

Law Firm Stays Strong with Second Generation Father-Daughter Team Make Good Match

COVER STORY

Law Firm Stays Strong with Second Generation Father-Daughter Team Make Good Match

By: Charlene Mitchell-Rodgers

Elbert L. Hatchett has cemented his legacy in the grand halls of courthouses across the United States, litigating cases, and winning multi-million dollar verdicts. He defends his clients with a vigorous and powerful dedication to their defense. His eloquent tone and charismatic flair creates a magnetism that sometimes his causes his opposition to lose their concentration in the midst of a trial. In short, Elbert Hatchett is an awesome lawyer who seems to love the challenge of difficult cases and is equally delighted by victory. Praised by judges as one of Michigan's most well-prepared lawyers, he is also lauded by his colleagues who count him among the most well-respected lawyers in the nation.

A native on Pontiac, MI, Hatchett is among one of the Pontiac Public School's most successful graduates. He earned both his undergraduate degree and law degree at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee. Although retirement is not on his agenda as of yet, he is preparing to one day turn the practice over to his daughter Ayanna. A move that will likely make him proud, now that he has grown accustomed to having her as a partner in his firm. I met with the two of them in the law library of the firm's Pontiac offices.

DBP: What is most gratifying about working together?

Elbert: It is a challenge for me because she doesn't take orders from Dad very well. She's prepared to bump her head if necessary, and she comes to me as a last resort. I must say that I admire her sense of independence. I do enjoy when she is preparing to go to trial and bounces her arguments off of me. She always insists that I stay objective, and I do.

Ayanna: At the risk of sounding redundant, the most gratifying aspect of working with my father is working with my father. It is very rewarding to work for and with a family member that you respect and trust.

DBP: Looking at the two of you with both of your names of the shingle, did you always know that one day it would be a father/daughter practice?

Elbert: No, in fact she greeted the challenge of practicing law with great trepidation. I don't know if it was in her heart as her first choice. She sees now that it is an effective way of serving her fellow man, and she has always had a good heart.

Ayanna: I didn't decide to go to law school until I finished college. I had wanted to go into broadcast media, or have my own talk show like Oprah. Later I began to open

you find that it offers the kind of career that satisfies your goals?

Ayanna: Litigation is still a very tough field for women generally and for African American women to break into. I meet for lunch and dinner regularly with many of my African American female colleagues because it is important to maintain a connection with each other especially in light of our diverse areas of practice. There is

daughter, she could come in without that kind of experience and learn from the experienced lawyers around her, including me.

DBP: What are the most important lessons you've learned from your father, and what career advantages has it afforded you?

Ayanna: The most valuable lesson I've learned is how to practice in more than just one or two areas of the law. It is good to know as much as possible within a number of legal specialties, especially in this recessed economy. The greatest advantage in working with him is that I have access to one of the greatest legal minds there is. There is no better master of the law and analysis than him.

DBP: As a father, what has surprised you most about your daughter since she joined the firm?

Elbert: I was surprised to see how feisty she is in the courtroom. I always thought she would be more demure. She has a lot of fire in her approach, and exhibits a stirring passion.

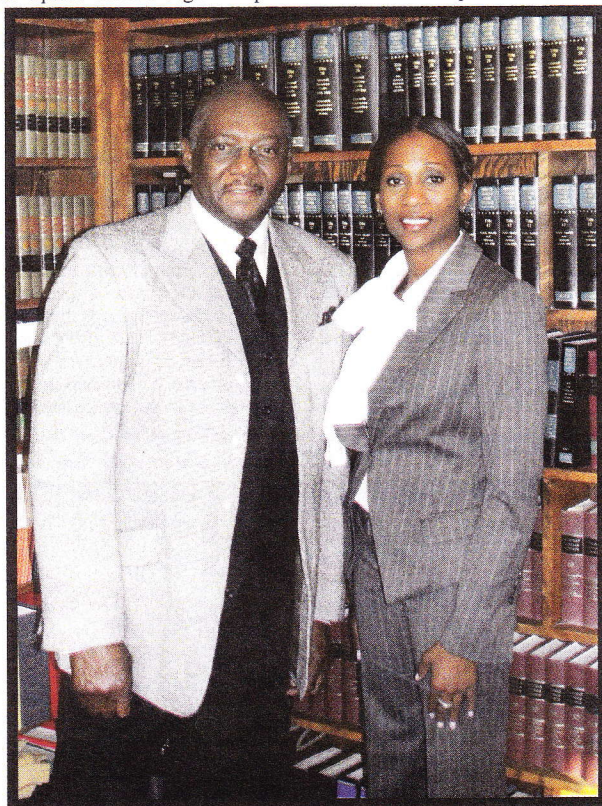
DBP: When retirement day comes for Elbert Hatchett, what will it feel like to have Ayanna Hatchett having to carry the torch and fill some mighty big shoes?

Ayanna: Honestly, I'm not really sure. It is very hard for me to imagine my father not practicing, much less what I will do when he has finally had enough.

Elbert: I'm looking forward to the day when she can be at the helm. I must say that it will probably be emotional. It will probably be like I felt when she was first sworn in at the Oakland County Courthouse. I was so proud of her that it brought me to tears.

Ayanna D. Hatchett is the middle child of Elbert and Laureline Hatchett of Bloomfield Hills, MI. She credits both of her parents for providing her with a well-rounded education upbringing and access to a variety of social, political and charitable activities that helped shape her life.

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Attorneys Elbert L. Hatchett and Ayanna Hatchett

my mind to other careers and fields of endeavor like philosophy, political science and sociology. Because in my generation a graduate degree of some kind is a must, I felt law school was most practical.

DBP: You have handled numerous domestic cases involving divorce, child custody as well as corporate cases and some criminal law. Now that you are deeply entrenched in the practice of law, do

always something to be shared or gained amongst us.

DBP: Speaking of African American female lawyers, Ayanna was not the first one to work in the firm. What makes her different?

Elbert: I have mentored other female attorneys at my firm who were African American; however they came from other firms and brought with them a wealth of experience. Because Ayanna is my



Father says law firm is in solid hands.
"Ayanna has fire and passion in the courtroom"