

## Frederick Factor - The Mentorship Factor Transcript

**Sandy:** Welcome to the Frederick Factor! Everyone who has lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick, Maryland, knows that there is something 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. I can't wait for you to hear this fun, exciting conversation with Ashleigh Kiggans. Ashleigh is the Vice President of MacRo Commercial Real Estate - right here in Frederick. She has been a dedicated member of the community and a very passionate resident. She is one of very few African-Americans in commercial real estate in Frederick and one of very few women in that industry. Some of my favorite parts of this conversation include speaking with her about her career journey and her tips for young, underrepresented females. I hope you enjoy my conversation with Ashleigh Kiggans!

**Sandy Dubay:** I'm Sandy Dubay, and I'm welcoming you here to the Frederick Factor. Today we have Ashleigh Kiggans. Ashleigh! Yay!

**Ashleigh Kiggans:** Hello. Excited to be here.

**Sandy:** So excited to have you. You are my first in-studio guest. Yes,! Oh my gosh!

**Ashleigh:** I'll sign your desk when I leave, don't worry.

**Sandy:** I love it! I love it! So we've been doing this over Zoom, which is great for people to feel comfortable with the technology and for us to be able to do that during the pandemic. But for somebody that is local here in Frederick and wants to come in and visit with us in-studio, I'm super excited. So thank you for doing it.

**Ashleigh:** Absolutely, it's so good to see you without having to put quotations in front of it.

**Sandy:** Exactly, in that little one-inch square box on "the Zoom." Yeah. Cool. Well, let's dive in. So here we're talking about kind of all things Frederick and trying to tell the stories, hear the stories of underrepresented businesses and entrepreneurs that are doing amazing things in the Frederick Community. And I'm so excited to have gotten to know you over this past year. Actually, can you believe I don't think we knew each other before two years ago or so?

**Ashleigh:** We met over Zoom, staying for an award show after, and met by stating, I said 'I think I want to go get crabs,' and you said 'I want to go too,' so we just made a crab date - very Maryland of us.

**Sandy:** Oh, great. I know. Oh, my goodness. So aside from Maryland crabs, and what is it that brought you to Frederick County.

**Ashleigh:** So the age-old traditional response of a relationship originally brought me to Frederick. Um, and just kind of let it become my town, decided it was going to be my home even post-relationship. And you know, it was such a great place to raise kids and close enough to the city but far enough away. So, you know, I grew up as a Northern Virginia girl. So DC was my was my home. And then when I moved to Frederick, I said, I don't think I need to go back to DC for anything. I have restaurants; I have people; I have shopping; I have everything I need here.

**Sandy:** Yes, I agree. Everything is right here. Um, so tell us, what do you do for a living? Tell us about your job.

**Ashleigh:** So I am a vice president for a commercial real estate company. I started in commercial real estate probably about 11 years ago, about 2010, for an executive office suite company in the DC area and got tired of doing the Frederick to DC commute and found a local company here with Rocky Mackintosh called Macro Commercial Real Estate and teamed up with them. And I have been there for about six years now.

**Sandy:** Wow. Now, what inspired you to get into commercial real estate that's different for you know, a young black woman in particular. Tell me about that.

**Ashleigh:** Absolutely, so I started actually, as a temp, I was a receptionist, a temp receptionist for a, like I said, Executive Office company in DC. And the nine to five was really attractive to me. I had one child at that time, and I wanted something a little bit more, where I had the flexibility to still have my evenings and weekends. So I kind of fell into this and said, 'Hey, you know, I, I seem to like this,' and became a general manager was leasing my own office space, and then kind of wanted to expand outside of that. So again, not a very common job you would see for especially, you know, as I said, I was a 22-year-old black female, deciding that that was the industry I wanted to go into.

**Sandy:** Wow. Oh, my goodness, you know, so many questions come to mind, um, with that. First, I kind of have to ask the question of the pandemic and how the pandemic has changed and impacted your career, your outlook, you know, the services that you're able to provide for your clients, or what they're asking for, I guess.

