



# Kevin Gooch

## Alston and Bird LLP

Over the last few years, in addition to serving as president of the Emerging 100 of Atlanta, the young professionals' auxiliary of the 100 Black Men of Atlanta Inc., and serving on multiple boards, Kevin Gooch has billed thousands of hours each year as a partner of Alston and Bird LLP. While the partnership might be the pinnacle of his profession, to date, his presence in the life of his mentee at BEST Academy High School takes top billing. "I've had his back and been a source of encouragement whenever he needed it. I've taken him to his college orientation at UGA, his first UGA football game, an NBA Finals game in Miami, several Hawks games in a suite and several lunch outings. These are things that he couldn't have imagined. However, I've planted in him a seed that he can do whatever he wants if he works hard and commits himself to a standard of excellence. Most importantly, I've shown him an example that he can follow."

How different are you now as a person from when you first started out in the professional world?

When I first started out in my profession, I was a blank slate. The only thing that I knew was that I was going to work my tail off, strive for excellence and have faith that I would be successful and all things would work out. In reality, the only thing that I could control is my dedication and willingness to work harder than anyone else to accomplish the task at hand, my unwillingness to settle for anything other than delivering my absolute best and my faith in the outcome. I did desire to be an African-American partner in one of the top law firms in Atlanta and to be respected as one of the best in my practice area. Additionally, at an early age, the spirit of appreciation for those that had helped me along through prayers, advice, support or encouragement was instilled in me by my grandmother and my parents. Given the prevalence of that spirit in me, I've always had a great desire to pay it forward to others.

What would you have done differently professionally if you knew then (when you first started out) what you know now?

One thing that I would've done differently was work a year between undergrad and law school. I think a year of work in the "real world" would've better prepared me for entering the workforce in a large law firm. There were certain lessons that I learned as a new lawyer that I would've learned earlier had I previously worked between undergrad and college. For instance, at another law firm, there were times when people asked "how busy are you?" in an effort to get your assistance with a matter. I honestly thought these people wanted to know how busy I was. Then, I learned the meaning behind that question, which was unless you are dying and working 20 hours per day, here's a new project for

you. Learning these lessons earlier would've made my life in the early years of my career a bit smoother.

Where do you think you find the most common ground with others?

The thing that I share in common with most people is the opportunity to control my successes and circumstances each and every day. I'm not some guy from a wealthy family that went to private school and had my life planned out for me. I grew up with a grandmother who didn't attend college and worked three jobs per day to make ends meet. I went to public schools in Covington, Ga., for my entire life. We didn't have our own car and lacked central heating and air, cable TV and a shower for most of my childhood (I had to take baths through 11th grade). Given these circumstances, I dedicated myself (and my grandmother and parents encouraged me) to working my tail off. I knew that I had no control over whether I was the smartest guy in the room. The only thing that I could control was how hard I worked. Watching my grandmother work from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. at a dry cleaner, 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. in a nursing home laundry facility and 11:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. at McDonald's on the clean-up crew inspired me to work relentlessly. I wanted us to have a better life and knew that education was key for that better life. I'm just a normal guy that worked my way to this place in life. All of the young people that I encounter have the same opportunity and ability to be as successful (if not more successful) than me if they make the right choices and put in the work. I always encourage my mentees to come up with a long-term vision and put in the work necessary to make that vision a reality. In my view, "success" in every facet of life is contingent on the amount of work (and sacrifice) a person is willing to put in. **AT**