

HIRE TO GIVE FIRST AND SECOND CHANCES

> **Fred Brown**

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As a schoolteacher, probation officer and nonprofit director, I've buried more than 50 black kids. I've had an intimate relationship with premature death. So I've been called to do this work to create hope in the hopeless and provide light in the darkness. I just listened to a second-year college student from our neighborhood. When asked a few years ago, "How long do you think you'll live?" he said he thought he'd be dead at 14. He didn't have aspirations of getting out of his circumstance. Now he does.

The level of resilience in our community gives me hope. At the same time, I see attempts at inclusion that are transactional, not transformational. That says to me Pittsburgh is poisoned by the notion that if we have a conversation about equity and inclusion, we've had a win — with no indication of shifting the needle toward action. To change that — to have a true "community of we" — we have to bring more people of color from vulnerable communities into leadership roles, where they are involved in hiring issues. We need a Rooney Rule (the NFL policy that teams interview minority candidates for top coaching and operations posts) for C-suite jobs citywide.

Another tangible and truly transformational step would be to help people with criminal records find jobs. Our vulnerable communities are home to 80,000 people; 46,000 are on probation or parole. If people with criminal backgrounds don't get a second chance, over half the community is ineligible to work.

I hire those people because I understand how mistakes get made. I can discern they're trying to change. As corporations take this risk, we need to ask them about their return on investment. What was the outcome? If we did that, it would make people more comfortable about trying it and expanding the idea of "we."

— Interviewed by Christine O'Toole

