



From Generational Barriers  
to Generational Wealth

# Inside the Black Talent Skills–First Journey





As soon as Melvina Jones stepped into Durham's Hayti District—a neighborhood built by freedmen and freedwomen—she felt something shift.

It was an overcast day in October. But as Jones approached the Hayti Heritage Center, the clouds gave way to sunbeams that cast a soft glow over the center's steeple and stained-glass windows. Once a site of refuge for civil rights leaders, the center is a monument to Black history and culture.

It feels only fitting that Jones is at this historical landmark today to talk to Black talent about how to build their own futures.

Over the next few hours, Jones meets with multiple Black attendees at OneTen's Career Speed Coaching Fair. After listening intently to their journeys, she shares how they can prepare for the family-sustaining careers they deserve. She then points them to on-site members of the OneTen Coalition, which include Amgen, Bank of America, Cisco, IBM and her organization, Delta. All these companies have sent delegates to this event to provide career advice and resources, as well as to connect Black talent with job opportunities.



## Creating Opportunities For Black Talent

OneTen is a coalition of employers, talent developers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders committed to hiring, upskilling and promoting one million Black individuals without four-year degrees over ten years. Jones herself is one of the thousands of Black talent who have been able to move into a [family-sustaining career](#) because of the coalition's skills-first approach focusing on competencies.



When I thought about corporate, I didn't think about myself because I never saw myself reflected in the corporate mirror. OneTen gave me the confidence to say, 'Oh, I do belong. I am enough, as I am, where I am, with the background that I have.'

— Melvina Jones

Equity Strategies Coordinator, Delta



Melvina Jones



## Opening Pathways for Advancement

Historically, Black people have not felt embraced by corporate America. Across the country, Black unemployment is [twice as high](#) as white unemployment. Black adults face systemic barriers to accessing meaningful careers. Centuries of oppression have added up to a staggering racial wealth gap. On average, Black households [hold just one-sixth of the wealth](#) of white households.

OneTen aims to close this opportunity and racial wealth gap. The coalition is working to transform the status quo in Corporate America and unlock opportunities that will allow Black workers to climb the economic ladder and build generational wealth. Its mission is a beacon of promise for Black individuals and a call to action for companies to rethink how they assess and support Black talent.

In the United States, true [family-sustaining careers are rare](#). In addition, four-year degree requirements for these careers often prevent Black talent from moving out of [frontline positions](#). Jones herself has experienced how difficult it can be to move out of entry-level support roles.

For 12 years, Jones worked in various support roles at Delta—as a gate agent, a global ticketing support specialist and a lead customer service representative. Six years into successfully managing a team, Jones asked about opportunities to move up. She was told that without a degree, her options for advancement were limited.

But that all changed when Delta joined OneTen in 2020. As one of the coalition's founding members, Delta pledged to dismantle the barriers that prevented Black talent from reaching their full potential—barriers like bachelor's degrees.

Together with OneTen, Delta worked to remove four-year degree requirements and re-credential its non-executive job openings. By 2021, more than [90% of these openings](#) no longer required a college degree.

Delta also set a goal to staff 25% of its corporate and management positions with employees previously working in frontline roles. It created an “earn while you learn” apprenticeship program to support this goal. Embracing a skills-first approach to identifying and promoting internal talent, the apprenticeship program also equips hiring managers with the mindset and tools to support and develop employees who have traditionally been overlooked.

For Jones, this shift to skills-first thinking has been transformative. Through the apprenticeship program, she is now working as an equity strategies coordinator for Delta's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) team. She has room to grow, as well as the ability to earn more and invest in her future.

OneTen's partnership with Delta has created upward mobility—and not just for Jones, but for hundreds of Delta employees. “My story is not an uncommon one,” she says. “I’m just the story that’s being told now.” Jones looks back to her childhood, spent in the working-class neighborhoods of Greenville and New Bern, North Carolina. She remembers her healthcare worker parents who hustled every day to get by. She thinks of her sister, whom she encouraged to sign up for the OneTen Career Marketplace, as well as her nieces, who have seen their world open up.

