



She Bangs a Drum

Using the primal sounds of West African percussion, Drum Café communicated trust and unity to a packed audience at the Women of Color Multicultural Conference 2005.

By Anne Marie Lee

SEPTEMBER 01, 2005 - -- Hundreds of female professionals gathered at the Sheraton Hotel & Towers in New York City, for an early morning conference event of unusual rhythmic proportions. The unusual event—titled "The Sounds of Trust"—was a part of the Women of Color Multicultural Conference 2005 organized by Working Mother magazine and sponsored by IBM Corporation. The highly interactive and energetic session of percussion and positive thinking was led by an equally energetic troupe of corporate motivators, known as Drum Café.

Attendees streamed into a large hall filled with hundreds of chairs and the restless din of pre-show excitement, chatter, and the brisk, rattling sound of logo-imprinted, egg-shaped maracas, which were given away at the door. Once assembled before the large, dramatically-lit stage, flanked with two large video screens showing roaming views of the audience, each of the 300-plus attendees was given an authentic djembe drum to use for the duration of the show.

The djembe drum, pronounced "jembay", looks like a mini bongo drum that's cinched at the waste. Originating from West Africa, it is made of goatskin and hollowed wood from indigenous trees. The **beauty** and diversity in the appearance of the drums themselves, is but one of the many accessible metaphors to be taken from Drum Café group- motivating event.

"Each drum is unique, as are you!" began Aviva Nash, the vigorous and hospitable stage host of the session and spokesperson for Drum Café New York. As a group of world-class drummers palmed out a strong, steady, heart-pumping beat from a raised platform towards the back of stage, Aviva, drum in hand, took to the forefront and warmed up the crowd with spontaneous riffs and even a couple of jungle calls. By the end of the session, business women in suits and smiles traded in their workday worries for tambourines, and for the duration of 45 minutes, the many became one via the great equalizer of shared music.

Drum Café strives to unify and empower the group through a common bonding experience. "It's all about the group dynamic" says Nash, "once people are listening to each other, and they're trained to the beat, they're in sync with each other."

Depending on a company's objectives, drum sessions can focus on general topics such as diversity and communication, or sessions can be tailored to fulfill more specific goals in team building and motivation. Says Nash, "What we often do in our team-building sessions is that our drummers will illustrate in a 2-minute performance how just by listening to each other and keeping integrity to the base beat, they can play their own intricate rhythms and together make incredible music. And then people realize that in their professional lives, they're doing the same thing. As long as they keep integrity to their company mission, and they're listening to each other, then they can innovate, be creative, and together they will make incredible magic; as a company, they can be a projectile!"

The effects of a Drum Café session are long-lasting says Nash, "I heard of one group of people who—long after the Drum Café left—when they would sit around the boardroom, if their concentration started to wander, they'd start beating the table—buh-bum!—everyone would come back, and they'd be focused again."

Drum Café is available for a range of events, from team building to incentive programs, throughout the United States. Clients listed on their Web site, www.drumcafe.com, include major corporations like Kodak and Nissan. Responses to the sessions have been very positive; Nash recalled one from JP Morgan/Chase: "It really helped to create an environment among participants whereby they felt comfortable and open to exchange ideas during meetings that followed." The Drum Café brings new meaning to the saying, business pow-wow. For Nash, inspiring people to be themselves—and helping to create an optimal work environment —is what it's all about.