

Frederick Factor - The Empowerment Factor Transcript

Sandy: Welcome to the Frederick Factor. Everyone who has lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick, Maryland, knows that there's something, well, special about this place. One of those things is the incredible, diverse community that continues to grow. Here, on this podcast, we will be bringing Frederick's underrepresented business owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders into the spotlight to share their stories with you and find out what's your Frederick Factor. Our guest for this episode is Dr. Xavier Bruce, the founder of Uplift Energy Coaching. Xavier is a retired lieutenant colonel in the US Air Force. During this time in the Air Force, he was dealing with a rocky marriage, raising a son with autism, struggling through a doctoral dissertation process, and was experiencing microaggressions in the military. While also being surrounded by rocket attacks while deployed in Afghanistan. With no one to guide him, he turned to self-learning and developed his own self-development framework, which he now uses to support underrepresented men and women in the military. In this episode, we hear his story about how he's become the change he wants to see in the world.

Sandy: Let's dive in. Thank you to Dr. Xavier Bruce, for joining me today on the Frederick Factor! And our paths kept crossing over the last year or two, and we wanted to use this as an opportunity to get to know you a little bit more, hear your story a little bit more, a little bit differently than perhaps we have heard in the past. But to start off, what brought you to Frederick County?

Xavier: The military, the military. As you may or may not know, I am a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel. So, I'm originally from Arkansas. Some people say that, 'Wow! It doesn't seem like you're from Arkansas.' Well, if I go back there for maybe a few days and I come back then you'll be able to notice my twang if I stay there too long and come back to Maryland, but originally from Arkansas went to the Air Force Academy bounced around the Air Force. Deployed a few times: Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar, and spent my last three years at Fort Detrick. So, that brought me here. I've been here in Frederick since 2016. So what's that five years? So, the military brought me here to Frederick.

Sandy: So, your business... I want to obviously hear and share more about your business and kind of that entrepreneurial journey in it. It sounds like you're starting to tell the story. So, as you were here, you got here to Frederick in 2016 and then were getting ready to transition out of the military. What then?

Xavier: Yes, so I knew that I wanted to help veterans, especially Black veterans, because I was enduring stress and anxiety as I got closer to retirement. And I was a field grade officer; I had my

doctorate. I felt like, 'You know what? Why am I having stress and anxiety? I'm good, I'm good to go. I'm going to get a retirement check. More than likely I'll get a pension due to disability, VA disability.' So, I decided to start Uplift Energy Coaching because once I got my doctorate, right after that, I became a life coach. Why? Because I endured some things in the military, that I didn't feel comfortable going to military medical care, due to the stigma associated with maybe some mental stress and anxiety. So I said, 'You know what? I'll just keep it to myself; maybe I'll find a life coach.' But, as many of you all know, life coaches don't look like me, most life coaches look like you. It's not too many brothers out there that are professional life coaches. So, I decided to become a life coach. So fast forward to 2018, I started Uplift Energy Coaching, and it's based off this concept of energetic self-perception. I combined that framework with my doctoral study and my experiences, and I built this framework called strategic energetic transition. So when I started Uplift Energy Coaching in 2018, I wanted to help veterans in general transition out of the military, but then I pivoted, and then COVID hit, and then the state of race relations became a factor. So that's when I started focusing our data, a laser focus, on Black veterans enduring stress and anxiety associated with their life transitions.

Sandy: Wow. I mean, I know a lot of female life coaches, most of them actually that I know in the space that I work in look like me, are white women, you know, about my age, because that's what I'm drawn to are people that have had similar experiences. So, I totally understand the idea of wanting to work with a coach that looks like you, that has had similar experiences, which is so unique. And I was reading a blog profile that you had done once and said that you... yeah, did just that; tried to find somebody that could coach you and found out that there wasn't anybody out there. So you said, you need to do it yourself. Which is interesting.

Xavier: Yeah. I wanted to be the change that I wanted to see in the world —wasn't it Gandhi who said that? But basically, once I started Uplift Energy Coaching, I found that veterans are used to getting services for free. So, how was I supposed to make a living, providing service to veterans who are used to getting there for free? So, what we decided, me and my wife, we decided to start a nonprofit called Uplift Empowerment. To address what I was putting on myself, a facade; as veterans, we act like we're squared away when we're not. And FACADE stands for Fitness, Awareness, Connectedness, Anxiety, Depression, and Energetic self-perception. So, we built this, this nonprofit, so that now we can reach those veterans, and we can get some donations, we can get grants. So now we can provide those services to veterans without them having to pay us or paying us much lower than they would to us as a for-profit. And then I stumbled upon this organization that's been around for 50 years, that services Black veterans in particular, and it's just like the VFW and AMVETS and American Legion, but it's called NABVets or National Association for Black Veterans. And they didn't have a chapter in Frederick, so I charter a chapter with eight other veterans, and it's going to service Western Maryland. And when I say service, here comes another acronym, it stands for Social, Economic, Residential, Vocational, Insurance, Compensation, and Education. So, when you ask about my

journey, it started in 2018, with me wanting to be a for-profit, coaching veterans on their stress and anxiety. And now there are three entities based out of Frederick, Uplift Energy Coaching, Uplift Empowerment, and the Western Maryland Chapter of NABVets.

