

Exclusive Interview With The Former Candidate of The Apprentice 2: Stacie Upchurch

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 28 February 2011 21:02



Née in Omaha, Nebraska, Stacie Jones Upchurch grew up in Colorado. It is important to note that Upchurch hasn't just relied on her beauty to "make it". She attended both Emory and Mercer Universities in Atlanta where she received, respectively, her B.A. in Marketing and her M.B.A.

At twenty, while attending college, she set up a marketing company that employed a staff of seventeen. She ran several businesses in Atlanta before settling in New York City, poised to achieve her modeling, acting and business goals. In this respect, Modeling on the runways of New York City, acting on daytime television, running her own Subway franchise, starring on Donald Trump's "Apprentice," (season 2) represents just a few of Stacie J.'s accomplishments.

Aforementioned Stacie Upchurch is an ambitious and a brilliant woman. She became a candidate for the second season of the TV reality show *The Apprentice*. Over one million

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people apply each year to participate on this show. Upchurch was among the eighteen highly qualified and successful applicants. All candidates of

[The Apprentice](#)

were subjected to a series of interviews, auditions and intense competition with other aspiring corporate executives. Over forty million people watch

The Apprentice

each week. It has become one of the most successful programs in television history, and has received at least four Emmy nominations.

Stacie Upchurch started modeling in college when Manhattan Model Search came to Atlanta looking for new talent. Out of 5,000 people, Mrs. Upchurch was one of two finalists chosen by Elite NY, and soon Stacie started working in Miami. She then modeled in Europe and Africa, and subsequently returned home to Atlanta to finish graduate school and pursue business interests. Stacie Upchurch was also a professional model with Ford Model Management based in New York City. After selling her interest in her first restaurant, Stacie Upchurch resumed her modeling career and went to New York to pursue other business endeavors.

Settling in Harlem, Stacie J. and her family decided to open a Subway Sandwich Shop franchise. Their business, located in Harlem across from former President Bill Clinton's office on 125th Street, allows the youth to gain valuable experience which will serve them in the future. After living there for a few months, Mrs. Upchurch recognized and seized a great opportunity to create jobs, provide healthy food alternative and take advantage of an emerging market within her community.

Stacie Upchurch has also launched a jewelry and accessories line available at Icing by Claire's stores nationwide. The line, available in 200 stores, includes rings, belly chains, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, sunglasses, handbags, and belts. Icing by Claire's, a division of Claire's Stores Inc., is an accessories store for women age 17 to 27.

It is important to mention that Mrs. Upchurch has an interest in other domains. In this regard, she made her acting debut in the film "The Scorned" (a 2005 horror movie). It was the first movie comprised entirely of people from previous reality television series. The movie was filmed during the E! behind-the-scenes reality show "Kill Reality"; Upchurch played the role of Trish. She also acted in many American soap operas such as *As The World Turns*, *One Life To Live* and so on. Throughout her career, Upchurch has made the cover of several magazines, including

Lucire

from New Zealand. She has also been a guest on popular programs like

The Oprah Winfrey Show

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Now, Stacie J. is a full-time mom to her 2-year daughter Riley Lynn and an insurance professional for *Unique Underwriter*, the fastest-growing national Independent Marketing Organization that focuses exclusively on mortgage protection insurance, and on generating top-quality mortgage protection insurance leads for our agents. She currently manages approximately 30 agents in NY/NJ, Atlanta, Chicago and Miami. Mega Diversities had the pleasure to speak to her last November. Stacie Upchurch was located in New York during the interview.

By Patricia Turnier, Editress-in-Chief of Mega Diversities.

Patricia Turnier, LL.M. talks to Stacie Upchurch, M.B.A.:

P.T. Who inspired you when you were younger to become successful? In other words, did you have a mentor?

S.U. While I was in college in Atlanta, I had a mentor when I was 17 named Michael Child. He was a very prominent businessman and is still in Georgia. I learned a lot from him and I will always be grateful. He owned a small medical company with four employees, including me. This experience allowed me to learn how to run a small business. Michael Child took me under his wing. He taught me about accounting, customer services, contracts, profit margins, marketing, in other words everything concerning entrepreneurial skills. The knowledge that I got from him will serve me for life. Michael Child is still one of my biggest mentors.

