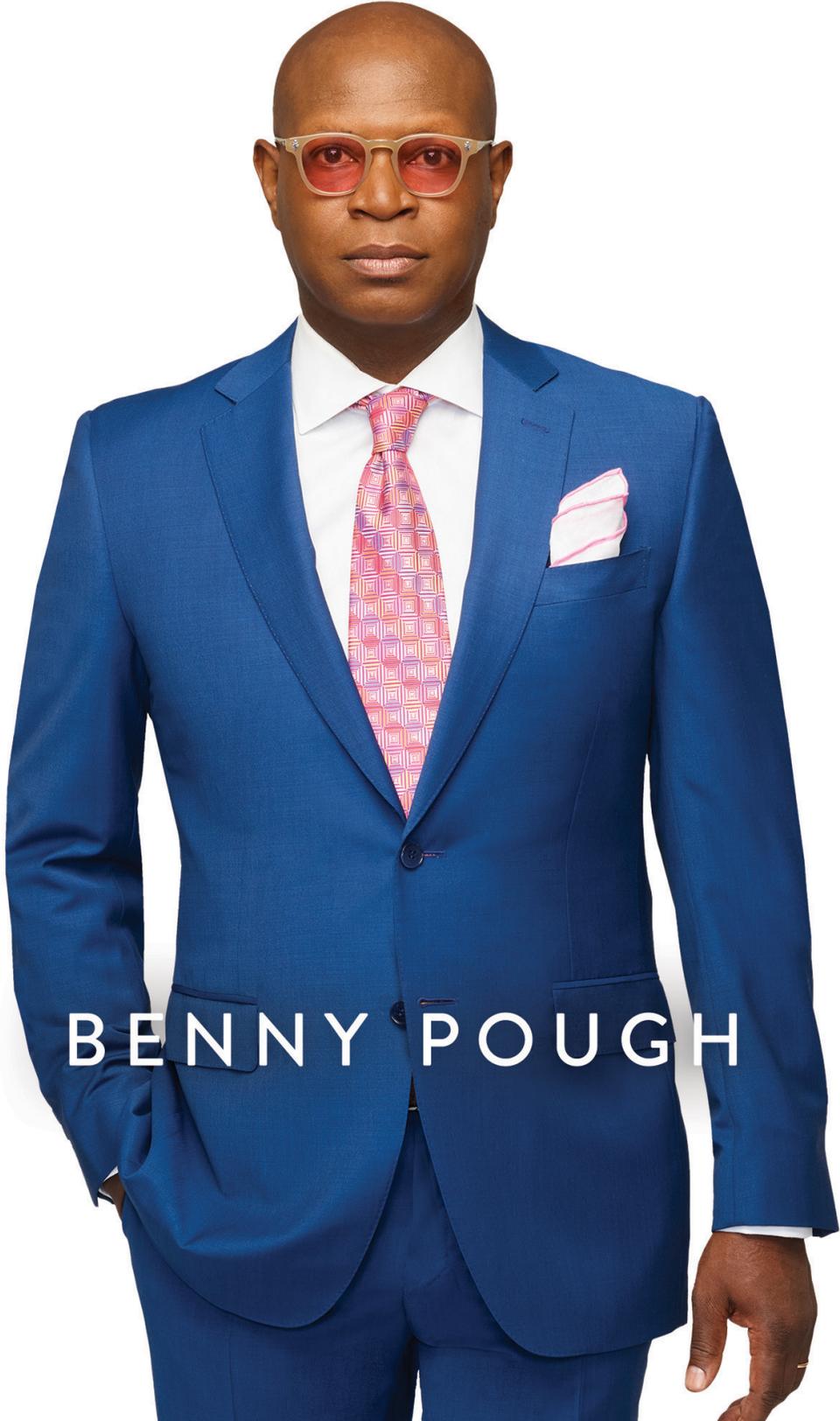


ON IMPACT

LIFE, LEADERSHIP AND BETTING ON YOURSELF



BENNY POUGH

On Impact

Life, Leadership and Betting on Yourself

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*For my mother, whose love, support, and friendship exists beyond the confines of space and time.
Her spirit is forever with me.*

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PREFACE

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another,” has always been the foundation of my relationship with Benny Pough. Seventy-two hours after Benny strutted into the Def Jam Records office for the first time, I had no doubt he was a mover and a shaker.

