

» MISSISSIPPI LEADERS by Martin Willoughby

Showing respect

Flynt leads AT&T Mississippi by enjoying both work and workers

There is a new movie titled *42* on at the theaters about the life of Jackie Robinson, who was the first African American to play Major League Baseball. In the face of great resistance to this groundbreaking feat, Robinson said, "I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me... All I ask is that you respect me as a human being." At our core, we all want to be treated with respect. Too often, leaders ignore this reality and treat others as if they are cogs in a machine rather than valuable team members. I find that successful leaders demonstrate and model respect for others.

Mayo Flynt, president of AT&T Mississippi, is one of those leaders who models respect. After graduating from the University of Mississippi, Flynt moved to Washington D.C. He said, "This move made me get out of my comfort zone." In his very first job, there was a 75 percent annual turnover and terrible work environment. Flynt learned from this experience the value of enjoying co-workers and working with people you

Up Close With ... R. Mayo Flynt III

Title: President, AT&T Mississippi
Favorite Books: *Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard; *In the Sanctuary of Outcasts* by Neil White; *Every Good Endeavor* by Tim Keller
First Job: "Newspaper carrier for the *Clarion-Ledger*; ice cream scooper at Swensen's restaurant"
Proudest Moment as a Leader: "When AT&T launched UVerse in Mississippi. It was a brand new product, involved every aspect of the company and encapsulated a whole new market."
Hobbies/Interests: "Spending time with my family — wife and two daughters — music, and spending time in the Grove."



respect and that respect you. He shared, "That experience also taught me to make sure that you enjoy your job — you want to wake up excited to go to work."

His next job was with Sen. Thad Cochran. He noted, "Working in D.C. challenged me as an individual and exposed me to a whole new world." He shared about Sen. Cochran, "I saw that people wanted to work for him because they saw that he was a respectful man to work for, and he treated

his staffers as individuals and with thoughtfulness." Flynt went on to work for Bell-South where his father worked for over 30 years. In January of 2007, Flynt was named president of AT&T Mississippi. In this role, he is responsible for AT&T's operations in Mississippi including external affairs, regulatory affairs and public policy.

Flynt shared, "In my role at AT&T, I try to listen and get input from my team on the challenges that we are facing as a company."

He believes that when you show respect for others by listening to their opinion then you get the best results. He also believes in not only delegating responsibility but also empowering his team with the authority to make decisions. Flynt



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strives to create a collaborative team environment. He learned from his mentors to be an encourager and to seek the advice of others. He said, "I was allowed to do my own thing. They didn't necessarily tell me what to do. They would coach me through tough situations. They were supportive of my organization and my group."

Flynt's leadership philosophy also involves the Golden Rule. He said, "I come in the office every day and treat others the same way that I want to be treated." Flynt's father taught him that work should be "fun, enjoyable, challenging." He subscribes to that philosophy, and he seeks to help others enjoy what they are doing. He tells his team members, "If there is a way that I can make their job better — tell me." Flynt also shows respect to his team members by getting out of the office and walking around to visit with them. This is a great practice for leaders. As the saying goes, "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." Leaders like Flynt know that they can show that they care by showing respect, listening to others, and being interested in their lives.

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