

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/race-and-entrepreneurship/>

PlayVS CEO Delane Parnell describes his experience as a black tech founder, including instances of bias and racism. He shares how he and his team power through those challenges, and explains how he's built a majority-minority company by hiring women and individuals from diverse communities, and also aligning himself with investors who are willing to stand up for diversity and gender equity.



## Transcript

- First off, I'd like to say that I'm extremely proud 00:00:05,590 to be black, and to be a black entrepreneur and to represent the black and brown community, in tech, in gaming, where there's few of us.. And I feel privileged and humbled and motivated to succeed given that I'm one of few people who raised this much money at this age and from that community.. And I had this much success, and so, like, I think, it's certainly, more difficult, I'll say.. And, frankly, I think, even for me, I think that I, it's not as difficult as it is for black women, black and brown women, I think, black and brown women probably face the toughest challenge in building companies, certainly raising capital, because they sort of get hit with a double minority, right? They're woman, and they're black, or brown.. And for me, at least, I get the privilege of being a man, which, there is some privilege there.. But look, it's difficult.. And luckily, like I'm able to have investors who care less about the color of my skin.. And partners, by the way, as well, who care less about the color of my skin, and just more about my intellect, my drive, the things that I'm working on, and also just my integrity and character.. We've had some challenges in our business just given, the audience of stakeholders where some folks have not worked with us, because they've said that, a black person runs the business.. And that's obviously super challenging..

And this isn't from like a for profit side, but, we face this, with stakeholders on the education side of the business.. And I think that that's obviously tough, and we don't lean super heavily into that, and we don't even talk about that a lot externally.. we sort of, push through it.. But, I'm proud that the team continues to support me and support each other and continue to dedicate themselves to our mission, and never let racism get in the way of what we're building.. And we're a majority minority company.. Most of the people who work at our company are either of color or women or some form of minority.. And so we're super excited about that.. And we wanna continue to hire people that represent my community and other communities to help us bring this company in the light.. But yeah, I mean, that was a very general question, and so hopefully, that's the general response also.. - I appreciate it..

00:02:39,210 And I think it's a difficult thing to talk about, also, just because it's, you only have one perspective, like, I can't wake up in the morning and not be Indian.. - Yes, sure 00:02:51,310 but I also think that makes it even more important for us to have these dialogues and these conversations.. Especially these stories around if you have people that choose not to work with you, because of the color of your skin.. I don't think that that is something that people realize is still persisting, or at least certainly I haven't.. Is there anything else? Or what else don't people realize that you've, you think about the experience of being black or just being a minority in the process of entrepreneurship that we should be shedding more light into? Is there anything else that you can share? - Yeah, I mean look, 00:03:21,580 I don't think that there's like a laundry list that like-- - Yeah.. 00:03:34,770 I've been in meetings, with my team, where people will dismiss me, and sort of, revert back to someone else on the team who may be a white male, not knowing that, it's ultimately, my decision.. I've had potential partners that we've talked to who we've, been able to uncover racists who said to, "I don't wanna be on the phone if Delane is on the phone." Like, do you know, there's been, like, a number of incidents that we've had, just given the nature of our business that are, just frankly, unfortunate.. And, I think the first time it ever happened in this business, I got, it sort of got under my skin, but this guy at Laz, who's Cuban, in fact, and was one of our earliest employees, he's no longer with the company, he started his own company.. I remember having walk from my desk 'cause like, this happened, we're in a conference room and like, we kind of took a breather, and I like walk from my desk, and I was just like, taking a walk, 'cause I was thinking, and I was just so like, I forgot, it felt like for me, we had so much success so quick, I forget that, that this could be a factor in the business

that I was trying to build, given the audience that I'm serving, which ends up being this really broad audience, but that's there's a subset where that exists there and we have to deal with, and they have that opinion of black and brown people.. And Laz walked up to me, and honestly, I had tears in my eyes..

He said, "Yo, no one can build this company but you." And I'm like, I'm on a journey.. And from that moment, I've never let, it obviously bothers me, but I've never let it get under my skin.. And we sort of just keep moving at the company, like we don't even hold it against people.. We don't even fight it, we just sort of keep moving forward.. But, and we do our part, till we try to do our part at least, to make sure that the people following us either in the gaming space or other entrepreneurs, of color who are trying to build companies, given the responsibility that we have, given how much capital and success that we've had, we recognize that responsibility, we try to do our part by delivering so that they get opportunities.. And we try to make sure that the people we associate with at least from an investor level, they represent the things that we believe in.. When I raised capital from for PlayVS in our series A, I didn't take a term sheet from any investor who wanted to lead unless they could accommodate two things, two contingencies, one, they had other black founders in our portfolio, and I was very direct in asking them that even in our earliest conversations.. And then two, they were okay with us having a woman represent the independent seat on our board, when it came time to fill that seat.. And you had to be okay with that.. You had to be willing to even write that in for me to take that term sheet from you, and consider you even to be an investor..

And so, we try to surround ourselves with people who believe in the things that we believe in, and for those that we encounter, who don't, we recognize that and we sort of keep pushing forward...