Ora Denise Scales, Featured By Influential Women, Turns A Deep Commitment To Learning Into A Lasting Educational Legacy



DUNBAR, WV, UNITED STATES, September 25, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Through Perseverance, Professional Development, and Advocacy for Learners, Ora Is Creating Opportunities for Others to Discover Their Potential

Dunbar, West Virginia – Ora Denise Scales is an accomplished mentor, professional development leader, lifelong learner, and advocate for educational opportunity whose personal journey has become the foundation for a mission centered on helping others recognize their potential. Her path into higher education began later in life, but what started as a personal decision to pursue a degree has developed into a broader commitment to mentorship, leadership development, student advocacy, and creating educational opportunities that can benefit future generations.

At age 55, Ora returned to college through the University of Phoenix with a clear goal: to create a new legacy through education. Her decision came with significant challenges, but she refused to allow circumstances to determine what she could accomplish. During her academic journey, she underwent chemotherapy for breast cancer, faced multiple knee replacement surgeries, and experienced the loss of both of her parents in 2016. Yet even during some of the most difficult moments of her life, she continued attending class and moving toward her goals.

Ora's determination eventually led her to graduate summa cum laude with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, including a certificate in Human Resource Management. She subsequently pursued her Master of Business Administration in Business Administration,

Management and Operations and has set her sights on doctoral studies in Education Curriculum Development, which she plans to begin in January 2027.

Her academic accomplishments carry particular significance because Ora is a first-generation college graduate from the marriage of William Edward Mitchell and Johnnie Bell Mitchell. Across several generations, she became the first to advance beyond a fourth-grade education level, making her educational journey more than a personal accomplishment. It represents a new chapter in a family legacy and demonstrates what can become possible when someone chooses to pursue a goal despite the obstacles standing in the way.

For Ora, perseverance is not simply a quality she admires; it is a principle she lives by. She attributes her success to tenacity, perseverance, and what she calls her “don’t-quit attitude.” Even when undergoing chemotherapy or recovering from knee replacement surgeries, she continued working toward her education. At times, she would ask her husband to bring her laptop to her bed because she was determined not to stop attending class.

She credits that persistence in part to the example of her grandmother, Ora Bell Mitchell, after whom she was named. Her grandmother worked at a hospital for 40 years and, according to Ora, never missed a day. That example of consistency and commitment has remained deeply influential throughout her life.

Ora describes her approach to progress as being similar to a woodchuck chipping away at a task. Each day, she believes in doing something productive that moves her closer to the goal. Her philosophy is rooted in the belief that “the you in you” is what ultimately gets things started. She encourages people to take care of themselves, remain committed to their dreams, and continue taking steps forward even when progress seems slow.

That philosophy has naturally extended into her work as a mentor and professional development leader. Ora serves in mentorship and professional development capacities through organizations and honor societies, including Ambition in Motion through Delta Mu Delta, Golden Key International Honour Society, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, and the National Society of Leadership and Success. She is also a member of the National Black MBA Association’s Charlotte, North Carolina, chapter.

Her professional and academic affiliations also include lifetime membership in the Golden Key International Honor Society and the Worldwide Women’s Association, along with membership in Delta Mu Delta. Through these connections, Ora continues to engage with individuals who are pursuing academic, professional, and personal growth.

At the center of her mission is a desire to help people understand that their circumstances do not have to define their possibilities. This is particularly important to Ora in her work with neurodivergent learners. As someone who identifies as a kinesthetic learner with dyslexia, she understands firsthand that traditional approaches to education do not work equally well for

every student.

Rather than viewing learning differences solely as obstacles, Ora advocates for recognizing the strengths that can accompany different ways of processing information. Her experiences have strengthened her desire to help students discover learning approaches that work for them and develop greater confidence in their abilities.

Her long-term goal is to become a university professor, where she hopes to combine her academic experience, professional development background, and passion for mentorship to support students directly. Her planned doctoral studies in Education Curriculum Development represent another step toward that goal.

Mentorship has also given Ora important guidance throughout her own career. One of the most influential sources of career advice she received came from her mentor, Pastor Paul Anthony Dunn. He shared two principles with her that she continues to carry with her.

