

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

(music)

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to another installment of Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and sometimes legends and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, sports legends, and heads of major business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is Benjamin K. Richmond better known as Ben Richmond. He is president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League. I'm going to read a bit of his bio to you. It's rather eclectic so hang on and we're in for a ride. He was born in North Carolina to a Methodist minister Richmond was schooled in Mississippi and grew up in the 1950s south. He received a bachelor's degree from Tougaloo, hope I pronounced that right, college in Mississippi and a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Bet you did not know this tidbit, Richmond is a classically trained vocalist who went on to a career in music. Richmond was then able to travel through Europe on an exchange fellowship with the North West German Music Academy. After spending seven years in Europe Richmond returned to the U.S. and began his Urban League career in 1979 working with the Urban League in Madison Wisconsin. From 1982-1987 he served for five years as president and CEO of The Battle Creek Area Urban League in Battle Creek, Michigan. And then in 1987 Richmond became president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League. Now the mission of the Louisville Urban League is to assist African-American and disadvantaged persons in the achievement of social and economic equality primarily through education, employment, housing, family development, and community development. During his Louisville tenure he has established the Rebound

Housing Development Project, expanded the league's training and workforce development and fostered the growth of minority businesses and entrepreneurs. In addition he completed a 1.2 million dollar capital campaign and oversaw construction of a new league headquarters. But in 2004, he was named Louisville of the Year, excuse me, Louisvillian of the Year by the Ad Federation of Louisville and in 2005 he received the Champions of Children Award by the Jefferson County Public Schools. And in 2007 Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson announced Richmond as the recipient of Louisville Metro's Dr Martin Luther King Jr Freedom Award which recognizes citizens that have dedicated their lives to promoting justice, peace, freedom, non-violence, racial equality, and civic act. Abramson said, "Over his decades of leadership countless lives have been improved through Ben's tireless efforts in workforce development housing and youth programs and through forging partnerships with the business community." Upon his acceptance Richmond stated, "My parents were very involved in the struggle for civil rights and times were much more difficult for them especially during the 50s, 60s and 70s. I feel a great deal of responsibility to be a steward for their work and the values and principles of Dr Martin Luther King Jr who stood for peace, racial equality, and worked to make the world a better place for everyone. We have done well but we still have much more to do." Currently Richmond serves on the board of directors for the Fund for the Arts, the Spirit of Louisville Foundation Bell awards, Greater Louisville Inc., which is the Metro Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Louisville Board of Overseers, and the Metropolitan Sewer District of Louisville Jefferson County. And he is a member of Broadway Temples Zion Church, the Rotary Club of Louisville and the NAACP. Welcome Mr Richmond to Leadership Landscape.

Ben Richmond: Thank you

Kirt Jacobs: Thanks for let me read that bio. It's quite eclectic to go from a vocalist to the head of a Louisville Urban League. Quite a pleasure.

Ben Richmond: Yeah it wasa... It's been a great experience.

Kirt Jacobs: Could, could you before we go into our general questions for the interviews that we do with our guest. Could you elaborate and describe a little bit the mission of the Urban League? Maybe on a national, Louisville level.

Ben Richmond: Well you captured it toward the end there and here in Louisville we have a mission that says to assist African-Americans and other minority groups and the disadvantaged to achieve social and economic equality. And what we mean by that and the key word social economic equality. Equality equity social justice issues and we don't we don't do that just by advocacy. We do it by direct services. And so our mission is to help those groups African-Americans, other minorities, and the disadvantage. Those who are poor. Those who are economically disabled to enter the mainstream, to be a part of the main economic and social mainstream of our community. That's in education. That's in business and to upgrade their quality of life and along the way we get involved in a whole array of issues. Nowadays we say diversity.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Ben Richmond: Making sure that our community is reflective of its diversity throughout the length and breath. Whether it's at the high end level, middle and so we want to open doors. The National Urban League has a very similar mission. It focuses exclusively exclusively on African-Americans. That's its niche in the marketplace. Here locally we have to be broader. We just cannot focus on one group but we look at all people who are economically disadvantaged. Our history lie out of the African-American experience coming out of the 1800s into the 1900s and and so ultimately we want to see a level playing field. Where people can economically participate with a good job, a good career, have a good income for their family, loving nurturing environment, homeownership is very important. And we want to see people start out maybe in an apartment with a family and then to learn how to own their own home and ultimately grow their wealth. And so our mission is to open doors, build bridges among people of diverse backgrounds. Whether that is poor toward wealth and so it's a broad mission. You can work on it morning to night.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah well that leads us into our first question. What drives you to do what you're doing with the Urban League? I mean to go from a music background to this.

Ben Richmond: Yeah well

Kirt Jacobs: It's been pretty interesting.

