

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sheila Talton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Talton, Sheila Gayle, 1952-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton,
Dates:	August 23, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:35:44).
Abstract:	Corporate executive Sheila Talton (1952 -) had extensive global operations experience as a business leader and entrepreneur in the information technology industry. She founded Gray Matter Analytics in 2013. Talton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 23, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_216
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive Sheila G. Talton was born on October 12, 1952 in Cleveland, Ohio. As a teenager, she became involved in the civil rights movement in Rockford, Illinois. Talton went on to graduate from Northern Illinois University with her B.S. degree in business administration and speech communications in 1980

Upon graduation, Talton was hired as a sales trainee at NCR Corporation. She became head of Midwest sales for Data Group Systems in Chicago in 1982,

moving on to a position as team leader in the sales department of Applied Data Research (ADR) in 1984. Taking advantage of a void left by the breakup of AT&T, Talton founded Unisource Network Services, a provider of voice, data and video networking consultation and support services, in 1987. In 1996, while still leading Unisource, she helped establish the Information Technology Senior Management Forum, a mentoring group that cultivates executive talent among African American IT professionals. Talton sold her stake in Unisource in 2000, and was hired as the vice president of Cap Gemini, Ernst & Young's Midwest technology consulting practice. In 2002, she was named president of global business innovation services for Electronic Data Systems (EDS). Talton was hired by the computer networking company Cisco Systems Inc. in 2004 where she became vice president of advisory services in the Customer Advocacy Group. She was promoted to a role as vice president of Cisco's Office of Globalization in 2008 and helped the company identify growth opportunities in emerging markets around the world. She left Cisco in 2012 to found the consulting firm SGT, Ltd. In 2013, Talton established Gray Matter Analytics, Inc., a business providing consulting services and cloud hosting service for analytics.

Talton has served as a member of the board of directors of the ACCO Brands Corporation, the Wintrust Financial Corporation, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Northwestern Memorial Hospital Foundation, the Lighthouse for the Blind, and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Her honors include selection as a Congressional appointee on the US White House Women's Business Council, as one of the "Top 10 Women in Technology" by Enterprising Women, and as "Entrepreneur of the Year" by the National Federation of Black Women Business Owners. She is also a recipient of the "Entrepreneurial Excellence Award" from Working Woman magazine and a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy Award. She was named a 2007 "Woman Worth Watching" by Profiles in Diversity Journal, received a 2008 Egretta Award from the African American Women's Business and Career Conference, and was named a 2009 Business Leader of Color by Chicago United. In 2010 she was honored as a Woman of Achievement by the Anti-Defamation League, and as the Outstanding College Alumni of the Year by the Business School of Northern Illinois University. In 2011 she was named one of "25 Influential Black Women in Business" by The Network Journal and received the "Diamond Leadership Award" from the Information Technology Senior Management Forum.

Sheila G. Talton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 23, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sheila Talton was conducted by Anthony Poole on August 23, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Corporate executive Sheila Talton (1952 -) had extensive global operations experience as a business leader and entrepreneur in the information technology industry. She founded Gray Matter Analytics in 2013.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Talton, Sheila Gayle, 1952-

