



# Effenus Henderson (1949-Present)

Co-Founder

**Institute for Sustainable Diversity and Inclusion**

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*“Environmental work and natural resource work may not be the field that offers the most pay, but it provides opportunities to give something back.” Effenus Henderson, 2006.*

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## Overview

Effenus Henderson is an internationally recognized global diversity thought leader and has been invited by numerous companies and organizations to share his expertise. He has addressed members of the General Assembly of the United Nations on intercultural and interreligious diversity, and also addressed a high level panel of the Alliance of Civilizations in Madrid, Spain in 2008, Istanbul Turkey in 2009 and in Doha, Qatar in 2011. In 2013, He was a speaker at the 2nd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue and Diversity in Baku, Azerbaijan which was sponsored by the UN, the government of Azerbaijan and UNESCO. He has also participated in a high level dialogue sponsored by the High Commissioner on Human Rights in preparation for the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Universal Declaration of human rights. He was part of a special panel on diversity at the VII Annual Inter-American Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility held in Punta del Este, Uruguay in December 2009. He continues to advise members of the United Nation’s Alliance of Civilization and Global Compact offices on emerging issues. Additionally, he has advised leaders of Club de Madrid’s Shared Societies Project on cross-cultural inclusion. He is co-chair of Society of Human Resource Management’s (SHRM) National Diversity and Inclusion Standards Taskforce.

*This interview was conducted in 2010.*

## Early Life and Education

Effenus Henderson was born in 1949 to Horace, a farmer and hospital employee, and Katie, a homemaker, and raised with his eleven siblings on a North Carolina farm. Henderson says his parents instilled in their children the value of hard work and education, and those ideals have shaped both his personal and professional achievements. Henderson’s mother died when he was 13 years old, and his father became the family’s sole caretaker. Henderson remembers how his father emphasized personal integrity, family teamwork, and the family’s higher good over individual pursuits; “I learned the value of self-sacrifice when family considerations were more important,” he says.

Henderson obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology from North Carolina Central University in 1971. Although he majored in psychology, he also did substantial coursework in biology. Henderson's future career began to take shape that same year, while working at a community action agency in North Carolina, where he did research, planning, and grant writing. After a year, he moved onto a position with an environmentally focused regional planning agency, where he specialized in social planning for the elderly. That agency soon faced funding cuts, however, and Henderson decided to make the move to industry. He applied to the Weyerhaeuser Company, a lumbering company known for its sustainable forestry practices, and was hired in 1973.

Henderson says that though he had dealt with environmental issues in previous jobs, coming to the Weyerhaeuser Company made environmental concerns a fundamental part of his work. Henderson first worked as a human resources representative, where he was responsible for recruiting and training minority employees. He later became a staffing representative and regional recruiter for the company, covering all of their North Carolina operations. He progressed upward through the company in a series of human resource management positions, including time spent as an international human resources officer, where he helped support Weyerhaeuser divisions in Europe and Asia.

Henderson says environmental ethics are an integral part of the operations of the Weyerhaeuser Company. "As a major employer, environmental stewardship and accountability are a core value at Weyerhaeuser Company," he says. Henderson is currently the Director of Workforce Representation and Diversity. In this capacity, he oversees the company's strategies and advises the CEO on how to build a more diverse workforce, an effort he says is critical. "Diversity is becoming more of a business imperative," he says.

## Highlights

Henderson cites a number of accomplishments as career highlights. One of those milestones was his selection to Stanford University's Executive Program in 1995. "It's an advanced management program for business executives designed to strengthen [their] understanding of business," Henderson explains. "I was one of approximately 60 students, many of whom were international students, matriculating at Stanford for the program." Another highlight was the publication of his article, *Affirmative Anchoring*, in a human resources magazine during the early 1980s. Henderson also won Weyerhaeuser Company's President Award for developing a company-wide survey process to measure employee satisfaction, and has traveled to China to participate in a study on human resources. Most recently, Henderson notes that he has had the honor of being selected as a member of the national board of trustees for the Urban League, as well as continuing work with his local Urban League Chapter. "Just getting to experience those types of things has been great," he says.

## Challenges

Henderson acknowledges that he has also faced a number of professional challenges. Mid-way through his career, the Weyerhaeuser Company experienced job cutbacks. Henderson was told by one of the company's corporate executives that his position was one of many positions being eliminated, and that he was not qualified for the position that would replace it. However, he dealt with the situation proactively. He defended his credentials for the new position, pointing to his history as a dedicated and

competent employee. The executive was impressed, and ultimately Henderson was awarded the new position. Henderson says that experience taught him a lesson: “Often times we give up too soon in situations where we should persevere,” he says. “If you don’t stand up and talk about the things you do, people won’t know and you may not get ahead. Be clear on what you want. Don’t roll over if someone doesn’t think you’re qualified for a job. Have the facts and data to support your claim. Keep track of your professional accomplishments. That was a point of learning. [It] taught me to depend on myself and my faith to get through those experiences. I’ve followed those principles... [I’ve] stayed grounded and haven’t been discouraged since.”

Henderson is involved in a variety of diversity initiatives. He is a member of the advisory board of the northwest chapter of the United Negro College Fund. He also sits on the boards of INROADS, an organization that helps identify and support minority students interested in corporate internships, and the Environmental Careers Organization (ECO). In 2005, he helped put together a study about diversity in the environmental field. Finally, the Forest Resource Council at the Tuskegee Institute recently honored Henderson and the Weyerhaeuser Company for their support of the Institute’s programs. “It was a great privilege,” Henderson notes proudly.

## **Importance of Mentoring to Career**

Henderson says his family has helped him stay focused on his professional goals. He also credits a number of mentors, both within and outside the Weyerhaeuser Company, for helping him “navigate the [corporate] culture”. This type of guidance, he notes, is very important to minorities. “Being a person of color, coming from a non-industrial background, you don’t always know the important things you need to know for corporate America,” Henderson says. “[They] helped me understand different signals...what was appropriate and inappropriate in the workplace...they [helped] me build my career.” Henderson acknowledges the significant role mentors have played in his life by becoming one himself: he has served as a mentor to fellow colleagues within the Weyerhaeuser Company, as well as university students and community members. “It’s important,” Henderson says of his work as a mentor. “It’s my way of helping others be successful.” He continues to follow the professional development of many of his mentees, and maintains a personal website that provides human resource materials on diversity-related issues. “The site is a way of giving back to people who might aspire to be human resource professionals,” he says. “[They] need to understand what resources are available to them.”

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

Henderson says there are great opportunities for young people of color interested in pursuing an environmental career. He believes young minorities can find great satisfaction in environmental and natural resource work, but says passion is the key component to success. “Have passion for the work. Environmental work and natural resource work may not be the field that offers the most pay but it provides opportunities to give something back...to help clean and protect the environment.”