Ben Richmond: It was even interesting for me and I.. It wasn't planned. And I don't.. As the things I've done over time I don't think they were all never planned. It was kind of like being in the right place at the right time. And this was all about timing. It was January of the year when I return from Europe. I was looking to get me a professorship at some college or university and I learned that you don't do that in January. You do it in the spring of the year and and that's when colleges and universities are out looking to fill positions. So in the meantime I was here. I had about six months before I could look for something in the field of music and came in contact with the Urban League. And through a friend, through an acquaintance and I went to the Urban League to have them to help me to find a job. Something that would tie me from over that six months while I was in Madison, Wisconsin. Before I could look for something in the field of music and came in contact with the Urban League. Through a friend. Through an acquaintance. And I went to the Urban League to have them to help me to find a job. Something that would tie me from over that six months while I was in Madison, Wisconsin and went there and lo and behold there was a position open. And and and someone say you should apply for that and I followed that person's suggestion and and within a few weeks I was employed by the Urban League. And when I got into the Urban League and found out what it was all about and and the job that I was doing and working with people. Helping people to put careful employment was back in that time and I was working with some young ex-offenders were actually young they were in their 20's and 30s and these men would recently released from prison and and my job was to work with them on their resume. Help them to transition back into the community with housing. And so I I we helped one young man get him get a job and and just

his enthusiasm and and he was so happy that just took effect. And I just I think I found a calling there.

Kirt Jacobs: I think you have.

Ben Richmond: Yeah

Kirt Jacobs: It's funny how things work from a Higher Power.

Ben Richmond: Yes sure

Kirt Jacobs: Whom do you credit most influential in your life?

Ben Richmond: Well there are many people throughout my life that have had an influence on me and what I do. I guess the two people that have had the greatest and still have the greatest because they are still with us and this is my my my parents. My mother, my father. Dad is 91. Mama is..

Kirt Jacobs: Good deal that they are still here.

Ben Richmond: ...88. Yeah. Very alert mind and very much into their work which is the church work and guided by that. So those are the two. And through the years but as I went from high school to college in my college experience there were two people that had a great influence on me at the time. And that was my music professor Dr Area Loveless. And then there was a man over in a social service department his name was Dr Bobo Berinski.

Kirt Jacobs: Never forget that name.

Ben Richmond: Right. BoBo Berinski was a little short man and but he was always pushing us to do our best and always challenging us to think broader you know about about issues. You know. And so I but then I went on to college to to teach school for a while and there was a man named Walter Washington. Big tall

Kirt Jacobs: All these alliterations.BB WW.

Ben Richmond: Yeah right right. Walter Washington and Walter Washington had an enormous influence on me in terms of getting a master's degree. He'd motivated me by saying if you don't show me that you're in somebody's graduate school by the end-of-the-year I'm not going to renew your contract.

Kirt Jacobs: There you go.

Ben Richmond: You know so that was motivation.

Kirt Jacobs: (inaudible)

Ben Richmond: Yeah right there was always some motivation there. And so and there were a lot of people throughout my career that have inspired me and have motivated me you know to want to want to be successful.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment of your life? It could be professional or personal.

Ben Richmond: Well again I can't think of any anyone period. There were always transitions in my life and and it seemed like they were always transitioning to a broader and better experience. When I graduated from college I mean you know in college in '65 I had no idea that I was going to end up teaching in a community college. They had a high school on the campus and that was with Dr Washington. And all of a sudden I was 20-21-years-old and I was teaching students.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow

Ben Richmond: Although music. That were almost my same age. And I had to learn to manage that with them. And then when I went to grad school I went from Mississippi all the way to Wisconsin. Madison universal Wisconsin. I had never been in an all white situation.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And had to adjust. I was in an all black situation growing up in Mississippi and and my world was with the exception of Tougaloo, which was integrated, and it was all black. And so I went there at the encouragement of Dr Washington.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And his wife and it was a great experience but to adjust and it was very difficult musically speaking.

Kirt Jacobs: What caused that?

Ben Richmond: Those kids man. They can hear the tone when the when it falls on cotton when a pin falls on cotton. They can tell you what frequency. Well they were bright. They were real smart.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah yeah

Ben Richmond: So that was a great experience. And then when I went to Europe in 1987. I couldn't speak German and that was a real defining moment. You know. How do I go to another country that I don't speak the language and exceed and be successful. And it was great. I learned a lot you know. So that there were always moments of transition. You know that I would say were defining for me rather than just any one thing.

Kirt Jacobs: OK if there is one Mr. Richmond what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there something you would have done differently? It can always be professional or personal.

Ben Richmond: Well um regret. I don't know if...

Kirt Jacobs: It's always a strong word but it's one we use with all our guest.

