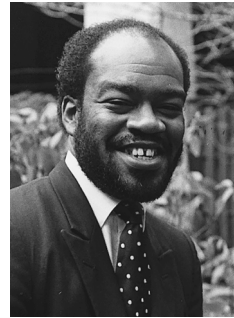


## LAWRENCE E. MILAN

BA 1973 (English, health, and physical education) Bluffton College, MA 1975 (personnel management/labor relations, higher education administration) Michigan State University; assistant to the vice president for student affairs, State University of New York at Oswego, 1975-1977; assistant to the president, 1977-1978; personnel officer, MIT, 1978-1980; regional director, MIT Alumni/ae Association, 1980-1985; from senior employee representative to director of human resources, Pitney Bowes Inc., 1985-1996; human resources executive, Aetna Retirement Services, 1996-1999; vice president for customer service, 1999- ; vice president and treasurer, Connecticut chapter, Sickle Cell Disease Association of America.



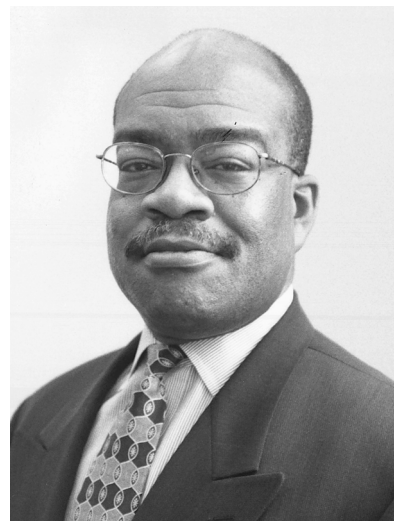
Canton, Ohio, is my home, where I was born and raised. I'm the oldest of two sons. My brother is two years younger than I am. My mother and father were hardworking people. My father worked in the steel mill for over forty years, my mother worked in the school system. She progressed from the secretarial ranks to become an executive assistant for the superintendent of the Canton public schools. She had the distinction of having worked for seven superintendents in total before she retired in 1994, with thirty-six years. They wrote her up on the front page of the *Canton Repository*. That's a family highlight—in addition, obviously, to my father having his forty years.

The Milan family came from Tennessee. That's where Pop Milan, my father's father, came from. He came out of Fayetteville, Tennessee, and led the way to Canton, Ohio. He got a job there at Timken Roller Bearing Company. Then he brought my grandmother up, Grandma Milan, and the two boys—my uncle Cornelius and my father Bert. My mother was a native of Canton. Those were my roots. It was a very close-knit family.

I went to public schools in Canton, Ohio. My big focus was sports. That's all I thought was important as a young man. I just wanted to be the greatest catcher. Roy Campanella was a hero of mine. They all told me I looked like Roy, so I got excited about becoming a catcher. Then, of course, being a husky guy, everybody assumed I was going to play football. So that, too, was the influence. Jimmy Brown was a big hero around there, because he was with the Cleveland Browns at the

time. Of course, Marion Motley came out of Cleveland, also. You can see the influences of sports there in the Canton area, and of just being good working folks and then good roots in terms of the family.

I would say that from growing up in the Milan home and moving through the sports experience, high school was significant as well. I played both football and baseball. I got into a college preparatory program and started thinking seriously about college. As I graduated, I realized I wasn't going to get to play at a big level, Division I, in football or baseball. Nonetheless, I knew that college was where I needed to go. I was the first child among my first cousins and my brother to go to college, and ultimately to graduate from college. My mother's first cousin, who was my mother's sister's son, did get a Ph.D. in aeronautics



Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Lawrence E. Milan in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 15 July 1998.

and astronautics out of the University of Minnesota. He worked at Honeywell and he went on to NASA—Raymond Rose, Dr. Raymond Rose. So that was a great influence on me, to see what could happen with an education. Raymond didn't spend a lot of time with me, but any time he did, he was always asking pointed questions about academics and career plans. That always stayed on your mind, to make sure you're able to talk clearly about what your plans were. That really motivated me—Raymond did, and especially the family foundation.

A third influential factor for me, coming out of high school, was an English teacher. Tim Best was my senior English teacher. I was always good in English. I just did it—grammar, literature—but he really made me realize what you can accomplish with skills in that area. I was a moderate student in math and the sciences because I was a bit intimidated by them. I did them in order to qualify for college, but excelled in English. So I thought I would go to college and become an English teacher and kind of a non-traditional one, really to not only help youngsters to use the English language effectively but also to really get inside of literature. I loved to analyze literature, whether it was poems or prose. And I loved to write. I wrote my first short story as a senior. It was a joy because my mother typed it. It was approximately two hundred pages and I got a pretty good grade on it.

So I went on to college—Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio—and that's where I did play football, Division III. I focused on English. I ended up graduating with a BA degree in physical education and health and English. That was my master's. Also, I received my teaching certificate. I also did my student teaching and got married at the time. I got married my junior year to a very bright woman—a math major, ironically. She was a brilliant woman who also influenced me greatly. The first couple of years I wasn't the strongest student. I wasn't opening books; I was busy playing ball and getting acclimated to being away from home. I wasn't used to being away from home. This woman was a good influence because I didn't want her to get better grades than me. My grades shot up to be pretty strong. We got married our junior year and became dorm directors. We got a free apartment and ran the dormitory. That was a significant part in my life in terms of influencing my career plans,

if you will. Now I was focusing on academics. I thought I was just going to go ahead and be an English teacher with the physical education and do some coaching, but I went into this dormitory business.

It was really significant here. I haven't talked about the black experience a whole lot at this point. I took the black experience growing up pretty much as a way of life. There were significant things that happened. For example, my father went to a neighborhood store to pick up some milk and he came back home chuckling. He had just a tremendous peace within. He said that while he was in the store, there was a man with his son in the store—a white man with his son—and the little boy said, "Look, daddy, there goes a nigger!" My dad said he started looking around. He said he wanted to see a nigger because he never saw one.

So that tells you the kind of man my father was. That was the kind of experience I had growing up. My family never fueled the fire behind things. They helped us to deal with things, always to be prepared, because it's a way of life. My mother was always concerned about my brother and me not ever getting caught up in a situation where some white folks could get us and do some terrible things to us. She was always concerned about us watching our back. My dad encouraged self-defense and looking out for each other.

So those were things that were a way of life growing up. You took it serious, the way of life, and it didn't hit me real hard until I went to Bluffton College. When I went to Bluffton College, there were no black faculty or staff.

*What years are we talking about?*

I graduated in 1968 from McKinley High School in Canton, and that fall went into Bluffton College, the fall of '68. There were eleven black students in my freshman class. It was a very small school, a school of seven hundred students. The faculty-student ratio was seven to one. It was a Mennonite-affiliated school. The sister is Goshen College, out in Indiana.

Here at Bluffton College, you're talking seven hundred total student body, but eleven African-Americans were brought in, in the fall of '68. It was the largest African-American class ever. So you could tell, eleven in one class of a total student body of seven hundred—big impact. One brother

was from New York, there were brothers from Chicago, there were brothers from the South in that group. Here we are brought into Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio—very small. I mean, they had one cop car and that guy cruised the streets like Andy of Mayberry. That's the kind of city they brought us into, out in the country. The closest cities were Lima, Ohio, twenty miles one way, and Findlay, Ohio, twenty miles the other way. Toledo was about forty-five miles north of us.

So that's where we were and we had to make it. There were no black mentors—again, no black faculty or staff at all. That became very dramatic for me, to go downtown and be stared at. It was really two-sided because the brothers didn't help us. They would go downtown and they could literally rob the jewelry store while watching the cop sleeping in his car, the New York brother and the group. They were doing that kind of stuff and never getting caught. So our folks weren't helping our situation, but on the other side we had no mentors or anybody to straighten them out. The white folks were patronizing us and not comfortable in dealing with us. Of course, it's a Mennonite-affiliated place and the motto of that school is, "The truth shall set you free." That was the motto of Bluffton College, and that's how they tried to behave towards us. It was on the honor system. The professor would give out the exams and leave the room because it was an honor system. "The truth shall set you free." Every week we had convocation. You had a required Bible course that you had to take before you graduated, that kind of stuff.

