

BLACK EXECUTIVE MEN

EXECUTIVE RESEARCH · VOL. 01 · OCTOBER 2026

The Four Gaps

How Black Men at the Top Build Lasting
Advantage Together

Four gaps. Three identities. One solution.

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200+

MEMBERS

176

COMPANIES

27

INDUSTRIES

Many Black men in senior corporate leadership have strong general executive networks, yet few have a trusted global network of Black men operating at the top of enterprise leadership. Four structural gaps help explain why. Each can be closed.

Executive summary

- **Black leaders grow scarcer with every step up.** Black workers, men and women combined, are 12.7% of all employed Americans but 5.6% of chief executives, so Black men at the same level rarely meet by chance.
- **Networks built on shared background confer real advantage.** People hire, promote and do business with those they identify with; in one study of elite firms, more than half of interviewers ranked cultural fit, a sense of shared background and interests, as their top criterion. Other communities have organized that advantage for generations.
- **Identity is the foundation.** Black men in senior leadership are often the exception three times over: among enterprise peers, in the wider Black community and, for many, in their own families. In much of corporate America, that identity is unfamiliar to those around them; within BEM, it is familiar.
- **Four gaps keep Black men at the top from building that advantage together:** proximity, trust, depth and continuity.
- **Each gap closes with structure, not goodwill:** vetted membership, a shared standard, curated agendas and a named concierge.

BEM brings all four together in one membership.

Before reading further

Three questions to answer privately:

1. How many Black men at your level could you call tonight about a confidential career decision?
2. When did you last pressure-test an enterprise decision with another Black man at your level?
3. If your role ended tomorrow, who are the first three Black men you would call, and have you spoken with them this year?

The full set of questions appears at the end of this briefing.

SECTION 01

Why executive networks matter

At senior levels, advantage flows through networks.

Opportunity, information, insight and early signals of what is coming next move across industries through trusted relationships and sources: industry conferences, associations, executive networks and

organizations, and companies themselves. Executives invest heavily in staying at the center of that flow. In a Harvard Business School study of 27 CEOs of billion-dollar companies, tracked around the clock for 13 weeks, 61% of working time went to face-to-face interaction, and only 47% of work took place at headquarters. The rest was spent at other company sites, with external constituencies, in transit and at home ([Fortune, 2018](#); [Fast Company, 2018](#)).

This marks a clear break from the middle of the organization. At the managerial level, doing the job well within an operational network drives advancement. At senior levels, advancement, influence and clarity in decision-making depend increasingly on the strategic network: the relationships through which executives gather information, pressure-test it against peers across their industry and see what is coming before competitors do. Ibarra and Hunter found that managers who relied on operational and personal networks alone often struggled to make the transition to leadership ([Harvard Business Review, 2007](#)).

SECTION 02

The stakes

Black men who reach the C-suite and vice president level have done so with exceptional skill, discipline and resilience, often while navigating every dynamic this briefing describes. Nothing here questions that

achievement. The gaps that follow are gaps in structure, not in the men themselves, and the resilience that carried these leaders to the top is exactly what a shared network can organize and multiply. BEM is built for men who already hold the values it upholds: mutual support, discretion and shared success.

Black men at the C-suite and vice president level have, by and large, built strong general executive networks, formal and informal; those formal and informal networks are part of how they reached their seniority. Many also know Black men at their level, often two or three they trust. What few have is a full network of them: enough Black men who share their seniority and identity, across enough companies and industries, to call on for counsel, information and opportunity.