Ben Richmond: Yeah right I think I might would have done something different along the way. I am a little older now and I like to think I was a little smarter. I think that if there were maybe one thing I think I would have had a family when I was younger you

know. And and I would I think I would have taken the time to develop that part of my life you know. Now I say all of my kids you know.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Ben Richmond: Kids come to the Urban League. We have a growing youth development program and I see kids coming through and while I don't interact with them one-on-one always I know we are responsible for them. We are responsible for making sure that that they get the kind of counseling, leadership training, life experience exposures at the League and other places. But if I had to do it all over again I think I would have looked at that a whole lot different.

Kirt Jacobs: OK. What do you find exciting about all this? I mean you had that music career. You've been, you've stayed with the Urban League.

Ben Richmond: Well I found all of this the Urban League work... I found music all very energizing. And and when I was in the music field when I went to Europe I had a professor and the professors over there they treat you like their own.

Kirt Jacobs: Really

Ben Richmond: And his name was Dr Professor Helble Cretchmar and never will forget him. And he was a a motivator and he was an energizer you know. And he was always looking for perfection. You know he always wanted you to hear it and and and if you if you hear it then you could you can do it you know. And that was that was that was energizing and that same kind of energy I found in the Urban League movement. And when we're trying to better the quality of life for people and you can go from the individual all the way out to the whole community.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And trying to help that person to be economically stable and and and looking at that person and seeing what their

needs are coming up. What we call it individual development plan. And it might be certain counseling and then you get into the whole employability skills.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Ben Richmond: Continuing education. Getting that first job. Working with them through their first job and then helping them to qualify for another job. And so that's the whole process. And then going out into the community dealing with community issues. I found it very energising.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the best advice ever given to you Mr Richmond? It can be more than one piece of advice.

Ben Richmond: Well my dad always say be a good person.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: Be a good person. Treat the other person the way you want to be treated. Be honest and and live a good Christian life. Now that's the basics but along the way I think to be tenacious.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And and have a certain stick to it ness. I remember Professor friend of mine from University of Wisconsin, his name was Dr Robert Mancin. I will never forget Dr Mancin because it was difficult trying to integrate if you will into the school life at University of Wisconsin School of Music. And then Dr Mancin kept saying Ben you can do it you know. You can do it you know you just have to be tenacious about it and so. But words like that you know. Dr Washington when when he said that you know you've got to make sure you go on and get that advanced degree. You know that was a great piece of advice. I don't think if he hadn't told me that I think I would have just taught school. I don't think I know...

Kirt Jacobs: Funny how one thing can change

Ben Richmond: Right. I never would have gone beyond Mississippi. Mississippi was very interesting. When I came along in 1961-65 we couldn't go to the University of Mississippi to graduate school. So if you want to get a master's degree in music now you had to leave the state.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And and so that's why I end up in Wisconsin. It's not because I wanted to go north.

Kirt Jacobs: Right right. Things have changed.

Ben Richmond: And I I applied all over the Northeast and Midwest and Wisconsin was the first school to accept me. And and several others came on later on but I was excited about just being accepted and but Mississippi was back in that day and we couldn't go to graduate school. Now there were some state colleges like Jackson State University in my hometown did have a master's program in education.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: Because the way out in the south the days of old was through education. My mother told my three.. There are three of us. My brother and my sister that you're going to go to school and you're going to get a teaching degree. You're going to go to school you're going to get a teaching degree. She knew that was the way out. She didn't say you will go to school become a doctor but she knew that if we went to school and and got a teaching education degree that will be a way out. And so and that's what we did. I went to Tougaloo College and my mother didn't rest until she knew that I was doing my student teaching. And my dad. And so I came out with a bachelors of science in education music. You could get back in the day. And so I don't think if Dr Washington hasn't had challenged me to go to graduate school and then I began to explore that I don't think I would have left Mississippi. I wouldn't have left as soon as I did. And I wouldn't have been ex-

posed to a Big Ten setting like in Wisconsin. I don't think I would have gone on to do the other things that so you know.

Kirt Jacobs: So our next question is do you think there's a difference today Mr Richmond in our leaders and there wasn't past generations? Do you think they embrace diversity more? Do you think it's it's kind of an open ended question.

Ben Richmond: Well I think that the issues today are different than they were 20-30 years ago. And I think that life is a lot more complex today.

Kirt Jacobs: Technology.