**Ashleigh:** Yeah, it was panic right away. Because I had a lot of deals, I mean, we had just finished an amazing 2019. And I mean, Frederick County, just all the commercial real estate, the way that our county has grown, and the businesses coming into it. I mean, it has been a really stellar couple of years for us. And when we got word of shutdowns, we had people pull out of leases; we had people who were going to sign a contract but held off. And so we probably took about, you know, four to five weeks of kind of just figuring out: *How do we adjust? How do we still, you know, assist our clients? How do we still show properties? How do we do all of that while still staying safe?* So, you know, once we got through that we managed, you know, wearing masks, keeping our distance, you know, following all the guidelines, CDC guidelines, and people started getting comfortable again, and started seeing kind of the light at the end of the tunnel, and it has continued to push through. I mean, Frederick is one of the places people want to be now.

**Sandy:** Wow. Now, getting back to the other portion of the conversation. What advice you know, what do you advice do you give young black women who even consider, or do you have people that are even considering commercial real estate as a career? Do they see that as a potential?

**Ashleigh:** I would hope so there's not a lot that I know of, not a lot of women in general that I know of really who are saying, yes, I can't wait to get into commercial real estate. Ironically, I have a young cousin who is she just graduated high school in Philadelphia. And her mom sent me a message and said she wants to do commercial real estate. And I told her: *when she's ready to intern for a summer, please call me.* She's getting ready to go to Penn State. So you know, we are so very excited about that. But I think one of the things I would say is, try to find yourself a really strong mentor. I was really lucky to find Rocky Mackintosh, who was my mentor and really took the time to teach me the industry, even though I already had kind of four and a half years experience, really took the time to almost breakdown and teach me and I want to do that for somebody else. My goal would be to be able to do that; I would love to be able to do it for, you know, another black female. And you know, it's not necessarily the easiest, you do have to have very thick skin, you have to be ready to deal with the fact that you may not get a deal because of who you are, you may get yelled at, but you just kind of gotta just brush it off and use that to kind of inspire you to keep going forward. All of that just lights my fire.

**Sandy:** Wow, yeah, I would imagine that there aren't... there are some women that aren't that tough, though. And that would use that as an excuse to just try something easier, try something simpler. Try something where there were, you know, perhaps more women that could help them and mentor them and stuff like that. I think that it might not have felt that way at the time. But probably really, really lucky that you found Rocky and found somebody that was willing to take a chance on you, like saw something in you that perhaps others didn't.

**Ashleigh:** Absolutely. And it's funny because I applied to a lot of companies before I actually got an interview with Rocky; it wasn't his, actually. I got an interview right after applying with him. But I applied to a lot of other companies here and got no phone calls. And that wasn't necessarily even like a race-driven thing. I think that it was also just a youth being young, I did not have a lot of work experience behind me at that time, and I had not finished my degree yet - I was in the process of doing all of that - and just you know, and being female. So it was kind of one of those things where I threw something out, threw my rod out, and was hoping that I would catch something or really someone would catch me and got lucky.

**Sandy:** And what would Rocky say in terms of that thing? Just do you know, do you guys have that conversation? What was that thing that he saw in you and made him make that decision to bring you in and to hire you?

**Ashleigh:** So he put the hiring out on his blog because we do a regular blog; he's done it for, oh, gosh, I think maybe 10 or 11 years now, a weekly blog, and I found it on LinkedIn. And he told me I was the only one who followed every single instruction. And part of that, I think, was I didn't know who I was when I was applying, I just said, *'Hey, this is what they're telling me to do. They're telling me to write a cover letter, they told me to write a 500-word essay, they told me to send my resume, and they told me to send it to a particular email address.* And I followed all the instructions, and he said, you're the only one - that's what he tells me to this day - you're the only one. And then I went through five interviews, a three hours Myers Briggs, and an hour and a half with the career psychologist who was actually just a psychologist.

**Sandy:** Wow! Five interviews, I cannot even imagine; I think I need to be, you know, ramping up the Platinum PR interview process here. That is great, though.

**Ashleigh:** But when you're looking for someone that you're going to truly mentor, and you're going to spend all your time with them, your goal is to make that person better than you almost like a parent, you know, your goal is to make sure that they are better than you. When I looked at that process when I was in it, I said, *"This is ridiculous. This is crazy. Why am I still doing this? What in the world is driving me to still want to do this?"* And when I look back on it, I'm like, I don't know if I'd hire any other way now.

