

## /strə'tējik/

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#### **What is your favorite word?**

Strategic. It's more than a word to me—more like a philosophy. On great days when I have achieved a goal that I'm particularly proud of, I can reflect on this idea and be proud of the strategic steps that I took to allow me to obtain my goal. On challenging days, it becomes a reminder to focus on the things that I can control—much easier said than done!—and devote my time and energy to determining how I can effectively and efficiently get things back on the right track.

#### **How do you define it?**

For me, "strategic" means acting with intent and purpose and being ready for the opportunity that has yet to even present itself. In my professional life this means striving to find a balance between being fully present and engaged in the moment, while continuously assessing my environment for opportunities to grow. This could be an opportunity to develop a new skill, identify an opportunity for collaboration, or gain fresh insight through listening to a different perspective. As scientists, we're trained to think critically in a methodical, strategic manner, and I believe this to be one of my strongest assets, because it means that no matter what I'm faced with, I'm confident I can obtain the information and resources needed to develop a plan of action to move forward.

#### **Has your word influenced you during your career, or is it a word that you have chosen retrospectively?**

This word is one that has steadily emerged over the years and has definitely influenced me during my career, even through the times when I've been uncertain of where my next step may lead me. The most rewarding experiences and biggest victories I've experienced professionally have come as a result of working and thinking strategically.

#### **What other interests do you have?**

I really enjoy spending time with my family, listening to music, and attending concerts when I am able to do so. I love many genres, but one of my favorites is '70s funk/soul music exemplified by bands like Earth, Wind, and Fire. I recently began



learning to play the bass guitar out of a desire to do something new, and to have a greater connection with my favorite classic funk songs. 🎸

*Johnna Frierson, PhD, is Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Pratt School of Engineering at Duke University. A native of Rock Hill, SC, she received her bachelor's degree in biology at Furman University, and her PhD in microbiology and immunology at Vanderbilt University. Her interests and expertise lie in examining and identifying solutions to challenges at the intersection of STEM, education, and diversity. Dr. Frierson translates this expertise into developing innovative programs and initiatives to enhance recruitment and retention of students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds, support student development, and expand community outreach to inspire the next generation of STEM scholars.*