On that day, I had assembled an independent radio team to distribute Kayne West’s, *Thru the Wire*. Mind you, this was pre-fame Kanye, but don’t get it twisted—the infamous ego was in full effect. Benny led the overall radio promotions when the *powers that be* weren’t sold on *College Drop Out*, or for that matter, Kayne the Rapper. Because I vouched for Kayne and *College Drop Out*, it was my responsibility to get traction on his inaugural song. So, I rolled my dice with Benny, who, at the time, was the Head of Radio Promotions at Def Jam. My trust was not misplaced: Benny made *Thru the Wire* a mainstream hit. The song launched Kayne’s career and was the impetus to my multi-decade brotherhood with Benny.

To put it mildly, Benny is a magnet. Early on, I was drawn to his deep-rooted integrity, charisma, and commitment to his word. He always does what he says he’s going to do. Additionally, Benny is contagious in the way he interacts with people and always makes sure that everyone around him feels comfortable and valued. These values have become the cornerstone of his identity. Whether you are the CEO of the label, a superstar artist, or the intern bringing him a bagel, he will never “big time” you. When Benny enters a room, it lights up: what he brings to the table can’t be taught or bought. Day in and day out, from the first time I shook Benny’s hand, he has shown himself to be a true leader. After the acclaim of *Thru the Wire*, Benny and I worked on the next three singles Kayne released from *The College Dropout* album.

Parallel to the Kayne promotions, I had another song, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, that I needed to push. Our process was akin to a two-part assembly line at a factory: I brought the record, and Benny did his magic. He strategically placed the records at certain stations, he knew when to release the songs, and he consistently implemented a custom-fit, comprehensive strategy for each single.

Early on, Benny was instrumental in securing some of the biggest hits we achieved at Roc-A-Fella Records. One of our shared experiences that resonated the most was our successful work on *No Better Love* by Young Gunz and Rell. At that time, I witnessed firsthand Benny’s passion, stamina, and high spirit. We spent an entire day in his office as he played the song at least thirty times. He would scream over and over at the top of his lungs as if I were two blocks away, “Yo Biggs, you sure?” He kept looking at me and hollering across the desk, “You sure this is it?” We listened to that song on “repeat” until we knew every verse and every note.

After a drink or two, we signed off on it and then went to work promoting the single. The song shot up to the Top 10 and broke 5,000 spins on the radio. It was an early win which confirmed to me that Benny was not only a star, he also knew how to make a fourteen-hour workday feel like a lively hour-long lunch.

In writing this foreword, I had to abandon my professional relationship and my personal friendship with him and ask, “Why is Benny the right person to write this book?” I did not have to think about it for long because the answer was simple: few people make it out of neighborhoods like those Benny and I were born in, and those who do make it out, do not always prioritize giving back like Benny does. In addition to this, *On Impact* is a road map for young Black

men to keep pushing forward despite life's challenges, while supporting their communities along the way.

I earnestly believe that this book will be inspirational to indigenous communities all over the world. It will be a blueprint for the average person who doubts himself and does not know how to succeed beyond his surroundings. Early on in life, I could have benefitted from the lessons found in this book. I experienced my own apprehension and doubt and often found myself on the fence. I believe that Benny's straightforward, transparent, no-nonsense story of persistence and hard work will have a snowball effect which will, undoubtedly, impact many lives for years to come.

Benny also has succeeded through true grit over the long-haul with rarely matched production skills and exceptional performance in the music industry. Benny is a pacesetter. His team can barely keep up with him. Benny embodies work ethic; the one trait I look for in a co-worker, along with honesty. His integrity, commingled with his stamina, is what separates him from others and is the fundamental reason that he and I see eye-to-eye. I can call him at any time of night, and he will be there because Benny never stops. That is the kind of person you want in the trenches with you when you are trying to build any kind of company.

The other attribute that stands out when I think of Benny is his vulnerability. When he trusts you, he turns off his edit button and lays out so much that you, in turn, feel comfortable telling him your innermost thoughts. In fact, when Benny and I get together, it is a lot of, "Man, I never told anybody this," or "I never told anybody that." When Benny shares his stories with me, there is always that "aha!" moment. I have gone through many of the same things he has gone through, and it is rare that Benny and I disagree on anything. The few times we have had an opposing thought, one of us says something that makes sense and draws the other over to the same line of thinking. The "bridge" that truly brings us together, more than anything else, is that we are two men of faith. Our bond is rooted firmly in our relationship with God Who is always at the center of our lives.

I profoundly look forward to many decades of grinding, building, and winning with Benny, as well as helping as many people as humanly possible along the way.

—Kareem "Biggs" Burke