

#MyWorldMonday - Chorvelle Johnson Cunningham Teacher-Turned-Leading Banker

Posted February 01, 2021

Via [The Jamaica Observer](#)

Before entering the arena of finance, which eventually culminated with her appointment as CEO of Sagicor Bank Jamaica (SBJ), Chorvelle Johnson Cunningham's career began in a classroom at Kingston Technical High School, where she taught business to upper school students.

Nearly two decades later, the formidable author has built up a stellar résumé between Scotia Investments and Proven Wealth, along with a fellowship at the International Women's Forum.

Despite only spending two years at SBJ, her impact has been resounding as the bank's bottom line swelled by 71 per cent to a record \$3 billion.

Although 2020 has been less than appealing, Johnson Cunningham remains confident and shares her thoughts today on the transformation of the executive and boardroom in Jamaica's corporate space.

Business Observer (BO): As of January 1, 2021 there will be four female heads of commercial banks in Jamaica. As one of these women, how do you feel or react to this news that representation for women has increased at this corporate level? Also, how do you feel about the increasing participation of women at the executive and board levels versus middle management?

Chorvelle Johnson Cunningham (CJC): As a proponent of female empowerment I am honoured to be among this group of women making our mark in the financial sector, and look on with pride at the achievements of women taking the lead in various other sectors. I am elated that more women are now participating at the executive and taking a seat at board level, but would love to see more of us being named chair of boards. Many women are skilfully mastering the balancing act of career, family, and personal passions, excelling in all areas — something the naysayers said could not be done. Well, it's happening now.

BO: You joined SBJ in 2018 following your role at Proven Wealth and time as a teacher. Since joining SBJ, how have you impacted the bank's performance?

CJC: Sagicor Bank is the fourth-largest commercial bank in Jamaica, and we continue our thrust towards becoming the bank of choice for all Jamaicans by delivering easy, simple and personal solutions to our clients. I am honoured to be leading a team of amazing, talented professionals as we redefine the banking sector by introducing innovative products that support the country's development and stimulate economic activities. A major part of our focus is on becoming more inclusive and providing solutions for many of Jamaica's unbanked.

Since 2018, a few of our flagship innovations have included:

* The launch of Jamaica's first mobile point-of-sale machine, SYWPE, a compact portable card reader that works with

phones and tablets to accept debit and credit card payments. This device opened the door for many local micro, small, and medium-sized businesses to experience the convenience of accepting electronic payments and increase their earning potential.

* The launch of MyCash, a prepaid card which allows payments and the transfer of funds locally and internationally using a mobile application. This innovation, done in partnership with Digicel and Mastercard, has provided an opening for many Jamaicans who were formerly excluded from the formal banking sector to now have access.

* The launch of our online account opening portal which allows individuals to open bank accounts completely online. We continue to be #SBJ in your corner.

BO: How do you see your role as a woman leader influencing the next generation of corporate aspirants who seek to reach similar levels of success?

CJC: The accomplishments of women over the years have been tremendous and is a continued source of motivation for me along the journey. All of us in premier positions today are standing on the shoulders of women who went before us, many unheralded and under-appreciated. As a female leader in this society, I hope that my work and achievements will inspire young women to aim high and work assiduously to accomplish their personal and professional goals. I want to encourage the next generation of female leaders to be fearless and bold while climbing the proverbial ladder and remain focused on realising their goal. They must know that they can achieve by being committed and determined.

BO: How do you reflect on your role as a teacher and now leading Jamaica's fourth-largest bank?

CJC: I am grateful for my journey and the path taken that has led me to become the CEO of Sagicor Bank Jamaica. I am extremely thankful to my parents for how they groomed us — my siblings and me — over the years to not see a 'glass ceiling', but to continually do our best and to treat people with respect. The lessons learnt and experiences garnered over the years have honed my skills and played a role in helping me to become the type of leader I am today. Mistakes are only learning tools that guide the way forward. Specifically, my background in teaching has taught me patience, tolerance and empathy, which are critical characteristics in managing people and personalities, and the perfect foundation for my current leadership role.

Update: Since this article, Chorvelle is now the board chair for United Way.

For more on Sagicor culture, work life and inspiring team member stories, follow us on our