



Owners' Box Perspectives

Leading By Example

Featuring Johnny Collins

In the first installment of our new series, *Owners' Box Perspectives*, Johnny Collins, co-owner of Community National Title, talks about putting people first, the power of legacy, Black History Month, and more.

The following interview has been edited for brevity and clarity. In addition to reading the interview transcript below, you have the opportunity to hear Johnny in his own voice via this one-minute introductory video: [Johnny Collins – Real Estate Is In My Blood](#).

Q: As a title agency owner, as an employer, what are you most proud of?

A: You know what I'm most proud of? When I should have quit the title business, I didn't. Our entryway into the title business was not filled with birthday cakes and roses. It was a situation where we came in, did really well up front, and then went through a dark time. Working through all of that is what I'm proudest of in terms of my journey in this business, because there were a lot of other families who were attached to my decisions, my partner Philip's decisions, our decisions. And to have the ability to not let those families down means the world to me. Because you never want to venture into something and sell a dream, then in the middle of the dream have to close down shop. That's just not a good feeling, but that's something I thought would happen a few times. And of course it never did. Here we are, and I'm pretty excited.

Q: Some people say our industry can get in your blood. How does that tie into who you are as a title person and an individual living in the world?

A: I'm married with two children. Sure, I'm an individual, but I come with a crew. For me, it's family first, and I'm serious about that. When I talk about our team, they're a part of our extended family – I spend more time with them than I do with my own family.

I'm a real estate child. My mother was a real estate broker—legendary in her own right—she did a lot of great things in Texas when it wasn't popular for folks who look like me to do things in Texas and real estate. That's what's really in my blood, and title has been a derivative of that,

and one I'm really appreciative of. I never thought I would be in the title business. I think it's probably the most boring business on the planet, but it's proven to be exciting and definitely rewarding. Not just for my family, but everyone under our umbrella – everyone in our organization and their families.

Q: It's Black History Month. What does that mean to you as an owner of a title agency?

A: It means a lot. When I got in the business, I was the only black agency owner for a long time. Now there's about four. I was speaking to a guy last night who is also black. He's getting ready to be an agent hopefully in Texas, and I was telling him, look man, if there's anything that I can do to help you, let me know. I told him, I'm a little selfish in the fact that I would love for you to come be on our team, but I want you to win either way. So if there's ever a time or an opportunity for me to help, call. Don't try to make this walk by yourself, because the title business—no matter what color you are—can be lonely if you don't have internal relationships to help you along the way.

Q: When did you know you wanted to own your own business? Do you have an entrepreneurial spirit?

A: I come from an entrepreneurial family, but I don't know if it was something I knew I would do. I think sometimes stuff is just in you, if that makes sense. Then, once you come of age, you realize this is the only way.

Q: What are some of the ups and downs of owning your own business?

A: It can make you feel a number of ways, like poetry. Some poems can uplift you, others bring you down. That's what the entrepreneurial plight really is – having the ability to manage the emotions of the journey. And, as your organization grows and people are added, having the ability to manage the personalities.

Q: Is that a key part of your management strategy? Embracing your relationships with people?

A: I always say friends don't quit on friends. And that's a mantra I've lived by. If folks know that you're definitely going to be there when it hits the fan—whether you're facing a mild crisis or a big crisis—they'll go to the end of the earth with you. Even this morning, where I'm at in DFW, schools are cancelled. We've been texting back and forth as a team, checking on everyone, letting our people know they can work from home. For us, it's people first. That can be a big cliché, and I find it to be comical sometimes, but we really do our best to live by that and make sure our people know they come first. It's worked for us.

Q: Some people see the title industry as a service profession, and that seems to tie in with what you're saying about your perspective on the importance of your team. Is that how you view it? Do you think you're making a difference as part of this industry?

Well, you know, sure. I think any time you go into business for yourself, you go in for several reasons. One reason, usually, is to make money. But, for all of us who really care, you also go into it to make a difference and impact people. Not just from a teammate perspective, but also from a client experience perspective. For example, we would ask a closer, how did the client experience you. Whether it be at the closing table, or just talking on the phone, or whatever the interaction – what was that experience like for our client? Inevitably you want to make lasting relationships, where people feel almost obligated to come back the next time they're ready to transact business, because of the experience they had the first time.

Q: Being in the owners' box is a big deal. Some of us have trouble imagining ourselves in your position. What words of encouragement or advice do you have for folks who can't imagine themselves being part of the ownership team of a business that employs lots of people, serves the real estate community, etc.

Anybody can be in business for themselves – anybody. I passionately and deeply believe that. Now there are people that won't necessarily get where they want to go just because they've subscribed to a false truth – the belief that what they want is something they cannot have, you know, like business ownership cannot happen to them because of, whatever that is, their childhood, or whatever. Anybody who wants to be in business in this industry—as long as they have the know-how and obviously the resources—they can definitely do it. One of the things that my fearless partner, Philip Postel, and I have been very forward on is helping people in the title business get in business for themselves. Yes, if you're in this business and you know what you're doing, there's a place for you in ownership. Were one of those groups that believe that there's enough business out here for all of us.

There's under representation of black folks in the title business, mainly because of lack of exposure and lack of understanding of how rewarding this business really can be for those that get in and stick with it. You can't Google how to be an escrow officer or a title agency owner. It's something you have to really embrace and put your hands on the steering wheel.

Q: What are your hopes for the future? For you, your family, your team, and the people who might not be able to imagine themselves sitting in your spot?

A: For me, it's about creating legacy. How many families can we bring with us and make sure that they are blessed in the same way that we are blessed because of the progress that all of us have made. I want to look back and have a long line of people that are really impacting their own personal legacies not just financially but also in personal growth, including eliminating the false truths from their lives. I love to see people have personal breakthroughs that they can take not only to the workplace, but they can take to their spouse, they can take to their children. I just want to see more people, whether they're black, white, brown or somewhere in between, get to a place where they can start impacting legacy. If I can help people succeed, I can sleep well, you, know?

Q: Any last thoughts you want to leave with the people reading this interview?

A: There's a passage in the Bible that says, 'give and it shall be given unto you.' I want to challenge people in the Texas title business to make sure we share our expertise and pass it along. You know, share the information that a 30, 40, 50-year title vet has learned from experience to make sure that the next generation has the opportunity to benefit. When we share expertise and pay it forward, the better off our industry will be.