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Virgin Islander and VP of IBM's North America Global Markets Makes Fortune Magazine's Coveted 40 Under 40 in Tech List

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Rashida Hodge was named among the top 40 under 40 in America by Fortune Magazine.

It was a book that sparked an interest in the career field of industrial engineering, but it was the unwavering support of her mother and the undeniable determination of a bright young woman that allowed the realization of a dream. Today, that spark has materialized to far more than she could have ever imagined, as Rashida Hodge has been named one of Fortune Magazine's 40 Under 40 in Technology, for 2020.

"I am truly humbled by the experience and it was certainly a surprise to me to be awarded with this honor," said Ms. Hodge about the recognition. "I saw that I was on this amazing list with

extraordinary people across multiple industries that are doing amazing things, so to be in the company with such dynamic people and people who are driving meaningful impact, particularly in the technology field, was very rewarding."

Born and raised on the island of St. Thomas, Ms. Hodge attended the Charlotte Amalie Highschool. There, she realized a love and aptitude for math, initially wanting to become a computer scientist. But after discovering industrial engineering through some research, Ms. Hodge knew immediately what she wanted to pursue as a career. "An engineer solves problems," she said, "and I went to my mom and said I want to be an engineer."

Years later, through hard work and determination, and through the unfaltering support of her mother, she is not only an engineer, but also VP of North America Global Markets at IBM. She started at IBM as an intern in 2002, while working on her master of science degree in industrial engineering. She later transitioned to part-time employment while finishing her degree, and then to full-time once she graduated. Ms. Hodge would also later receive her MBA from Duke University through IBM's executive MBA program.

Since then, she has had many roles at IBM; from a program manager in IBM's personal computing division, to heading up technical support for IBM's customers in Europe and Africa. She has also been to over 60 countries, including China and Slovakia, in her 18-year tenure at the company. In her role as the VP North America Global Markets, Ms. Hodge leads product integration of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies for North American clients. She is also among the youngest executives and youngest high-ranking African American women at the company — successes which caught the attention of Fortune Magazine.

Ms. Hodge attributes her success to always having her mother by her side to encourage and support her through everything. Ms. Hodge also says she has never been the type to shy away from an opportunity that would foster growth.

"I opened up myself to explore. When IBM said we want you to go to China," said an impassioned Hodge, "I didn't know anything about China, but I said yes!"

She said it was because of her willingness to say yes, to not be afraid of taking chances and exploring new things, that she is successful today. She also encourages an attitude of not limiting one's self to circumstances, another trait Ms. Hodge attributes to her mother. And her mom, who was a teen when she had Ms. Hodge, has always fostered in her daughter a mentality of determination, despite being condemned to failure by society.

"To now be able to have this type of accolade, I'm so very proud of the fact that my mother didn't give up on me...she pushed me...she helped me to educate myself on what those opportunities were. And even when I fell, she said get up, dust yourself off and keep going," said Ms. Hodge. "I certainly wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for my mom. If she didn't have the strength when she got pregnant as a teenager to keep going and to keep thriving...and to, quite frankly, give up opportunities for herself so I could have opportunities... I really dedicate this to my mother because she has just been a pillar of strength and support for me. I imagine greatness, not just goodness, but greatness because of her."

When asked what advice she would give to young people of the Virgin Islands, Ms. Hodge had two things to say. First, she said, "You are not a product of your environment, you are a product of your imagination," reiterating her attitude of taking chances and being determined no matter what life throws at you. Her second piece of advice is to never turn down opportunities, again

emphasizing the importance of taking chances. In addition to this, Ms. Hodge mentioned the importance of accepting and taking advantage of the tools and resources available. She encouraged the VI community to provide mentorship opportunities, assets, and the “opportunity to imagine” to the young, up-and-coming youth of the Virgin Islands.

In closing, Ms. Hodge said she would be more than happy to be a mentor to anyone who was interested, saying that they could reach out to her through any of her social media platforms.

Ms. Hodge has made an endowment to her Alma Mater, NC State, to aid African American women and minorities who want to study engineering. She has also made contributions in the USVI through this year’s summer STEM Camp with the RT Park, donating \$25,000 to the program.

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