Anyway, some of the experiences there were different. There was the white roommate. That worked out okay, but clearly that guy didn't have a clue on what it was about for us, what our value systems were. I share that with you because I turn that around to say, "I can make a difference."

I'll spare you all the details of the four years. It actually ended up for me being five years, because with the two majors and with Adah—the woman I married—being a year behind me, I went on and stayed an extra year, got my double major, and we were able to be directors of this dormitory. This was interesting because I had at one time lived in the dorm as a student and I knew what the antics were. So now suddenly I become head of that dorm and I know what the games are. That was a growing-up experience for

me too. The brothers put a wall up between me and them. The white boys were one thing, but the brothers now, because I was "the man." They knew I knew their stuff. That was hard because I couldn't be their buddy anymore. But the good news was that it really was an impetus to my being very serious about my future career.

Let me reflect briefly for you on my initial work history. My first job in Canton was at the swimming pool, as manager of the city pool. I went in there and I was there all of a couple of days when an interesting thing happened. I was assistant manager and there was an older man, veteran player, who had an alcohol problem. They ended up firing him and they promoted me. Here I am a sixteen-year-old kid and I became the city pool's manager. Those kinds of things in my career always happened, the right time and right place and the people would like me. Later, I ended up being the recreation leader for the whole city of Canton's recreation system, school grounds. Again they liked me—right time, right place.

Bluffton College again. It's very rare that an undergrad student couple becomes dorm directors. We became dorm directors. What I did, though, I tried to be a leader for the black folks—a role model, Adah and I. Adah was a very strong player with me. We were good partners at that time in our life. Then we graduated from there and went on to Michigan State. At Michigan State, having had the background we had, I was able to go in there and get a job as director of a major dormitory.

*So you actually went there to work.*

No, I went there to get my master's. It was a one-year master's program. I was going to go in there and study college student personnel, higher education administration. Michigan State is known for that area. I was going to do that. Adah was going in to get her MBA. We both thought we could get through there probably in one year. We went up and I was a graduate assistant to a dorm director. We had the apartment there and I had a section of this twenty-four-hundred-student building. There were two towers, twelve hundred each. I initially worked for a head of one twelve-hundred-student dorm. He was a veteran player. This man was probably in his mid-thirties. I was twenty-three years old, actually twenty-two turning twenty-three in the fall of '73. That's when I went in there, the fall

of '73. In October I turned twenty-three. I went in there in August or September.

By the time school started, they had fired him—alcohol problems. He wasn't getting it done. They came and talked to me and said, "We'd like to give you the full-time job. With your experience out of Bluffton College, we'll give you the full-time job to run this dormitory." It normally didn't happen until you had a master's in student personnel. I thought, "This is an interesting pattern in my life." I obviously accepted. What it meant, though, is that it took two years to get my master's rather than one. I couldn't take the full-time course load. But it meant more money for Adah and me, so I took it. I ran the dorm for two years. Those were great years. I had good grades and gained strong leadership experience at the same time.

At Bluffton College, by the way, we introduced the Black Student Union. That was very important. We introduced that about my junior year. Adah and I were key leaders of the initial Black Student Union, bringing leaders onto campus—Nikki Giovanni, those types of folk. We exposed the campus to Black Student Weekend, Black Weekend—we truly enlightened that Mennonite college. In fact, my freshman year, with the brothers there—there were a couple of senior brothers, but there were only one or two—we started an organization called "B to the Third Power," or "Black Brothers of Bluffton." We wore white t-shirts trimmed in black with the motto "B" on the front.

Anyway, this gives you a perspective on blackness and black pride at Bluffton. The other thing, I have to tell you, is that we graduated in African attire as seniors. Adah made our outfits. She wore a robe and I had a dashiki, with black pants matching my black-and-white dashiki. All the blacks walked through in our African attire. Of course, that was devastating to our families. Here we are the first generation of college graduates. Adah's poor father, being the preacher man that he was, couldn't understand that—"Why would you want to go and do that? Here these people let you get a degree..." You know how they are—"Y'all going to go and not put on your cap and gown? It's an honor to wear that cap and gown." This was in '73. We were the first class that did it. Brothers graduated before us, but we marched in African attire. That's what we did. We marched. After the

ceremony, we did pose for pictures for our parents in traditional caps and gowns.

Carrying that further, we always were into an education mode—white people learning how to deal with black people and black people learning how to work together to be more unified to get things done. Moving on to Michigan State, it was even further enhanced there. I was in an environment where it was fed. There were some great leaders up there at Michigan State. I was able to play along with those leaders and lead the dorm I was involved in as a part of my academic program. That fueled me a lot as a leader, to take my role with younger folks, with peers and white folks. I was respected. White folks listened. I had a way of helping white folks understand what the black experience was about and better understand the "struggle." I introduced open discussion sessions in the dorm with a focus on racially sensitive topics.

Moving on, my marriage started getting a little rocky. A lot of that was because we grew apart with her focus on her MBA, me focusing on my academic program and career. We ended up nonetheless staying together when we graduated. We went off to State University of New York, Oswego. That's where I got my first formal job, my first professional job with my master's. I got my master's in '75, June of '75, and Adah got her MBA. I interviewed at several universities because I was going into student affairs right away. I wanted to go into student affairs. I interviewed and I went down to a conference in Atlanta where career fairs were being held. I met Dr. Robert Rock from State University of New York, Oswego. My strategy was that I wasn't going to go into admissions, I wasn't going to go into financial aid, I wasn't going to go into any specific student affairs unit. I said, "I'm going to go somewhere and be a big fish in a little pond"—to gain a broad, multifaceted career experience.

So I had to go to the boondocks. I went to Oswego, but I went up there as assistant to the vice president of student affairs, Dr. Robert Rock. That's what I did. I consciously did that. At this point now I was twenty-four.

*You were young.*

Yes. I turned twenty-five that October. I graduated in '75, and in October '75 I turned twenty-five. I went up to Oswego, the boondocks. It's above Syracuse. The school sits on the bank, State

University of New York. It gets so bad with the lake effect that they have lifelines from building to building that you use to get around when the snow comes in. This was a big experience for me. I didn't realize it. I heard rumors, but I didn't believe it.

So here goes this brother and sister up there. I worked for Dr. Rock. It was a new position. They introduced this concept of having an assistant to the vice president. I knew what it was about. It was to come in and help deal with the brothers and sisters. That was fine with me. I knew that they needed that, but I also knew that I was not only going to deal with brothers and sisters, I was going to be the assistant to this vice president and learn how the business operates.

Rock was a laid-back guy who would give you all that you could take on. If you want it, fine. So I ended up learning a great deal about student affairs that first year. I set up a program called Interactions for the blacks across campus—faculty, staff, and students. Every Wednesday night at seven o'clock, I'll never forget it, whoever could come filled the room and we'd put them all in a circle. It could be anywhere from fifty to a hundred people. Blacks would just come in and we'd select a topic. "What's the topic for tonight?" We'd just have people talk about it. It was a way of getting it out, a way of being unified. That got me one appreciation award from the student body and from the faculty, because they hadn't had that kind of unity-building. That was only one example. That year culminated in a recognition program that was attended by the president, faculty, and students. I received an "Administrator of the Year" award from the Black Student Union. That was touching, the fact that you can make that kind of impact in a year on these youngsters, on that college.

As a young professional, I got to sit at the table with the vice president and his whole staff—the head of financial aid, the head of the career placement center, the head of admissions—at those staff meetings. I got to experience how the budget is run, what some of the overall dormitory issues are, the student activities center, et cetera. That was good. Also I experienced staffing/recruitment by coordinating major searches. So I got to learn some personnel areas. Also, besides getting my student affairs degree, I got a labor relations and personnel management degree. I made sure I had a dual degree, so that I could always fall back on HR if I decided to switch.

So there I was, at SUNY Oswego. Three years I stayed there, from 1975 to 1978. They brought Adah in as an assistant professor in the business school. We were a package deal. She came along with me. About a year later, we did break up and she went on back to Michigan State and got a faculty job there. I was there as a single man at this point. I ended up doing that job, assistant to the vice president, for two years. I really brought some black people on campus, new black faculty. I really helped the students to have some structure. I played a lot of conflict management roles.

