

Corey Andrew Powell (00:03):

I am so happy to be joined today by Oladotun Idowu — I think I said her name correctly? Hopefully I was close enough and she is a graduate of SI NewHouse school of public communications at Syracuse university. She started Sisters in Media in the hopes of giving young women of color and opportunity to thrive in media and creative environments. Ola, welcome to Motivational Mondays.

Oladotun Idowu (00:24):

Hi, thanks for having me.

Corey Andrew Powell (00:26):

Well, it is my pleasure. And, um, was I close on the name? At least?

Oladotun Idowu (00:29):

You were close. You were close. Not quite, but you were, you were 80% there.

Corey Andrew Powell (00:35):

Okay, cool. I'm gonna work on that other 20. I'm just gonna like, just text you one day.

Oladotun Idowu (00:39):

Exactly, I'll give you the phonetics

Corey Andrew Powell (00:41):

Yes, exactly. So, okay. Well, moving right along, you are doing so many great things. My sister, you have been named by Forbes in their prestigious 30, under 30 in 2022. So congratulations on that. Thank you. You're very welcome. That's very impressive. And so you're an expert in marketing, strategic communications and publicity with a focus on television and film. So I'm curious to know just when your interest in media began.

Oladotun Idowu (01:09):

Yeah, honestly it began ever since I was a child and I was obsessed with The Backstreet Boys. Like honestly, like I just loved TV so much from, you know, when I was a Childs and then I went to boarding school and that still was like, it was that phase of before boarding schools. It was a phase of like Nickelodeon. Then it was a phase of Disney. Then it was a phase of like the Twilight movies. And then it was a phase of anything pop culture. I was just a fan of, and when I was a senior in high school, I started to have like a nervous break down because I was just like, I don't know what I wanna do. I just, I, I don't, I don't know what I'm gonna, like, what am I gonna study in college? Like, I really don't know.

Oladotun Idowu (01:51):

And my guidance counselor said, well, what do you like? And I said, well, I like to watch TV. I like to help people, but I can't be a doctor. And, you know, I can be a lawyer. I'm like, I didn't, I was like knocking things out. And she was just like, well, why don't you think of companies you wish you could like work for and think about interning there and, and figure it out from there. And because I really loved helping people. And I also liked kids and I liked entertainment, I thought, why don't I intern at the Make-A-Wish foundation? It seems like perfect. You know, they, yeah. Bring like celebrity guests to meet the kids. The kids get happy. It's like everybody wins. In college, I was able to intern for Make-A-Wish foundation. And I remember it being a really great experience, but I like kept crying.

Oladotun Idowu (02:41):

I was just too emotional. So I decided maybe I shouldn't do this work. Yeah. But, um, I went to Syracuse and I discovered they had a great media program. And I was just like, let me give that a shot. Did the media program and was opened like, literally my eyes opened like, wow, there's so many different jobs out there. Like, I felt like there's no

way I could be in media or entertainment because I'm not a singer and not an actress and I'm, you know, I'm not trying to be a director. So then what can I possibly be doing? And didn't realize like, there are things you can promote, you can do marketing, you can do events. And, you know, once I realized the opportunities were endless, then I felt a little bit more confident and comfortable.

Corey Andrew Powell (03:25):

Now you've also in a podcast I listened to, it's really funny because I had a similar situation. I think you mentioned your parents. Well, you you're from Nigeria, right? You're both your parents.

Oladotun Idowu (03:35):

Both. My parents are from Nigeria. Yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell (03:36):

Yes. And you mentioned in this podcast, guess I think it was 'Cuse Conversations' that your parents don't really, or maybe they do now, but they didn't really know what you did. They were just kind of like, she goes to work, she gets a paycheck and that's it. We don't know what she does though.

Oladotun Idowu (03:51):

No, if you ask my mom, what does your daughter do? She would just be like, "She works at Twitter." And they ask like, what exactly does she do a Twitter? She said, yeah [inaudible]. But yeah, my parents are not industry people. And, that's fine by me. I mean, they came to this country in the eighties and my mom has been since then working in the nursing field. And my dad was, you know, in interested in more like construction. So their professional background is not this. And then also, if you are from any African household or any like foreign households, you know, that they only really consider like doctor and lawyer and engineer as like real jobs.

