

Black History Month Leadership Series

Amplifying Black Leaders in Finance

STRUCTURED
FINANCE
ASSOCIATION

DIVERSITY IN
STRUCTURED FINANCE



CHRIS VALENTINE

SENIOR MANAGING PARTNER

Celeres Capital

Chris is a Senior Managing Partner at Celeres Capital. He is responsible for leading the firm's investment activities across asset-backed lending, structured finance and whole loan principal finance. Chris co-founded Celeres Capital, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 2019 and has been in the industry for more than two decades. He has held a variety of roles across investment banking, private equity and principal investing focused on financial and business services.

For his entire career, Chris has been involved in structured finance markets that facilitate liquidity for consumer and commercial finance originators and investors. His roles have included origination, structuring, financing and investment into both loans and securities.

In addition to leading a Black-owned investment firm, Chris is also involved in the industry's diversity and inclusion efforts, including serving as a member of the Structured Finance Association's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee.

Chris holds a BBA in Finance with an Independent Study in Actuarial Science from Howard University. He resides in San Juan and is the proud father of three daughters.

What inspired you to get into the finance industry?

As a freshman in college, my good friend and now business partner at Celeres encouraged me to seek an internship with Goldman Sachs, despite my interest in looking at interning with other companies in consulting and entertainment. While initially reluctant, the more I got to know representatives from various investment banks on campus, through volunteering at the Howard University School of Business – Center for Professional Development, my excitement grew. I found the energy invigorating and it almost goes without saying that the scale and large numbers moving around were intriguing. With that said, the work itself felt a lot like golf in its personal challenge, but also a lot like basketball in the team aspect within groups and across entire firms. As a result, I ended up having the opportunity to intern all three summers of college in sales & trading and investment banking across Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan, where I began my career as an M&A Banker in 2001. Needless to say, I never looked back – as I had found a home in finance that matched my skillset, temperament and ambitions.

How do you help support DEI initiatives at your organization?

As a younger firm, our most effective form of support is through leading by example - given that our partnership includes three Howard University graduates who collectively own and manage the firm alongside another Partner. By our nature, we are diverse. By way of the natural progression of our collective networks, the firm's pipeline of opportunities and executed transactions are quite diverse and often inherently impactful.

For example, we were able to back a trucking business project that includes training programs for both incarcerated and previously incarcerated men and women to create a path towards: obtaining a CDL license, an entrepreneurial trucking career and financial independence. And of course, locating our firm in Puerto Rico has opened up further opportunities to create positive outcomes across investments on the island. One of our portfolio companies in Puerto Rico, which had never originated a loan, is now on a path toward being one of the largest unsecured consumer lenders on the Island focused on providing affordable loans to municipal workers and retirees.

FUN FACT: On at least four occasions that I know of, Tiger Woods has been told that he looks like Chris Valentine.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month is a very reflective time for me. I recognize the roles of others extra vividly - all of the efforts and sacrifice it took to pave the way for each successive generation to push forward. I am eternally grateful for how the struggles of the past have opened up doors for me, which is firmly accentuated during this time. I think about how my great-grandmother (the granddaughter of freed slaves) was educated through 8th grade, my grandmother through high school and my mother being the first to attend college and graduate school. I relish in the idea that I have the privilege to carry that progression forward and feel blessed in the fact that the path before me has been made easier because of their resilience.