It is important to mention that for a long time I had an interest in commerce. Since I was 14, I had small businesses in Colorado. I owned a business at one time with my younger sister. I was always doing something related to business. I knew for a long time that I had the entrepreneurial spirit. I would like to add that my mother always encouraged me to do my best in every road I chose. She told me to never settle for mediocrity.

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P.T. Can you elaborate more about the small businesses you had with your younger sister when you were 14?

S.U. I can tell you about one of the businesses that I owned in Colorado with my younger sister and that I loved. We used to ski in the mountains. We had to take a train before. We realised that the passengers were thirsty and hungry. So, the night before the ski trip, we used to make candies which were called more specifically rock candy, baked in the stove, with different flavours. We sold them with Pepsi products and so on. That was huge at the time in Colorado. The kids and their families loved what we sold. We did this every week. We sold the same products in schools also. In addition to all this, I had a babysitting service. I always worked in high school. So, for a very long time I had an entrepreneurial spirit.

P.T. In 2005, you were a candidate for the second season of *The Apprentice*. What did you learn from this experience?

S.U. The candidates and I were in a very competitive setting. We were from different backgrounds but we had in common a type A personality. Some of the contestants had an entrepreneurial background, but the majority came from Ivy League universities and were doing well in their respected fields. The contestants were accustomed to winning; none of us expected to lose [Laughs].

My Apprentice experience made me realise even more that when I was in college I wasn't a member from any sororities or affiliations. Being an entrepreneur, I always call the shots and made the decisions since I was at the head of my organisations. Most of the business people that I know didn't even have a sorority experience. I never was in a big corporate setting. I ran my own businesses and I dealt more often with individuals such as my assistants. When you are in *The Apprentice*, you end up in a team setting and it didn't help in my case that I didn't have a sorority experience. I would have had more tools to deal with different type of personalities if I participated in sororities, but at the time I wasn't attracted to female group gatherings. I felt for instance that if I needed to organise a fundraising, I could do it on my own. I am not used to relying on other people so *The Apprentice* was an adaptation for me.

On the show there were two aspects to consider: 1) everything which had to do with being part

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of a sorority clique, 2) the business part of the contest where you have to do the task. In other words, there is a subjective part (power relations, group dynamics...) and a more objective part to consider in the entire process. In this respect, as a contestant it is important to find a way to navigate toward all of this. In *The Apprentice*, it is a prime necessity to play overall as a team and it can be the same thing in other corporate settings. I was great for the part of doing the tasks. However, with my independent personality it created an incompatibility of characters with the other female candidates and I didn't do small talk with them. So, to sum up, I am more an independent woman than a team player. I realise that in business one is not always judged on merit and performance. This is what I learned about myself throughout my experience in *The Apprentice*

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P.T. Do you think it is a myth or a reality that to make it in a high level position in corporate America, a female needs to adopt male standards?

S.U. Well, my background is not corporate America. So, I can only speak conceptually about that and I am going to base my opinion on what I heard from my friends who worked at that level. I know that they have to play the game. They need to find a balance between being a team player and a hard worker. Overall, the majority of people at the head of companies are male. There are many factors to consider about how a female can rise to the top of corporate America. She often has to work long hours, put their family aside. Some have to wait to start to create a family. Getting to the top is attainable, but it is not easy. If the females have mates, their partners need to be very understanding.

In some cases, females in corporate America have to display male characteristics: working long hours, not having kids. In other words, some feel that they have to be hard-core. In some milieus, they think they need to do this to be taken seriously. Others even believe that they have to be authoritative. However, it is possible to command respect without adopting those traits. I also believe that in some cases the reverse of the medal is true. I mean using male standards can help some females to get to the top of corporate America. It plays an important part in the culture of this realm. Maybe one day this situation will change, but alas for now adopting male standards is part of the culture.

P.T. What advice do you have for young visible minorities to enter and to break the glass ceiling in corporate America?

