Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John W. Thompson

Thompson, John W., 1949-

Alternative Names: John W. Thompson;

Life Dates: April 24, 1949-

Place of Birth: Fort Dix, New Jersey, USA

Residence: Woodside, CA

Work: Menlo Park, CA

Occupations: Chief Executive Officer

Biographical Note

Chief executive officer John W. Thompson was born on April 24, 1949 to Eunice Walden and John H. Thompson in Fort Dix, New Jersey. He was raised in West Palm Beach, Florida where he graduated from John F. Kennedy High School in 1967. He briefly attended Lincoln University on a music scholarship before transferring to Florida A&M University where he earned his B.A. degree in business administration in 1971. Thompson later attended the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he received his M.A. degree in management science in 1983.

After obtaining his B.A. degree from Florida A&M University, Thompson joined IBM Corporation as a salesman. He was later promoted to general manager for development and marketing of OS/2 computer software and other Intel-based server products. During his career at IBM, Thompson held the roles of branch manager, assistant to the regional manager, regional marketing director, assistant to the chief executive officer and chairman, director of IBM's Midwest operations, and general manager of personal software products. He was also a member of the company's worldwide management council. Thompson left IBM as general manager of IBM Americas in 1999. That same year, he was appointed chief executive officer and chairman of Symantec Corporation in California, making him the only African American at that time to lead a technology company. He retired from Symantec in April of 2009, but remained as chairman of the board until October of 2011. In 2010, Thompson became chief executive officer of Virtual Instruments. He remained here until April of 2016; and, the following year, he joined Riverwood Capital Management as an executive advisor. Thompson was with Riverwood until March of 2018. In May of 2018, he became a venture partner with

Lightspeed Venture Partners.

Thompson has served on numerous boards, including those of Illumina, the Illinois Governor's Human Resource Advisory Council, Teach for America, Illumio, Liquid Robotics, Rubrik, and Seismic Software. In 2014, he became chairman of Microsoft, where he succeeded Microsoft founder Bill Gates. He was also appointed to the National Infrastructure Advisory Committee in 2002 and to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission in 2009.

Thompson has been the recipient of numerous awards throughout his career, including the Pioneer Business Leader Award presented at the Silicon Valley Education Foundation's 2010 Pioneers & Purpose event, and the Technology and Business Award presented by Black Entertainment Television in 2015.

Thompson resides with his wife, Sandi, in California. He has two adult children, Chelsea and John E. Thompson.

John W. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on December 18, 2019.

Related Entries

Suncoast Community High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Lincoln University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

    B.A.

The MIT Sloan School of Management [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

    M.A.

Lincoln Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

International Business Machines (IBM) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

    General Manager, IBM Americas

Symantec [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 199904 to 200904]

    CEO

Virtual Instruments [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 201102 to 201703]

    CEO

Riverwood Capital Management [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

    Executive Advisor

Lightspeed Venture Partners [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

    Venture Partner

Symantec [MEMBEROF]
[from 199904 to 201110]

    Chairman of the Board

Microsoft [MEMBEROF]
[from 201402 to ?]

    Chairman of the Board

Northern Indiana Public Service Company [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

    Board Member

Fortune Brands [MEMBEROF]
[from 1998 to 2000]

    Board Member

Seagate Technologies [MEMBEROF]
[from 2001 to 2013]

    Board Member

United Postal Service [MEMBEROF]
[from 1997 to 2009]

    Board Member

Illumina [MEMBEROF]
[from 201705 to ?]

    Board Member

Illinois Human Resource Advisory Council [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

    Appointee

Teach for America [MEMBEROF]
[from 2000 to 2003]

    Board Member

Illumio [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

    Board Member

Liquid Robotics [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Rubrik [MEMBEROF]
  [from ? to ?]

Board Member; Investor

Seismic Software [MEMBEROF]
  [from 201606 to ?]

Board Member

NiSource [MEMBEROF]
  [from 1993 to 2001]

Board Member

Wetland America Trust [MEMBEROF]
  [from ? to ?]

Board Member

Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission [MEMBEROF]
  [from 2008 to 2009]

Appointee

Blue Ribbon Task Force [MEMBEROF]
  [from ? to ?]

Appointee

National Infrastructure Advisory Committee [MEMBEROF]
  [from ? to ?]

Appointee