Sandy: Wow, my golly, you see a missing link, and you're just, you're filling it. It's fascinating! I applaud you for that. I think that's beautiful. You're right; I hadn't thought about that payment piece. Veterans being, you know, kind of expecting to see things. So changing your business model, so to speak, to adapt, but still be able to provide those same services that you have identified is, is pretty awesome. That's great. So, Dr. X, you mentioned your doctorate. Tell me about that education. How does that play a role?

Xavier: Oh, wow, so I started my doctorate in 2009 and I think I was stationed in St. Louis, at this time at Scott Air Force Base. And the reason why I decided to get my doctorate as, I think I was a major at the time; I decided to get it because I felt like I needed to differentiate myself from my peers. I endured racism; I endured discrimination. It wasn't as overt as it used to be in, I guess, the 50s and the 60s. But it wasn't until later when I rewound the tape that I was like, you know what? That wasn't right. I felt some kind of way back then, but now I know what it was, and it can be described as microaggressions, micro-inequities, micro insults. So when I was going through that, I said, 'Wow, I need to differentiate myself in the system, like on paper, so that there's no denying that I'm worthy of the next rank, which was Lieutenant Colonel.' So, I wanted to get a doctorate in something different. So instead of a Ph.D., I wanted something different. So I got a DBA, a Doctorate of Business Administration. So I went from MBA to DBA. Some people see DBA, they think, 'Oh, what are you doing? Business ads? A database administrator? No, Doctorate of Business Administration.' I wanted to get it in something practical. So I got a DBA in supply chain management, you know, how do you get the right products to the right people, at the right time, at the right cost, and the right quality. So, I got my doctorate while I was at the Defense Logistics Agency. But I was going through a rough patch in my marriage and I decided, you know what, I need a break. So, I actually volunteered to deploy; then, I deployed to Kuwait. Well, back in the day, Kuwait was very dangerous. Well, over time, Kuwait became less dangerous and almost like a garden spot if you're going to deploy. Well, low and behold, I get to Kuwait, I forward deploy, they sent me forward to the most dangerous place at the time, which was Kandahar, Afghanistan. So I got there, I mean, the 11th hour of my doctorate, and I'm in Kandahar, Afghanistan. But fortunately, my committee worked with me, and I was able to complete my doctorate while in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and again, that was back in 2011. I've had my doctor for 10 years; I've been teaching online over those years, I could see me being, you know, the real-life Professor X [*from the Marvel comics and movies*] in front of a crowd of students teaching different subjects. But for now, and it kind of goes to my whole transition, for now, you know, I have to have a full-time job. I ran out of runway, if you will, in the Air Force, you know, you have runway to take off. Well, one of the challenges we face as underrepresented entrepreneurs, especially veterans, you know, we may not be as business savvy

as those entrepreneurs that weren't in the military. So, that's something that has been a challenge for me.

Sandy: Yeah, I'd love to dive in a little bit more on some of those challenges that you have, as an underrepresented entrepreneur. The lens that you have of getting that Doctorate in Business Administration is so unique and certainly not a path or an experience that I would suspect many have. So, for you to take that and be able to build your nonprofits, build your companies, you know, build these different entities and foundations and stuff like that is super cool. And I'm curious if you've had a chance to really reflect on how that has impacted your journey?

Xavier: It has impacted my journey, in that it shows my capabilities, it shows my potential to do great things. The doctorate — it was me proving to myself that I'm a smart guy; sometimes you have to prove to yourself. Well, guess what? When I was at the Air Force Academy, I almost flunked out. My freshman year, I had a 1.87 GPA. I was on academic probation, the majority of my time at the Academy because I was trying to be a great student and play football at the same time. It just wasn't happenin'; I had to actually walk away from the football team to focus on my studies. So you fast forward, and I'm like, 'You know what? I'm gonna get my doctorate to prove to myself that I am smart and that I am capable of learning and doing whatever comes in front of me.' So that impacted me today and with my for profit and with the nonprofits. Because guess what? My confidence is at an all-time high. Because I just, I just know that I'm capable of building, I'm capable of creating opportunities for others. So, it has definitely impacted knowledge ownership because there's nothing that I can't figure out. So definitely, if I could do it all over again, I would, and it adds credibility. As you know, sometimes it's tough for underrepresented entrepreneurs to have credibility. But when you have letters behind your name, it helps. It's kind of a leveling, if you will, because, yeah, I might be underrepresented or minority, but 'Wow, okay he has a doctorate. He has some letters behind his name.' So, yeah.