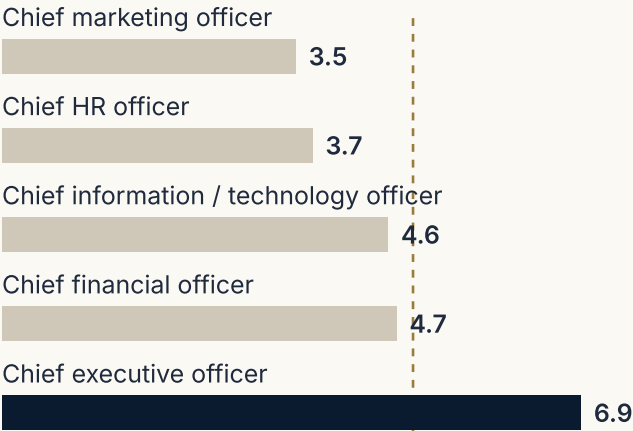
Seniority is also less secure than the title suggests. Across the top 1,000 US companies by revenue, C-suite executives hold their roles for 4.9 years on average ([Korn Ferry, 2020](#)). CEO departures in the Russell Reynolds global index reached 234 in 2025, 21% above the eight-year average ([Russell Reynolds, via HRD](#)), and US employers announced more than 1.17 million job cuts in the first 11 months of 2025, up 54% on a year earlier ([Challenger, Gray & Christmas, via Fortune](#)).

EXHIBIT 1

Below the CEO, C-suite leaders hold their roles for under five years

Average tenure in role, in years, top 1,000 US companies by revenue

C-SUITE AVERAGE, 4.9 YEARS



Source: Korn Ferry Institute, Age and Tenure in the C-Suite, January 2020

For vice presidents, exposure is greater still. A single phone call can end a vice president's role, and the search that follows can take a year. When that call comes, what matters are relationships already in place, inside and outside the company, across industries and regions.

Many Black men at this level also carry a conviction formed long before they entered corporate life: a community ethos in which shared success, collaboration and mutual support are the ideal for the

health of a community they see themselves as part of. The ethos has deep roots. Political scientist Michael Dawson named it "linked fate," the sense that one's own prospects are tied to the group's (*Behind the Mule*, Princeton University Press). It remains widely held. In a 2021 Pew Research Center survey of 3,912 Black adults, 76% said being Black was extremely or very important to how they see themselves, and 82% said at least some of what happens to Black people nationally affects their own lives (Pew Research Center, 2022).

That ethos runs through a long lineage of Black communal support: families that have produced professionals for two and three generations and treat mutual support as part of what success means; churches and civic institutions; the Black Greek-letter fraternities and Sigma Pi Phi; and professional bodies such as The Executive Leadership Council and the National Black MBA Association. Many Black men at the top grew up inside that lineage and already live by its rules. What BEM adds is a format built around the four gaps, for Black men at the vice president and C-suite level across industries. That is the focus of this briefing.

SECTION 03

How we got here

Black executives entered corporate America through law and policy, built networks to support one another, and first reached a Fortune 500 CEO's office in 1999, twelve years after Clifton Wharton became CEO of TIAA, then outside the Fortune 500.

EXHIBIT 2

Sixty-five years from open doors to 11 Black Fortune 500 CEOs

Black corporate leadership in the United States, 1961–2026

- Leadership milestone
- Network founded
- Law, policy or research

DOORS OPEN

- **1961** Executive Order 10925 first asks federal contractors for "affirmative action"
- **1964** Civil Rights Act: Title VII bars job discrimination by race
- **1965** Executive Order 11246 sets affirmative action duties for federal contractors
- **1969** National Urban League Black Executive Exchange Program reaches HBCUs
- **1970** National Black MBA Association conceived at the University of Chicago

FIRST WAVE

- **1986** The Executive Leadership Council forms with 19 founding executives
 - **1987** Clifton Wharton leads TIAA: first Black CEO of a major US corporation
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POLICY SHIFT

- **1996** California Proposition 209 bars preferences in public employment
 - **1996** Sharon Collins publishes a study of Black executive careers in Chicago
 - **1996** ITSMF forms to develop executive talent in technology
-

FIRST CEOS

- **1999** Franklin Raines, Fannie Mae: first Black Fortune 500 CEO
 - **2009** Ursula Burns, Xerox: first Black woman to lead a Fortune 500 company
 - **2012** Six Black Fortune 500 CEOs at once, a record at the time
 - **2020** McKinsey Black Leadership Academy launches
 - **2021** Black Executive CMO Alliance forms for marketing leaders
-

TODAY

- **2025** Executive Order 14173 rescinds Executive Order 11246
- **2026** 11 Black Fortune 500 CEOs, a record; 28 in Fortune 500 history

Source: Sources listed at the end of this briefing

The first generation entered management in the 1960s, as civil rights law and affirmative action opened doors. Sociologist Sharon Collins, interviewing the most successful Black executives in Chicago's major corporations, found that many had been placed in roles defined by race, such as affirmative action programs or specialized markets, rather than the planning and production roles that lead to the top. As the policy climate changed, those roles became less secure ([Collins, 1996](#); [Publishers Weekly review](#)).

