostering creativity can be a challenge. One benefit of having a diverse, open-minded environment is that it can drive business innovation. Research by McKinsey and Co. has found that “for companies ranking in the top quartile of executive-board diversity, ROEs (returns on equity) were 53% higher, on average, than they were for those in the bottom quartile.”² To benefit from these differences, there needs to be a proper pipeline of diverse talent. This starts with providing early access to good education for all. Going back to school for my Executive MBA from NYU Stern will improve my leadership skills and capabilities to impact change.

I have identified a bottom-up and top-down approach, leveraging my education, leadership skills and the resources of the advertising industry to address this issue. My bottom-up approach includes continued involvement in programs like the Multicultural Advertising Intern Program, the Advertising Club of New York and Reading Partners. Through these programs, I

¹ <https://readingpartners.org/the-literacy-challenge/>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/is-there-a-payoff-from-top-teamdiversity>

mentor college students and help educate younger students on the skills needed for future success.

From a top-down approach, improving access to education can come from advertising agencies and businesses holding each other accountable. I would do this by working with advertisers with strong values and purpose. In my previous job, I worked with General Mills on their Box Tops for Education program, which allowed schools to earn over \$868 million in support of education³. I see an opportunity for brands to take advantage of the proliferation of screens and increasing global connectivity, to spread digital learning materials. This would both positively impact access to education across the globe and drive business success, particularly as Millennials have shown strong support for brands with a cause.

Earning my MBA increases my community influence and allows me to better approach education and the development of a diverse talent pipeline from a top-down and bottom-up perspective. This will create a greater opportunity to use my leadership skills and industry involvement to help break the poverty cycle through education. People of all backgrounds deserve the chance to succeed, and without providing access to better education, we are doing everyone a disservice.

³ <https://www.boxtops4education.com/about/history>