Poole, Anthony (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Talton, Sheila Gayle, 1952---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Corporate Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, August 23, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_001, TRT: 1:29:56 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton was born on October 12, 1952 in Cleveland, Ohio to Mildred McWhorter Russell and Levard Russell, Jr. Her mother was born into a family of sharecroppers in Elbert, Georgia, and was educated through the tenth grade. Talton's father was born in Apollo, Pennsylvania to Delia Frye Pearson and Levard Russell, Sr., both of whom later remarried. He completed several years of college, and taught Talton the importance of social etiquette. Talton's parents separated when she was six years old. At that time, she moved with her mother and younger brother, Ronald Russell, to a poor, segregated neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky. There, Talton attended the all-black William H. Perry, Sr. Elementary School from the first grade to third grade. She experienced Jim Crow segregation for the first time, and was prohibited from shopping in the stores downtown. Talton and her brother often spent Christmas with their father, stepmother and stepsister in Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_002, TRT: 2:30:03 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton lived with her parents in the middle class black Hough neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. After they separated in 1958, she moved with her mother and younger brother to Louisville, Kentucky, and saw her father once a month. In 1962, Talton's mother moved the family into a boarding house in a poor black neighborhood of Rockville, Illinois. There, Talton attended the Franklin School, where she was one of a few African American students. There were limited opportunities for African Americans in Rockville, and many worked in factories or domestic service, including Talton's mother. When Talton was fourteen years old, she ran away from home to pressure her mother into reconnecting with her father. Talton went on to become involved in the Black Power movement, and joined Rockville's nascent Black Panther Party chapter. Her father disapproved of her militancy, including her boycott of school after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_003, TRT: 3:29:55 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton rarely focused on her studies at Rockford West High School in Rockford, Illinois. Upon graduating in 1970, she agreed to attend Northern Illinois University to appease her father, but did not take her studies seriously. Talton left the university in 1972, and worked as a clerk for several years. During this time, she worked at large corporations, and was often the only African American employee. Talton met her first husband in 1975, and gave birth to their daughter in 1977. At that time, she was working as a clerk at the Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company. With encouragement and tutoring from a white coworker, Talton decided to finish her college degree, and completed coursework at Rock Valley Junior College. She was admitted for a second time into Northern Illinois University, and excelled in her studies. She majored in business administration, and focused on the growing technology industry. She also took communication classes to make her a more competitive job candidate.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_004, TRT: 4:31:19 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton joined the NCR Corporation after graduating from Northern Illinois University in 1980. She sold computer software and hardware to businesses in Illinois, and focused on the healthcare and education industries. Talton was the only African American and one of ten women in her training group. As the software industry grew, she left the NCR Corporation to join Data Group Systems, which specialized in software development. She was chosen to open the firm's office in Chicago, Illinois, where she sold software to clients like PepsiCo and the American Hospital Supply Corporation. After three years, Talton joined Applied Data Research, where she worked in systems software. In 1986, the company was acquired by Ameritech, and Talton decided to start her own business. She secured a \$1 million investment from the Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation to found Unisource Network Services, which designed local and wide area networks for clients like the Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_005, TRT: 5:32:25 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton learned about data analytics and software while working at Applied Data Research. She went on to found Unisource Network Services in 1987 with financial backing from the Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation. She ran the company successfully for several years, and later secured a \$6 million investment from a small venture capital firm in Chicago. The business suffered during the financial downturn of 1998, and Talton left the company after a disagreement with her investors in 2000. Next, she was hired as a director in the technology consulting practice at Ernst and Young, where she worked with large corporate clients such as the Kraft Foods Group, Inc., McDonalds Corporation and Sara Lee Corporation. Eighteen months after she joined Ernst and Young, its technology division was acquired by Capgemini SE. Talton left in 2002, when she was recruited by Electronic Data Systems Corporation to help establish and operate the company's global front

end technology consulting business.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_006, TRT: 6:32:28 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton received a degree from the Harvard Business School in 2002, and began working for Electronic Data Systems (EDS) in 2004. From that time, she managed the global expansion of the EDS technology consulting business. The consulting project was shut down after a mismanaged contract resulted in loss of revenue. Talton was offered a position at Cisco Systems, Inc., where she ran the global consulting group for three and a half years. She was then assigned to expand the company's partnerships with the Chinese government. Next, Talton traveled to Mexico to develop video surveillance technology. She also spent time in Chile and Brazil, where she worked to improve communications technology in the ethanol industry. In 2011, Talton returned to the United States and joined a small private equity firm called Sterling Partners. There, she developed a plan to invest in emerging areas of the software industry. After the firm dismissed her ideas, Talton decided to found Gray Matter Analytics.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Talton, Section
A2013_216_001_007, TRT: 7:29:38 2013/08/23

Sheila Talton began working for Sterling Partners, a small private equity firm, in 2012. After the firm neglected to pursue her ideas for investment in the big data industry, Talton decided to develop her own business, Gray Matter Analytics. The company provided data analytics and predictive modeling services to businesses in the healthcare and financial services sectors. Talton established offices in Silicon Valley and Chicago, Illinois. At the time of the interview, Gray Matter Analytics employed nine people. Talton planned to develop the venture into a \$30 million company with 125 employees. She describes her values, her hopes and concerns for the African American community and her plans for the future. She also reflects upon her legacy and her parents' guidance. Talton concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.