The prevailing expectation was that Black executives would adapt to established corporate cultures. Black professionals answered by building institutions of their own, each serving a specific niche of the corporate landscape, and many have done so with real and lasting effect:

ORGANIZATION	FOUNDED	SERVES
<u>Black Executive Exchange Program, National Urban League</u>	1969	Black executives teaching at HBCUs, connecting students to business
<u>National Black MBA Association</u>	1970	Black MBAs entering and advancing in corporate careers
<u>National Society of Black Engineers</u>	1975	Black engineers, from students to professionals; more than 30,000 members
<u>The Executive Leadership Council</u>	1986	Black executives within two levels of the CEO at Fortune 1000 or Global 500 companies
<u>Information Technology Senior Management Forum (ITSMF)</u>	1996	Executive talent among technology professionals, with a focus on emerging Black leaders
<u>AfroTech</u>	2016	Black technologists and founders; 37,500 attendees in 2024
<u>McKinsey Black Leadership Academy</u>	2020	Black leaders from early career to one or two levels below the C-suite
<u>Black Executive CMO Alliance</u>	2021	Black marketing executives and the pipeline to the C-suite

These institutions have opened doors, built pipelines and advanced careers for generations of Black professionals. The Executive Leadership Council, founded by 19 executives, has long convened Black leaders within reach of the CEO's office ([ELC](#)), and the Black Executive CMO Alliance is doing the same for marketing leaders today. Older institutions have cultivated mutual support among accomplished Black men for more than a century: Sigma Pi Phi, the Boulé, founded in 1904 to bring together men of similar academic and professional standing ([SCETV](#)), and the Black Greek-letter fraternities, which count many corporate professionals among their members.

Black Executive Men stands in that tradition and builds on it. Each of these institutions serves its own niche. BEM's is specific: Black men in senior enterprise leadership, organized around the four gaps this briefing describes. Many executives belong to more than one.

At the very top, numbers remain small. Fortune counted 19 Black CEOs among roughly 1,800 in the Fortune 500's history through early 2021 ([Fortune, 2021](#)). By June 2026 the total had reached 28, with a record 11 serving at once ([Fortune, June 2026](#)). Numbers this small carry their own dynamics, examined in section 5: each executive is highly visible, and the few places at the top can create structural pressure to stand alone.

SECTION 04

How other communities build advantage

Communities with generations of business leadership pass down more than capital. They pass down working networks: shared norms of trust and confidentiality, consequences for breaching them, and senior figures who mentor and sponsor the next generation. Members advance on ladders others have built, with earlier access to insight and opportunity.

The research is consistent. A study in the *American Economic Review* of admissions to Chile's top business programs found that admission raised the probability of a corporate leadership role by 44% and of reaching the top 0.1% of earners by 51%, but only for men from elite private high schools; the author attributes the difference to peer networks ([American Economic Association, 2019](#)).

Black professionals have built such networks deliberately, as section 3 shows, and so have other communities. TiE was founded in Silicon Valley in 1992 by entrepreneurs and executives with roots in the Indus region and now reports more than 11,000 members ([TiE](#)). Ascend, founded in 2005, runs an invitation-only network for senior and C-suite executives within what it calls North America's largest pan-Asian business membership organization ([Ascend, 2019](#)). The Committee of 100, formed in 1989

by Chinese American leaders including I.M. Pei and Yo-Yo Ma (Committee of 100), and the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility, which marks its 40th anniversary in 2026 (HACR), play similar convening roles. So does the Council of Korean Americans, begun in 2011, which describes itself as a national membership community connecting Korean American executives and leaders across sectors, with members admitted through a review process (Council of Korean Americans). Sponsorship then converts networks into results: Sylvia Ann Hewlett finds that senior executives who sponsor others are 53% more likely to be promoted themselves (*The Sponsor Effect*, 2019).