The first was that she is where she is because of the choices she has made. For Ora, that principle reinforced the importance of taking ownership of her path and recognizing the role that personal decisions play in shaping the direction of a life and career.

The second principle was that whenever God is about to do something new in her life, she meets new people. Ora has carried both lessons through major transitions, using them as reminders to take responsibility for her decisions while remaining open to the relationships and opportunities that emerge along the way.

That openness is particularly evident in the way she approaches challenges. One of the difficulties she encounters in her mentoring and professional development work is helping people commit to moving forward. Life can create circumstances that prevent individuals from taking the next step, requiring Ora to remain flexible and adjust her approach.

When someone is unable to move forward, she does not necessarily see the situation as the end of the process. Instead, she may pause, work with someone else, reconnect later, or help the individual navigate whatever circumstances are preventing progress. She understands that people can sometimes find themselves in what she describes as a storm, unable to see clearly in any direction. Her role is often to help them find a way through that moment.

Her own experiences have given her a deep understanding of perseverance. Beyond her academic challenges, Ora has overcome breast cancer and significant physical difficulties related to her knee surgeries. After one knee replacement procedure went wrong and she nearly lost her left leg, she was faced with another major obstacle. Yet once again, she continued moving forward.

Ora also encourages young women entering professional environments to develop resilience

from the beginning. Her message is straightforward: “no” should not be treated as a reason to abandon a goal. She encourages women to establish SMART goals, remain committed to their vision, and avoid allowing external or internal distractions to derail their progress.

Active listening is another skill she considers essential. In professional situations, she believes that missing a single detail can affect an opportunity, a relationship, or a potential agreement. Paying attention, understanding what others are communicating, and remaining focused can therefore make an important difference.

Ora uses the metaphor of bricks to explain how she approaches rejection. Every “no,” she says, can be viewed as another brick thrown in someone’s direction. The question becomes what the person chooses to do with it. Rather than continually ducking, she encourages people to use those bricks to construct something.

Her own life provides the example. She was told that she was too old to return to school and that she would be 59 by the time she graduated. She was also told that it was too late to start a foundation. Instead of allowing those statements to determine what she would do, she used them as motivation to keep moving forward.

That philosophy now informs another important part of her vision: the establishment of the Johnny B. Mitchell Legacy Foundation, named in honor of her mother. The foundation is intended to provide scholarships for mothers and daughters who pursue higher education together and graduate together. Through this initiative, Ora hopes to encourage families to create educational legacies that continue across generations.

The concept reflects the larger purpose behind her own story. Education changed the trajectory of her life, and she wants others to have opportunities to experience that same transformation. By supporting mothers and daughters together, the foundation can encourage education as a shared family achievement rather than an individual accomplishment.

Underlying all of Ora’s professional and personal endeavors are what she calls the four F’s of her life: Family, Friends, Finances, and Fun. Family comes first because it provides her with a foundation and support system. Friends matter because she values people who believe in her, challenge her, and encourage her to continue moving forward. Finances represent responsibility and the importance of being able to care for herself and others. Fun serves as a reminder that life should also be enjoyed.

For Ora, balance comes from maintaining space for all four.

Beyond these principles, she embraces another philosophy: giving is living. She believes that doing good for others and putting positive energy into the world creates a cycle of generosity that can eventually return to the giver. This belief is reflected in her dedication to mentorship, education, professional development, and the creation of opportunities for others.

Ora Denise Scales' journey demonstrates that education does not have to follow a conventional timeline and that a late beginning does not have to limit the destination. Her return to college at 55, her academic accomplishments, her continued pursuit of advanced education, and her commitment to mentoring others have all become parts of a broader mission.

As she prepares for doctoral studies and continues developing the Johnny B. Mitchell Legacy Foundation, Ora remains focused on creating pathways for learners, encouraging women to persevere through rejection, and helping individuals recognize the strengths within themselves.

For Ora, every step forward is another opportunity to turn perseverance into progress—and personal achievement into a legacy that can benefit others for generations to come.

Learn More about Ora Denise Scales:

Through her Influential Women profile: https://influentialwomen.com/connect/oradenise-scales

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