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S.U. I think it begins with education. You should equip yourself with the highest level of education possible. Unfortunately, overall we still live in a world which discriminates against females and people of colour. So, being highly educated and well cultured are the best deterrents to discrimination. If you can go to Harvard, do it. If you are able to obtain a Master's or a PhD, go for it. You have to be equipped to shatter the glass ceiling. You need to be prepared. It is important also to be passionate about what you are doing and work hard. Eventually, people will recognise that and they won't be able to stop you from breaking the glass ceiling. For me, to get to *The Apprentice* after competing against over a million people I had to set myself apart by being among the most prepared academically besides my entrepreneurial experience. It has been like that with everything I have done.

P.T. What advice do you have for employees who are in a cutthroat work environment?

S.U. [Silence] My first inclination would be to say that in this kind of situation, an individual is not shrewd if he chooses to be quiet. You have to be diligent, a hard worker and find a balance to see how to navigate in a cutthroat environment. You are entitled to make a living, at the same time you have to find a way to make sure that this kind of difficult situation won't be detrimental to your mental health. It is important to show integrity and honesty consistently because this will always prevail. At the same time, you have to make sure that nobody will step on you by behaving in a cutthroat way.

Human resources or other authorities such as unions have to ensure that you will be in a supportive work environment. They have the responsibility to create and maintain a stress-free working atmosphere for their workers by using psychological approaches.

P.T. As an entrepreneur, do you have some advice for someone who wants to start his own business?

S.U. It is helpful to find a mentor. It is important also to not take no for an answer. You can find someone who has a similar enterprise that you want to build and offer to work for free (through an internship program for instance) even as a learning experience for six months to a year. At the end of this process, you will get referrals. The training experience will also allow you to see if you will want to pursue a career in your realm. You have to be sure of what you want. There are people for example who can dissuade you from opening a Subway Franchise because in their minds there are already a lot of them. In fact, whatever the type of company you want to open (a computer store and so on) you will always find negative people who won't encourage

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you. It is important to not be influenced by that and avoid those individuals. However, before opening a business there are guidelines to follow. You have to know your market by studying it. You have to be aware of who are your competitors and analyse how you can bring something to the table, etc. If you want longevity in the business sphere, you have to be passionate because you will be less discouraged with the future hurdles that may arise.

P.T. You like to explore other avenues such as acting. How was your experience as an actress in the horror movie *The Scorned* in 2005? Are you interested to do other movies? If so, what would be your ideal role to play and why?

S.U. I modelled for about 12 years when I was younger and acting was a natural progression of modelling. *The Scorned* is an experience that came to me after being on *The Apprentice*. I would like to add that I have already been in many American soap operas (*All My Children, One Life To Live, As The World Turns*, etc) for about 10 years. It is important to note that for now my acting career is on hold because my priority is my daughter. Also, to prosper as an actress you have to move to L.A. and the reality is that I live in NY. It is a very hard business and when you are starting, you have unstable income. I can't allow this because I have my responsibility as a parent. When I was 21, I was acting and I didn't move to L.A. even if I had the right agents. In retrospect, it means that maybe I didn't want this bad enough. However, it is still in me and I would be interested in accepting projects in the future when my child will be older. For now, my focus is my daughter. She started to do modelling jobs and I am training her to be an actress. My daughter will do anything she wants, become a physician, etc. The world is open to her. For me, maybe in two years I will get back into acting.

To get back to your question, my experience with *The Scorned* was great. I played against Jonny Fairplay who played my boyfriend. I had to go into my character, to different places within myself. Acting is about pretending, becoming someone else and being able to bring out the character. That was a challenge and a great experience. I had fun on the set. It was a reality show and a reality movie. We all lived together. Sometimes it was crazy because there was some fighting inside the house. It was like being in *The Apprentice* again [Laughs]. To sum up, it was a nice experience and I would like one day to do more acting.

About your last sub-question, my ideal role in a movie would be to play a James Bond girl in the future. That would be great. They have the best roles with one of the hottest men [Laughs]. It would be also interesting to play a super heroine in a movie like Angelina Jolie did. If I were approached for roles like that I would be definitely up for it.

P.T. You have been modelling since you were a kid. Do you have any advice for girls who want to become successful fashion models? Also, how can they avoid the traps in this realm?

