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# **Carla Harris tells Black Founders Forum crowd to over deliver**

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Image: Perry Dickerson

## Penny Dickerson

Carla Harris is a senior client advisor at Morgan Stanley.

Emerging entrepreneurs, investors and the corporate community gathered on Thursday for the first PS27 Black Founders Forum. The event is the brainchild of PS27 President and CEO Jim Stallings, but title sponsor JP Morgan Chase & Co. was integral in bringing the forum together.

A host of established founders in the innovation and technology sector were on hand to share insights, but arguably the most resonant words were delivered by keynote speaker, Carla Harris — a 36-year finance and investment C-suite executive renowned for her passion and commitment in support of those entering a fast-growing field.

Harris said entrepreneurs must answer these questions when telling their story: Why

me? And why now?

An alumna of Harvard University, Harris has taken hundreds of companies public and said the reason why there's a thing called a roadshow is so that large institutional investors can look entrepreneurs in the eye and make sure they understand the game. The game is you must under promise and over deliver.

"The last thing you want to do when you go public is interrupt the stream," Harris said. "The stream will have a forecast of how you're going to perform in the next quarter, and if you're underneath that, you will get punished and it will be unmerciful.

"And if you're a private company, you will get punished the next time you go to market because it's a small, world and people will remember what you forecast."

She further encouraged entrepreneurs to seek exposure, develop trust and employ diversification within their teams prior to seeking capital. During a Q&A session, Harris emphasized the value of leaders bringing their authentic selves to environments. Doing so encourages others to do the same.

"Becoming and remaining a Black entrepreneur can be challenging," said Paul Drayton, market executive director at JP Morgan Chase & Co. "Alleviating challenges requires significant investment and a desire to promote equity and opportunities. Chase is committed to fostering an ecosystem that combats systemic biases, increases access to capital and provides mentoring and resources to Black entrepreneurs from startup to IPO."

Kimba Williams and her company, KUSHAE seized an opportunity during the forum's Shark Tank pitch competition. What started out as an innocent conversation between a doctor and a diva on a girl's trip turned into a \$250,000 investment prize.

Williams is a former pharmaceutical sales consultant turned naturalist with a female tech startup in the health and beauty OTC market. Her products boast a line of doctor-developed feminine health and hygiene products using natural and non-toxic ingredients.

"We've had very strong support for entrepreneurs who were the stars of the show," Stallings told the Business Journal. "They brought their dreams and visions to

Jacksonville with innovations that can change the world.

"We brought investors to fund, encourage, motivate and support them. We could only give one person the financial prize, but personal interactions can lead to investors. It's the American dream in action."

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**Penny Dickerson**

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