



## **Christopher Cathcart** **Public Relations Guru, Author, Public Speaker and Community Activist**

Interview by Sonya Shields

Christopher Cathcart is president and founder of OneDiaspora Group and The One Diaspora Project in Los Angeles, California. He is an author and editorialist, noted public speaker, community advocate, and instructor of marketing and public relations at the Columbia College Hollywood, a leading film school in LA. Chris has more than 19 years of public relations experience that spans a wide spectrum of entertainment, corporate and political activity.



And in recent years, his commitment to community service has become his primary focus and true passion in life.

Chris and I go way back to our public relation class at Howard University with Dr. Debra Miller, one of the most accomplished women in the field. Chris and I now laugh at how we had no idea where our lives were headed. But I always knew that Chris was headed for greatness. He made a huge impact on the lives of the students and faculty at Howard. Chris became involved in student government and ran for president of the Howard University Student Association with his good friend Manotti Jenkins and won. One of their biggest accomplishments was a yearlong anti-apartheid campaign. They not only protested on campus, at the South African Embassy and around the city, but also hosted forums to ensure students were educated on the cause. Chris not only led the anti-apartheid movement on campus, he advocated that all students at the university be required to take a class on African-American history. His vision is now a reality for current students at Howard.

It was during his college days that his passion for activism and giving back to the community began. And while he has worked for some of the largest companies in the world and has a long list of impressive clients, Chris has maintained a commitment to using his life in the service of others. He believes that his life has come full circle. He knows more than ever that his path is giving back. Talking to Chris is inspiring because he is a true public relations talent and well known in the entertainment and corporate world, and has decided to primarily focus on working with nonprofit organizations. In his career, he has worked for companies such as Turner Broadcasting Systems, Inc. (home to CNN, TBS, TNT networks, etc.), Motown Records, and Warner Brothers Television, to name a few. As an independent consultant, he has worked with a broad array of news-making individuals and organizations, along with a variety of prestigious events. Through OneDiaspora Consulting, his clients have included a long list of companies that includes names such as Jaguar Cars, Hidden Beach Recordings, and UniWorld Group, Inc., a leading African African-owned advertising and communications agency.

In 1999 Chris launched The OneDiaspora Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting areas in need throughout the African Diaspora. The Project also focuses on raising awareness and activity surrounding the international HIV/AIDS crisis and the devastating impact it is having in the black community. He is also a published author whose first book, *The Lost Art of Giving Back*, a how-to



guide to help encourage people to enhance their lives through volunteerism, was published in 2006. As an editorialist, his social and political commentaries have been featured in newspapers and magazines across the nation, and he has an essay in the groundbreaking anthology *Not In My Family*, a collection of works by leading African Americans on the impact HIV/AIDS is having in the black community.

As a public speaker, Cathcart has addressed groups, schools, organizations and a variety of conferences around the country on such topics as Brand Marketing, The Effective Use of Media and Public Relations, and Self-Empowerment Through Volunteerism, among others. In 2005, he co-founded the “As Powerful as You Want To Be” public relations and mentoring workshops. The three-hour “boot camps” arm participants with simple, yet effective PR techniques aimed at helping them take concrete steps toward realizing their full potential in business and beyond.



However, he considers his work in the volunteer realm most rewarding. He has been actively involved in community service his entire adult life; mentoring young people, frequently speaking at schools of all levels, and volunteering with numerous organizations. He served seven years as a mentor for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Los Angeles, which, in 2002, named him, “School-Based Mentor of the Year.”

Chris also sits on the board of directors for several organizations including R.I.S.E. (Reaching Inside for Self Esteem), a Washington DC-based community assistance program, and the Black AIDS Institute, an organization dedicated to combating the AIDS pandemic in Black communities. It was through his work with the Black AIDS Institute that he was able to publish LEDGE, the nation’s first and only HIV/AIDS awareness magazine written by and for students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

**Please read the interview with this very inspiring and wonderful man, who truly represents what giving back is all about.**

#### **What is your passion?**

My passion is encouraging other folks to get active and give back. To get involved in the community. It probably sounds so cliché to make the world a better place. I have been trying to figure this out for awhile. How to get the community more involved. That's my passion.

