



Michael Johnson, MBA '04
CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Dane County
Madison, Wisconsin

A CHAMPION *for children*

While growing up in Chicago's notoriously rough Cabrini-Green housing projects, a mentor gave Michael Johnson, MBA/GM '04, hope for a better life. Today, as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, he is doing the same for others.

Growing up in the housing projects on Chicago's North Side, Michael Johnson didn't dream of becoming a fireman or a doctor or a teacher. In this tough neighborhood, making it to your 18th birthday was considered an accomplishment, a grim reality underscored by the fact that only four members of his elementary school class of 25 are alive today.



Michael Johnson with children who attend the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County in Madison, Wisconsin.

But Johnson defied those odds thanks to sports, his church, the local Boys & Girls Club and a mentor who made all the difference. Today, as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County (BGCDC) in Wisconsin, he is helping kids just like him take charge of their futures and create better lives for themselves.

An unlikely mentor

As a boy, Johnson and his single mother lived with eight others in a three-bedroom apartment. At 13, he decided it was time to find a job and help his mom pay the bills. One day, he put on his Sunday best and paid the owner of the neighborhood market a visit. “I went to his store in a white suit with a briefcase, and I asked him for a job,” Johnson remembers. “He laughed at me. Then he told me, ‘Your first job is school, and your second is to stay off the streets and work here.’”

And so began an unlikely friendship between Johnson and the Greek-American man who would become a stand-in father to him and teach him about his

potential. “He said to me, ‘I believe you can go to college and make something of yourself,’” Johnson says. He did, eventually earning his associate and bachelor’s degrees and starting a career of service to youth.

Finding his footing

Johnson began his career at the YMCA of St. Louis, later working in education and social services in Indiana and Pennsylvania. While employed by the Philadelphia Public School District, Johnson’s boss told him that he needed to return to school to get his master’s degree, a move that would prepare him for future leadership roles. He earned his Master of Business Administration with a Concentration in Global Management from University of Phoenix in 2004.

He continued to progress in his career, managing hundreds of facilities as deputy recreation commissioner for the City of Philadelphia until

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Michael Johnson, MBA '04

2010 when the opportunity he had dreamed of came calling. “I never imagined I would become CEO of a Boys & Girls Club,” he admits, “or that I would turn down a \$250,000-a-year job in the private sector to do so.”

A mission to serve

But his heart was always with the Boys & Girls Club, and it is there that he is doing his life's work of helping the kids who need it most. “My job is to make sure our kids are successful,” Johnson says. He does this by hiring and managing the right team to work at BGDC, raising funds and managing a board of 24 members. “A major part of my job is resource development,” he sums up. “And if the staff is happy, then the kids are happy.”

Johnson credits the University of Phoenix with giving him the skills he needs to change children's lives for the better. “If I couldn't manage a budget and raise resources, then I would fail these young people,” he says.

A measurable impact

Under his leadership, the BGDC has thrived, due in part to his persuasive fundraising skills during a downward economy. One of his first initiatives was to revitalize the dilapidated clubhouse. “It was depressing,” says Johnson. “It is a huge facility, but it was not warm, not bright, not clean. I wanted it like a country club.” Within seven months, he had raised enough money to completely renovate the place with new paint, carpet and furniture. He also purchased six new mini-buses so BGDC staff can pick up kids from 18 schools who otherwise wouldn't be able to get to the club.

But Johnson's most important accomplishment to date has been the boost in college entrance among the kids at BGDC as a result of the club's college prep program. “At the end of 2010, 100 percent of our kids graduated from high school and 90 percent of them went on to college,” he explains. “In 2011, we had a 100 percent graduation rate, and 100 percent of them went to college.” In this way, he is helping to set these kids on the path to success, as his own mentor did for him back in Chicago.

But that's not enough for Johnson, who feels responsible for the kids in his program after they leave the walls of his club. He doesn't want to lose touch with them after they graduate from high school and risk having them lose their motivation to continue their education. To remedy this, he is in the process of creating a college continuation coordinator position at the club to follow his kids' progress and show them the BGDC still cares. “We are going to stalk them after they graduate,” he says, smiling. “If they don't graduate from college, then we didn't do our job.”

Full circle

Recently at the Boys & Girls Club, Johnson and his wife had the chance to visit with his mentor, the businessman who took a chance on him and gave him hope for a brighter future all those years ago. “I know I wouldn't be alive today if he was not in my life,” he says, frankly. “He gave me inspiration and encouragement, and he opened doors for me.” Johnson's greatest satisfaction is doing the same for others now that he is able. “When I look at them, I see myself.” 



BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

The UOPX-BGC Connection

Since 2007, University of Phoenix and Boys & Girls Clubs have partnered to provide opportunities to at-risk youth across the country.

- The University has awarded more than 200 scholarships to Boys & Girls Club members.
- University of Phoenix Foundation provided a \$1.8 million grant for the BE GREAT: Graduate program in partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, which provides high-impact educational support for young people at 10 Clubs nationwide.
- In 2011, select University of Phoenix campuses received \$100,000 in engagement grants to support 20 Boys & Girls Club projects that make a meaningful contribution to literacy support. University employees, faculty, alumni and students logged more than 1,400 service hours creating reading-friendly environments, hosting book drives and volunteering in Clubs.
- Apollo Group volunteers, including University of Phoenix staff, have donated more than 2,100 hours of service to Boys & Girls Clubs across the country.