S.U. It is possible to pay people which will help them build careers as future models (such as agents and so on). To be more precise, I am referring to fashion consultants. They have to be experienced, and it is important to do your research to learn which models were launched by them. Every parent thinks that their child should be a model which is not very realistic. So, it is important to get an opinion from top fashion consultants. There are so many people who want to become models and some have to be honest with themselves. In addition, there are all kinds of models. So, you have to think if you want to be a catalogue model, a high fashion model and so on. Rule number 1: you have to be at least 5'9, under 120 pounds to make it big. You need to have a look.

People also have to be careful with hidden costs before signing a contract. It is always good to verify everything with an attorney. You have to do your research and seek well-known agencies (with excellent reputation) that proved themselves in the past by promoting the careers of others. In other words, look for an agency with an impressive body of work. The criteria to consider are: how long they have been established, who are the models they launched, etc. You have to choose an agency that works best for you.

A good agency supports the girls, especially the youngest ones. I have been involved with Ford and Elite agencies for over 10 years in NY, Miami, Chicago, L.A. Every week, those agencies have open calls. You can walk in, show your portfolio. They will tell you if you have what it takes. If so, they will pay for additional pictures. You don't have to pay a photographer or join a class to get pictures. A lot of companies will charge 2000\$ and more to train you to become a model. At the end of the day, they take your money and won't place you with any agency. You have to be very careful with this. Getting an agent is the first step, so going to open calls is important. You can also find a mentor, someone who has experience in this realm. It can be someone like me for instance or somebody else with whom you feel comfortable to guide your career. Watch out also for specific events. For instance, annually in Florida there is a model season from January to April where every model in the world is in South Beach, Miami. You can look in your own town where there are opportunities for modelling.

The parents have to be involved with under-aged girls to support them in every step. There is a lot of competition and a cadre is required. I would like to add that it is important not to limit

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yourself to one country. It is a necessity to make French, English, Italian magazines and so on if you want an international career. Serious agencies such as Ford send models to Europe where they can do fashion shows and work for magazines. The fashion companies pay the staying of the models abroad for a certain period. It is a must to go in other countries to obtain longevity in this realm. So, this criterion is imperative when choosing the agency that you want to work for.

P.T. Do you believe in the maxim: “Luck is when opportunity meets preparedness?”

S.U. Yes, definitely. You have to be prepared when opportunities arise. Luck is an interesting word. I was prepared when I had the opportunity to be involved in The *Apprentice*. I went to top universities, I had my business since I was a teenager. For a long period of time, I was involved in commerce. When I applied, I knew how to audition. In the past, I had many years of auditioning so, I was definitely prepared. In this respect, when the opportunity presents itself you know how to deal with it. People say well, Stacie you were lucky to be on the show. I don't agree with this statement.

P.T. You made your luck.

S.U. Exactly. I was there at the right time and I was prepared. So, I believe that luck is when opportunity meets preparedness. It is an interesting interpretation. Most of the time, opportunities favour the bold, the active and the prepared. I believe that you make your luck with hard work. You cannot rest on your laurels. When life gives you opportunities you have to give it your all.

I like also this adage from Albert Camus: “An achievement is a bondage. It obliges one to a higher achievement.” In addition, Victor Hugo said “Nothing can stop an idea whose time has come.” I strongly believe in this maxim.

P.T. You said in the past to the media that you consider that you have a social responsibility toward the African-American community. Can you elaborate on that?

S.U. Sure. First of all, I am an African-American female who has been catapulted in the media

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through shows such as *The Apprentice*. In this respect, I became visible. I am no longer just Stacie Jones Upchurch. I became someone that people can look up to. Being the second Black female who ended up in *The Apprentice*, I feel a responsibility toward the Black youth and also to other young minorities. I value the need to get an education, to have integrity, to go after your dreams and your passions, to become entrepreneurs as a way to build wealth in our community. I feel a social responsibility and I want to use my status to help African-Americans to achieve their goals.

I am doing my part by employing young African-American kids (from 16 to 19) for my business. It gives them experience and focus to go forward in life. I also encourage them to pursue their education and always look for opportunities which can lead them to a higher level.

