

COPY HER SUCCESS

Ursula Burns grew up in the projects of New York City's lower East Side. Her mom took in ironing and ran a day care so she could send Burns and her two siblings to better schools. Although she was a math whiz, teachers tried to steer Burns toward nursing. But she researched the top-paying math-related fields and decided instead to attend the Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn for mechanical engineering degree.

After a summer internship at Xerox, she accepted an entry-level job and the company helped pay to earn master's degree from Columbia University. Burns was quite content with her engineering career at the printing giant.

But that changed in 1990, when her boldness on a companywide panel caught the attention of a Xerox executive. He offered to mentor her. Working alongside him raised her sights to the executive suite. Another high-level mentorship opportunity followed. In 2007, she became company president.

Burns made headlines by becoming the first black woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company in 2009. She's been on Fortune magazine's Top 50 Most Powerful Women in America every year since 2005 and Forbes' Most Powerful Women in the World since 2008.

When talking about her success, Burns credits her mom for instilling the belief that circumstances shouldn't define you. As she said, "**Where you are is not who you are.**"

