

## Dr. Bonnie R. James

“Facilities are instruments that must serve and support the mission of the institution. That’s why planning is so important.”

Dr. Bonnie James knows what he’s talking about. He spent an entire career — his first career — sitting on the “other side of the table.” The breadth of his experience in education stretches from the classroom to the boardroom and from human resources to financial planning and management. His parents had hoped that he would choose medicine or law, but early on, teachers shaped him and awakened in him a desire to “give back.” A high school teacher encouraged him to go to college and a community college teacher inspired him to reach even higher. He has been and still is both a student and a teacher.

After completing two undergraduate degrees, a master’s degree and a USC doctorate (all in education and/or administration and finance), James distinguished himself by becoming the first African American Chief Business Officer at a California Community College. As the first Chief Facilities Executive for the Los Angeles Unified School District, he oversaw a \$2.5 billion construction budget and functioned as the District’s construction program manager. In these positions he honed two very valuable skills — managing details and managing people.

Most people who have reached James’ level of success have chosen to rest on their laurels, but he has started a new company, one that he thinks fills a crying need. Some people call him “missionary.” The way he sees it — and he sees it as few others in the business do — every construction project is made up of thousands of pieces: pieces of buildings, of information, of processes. They all have to fit together and work together, and that takes minute planning. “Attending to detail minimizes mistakes. Minimizing mistakes saves time and money and helps make sure that the building works -- on both a practical and a conceptual level. Will the roof leak? Will the toilets flush? Will the space be flexible enough for the next generation?”

Often the most challenging pieces of the puzzle are the diverse institutional stakeholders. James understands that needs and interests in the educational environment vary within institutions and from campus to campus. He knows because he has experience at institutions such as Los Angeles Unified School District, Pasadena City College, Compton Community College and Los Angeles Southwest College. He’s very sensitive to the concerns of faculty, staff, students and the community at large, and believes that the best approach is straightforward communication, whether the news is good or bad. “When a mistake is made, admit it. Then waste no time in fixing the problem.”

Bonnie James takes a certain pride in knowing that for most of his life, he has been able to accomplish what he set out to do. He even shot a 77 in golf once. Just once... but there’s always next week.

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