



Harvard
Business
School

THE ALUMNI TRAILBLAZER AWARD FOR EARLY DISTINCTION

Each year the H. Naylor Fitzhugh Conference brings our community together for a cross-generational event that informs and empowers through the productive exchange of ideas and experiences. A deeper aim is to galvanize the courage to act on our convictions.

In that spirit, the conference is an occasion for honoring our pioneers and leaders for their professional excellence and exemplary contributions. Celebrating their achievements keeps our history alive and illuminates the path for succeeding generations.

At the 53rd annual H. Naylor Fitzhugh Conference, we are proud to present the Alumni Trailblazer Award for Early Distinction to

2026

Deavra Daughtry
(OPM 52, 2018)

When she was growing up in Houston, **Deavra Daughtry (OPM 52, 2018)** loved Sundays. On those days, she'd return from church with her grandmother, who served as treasurer of the congregation, and help count the bills and roll the coins from the service's collection. "My grandmother was my primary caregiver," Daughtry recalls. "I learned so much from observing her integrity and the respect she earned serving as treasurer of her church for 63 years. I understood that money was a tool that could be used for the betterment of the community and to serve those in need."

Today, Daughtry embodies the qualities she observed in her grandmother. "Each of us has a gift and an assignment in life; I believe our legacy and sense of fulfillment come from exercising that gift," she says.

That belief lies at the heart of Excellent Care Management (ECM), an agency providing personal in-home care to seniors. Founded in 1996, the business grew organically from a simple desire to serve others. Daughtry was employed as a social worker for the state of Texas when she applied for her license to be a home healthcare worker. She was already helping her grandmother and a few of her friends with grocery shopping, errands, and doctor's visits and found the work rewarding; maybe she could make a business of it. As with all entrepreneurial ventures, building the business took time; Daughtry keeps the leather tote she refers to her as her "first office" as a reminder of the period when she was working out of her car, scraping together funds for gas and food. From those humble beginnings ECM has grown exponentially, today employing more than 1,500 caregivers serving the greater Houston area; since its founding, Daughtry and ECM have been responsible for training more than 20,000 caregivers and nurses.

Thanks to that success, Daughtry says she is often presented with new directions to expand her footprint. In evaluating these opportunities, she maintains



strict boundaries: "There is plenty of good work out there, but I always ask, Is it *my* work? Because I don't want to be distracted by something that doesn't align with my purpose." Prayer is part of that discernment process, she adds: "Often individuals separate faith from their professional life, but I believe who you are in your faith is who you are in your business. The two are intertwined and stem from who you are, deep down."

Service is at the heart of what centers and guides Daughtry, who in 2003 also went on to found The World Empowerment Foundation (TWEF), a nonprofit dedicated to building stronger communities through education and skills training. In 2006, she purchased land and donated funds to build the Empowerment Community Center, providing a site for job training, youth development, and mentorship programs, with classes in computer training, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and other skills. The site also includes a community garden—offering on-the-ground experiences for children learning about agriculture, science, and business (the garden provides vegetables for area restaurants). More recently, TWEF has awarded more than \$400,000 in scholarships to college-bound students, many of whom started with the organization

as children. “Knowing that you’ve been instrumental in making a difference is an experience that I wish everyone could have,” says Daughtry.

Her enrollment in the OPM program was not a given; one of TWEF’s guest speakers mentioned the executive education program to Daughtry and suggested it might be a fit, but it was her son, Chaz, and daughter, Ebone, who filled out the application. “It was one of the top experiences of my life,” she says, adding that the negotiations segment taught by Professor **Deepak Malhotra** was a highlight. “Being a woman in business is different and I picked up so many useful tools.” As TWEF expands its focus to affordable housing, those skills come in handy in real estate development deals, she adds. “Initially, someone may see you as a kind, nice person, and I am—but they don’t always understand I am also a business-woman who will stand up for herself and make sure she’s treated with respect, just as my grandmother did. It’s a reminder of the constant need to reinforce who I am and what I bring to the table.”

Daughtry counsels the young people she mentors to face their problems head on before they multiply and become a bigger issue; she also cites the importance of having the right mentors in one’s life. Through a passing connection made at a conference, Daughtry received an introduction to Dr. Myles Munroe, a leader known globally for his inspirational writing, teaching, and speaking as head of Bahamas Faith Ministries International. Inspired years before by Munroe’s *In Pursuit of Purpose*, Daughtry sent him the manuscript of her first book, *Purpose to Blessings*, prompting an invitation to meet from Munroe and his wife, Ruth. “I agree 100 percent with the phrase ‘Life travels by the speed of relationships.’ Who would have ever thought

I’d be able to meet and work alongside one of my role models?”

Under Munroe’s leadership, Daughtry served as vice president of business affairs for the International Training World Leaders Association (ITWLA), a global nonprofit Munroe founded nearly 40 years ago to foster leadership in underrepresented communities in more than 60 countries. In 2023, she became the first woman to serve as chair of ITWLA. With Daughtry’s guidance, the organization will expand its offerings to include training programs and consulting services focused on governance, private sector expertise, and disaster response. It should also benefit from her entrepreneurial experience; in addition to ECM, Daughtry’s portfolio includes family-owned and operated businesses in media, consulting, and food production.

When she considers her trajectory to date, Daughtry uses the word “organic” to describe the path that

has brought her to this place—each development following from the one before it, guided by a strong sense of purpose. “Everyone has a different path, and fulfillment looks different for everyone,” she says. “I’m in the people business. It requires constant focus and discipline in the face of multiple distractions.” In the past, Daughtry adds, she’s been content to lead from behind. As recognition of her accomplishments grows and her impact expands, she knows she will be asked to step forward in a more public way with greater frequency. With the recent passing of her grandmother, for whom she was primary caregiver, she now has the bandwidth for that commitment, too—and a clear legacy to live out in her memory. “There’s still so much I want and need to do,” Daughtry says. “I will continue to make a difference and inspire and influence others to follow their own path.”



“There is plenty of good work out there, but I always ask, Is it my work?”

The Alumni Trailblazer Award for Early Distinction acknowledges the contributions of more recent HBS alumni who are forging a new path and making bold moves early in their careers. The award is jointly conferred by the HBS African-American Alumni Association and the HBS African American Student Union. By embodying the highest standards in everything they do, these individuals exemplify the best our alumni offer to their institutions and society, inspiring all who hope to make an impact on business and contribute to the greater good. Through their leadership and excellence, they have truly made a difference in the world.

Past recipients, from 2021 onward, include:

Aaron Craig Mitchell (MBA 2011)

Kwame Owusu-Kesse (MPP 2011/MBA 2012)

KJ Miller and Amanda E/J Morrison (both MBA 2014)

Akinseye Akinola (MBA 2013)

Aaron Hancock (MBA 2021)

This Trailblazer Award is an original work designed and produced by GlassRoots, a nonprofit arts organization focused on underserved youth and young adults with the mission to “ignite and build the creative and economic vitality of greater Newark...through the transformative power of the glass experience.”



**Harvard
Business
School**

African-American
Alumni Association