"I'm so excited for what it means for our collective," Jones says. "To have opportunities that we were qualified for but never really got—for this next generation to see us excelling and not just working ourselves to the bare bones—I love to see it. We deserve economic freedom.

## Accelerating Career Changes

Cedric Green knows about struggle. He was born and raised in Oklahoma City, where the [legacy of racial segregation](#) and [poverty](#) still persists.

"It was kind of rough," Green says. "Growing up in OKC gave me a false sense of what I could actually do. I felt limited."

Growing up, Green was curious about technology. After receiving a throwaway computer from his high school, Green spent his free time discovering the ins and outs of the machine. But soon, his interest had to take a backseat to survival.

As an adult, Green strove to make ends meet. He worked as everything from a lawn care business owner to a Class A truck driver. He was driving for FedEx when he noticed the industry changing. "Cameras and different types of technology were finding their way in the truck," he says. "It brought on a concern about autonomous trucking. I also knew I had to make a change and switch to a career in tech if I wanted to stay relevant. But I didn't know if I could quite afford to take a pay cut and retrain myself. I thought: I've got three daughters. How am I going to feed them?"



Cedric Green

At the same time Green was wrestling with his next move, OneTen was working with talent developer Udacity and the Blacks In Technology (BIT) Foundation to establish a [nanodegree scholarship](#). The scholarship included the opportunity to earn a certification in front-end web development, a certification that would normally cost learners more than \$1,500. Green applied for the scholarship on a whim. At the time, he thought, “There’s no way I’ll get accepted into this program. It’s probably geared toward attracting younger talent, but why not try anyway?” But to Green’s surprise, his application was accepted.



When I got the scholarship email, I almost jumped out of my seat. I’ve been given nothing, so to have somebody else who believes in you, that doesn’t even know you, is nothing short of incredible. I used that energy to power through the program, and it has since given me a foothold to actually secure employment.

— Cedric Green

Full-Stack Software Developer

With the scholarship, Green was able to receive real-world training, work towards his bachelor’s degree *and* continue to work full-time. He used his new programming experience to secure a position as a full-stack software developer.

With the scholarship, Green’s financial barriers to a career change were removed and he was able to realize his childhood dream: working in tech. He now has a sense of stability and a new perspective on the economic possibilities for his family.

Like Green, many Black adults fear [increased risk of career disruption](#) due to the rise of automation in frontline work. Understanding this reality, OneTen ensures that qualifying jobs from their employer members have limited risk of automation in the near term. Moreover, by building strategic partnerships with talent developers, OneTen is helping Black workers level up their skills and move into new industries. And with scholarships, apprenticeship programs and talent support services, Black talent like Green do not have to choose between their current livelihood and future career growth.

Sierra Stanton



## Discovering Untapped Potential

A natural and ambitious self-starter, Sierra Stanton has always defined her own success. As a child in Southern California, Sierra spent her time marking up issues from her grandfather's *Harvard Business Review* subscription, working at after-school and summer jobs as well as creating her own entrepreneurial opportunities.

"I worked at a skatepark, cleaned homes, helped out with my grandmother's business on weekends..." Sierra explains. "I would even package items I'd buy in bulk to sell to other kids. I was always thinking of creative ways to make money."

For a variety of reasons, and despite excelling in high school, [Sierra didn't have the resources she needed](#) to pursue a degree at a traditional, four-year college after graduation. So she pursued other opportunities, including attending community college, joining a tech startup, and later even starting a small business serving startups and other organizations. But eventually, Sierra began to feel that even with her hard-earned knowledge, skills and network, [her lack of a four-year degree was a roadblock to further growth](#).

"I couldn't find opportunities for growth in the areas I was interested in," Sierra said. "Especially in big tech, there are a lot of gatekeepers. I started to realize I didn't know how to play the game—and didn't know if I exactly wanted to, either."

While completing a data science bootcamp to expand her skillset, Sierra discovered OneTen, which helped match her with a role on Cisco's Global



“This new kind of world has opened up to me. I've been able to learn and grow in ways that I didn't realize were possible before. I get the chance to take advantage of an incredible amount of resources, skills training and support.

