

Board of Directors Profile – Michael Keeley



The California African American Chamber of Commerce often referred to as “*the* Chamber to Black Chambers” is excited to share unique perspectives from our esteemed Board of Directors.

This month we are fortunate to have Michael Keeley share his outlook on business and entrepreneurship.

What is your value statement regarding CALAACC?

Keeley: The tragic death of George Floyd awakened our world to the unfortunate realities of being Black in America. Conversely, that awakening has resulted in true historic opportunities for our businesses. At no point in the history of our republic has there been the current demand for African American businesses to access pathways for success. It is incumbent upon our leadership to both vet and link these opportunities with businesses capable of performing and succeeding. CALAACC is the true conduit for facilitating those relationships which is the value proposition we present.

As a board member, describe the role and responsibilities that you shepherd. On what committees do you serve?

Keeley: The role of a board member is to provide leadership, structure, and guidance for policies furthering the mission of an organization. I serve on the Development Committee of the California African American Action Fund (CAAAF) which is responsible for securing partnerships with organizations possessing resources to assist us in attaining our mission. In this role, as a Committee Member, I utilize my relationship currency (term coined by Carla Harris, Vice Chairman at Morgan Stanley) to reach potential sponsors sharing our vision for inclusion of qualified African American businesses in their success matrix for achievement of organizational goals. This role necessitates current existing relationships to facilitate that goal along with the highly desirable characteristics of our Members.

African American businesses in California are an essential, significant, vital asset to the state’s overall economy. In your own words, describe your perspective about CALAACC businesses.

Keeley: African American businesses form the cornerstone of our communities’ economic self-sufficiency. We start with this premise—true freedom cannot exist without an economic foundation, thus creating a value proposition for all involved. In this instance, African American businesses are more likely to employ African American employees, thus becoming vested in our communities. This ecosystem supports entrepreneurship, thereby creating the vehicle for our Chamber to optimally provide the leadership tools necessary to sustain and propel our businesses. In our state’s economy, it is critical that each of us contribute toward its success and share in the rewards. Our Chamber assists in transforming that vision into reality.

Tell us about your career journey.

Keeley: I completed undergraduate study at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), with a major in Political Science. Initially, I considered becoming a lawyer so I studied and graduated from UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. While there, I discovered that most of the well-paying jobs went to students who had resources--long before law school--to succeed. I decided instead to pursue a business career track and began working in the litigation department of a Fortune 1000 insurance company. I remained there until opening my own insurance brokerage firm, in 1996.

I moved from the Bay Area to Sacramento in 1986. This resulted in an increase in my political interests given the proximity to our State capitol, which also allowed me access to various political activities and elected officials. Concurrently, my business relationships begin to expand, securing public sector clients. It became evident that relationships cross-pollinate. Subsequently, I was appointed by two California Insurance Commissioner's, from both major political parties, to serve on committees impacting African American access to insurance products; later vendor contracting and board of director opportunities.

Complementing my career I joined a fraternal order of successful Black Men in 2006, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, aka the Boulè, established in 1904 to cultivate success among African American men. I was elected to a regional leadership role recently and have implemented a business and economic empowerment strategy for promoting and sustaining African American business interests impacting our communities.

What are your aspirations and goals for CALAACC?

Keeley: My aspiration is to assist our Board of Directors in developing strategies for the successful integration of African American businesses with opportunities to succeed: whether that entails developing an information repository for contracting; providing educational, informational, training and/or various forms of assistance I stand ready to assist. Entering the sunset of my professional career having achieved some modicum of success, now, my time is focused on reciprocating knowledge, in the tradition of a paraphrased biblical passage, *To whom much is given, we should be willing to give even more in return.*

What advice do you have for African American businesses operating in California?

Keeley: The best advice I can offer an African American business anywhere is to develop a solid business plan, with accountability check points along the way. This pathway provides the best opportunity to succeed. Your plan should include: a personal component, a professional networking component, as well as community service component which many do not. Establish a mentor relationship with a business person, if possible, and/or an advisory board composed of the most successful business people available to you. Last, and certainly not least, join ALL of the local business chambers; do business with diverse ethnic groups.

Provide background information including: your hometown, high school, favorite childhood memory, influencer who had biggest impact on your life and why?

Keeley: My hometown is Pasadena, California. I graduated from Blair High School, where we won a CIF Football Championship. The biggest influencers in life are my parents: they provided me with structure, personal drive, career ambition and a blueprint for success. Though modest in their own life accomplishments, they always encouraged me, provided the things I needed and salient advice. One life lesson, in particular, still resonates. They told me often, "Get your education; it is the one thing *the white man* can't take away from you."

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