

Ayrton Bryan

Senior Manager, Avery Dennison
Member since December 2022

Milwaukeeans will never know how close they came to tuning into Ayrton Bryan's advice on tomorrow's cold front rather than benefiting from his quiet, powerful helpfulness in shaping the city's long-term climate. That's because if he had not been -- in his words -- "the worst of the worst" undergraduate forecaster in the Texas A&M meteorological program, he never would have pursued the studies and experiences that have produced one of Milwaukee's most promising 40-under-40s.

Ayrton's resume tracks his scholarly and professional journey from a recognized university scholar at Texas A&M (weather forecast notwithstanding), to graduate engineer at Virginia Tech, to MBA from Quantic School of Business and Technology and to health, safety, and sustainability officer at east and west coast firms before Milwaukee and Rockwell. But you soon learn it's what's in his mind, spirit, and heart that distinguishes him as a consequential force in Milwaukee's better future.



"Companies are looking for puzzle solvers," Ayrton told STEM Forward students in 2020. "People who take a chance and learn from it, who collaborate as a team, who might have a big idea but know that no one person can do it alone."

That same goes for cities and Ayrton applies that advice to a city that needs to solve puzzles and tackle problems. He's a fan of the collective impact approach used by Milwaukee Succeeds. But he knows that one laudable effort only begins to address what's needed across the city -- a system and structure that produces a total that is greater than the sum of the parts.

"Milwaukee must be fearless in taking on its challenges, creating a culture of psychological safety that produces learning, innovation, and growth," he declares, reflecting on the approach taken by Harvard's Amy C. Edmonson.

"The most pressing issue facing Milwaukee is its structural silos," Ayrton stated in his 40-under-40 interview. "There are so many dedicated people working on great things, yet we are not assertive enough in having conversations and meetings on how to best collaborate."



We need to invite people into spaces and conversations they have been traditionally excluded from -- across measures of race, gender, physical access, age, etc., he explained. One way to do that is a series of "purposeful events" that "re-imagine and re-energize" the city to produce shared purpose that bridges the silos that block us from becoming "engines of opportunities" that make things happen.

"Egoless ownership and sharing of resources would drive Milwaukee to the top of every list we want to be on," he predicted.

The "egoless ownership" is something Ayrton applies in his own life and in his role with others, a role he describes as "Villager B." Simply put, it's a preference to be in the small print on the production's billing, letting others take the spotlight and enjoy the

applause. He likened the philosophy to General Eisenhower’s approach as allied commander in Europe: “There’s no limit to what you can accomplish if you don’t want credit for it.”

Whether he sought praise or not, since coming to Milwaukee in 2019. Ayrton’s ability to get things done has been noticed. As interim director of MKE Black, a non-profit supporting and powering, Black-owned businesses, Ayrton fundraised, partnered with BizStarts and Sherman Phoenix, grew the staff from four volunteers to 30. That produced an honor as Wisconsin Minority Small Business Champion of the year by the Small Business Administration.

Then there’s the United Way’s Emerging Leader award as one of the Philanthropic 5 of young community leaders who give, advocate and volunteer for change.

“Ayrton often gives voice to those who don’t have the capacity or connections to advocate for themselves,” said Lynn Heimbruch in his nomination.

A native of Atlanta, Ayrton was on a post-college quest to find a mid-sized, affordable city he could call “his.” Over time, he methodically sifted through the attributes of five cities on his short list and chose Milwaukee.

“I moved here for work but what keeps me here is the people,” Ayrton explained, sharing he’s now a senior manager with Avery Dennison, a global materials science and digital identification solutions company. He works from Milwaukee – he insisted on not moving -- but serves a larger region. It’s another stop on his path to his personal goal of becoming a corporate chief sustainability officer.

Getting “things done” is one of the aspects Ayrton likes about Rotary, citing the Ukraine project as an example of Rotary’s “agility and impact.” That said, he joins other new generation Rotarians who wonder whether more can be done for the city, using the organization’s convening power to bridge silos and focus on unmet challenges.

“The city needs a shared vocabulary and context that’s absent for the collective effort needed to help us all live the American dream,” he said. “Most of us have so much to be grateful for. But our comfort can cause us to miss the moment for action.”

That summarizes Ayrton’s personal “why”: Connecting people so they can all lead better lives. It’s a “why” that prompts a forecast of sunny and bright for Milwaukee’s future with Ayrton’s credits in the small print.



Editor’s Note: *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Jeff Smoller.