



Matt Augustine

CEO of Eltrex Industries

*"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."
Eleanor Roosevelt*

Matt Augustine's path to success has been marked by more obstacles than many of us will ever have to deal with. However, this very hardship instilled in Matt from a very young age the desire to not only succeed himself, but to change the way things work, so as to facilitate the success of others as well. From his days as a student, Matt has consistently found himself in need of summoning up his courage in order to face obstacles head-on without flinching. The combination of this resilience and the desire to create a better life for himself and others has given Matt the edge that he needed to become truly successful.

It all started primarily because of the place and time that Matt was born into. He was born in Georgia, but soon thereafter moved to another southern state, Louisiana, just before the civil rights movement would start hitting its major strides. This wasn't an ideal environment for African American families such as his. From a very young age, Matt's parents helped to prepare him for the hardships that they knew he was bound to face, by telling him that if he wanted to succeed at the same level as others, he would need to work at least twice as hard in order to overcome the discrimination that would naturally be leveled against him because of his race. This proved to be quite true. Matt had to work very hard throughout school, but nevertheless he did

succeed in earning grades high enough to enter the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

College campuses at that time were not places noted for their acceptance of people from all stripes of life. Rather, they had long been a homogenized world that was just recently seeing the influx of liberalism that would lead to the "turbulent times" that Matt recalls having to contend with on a daily basis. So intense was the persecution Matt faced that he had to engage in bitter fights with the University staff for more than a year, just to be granted the right to live on campus.

This kind of treatment didn't sit well with Matt, so he decided that he would **be the kind of person who actively works to bring about changes within the system.** He soon found himself getting involved with campus societies and clubs that were dedicated to the ideals of social reform. Given that he attended school in the mid 1960s, this was a time period that saw more than its fair share of protests and demonstrations. Matt's efforts with these groups were a valuable learning experience for him.

Matt's experience at the University of Southwestern Louisiana came to a head when one of his professors attempted to sabotage his academic career. Despite Matt's having the highest grade in his class, the professor in question gave him an F for the course on the grounds that he had missed too many days of class. Despite the fact that Matt had not actually missed any days, he was at a loss as to how to prove his innocence, due to the fact that attendance wasn't officially kept. He continued to be a victim of the system he had been working to change.

Tired of contending with the politics of academia, Matt left school to join the Marine Corps, where he served in Vietnam and did exceptionally well for himself. Working within military intelligence, Matt was awarded many honors and a top level security clearance. It was only after this success that his turning point came.

When he returned home, Matt continued to struggle with discrimination as a result of

political unrest and the escalating civil rights movement. He was fortunate enough to meet with two professors who knew of his academic and service records, and they suggested that Matt apply to the Harvard Business School where they had both received doctorate degrees.

Matt enrolled and quickly found himself an active part of life on campus. He once again was appointed leader of many student organizations and societies that were dedicated to fighting discrimination. He particularly recalls steps that he took to bring global awareness to the somewhat insular and conservative Harvard campus by protesting the tragic events that had happened at Kent State and Morgan State. Despite managing all of those obligations, Matt still found the time to run his own successful business with friends on the side, putting in an average of 60 to 80 hours a week. In addition, he carried some of the highest grades in his class.

While Matt was doing well at Harvard, Joe Wilson, the founder of Xerox Corporation, helped start a manufacturing company that would be dedicated to giving African Americans job opportunities. Despite their noble aims, however, the management was simply not up to the task of running the business aptly named Fighton Inc., and so they embarked on a nationwide search for an entrepreneur who could turn the organization around. They found Matt.

The activist nature of the business appealed to him, and he was quickly brought on in order to turn things around. As he puts it: **"We beat the odds, but it wasn't easy."**

This quote personifies the approach that Matt has taken with all of his ventures, both personal and professional, over the years. A dedication to rooting out the causes of failure and injustice and working to change them has given him a degree of success that has been matched by few.

Because of his adherence to these principles, Matt indeed succeeded in turning Fighton Inc. around. Without sacrificing the principles of the organization, Matt changed their public persona by adopting the name of Eltrex Industries, and diversifying the company's manufacturing base to cover just about every aspect of the industry that presented a niche.

Recently, Matt was named as one of Rochester's 50 most successful businessmen over 50, being inducted into the Business Hall of Fame in 2002. Going on the momentum of his success at Eltrex Industries, Matt continues to **find ways to give back to the community and work towards social change**. He's intimately involved with efforts to raise money for black scholarships to give inner city youth the opportunity to receive the same kind of education that he had. In addition, he served as a Distinguished Minuett Professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he worked to impart his unique blend of business sense and social consciousness to a new generation of entrepreneurs. Today, he's looking to expand his skills even further by pursuing his doctorate in Executive Leadership. This pursuit was made possible thanks to the efforts of an individual who received her own doctorate in part because of one of Matt's scholarships. This is a testament to the sweeping changes that Matt has created in his life.

Though he still faces discrimination from time to time, Matt looks on today's business environment as a place where there are a lot more opportunities for African Americans and repressed people of all stripes. Though he is modest about his own involvement, there's no doubt that at least some of the credit for this change goes to his own efforts, and his tireless dedication to change for the better.