

# Leaders to Learn From

## Yamilée Toussaint Beach

*Founder & CEO*  
**STEM From Dance**

As a graduate of MIT with a degree in mechanical engineering, it might sound surprising that Yamilée Toussaint Beach's organization is focused on dance. But that is exactly what makes her experience so unique and interesting. "STEM From Dance uses dance to get girls excited about a future in STEM. We believe that STEM allows you to be creative. It plays a role in so many aspects of things we're passionate about in life. For me, that was always dance." Following her graduation from MIT, Yamilée knew she wanted to support women of color in particular to pursue their passions. She initially did that through teaching and saw it as an opportunity to learn what was happening at the community level. And that is where the idea of combining her own passions to support the communities she most cared about came to her. She now uses dance as a means of showing young women that math and science are not dull subjects—they can be interesting and fun when applied to something you're excited about. "I was compelled by the demographics that I saw at MIT which I knew existed in other institutions; how few people of color and women and women of color studying engineering. In my whole class there were maybe 25 black women. I saw teaching as an opportunity to learn what was happening at the community level." In today's workforce Black and Latina women represent only 4% of the workforce.



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### About the Organization

Currently located in New York City, STEM From Dance gives girls of color access to a STEM education by using dance to empower, educate, and encourage them as our next generation of engineers, scientists, and techies. They do this in three ways: creating awareness, building confidence and providing the experience. Recently they launched a new signature summer program, Girls Rise Up. For two weeks, 75 girls will be able to deepen their knowledge of both STEM and dance while discovering the many ways they work together. The girls will create their own dances and integrate technology into their choreography.

## The Qualities that Make a Great Leader

- “First is of course the desire and openness to grow and change. Adaptability is so important to learn and improve continuously. Especially the leader of something that is new. In my own life the things I thought would happen since day one are very different from what it looks like now.”
- “Second is being able to balance being in the clouds and in being in murky areas. This means the ability to deal with uncertainty and navigating it but also balancing it with a clarity and a direction. I see my unique value to STEM From Dance is that I can set the direction of the ship but there are times I can be unclear about things and in the midst of figuring stuff out.”
- “Third I think a lot about building a culture and a team that is invested and excited about the work. Great leaders don’t do what they do alone.”
- “Finally, I think a sense of understanding and patience. Knowing that people make mistakes, things take longer than they can expect, not every person is going to be over the moon about an idea and that being OK. Because that can turn into resentment and a sense of entitlement, but I know what I am doing is beneficial and sometimes things take time and just making sure I extend that grace to other people I find to be important.”

## Challenges in Getting to Where You are Today?

“My greatest challenge is probably the lack of experience in the things that I’m doing. For example, prior to starting STEM From Dance I never fund raised. Currently I am the organization’s primary fund raiser. So I had to learn while doing and it has its pros and cons and I certainly wasn’t confident when I started. Also learning how to form the strategic direction, especially since we don’t have a lot of peers, getting used to that feeling of not being equipped or having that prior knowledge and being held back but continuing to lean in and drive the ship forward has been a really uplifting experience.”

## What About STEM From Dance are You Most Proud Of?

“I will always remember that as much as STEM From Dance has grown, it always started with an idea that I had, a risk that I took on. I stepped up. I took an idea I had and brought it to life and have been able to have an impact on people. Students we work with who say ‘I never thought I could be a scientist’ and staff who are able to do what they love and inspire the next generation to our funders who get to invest in this vision we have. I’m grateful that people actually appreciate it and value it. I continue to be amazed by the girls who come to love dance and engage in technology. I like helping them lean in and learn. It feels good to see them being proud of their work and realizing they are capable of doing this.”



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