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Leaving Footprints in the Sand By Laurie N. Robinson Senior Vice President and Assistant General Counsel, CBS Corporation

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In November 2007, a friend of mine, Cynthia, passed away unexpectedly at the tender age of 42 years old. Cynthia was the founder and executive director of a non profit in Harlem, which provided after-school educational services to at-risk African-American and Hispanic girls ages 7-12.



By brief way of background, many of these girls who attended Cynthia's after-school program faced challenges in their lives. Many of these youth were being raised by a single mother with very little income and means. Some were being raised by a grandparent or great-grandparent. Some had parents who were alcoholics or drug addicts. Others had a parent who was incarcerated. A few had been violated by a family member or by a mother's boyfriend.

For 10 years, Cynthia rolled up her sleeves and poured her days, nights, heart and soul into developing these young Harlem girls. At the after-school program, each day she would start by making the kids a hot meal--for many it would be their only meal for the night. After the meal, she would require them to complete their homework. She and the tutors would help them with their homework until their parent or guardian arrived.

Cynthia encouraged those girls, gave them hope for life, took them on field trips around New York City, exposed them to culture and helped to build their self-esteem. Notably, the girls who attended the after school program not only improved their daily attendance at their regular schools, but also improved their grades and standardized test scores.

Cynthia did this all on her own. She was genuine. There were no cameras around. No elbows to rub. No hobnobbing to take place. And, no important contacts to make. She focused on the kids and gave from her heart.

Cynthia's hand was in all of those kids' lives. When she passed away, the kids were devastated. But they never forgot her or the things that she had taught or instilled in them.

In December 2010, a couple of us hosted a holiday party at a Harlem Restaurant for the girls--to bring them back together for a night and to check on how they were doing. What struck me was the fact that Cynthia was only 42 when she died. Yet, her impact was so strong. In fact, 3 years after her death, the kids were still reminiscing about her. They were still talking about her as if they had just seen her yesterday. The girls brought their report cards to the party. I am happy to report that many were still maintaining their A and B averages! Some were even talking about wanting to go off to college.

Often times we get so busy with life, work, career, family and with ourselves that we forget to stop and help our fellowman. We all should pause and take time to mentor, feed the homeless, and fight for causes that uplift and build the human race. At the end of our lives that is all that will matter--what we did for others to make a difference in the world.

We can all take a page from Cynthia's book by leaving our footprints in the sand.