Oladotun Idowu (04:32):

Yeah. But I was really blessed because my parents are like, when I told them what I was interested in doing, they just supported me. Never did my mom or dad say, I don't think that this is the career you should be pursuing. And that's just like the faith that they had in me and the faith that they knew in my work ethic and, and how they knew like, listen, if Dotun and that's what they call me. If Dotun wants something, she'll go for it and she'll work hard. So whatever she does, we support her. And when I started Sisters in Media, my dad — biggest supporter, he is truly a fan of the work that I do. I don't know if he loves the work. I just know that he supports it and they do it for all of us. You know, every single one of my siblings have been supported by my parents. And I'm really blessed cuz that's not really the typical Nigerian upbringing, they're are a lot of people who grow up in house home, like good example is, I don't know if you know, Yvonne Orji from 'Insecure', the woman who plays Molly. Yeah. She's Nigerian as well. And she was pursuing a career in like medicine. Um, she was like a biology major. She has a medicine background and told her mom, you know what, I'm not gonna pursue medicine anymore. After college, I'm going to go to New York and be a comedian.

Oladotun Idowu (05:48):

Her parents were like, what? Like, no, this is not what we planned for. So I never had, never had an experience where I said, mom, like, this is what I want and this is what I'm gonna do. And I never heard them say like, I don't think you should do that. They just would be like, OK. They just trust me. And I'm so grateful to God that I was able to be born into this family.

Corey Andrew Powell (06:11):

Now I do wanna get into sisters and media. But first I wanna ask you about your current role. You are the Entertainment Content Partner Manager at Twitter. So what is that role? Exactly. And what does it entail?

Oladotun Idowu (06:25):

Yeah. So at Twitter we have two entertainment teams and one team is focused on partnerships and relationships with our VITs, which we call very important tweeps. So like celebrities and the other team, which I'm on is focused on revenue. So my job is to make sure that I'm working with partners, TV, partners, entertainment, partners, um, and making sure that I'm selling their content on our platform. Um, and we're making money based on it. So I'm not technically a seller. I'm not on the sales team, but I am on the partnerships team. So my job is to work with our media sales team, my partners like, you know, A&E, AMC, any network and Hey, you have a cool video clip for the Walking Dead. And it's an exclusive clip, let's work with, I don't know, Wendy's

Corey Andrew Powell (07:15):

Right. Make a zombie burger campaign.

Oladotun Idowu (07:18):

Yeah. Let's, let's do a pre-roll, which is basically a commercial of Wendy's five seconds on Twitter and people like you, users will scroll, you'll see the five second ad of Wendy. And after the five second ad of Wendy, you'll see the exclusive Walking Dead clip. And that is how, um, our amplified program works. And that's basically my job and, you know, it's revenue based. So my goal and my role is to make as much money and our other team's goal is to make sure we're building and cultivating these relationships. So, and, and that's my goal too, you know, I love what I do. And I also wanna make sure that I'm focusing on organic moments too. Let's say we, we don't have a opportunity to make money necessarily with the Walking Dead, but how about we just pull in the cast and have the spaces and just talk about this new episode and get fans excited. So that's my job. Um, and it's cool, especially because I'm an avid TV watcher. I watch literally everything. So, so far all of the partners I've been working with, I'm like, I know your content and nothing is like, like, oh, I have no idea what this show is. I actually know.

Corey Andrew Powell (08:28):

Right.

Oladotun Idowu (08:29):

So it actually works in my favorite all those days I was watching TV paid off.

Corey Andrew Powell (08:33):

I was just gonna say, that's, what's so funny because you know, you started off saying, you love TV, you love media. Yeah. And that is the, the full sermon that you are working in. It, it is. And now you're one of the purveyors, if you will, in that industry, it's sort of like I got told my whole life, you know, um, you talk too much. Yeah.

Oladotun Idowu (08:49):

And now you're making a living from talking too much

Corey Andrew Powell (08:51):

I pretty much get paid to talk. So it's pretty cool.

Oladotun Idowu (08:54):

I don't need to get preachy, but I'm gonna say it. Cause it came in my heart. If God puts something in you or, you know, whatever, you know, if something is in you and you love it and it brings you joy and it's a passion of yours and you're like, man, why do I love this thing so much? It's gonna be used for good. Like, and it's gonna be a blessing to someone else. Like, yeah, you love to talk and people sometimes complain about it, but you have a great time talking. You have a great time communicating with people and that's what you're doing for a living now you're inputting what was you're outputting, what was inputting to you and that's the biggest blessing. So yeah.

Corey Andrew Powell (09:31):

Thank you. No, I appreciate that. It is true because, um, you know, I hear that a lot of times with people who have kind of turned things that were sort of, um, adversity in their lives into a career they loved. And, um, yes, we are blessed to do that. And I know that you are deeply rooted in your faith. So I appreciate that you have shared that with me. So thank you.

Oladotun Idowu (09:51):

Thank you.

Corey Andrew Powell (09:52):

No, getting to Sisters in Media. I know how, how that emerged, but I wanna first begin by asking you about when you graduated. I know you spoke about, you got your first, I guess at that time considered your big dream job, NBC universal, and then you get there and you sort of, you know, you're vibing and you digging it, like this is good, but then you look around, you're like, I really wish there were a few more people that looked like me. Yeah. Here. So tell me about that experience. And what is the feeling you had of that missing component of having others around that maybe identified with you or be it physically or, um, through the similar background or what have you?

