

Michael Sorrell

Visionary Leader, Institutional Change Agent, President of Paul Quinn College

In 2007, Dr. Michael Sorrell faced a life-altering decision. He was part of an ownership group that was on the verge of purchasing the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies and he would serve as the team's president following the completion of the deal — a dream come true for him. At the same time, he was approached by Paul Quinn College, a failing institution, to serve as the historically Black college's president in the interim while they sought out a permanent appointment to take over the role — a search that was proving difficult as the school continued to falter. Dr. Sorrell accepted the role, hoping it would be a brief side quest on his journey to becoming an NBA executive. In reality, it marked the beginning of a transformative and innovative era for the school that continues to this day. Dr. Sorrell has spearheaded one of the great turnaround stories of our time — leading Paul Quinn's evolution from one of the worst in the nation to a higher education powerhouse. As the longest-tenured president in the college's history, he has instilled a "WE Over Me" mentality in students, faculty, and the community at large and has been revered throughout his historic tenure for his ability to reimagine organizations to better serve the needs of the people that depend on them. He is a testament to the power of purpose and vision.

Exclusively represented by Leading Authorities speakers bureau, Dr. Sorrell's talks center on why the simplest approach to leadership is often the most effective one. As he engages the audience with the experiences that led him to Paul Quinn College, and the turnaround that followed, he introduces them to his values-based leadership formula. Dr. Sorrell emphasizes the importance of being authentic and establishing a vision as a leader and demonstrates how leaders can adapt when life takes an unexpected turn and unite people around a shared mission. Sorrell is a polished storyteller who captures the audience's attention from his first word and keeps it until the very end. As a leader who truly walks the talk, Dr. Sorrell's story of forgoing his dream of serving as a president and part owner of an NBA team is one of sacrificing personal interest in order to serve and elevate others.

Prior to Dr. Sorrell's tenure as president, Paul Quinn College was on the verge of permanent closure. He brought a vision for rebuilding the 151-year-old HBCU on foundations of problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and academic excellence. Dr. Sorrell's revitalization plan began with rebranding the campus and partnering with PepsiCo to transform the college's unused football field into the "WE Over Me Farm." These initiatives were part of his broader mission to create a new urban college model and address the food desert in the surrounding community. Under Dr. Sorrell's leadership, Paul Quinn College revamped its admissions policy to include the families of incoming students, established partnerships to increase academic offerings, and modernized operations leading to budget surpluses. By 2011, Paul Quinn had gone from struggling small college to being named the "HBCU of the Year."

Among his most notable awards and recognitions, Dr. Sorrell has been named one of the "World's 50 Greatest Leaders" by *Fortune Magazine*, received the George W. Bush Presidential Center's Bush Institute Trailblazer Citation, and is the only three-time recipient of the HBCU Male President of the Year Award. Dr. Sorrell has also been named by *TIME Magazine* as one of the "31 People Changing the South" and one of "America's 10 Most Innovative College Presidents" by the *Washington Monthly*. Among his numerous board appointments, Dr. Sorrell has served as the chair of the Board of Governors for the Dallas Foundation and co-chair for the Aspen Prize. He has also been a trustee for the American Council of Education.

Before becoming president at Paul Quinn College, Dr. Sorrell served as a Special Assistant in the Executive Office of the President during the Clinton Administration, opened his own business, worked as a public affairs consultant, and practiced law.