Philanthropic federations convene professionals by industry as well. The Wall Street and Financial Services Division of UJA-Federation of New York, the city's Jewish philanthropic federation, has drawn nearly 1,200 finance professionals and business leaders to a single annual dinner in support of its charitable work (JTA, 2011).

Private clubs and invitation-only networks form another layer, largely unseen from outside. Harvard's final clubs are independently owned, admit members only by invitation and have counted U.S. presidents among their alumni (*The Harvard Crimson*, 2016). YPO, founded in 1950, brings chief executives who join before age 45 into peer forums within its chapters, and has reported more than 20,000 members in over 130 countries (Chief Executive). Many comparable

executive clubs, legal networks and invitation-only communities are not publicly listed at all; they grow by referral, from one executive to the next. Some were closed to Black members until within living memory: Augusta National admitted its first Black member, Gannett executive Ron Townsend, in 1990 (*Golf Digest*). In our experience, some Black men at the top have never been introduced to networks like these, or learned of them late in their careers.

What these networks share is deliberate

organization. Their admission practices and purposes differ, but each organizes relationships on purpose, many with their own expectations of members, so that trust, opportunity, insight and competitive advantage can pass among them. These communities can play a significant part in advancing careers, offering safety and stability in difficult moments, and opening opportunity across industries, over decades and across generations.

Homophily, the tendency to connect with similar others, reinforces the pattern. A landmark review in the *Annual Review of Sociology* found that "similarity breeds connection" across work, friendship and information networks, with race and ethnicity producing the strongest divides (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). Lauren Rivera of Northwestern University interviewed 120 hiring decision-makers at elite banks, law firms and consulting firms. More than half named cultural fit, meaning similarity to existing employees in background, interests and self-

presentation, as their top criterion at the interview stage; employers, she found, want people "who they will bond with, who they will feel good around" ([Rivera, 2012](#)).

General executive networks reflect the same dynamic. They tend to draw people already familiar with established networks, so a Black man who joins may still be one of only a few members like him. Black men at the top bring a strong tradition of communal support. BEM is designed to carry that tradition into the daily work of senior enterprise leadership, with a shared standard, and peers and sponsors who have walked the same path at the same level.

SECTION 05

What Black men at the top face

Against that backdrop, three dynamics shape the experience of Black men in senior leadership: the unwritten rules of each level, the "only one" dynamic, and the three identities of the Black executive man.

The unwritten rules of each level

Some Black men in senior leadership learned the unwritten rules of the next level from family, mentors and the institutions around them. Others are among the first in their family, community, company or industry to reach their level of corporate seniority, influence, or authority. Either way, each step poses a

different question, and the answers are rarely found in a training program. They pass from person to person, from those one or two steps ahead.

EXHIBIT 3

Every level has its own unwritten rules

An illustrative path, not a required sequence. Many careers move differently.

Influence across industries and regions

Board chair

How do I build influence across industries and regions?

Paid board director

How do I become board chair?

CEO

How do I land paid board seats?

Fortune 100 C-suite

How do I become the CEO?

C-suite executive

How do I operate at Fortune 100 scale?

Vice president

How do I land the C-suite?

Source: The BEM view of the senior leadership path

Without that infrastructure, even highly accomplished Black men can be more exposed to industry or company change than peers with deeper inherited networks. The cause is not effort or ability. It is infrastructure and larger social dynamics. When Black men at the top lack a network of their own, they operate without an advantage many of their peers depend on or take for granted.

The "only one" dynamic

At the top of many companies, Black men are few enough that each one stands out, and that visibility shapes how they relate to one another. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, now of Harvard Business School, found that when a group makes up roughly 15% or less of a workplace, its members become "tokens": highly visible, treated as representative of their whole group and pushed toward stereotyped roles ([Kanter, 1977](#)).

Structures that reward standing out alone make collaboration costly for anyone in a small minority. In experiments published in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, African American participants competing for a single promotion were 16.7 percentage points more likely to choose an all-White team than when rewards were shared. When rewards were shared, participants preferred teams that included others like them. The behavior followed the incentive, not the people. A separate follow-up study traced a similar pattern among other minority-status participants to the belief that a contribution

stands out more as the only one (Kirgios, Chang and Milkman, 2020). Advocacy carries a cost as well. A study in the *Academy of Management Journal* found that ethnic minority leaders who promote diversity in hiring are penalized in how their competence is judged (Hekman et al., 2017).