After two years, the provost of the school—Dr. Virginia Radley—was made president of State University of New York. She was the first female president of the SUNY system, State University of New York system. She immediately promoted the assistant to the president, Dr. Patty Peterson, to be vice president of administrative affairs. That freed up the assistant to the president job. At that point, Dr. Radley promoted me. I was flabbergasted to think that they thought I was ready—now I was twenty-six years old—to be assistant to the president. But I learned then that it's not only what you bring to the table but also your potential, if they're betting on your potential. She was the first female president of SUNY. At that time Clifton Wharton was chancellor of SUNY. Virginia Radley was promoted to president of SUNY Oswego by Wharton, and I became her assistant. That meant I was responsible for all EEO programs for the campus, as well as her general assistant.

*That was major.*

Yes. It wasn't just student affairs now. Now it was much broader, perhaps similar to your job before it was broadened—some similar issues, although at a smaller school. That was just eye-opening. What happened here is that I learned with and worked closely with the senior folks—Dr. Rock, vice president of student affairs; Dr. Virginia Radley, president; and senior faculty members, several of whom were department heads. Dr. LaFleur, I can't remember his first name, was chairman of the sociology department—a brother. He was one of the few brothers who made the ranks up there. There were some other brothers.

So I was able to bring the faculty and administrators together, through the assistant to the president role. I became head of the Black Faculty and Administrators Association. They would seek

me out for advice and counsel and for strategy development.

*You were doing exceedingly well.*

So there was that experience. But what I also learned was that I wasn't intimidated by the status of these folks. Dr. Radley would talk to me about some of her fears and her concerns, some of the issues going on with the chairman of the faculty committee—this belligerent white male who was giving her a hard time. She would talk with me about that kind of stuff. Sometimes, because her house was on campus, she would have me go with her and we'd sit at her house over sherry in the afternoon.

*She's white, right?*

Yes. We'd sit and talk over sherry. I was her confidant.

*You learned a lot, a tremendous amount.*

Oh man, tremendous at that level. And Rock wasn't quite as revealing, but I got to see his frustrations. It told me, if you don't sit with them and you're sitting down in the ranks, you think there's a whole other thing going on up there. And you realize they're human, man. They're vulnerable, they're human, they put their pants on one leg at a time, they shit and get off the pot like you and me. It was so tremendous. I focus on this because that was a tremendous lesson to get at twenty-six years old. That has helped me throughout my career not to be intimidated by senior officials, because I could assist them. That's been one of the common things for me in terms of dealing with senior officials. They like that comfort level of somebody who sits, listens to them, provides them with counsel. That worked out pretty well.

*From everything I've heard you say so far, to have that experience at twenty-six years old, that is very young to be involved with the top people running a university—the kind of people you described who shared with you their concerns and issues and asked for your suggestions about how to deal with them and all that. That's major.* Yes, you're right. As you say that, I'm only beginning even to more fully appreciate it at this stage of my life. Twenty-one years later, this is twenty-one years later, I'm sitting here looking back. I look at a twenty-six-year-old guy who would have that kind of job today.

*I don't know too many.*

Yes, so that was something. Then what happened, there was a very bright woman, Marilyn. I always run into these bright women. Marilyn you met very early when I came to town. Marilyn was a student, a very bright student leader. She decided to finish her senior year at Northeastern. She left State University of New York Oswego and came up here. The year I was assistant to the president, she had already moved on to Northeastern. I came back and forth to Boston to see Marilyn. After she finished Northeastern, we agreed that now that she's out of school and she had a job up here—I forget where she started, but she ended up at StrideRite Shoes, in personnel there—it was time for me to move on. It was getting tough there anyway. Here I am sitting there and she's up here, and all of that snow. Dr. Radley was interesting. She said, "Well, I could make your life tough."

*Your president felt that she could make it difficult for you.*

Yes, to leave there. At that point, there was a senior student affairs job—not the vice president job yet, although she didn't like Bob Rock, Dr. Rock. She didn't think he was the right guy. Plus, that wasn't her team. Anyway, she felt that she could give me a senior-line HR position, like the dean of student affairs reporting to the vice president of student affairs. That's how they had that hierarchy there. She said that's what she could do. She would give me more money, make me the dean of student affairs, and ultimately make me the vice president. She told me that. So I'm sitting here like, "Okay, what am I going to do?" She was good because she said I could do that, but she said, "You have to make your own decision."

At that point, of course, I started networking up here. Marilyn knew folks and saw all the MIT stuff in the paper. I put my suit on and started pounding the pavement. I walked into Personnel here at MIT and met Dick Higham. It really wasn't Dick who did it, it was the receptionist. I walked in and handed the receptionist my resumé, said I was from out of town and I was there to talk about the associate dean of students opening under the dean. What was the lady's name? A white lady, a heavy-set lady, a darling of a woman who was the dean of students at that point—kind of a German, foreign lady.

*Oh, you're talking about Carola Eisenberg.*

Yes. Carola was here then. I went in there and told the receptionist what I was here for. It's tough

getting by the receptionist. You don't just walk in and get an interview. She picked up, though. She was a sharp one. She was very sharp. That's the kind of person you want on your staff. She took that resumé back and gave it to Dick Higham. Dick Higham came on out. You know Dick. He said, "Hey there, Lawrence," shook my hand, and brought me on back. Before I left there, he told me not only was the associate dean of students job worthwhile, but there was a personnel officer job. He said, "Let me talk to Claudia Liebesny." I don't remember whether it all happened then or if he needed to get back to me after seeing Claudia and seeing Carola. I think that's what it was. That's what I think he did. He took that material and he talked to Claudia and he talked to Carola. He had asked me if I wanted Personnel. Now I'm starting to think, "Gee, that personnel management background, I can make my move if this goes through and go to Personnel." But I said, "Let me play it out."

Well, I went through the interview process, saw John Wynne and Claudia and folks over there in Personnel. I saw Carola and folks over there. I received a dual offer—the dual offer to come to MIT. Man, what an honor—associate dean of students and personnel officer, and they level-set the salary. So I couldn't look at it for money. I had to look at it for what it was, a dual offer. Dick said, "That is very rare that that happens, but we're making you a dual offer and you choose the one you want—associate dean of students or personnel officer." I thought long and hard. I think I even asked to see some more folks. I'm really surprised they didn't let me come to you. I didn't know you existed. I later heard about you, but I think it would have been great to have had a conversation with you then.

So I thought about it long and hard and I ended up going to Personnel, as you know. I went to Personnel because I thought, "If I get in here, I've got the strong student affairs background. But I need to get some legitimate experience in Personnel." I had the EEO stuff, but not really being a direct Personnel guy. MIT has a reputation as being as close to a corporate sector as any business. It's not like doing Personnel in other higher education. MIT is like a corporation, so I knew I was going to have credibility in being in Personnel at MIT. It wasn't just a personnel administrative job. I was going to have clients, which I did. I had

clients, different clients. Sam Goldblith was a significant client, look what happened there. I went into Personnel, had Sam Goldblith as a client. I can't even remember all the clients I had, but I had a number of clients and I liked that structure.

That was, by the way, July 1978. I started July 28, 1978. That's when I came into MIT in the Personnel job. I interviewed that spring of '78, got the offer around May, started up here, and moved on in. I remember a couple of significant things starting to happen. I was just totally awed coming in—just to think, "MIT! I'm going to play ball on the MIT team." Even now I kind of get emotional thinking what a great experience. The reception, I can tell you now, was like none other of any career I had—professional career—in terms of the environment, in terms of all the experience I've had up to that point going to new places and even places where I've been since coming to MIT.

I've been to two corporations. I've been to Pitney Bowes and I've been to Aetna—MIT in '78, Pitney Bowes in '85, Aetna in '96. I'll tell you, MIT embraced me and made sure that I understood my job, made me feel welcome into the culture. I really felt supported. What happens at the other places is your peers are competitive. They see the new kid come in and they kind of watch you. They don't want to help you too much because you might outshine them and the next promotion you're going to get.

