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'Fortune' Magazine adds GSU grad to elite 40 Under 40 list

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‘Fortune’ Magazine adds GSU grad to elite 40 Under 40 list



The bachelor’s degree in business Jeremy Joyce (‘15) earned at [Governors State University](#) set him on an unexpected path, one that led to success and happiness in surprising places.

The founder of immensely popular Black People Eats, an Instagram (IG) sensation with nearly 150,000 followers, Joyce recently earned a place on “[Fortune](#)” magazine’s [40 Under 40 list](#). While the honor recognizes Joyce’s popularity among social media audiences, it also spotlights his commitment to growing the Black economy.

On his branded IG account, Joyce posts videos of himself consuming and discussing food, as well as celebrating the Black-owned restaurants he visits. The brand’s success has rocketed since being established four years ago, gaining huge visibility in June 2020 when Joyce raised \$100,000 to buoy 54 restaurants struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fundraiser validated Joyce’s decision to step away from his job in corporate America and blaze his own trail by combining dual passions for service and food.

“That’s when it hit me — there is no way I should be working when I just raised almost twice my salary in two weeks,” Joyce said. “I also realized people believe in me. If I could fundraise that much, I could build something great for myself, too. The fundraising was a reflection of the potential I have within myself.”

Joyce earned a [Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration](#) from GSU in 2015, his sights set on a career in corporate finance. He quickly secured his “dream” job, and just as swiftly discovered he deeply disliked corporate culture.

After a lifetime focused on business success, Joyce felt lost in his new job, “like half of myself.” He worked in downtown Chicago wearing nice suits, a sharp haircut, leather shoes and bag — everything he thought he’d always wanted. Now that he “had it all,” it all felt meaningless.

“I had an inkling that there was more I needed to do with my life,” Joyce said. “I called my mentor and he said, ‘If you don’t know what you’re supposed to do, you need to serve others.’”

Joyce started volunteering with a program in which he mentored 100 Black men in Chicago. Food kept emerging as a theme, and Joyce found inspiration in the joy of culinary delights and sharing it with others.

He started making videos that featured him celebrating food. They made his friends laugh and the creative process made Joyce happy. Now, Black People Eats is his full-time job, an enterprise that employs five others.

“Because of food, God has allowed me to echo joy to people,” Joyce said. “At the end of the day, if someone can watch a video and receive joy and positivity, that can change their life.”

Not just anyone can create a budding business based on people watching them enjoy food. Joyce combines his enigmatic on-camera presence with a genuine sense of purpose in promoting Black-owned businesses.



Tying it all together is the business knowledge and professional experience he gained while studying and working at GSU.

During his time at the university, Joyce served on the [Board of Trustees](#) as its student representative, participated in many volunteer activities and worked in the department that supports the university's [Dual Degree Program](#), which partners with community college students who transfer to the university.

"I love GSU. I was able to work with the [Peer Mentoring Program](#), and also in the DDP, helping with the onboarding of new students," Joyce said. "It was a blessing to be able to volunteer in so many areas."

Joyce also said there are "too many people to name" when asked about mentors.

First he credited LaTonya Holmes, his supervisor in the DDP job. He said that Holmes, herself a GSU graduate, taught him the importance of leveraging relationships in business. Her disciplined approach helped him to focus and execute at a higher level.

"She was the discipline I needed because I'm optimistic and energetic, which is great, but sometimes it could make me spiral out of control," Joyce said. "She taught me how to channel my energy, a skill that was reinforced the moment I came to the corporate setting."

Another major influence was [William Davis](#), who is GSU's Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Marketing and Communications. Davis mentored Joyce, exposing him to valuable experiences in the professional business world.

In one memorable outing, Davis allowed Joyce to tag along to a meeting he had at the financial services giant Deloitte.

“He introduced me to the corporate scene while I was in college,” Joyce said. “Especially as a Black kid, people aren’t doing that for you, you know? But he saw something in me.”

Davis also may have sensed Joyce’s potential star power. When Davis was interviewed about GSU by on-air anchors at NBC 5 Chicago (WMAQ-TV), he brought the young man along to watch the taping.

The relationships he made at GSU and what he learned from them, Joyce said, are just as important as the degree he earned. When approaching higher education, he urged future students to not get hung up on what they think it means to have a certain degree.

“When it comes to school, don’t look for ‘this or that’ degree, but think more about what you can learn,” he said. “What skills do you need to learn and develop yourself? If you can find your gift, nurture it and apply it, then look at what the gift results in. You’ll be amazed.”