P.T. The African-American community has over 913 billion dollars purchasing power per year, according to Humphreys[1] but only circa 3% of it stays annually in the Black community. As an expert who holds an M.B.A., what are the necessary measures which can correct this situation?

S.U. Wow, this is a deep question. I am going to try to give a synthesised answer. African-American people really need to start to own businesses and buy the products within their community. They can learn a lot from the Asian community. Asians come to America, they live in the same homes. They work in Subways for instance and put all their money together. They will buy from their community and live within their community.

P.T. I think your example about the Asian community is very interesting. The Asians are self-sufficient. Right now, in the U.S. among everybody they are the only group that has an unemployment rate of circa 7% which is below the national unemployment rate.

S.U. Definitely. It is sad to say that unemployment for African-Americans has surpassed 16 percent. Blacks in America need to learn how to trust more one another and to have a more collective awareness which can build wealth in the community. We have to heal from our heavy history. We need to trust one another more. There are popular beliefs which have been instilled historically in the African-American community which do not serve us and we have to find a way to get rid of that. I believe Atlanta is a great example that we should follow. It is there that I learned how to be an entrepreneur. I went to Emory University which is not an historically black university but outside of this institution I saw a lot of African-American people. Circa 67% of Atlanta's population are African-American. We find many black-owned businesses and

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opportunities for Blacks in this city. We see huge houses owned by the African-American community. For me, it is concrete proof that we can develop our entrepreneurial abilities and that we are able to support our businesses. So, the Black community can learn a lot from Atlanta.

According to a study conducted for the Magazine Publishers of America[2], African-Americans are avid consumers. African-American teens spend more on average than WASP teens on many products, including clothes, video-game hardware, computer software, etc. Those teens are particularly loyal to their favourite brands. They also have a lot of influence, purchasing items from cereal to cell phones. So, we have to look deeper into this and see how our money can stay more in our community and benefit us as a whole. Another thing which can create a richer black community is to buy less on credit and save more for the future, find other ways to economise, such as not spending money on material possessions which have no long-term value. About clothes for instance, there are ways to look stunning without spending a lot of money. Our people need to know that there is good debt (such as student loans, business loans, mortgages) and there is bad debt (for instance, credit cards with often high interest rates which can take years to pay off). To conclude, I would say that the government can set up enterprise zones with tax breaks to favour the creation of small businesses.

P.T. I would like to say that for a long time, I have been fascinated by the story of Madame C.J. Walker who became the first self-made female millionaire in America. So, this is concrete proof that there is a way for African-Americans to build a stronger economy. They have their resources.

P.T. My next question is where would you like to be on a personal and professional level ten years from now?

S.U. When you have a daughter, things change. So, ten years from now I would like to see her in a great private school, excelling, doing well. When I was younger, I was talented in different areas and I wish that the same things will happen to my daughter. I want to help her discover herself and see what she's really good at (math, tennis, acting, modelling...) and encourage her. I want my daughter to be happy and choose her own path. My focus is not on me anymore. But, if I have to find a goal for myself the main thing for me is to be more stable and strengthen my entrepreneurial career. I have a life insurance company (which offers mortgage protection) since 2007. I would like to become a multimillionaire. This would allow me to give everything that my daughter will need (go to the best universities...) and it would offer me protection if in the future I have health problems which would prevent me from working, for instance. It gives more freedom when you don't have to think about essential expenses. About myself, right now I

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am single but I hope that I will be eventually married. I would like to have more stability in my personal life.

P.T. To finish, do you have a message for our readers?

S.U. Without risks there are no rewards in my book. Go for what you are passionate about and do not settle. Do not let anyone stop you and don't take no for an answer. Also, hard work is the key to success. Always try to surpass yourself and attain high goals.

P.T. Thanks for this great interview, Mrs. Upchurch. It was a real pleasure to speak to you!

[1] Source: Jeffrey M. Humphreys, *The Multicultural Economy 2008* (Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia, 2008), 14; See Table 1

[2] Source: Magazine Publishers of America, "African-American/Black Market Profile" New York, 2008