Oladotun Idowu (10:30):

First of all, Corey I really appreciate this because you've done your research and I feel like so honored.

Corey Andrew Powell (10:36):

Awwwww

Oladotun Idowu (10:37):

I'm like I've never done an interview before where someone like actually did their research on me. I feel so honored. So thank you so much for being clever and smart and thorough. I feel like honored. You don't even understand.

Corey Andrew Powell (10:48):

Well, thank you. Okay. Let's have a fanboy moment here for me, because I think you are so awesome. And I was researching you like this girl is so awesome. I am not going to messed this up, so, okay. It's all love, love Fest.

Oladotun Idowu (11:00):

Aw, thank you. Oh my gosh. That means so much. Yeah. So I, um, when I was at NBC, I was so green and I'm like, there are not, and this is your first time and this is for students, right? When you go outside of college, the world looks different from in your college. And listen, I went to a predominantly white school, Syracuse university, like 80% white, but I placed myself in circles where I didn't notice that unless I was in class, like all my friends were black. I joined only black programs. Like I was in NABJ —National Association of Black Journalists. I joined African student unions. And so I was surrounded by only black people. And then, you know, obviously in classes, when I went to New House classes, it was then white students, but I kind of like just phased that part of my life out.

Oladotun Idowu (11:51):

So then when I go to NBC and I'm like, wait, first of all, work is eight hours a day. I'm at work more than I'm at home. More than I'm hanging out with friends, which is not really the case in college. In college, you have a, you have a class, but most of the time, like, you know, people in the class, that's like, you're, once again, you're hanging out with your, of black colleagues in class. Right. And then you hanging out with them in the social scene. This was the first time in my life where I was put in a space where I'm really a minority and it's forever, like, cuz I'm always gonna work until I'm like 65, like until I retire. And so that was kind of like, it was difficult cuz you know, white people don't have to worry about those spaces, white people, wherever they go, they're gonna always be the majority.

Oladotun Idowu (12:38):

And so uncomfortable, isn't something that they have to worry about. We're all people, you know, we're all working at NBC because I think we're all fans of TV. Right That's why we all chose to work here. But at the workspace, that's not what it was like. You know, I would come back and I was so naive, but I would come back from like the weekend and be so excited to talk about like the B E T awards, like, oh my gosh, did you see when Kanye did this at the B E T awards? And everybody's like, my coworkers are like we didn't watch the B E T awards. And I'm like what? It was trending on Twitter. But I'm referring to black Twitter and they're like, what's Black Twitter?

Corey Andrew Powell (13:16):

If it wasn't Taylor swift, they have no idea.

Oladotun Idowu (13:17):

Right? Exactly. And you know one thing I found that so annoying only because, it's fine. Cuz if it's for us, it's by us. Like, it is fine. Like that's our thing. I love our culture, but I watch the Oscars. I watch the golden Globes. I watch the Grammys, I watch the Critic Choice Awards, SAG awards, things that it's predominantly white people that are part of those programs. And I'm like, well, I'm watching it because I'm a fan of TV. Like I think the only thing I'm not watching is like the Country Music Awards and the Latin Grammys because I don't speak Spanish. Um, but yeah, so I, I felt like dag, this is it's kind of feeling, you know? And then there were things that they would talk about. I didn't know what SoulCycle was until I graduated college. I was like, what's SoulCycle?

Oladotun Idowu (14:00):

And I felt dumb asking that cause they were like, what do you mean what's SoulCycle? That's like "the thing." And it's just a cultural shift. It really is. Like, I wasn't raising the same way that they was like the food that they were eating, I wasn't eating that type of food. I was like, well, what's that? I felt like, you know, I felt so embarrassed cuz I was just like, I'm starting to see a clear identifier in like the economic shift between how they were raised and how I was raised growing up in a lower middle class family. Growing up someone who, I did not grow from a really nice neighborhood in Brooklyn and then in Queens. Um, and they don't have that experience. So they know about restaurants. Their parents go to like restaurants. My parents don't go to restaurants like right. Yeah. My dad takes my mom to IHOP for her birthday.

Corey Andrew Powell (14:54):

And that's like splurging, right?

Oladotun Idowu (14:56):

That's splurging, they don't do like restaurant restaurants. Like, um, and, and that was new to me. And it was, it was difficult, but then I discovered employee resource groups. And then I discovered, Listen, you, you make your own experience. Like you wanna sulk in the corner and feel alone, then that's by all means your experience. But if you wanna go around the office and find every black girl you see and be like, hey, can we be friends [inaudible] together? Then that's another thing. And I'm still friends with some of my NBC employees to this day and the black ones because we connected. We all, like I thought it was just me, but then we talked to each other. I'm like, oh, like we're all thinking it? Yeah. And, and that's how you built community.

