

“None of us who started that program left the same way... We are changed by the ways that we have faced adversity and the way we've had to overcome things”- Jordan Haynes

Community Letters

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Jordan Haynes, National Urban Fellow,
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In October 2022, I met Jordan at a graduate school fair. When he didn't submit his application, I reached out to see why. He shared devastating news - his wife had just passed away. In that moment of grief and uncertainty, I extended our application deadline by a week. Something about NUF's mission resonated with Jordan, offering a way forward when he needed it most.

At the National Urban League, Jordan was paired with mentor Traci Scott '05, Vice President of Workforce Development. Seeing him wrestle with leadership insecurities that many of us face, Traci challenged Jordan to write down a mantra every single day: "I do not need to be liked, to do my job and to do what is right." Those words became his North Star, helping him discover what I had learned during my own fellowship - that true leadership isn't about approval, it's about impact.

Twelve years after my own fellowship experience at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, I returned to NUF with a mission: to identify and recruit the next generation of transformative leaders. In Jordan, I saw what my mentors must have seen in me - raw potential ready to be shaped by NUF's unique blend of rigor and support. As Jordan puts it, "We're in a fight of our lives and we're never going to get through that unless we have leaders who are culturally competent and have some grit."

This is NUF's transformative power. At a time when equity initiatives face increasing challenges, we're developing leaders with both the competence and courage to stand firm. Today, Jordan and other recent Fellows are ready to do the same.

Jordan's daily mantra - "I do not need to be liked, to do my job and to do what is right" - isn't just about personal leadership. It's about the courage we all need right now to stand up for equity and justice.