"It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.”

~ Robert Greenleaf, The Servant as Leader
by picking up on talent in others that they may not see in themselves.
As a young girl, Kim Drumgo was always looking out for her brother Jahmon. Although he was older, she designated herself as his faithful protector. As a young, gay male, Jahmon encountered his fair share of abuse and bullying. Drumgo, at 10 years old, didn’t quite understand, but she knew who he was and that it was something not a lot of people understood. So, when other kids teased him, young Kim was there to step in and defend him against the bullies. It was an assignment that she would continue long after they’d both reached adulthood and he’d become sick from the complications related to HIV/AIDS.

"From a very early age, I had a strong sense to protect others in ways they could not protect themselves. All I knew was that he needed my protection from schoolyard bullies and even adults who didn’t want to come to terms with who he was. Until his last day, I was always willing and ready to take on the emotional or even physical bruises aimed at him," Drumgo said.

A SERVANT-LEADER

Those strong qualities of empathy and awareness in Drumgo are two of the 10 defining characteristics of a servant-leader that Robert K. Greenleaf, founder of the modern servant leadership movement, espoused in his classic 1970 essay, The Servant as Leader. Greenleaf maintains that the “servant-leader is servant first,” meaning that identifying and meeting the needs of colleagues, customers and communities is a fundamental characteristic of a servant-leader.
Based on her career positions, first as director, chief diversity official at Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) and now as director of diversity and inclusion for the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA), as well as her commitment to lift and help others in her personal life, Drumgo is the embodiment of those characteristics Greenleaf describes.

Prior to her 11 years in the Diversity and Inclusion space, Drumgo spent over 13 years in technical project management. She held leadership positions in government, healthcare and banking with organizations, such as the North Carolina Department of Revenue, Keane, Inc. and Anderson Consulting (now Accenture). However, she believes that, recently, her role in diversity at AICPA allows her to influence change nationally and globally, as well.

“As I continue to look at the impact I can have in the diversity and inclusion space, I’ve progressively grown from working locally at BCBSNC. AICPA offered me the national reach and I knew that the partnership that AICPA has recently made with the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, an international accounting membership organization, would foster a long-term goal of working globally to address issues of respect and equality across the world.”

Additionally, Drumgo is the chair of the board of directors for The PhD Project, an organization that has been her passion since its inception. The PhD Project is the nation’s largest network of doctoral students of color and aims to increase the number of PhDs of color in the United States. She also mentors a variety of students at all levels of their education and career paths.

“I am a firm believer that diversity is better than merit. Diversity helps us think outside the box and helps the businesses where I work to be successful. It is a part of my identity to make diversity a priority.”
founded to increase workplace diversity by increasing the diversity of business school faculty. Since its inception more than 20 years ago, the number of minority business school faculty has more than quadrupled. Although, Drumgo was familiar with the organization’s mission, it wasn’t until she attended her first PhD Project Conference that she realized how impactful it was.

“I was immediately enamored and filled with the energy that all the potential students had regarding this very important next step in their lives. The PhD Project has created a sense of community for minority Ph.D. candidates and lifelong friendships and supporters for those who receive their Ph.D. Once a PhD project member, always a PhD project member. The support continues throughout your career,” she said.

During Drumgo’s tenure with the PhD Project, five years as a member before serving as board chair, she has noticed undeniable attributes that have contributed to the organization’s success.

“Passion and persistence, passion to do something that matters and an undeniable persistence to keep going even in the toughest of circumstances. In all the PhD candidates I’ve met … passion and persistence has been common traits among all of them,” she stated. “Students who see success will strive to achieve success. The PhD Project is about curating a vision in talented minority students to transition from being scholars in the classroom to being leaders in front of the classroom.”

FAMILY LEGACY

Drumgo’s servant leadership isn’t something she picked up from a career of working in diversity; it was instilled in her by a long line of relatives who were highly educated leaders from the Deep South and believed in education and in serving their communities. Her grandparents met at Tuskegee University and upon graduation, her grandfather worked as an agricultural consultant for black farmers, offering advice to black landowners on crop rotation and her grandmother was a teacher in
None of my personal accomplishments make me **prouder** than the ones my children achieve.
schools and the community. All of her grandparents’ six children have advanced degrees—four have doctoral degrees and two have master’s degrees.

“Their belief that education was power resonated and continues to be woven into the fabric of our family’s history... Now in our third generation of college graduates, their legacy is continuing,” Drumgo said.

COMMITMENT TO THE GROWTH OF PEOPLE

Another of Greenleaf’s characteristics of a servant-leader is a commitment to the growth of people. So, it’s little wonder that Drumgo’s proudest achievements don’t belong to her; they’re her three children’s.

“None of my personal accomplishments make me prouder than the ones my children achieve,” she said. “Even if I were to go to the moon and back, it would not equal the level of accomplishment I feel when my children overcome obstacles and achieve great things themselves. This means, I’m giving society a gift of conscious global citizens.”

Although she and her former husband, Shawn, are divorced, they long ago committed themselves to remaining friends and co-parents for the benefit of the children.

“Our goal was to make sure that our children had uninterrupted lives through our relationship misfortune. We are an ‘all-hands-on-deck parent team’ and that’s the greatest gift we can give our kids,” she explained.

Her obligation to the growth and development of people isn’t only reserved for family or those close to her, as she recently extended herself to others through professional coaching. “I am energized by picking up on talent in others that they may not see in themselves. I’d like to help others nurture their talent and help them exceed their own expectations,” she said.

It’s also through coaching that she learned one of the most valuable leadership lessons of her career.

“[I] learned the power of asking questions that create meaningful dialogue. [That] begins with understanding our own intent,” she stated. “If my intent is to change your mind about LGBT [issues] in the workplace, then I enter the conversation listening to win, to interject and to provide something. On the other hand, if my intent is to understand your thoughts on LGBT issues in the workplace, then I enter the conversation listening for understanding, to be curious and courteous in letting [your] thoughts be heard in a non judgmental way.

Meeting people where they are allows you to see both sides and craft solutions that will result in sustainable change.”

In her role at the AICPA, Drumgo develops forward-thinking strategies to increase the pipeline of diverse talent and foster inclusiveness across the accounting profession. She also serves as the vice chair of the AICPA’s National Commission on Diversity and Inclusion (NCDI), which is dedicated to providing thought leadership on the recruitment, retention and advancement of diverse talent in accounting. She has led the AICPA to develop best practice toolkits, assessments, and facilitate webinars to help firms and organizations improve their inclusivity.

Drumgo works with a dynamic team of professionals dedicated to deconstructing the latest insights, analytics, and benchmarks that inform the AICPA’s strategy to support and guide colleges and universities, state societies, and firms and organizations in inclusion. Due to the efforts of her team and the NCDI, AICPA was awarded a Leader in Diversity Award by the Triangle Business Journal in 2016.

When asked what advice she would give to up-and-coming professionals in the diversity space, Drumgo responded, “Be emotionally intelligent: be self aware, self regulated, motivational, have the ability to show empathy and execute flawlessly socially.”

As a guide along her own journey, Drumgo relies on the singular quote: “Focus on what you can change, let go of the things you can’t change.”

“I do not like to waste time or my energy by focusing on this quote, I eliminate the waste of time and energy. I’m always striving for a goal and I live a life that’s purposeful and adaptable,” she said.

“The only thing that you can control is you. What you think, determines how you feel. What you feel then determines how you behave. The more you can control you, the better equipped you will be to influence the things that happen around you.”