Taken together, the research describes a structure in which acting alone is rewarded and acting together is costly. Without a shared network, Black men at the top can be kept apart by the same dynamics that make each of them visible. A vetted, coordinated network is designed to change that calculation: support flows through the group, rather than depending on any one executive's visible advocacy.

The three identities of the Black executive man

For many Black men in senior enterprise leadership, three overlapping identities shape their experience, and in each they are often the exception:

- 1. A Black man among enterprise leaders.** Among his peers, he is often the only Black man at the table.
- 2. An enterprise leader among Black men.** In the wider Black community, his role and the decisions that come with it are uncommon.
- 3. A standard-bearer in his own family.** Many are the most successful in their families; others carry forward a family tradition of achievement. Either way, the role brings its own expectations.

Together, these three identities form a hybrid experience that is rarely discussed or reflected back. Public portrayals of Black men center heavily on sport and entertainment. A literature review by The Opportunity Agenda found that media rarely portray Black men as "competent, capable, and successful members of businesses and families" ([The Opportunity Agenda, 2011](#)). Communities with long traditions of business leadership tend to see such leaders reflected in their institutions and public life. Without that mirror, the isolation of Black men at the top deepens.

This is the foundation beneath the four gaps. In much of corporate America, a Black man at the top is the exception: often the only one at the table, his racial and cultural background unfamiliar to many of those around him. Within BEM, he is the norm. Members share both his seniority and his experience, so his background is familiar, and that familiarity strengthens connection, trust, and the sharing of information and resources. BEM is designed to be the room in which he is not the exception.

SECTION 06

The four gaps

Four structural gaps keep Black men in senior leadership from building this advantage together. Proximity creates connection. Trust enables candor. Depth creates value. Continuity compounds it.

Proximity creates connection.
Trust enables candor.
Depth creates value.
Continuity compounds it.

Proximity

Regular contact with Black peers at the same level rarely happens on its own. The peers who share their seniority are dispersed across companies, industries and cities. The numbers explain why. Black workers make up 12.7% of all employed Americans, but 8.8% of those in management roles and 5.6% of chief executives (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025).

These national figures cover Black men and women together, and broad occupational categories rather than large corporations alone, but the direction is clear: the more senior the role, the fewer Black leaders. On many senior teams, that leaves Black men in the kind of small minority Kanter described, and Black men at the same level rarely meet by chance.

EXHIBIT 4

Black representation falls as seniority rises

Black share of employed, US, 2025 annual averages (men and women combined)

All employed



Management, business and financial



Management occupations



General and operations managers



Chief executives



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 11, 2025 annual averages; federal data do not report race by sex at this level of detail

Proximity does not come from goodwill. It comes from a calendar.

Most of the evidence in this briefing is American, as is most of BEM's membership. Representation and corporate dynamics differ from country to country, and the US figures above do not transfer directly. For Black executive men outside the United States, the case rests chiefly on proximity and continuity: relationships with peers at the same level that hold across borders, companies and career moves.

Trust

Trust at the top depends on a shared standard for how Black men at this level work with one another on enterprise matters: what stays confidential, what support looks like, and what happens when trust is broken. Without that clarity, careful leaders withhold the conversations that matter most: the career question kept private, the introduction left unmade, the opportunity shared too late. The "only one" dynamic deepens the caution. Where visible advocacy for similar others is penalized and standing out alone is rewarded, holding back can feel like the rational choice.

