

Leading with authenticity: Damon Ealey shares his journey as Centre Dufferin's first Black principal

Written By **Danielle Williams**

In the halls of Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS), Damon Ealey stands as a beacon of authenticity, integrity, and leadership. As the first Black principal in the school's history, Damon has demonstrated tenacity, courage, and a strong dedication to promoting academic success.

Damon has always aspired to be an educator, but it wasn't until he embraced the leadership skills within him that he aimed higher and became a principal.

Although becoming a principal was never his original goal. When teaching at the Peel District School Board, the principal there, who also happened to be his old football coach, told him about how time-consuming the job would be. Taking that fact into consideration, he put being a principal on hold to spend more time with his family.

"The older I get, the more I like being in the presence of family and family friends," said Damon.

Coming from a family of high achievers and exemplars of excellence, Damon's upbringing instilled in him a deep-rooted commitment to integrity, fairness, and compassion. Surrounded by siblings who have carved their paths of success and impact, Damon draws strength from his family's legacy.

He believes he is a good leader who doesn't need to fake who he is to rise in position or status. He does not compromise and believes in fairness and equity, saying that everyone deserves the opportunity to be successful.

Mainly, he emphasizes that by hiring the right people and good teachers, the educational experience can be very different.

"If you have the right people, you can do almost anything," said Damon.

His educational journey has taken him across continents, from starting his teaching career in 1999 to teaching in Toronto to teaching in Japan.

Damon's worldview has sharpened his leadership and teaching abilities giving him a "super-set" of tools to manage the intricacies of the educational system.

Transitioning into the role of principal at CDDHS wasn't without its challenges. Damon acknowledges the pressure he felt to prove his competence and earn the trust of the school community, particularly as a Black leader in a small town.

"The hard part of any small town and any smaller community is for all the people in the community to develop trust. It's to cultivate the trust of a small community, and as a Black principal, many times it is an even harder ability because people have preconceived notions as to why you're there. They're questioning: Are you competent enough to be there? Are you there just because you're Black? Does this satisfy a certain percentage of the community? Or do you actually know what you're doing?"

He added, "I think that the hard part in a smaller community, especially as a Black principal, is that you have to prove, one that you know what you're doing, and that you're not just there because you're Black, and two that you're not there just to consider the needs of Black students."

Despite these hurdles, Damon's unwavering commitment to authenticity, equity, and fairness has propelled him forward.

His leadership philosophy lies in a commitment to integrity. Believing that true leadership stems from genuine connections and mutual respect, Damon prioritizes creating a safe and inclusive space where everyone feels valued and heard.

He believes most of his leadership qualities originate from when he was the quarterback for his football teams.

?Every person can be different sizes; every person has a different role to play; everybody has to work together at the same time to make something work; similar to rugby, if one person messes up, then the whole thing crumbles, so you have to move as a team,? he said.

Damon mphasized how his raole was to encourage and boost his teammates to work as one to produce a winning outcome.

With a firm belief in the transformative potential of hiring the right people and shaping a curriculum that fosters global citizenship, Damon envisions a future where every student can thrive and succeed. Continuing to lead with integrity and passion, Damon is dedicated to building a legacy of authenticity, equity, and excellence that transcends generations.

?I hope to cultivate a culture of authenticity, authentic leadership, and authentic teaching relationships. If I inspire or instil in people that level of authenticity and level of safety, then they'll carry that through their teaching.?