



**Robert Hawkins**  
VP, Conferences  
Fortune Magazine

At the time of this interview, Robert was a senior executive with a record of success in media sales, marketing, communications and operations management. He received his BA from University of Pennsylvania in 1983 and quickly rose to Marketing Vice President at World Vision in Seattle where he managed a 200 person professional staff. After a two year stint as Director of New Market Development at Columbia House, he took his current position at Fortune where he drives the strategy and execution of all sales and marketing for the Conference Division. Robert has won numerous awards including a Gold Echo, Silver Echo, Bronze Telley and Time Inc. Presidents Award. He is a member of 100 Black Men and on the Board of Directors for the Gospel Music Association. He and his wife A'lexa have three children, Aarika 12, Robert III 9, and Rachael 5.

professional

### **What makes a great leader?**

In terms of leadership I think that there is no question about the fact that good leaders have great vision. You really have to start with vision and a real goal, a real sense of where you want to go and why you want to get there. And every great leader I've ever worked with has had a great sense of where they want to go and why they want to get there and I call that vision. Beyond that, I think people have to have very good character because people tend to want to follow people who they think are trustworthy or honest, who they can believe. When your character is in question, then your vision becomes irrelevant. People don't really want to follow somebody who they can't really believe in. I think having that kind of a visionary style, mixed with a very high degree of honesty and integrity is really what makes great leaders. And that's been my experience and that's what I've tried to emulate.

### **Who are your heroes and why?**

My father is my hero. He always has been. So I don't really have any other secular heroes or people I look up to, really other than him. And that's mostly because of the kind of lifestyle that I saw him lead in very difficult times. He was very poor and had a big family and he did some phenomenal things from a very young boy. He was 12-years-old with nine brothers and sisters and they were all younger than him. He took a leadership role when his father wasn't really taking that role, to kind of lift his family up out of poverty and see his brothers and sisters into college and through college, help his mother buy their first house. He made it possible for me to go to school and do the things that I do and he's still there doing a lot of that stuff. He passed a number of opportunities to lift himself up, just so that he could be sure that everybody who was coming behind him could achieve some level of greatness and he shaped a lot of the way that I think about myself and my family and my faith and my life. He'll probably always be my hero for those reasons. Lots of people you can emulate or look up to, and you don't know their life. You see success or you see one thing or another or you hear sound bites or even read a book, but there is nothing like seeing somebody up close and personal, seeing all their strengths and weaknesses and seeing them overcome those, systematically to reach a goal or objective in life. I can't imagine a better role model than that.

### **What was your worst career decision or mistake?**

### **How did you get involved in the career you are in?**

personal



## **How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?**

When I think about success, there are different levels of success, beyond just your finances or whether or not you have a position of power. Success is related to the kind of balance that you have in your life and if your family is suffering and you are the CEO of a great company, I wouldn't necessarily consider you a success. If your kids are strung out on drugs or have a difficult time in school and you've got a million dollars in the bank, I wouldn't consider that successful. When I talk about or even consider the whole idea of success, I think about it in a much more holistic manner than that. So certainly there are people who have had questionable characters or moral or whatever, who have achieved some sense of success and maybe in a more classic sense. That's not really what I'm talking about when I talk about success.

s p i r i t u a l

## **How does your faith help you in your professional life?**

I've been going to church and have been a part of the Christian faith since I was very young. I guess maybe since the age of 14 or 15 years old. I got very involved and interested in the Bible and in the life and person of Christ. It influenced my whole worldview, in terms of how I thought about myself and how I thought about these issues of leadership and vision, character. How I would conduct my life as it relates to my family and my work. I believe that it's helped me to maintain balance and make decisions. There have been a number of opportunities to make decisions that might have catapulted me to maybe higher levels or make more money, but would have caused me to make sacrifices as it relates to my family and my kids and it was always easy for me to make those decisions and I think it's difficult to make those decisions when you don't have a core set of values that are helping you make those decisions. I feel like those set of principles, that still set of values that originate from my spirituality, from my belief system, have made those decisions very easy for me and it's helped me feel good about where I am in life and where I'm going.

## **What makes Christianity stand out to you amongst other religions and/or answers to life? What makes it practical to you and/or me?**

## **Why do you believe in God?**