#### **What motivates you to do your work? What do you hope to accomplish by doing this work?**

In general, I like to encourage people to find out what motivates them to get active. Whether it's HIV/AIDS, mentoring youth or refugee issues in Africa. Those are my three avenues. I try to work with people who are working in those areas. I also try to tap into what people are passionate about. I tell people not to feel the need to do what I am doing or anyone else. There are lots of opportunities to get active and get involved in public service. I think that everyone has an issue that resonates with them. Find out what motivates you and get busy.

#### **When did you discover what you wanted to do? What was the next step?**

My father was pretty politically conscious. There was always information in the house on different issues impacting the Black community. And so activism was in me, but I didn't completely know it. I went to Howard on a football scholarship, mostly because the women were so beautiful. I thought naively that just being at Howard, I would naturally soak up the history and culture. But I found out that you still had to look for it. What tipped the scale for me is going to several parties with thousands of students and I saw a flier on this film on Malcolm X. I had barely heard about him in high school. So I decided to go to the screening and there were five people there. And this is at Howard University. I go from a party with 1,000 to a film with only five students. So I realized maybe being at Howard is not enough. I need to involve myself in history and culture. There were some protests on campus during

my sophomore year and I got involved with the campus and became active. Then I ran for student government. I didn't know exactly what I was "suppose" to do. I just knew it was more than satisfying my personal needs. The buildings at Howard were named after people who dedicated their lives to public service. And they all distinguished themselves to help other people. And I knew that I should be doing something in that vein. I knew that I wanted to give back and not just worry about how much money I could make. So I gave up the football scholarship and decided to take another path.

Public relations happened because I changed from journalism and decided to go towards public relations because it was a natural direction for me. It was a natural profession for me. It helps to persuade, communicate and develop messages. As I became more politically active, I realized that the public relations would help me to encourage other people.

### **Who inspires you?**

That's a hard one. There are many people who I am around everyday. Certainly our leaders like Martin and Malcom. But there are people that I know, like my father. He has always lived his life doing what he believes is right. Public relations guru Terry Williams helped me get going in public relations. She's a good friend of mine. There are people who have inspired me throughout my life who are not rich, but are dedicated and do small things all the time. Because of so many everyday people that I have been lucky to meet, no one is going to write on my tombstone that I have a BMW and live in a nice house. I hope people will say that I lived my life to help other people.

### **How do you define success?**

Inspiring other people. Most people use wealth and celebrity as their measure of success. That's the matrix. That's what society has done. The society wants us to be top consumers. To buy things. We need to buy bigger and more expensive things. For many of us, it's about where do you live, what kind of car you drive, etc. But real success is how do you help to make the lives of other people better. If you think about who we talk about that have made an impact in the world, we do not talk about people who were just "rich." We talk about people who actually gave back to the world. Even the Rockefellers of the world have given away millions of dollars to help other people. Maybe I will never know how successful I am. Because it is a pursuit more than a destination. I would rather people admire me for what I did than what I have.

### **Where do you see your life professionally in the next ten years?**

The goal is to do more teaching more. I teach at a Film School here in Los Angeles. It's fantastic. I want to do more teaching, public speaking and writing. I want to work with more nonprofits around my specific interests. I'm actually speaking at the Divinity School at Howard in another week. I don't see myself doing a lot of media consultant work anymore. I do have Heart & Soul as a client. I've worked with UniWorld. I did all the media for Hidden Beach the label that Jill Scott is on. I worked with a host of nonprofit groups on special events. But I'm moving away from those types of jobs. I really want to focus on nonprofits and speaking engagements and writing. I've done a lot of editorial and commentary writing on social and political stuff. And I have taken on a crusade to get heterosexual black men to address HIV/AIDS and to overcome homophobia.



### **What do you fear? How do you overcome that?**

My greatest fear is not doing the things that are important. I don't know how to overcome it. I just try to stay on path and not being drawn back into selfish behavior, other people's expectations, or "meism." I have a fear of throwing my hands up and living my life based on what people think I should do.

### **Looking back over your life: Is there one thing professionally or personally you would do differently?**

I would have started much earlier on the path to work with charity organizations, inspire young people and people in general to get involved in the community.

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