

Leaders to Learn From

Monique Rhodes

Director, Communications, Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), Prudential

“I come from a family of strong, passionate and resilient women. My mom is one of five girls, and I am one of three girls. During childhood I had the opportunity to see my grandmother, mom and my aunts pursue different career paths, raise children, and support their families and community. This inspired me to do the same.” Monique Rhodes is a Director, Communications in the Office of the CIO at Prudential Financial. After joining the company in 1998, her path to reach where she is today was not a traditional one. “I’m a creative. I never thought that I could build such a fun and engaging career at a 140+ year old Financial Services company. I’ve been at the company for 20 years and half of that time has been spent in technology. It’s been exciting to see how technology has changed in the last ten years. What’s kept me here is the great people, mentors, learning opportunities and varied experiences.”



Her Pathway to a STEM Career

While in school at the School of Communications at Rutgers University (Douglass College), Monique worked at the Rutgers Computing Facilities – Computer Lab. There she helped students and faculty to use the different software on the computers, and also resolved any computer issues.

During her junior year she applied for an internship through a program called ‘INROADS’ and landed an internship at Prudential. INROADS is a highly competitive program that seeks high performing students for internship opportunities with some of the nation’s largest companies. The rigorous career development training process challenges students to commit to excellence and raise the bar on their personal expectations. After graduating with a degree in Communications, Liberal Arts, Monique knew she wanted to return to Prudential and “every year, I see hundreds of students come through our summer intern program, and I have this connection with them, especially the technology students, because I know what this opportunity means for them.” I’m thankful to have an opportunity to sponsor and mentor some of them, to support and amplify programs that make a difference in people’s lives, and to help to build a diverse pipeline of STEM talent.”

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Her Process

As someone who took a completely different path from her major, Monique is sympathetic to those who are unsure what they want to do next. She has a three-step plan which has been crucial in her own life: look in, look out, and engage.

- **Look in** - Write down or take note of what excites you, write down when you receive compliments on something you do, write down what you enjoy doing, write down what drains you, and takes away energy from you. All of this will help you stay in tune and remain your authentic self. You can also look back and see how you've grown and evolved.
- **Look out** - Be curious. Talk to others, ask people about their stories and their interests. This may help you learn about possibilities you didn't know about. There is always something you can learn from others.
- **Engage** - There is no one way to find what you love. I found my love of technology because I was open minded and willing to try something. Find creative ways to try things out you haven't tried before. You may just find what you want to do.

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Advice for Future Leaders

At Prudential, Monique is currently responsible for internal communications, event planning, and helping to build awareness and use of technology at the company. She supports the company's Global Chief Information Officer in engaging more than 7000 technology associates and driving the organization's technology and talent strategies. While there, she has had the ability to work closely with great leaders who have been mentors to her showing her traits such as empathy, the ability to be self-aware, being an inclusive listener and always striving to be bold and brave. As a leader and mentor herself, Monique has taken these qualities in stride.

“I like to advocate for good work going on within the company that will make a difference in the organization and add business value, while at the same time, enhancing the lives of others. (I'm thinking of the wonderful STEM partnerships we have and how these will not only impact Prudential but the industry, and those who pursue STEM careers). I enjoy seeing people on my team and in the organization learn and grow and find opportunities for them to use their various skills and talents to achieve the work that they are passionate about. I also enjoy advocating and being a mentor/coach to members of my team as well as others within the organization, especially our early talent such as summer interns and Girls Who Code students. I enjoy the process of working through challenges and coming up with creative ways to solve problems together.”

As a young woman of color who had a passion and skill for creative writing but 20 years later has found herself in a STEM career, Monique Rhodes is an inspiration for young women and girls everywhere and her successes have proven that if you work hard you may not end on the career path you thought you wanted but will find something you ultimately love.