Corey Andrew Powell (15:40):

Well, it's interesting there because that's a clear identifier for the brand that there was something, uh, well I don't wanna use the term wrong, but there was room for improvement. If you have women of color or people of color joining your organization and they're like kind of gotta go to other departments and be like, well, could I find someone who looks like me? Just, just kind of feel a little bit like I fit in. Then that brings up the whole conversation about diversity and inclusion, which is why you emerged to build your Sisters in Media platform. And I think it's great because the whole idea about be the change you want to see in the world. It sounds cliché, but you literally did that.

And so tell me how that experience then manifested into you creating Sisters in Media and the mission of Sisters in Media.

Oladotun Idowu (16:26):

Absolutely. So the purpose of sisters and media is to increase the presence of women of color in media while making valuable contribution to our community and society at large, I felt that I needed to do this only because when I was at NBC, I realized, like I said, I was super green, super naive. Didn't understand what nepotism was, but like boy did NBC open my eyes to it. Mm. And I didn't realize like, wow, like if you know people, you have advantages, like whether you're talented or not. If you're talented and you don't know people, it might be harder for you to break in. And that is something that was so crazy to me. I was just like, wait, I experienced it too. I'm not even gonna say that I'm excluded from that. I got my job at NBC. Been applying, you know, sent out email cold emails, let people know I'm a Syracuse alum.

Oladotun Idowu (17:21):

And then I sent a cold email to a random woman and she was just like, okay, I'll help you — random. I like a random lady on LinkedIn. I was like hey, I see you work at Bravo. And I really wanna work there, I see that they have a opening. I came from Syracuse. I really think I'd be great. She was just like, okay, let's do lunch. And this woman's name is Jennifer. She was great white woman. She just was like, okay. And she brought me in, she connected me and didn't get the job at Bravo. But because I interviewed with Bravo, the recruiter now had my, my resume on filed and referred me to USA network. And now got my job there. So technically nepotism worked in my favor. It's not like I applied and got an email back. Like never in my life. I've been working since 2014, never in my life did I get a job from applying? Like just applied, sat down and got an email back. Never, never. Every job I've gotten, it was through a referral, somebody knew me. So like it's never through just me applying. And that's just the nature of the beast. And when I realized that I was like, wow, what is if my mom was in the industry, where would I be? And like, what if, what if my dad was the executive? Where would I be? Also thinking about the kids who their parents are from this industry? And I'm like, bro, you're not even really that talented. And you got this role because you knew somebody.

Corey Andrew Powell (18:48):

We've seen a lot of those.

Oladotun Idowu (18:50):

Kind of mediocre. Like you don't even work that hard. You don't even like break your back. And you know, a part of me was kind of like envious for those years. Just looking at people like this is so unfair. Like, a majority of these industry leaders are white, right? So that's the cycle of not seeing so many people that look like you because the leaders are bringing in their people and the leaders are white and their people most likely are gonna be white. You know? And I thought like, this is so unfair. And then I thought, no, but if you were a CEO of some company who you hiring? And I said, you're right, I'm hiring my people. Like, so I can't be that upset you because you know, when it's my turn, better believe my whole squad is gonna look colorful. I thought, wow, I wish I could create an organization that can be like the CEO of something that can help these women get into organizations, get into companies and get jobs and internships and create mentorship relationships.

Oladotun Idowu (19:52):

I even felt like a little bit discouraged because for me, I like, I lean on wisdom from people who've already experienced it. And at my job, I didn't see any other black women. You don't need your mentor to be the same race and background as you at all. But for me, I wanted like when I look for a therapist, I want her to be a black woman. I would love for her to be Christian. If she's not whatever, but like I want her to be able to sit in the same type of experience as me. So that there's a little bit more to relate to. So when I'm looking for a professional mentor and I'm like, I wanna black woman it's because I know that she's gonna be able to understand when I tell her, you know, this woman touched my hair and I felt uncomfortable, or I didn't like how they didn't wanna talk about race in this meeting.

Oladotun Idowu (20:40):

Like, she'll be sensitive to that because she's also a woman and she's also black. So that's how I seek mentorship. You do not, I'm not saying —not everyone needs to do that. But that's what I wanted. And so I built this as a media on those foundation, like the foundation of mentor and mentee relationship, um, and the foundation of networking and making sure that we are allowing people to meet the right people so they can get interviews, so that they can have opportunities, so they can have one on ones, so they can get jobs at the end of the day.

Corey Andrew Powell (21:14):

Thank you for listening to Motivational Mondays presented by the national society of leadership and success and available wherever you listen to your favorite podcast. I'm Corey Andrew Powell, and I'll see you again here next week.