

# Self-esteem Advocate

DeShawn Snow wants girls to know – and keep – it real

By Mary Welch

**D**eShawn Snow knows she lives a privileged life. Her mission is to show people – especially young African-American women – that life is more than fancy cars, big houses and a professional athlete on your arm.

“I always tell people not to judge the inside of a person by their outside,” she says. “I’ve been blessed, but the exterior stuff is not the person inside. I want girls to be grounded and be true to themselves. Material things don’t make it right inside. Young girls think that what they see in a music video is real. They want to look and act like those girls. Those video dancers are rented for the video. They are not the type of women who is taken home to meet mama or get married. You can’t get caught in the trappings of material things. You can supposedly have it all and be so empty inside.”

Snow, wife of Cleveland Cavalier forward Eric Snow, devotes herself to helping young women to understand the importance of self-esteem and having goals. In 2005 she formed The DeShawn Snow Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower teenage girls to overcome academic, social and emotional difficulties so that they can reach their true potential.

Snow grew up outside of Detroit, raised by a divorced mother. Even so, she had dreams. “I knew I was destined for something great, and I did go to college. My father told me he remembers me saying that I was going to be the CEO of my own corporation.”

She went to Michigan State University and in her freshman year started dating Snow, whose athletic ability earmarked him early for the NBA. She graduated with a marketing degree and worked at a bank while Eric was drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks and then sent to play for the Seattle Seahawks. After a two-and-a-half year engagement, the couple married and moved to Philadelphia, where he played for the 76ers.

From the start she wanted to start a family and manage the couple’s two homes. “I was so involved in his career. I was his No. 1 fan, and it was my choice,” she says. “I wanted to just have a family, run the houses. It was all about him.”

She became involved in Behind the Bench, a networking group of NBA wives, and heard one of the wives speak about the importance of having your own dreams. “I remember thinking, ‘Wow. I never looked at it that way.’”

Snow took the message to heart and got her real estate license – in Georgia. “We were coming to Atlanta a lot, even though we were living in Philadelphia, and we still had our home in Michigan. I started my own company with my cousin, and we started growing.”

She eventually linked up with a broker and commuted between households while growing her business, EDJ Realty LLC, and taking care of their three sons. Eric was traded to Cleveland in 2004, and

the family maintained residences in Atlanta and Cleveland. “We just really liked Atlanta,” she says. In 2007 they bought 5 acres of land and started building their dream house. They moved into the 15,000-square-foot abode in February.

By this time Snow’s business had grown to 26 agents and it was too much. She scaled down her operation. “I had the vision, but I’m not a manager, and I couldn’t be there full-time. Besides, God did not tell me to start a real estate business; I did. It was too much to handle. I got a new perspective and saw that my life wasn’t about me; it was helping others,” she says.

She started 6 Star Lifestyle, a referral company for friends in need of services such as real estate agents, financial planners and schools. Today she gave referrals for friends more as a favor rather than a business.

By this time the family was fully grounded in Atlanta, and the Bravo TV network asked her to be on the show, the “Real Housewives of Atlanta,” which profiles the lives of several women and airs this fall.

“You don’t know how you will be portrayed on these reality shows, so I hope for the best,” she says.

What attracted her to the show was that it could be a platform for her foundation and her spiritual work. She is now enrolled in an online master’s of divinity program. But her main focus is on her foundation. Primarily it targets underprivileged and disadvantaged girls ages 11 to 17.

Working with the Andrew and Walter Young Family YMCA, the foundation runs a program called For Sisters Only, which operates its Empower Me! Camp. Started three years ago with 180 girls, it now has 325 girls who attend workshops that focus on communication

through artistic expression; making the right choices; image defining and designing; health and fitness techniques and smart starts to entrepreneurship. The camp ends with a talent show, complete with red carpet and glitz and glamour.

“We spend a week building them up and helping them change,” she says. “My challenge is to get them to believe they can go to college, get scholarships and start their own businesses. Once you know something is possible, then you can get it. It’s a mind-set.”

The second program is for girls who have shown leadership potential. Twenty girls are treated to classes designed to hone their etiquette, goal setting, self-image, communication, networking and leadership skills.

Snow understands how images can distort self-esteem. “I know that the image of women like me is that we do nothing but shop. I like to shop, but I have other things. Even if I didn’t have my foundation, I’d have a full life taking care of my husband, my sons and my house. I deal with those issues so I am in a position to help young girls deal with their self-esteem issues.”

“It gets back,” she says, “to knowing who you are so your dreams can come true.” ♀

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DeShawn Snow,  
Founder  
DeShawn Snow  
Foundation



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