That didn't happen here. Those people—Kathy Rick, Sally Hansen, Dick Higham, Kenny Hewitt, and Pat Williams—were very helpful folks. Claudia was the boss. Claudia was Claudia, but she was very helpful—immediate feedback on what was going well and what wasn't going well. The broader community was very helpful—John Wynne's office, Jim Culliton was very supportive. Pat Garrison at that time was in the school, so I didn't know her yet. Ultimately, of course, I met you. With you, I remember just feeling, "What a breath of fresh air, having a senior brother." Immediately, I knew that if some stuff went down, I'd come and talk to you. That was a great feeling. Later, of course, I met John Turner. But the feeling was really profound with you.

So the environment was exciting. I liked having that contact with students. I was told I could even be a student advisor if I wanted to. That was good. I felt okay. And the greater Boston area was good too. I had heard stuff about Boston. I was

reluctant to come and live in Boston. I said I would never live in Boston. This is now '78, and the stuff had hit the fan in the early '70s and the '60s. I was troubled with that. I struggled with that. But I came in and found there were things for black folks to go do, and black folks—professionals—were doing very well up here. The academic community, of course, was somewhat disconnected from the Boston side. I lived in Boston, the South End. But the academic community of MIT and Harvard was really quite an experience.

So there I was, getting a good experience in Personnel. I felt oriented and assimilated very effectively, working for Claudia, meeting the community within. It's funny, because Nels Armstrong—I'm sure he's told you that story—all I kept hearing was I was supposed to meet Nels. I had to meet this guy Nels. It was July 28 and I never met Nels until the African-American reception to welcome the students on board, over at the Student Center.

*The BSU Lounge?*

Yes. I walked in—late afternoon, early evening, whenever it was—and the room kind of opened up. Nels and I looked at each other. We had never been introduced before, and I knew that was Nels and he knew I was Milan. We embraced. That man and I embraced.

*The first time.*

Yes. We just met each other and just embraced—"Glad to meet you finally," hugging each other. We always say if one of us was a woman, we probably would have got married. Nels would say it was love at first sight. "I never had love at first sight," he said, "but this was love at first sight." That was a significant experience here for the record, to have a brother you just connect right with—a peer brother, man. So at that point I was really locked in. I knew I had you and then I met this Nels guy. I said, "This ain't bad," in terms of a little connection here. I was trying to do my job, so it was very helpful to have Nels as a confidant. We quickly became confidants.

*What was best about your experience at MIT and what was worst about your experience at MIT? I think it's important because our environment is one in which, I think, people are willing to make adjustments and changes. I think all of these discussions we have with several administrators about your experiences, which will be expressed honestly, are important. What was good and what was not so good about it?*

Let me take you there this way. You're following my life. I'm kind of giving you that. Now I'm going to talk as candidly about MIT as I've been talking about the other experiences I've had up to MIT. I'm going to be candid right now. The entry was highly favorable and I felt just totally great to be here. I was supported, the Personnel area was supportive. The important thing that I don't know if you're aware of is that, within the first year I was here, a head-hunter came after me and I got an offer to go to DEC. Within the first year I was here. I made that known over there. I didn't flaunt it, but I made it known. It was a year in and I was getting a little bit bored with that personnel officer job, but not real bored. I was still on a learning curve. That was '78 and the head-hunter came toward the end of '79. So July '78 toward the fall of '79, the offer came and I turned them down without knowing what else was going to happen here. I turned DEC down. What a great time to go to DEC. That was '79 and I was going into HR, HR in DEC.

I ran into David Bohy again. David Bohy was the senior guy who offered me the job. He ended up offering me another job. He not only offered me a job, he later went and became senior vice president of HR at the major hospital in Providence. He offered me a job when I was at MIT. I turned him down at DEC. Then later, when he had a senior HR position at this hospital—Merriam or something like that—he offered me to come in there again. He tried to get me out of Pitney Bowes.

So that was the connection there, the point being to talk about mentors. This guy was doing very well at DEC; they all said, "You'd have been gone." The track record I was on there, I would have gone. Probably, not knowing in terms of the personal crisis I ran into—and I'm going to talk about that in a minute—would I have avoided the personal crisis or would I not have? I don't know, but I'm going to lay that on here now. It's the MIT experience now that I'm getting ready to talk about. But had I gone to DEC and been in that disciplined environment—focusing on HR, going through the regimen of becoming a senior HR player, taking that job—what would have happened? Would I have gone on and seen the riches of that and been very clear and focused and become a senior vice president? I'd be somewhere now. I'd probably be a corporate vice president of



HR somewhere, if nothing else happened that slowed that up. That's there.

But I chose to stay at MIT. I didn't take the offer and I didn't have a counter-offer. I just chose to stay. However, quickly, somebody—Sam or somebody—got to me about an opening in the MIT Alumni Association. That was fall of 1979 that I turned down DEC. In February '80, I started in the Alumni Association as the first black over there—the first black. I experienced change now. You want me to start talking about work's experience. Upon entry, just the way they handled me—Ron Stone and the environment of the Alumni Association. When I was in Personnel, I used to walk by there. I thought, “Man, what in the heck is back there?” I didn't even know what it was, that glass cage and the elegance. They were superior folks, you know. Plus, I moved at this point because I thought I was going to be closer to Sam—you know, as a mentor. Sam was vice president of development.

But he referred me over for the opening in the Alumni Association. So I now got turned over there to Ron Stone. Jim Champy was there. Champy was still there, but he was going through his stuff. Pretty soon Hecht came in, but Champy and Stone hired me. I never felt they really wanted me. It was very clear that there was pressure on to get a black in there. I said, “Here I go again, but I think I'm ready for it with all the experiences I had. It would be a good career move. This ain't going to hurt me.”

So I went over. I never felt they were sincere about it. The Personnel job, I told you that intentionally—I entered MIT and that Personnel job and the Student Affairs job, people wanted me and they loved me, they were happy and they knew I was competent. This job I had no background for. Sam referred me. Sam was Big Daddy, and they also knew there was pressure on them from a racial standpoint. So here I go. I went in and I didn't feel I had any kind of air cover anywhere. I didn't know enough to give a holler, to come and sit with you. I was so proud to have gotten that opportunity. I was too proud and I was too naive to know, “This is heavy shit, Larry. You need to make sure you got your anchors out there, boy.” I didn't know that.

So I went in and I'm running like crazy on that learning curve, to learn this business. I never knew what that business was—fundraising. I'm

saying, “This is a machine here. Now I'm a regional director of the Midwest? I've got to get on an airplane and travel regularly, manage these heavyweight alumni people?” By the way, after I took the job, they told me what was being said about me. Norm Klivans out of Cleveland and the other alumni, Ron confided in me, did not want me in there, in terms of being black. “He's black and he doesn't have an MIT degree. Why did you guys put him in there?” They hadn't even met me, so it wasn't even about me personally yet. Ron told me that. He also told me about the secretary in there, Anita, who wanted to change. She was supporting Joe Collins. Joe got moved to the Fund and the secretary stayed. He told me how she had come to see him and didn't want to work for a black man. So the overall reception was heavy.

*That's a major change from that Personnel area to there. It's like night and day.*

Right, in terms of reception and assimilation. I don't think they assimilated me well. I don't think they helped me to understand the business or gave me helpful hints. Ron was fastidious. He was a good man. He meant well, but he didn't know any better. He didn't know how to be comfortable with me and orient me. He had no clue. Joe was busy trying to get his thing going on in the Fund. I think he could have been helpful because he had had that area. I could go talk to him, but he was focused somewhere else. It wasn't negative, but they didn't have those skills that the Claudias and the other folks had over in Personnel to kind of get you oriented. These folks were busy running the business.

So I'm basically on my own, figuring out how this thing works. They assume I'm going to ask questions. I'm sitting in meetings and I'm learning this stuff. I've got to get trips ready to go out and meet with alumni. Of course, I'm thinking, “I'm not a beggar.” But you're supposed to go out and set up these social meetings and you're supposed to kiss people's butt to get them to give or get them to host some major alumni event. So I'm thinking, “What kind of a job is this?” I had the skills to do it, but Personnel was meaningful, Student Affairs was meaningful—they had substance. I was good at it and I knew where I was going with it, what difference I was trying to make. Here, what difference was I making other than to break the barriers?