Ben Richmond: Technology and a lot of doors were opened in the 60s with all the civil rights legislation. Affirmative action in the 70s.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Ben Richmond: And so today things are much more institutional. I think you you have to be I think a lot more alert. A lot more smarter if you will to find those things that need to be addressed. And and I think that... There are two ways to do it. You can be very direct and forceful or who are you can seek to have some dialogue and talk about the issue and to find some solutions.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And I think that method is while it is not always easy is one that I think that that works. That will maybe better. I can't say better but because I think to be direct as an activist. Be a burr under the saddle if you will. To make your point. But then somebody has to come along and say what are the solutions here you know. What will really work. What would take to make it work. And then who's going to do the work you know. So I think that things have changed. Issues are different today then and I think to lead today it's it's it's just not one person.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: I think it's it's a lot of people. It might start out with one person but for so with it's going to be several people or organizations around the table. I don't think that... We might see another model of the King but I think it's going to be a while. Or a John Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt you know. That was some real issues back in that time to address. Not only just racial lines but also economic lines

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Ben Richmond: You know and there's a lot more opportunities now day to get an education. It's helping people to better understand how to to work with people. Helping our educators to understand how to educate all children regardless of what environment they might come.

Kirt Jacobs: What have you.

Ben Richmond: Home life. You know that every kid can achieve at his or her maximum and so and so that I think that... Leadership styles have to be a lot more inclusive if you will when you forge off and say I want to do that. You have to look who am I going to partner with? Who are I going to collaborate with...

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Ben Richmond: ...to get this done. You know. And so it's a little different.

Kirt Jacobs: We're running a little short of time here but I want to get the last couple questions in here. If you were granted, excuse me, two weeks right today no obligations no commitments how would you spend that two weeks of mini vacation? You know put the cell phone down e-mail no computer take family with or without in two weeks and see in fourteen days what would you do?

Ben Richmond: Well I would probably find four or five people you know that was just want to get in the car and go.

Kirt Jacobs: There you go. There you go.

Ben Richmond: Yeah right. Want to go. No agendas.

Kirt Jacobs: Alright

Ben Richmond: You know

Kirt Jacobs: I like that.

Ben Richmond: And just hang out and do stuff that that could be intellectual maybe.

Kirt Jacobs: Doesn't have to be.

Ben Richmond: Doesn't have to be.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a government show now.

Ben Richmond: We are off the clock. We are off the clock.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Ben Richmond: So we might go to straight to the ocean.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: You know and I do like historic things. I do like visiting historical kind of things you know and just milling around.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Ben Richmond: I was in Washington. I guess a couple months ago and I had a couple hours and I just enjoyed walk walking around looking at people you know. Watching people and just milling around. So I would probably go to some water water area ocean. And and I was in South Carolina of Charleston you know back in January and I just found that a fascinating place. To go and learn

about that community and their culture. There you know but also I can be I can end up being a couch potato.

Kirt Jacobs: At least you are honest.

Ben Richmond: The work is so energizing and and I been blessed to be very excited about the work of the Urban League because it involves so many different things working in our community. In the morning I can be downtown business group talking about various issues and you know I'm always talking about the inclusive side of the business. You know well as make sure we do this let's make sure we do that. But at the end of the day I could be somewhere out in another part of town.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah.

Ben Richmond: You know interacting with people that where the rubber really hits the road you know. And and I find that that very energising. You know I think that enthusiasm and having passion for what you do is the key often to success.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: You know it's the key often to success. I think you find problems through positiveness. Even the situation might be negative. You know I look for a silver lining.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: in there you know. It might be chaos..

Kirt Jacobs: Every problem as a solution maybe.

Ben Richmond: Every problem... well ultimately now you know you dream.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah

Ben Richmond: You know I do like to think I'm a dreamer. You

know and and and ask what is and just say why not? You know it can happen. You know and so I don't operate on the negative.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: I might complain but it's only going to be for a minute.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Ben Richmond: And I want to see OK now that's what makes what makes this work. Let's get on with the business.

Kirt Jacobs: I got you.

Ben Richmond: Yeah

Kirt Jacobs: One final question. We run very short on time. We ask this to all of our guest young or old. When the great day comes Mr Richard how do you want to be remembered? God forbid..

Ben Richmond: I don't know that. I saw your question.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah yeah you see them

Ben Richmond: I saw your question on that.

Kirt Jacobs: We ask everybody that.

Ben Richmond: I saw your question on that. You know the Urban League in this town was was was led by a great man Art Walters.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: I never wanted to let Mr Waters down. I didn't want to let anybody down. I never want to let the Urban League down, the board down the community down. So I like to think that over these times that we have stayed the course and we have gradually gotten better and better in terms of our service.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Ben Richmond: And if somebody looks back over their shoulders says what he did a very good job. Or a good job and have been very very good job maintaining a strong Urban League in Louisville and I'll be at peace.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. On that note we're going to end. It's quite a pleasure to have you Mr. Richmond.

Ben Richmond: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Kirt Jacobs: Thanks for being on Leadership Landscape. Hang on just a second.

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com