

The Mayor's Office of Appointments (MOA) is dedicated to advancing the Mayor's vision of a diverse and inclusive team of senior leaders in City government. Working across all City agencies and mayoral offices, MOA serves a critical role by providing talent recruitment and development support for all levels of employees in the administration. Additionally, MOA advises the Mayor on over 300 boards and commissions that fall under his purview. Visit on.nyc.gov/resumeportal to submit your resume to MOA's Resume Portal!

SITTING DOWN WITH: COMMISSIONER GREGG BISHOP



Gregg Bishop is the Commissioner for the Department of Small Business Services (SBS). Commissioner Bishop is charged with running a dynamic City agency focused on connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building a thriving economy in neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

MOA sat down with the Commissioner to discuss his rise from digital intern at Vibe Magazine to Commissioner, his civic engagement, and how he manages it all.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Prior to your roles at SBS you had a successful career in the private sector. Can you tell us a little bit more about your career path and what motivated you to transition into public service?

I started my career accidentally. I did not have a solid plan after high school and the only college I applied to rejected me. I ended up at New York City Tech for a year and transferred to Brooklyn College where I majored in Computer Science. In 1994, I stumbled upon a new programming language called HTML and taught it to myself. I started a hip hop website later that year and used pictures from VIBE Magazine without their permission. Once they found out, they sent me a cease and desist letter. The first paragraph was full of legal jargon, but the second paragraph ended with "we like what you did, can you come in to talk?" What started as an internship, quickly turned into a full-time job offer. I decided to drop out of college and work full-time. I then spent seven and a half years working for various media companies in technology.

After September 11, 2001, I was laid off from Oxygen Media – it took me a year to find another job. I decided to return to college to complete my undergraduate degree and to continue on to my master's. As I got closer to graduation I made the decision to not go back to the private sector. I wanted to do something meaningful that wasn't just enriching shareholders. I ended up in the non-profit sector, which made it easier to transition to the public sector. I was recruited to SBS to help Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) compete for City contracts. I felt that if M/WBEs were successful they would hire within the very communities I was passionate about helping. That was what convinced me that I should start a career as a public servant.

What skills did you develop in the private sector that helped you navigate your career in City service?

The private sector teaches you accountability. It's fast paced and it's imperative that all groups are operating in sync in order for large scale initiatives to be completed on time and preferably under budget. This means communication, transparency, accountability, and a culture that is supportive of the overall mission is imperative for success. SBS had a similar culture when I joined. It was unlike other agencies, and therefore it was easy for me to fit into the culture. Change was also prevalent in my career. Working in tech forced me to adapt to new ways of thinking and delivering content. That helped my career in City service because I was always looking for new ways to deliver a service, or to figure out new ways to collaborate with our units at SBS. This constant desire for change helped me to learn about other areas of the agency, and position myself to take on new expanded roles.

You continue to hold a strong connection to your Caribbean and Brooklyn roots. How has your identity influenced your career trajectory and the way you approach your work?

Having a strong work ethic was ingrained in me as a child growing up in Grenada. I have carried that strong work ethic throughout my career. I approach work determined to make a difference for our constituents who are growing up in communities similar to the one I grew up in. In many low income communities, awareness and access to resources presents a challenge. Therefore, I'm very sensitive to how we deliver our services. We recently completed a five year strategic plan that looks at service delivery through an equity lens to address every issue. I'm proud that I was able to help ensure that no matter where in NYC you reside, our resources at SBS will be available to you.

As a Black man in a commissioner level role in City government, what career challenges have you faced on your path to Commissioner? What advice do you have for young people of color who hope to get where you are one day?

I am very fortunate that throughout my career at SBS, I've always had leadership that supported my career growth. As a result, I have instituted programs to help staff advance in their careers within the agency. Having a strong leadership bench is important, not only to the agency, but to the city at large. Our leadership should reflect the diversity of the city. My advice to young people of color is to let your work speak for you. You need to work hard, and in many cases above and beyond what the job description outlines. You need to be inquisitive, don't operate in silos, and most importantly speak up. I'm always supportive of someone that is clear on what they want to accomplish.

SBS provides various programs for workforce development and small businesses in NYC. What are some of the initiatives SBS is implementing to advance equity and access in underserved communities?