Here I am at forty-seven and I look back on that experience. That was 1980. I wasn't even thirty years old yet. I was twenty-nine. I turned thirty that October. I went in there in February '80 and in October I turned thirty. I was twenty-nine years old when I went in there.

*When you look back at your experiences in Canton all the way up to that point, there was nothing that prepared you for that kind of arena.*

Nothing. I will tell you that today, and that's not even being defensive. I just tell you. The shit that went down we'll talk about. That's one thing, but I'm going to tell you, there was nothing in terms of a support structure. It was kind of like—you know and you've watched it in your life—they took a brother and said, "We got one." And it was so competitive.

Remember, they had that girl in there too—Carol Seligson. She was an MIT graduate and she ran her own business, so there was night and day between us. She was just running all over everybody, running all over everybody. She was just draining Ron because she had to get all the attention. They loved her because she was MIT. Blake was a senior guy, but he didn't give me the help that Higham gave me over in Personnel. So you're sitting there saying, "Well, it isn't in terms of that ..." You look at your own decision to go in and you're saying, "But this isn't substance here. I'm not even out there helping black alumni. I'm out there stroking the butts of senior white males in Rochester, in Cleveland. I'm going out there hat in hand to sit with them and chit-chat."

I'm going out there and that's the first time I had to learn what an elevator speech was. Technical coaching they gave me, and by the way—let me be clear—that was tremendous technical preparation. Any shyness I had about speaking publicly went away in that job. So that was a good job.

*Yes, in that sense.*

The orientation wasn't it and the rationale for me coming in. Hey, you know, I was twenty-nine and went into that.

But let me go on the positive side. That was the worst, that snapshot of time. The goodness was the technical skills I gained. I already had good interpersonal skills, but it was also the preparation, the sharpness, and the crispness of doing homework and then knowing what was going on at

MIT, to talk to these guys who want to get down to business and know what Ernie Cravalho was doing and some of these other professors, to get to the professors, to match them up for a trip out. I quickly got to substance because these alumni needed to be kept up to speed on what's going on here. You get the resources to go out there. You're the broker—make sure the resources are there, getting the facility set up, getting somebody to host it, thanking them for doing it, and stroking them and keeping them happy. Then it connects into the Fund.

That was great. I do not regret that. I'm not sitting here saying I regret that. I wish that the assimilation and the preparation were better. That's the only thing missing here, the only thing missing. You're dead-on right here. Would I make the same decision again? Absolutely. Being a veteran forty-seven years old planning right now to go in that job, I'd kill them. I'd end up getting Hecht's job, ultimately. Look at Nels up there at Dartmouth now. Look, that's what he's doing.

*He's performing exceedingly well.*

Yes, he's killing them. So there's a big difference stepping off into that. Again, I had only been at MIT one year. I hadn't even been at MIT three or four years to kind of get the lay of the land.

So I went in there, just bringing this on down, and that first year there was another experience I had. This was within the first three or four months. Norm Klivans came in from Cleveland, Mr. MIT in Cleveland. He came up here for some alumni meeting. You know, the biggies you go pick them up at the airport. So I went out to the airport and picked up Mr. Klivans. This is the first time I've ever met this man. I've talked to him on the phone. I'm riding back. We have now gotten through the tunnel and I think we were on Storrow Drive. He turned to me, man, and looked at me. I'm driving my car and he's sitting there. He says, "Larry, tell me something. Why in the hell did you take this job? I don't understand what you have in common. You're black, you don't have a Tech degree, you're black. Why would you take this job?"

I've got to respect the question. You've got to respect the question, if you cut to the chase. As I said to you, let's ask them, "Why did you put me in the job?" I think the skills I bring, I probably was the safest African-American to put in there. I

didn't have the headline credentials. I think they looked back at my having been assistant to a president, those kind of things. They thought, "This boy can come in here and play. He has good interpersonal skills. Sam has seen him work." All that makes sense. But the headline for those alumni was, MIT degree and unfortunately the non-MIT degree. I think MIT would have been fine. They would have accepted that reluctantly, but the fact was that you had two things—I was black, too.

And he said that to me. He turned and said, "You don't have a Tech degree and you're black. Why in the hell . . . ?" I said, "Norm, is this an insurmountable opportunity?" He stopped in his tracks when I said "insurmountable." He said, "Oh no, I'm just saying . . ." I think he understood me then. When I left here, they kept the reason behind my leaving kind of quiet to the field. But when I did my last fundraising program, he wrote a letter and called in talking about what a great program I had done and that I had come a long way, I had turned the corner, and I was operating like a true professional.

*That's what he said about you.*

Absolutely. And Bill Hecht left and said, "Isn't that ironic?" Bill knew what the deal was for me, but also the feedback was positive from the alumni out there. So from that '80 period to 1984, I'd say, some time in '84, he turned completely around. I had worked that hard. I was out there running shows—crisp shows, alumni fundraising, alumni major events. The relationship with the alumni, that never was an issue. My performance was never an issue. They recommended me for the Black Achievement Award, and I got it. So that was never the issue. They gave me a good pop too. I got a raise. I got a big raise, a higher raise than any of the other three regional directors at one point. Ron gave me the biggest raise because I acclimated so well in what I was doing. I was getting it done, but what no one knew was the personal struggle I was undergoing.

*Well, the amount of pressure involved in getting it done in that kind of arena becomes even more tremendous when you really think about where you were, what you had done in a totally different field.*

Getting prepared for something else, right. And then I got pushed over.

*You were going completely one way, then all of a sudden you come here. All your background had been*

*preparing you for this, and you shift over here. Then you still had to do it, and did it, but you had to pay a price for that.*

Right, I had to pay a price. And the balance too—I will say, a very important piece—is that I didn't have the support externally either. I was not married. I didn't even have Marilyn any more. She had left me, which devastated me. I was going to marry her. That really confused me. To this day, the only thing I know is I didn't marry her quick enough. But she walked out on me. I ain't never had a woman walk out on me. She was upset and she left. I tell you, that scarred me because I came up here for that girl.

She left me in June of 1980. So I'm going through this MIT thing and she left me in June. I ain't got nobody to go home to at night. On the other side, I'm learning this job. Now I'm kind of turning to the wrong support systems. My parents and family, ain't no family up here. Nels and I go out and clown, but you're too proud to say because you don't even know: I didn't even know I was struggling. I was working at that point, '80 was okay because I was working. And in '81 I was working, '82 I was starting to fall, because now I turned to the wrong support.

*The thing about it, though, is that you were doing it. But what you or I would have never been able to determine at that time was that you had to put so much energy in it that you didn't realize how much of a price you were paying in order to try to do it the way this guy could eventually recognize it.*

Right, you're right. There was no balance. That's that—what do they call it?—work-family balance. It's key, man. You've got to have that whole spiritual, mental, emotional balance. I had it. I was putting all my energies into that, and then not going out in a balanced way out there with my support systems.

I have to share this with you. This leads up to the worst experience. That wasn't so much the worst. I think what was worst is not recognizing how to go about getting support because I was so blind, working hard to be successful. What happened, it led to the events that led to my personal problems, probably the lowest point in my career. What happened is that you're a young man and you're dating women—and oh, by the way, there are some of the finest, sharp women out there. So you turn to that. The other thing is, popular time

for drugs, unfortunately. What happens is, you get associated with people. These aren't the street druggies. These are faculty people, attorneys, and so on, and they turn you on to drugs when you're socializing.

I said I would never, ever use drugs. I said I would never, ever use them when I came to town. I said I would never, ever use them. Cocaine? I mean, I couldn't even conceive that anybody would use cocaine. I had no patience for that. I had no patience. I got up here and I got with some folks. A friend offered the following example of a pro ball player—"You're up there and some of the great stars like Alvin Hayes and them, they would put it on some of the new boys that came along." Then they said, "You'd better not tell anybody what we're doing," breaking training or anything like that. It got so bad that they were talking to themselves. They would end up sometimes taking some cocaine thinking that they could go ahead and rest somewhere without having any pressures, peer pressure. And to some of them, that was good. It helped them to stay awake and party.

Larry Milan, same kind of thing. I got on it because I was part of some people I trusted. I thought, "Gee, this is a good outlet." And it was only a little bit, just a little bit. I said, "I'm never going to buy this stuff." I went from not tolerating it to "I'm never going to buy it" to using it to buying it. What I ended up doing, and this is the low part, is where it was given at a party. That was fun, you'd stay up and party.

