

I AM STEM

Leon Wilson

Leon Wilson is the Chief of Digital Innovation and a CIO at the Cleveland Foundation. Leon recognizes the importance of each letter in the STEM acronym, and encourages students to use their unique skills and talents to find their meaningful place in a variety of STEM-based careers.

We need to think about ALL aspects of STEM

When we say STEM, sometimes we focus on one of the four letters, but not all four simultaneously. When I was in college, it was the "E". Everybody wanted to be an engineer: electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering. Now, everybody wants to be the "T", technology: I.T. technology, digital. . But if you think about it, the "S", the science and the "M", the mathematics are the anchors- bookends that allow you to get into "T" to get into "E." We need chemists, we need biologists. We need a lot of other things, we need all of it. We're not just not fixated on one particular area of STEM. Think about what you're interested in, what you're gravitated to, what you think you will enjoy getting up every day, doing and thriving on. But at the same time, don't be afraid that you might pivot. You may start off as a biologist and become a coder. You may start up as a coder and get into the "M" piece of it so you may bounce around.

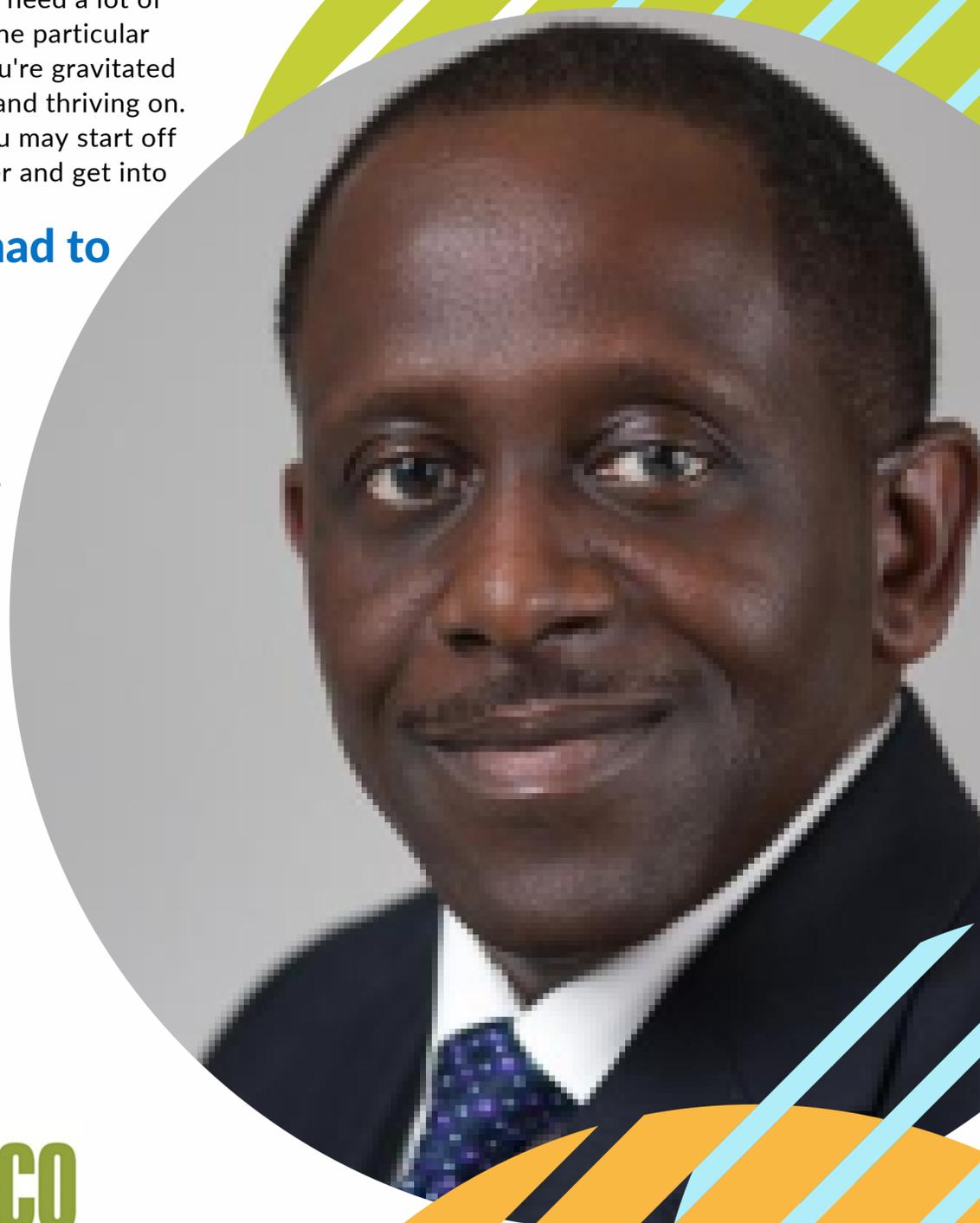
Are there any obstacles that you've had to overcome on your journey?

As a person of color, you're going to struggle with sometimes being the only person in the room in those particular fields. Seek a social network, seek a support network. That's what got me through college is that I wasn't the only one there. There were three other students that were African-Americans from the Detroit area that worked in computer science at the same time I was. And we made sure that each of us graduated and we stay in touch right now. Join social groups, whether it's the National Society of Black Engineers which covers all the STEMs, if you will separate maybe mathematics, but seek a support network because you're going to struggle, you're going to hit roadblocks, you're going to say, "I may not be able to do this." And if you have people from your tribe that can tell you that I'm struggling with you. Let's struggle together, you will more likely persevere and get through it.

What does STEM mean to you?

I always say that STEM to me is my form of art. I always say I'm not creative as an artist, but I'm creative when it comes to technology. So STEM to me is another form of experiencing creativity and freedom for me as far as how my brain is wired.

"WE'RE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP BECAUSE WE MIGHT FEEL LIKE WE'RE INFERIOR. ASK FOR HELP. THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND"



The NeoSTEM Ecosystem is a collaboration of organizations throughout Northeast Ohio who partner to improve STEM educational opportunities for all students. Formed in 2014, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem's goals are to improve meaningful STEM learning opportunities for all students in the Northeast Ohio region. As one of 94 ecosystems operating as a part of the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem holds regular virtual and in-person meetings to learn about what community educational needs are and to develop solutions for those needs. For more information, please contact us at info@neostem.org.

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