

DR. H. KEITH HUNT, 1994-PRESENT: A RESEARCH ICON EMPOWERS DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING IN THE MARKETING ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

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I met Dr. Keith Hunt in 1994 at the AMA-Sheth Foundation Doctoral Consortium held at Santa Clara University. As hindsight is a powerful learning mechanism, I now understand that I had come face-to-face with an extraordinary soul. In my first encounter with Dr. Keith Hunt, I met someone who would help me express my unique perspective as an aspiring African American, Female, Scholar. For me Keith Hunt offered me sanctuary in the marketing academic discipline – a place of refuge and safety. As a young scholar, oftentimes the only African American women in academic venues attended, I searched for an approachable kindred spirit. I found one in Dr. Keith Hunt.

The venue where I met Keith is known as the premiere consortium in the marketing discipline. The aim of the AMA-Sheth Foundation doctoral consortium is to bring together selected doctoral students from business schools in the United States, Canada, Europe, and the rest of the world and Faculty scholars who have made important contributions to the field and who are dedicated to helping doctoral students establish professional linkages among themselves and with faculty. It is no surprise to me that Keith Hunt would be amongst the selected faculty that would help expose doctoral students to the breath of topics, methodologies, and theories that exist within the marketing discipline.

I witnessed how Dr. Keith Hunt was able to contribute to the consortiums mission of sparking creativity and insight and challenging doctoral students to think outside of their existing paradigms and to broaden their views on what constitutes good research. I also can testify that he was able to help me make a successful transition to my first faculty position by providing guidance on research, teaching, and service. In addition, Dr. Keith Hunt was able to go beyond the consortiums mission to become a trusted advisor and mentor.

As the years passed and my interactions with Keith continued. His positive influence not only fostered my creativity and supported my confidence, he also affirmed my contributions to marketing thought and encouraged my exploring topics that fed my personal curiosity about marketplace dynamics. With his support and encouragement, I became more and more at ease with sharing my research and investigatory propositions, insights, and findings. He was a kind soul that made me feel understood. He encouraged me to publish and not bury my research!!

Dr. Keith Hunt is a difference-maker on multiple levels. He remained motivated throughout his career to take meaningful action that would support individuals, groups, and the marketing discipline. I often wondered how he got so much good done!! Four personal characteristics or traits stand out for me regarding Keith's mentorship and manifestation of support. In my eyes Keith Hunt, amongst other positive traits, tirelessly displayed the actions of 1) a Listener, 2) a Healer, 3) an Activist, and 4) a Nature Lover.

Listener

I was drawn to share with Keith my personal issues with facing my academic career even though I did not know him well. I sensed his compassionate, understanding, and less judgmental nature at our first meeting. Sensing these traits made it easy for me to open up to him. We bonded

quickly. I later observed how he had a way of making friends with people from many backgrounds and worldviews.

Healer

Somehow I knew he was drawn to my unease and suffering. Although we both understood that his title as “Doctor” was not one denoting the profession or role of the traditional healer, there were indications to me that he was a healer of sorts for those newly minted, aspiring scholars and educators. He made me feel in our initial conversations that there was nothing I needed to “fix” about my interest and worldview. Instead, he simply shared his confidence in my having earned my place at the consortium and in the academy. He offered his assistance and pledged his willingness to provide guidance on my academic journey.

Activist

Keith was humble yet open-minded in how he worked to level the playing field for aspiring academics. He inspired me to move forward with research ideas that were progressive. With his support, I found courage to look for applications of marketing thought that were aligned with my cultural background and interest. For example, he enthusiastically received my draft articles on exploring African Drumming as an experiential marketing endeavor worth sharing for its contributions to the concept of customer delight. His willingness to publish this research inspired me to continue academic explorations through my cultural lens, raising the bar for me individually and the marketing field collectively.

Nature Lover

Keith found a way of integrating his special connection to nature with the academic requirements of hosting venues for structured discussion of research literature reviews, investigative designs, research methodologies, study findings, academic rigor, and managerial implications. It was apparent that he was gifted with a special power of augmenting structured conference venues with nature’s catalytic energy to foster deeply collaborative meetings. He orchestrated many well planned conferences that incorporated awe-inspiring natural wonders -- spectacular places like Bryce Canyon. Keith seemed called to integrate the plant and the mineral kingdoms and infuse the elements of water, earth, air, and fire into atmospherics to enhance our discussions of marketing thought – figuratively and literally. Keith organized memorable caravans across Wyoming and Utah intermixed with conference sessions on customer satisfaction, delight, word-of-mouth behavior, and complaint processes. There was river rafting and discussions about gift giving and grudge holding. He was able to be a steward of beautiful landscapes while working to create academic atmospherics that permitted nature to open us up and fill us with energy and purpose. He understood how being immersed or surrounded by the waterways and mountains would make conference participants feel more calm, grounded, collaborative, supportive, and expansive. Attendees were rejuvenated in mind, body, and soul.

Today in academia there is an expressed interest and emphasis on Diversity, Equity, Inclusiveness and Belonging (DEIB). DEIB is defined as the programs and policies that recognize the importance of the representation and participation of different groups of individuals, including people of different ages, races and ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, genders, religions, and cultures. Back in the year 1994 when I met Keith Hunt, he demonstrated his acceptance of, knowledge of, and support of the importance of diverse thought and the gifts of diversity. He consciously established inclusive programs and fostered belongingness. Dr. Keith Hunt represents

an icon of the marketing discipline who understood the value of DEIB decades ago. As an aspiring African American, female scholar, he welcomed me into the marketing discipline. He supported me throughout my career. And now as a not-so-young African American, female scholar, for all of the above-mentioned traits and many more, count me amongst the many that deeply admire and appreciate Dr. Keith Hunt and his years of service to the discipline of Marketing.