But to pick back up on the MIT experience here, where we're at, in terms of some of the transitions during the Alumni Association years. I had a thought there on some of the messages you get and how to try to balance how you relate with the alumni folks. I was talking about skills earlier. The benefits were that I have skills that are still applicable today—public speaking, being conscious of how you go about technically raising money. As of today, I'm on the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, Connecticut chapter board of directors. What's my primary role? I'm the fundraising leader. They want me to put together a fundraising strategy. So it pays off. They're very excited. Any time you've done that kind of work for MIT, that jumps off your resumé. People go, "Whoa," you know.

And they're right. That was good teaching, technical teaching. We had some good workshops,

getting ready to go out there and fundraise, doing those campaigns. One key piece, Ron taught us that you always have an elevator speech in your hip pocket. You never know when you're going to show up in Toronto, Rochester, Cleveland, Chicago, DC, Baltimore, and you're in a room full of alumni. Somebody says, "Hey, Larry Milan is here. Larry, will you stand up and give us some words about Tech?"

I tell you, man, I remember in Chicago—literally in Chicago—I never forget, they did it. It was about five hundred folks in the room, man. They were taping it or something. I could tell from the lights. It's an event where like an Ernie Cravalho or Woodie Flowers or somebody would have been there to speak. But before they turn the key speaker over, they have the regional director stand up. So Ron always said, "Have an elevator speech in your pocket of at least three minutes or so." I learned what that meant and I have taught other people that trick. From now on, when you show up representing an organization, be ready with something of substance to say—some statistics or some major activities or major transitions. A great elevator speech is the reengineering that's gone on. That's great. That's an easy one. And you did it to me. You took me through and showed me examples of where things had turned around, how employees were being involved, the town meetings. That's the kind of thing we had to be able to say about Tech out on the road.

So I learned an elevator speech. Today, it's even fresh. My staff today, I will tell them, "Elevator speech," and they're in Human Resources. But you're covering these clients and you need to be able, in certain meetings, to talk about the business very comfortably. So anyway, I say that favorably.

I guess in summary, I'd say my external support structure was more of an issue than the challenge of being successful and effective in that role here. I think the worst experience was the downfall, as a result of everything caving in. I was fighting for my life and didn't know what in the world was going on. At that point, of course, I had made some wrong decisions about my own personal money, about my expense accounts. I really got inside of what it's like for a person. I'm more empathetic with people who go through that in terms of losing control. You're really not consciously doing that. You're in trouble and you're

reaching to make sure you're able to pay your rent. Man, I lost my car. I was a sane young man until I fell into that dark area, what they call "the white lady."

I will tell you, I really, really have to say I don't know what went on behind the scenes. But whoever dealt with me up front, I think they did me pretty good, considering all that transpired when I fell into that hole. The opportunity to go to rehab, I think, was great. I think to be able to have some salary, continuous money, and not just be thrown out on my ear was good. However that was—whether it was you or whether it was Joan or whoever—in the darkness of the fall, I have to say that was fortunate. That could have killed me if I had just got thrown out of here without rehab and without any kind of salary continuing. I would have probably woken up and gone and got a job, but I would have been struggling financially pretty badly.

So that was probably the lowest period of the feeling. But it was also a very supportive period for folks at MIT. Like I say, I know behind the scenes there were some things that you really questioned—you know, some of the behaviors. But I've got to say, whatever was presented to me, I own any damage I had done to get myself in that situation. So I think under the circumstances, they handled it as best as could be. There was no room, after some of the poor judgment decisions I made on finances, to hang around here. Making a decision about that airplane, that was bad. Was I consciously taking the people's money? No. In my mind, I'm going to pay it back. The other thing, at that age—now I was about thirty-one or thirty-two—I thought I was a pretty old and mature guy. Now I look back and say, without the support structure, I was a young man.

*You were a very young man.*

I look at people going through it now. I watch people going through it now. I watch them. If I have anything to do, I try to catch them. I can read quick, though. I can walk in and tell somebody there's a problem there. What I want to say here is that I was in financial trouble and so I made some poor judgment calls, but in my mind I was really going to pay the people back. I knew what I was saying. In my mind, the world worked that way. In my mind, the big boys played that way. Today I still say that. The big boys play, they give each other air

cover, and they make it. They play with their funds. I wasn't a big boy. Certainly it was wrong to have done that, but I thought you tap into your expense account and you're going to pay it back. One guy said to me once, "It went over the top," long before you even knew about it. They would come and say, "You'd better pay your advances back." Shirley and Bill would talk to me.

So that was a very low point—that whole period, even once I first started getting the first warning. The first warning didn't tell me how to cope properly. The first warning told me I'm not managing this account right. I thought I knew better than that, but I didn't connect that the two were related. That's how bad off I was. Then again, I fell into it—and you saw it—and I started disappointing my brothers. That black administrators conference, I was out of control. I can always look at the glass as half full because I learned a lot, but I would rather have learned without having to go through that. My worst experience, I would have to say—if you want to pull it back and get more clarity around that—was not understanding how to balance personal life, what was a life support system, with work. I was so gone, to the point where I was what you call—what's the word?—a short circuit. I short-circuited. I just blew up. I was just so gone and not really paying attention that I just started making poor judgments, man.

So that was the worst for me. It just couldn't get any worse than that, I tell you. That was devastating to be asked to leave, to have people who had such confidence in you lose it.

*Sure. I was very much involved with the latter stages of how to deal with it.*

The transition out, yes.

*And I felt that it was helpful whereby you could move ahead with your life because you had been in a situation like this, and with many of the whites not understanding how much pressure was on a young black man who was the first in that area. I didn't know it in depth before today, but I thought that the arguments that turned out to be persuasive were very helpful. I must say the thing I remember probably more than anything else—the person I remember who was very, very positive in terms of going along with a plan that at least everybody accepted that would be very helpful to you—was the head of the organization.*

Bill Hecht?

*Yes. He was very supportive. His major concern was, how can we help him move forward in his life? And he used that to get everything else in place as best as possible. That I really appreciated more than anything else.*

*What you're saying is very important. The good thing about it, and I think you probably know it better than most folks, is that it's a very common thing for a lot of folks—particularly a lot of our young brothers and sisters—to fall in that. What shows your strength is the fact that you not only survived but you took it to a higher level. It goes back to the way you were when you were coming up, before you came to MIT, the kind of person you were. You came back to that. Obviously, the kind of talent that you had before you came here was not destroyed at all. In fact, all that probably made you stronger.*

Yes.

*So I think it's a very fine example for our young brothers to understand how you can beat the odds. This society is very hard on black males.*

*You talked about that experience you went through there, to be in that situation where you were dealing primarily with white males, trying to get them to give the Institute money. That's heavy.*

Yes. The experience that I think I bring is, how do you give folks the support early enough? It's not even here. It's helping people to recognize you need that life balance. You really need it. I think that's what I would offer you and others for the young folks, and each other. It's not just young folks. All of us are going through it. I talk about these brothers coming into Aetna right now. These brothers are in their mid- and late forties, but I'm right there for them because they could short-circuit quick. Nobody's going to try to help them be successful because they don't want to see a senior brother come in and be successful. They have already dogged him and undermined him. This organization tried to undermine him. It's just that need to a) get people the right information, and b) make sure they have the right support system, internal and external. And give them some hard, strong feedback.

I think that's the other thing we don't do. Sometimes we're too nice to each other and we take too long to give people the feedback. I even look back and wonder if somebody couldn't have gotten me, just knocked me down, hit me with a two-by-four, and said, "Boy, you're going to fuck your career up, you're going to fuck your career

up." I don't know when I say this whether that's in the Hecht organization. I don't know if that's the African-American community, if there was anybody that just saw something that needed to say something.