Trust at this level is more specific than goodwill. Management research defines it as a willingness to be vulnerable to another person, shaped by judgments of that person's ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, *Academy of Management Review*, 1995). For Black men at the top, that vulnerability takes three forms, and each needs its own rules:

LAYER OF TRUST	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	WHAT A SHARED STANDARD SETTLES
What is shared	What is safe to disclose?	Career moves under consideration, compensation benchmarks, leadership judgment calls, a candid read on a professional challenge
How it is shared	On what terms?	Confidentiality by default, no attribution without permission, clarity on what may be passed on and to whom
How it is acted on	Who benefits, and how?	Credit given, introductions honored, opportunities pursued to the benefit of both parties, and consequences when terms are broken

The third layer is the most demanding. Wharton's Adam Grant finds that generous givers, people who offer introductions, advice and mentoring, are overrepresented among the most successful. What separates them is discipline: they set boundaries and are careful about whom they help ([Knowledge at Wharton, 2013](#)). A vetted membership with a shared standard does that screening on each member's behalf. It is designed to let executives lower their guard and share openly and generously, knowing everyone in the room has been vetted and has agreed to the same terms, making reciprocity the norm rather than the exception.

Harvard Business School's Amy Edmondson calls the result "psychological safety": a setting in which candor is expected and people speak up without fear. Google's Project Aristotle identified it as a key component of its most successful teams ([Harvard Business School Working Knowledge, 2023](#)). At the executive level, it is built from vetting, a written standard and consequences every member accepts in advance.

A standard is only useful if it is concrete. BEM's covers communication (how members reach one another and how promptly they respond), conduct and confidentiality, presence (attendance at forums, circles and matches), and conduct at gatherings, together with what happens when a member does not uphold it, up to and including removal from membership. The standard never asks members to share employer-confidential or material non-public information, and members remain bound by their own companies' policies. Every member knows what to expect of every other, and what is expected in return. Shared standards of this kind have a long history among accomplished Black men, from Sigma Pi Phi to the Black Greek-letter fraternities, as section 3 describes. BEM is shaped by its own moment, as Black men from many fraternities and societies, and from none, hold senior executive roles. It gives them a shared forum focused on supporting one another at the highest levels of enterprise leadership.

That clarity is what allows relationships to deepen over years. Management scholars Kathy Kram and Lynn Isabella found that peer relationships offer a real alternative to traditional mentoring, with one important difference: mutuality, in which both people give and receive. They describe a progression from information peers to collegial peers to special peers, with trust and self-disclosure deepening at each stage (Kram and Isabella, *Academy of Management Journal*, 1985). A shared standard is designed to move Black men along that progression, from peers who exchange information to peers who confide in and counsel one another, and then beyond what the study describes, to peers who sponsor one another for career-defining opportunities over many years.

Depth

Informal gatherings among Black men at this level serve many purposes well, and they are often the start of something more. Few are designed for the decisions that come with seniority, such as the reorganization, the board dynamic, the compensation negotiation or the next move. Herminia Ibarra and Mark Hunter, following 30 managers through leadership transitions over two years, distinguished three kinds of network:

NETWORK WHAT IT IS BUILT ON WHAT IT DELIVERS

Operational	The people you need to do today's job	Help with the task at hand
Personal	Shared interests and backgrounds	Referrals, information, mentoring
Strategic	Senior relationships across functions and firms	The bigger picture and support for where you are going

Most managers were comfortable with the first two, and almost all underused the third. The authors conclude that aspiring leaders must learn to build and use strategic networks that cross organizational and functional boundaries ([Harvard Business Review, 2007](#)). For many of these leaders, relationships with other Black men sit in the personal network. The opportunity is to extend them into strategic territory.

Continuity

Even valuable relationships between Black men at this level can fade over time. A strong conversation ends where it began, a promising introduction is never followed up, and a network built inside one company scatters when an executive changes roles, relocates or leaves. Without continuity, each executive rebuilds his relationships at every transition, and none of them compound.

Research shows what enduring relationships are worth. A study in *Science* by researchers from MIT, Harvard, Stanford and LinkedIn, covering 20 million LinkedIn members and 600,000 new jobs over five years, found that moderately weak ties, acquaintances rather than close friends, did the most to help people change jobs ([MIT Sloan, 2022](#)). In a study published in *Organization Science*, executives who reconnected with contacts they had not spoken to in three years or more found those dormant ties as valuable as their current ones, and often more so, with insights that were more novel and more efficient to obtain ([Levin, Walter and Murnighan, via MIT Sloan Management Review](#)).

Continuity means relationships that travel with the executive across companies, regions and career transitions, and that grow more valuable as each member advances. Follow-through, with a named person who keeps relationships moving, is one of the mechanisms that sustains it.