Sandy: He's obviously worked hard. He's accomplished something that many others haven't.

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Sandy: You know, one of the things I want to dive into a little bit here is maybe some advice that you give aspiring entrepreneurs, but I want to put a pin in that for a second and ask: what advice you give teenagers, those that are getting ready, or have just joined a military academy or college or something like that? I'm curious if you have ever asked that question or ever get to speak to or connect with teenagers or young adults that are struggling or thinking that, you know, they've got it worse than anybody does. You know, what kind of advice do you give them?

Xavier: The advice that I would give students, young service members, is to focus on your academics, especially as a student, your job is to make good grades. More than likely, everything else is taken care of; you're not paying rent, you're not having to buy groceries, you don't have bills to pay, you don't have all these other distractions. But in our society, if you get the right education, if you get the right grades, then you get into a good school, and then it just forms a great foundation for you that you can always fall back on. But when you don't have good grades, or you don't apply yourself when you're young, then you don't have a solid foundation. And you may not have as many options or as many choices as you would like to have. And then you turn 30 and 40 and 50 and you're like, 'Oh man! I don't have as many options as my colleagues or the ones I went to school with.' And it's because you didn't apply yourself in high school or when you're a young adult. So, the advice that I would give is, focus on your grades, but in the back of your mind, think about what you would do if you had your own business. If you were to become an entrepreneur. When I was younger, I didn't think about having my own business. You just don't, you just feel like I just want to get a good job, I want to make six figures. But as you get older, you decide that, 'You know what? If I could have my own business doing what I would really love to do, then I would.' But sometimes that chance doesn't...doesn't come because you didn't apply yourself when you were younger.

Sandy: Yeah, I didn't think about having my own business. I honestly thought I would work in county government and economic development in some, you know, county state, regional level for my whole career. I loved it, you know, it was the early part of my career. I don't think there was any reason to leave that; it was awesome. And somebody planted that darn seed, and made me think that I might be able to do it and, you know, now 19 years later, here we sit. As we're kind of coming out of this pandemic and stuff, I'm curious how the pandemic has impacted you and your organization's or the individuals that you're working with? What kind of challenges or issues have you faced during the pandemic?

Xavier: Yeah, great question. The pandemic has not allowed me to get out in front of people. I talked about the framework that I built, Strategic Energetic Transition. Well, I was flushing that out, I came up with a way: workbook, workshop, online course, flashcards, you name it. I was ready to get out in front of people and explain to them how they can uplift their damn selves. From the inside out, from mental and emotional, physical and financial, I was ready. But then COVID hit, and yeah, things went virtual but not at the beginning. So, I took a pause on that and focused on some other things but I kept building in the background, my material. But I feel like if the pandemic did not hit, I would be further along with getting this framework out there so that I would get those contracts, I would be in front of these military installations, and in front of these Veteran organizations, explaining to them that they don't have to give up, they don't have to perhaps take medication, they don't have to go through all the stress and anxiety that they may be going through. They can apply this framework to their lives and perhaps enhance their

lifestyle based on the framework that I've built. Again the pandemic kind of put that under pause, but we're coming out of it, and I'm gonna come out stronger than ever.

Sandy: Yeah, I have no doubt you will, no doubt. What would you like to see in Frederick County that could boost the growth of your business, of your organizations?

Xavier: Well, we're servicing underrepresented veterans. Some of the veteran organizations out there are not primarily underrepresented. And I've heard that back when, let's say, back when Black veterans came back from Vietnam, they tried to get into these organizations and really get some synergy and some camaraderie and rebuild brotherhood. But they couldn't be themselves, they couldn't talk about things, they couldn't bring up issues without it being either squashed or hey, why are you bringing this up, why are you bringing up race relations, why are you bringing up this and that. So they didn't feel comfortable in those organizations back then, so as you can imagine, now that they're older, they've had bad experiences when they try to get in, so they may not want to be members of those. So, what I would like to see in Frederick County is perhaps a space for NABVets. So that underrepresented veterans will be comfortable or feel comfortable there. Now they could tell their stories, now they can have similar lived experiences, in and out of the military. And it's not just veterans of color; a lot of these organizations may not have a female population or Asian-American, Hispanic, or even LGBT. So, I feel like that's what Frederick County can... can look at. I know they're building a platoon Veteran Services Center, but, I think that something to consider is a space for underrepresented veterans, similar to an American Legion or VFW, so that we can coalesce, we can rebuild that camaraderie, and we can have a safe space to tell our stories and rebuild that esprit de corps.