**Sandy:** But you're right, you know, so he was trying to take a career worth of knowledge and ultimately pass that down to you - share with you the mistakes that he made over the years that you would make different ones and you know, hopefully, kind of put you in a better position than he was when he started his career.

**Ashleigh:** Absolutely!

**Sandy:** That's amazing. And, you know, to be fortunate enough to have a mentor like that.

**Ashleigh:** And a supporter who also realizes that I don't have, you know, I don't have the same "setup" he had: I don't have the last name, I'm not a white male, you know. And he tells me not to see those as a hindrance, but he tells me all the time, "*Embrace those, embrace everything, do everything you can to embrace it. You're different from everyone else.*"

**Sandy:** And that's beautiful advice. You know, it's he's not trying to get you to be him. He wants you to be you.

**Ashleigh:** Yes.

**Sandy:** And what he can share with you is some wisdom and some experience, but he's not trying to change you.

**Ashleigh:** Yes, I will never be a white male.

**Sandy:** Wow. Okay! There's our takeaway for today. Thank you for listening. [Laughter]. Oh my goodness. But I love this idea. Have you had the opportunity to mentor or to coach or even do kind of informational interviews with college graduates and stuff like that - that have been thinking about a career in real estate?

**Ashleigh:** Not particularly for a career in real estate. I coach volleyball, so I get to spend a lot of time around young women. A lot of the girls I coach are usually juniors or seniors, I had freshmen this year, but I do get that time to spend with them. And then, I spent a summer as a mentor with women-to-women mentoring. And they knew I didn't have the time necessary to commit to a full time, but they had a girl who was a volleyball player who was going off to college. She was also a black female and wanted another black female, maybe one who is a little closer to her age, to really be able to kind of talk to when, and she and I have, you know, kept in touch here periodically, we actually played against each other, and volleyball and I said, don't forget, I'm your mentor.

**Sandy:** So dare I ask who won?

**Ashleigh:** I believe I did.

**Sandy:** Oh, okay, okay. Yay!

**Ashleigh:** She's not on here, so she's not gonna dispute it.

**Sandy:** 'Til we get comments on the blog on the podcast posts that say, *“wait a second, I'd like to clarify.”* [Laughter].

**Sponsor Break:** Hi, I'm Ellen Buchanan from Platinum PR and we are the sponsors of this season's Frederick Factor. Our team provides place-based marketing and communications for communities and destinations across the country. We reimagine places. Find us at [www.platinumpr.com](http://www.platinumpr.com) - our contact information in the show notes! Happy listening!

**Ashleigh:** But I would love the opportunity to have another Black female to really raise up or anyone young really, to be able to pass this onto and to work with.

**Sandy:** Yeah, I've always enjoyed, you know, giving somebody that first chance out of college - that has been really important to me - either as an intern or as a, you know, a first full-time employer. It tests your patience a little bit, um, or a lot. But it can be really rewarding to watch them, you know, move on and grow. Recently, I've been reconnecting with former employees that I had here at Platinum PR. And it's been great. Actually, it's been really fun to reconnect!

**Ashleigh:** You feel like a proud parent.

**Sandy:** I do! Oh, my God, I actually just spoke to one of them and sent a message and I said, *“oh my god, I'm just so proud.”* And I don't know how else to say that. But there was no other way. Except just to simply say that *“yes, I'm just very proud of, you know, what she's done, what she's become, how she's taken this teeny little role that I was able to play in her life and just really skyrocketed with her career.”* It was nice. Anyway, um, you know, I'm curious; obviously, you are an underrepresented woman in real estate, I'm curious how that has impacted your career knowing, you know nothing else, except what you see, you know, kind of as an outsider looking at others, but how do you feel it has impacted your career?