SBS is focused on accomplishing its goals with an emphasis on equity of opportunity and reaching underrepresented groups. To achieve these aims, SBS continues to prioritize our outreach efforts, such as Chamber On-the-Go and the new Mobile Outreach Unit. Targeted programming, such as WE NYC, which is an initiative aimed at helping women entrepreneurs overcome barriers and succeed by providing networking opportunities, mentoring opportunities, one-on-one financial counseling, access to capital, and leadership workshops. Additionally, SBS provides workforce training for growing industries, like the Bilingual Medical Assistant Training and Bridge to Tech (an introductory training in web development class), the M/WBE program, and services for immigrant entrepreneurs.

In addition to your role at SBS, you are the Chairman of the Board for the Red Hook Initiative (RHI), a non-profit organization that supports youth development and employment opportunities in Brooklyn. Why did you choose to become involved with RHI and how does your work as Commissioner complement your role as Chairman?

I have had the good fortune of growing up in an environment that was supportive of my success. I had mentors who advised me, allowed me to make mistakes, and helped me learn from them. Red Hook is the second largest public housing development in the city and with that comes many challenges. Those challenges create an environment that sometimes makes it difficult for young people to be successful. RHI was created to tackle those issues head on. After volunteering, I realized that the work RHI was doing connected directly to my desire to make a difference in communities of color. The same focus on building a strong leadership team as Commissioner complements my role as Chairman. At RHI we strive to provide growth opportunities for our staff, and we focus on creating a sustainable model that would be a consistent presence in the community.

Running a dynamic City agency, managing your leadership role at the Red Hook Initiative, and serving as an Adjunct Professor at Baruch College seems like it can be overwhelming at times. Who do you reach out to for advice when you are navigating professional challenges?

I still talk to my mentors. I also seek new mentors to get fresh perspectives. Having coffee (in my case tea) with fellow commissioners, non-profit leaders, or senior execs in the private sector helps me get various points of view and is a great sounding board. However, nothing beats a week away in Grenada on the beach to help clear the mind!



#LEADNYC Event

On September 18th, MOA hosted the LeadNYC Learning Series, "Managing Difficult Conversations." Organizational development experts from DoITT, Mitchell S. Davis, Senior Director of Learning & OrgDev, and Emily Johnson, Director of Talent Management, led an engaging discussion on the tools needed to manage challenging conversations in the workplace. Using role-play techniques, Mitch and Emily demonstrated the framework for effective conversations. The workshop displayed the value of active listening without judgement, empathy, and preparation when steering difficult dialogues. More than 80 employees from approximately 20 New York City agencies and Mayoral Offices were in attendance in this LeadNYC Learning Series session.

"The enemy of mastering difficult conversations is the lack of willingness to engage. You can work around this by sometimes understanding who people are and their motivations."
- Emily Johnson, Director of Talent Management at DoITT

If you are interested in attending future events, please email us at LeadNYC@appointments.nyc.gov.



APPOINTMENTS SPOTLIGHT

On July 12, 2018, Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed five members to the Nightlife Advisory Board. Mayor de Blasio's five appointees include individuals from all parts of the nightlife industry, from renowned disc jockey, DJ Tikka Masala, to small business owner, Luisa Torres. These appointees, working in conjunction with nine New York City Council Speaker appointees, will advise the newly created Office of Nightlife on issues related to the nightlife economy. In addition, the advisory board will make recommendations on how to improve policies that impact nightlife establishments.

NYC Service
nyc.gov/service

NYC POLICY IN ACTION

NYC Service is a division of the Mayor's Office that is helping to move Mayor de Blasio's [One NYC Goals](http://on.nyc.gov/one-nyc-goals) forward in creative and powerful ways.

On October 1, 2018, Patricia Eng was appointed as New York City's new Chief Service Officer. NYC Service will continue to promote civic engagement through the expansion of volunteer and national service opportunities under her leadership. NYC Service promotes opportunities for high school students, young adults, and community groups to get involved and help NYC neighborhoods thrive. One way NYC Service aims to promote civic engagement is through the [Love Your Block](http://on.nyc.gov/love-your-block) initiative which helps residents organize neighborhood volunteers and awards \$1,000 grants for community beautification projects.

Visit NYC Service at nyc.gov/service & register to stay up to date on volunteer resources and opportunities to [#ServeNYC](https://www.instagram.com/serve_nyc).