SECTION 07

Closing the gaps

Each gap closes with structure rather than goodwill. Conferences, associations and networks each address parts of these needs. BEM's distinct contribution is to organize proximity, trust, depth and continuity into one dependable membership experience for Black men in

senior enterprise leadership. The solution is Black men winning together; BEM turns that shared belief into daily practice.

EXHIBIT 5

Four gaps, and how BEM closes each one

The BEM framework

GAP 1

Proximity

THE GAP

Contact with Black peers at your level is rare and left to chance

WHAT CLOSSES IT

Contact on a calendar, not left to luck

HOW BEM DOES IT

2 forums, 6 circles and 12 matches a year, scheduled for you

GAP 2

Trust

THE GAP

No shared standard for confidentiality, support or consequences

WHAT CLOSSES IT

Vetting and one standard everyone keeps

HOW BEM DOES IT

Every member vetted; circles off the record; one written standard

GAP 3

Depth

THE GAP

Few gatherings are built for the decisions that come with seniority

WHAT CLOSES IT

Agendas built on the decisions of seniority

HOW BEM DOES IT

A skilled facilitator in every circle; a brief before gatherings

GAP 4

Continuity

THE GAP

Relationships fade or scatter at each career transition

WHAT CLOSES IT

Relationships that travel and compound

HOW BEM DOES IT

A named concierge and the same circle all year

FOUNDATION

Identity: Black men's racial and cultural background, treated as an asset, not a limiter

Source: The BEM framework

Black Executive Men (BEM) is built on that structure: who is in the room, what members agree to, what they discuss, and who follows up. In practice, it places 31 hours a year of executive conversation with Black peers on each member's calendar: 16 hours of forums, 9 of circles and 6 of matches, with concierge check-ins in addition.

EXHIBIT 6

Curated time with Black Executive Men members, per year

Forums at 8 hours, circles at 90 minutes, matches at 30 minutes

31 hours

arranged for each member,
every year of membership



■ **16 hours** Two day-long forums
2 × 8 hours

■ **9 hours** Six executive circles
6 × 90 minutes

■ **6 hours** Twelve monthly matches
12 × 30 minutes

Source: BEM membership calendar: forums at 8 hours, circles at 90 minutes, matches at 30 minutes

A year in BEM

Every hour is curated. A member's year is built from a few dependable commitments:

- **Two day-long forums**, in person and off the record, with a brief in advance so the time goes to real decisions
- **Six executive circles** of 90 minutes, with the same group of up to eight executives all year and a skilled facilitator
- **Twelve monthly matches**, each a 30-minute conversation with a member selected by BEM for relevance and mutual need
- **Quarterly check-ins** with a named concierge, a real person who knows the member's goals
- **One shared standard** on communication, confidentiality, attendance and conduct, accepted by every member

Who is in the room

BEM's membership spans more than 200 executives across 176 companies and 27 industries, in the United States and abroad (blackexecutivemen.com).

Members hold C-suite and vice president roles. Many come from within the lineage this briefing describes: members of Sigma Pi Phi, The Executive Leadership Council, the National Black MBA Association and ITSMF are among them, and many joined by referral from fellow members. Mutual support is not new to

them; they join because BEM applies the values they already hold to the work of senior enterprise leadership.

Senior Black men who share these values of mutual support, discretion and shared success can request an invitation at blackexecutivemen.com.

SECTION 08

What changes when the gaps close

When the four gaps close, the benefit is designed to compound at two levels: for the individual executive and across the network.

EXHIBIT 7

When the gaps close, value compounds at two levels

The BEM model of compounding value

LEVEL 1

The individual

Peers who share his seniority, before decisions are made; candid counsel; better-prepared moves



LEVEL 2

The network

Every member strengthens every other; ties that bridge companies, industries and regions

Source: The BEM model of compounding value

For the individual

GAP CLOSED	WHAT CHANGES	THE OUTCOME FOR THE EXECUTIVE
Proximity	A standing bench of peers who share his seniority, available before decisions are made	Decisions pressure-tested by peers who have faced them, and less isolation at the top
Trust	Candid counsel, and information shared early rather than after the fact	Earlier sight of roles, opportunities and risks, and better-informed decisions
Depth	Relationships that work on strategy, not only on shared interests	Better-prepared moves: to the C-suite, the CEO's office and the boardroom
Continuity	Relationships that travel across companies and transitions	Resilience when a role ends, and a network whose value grows as each member advances

Network effects

The network is designed so that each member strengthens every other member's position. Each year, a member gains twelve curated introductions, and a single circle of eight holds 28 distinct peer relationships.