**Ashleigh:** I think, in the beginning, I tried to be a little more naive thinking, *“Oh no, that's not because of this reason, that's not because of that,”* you know? Almost blocking it out of myself. I know that there are people who will respond to me differently than they would respond to, let's say, Rocky, or someone who's, you know, older, or, you know, not female, and not a minority. I know that they would respond differently. And I've had experiences where, like, I was saying earlier, where someone has come at me, and I know they're coming at me and saying what they're saying because they feel like they can just do that because they feel their superiority over myself, you know? And it happens; you just kind of brush it off. I mean, I'm lucky enough to (even outside of Rocky) to have a lot of support of fellow, you know, commercial real estate agents, I like to refer to them all as like, you know, my, my cousins or my uncles or my brothers,

because we have such a tight-knit community. So, and there are not many of us, to begin with, even just in the Frederick commercial real estate industry. So I had to work my way to get to them and to gain respect. And I feel like I have the respect of those who I'm working with. But you know, there's still going to be challenges, there's going to be owners who are still, you know, who are not going to select me because I'm, I, you know, they want to go with someone else who they feel more comfortable with, they may think I can't get the job done. And I just let it go. But then on the flip side, there are people who have chosen me because of the fact that I'm a minority because I'm a female because I can relate to them better. And they feel more comfortable in the way we're seeing so many minorities and females in business, like all these businesses coming up now. All this is just helping me, and it's you know, they love the fact that they get to work with someone who is just like them.

**Sandy:** That's awesome. I love it. I absolutely love it. That's cool. And you're right; you're not going to get every job, you're not going to get every client, so figuring that out. I have been in economic development my entire career, so I understand commercial real estate. For those listeners that are coming on here that are like, "*Oh, I only know what she's saying, like does she sell houses? Or what?*" Can you maybe, let's do a real quick, you know, 30 seconds of commercial real estate versus residential and what we're talking about recap.

**Ashleigh:** So commercial real estate would cover, you know, anything from an office building, a retail strip, a gas station, warehouses, a flex space (which flex is kind of those one-story buildings that everyone's seeing kind of coming up on the North and the Southside of town). And that can either be an office, or it can be a warehouse, or you can have a little bit of office and warehouse. We cover everything from land - but I work with residential land developers who want to find a piece of land that's zoned and do some development there, too. So basically, anything that is not your traditional house is what I usually work with. Um, farms, we do a lot of farmland that may have like an old farmhouse on it or something like that.

**Sandy:** So if you are looking to perhaps move your business out of your home or your garage, or you know, expand in some capacity, and they wanted to buy or lease, they could contact you and you could help them kind of figure out how much they needed and where they needed. And, you know, what would be the best fit for them.

**Ashleigh:** Absolutely! Working through kind of, you know, how do we set up the business plan? How do we get it all? I mean, I've worked from anywhere from, you know, little startups who are really at the very beginning to the Fortune 500 level. I mean, it's, there's no limit.

**Sandy:** That's awesome. What would you like to see in Frederick County that could boost the growth of your business? And probably the market in general?

**Ashleigh:** You know, that's an interesting question because it's something that comes up a lot, and that we all kind of talk about what we'd like to see. And, you know, I would like us to first continue what we're already doing. We're already working hard to make Frederick welcoming to businesses, welcoming to different minority groups; it's becoming such an interesting area, something that people have never thought of Frederick, as before. So I would like to see that continue. I would like to see us continuing to make Frederick an attractive place for people to you know, work, live, play.

**Sandy:** Yeah, it is that balance of those three elements that keep us all here, keeps us grounded in Frederick, and wanting to do, expand, grow, experience. So, cool. What would you like to share? So let's say we've got an aspiring entrepreneur that's listening to us today; what would you like to share with them.

**Ashleigh:** Never lose your confidence. Never lose your confidence in yourself; never let someone knock you down to think that you're not as good as you know you are. And that doesn't mean necessarily being cocky. It means that you know, what you're capable of, you know how strong you are, there's going to be hard times, there's going to be times when you cry, there's going to be times when you're affected, but just don't lose that confidence in yourself.

**Sandy:** Awesome. I think that could apply to many of us, not just young, aspiring entrepreneurs. I'll take that. Thank you. I've got a final question. But I'm curious if there's anything else that you'd like to share with our listeners today. I'm trying to highlight underrepresented business owners and those that are trying to do amazing work and are doing amazing work and let their voices be heard. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with the listeners today?

