

Michael Morgan

Career Executive, Management Consultant
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When Michael Morgan talks about his father's influence on his life, it's clear he took those lessons to heart.

"Although he was a man of few words, my father was one of those guys who if he says he's going to do something, he will do it and he will do it well. He was committed to his job, but he was all about family," said Michael, the eldest of six children. "Our parents taught not by lecturing but by example how we might want to live our lives."

From his mom he inherited his athleticism, a competitive spirit and a love of reading.



Michael, his wife Diana, and grandsons Nadiri Ali and Martin

"My mom was one of the most competitive people you'd ever want to meet," he said, noting that she was one of the best softball players on one of the top teams in south central Alabama, even though Tallassee, where he was born, was a tiny town. She was a homemaker while his father, from age 17 until retirement, was a textile mill worker. When his parents separated, Michael moved to Chicago with his mother. It was a dramatic change.

"Chicago in 1968 was in turmoil. It was a very intense time. We were small-town southerners and the whole city seemed to be coming apart."

He was referring to the uprising following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and later that summer, violent clashes between police and protesters at the Democratic National Convention.

This formidable transition was challenging but Michael found his footing. He excelled in scholastics and athletics, which earned him a spot at Lane Tech High School, a top U.S. school designed to encourage students to pursue engineering or vocational studies.

As a freshman, Michael mistakenly went to the football meeting rather than baseball, his longtime passion. When he realized he was in the wrong room and knowing his mom would never let him play football, he got up to leave. The coach told him to sit down and convinced him to give football a try. It changed his life.

"Football turned out to be a very good thing for me," said Michael, who made varsity as a sophomore and earned high school All-American honors. "It afforded me the opportunity to go to almost any university in the country on scholarship."

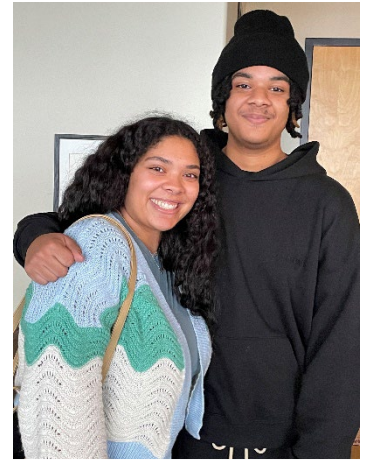
Michael attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison where he was a successful running back and earned a bachelor's degree in communication arts. He enjoyed calling basketball games for the campus radio station and also tapped into his storytelling skills by producing radio programs at WHA Radio. It was also where he met Diana Lee, his wife of 48 years.

Michael joined the Chicago Bears as a free agent and played during the 1978 season. Stepping up to professional football was a cold, hard reality.

“Notwithstanding skills, talent and a burning desire to excel, it is a very tough place to hold onto a job,” said Michael. After being waived by the Bears, he was signed by the Philadelphia Eagles only to suffer a knee injury on the first day of training camp in the fall of 1979.

“I was capable of being a good professional player, but you have to stay healthy to keep a job in the NFL. There are just too many other talented people.”

He was hesitant to end his football career until he realized there were other things he could do with his life. After a stint as a sales manager for Abbott Labs, Michael, the first in his immediate family to attend college and get a degree, returned to UW and earned his law degree.



Michael's granddaughter Esmée and grandson Robert Michael

Michael's career included University of Wisconsin System Senior Vice President for Administration and Fiscal Affairs; Gov. Jim Doyle's Principal Advisor on Tax Policy, Secretary of Revenue and Secretary of the Department of Administration; Milwaukee County Assistant District Attorney; Milwaukee Department of City Development Commissioner; and Helen Bader Foundation Program Related Investment Officer.

He feels fortunate to have been involved in developing programs and policies that positively impact Milwaukee and Wisconsin residents: Milwaukee's Riverwalk and the City Homes development, Wisconsin's Earned Income Tax Credit program, which incentivizes working parents to remain in the work force, and Family Care, a program that provides services that allow older adults and people with disabilities to stay in their homes.

“As someone who grew up in a household and a community where folks worked hard to earn just a little excess income, helping expand policies that enhanced the lives of working people was very important to me. Equity in building a strong, inclusive middle class and supporting all working-class families is what this country should be about “



Michael, his wife, and his daughters Jennifer and Daniela.

Asked to name his proudest accomplishment, Michael circles back to family.

“One thing I'm most proud of is having had the good fortune to be chosen by Diana, a wonderful partner and wife, and together, building a platform that allows us to assist our daughters Jennifer and Daniela and our grandchildren to achieve early life and career success. For me, at the end of the day, it's my family I'm most proud of.”

Editor's Note: *Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Mary Bolich.*