The span matters as much as the size. A study of 2,723 CEOs at large US public companies found that each additional relationship with an executive outside

the company was associated with roughly \$17,000 more in annual compensation, and that the premium attached only to relationships the company could not already reach through its other leaders. Duplicate ties carried none. The study covers US public-company CEOs between 2000 and 2007, and it establishes an association rather than a cause (Engelberg, Gao and Parsons, *Review of Financial Studies*, 2013). A network that crosses companies, industries and regions is built to supply exactly that kind of reach. It is also designed to ease the "only one" calculation described in section 5, so that several Black men can advance together without any one carrying the risk alone.

What BEM is designed to deliver

- Better-prepared moves at every step: vice president to the C-suite, C-suite to CEO, CEO to the boardroom, and boardroom to board chair, informed by peers one or two steps ahead
- Earlier access to roles, partnerships and market intelligence through members across many companies and industries
- Resilience when a role ends, with relationships in place before the call comes
- Greater influence inside the company and across industries
- Collective strength among Black men at the top

Outcomes depend on each member's engagement. BEM does not guarantee roles or advancement.

Questions for senior leaders

Six questions to test the strength of your own network:

1. In the past 12 months, how many hours did you spend with Black men at your level, pressure-testing the enterprise decisions in front of you? And when was the last such conversation?
2. How many Black men at your level could you call tonight about a confidential career decision?
3. Of those, how many could be trusted with enterprise-level confidentiality, without question?
4. Which Black men have already held the role you want next, and when did you last talk with one of them about positioning yourself for it?
5. How many of the introductions that led to an enterprise partner, industry insight or a new role came from another Black man? And when did you last actively champion another Black executive for a role or opportunity?
6. If your role ended tomorrow, who are the first three Black men you would call, and have you spoken with them this year?

If these answers are thinner than you would like, BEM is built to change them. If they are already strong, BEM places that strength alongside other men who share your values and your seniority, where it compounds. That is the work BEM was built to do.

About this series

The Four Gaps is the first volume of Black Executive Men Executive Research. Future volumes will examine the three identities of the Black executive man, and each of the four gaps, in greater depth.

Research and scope

This briefing draws on published research in management, sociology, finance and economics, together with federal labour statistics. Every source is listed at the end, and each figure is attributed where it appears.

What the evidence shows, and what it does not. The studies cited describe how networks, trust and sponsorship behave across professional and executive populations. They are not studies of Black Executive Men or of its members. Where this briefing describes BEM's model, it describes how the membership is designed to work rather than measured results, and it makes no claim that membership causes advancement, higher pay or any other outcome.

Populations and limits. Most of the evidence is American, and most studies cover broad professional or executive groups rather than Black men at the vice president and C-suite level specifically. Where a study's population differs materially from this briefing's audience, the text says so at the point the figure is used. National occupational data cover Black men and women together.

What comes next. BEM has not yet published outcome data on its own members. Future volumes will add that research, so that the case rests on evidence from the membership as well as on the published literature.

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BLACK EXECUTIVE MEN

Four gaps. Three identities. One solution:

**Black men winning together
in enterprise leadership.**

Black Executive Men is built for it.

ABOUT BLACK EXECUTIVE MEN

Black Executive Men is a private network built around the experience of Black men who serve as C-suite executives and vice presidents at for-profit enterprise organizations. Admission is selective: a request for invitation, a conversation, then admission. Membership is \$5,000 a year. For members whose organizations sponsor them, BEM provides an invoice-ready summary of the program's services: executive forums, facilitated peer circles, curated one-on-one introductions and concierge support. That focus reflects the shared experience this briefing describes, including the three identities, which is the foundation of the trust members build with one another.

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