Sandy: Awesome, I love that idea. To clarify, you work with Black men and women veterans, not just men. Correct?

Xavier: Correct. And I'm sorry, I work with all veterans, but my niche, where I can be myself, where I don't have the code switch, where you know I could just talk and people will understand where I'm going. That's why I'm focusing primarily on the Black veterans.

Sandy: Good to know. Thank you for the clarification. So, you know I kind of alluded to this earlier. What advice would you like to share with aspiring underrepresented entrepreneurs, whether they have a military background or not? I'm curious what advice you would give somebody that's maybe five years premature in your shoes. What would you like to share with a previous version of Dr. X?

Xavier: I would say, learn how to secure government contracts. After you build your brand — yeah, I have a brand! I have a tagline, "*Uplift Your Damn Self.*" I got all that but I'm a bit behind on learning how to answer requests for proposals, requests for quotes because you have the

federal, state, and local Government and they have a lot of money. That if you, it's kind of like writing a paper, and if you get an A on your paper or you get the high scoring your paper boom here's you know \$100,000 for your program. That's the way to look at it. So, what I would like to share for aspiring, underrepresented entrepreneurs, is to get good at that, is to learn the different systems, and to build your profile, learn that and learn the funding cycles for these different opportunities. So, that you can put your information in and maybe you don't win the first couple, but then you'll get better at it, and better at it, and maybe you won't struggle out here as much as you would if you're looking for individual customers to pay you what you work. Because remember, you're trying to get paid, you're trying to get reimbursed, you're trying to get a salary that will cover all your costs and give you enough of a salary to accommodate the lifestyle that you want. So how much is that? Will your community be able to support that? So that's something to keep in mind and that's the one thing that I would like to share, is learn, learn government contracts, and you'll be better off.

Sandy: Awesome. Is there anything else that you'd like to share? I've got one last question, but I'd love to know if there's anything else that you wanted to come and join us today and perhaps share with our listening audience.

Xavier: I would like to share that you really have to do three things in order to excel and enhance your lifestyle. The first thing you need to do is identify what's wrong or what's your energy block. And I mentioned it before: there's different types of stress and anxiety that will mess up the way that you show up as an entrepreneur as some who's trying to make it. And then, you need to analyze your energetic self-perception. How do you perceive yourself? Do you perceive yourself as a victim, or are you being your best self? And last but not least, you need to make a command decision. What do you need to do in order to succeed? And maybe you don't have all the answers. I know you don't have all the answers — no one has all the answers. But you may need to read, you may need to find a mentor, you may need to pray about it. It's not just one thing that you can do in order to succeed. You need to really look inside and see how you can align your passion, your purpose, and your power. And decide whether or not you want to be an employee, you want to be self-employed, you want to be an investor, or if you really want to be a business owner. That is very important to figure out as soon as you can, that way you don't waste time, and you can be effective and efficient.

Sandy: Great advice. Oh my goodness! Great advice at any stage I think of a person's life when they're looking to make a change. Thank you for that. So our final question that we ask every guest on the podcast is, what is your Frederick Factor?

Xavier: Frederick Factor? I've never heard of that before.

Sandy: It is a phrase that we are coining here on the podcast like, what, what's your thing? What is it about Frederick? Kind of why Frederick? What is it about Frederick that, when you go to describe it, you're like, wow, this is it?

Xavier: Okay. I will say my Frederick Factor is the... I will say the people, the business owners, and the business mentors that I've met along the way over those five years that I've been in Frederick. People like Sherman Coleman, like people like Wil Graham, others that I've met at the Minority Business Vision, when that was up and running. I would say that those programs, and me being a brand new entrepreneur, being a veteran, and coming here to Frederick, and being in those particular networks, and becoming a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and going to your business card exchanges, and some of the other activities. It just really helped me learn how Frederick works. And something that Sherman always says is, 'It's not who you know, it's who knows you.' And I feel like now that I've met people like you and people in the Chamber of Commerce, that now you know me, and that's, that's very important. And I think, is the Frederick Factor. Once you get into the mix, it's a big city, but it's small enough for you to really get your name out there. And if you have a good reputation, and you do good work, then the sky's the limit. So the people are the Frederick Factor.

Sandy: Awesome. Thank you, Dr. X. This was great. I enjoyed hearing, yeah, your nuggets of wisdom. I enjoyed, yeah, hearing about your journey. So thank you so much for joining me today.

Xavier: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

Sandy: You've been listening to the Frederick Factor. Want to find out more about our diverse community and what makes Frederick so special? Visit our website at www.FrederickFactor.com. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Facebook. 'Til next time!