*With the experiences you have had, not only here but elsewhere, what suggestions of ways do you have to improve or enhance the experience of, say, blacks at MIT? Your perspective is important, particularly as an expert on human relations for young blacks coming into a place like this, as administrators or even faculty members. Knowing something about this place—it hasn't changed that much since you left—what suggestions would you make to the Institute to enhance the experience of blacks coming to MIT?*

One thing, no matter what, people are their own person. It's hard. You're raising sons and they're their own person. I'm sure you have discussions with them. They're going to take what they think is important and you're going to sit back and later come back and say, "I tried to help you, son." That's a challenge too. Personally, I'm not sure what I would have heard. Maybe some people did try to reach me.

So my point, in answer to your question, is that that's always a factor. But the attempt should be there and we should keep attempting to offer some support. One, and this is first-hand experience, we actually have an assimilation process. We have key components of an assimilation program for new hires. We call it "the new execs." I'm a human resource executive and we have marketing executives. I'm new, so now it's an assimilation program to help Larry get oriented to the business unit he's responsible for and the bigger business, the structure, the people, his organization, key issues—and then, of course, the greater Aetna.

So business orientation, really understanding that. Organization orientation structure and issues. Roles and responsibility clarity. What are you really being held accountable for? What are you being measured on? Key interdependencies. Who are the people you interface with to do your job, for the most part, the functions and the individuals? Those things, to make sure people are clear on that stuff, are one piece. That's the assimilation piece.

The other is getting into some key culture issues. What's the culture? That's getting more into the question. What is the MIT culture? Is it an

embracing one in terms of people who will tend to be there to support you? So the culture, assimilation into the culture, however you capture that. The general assimilation and orientation. Orientation is the one piece—orientation to the business, orientation to the job, orientation to the organization. But then there's the orientation and assimilation into the culture. As I was sharing with you, what are some of the features and characteristics of the culture?

Aetna I can talk to when we go through this. Aetna is still that insurance-oriented mentality. It is very conservative. They are very impersonal. People don't speak. Brothers don't speak to brothers. You can get on an elevator and a brother will not speak to you to say, "Hey, how you doing?" So that is an assimilation. That you share with people.

When I first went in, a person took me to lunch. I was there all of about two weeks, maybe a week. They said, "One piece I want to make you aware of is that Aetna is a very difficult place to assimilate into." They gave me that piece.

*That's what a brother told you?*

No, this was a peer—a professional peer, a white person. They told me this. They said, "Aetna is a very difficult place." That was part of my meeting-of-people process; they do give you who to see initially. I was having lunch with this particular person. In my discussion with them about Aetna, they said, "Aetna is a very difficult place to assimilate into. You will think you have assimilated in six months down the road, even a year down the road"—this person had been there two years—"and you will find you haven't." You get the impression of having assimilated—people speaking to you, people acknowledging you in meetings. And then one day, all of a sudden, a roomful of people in a meeting will act like they don't know you. They act like they ain't heard what you said. Or in the hallway you thought you had a good rapport with somebody, and in a meeting you see him and try to follow up with him, he looks at you like, "I don't recall that discussion."

It's a culture of backstabbing. You will sit in a meeting, you will get an agreement, you will walk out of that meeting, and you will have people going off into bathrooms or into other offices and they will undermine the agreement that was made in the meeting among the people who were in the meeting. They will also make somebody look stupid. They will say, "In that meeting, can you believe

what Larry said? He must be on something." That kind of stuff. And they will literally go back and talk to their organizations about it, not keep it among their own. They will go talk to their staff and violate a confidence, if it was a confidential meeting, and then talk negatively about their boss, how he made a statement or expressed his position on an issue. So there's confidentiality violations, there's undermining culture, a difficult place to assimilate to.

Giving you that, what are the characteristics of an MIT? Are those prevalent? You throw that out and you do it in a constructive way. The other thing we do is we make sure the brothers go to dinner. A couple of times we have done that. The top corporate HR person of Aetna is a sister. She reports to the chairman. She is good and she spends time with me. She also looks to me now, because we have this rapport, to help across Aetna. We just established an Executive Diversity Council. This is made up of all diversity executives. Obviously, our plan is more to help the African-American community, but the Hispanics are on it—executive Hispanics at the vice president level and above are on this—and the Asian-Americans. We didn't bring in any gays or lesbians. People of color are what's represented on this Executive Diversity Council. Our job is to serve in an advisory form to the chairman of the company and senior management on diversity issues. That's our job. We still are crafting our strategy. In fact, next Monday night I'm going with this lady and the diversity head for all of Aetna to lead the work. He came from Marriott, where he had been vice president of diversity. He had been in the line job, so he knows business very well.

My point is, another thing is in terms of where are the support groups and what's going on around diversity? What is the diversity strategy? Who are the key players for people to talk to? What progress is being made here at this company? Are they really serious about making progress? Those kinds of things. So you're talking again from a business standpoint and an organizational standpoint and a diversity standpoint, in terms of how culture in this case is wrapped up into that.

But you're also talking, then moving over to the individual—to himself or herself—and that's where I was going to go next in terms of spending some time off-line with them. You know, grabbing folks for lunch. Last Saturday I went and played golf

with a guy. I've had people over to the house, just to come by. If they're looking for a house, look at my development area—the houses and my house. Dinners, about once a month a couple of us. When we had the first one, we agreed somebody else would initiate it next time. We don't formally do it. Then we got to where we even do some one-on-ones. Another brother—the senior vice president of emerging markets, the attorney who now has that emerging markets job—called me and it was really great, out of the blue. White folks have a hard time with him because he doesn't show his hand. But one-on-one with the brothers, he laughs and he's so light. He's one of us. He and I went one-on-one, you know.

Again, that type of stuff—to get those one-on-ones, to get the groups out off-line, to really build a rapport so we can build some trust here so we can kind of give each other heads up on things. That's the critical component of assimilation. Key on assimilation to the culture, if you walk away with anything, and look at helping people understand that culture and doing some things to help them to survive in that culture, because it will kill you otherwise.

*The key is understanding that culture.*

Yes. The key is helping them to understand it and providing them with some support.

*Let me see if I understand one other major factor you mentioned in this process. Do I hear you saying, for example, that one of the things that you think is key—particularly for blacks coming into a new culture, so to speak—would be to get some sense about the culture from other blacks who have been there, or persons who you sense have some sensitivity to help you understand? It doesn't have to be a person of color.*

That's exactly right. So it's both.

*The question I have, though, is—from your experience, how do you actually find those other individuals whom you could possibly approach, the ones who may be the kind of people who could help you understand the culture?*

I think you probably can answer that better than I can. You can name them to me here and then you reflect back on how you got to that point with them. I'll take a stab at it, because you're interviewing me, but it really comes to their track record and the rapport you have with them—their track record. You talked about Bill Hecht earlier. He gained some points with you in watching him go through that.

*Absolutely, no doubt about it.*

So you know that if something went down somewhere else, Bill had an experience that would be useful either as an off-line consultant for you or talking to another senior guy who was going through that with a person in his organization. You go to Bill and say, "Bill, would you mind having a conversation about how you managed this? You don't have to reveal the person, but can you talk about how you managed through that?" So you saw that. You see them in action and you're convinced from their track record that that's a quality person.

*That's absolutely right. I couldn't agree with you more. In fact, if I went into a new situation, one of the things I would notice would be, first of all, the blacks I think seem to have something on the ball, who do they go to? Yes, that's another way. Right.*

*I always just observe. I don't even have to ask. To me, a person who seems to have "something on the ball" can relate to a newly hired individual on a level that is quite different from this superficial level that seems to exist in most of these organizations. I would also think that the way the person deals with me directly—there's a vibe that you get from people over a period of time. You can fool us some of the time, but you can't fool us all the time. If I am talking to a person, say, who is white, and he could be a very sincere acting person, but then if another individual comes to have a dialogue, the way the person leaves me says to me how sincere this person may be. There may be good reason for the first time. If I see it happening several times, that to me means that I'm not worthy enough for this person to tell the individual, "Well, I'll be right with you in a minute." Do you know what I mean?*

I do indeed. I hear you.

*All of these other kinds of small nuances, you know what I mean?*

Read, and if the pattern is there you say, "Uh-huh, okay."

*First of all, we often are in places where we're the only ones. I can't imagine how much reading you had to do going into the alumni area for the first time. Who are you going to ask? You can't ask somebody like this.*

Right. You hit it. I think those are the nuances. You've got to be watching them to be helping folks. So yes, I think it's making sure of people who you are confident in, a few of us, and refer them to the new players. That's one.