— **Sierra Stanton**  
DE&I Project Manager, Cisco

Market Development team. Sierra started participating in OneTen events and initiatives, including taking part in a “Voices of Black Talent” panel and began working on data storytelling projects with Cisco’s DE&I team. Excited by the opportunity to incorporate her long-standing passion for social justice into her everyday work, Sierra later transitioned to the company’s DE&I team full-time.

“On this team, I get to use my skills to open the door for other folks, people who are incredibly brilliant in each of their own unique ways. It’s incredibly inspiring, and makes me confident that I’m where I’m meant to be.”

In addition to having the opportunity to learn and grow, Sierra has enjoyed a multitude of other benefits at Cisco. Thanks to the company’s flexible remote work options, she recently spent several weeks in Europe, visiting and working in Paris and Berlin. And after exploring Cisco’s whole-person benefits package, Sierra started regularly attending therapy and now engages with a money coach, who has offered support for budgeting, increasing her credit score and more.

For Sierra and others, wages are not the only consideration when it comes to building a foundation for prosperity. OneTen’s *State of the Black Workforce* report found that [benefits ranked second](#) for Black talent when considering a new job.

“When I meet with new OneTen Cohort hires, I tell them all the time: pay attention to those benefits, because not everyone realizes all their options,” she says.





## Supporting Black Excellence at Scale



Closing the opportunity gap for Black talent isn't just about increased representation. It's about cultivating corporate environments where Black talent can advance and get the opportunities and economic justice they are due. Focusing on skill sets, rather than four-year degree requirements, is a powerful step that not only gets these workers off the sidelines but allows companies to access an untapped talent pool that can help their organization thrive. Understanding skill gaps, and taking active steps to promote professional development through [apprenticeship](#) and [sponsorship programs](#), further equips Black talent for success.

When companies make a commitment to prioritize the advancement of Black talent, they also sign up to shift the way they think about the talent journey. OneTen helps companies make these changes through a variety of initiatives, including:

- **Re-credentialing:** a process whereby companies evaluate the skills and experience needed for existing roles and jobs and remove unnecessary four-year degree requirements.
- **Community of Practice and Working Groups:** recurring forums in which coalition employers collaborate and share insights and best practices around creating and sustaining inclusive and equitable, skills-first cultures. The forums are led by OneTen and its strategic partner, Grads of Life, an organization that helps companies create and implement diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) strategies that deliver social impact and business benefits.

To help connect Black talent to job opportunities from coalition members, OneTen created a Career Marketplace. This platform allows Black talent without four-year degrees to apply directly to well-paying jobs from the coalition's more than 70 companies, as well as access support services and upskilling resources from its network of more than 100 talent developers. The Career Marketplace uses smart technology to match talent with jobs based on skills and experience, teaches talent how to set career goals and explore various career paths, and puts them in the driver's seat while navigating their career.

The coalition also hosts virtual and in-person events bringing together talent, employers, talent developers and community partners to support recruitment and talent development initiatives.

Since OneTen's inception, more than 87,000 qualifying talent have been hired and promoted through the coalition, increasing their access to economic opportunity and mobility.

Behind every figure in that 87,000 is a Black life. An individual who has transcended challenges and obstacles. A household that has seized opportunities. A community that is that much closer to economic mobility.

Having the opportunity to fully participate in the economy and build wealth unlocks freedoms that were [historically out of reach](#) for Black people: freedom to create long-term goals, freedom to move to better opportunities and freedom to invest in the next generation's dreams.

## About OneTen

Founded in 2020, OneTen is a coalition of leading chief executives and their companies who are coming together to upskill, hire and promote one million Black individuals who do not yet have a four-year degree into family-sustaining jobs with opportunities for advancement over ten years. OneTen connects employers with talent developers and other skill-credentialing organizations, leading nonprofits and community-based partners who support the development of diverse talent. By creating more equitable and inclusive workforces, we believe we can reach our full potential as a nation of united citizens. OneTen recognizes the unique potential in everyone—every individual, every business, every community—to change the arc of America's story with Black talent.

Join us at [OneTen.org](https://oneten.org), where one can be the difference.