

Leaders of Tomorrow Report 09

By Monsuru Alasi

The Leaders of Tomorrow (LOT) programme has been one of the most crucial influences in my life thus far, affecting all parts of my life academically and otherwise. Since joining at age 14, the mentors have guided me through my transition from boyhood to a young adult. I still can remember the first time I walked through those doors, Kemar and me, late of course! The first thing we had to do in front of a sea of new faces was explain why we were late, our first experience of the infamous hot seat.

Having survived, I knew then that this was a very interesting programme, coupled with the opportunity to go to America. This was something I wanted to be a part of. This still stands true today, as my membership of LOT developed my confidence, as well as given me the opportunity to develop necessary skills to succeed in life. Through the weekly sessions, debates, visits and residentials have helped developed my intellect and shaped me to be the person I am today. Furthermore, attending the National Black MBA Association Conference in Atlanta (2006) motivated me to work hard in order to achieve my goals, as well as helping me to focus on what was important. I didn't even think I was good enough to make the selection for the Atlanta conference, I remembered thinking I had failed the interview when Vallin started questioning me about my Spanish! But luckily, Vallin saw something in me that told him to choose me; either that or he just wanted a good boy/girl balance. I now know that he saw something in me!

After the Atlanta conference I carried on attending, whilst some of my peers decided to leave. Why did I stay? I stayed because the programme continued to inspire and develop me, giving me exposure to new experiences. These experiences have helped me through my GCSE and AS examinations, as well as giving me the confidence to apply to prestigious universities. In fact the programme was a major factor in my preparation to apply to Oxford University. Although this was unsuccessful, the skills and experience attained during the process have benefited me greatly and were useful in my application to other universities as well as my application to the Prime Minister Global Fellowship Programme this year, another experience I was made aware of via the Leaders of Tomorrow programme. This is just another example of the teaching of the programme, when one door closes, another one opens.

Brazil was without doubt the best experience of my life. Those six weeks I will always remember and it wouldn't have been possible without Vallin and the support of the LOT programme. The Prime Minister's Global Fellowship Programme sends 100 students from all over England to Brazil, India or China for six weeks during the summer to see the effects of globalisation in different parts of the world in order for us to become global citizens in this new and changing economy. I was lucky enough to be selected as one of the 30 young people beating a field of over 400 hopefuls to represent the UK in Brazil.

The first two weeks was spent in Rio de Janeiro, where we were learning the language and immersing in the local culture. We were taught Portuguese, the language spoken in Brazil, and visited some of the tourist sites such as Sugarloaf Mountain and the Christ the Redeemer statue. The next two weeks were spent in Sao Paulo, where we stayed with host families, living the life of a Brazilian student, with a wide range of lifestyles, from penthouse suites and mansions, to living in poverty, or less favourable conditions. We also shadowed them in their school environment, seeing how the education system in Brazil differed to that of the UK and the contrast between public and private education in Brazil. The final two weeks were spent at the invitation of a Multinational corporation to see how Brazil plays a part in the global economy as well as Brazilian business culture.

Brazil did many things for me, it took me out of my environment, not just Peckham or South London, but the UK itself, and allowed me to reflect on my life and my ideas and allowed me to grow as an individual, as well as making 29, or even 99 new friends, some I hope will be long lasting. The whole experience also alerted me to the fact that there is more to the world than the UK or the USA. It has really opened my eyes to the idea of being a global citizen and working and living outside the UK, not just Rio or Sao Paulo, but also Dubai or maybe Hong Kong.

The LOT mentors have worked extremely hard over the years to help me become the best person I could be, from the get go, from teaching me to confound everyday stereotypes and how to succeed as a Black male in the UK, by remaining focused on the bigger picture. If they see potential in you they will go beyond the call of duty of most youth groups, such as assisting in the interview process of my Oxford application. When I was interested in becoming a barrister, LOT made it possible to meet Alphege Bell, a successful barrister, to gain some more information about the legal sector, to the sessions on financial literacy by Principle Investments which was a factor in me now wanting to work in the financial sector, after they told me how much money they made!

LOT has had a great influence in my life by giving me the relevant exposure, socially and culturally, from the “Ghetto Grammar” sessions, The NBMBA conferences and the trips to the National theatre. This programme has certainly moulded me in my transition from boy to a young man.

During my time at LOT I have attended two NBMBA conferences; my first in 2006 in Atlanta which I still feel was the best conference, and my second in New Orleans this year. I still look through my notes from time to time to remind myself of the messages I gained from the experience, such as:-

There are two important days of your life: 1) The day you were born, and 2) The day you know why!

“Average is the top of the bottom, but bottom of the top”

The impact of these conferences has been quite significant in changing my perception on life and my personal goals.

The theme to this year’s conference was ‘*Connect and reConnect*’, which I felt was relevant to me because I am at the stage in my life where making connections and networking is crucial to succeeding in my future career goals, alongside the focus on business and entrepreneurship by having useful workshops. At the careers fair, a sign of my maturity through this programme was that I was seeking out all the investment banks and MBA universities enquiring about applications and internships opportunities, whereas back in Atlanta, my aim was almost solely to grab as much freebies as I could.

This programme has been a guide throughout my journey to success; from that little kid from Academy at Peckham who turned up late, to a young man reading Politics and Sociology at the University of Warwick, a tier 1 university. I am extremely grateful to all of those who have helped me along the way and I would like to thank all the mentors, Vallin, Lindsay, Southwark Council, British Airways, National Theatre etc, who have supported the LOT program over the years, also all the fellow leaders who have come, gone and stayed over the years for enriching my experience.