*Based on your own experiences, is there any advice you would offer to a young Larry who would be entering a place like MIT as a very young person? Just in general, what advice would you give, based on all your experiences you have had so far?*

I think a couple of things. I think the one thing you've heard me say consistently is have a plan, be focused on a plan from a career standpoint. What is it that you ideally would like to be doing in your career? What are the steps that you need to take to get there and be flexible in that process? Throughout my career, I've been pretty flexible. I've kind of made a move here, made a move there. But I was always prepared. So preparation, and preparation comes through a plan and a focus. That's important.

The other important thing, along with that, is that nobody is going to do it for you. That is very important because I have not run into this entitlement mentality to the extent I have run into it with this new generation of youngsters. They look at the world as owing them. I'm talking particularly about the Generation X'ers, but I also see it pretty heavy in our youngsters, in our African-American youngsters. Interns are there, young professionals come in. They have no reference to how they got there, that they didn't get there on their own. Then they expect that they're supposed to get this promotion pretty quick or they should be getting more money quicker than paying a due.

So there's this entitlement mentality. I watch them. They come into my office, upset because they just took on a new responsibility and nobody's going to give them no more money. I say, "Where I come from, you're delighted to get new responsibility and you demonstrate that you can succeed, and then you're going to move ahead." You take it on yourself and you're gracious. No one is going to do it for you. They need to be gracious, gracious and humble, and it's hard to tell them that.

If I had someone who was really listening to me, I would share that with them. I have done that with some who really do listen. I say, "Humility, graciousness, ability to take responsibility for yourself, and then the focus on the plan." And not being afraid to listen to others—white, black, male, female. As my mother always says, "You don't get to be old being no fool." There's something to be gained from sitting and listening to someone who made some progress in their life, or had some

experiences. It may be, "Gee, I touched a hot rod and got burned, but let me share this with you so you don't have to go through that." Or it may be, "Gee, this is how I was able to be successful and these are some things I've put together." So that's important—the listening to others, the humility, the graciousness, having the plan.

Those are some things I would share. You're talking about in general, not so much just at MIT, but just coming in, certainly. The latter one that I was sharing about others is one I probably didn't do as much of as I should have. I'm not picking myself apart, but asking more questions of people is important—getting with you, getting with Bill Hecht, going in and just saying, "Hey, Bill, let's go to lunch and talk." But really pulling it back further than focusing just on my own needs. So, young people, don't be afraid to tap the resources around you and build a rapport with them. Get information.

The other final thing, the thing I've been saying throughout, is work-life balance, work-family balance. You've got to have that. I have it today. I don't work Saturdays, I really don't. I bring a laptop home sometimes. I will work long hours. I'll work about seven-thirty or quarter-to-eight in the morning to about seven-thirty or quarter-to-eight at night. I will do that Monday through Thursday.

*Those are long hours.*

Monday through Thursday. That's my structure. I'm okay there, and I have a structured day. I'm fine with that and sometimes I don't even get in until eight or eight-fifteen. I'm in and I hit the ground running. I now do lunch breaks, where I'll walk down to the cafeteria with someone. Or I'll have a meeting with them and eat my salad. If I don't go to lunch, I'll go get a turkey sandwich. I'm structured that way, where I don't have to think about it. I'm very conscious about even what I take in. What you eat is what you are. I'm very conscious about health as part of my external life, very conscious. I make sure that I take time for Larry to get a bite, even if it's a part of work. I know what I'm eating. I'm not going to just see what's on the menu today. I eat salad if I'm going to sit in the cafeteria and I eat a turkey sandwich if I'm taking it back to the office.

In the evening, after five, I'm on my e-mail. They're a heavy e-mail company. I've got to make sure I stay up administratively. My voice mails and my e-mails, any writing I have to do, that's work

from five or five-thirty to about seven, seven-thirty, or eight o'clock. I will do that. I don't take it home. Carla is fine with that, because she has a pretty challenging job herself. Friday night is our night. It's pizza night and I have myself a martini. That's the night. I go in and get myself a drink.

*Sounds like my schedule.*

Is that what you do too? Don't nobody bother us. She gets on the couch and I get in my chair. We sit there on Friday night and the pizza man comes. They know I call them. I order the pizza and they deliver it every Friday. They say, "Is this Larry?" "Yes, this is Larry." They know the pizzas we want. "That's you?" "Yeah." That's Friday night, brother. I sit there and chill, man, shut the week off. She may go up a little ahead of me. I'm sitting there and may watch something.

Then Saturday it's house stuff. I'm out in the yard. She's a big yard person and I'm a yard person with her. Errands, but no work stuff. Taking care of the bills. In the evening folks may come over or we may go somewhere, get a video. Sunday is laundry and getting ready for the week. If I have something to read, that I'm supposed to read before work, I may do it Sunday. I brought home my briefcase to get ready for Monday.

That's the balance. I can see a difference in my life, having that balance, versus work-work-work and then you don't know where you're going to be or what you're doing and you're just out there running. That is very important, that balance, including with the family that are remote—making sure I got that time out to get on the phone with my mom, making sure I got time when folks are coming out. This is summer and we got more folks coming out. So that's important. You only have folks one time. In your twenties and thirties you can say, "I want to go to the top," and you're working your butt off to get there, trying to do the right thing. I never thought I was trying to go to the top. I always worked hard because I thought that's what you were supposed to do. I tie that back to my mother and father. I always thought work ethics were very important, work practices. That's what was instilled in me, so I always worked hard. Like I said, I never raised a performance issue. But unfortunately, you've got to balance that stuff. So balance, work-family balance, is very important.

The one thing I've got to work hard on, though, I think, is the spiritual piece. That's an important piece in there too. I have the spiritual-

ity. It's really getting that formal place for us together to worship. We both certainly worship God and that balance is there, but we need to really get out of the house and go there to do it. That fellowship is very important. So that's that message.

*Well, it's an excellent message and you couldn't say it much better. Is there any other topic or issue that comes to mind, as you reflect on your own experience and on the experience of other blacks, that you would like to say before we end?*

A message to people coming in here to MIT—I think that this is a tremendous institution with a tremendous reputation. I think people need to stop and really appreciate what this institution represents and how it is regarded in the world overall. When you say MIT, people stop and listen. I tell you, I'm out there now and I'll say I was at MIT. People say, "You were at MIT?" First of all, if you were a student or a faculty member, it's a big deal. But still, the fact that I was an administrator there and put in some time—'78 to '85, "Oh, I was a professional fundraiser there and I did some personnel work"—they say, "Oh, okay," and they're still listening.

So it's a highly credible, highly reputable institution. Understand what you're getting into when you're playing ball here. There's a certain amount of sacrifice—you do make a tradeoff. It's no different anywhere else. Whether it's Aetna, MIT, Harvard, SUNY Oswego, we have our burden, our cross to bear as African-Americans. It makes it even more challenging because of all the reengineering and restructuring that's going on today. As an entity, people are stressed today, more stressed. It is not as warm and engaging, so it really, really becomes a challenge for African-Americans because we still haven't made the progress that we should have made. We revert back.

Looking at some of the attitudes that they exhibit at Aetna, I've had some heavy discussions about, "Where in the heck are we?" My boss doesn't have a clue. He doesn't have a clue that there are differences between African-Americans and white folks in terms of how you will manage them or relate to them. Or, even the naiveté to think that the world is not racist. Or, making such a comment as, "Somebody thinks that HR is an organization that takes watermelons to the picnic," not being a sophisticated business partner. One of the senior HR people who had heard that, I

wasn't in the meeting, was upset. He said, "Don't you understand what a comment about watermelons means?" He didn't mean it racially. He was defending HR, because he's a top HR guy. He was upset because people weren't taking HR seriously. They looked at HR as kind of the social folks, like in the old days. He said, "They think HR is supposed to bring watermelons to the picnic." Well, he didn't have sense enough to know, "Use another example, don't use that example." That's what we're dealing with there.

It's more than what you asked for, but I guess the struggle continues, man. We've just got to be aware that the struggle continues, so you balance that between being at an MIT and the reality that the struggle continues everywhere.