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LaRian Finney

Hennessey Privilege VSOP Cognac on the rocks with a splash of cranberry juice at Timothy Dean Bistro

By Sloane Brown

Special to the Sun

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LaRian Finney, 42, is founder, CEO and president of Visionary Marketing Group, a marketing and event planning firm in Baltimore. He lives in Reservoir Hill with wife Kia Finney, a federal attorney, and their daughter, Rachael, 14, and son Rian, 5.

Is your job fun?

Oh, I love my job. We have clients who call from all over the country who say, "We have a vision, we have a budget but we don't know how to make it relevant and hot." Like Dan Meachum, an attorney based in Atlanta. He's the attorney who represented Wesley Snipes in his recent tax case. He called and said, "I want to do my 50th birthday party. Here's my budget, and make it hot." So, we selected Miami. We selected the Versace mansion. We invited his A-list of clients, which included Denzel Washington.

What do you do in your down time?

I'm at Tim Dean's. I like to hang out with my friends with a cocktail and a cigar. I love the movies. ... My son and I, Thursday is our movie day. I pick him up from school, and we go and see a movie.

What would surprise people to know about you?

That I have a degree in chemistry. That I come from Cherry Hill, and I'm very proud of that. I think some people run away from their upbringing, which I think is being a coward.

Is it hard for you to relax?

Absolutely. When you own your own company, ... you're responsible for your team's eating and family. I'm actually reading this book called Bounce Back. It really puts into perspective how you have to balance the ups and downs.



Do you think of yourself as intense?

Folks might not know that, but very much so. Very competitive. Because it's so challenging in the space that we're in. You can't compromise the integrity of your product or your clients. So you have to maintain a high level.

So, which came first: the job or the intensity?

Even in college, I was a chemistry major and a scholarship athlete. That was outside the box. I played basketball at Mount St. Mary's. ... I think I'm laid back, but it's a fire in my belly every morning. It doesn't mean I have to bust through the door. Like rah-rah, like the financial guy at CNBC, [Jim] Cramer. I think that's an act. He's probably as laid back as I am, but he's found a niche.

How do you think other people describe you?

Definitely, [I] reach back and help folks. Very giving. Serious. And loyal. To a fault. Because if you're on my team, I will sometimes give you five strikes instead of three strikes.

What's your best quality, and your worst fault?

My worst fault? Impatience. My best quality? Very giving.

What are your pet peeves?

I don't mesh well with folks who aren't transparent. So, you [can] equate that with being phony or insincere. ... I just hate folks who, after they've reached a certain status, they have to act a certain way. Just be open. And sincere. Because we all have to deal with the same challenges.

Do you ever get silly?

With my wife and my kids, and my friends. ... I have no problem laughing. My son brings it out in me every single day. At least once a day. When we're together, he just cracks me up.

What are your favorite things?

My family. My company. Friends. Hennessy Privilege. A good cigar. Good music; from Coldplay to Alicia Keys, the whole gamut. Shoes. I have a shoe fetish. I can appreciate my wife when she shops for shoes because I have 20 variations of black shoes. I have a watch fetish. And I love to play golf. ... Timothy Dean's [chicken] wings, if I'm out. And if I'm home, my wife is such a great cook. She makes a serious seafood stir-fry.

Any particular food fetishes?

Definitely Starburst. If I have a pack of Starburst, I don't eat one. I eat the whole pack. I love lime-flavored Doritos. And Timothy Dean wings.

What do you do on a free Sunday afternoon?

I'm on the couch, watching Tiger Woods with my son.

What are other favorite TV shows?

I'm a news junkie. So, I'll get in trouble because my wife will be watching something, and I'll turn on CNN or MSNBC. Entourage. I love watching Weeds and reruns of Law & Order.

Do you watch reality shows?

Only when I'm watching with my wife. She loves American Idol and Flavor of Love.

Do you have a favorite line from a movie?

From Godfather II: Michael to Fredo, when he kisses him and says, "I love you. I love you." And it meant although you're my blood, you've crossed the line.

What about an all-around favorite quote?

There are two that I live by every day of my life. The personal [one] is "Never compromise your integrity." My grandmother told me that when I was 14. And at my company, it's "No titles, just get it done."

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