

PEOPLE

What's black and white and read all over?

Local author hopes it will be her book

By DAVID EMANUEL
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For Bowieite Sylvia Henderson, writing books is a matter of black and white.

And as for that gray area, there sure is a lot of it.

Her new book, sure to be controversial, is titled *Why You Talk So White? Eliminate the Behaviors That Sabotage Your Success*.

The motivational speaker/author/businesswoman will sign copies of her book Friday at Karibu Books at Bowie Town Center from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Even the press release was tricky to write.

"And what I say right up front is that it's not about race," said Henderson, who runs a business called Springboard Training.

In the press release she states that the book "offers anyone, regardless of ethnicity, pointed guidance to effective business and life skills."

"Born of the author's experience of being accused of 'talking white,' the book has little to do with race. It has a lot to do with the choices you make and the behaviors and attitudes you display, regardless of demographics, to succeed on both personal and professional levels."

"Growing up, my parents always stressed the importance of enunciating, speaking well, and to do better in order to be equal to other people," she said. "So I never put any ethnic association on what it takes to be successful."

And when she was a student in junior and senior high school, as well as college, "all of a sudden, people would stop and ask me, 'Why you talk so white?' That's just always stuck with me. And many people got angry with me for 'talking white.' But that was another lesson my parents taught me: Don't worry about what people say about you.

"And it strikes me as ignorant when people say that if

I do or don't 'talk white,' that makes me a certain type of person. Like I'm a sellout."

Henderson said she felt like she "lives in two worlds," even though that's not necessarily the case. And that feeling is a reality for many youngsters, especially African Americans, today, she said.

"They struggle. Kids struggle in general. But they all really want to do well, yet they are so driven by peer acceptance, that they 'hide their smarts,' so to speak. The things they know they need to do, they don't do it. Sure, kids want to, and need to, hang with their 'peeps,' but at the same time, you have to learn what it takes to be accepted and successful when it comes to the business world. And that doesn't mean 'giving yourself up.' And it's not about making excuses either."

She said the little things make all the difference — how you dress, being on time, returning phone calls, making a follow-up call.

"How you present yourself and how you speak can mean all the difference in being 'accepted' in the business world," she said.

Her 10 main steps to success are:

- Use language well. Enunciate words clearly and correctly.
- Associate with people who are where you want to be. Help others who want to earn a place beside you. Encourage those you want to work at moving beyond you. There is room for all.
- Be pleasant around other



people.

- Learn to compete, and win fairly.

- Know and appreciate from where you come. Release yourself from the binds that hold you. Get on board with

that which propels you forward.

- Remove excuses, negative language, name-calling, and labeling from your vocabulary and thoughts.

- Be noticed for your positives.

- Accept that 10 minutes early is "on time."

- Adopt and maintain a strong work ethic that reflects the environment to which you aspire.

- Take the initiative. Be responsible. Make your own researched choices for your life.

Henderson said already, she has received reaction from both whites and blacks, and it's been mostly positive.

"From the white business world, I have gotten, 'Oh my gosh, somebody is actually saying something that we'd love to be able to say but can't,' and from the black people, I've gotten, 'Oh my gosh, yes, I've heard this over and over again. This is very positive to know just how important this is.'"

"But I've also gotten, 'Why are you bringing this stuff up? It sounds racial.' And to that

I say, these are tips I offer in order for you to make decisions that you can make to be successful."

Even the title of the book, Henderson said, would hopefully grab people, white and black.

"It's either going to fly off the shelf or stay on the shelf," she said. "I hope people at least pick it up and look at it. And at a place like Karibu Books, or other Afro-centric venues, I think the book will do well."

(She adds it will also make a great stocking stuffer for the holidays.)

Henderson said she is available to talk to businesses, church groups and schools.

"Again, I always emphasize, it's not about race. It's not talking about 'being black' or 'being white' or 'giving up your identity,' it's about the decisions you make.

"I hope people come away with the thought of, 'so that's the subject of the stuff I need to

do in order to succeed, and that the little things are important to even get to make it to the next step in the business world.' And I want the younger readers to say, 'I figured I needed to do this, but my friends are just beating me down. I want my peers to understand, too.'"

Henderson has received a letter "thanking her for writing this book," from Julian Bond, chairman of the NAACP.

Burt Durbin, president of the Personal Achievement Institute, said, "This is a page-turner, a minor classic. The world, especially the world of would-be, upwardly mobile professionals, needs this profound wisdom."

Why You Talk So White ... is a short delineation of basic elements of success in the 21st century world of business ... Authentic, comprehensive, easy to understand and to implement, this is a must-have guide to getting ahead and moving on up."

Said Henderson, "I want

families and people to have conversations, and to understand that many of the lessons in the book are ones I learned as a kid, because Dad made me sit at the table, and he talked to me and told me these things. It wasn't, 'I'm going to tell you all about the business life,' it was daily lessons, and this book is a culmination of those lessons I learned from all those conversations."

Sadly, her father died of Alzheimer's disease before the release of her book.

Her mother, in her 90s, has read the book, and she worries that "it's going to upset people," Henderson said.

"I told her if people are upset, let them be upset," said Henderson. "I just really want to see two kinds of reviews come out on this book — one that says, 'You need to read this if you want to succeed,' and another that says, 'This is so controversial and doggone her for writing something like this!'"