**Ashleigh:** You know, one of the things I've learned in Frederick is how to get involved and give back. That has been a huge thing. I think that's actually helped me move my business along. Unlike when I was in DC, most people here, they don't care what deal you just closed, they don't care how much money you make. They don't care. What they really want to know is what are you doing to give back to Frederick, what are you doing to give back to the community? Where's your involvement there? And I think that's one of the most important things right now. There are so many opportunities on, you know, nonprofit boards and, and just areas to volunteer. And I think this is the way to kind of if you're kind of looking at: "*How do I get my name and Frederick.*" This is the way to do it -it's to give back, and it doesn't mean necessarily financially giving back. It's giving your time.

**Sandy:** That's great. Well, and before we started today, you were talking about the Mental Health Association, and your involvement there was completely unrelated to this conversation. So let's do a shameless plug for some amazing nonprofits. Tell me what kind of organizations that you're, you know, currently passionate about?



**Ashleigh:** Yeah, absolutely. So I sit on the board for Mental Health Association. When I got the opportunity to be on this board - this was something incredibly close to my heart. Also, I'm a trustee over at Community Foundation as well, which really gives us the opportunity to work with so many different nonprofits. And you know, we're doing these site visits and I'm learning about all these different projects that they're using grant money for, and it's so interesting and inspiring. Federated charities; that's why I kind of got my start and the nonprofit. It's a great nonprofit for someone who's looking to learn how to be on a board and kind of how to get their feet under them. Ellen Ross, who's over there, is incredible. For those who don't know, it's that building with the dog right there on Market Street; you can't miss it. And recently, you know, the I Believe in Me Foundation is another one that has really kind of taken off. I have friends who, who were recently with me, and they got to see Aje speak, and they were just so inspired and they're like, "*How do I get involved in this? How do I volunteer?*" And there's so many options, so many countless opportunities out there right now,

**Sandy:** It's funny that you mentioned your first organization that kind of got you hooked and involved. And I think many of us as young entrepreneurs, young professionals, remember that first time that somebody might have tapped us, we were fortunate enough for somebody to tap our shoulder and say, "*Hey, I think I'd really like for you to participate. Are you able to?*" I think what I would put out there for the listeners today is to not wait until somebody taps you on the shoulder, but instead to speak up and offer your time - and you don't have to sit on a board! My gosh, you can, you know, help staff a fundraiser. You can stuff envelopes. I mean, there's so much stuff out there so many different opportunities. But yeah, it was the American Red Cross that was the first to tap to tap me and ask me to participate. Oh my gosh, I thought that woman was kidding. Like, why would she want me? I had never done anything like that before, but I'll never forget the experience. So anyway, my final question. Thank you for that little deviation on the nonprofits. I love it! My final question is, what is your Frederick factor?

**Ashleigh Kiggans 21:49**

Oh, there are so many. Um, I have become such a rah-rah Frederick cheerleader. I absolutely adore this town. Adore the people, adore, it's a Huggy. I describe it as my Huggy town because after you've met somebody twice in Frederick when you see them again, you hug them - and that's probably been one of the hardest things in COVID is just not being able to go and hug people. But you know, just once again, the way that people make their names in Frederick and the fact that the way you do that is because of what you do to give back. And that's, that's something you don't see in most areas. You know, it's something my family always says, you know, they all make fun of me because all I want is for everyone to come visit. And then I say we're going to go downtown, we're going to go here, we're going to go there and you know, just talk to them about how great our town is. And I think you know, one of the factors is just the caring just how much people care here in Frederick.

**Sandy:** Awesome. Well, I cannot thank you enough for coming in here and being my first in-studio podcast guest so, yay!

**Ashleigh:** Thank you. It's so nice to be in-studio. I don't have to worry about my dog barking in the background or my daughter on the other side of the screen asking me for ice cream.

**Sandy:** We didn't have to worry about it buffering or me saying, you know, "*you're muted!*" or anything; we didn't have to worry about any of that Zoom technology in this interview.

**Ashleigh:** This is true.

**Sandy:** Who knew that those would be the thing that really mattered. But thank you, I truly cannot thank you enough. This was really an amazing conversation, and I hope everybody enjoyed it. And I will just say until next time, until our next crab dinner. But for the listeners, until next time! We will see you all soon. Thanks! Have a great day!

**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](http://www.FrederickFactor.com). You can also connect with us on Facebook and Instagram. 'Til next time!**