

CLEOPHUS (CLEO) FRANKLIN JR.

FOUNDER, PRESIDENT & CEO
FRANKLIN STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS



Cleophus “Cleo” Franklin Jr.’s leadership experience and expertise has been globally recognized, as his passion for business development, developing robust brand strategies, and designing and implementing innovative, disruptive business models have benefited many iconic brands across multiple industries. Franklin’s values and beliefs have always been centered on approaching difficult challenges with curiosity and maintaining a beginner’s mindset. He is a purpose driven leader who embraces servant leadership and investing in the personal and professional development of the next generation of leaders. Franklin grew up in Chicago’s inner-city West Side in a family of nine children and was raised by parents who brought their resourceful no-excuses, community-service and education-first mentality to the family. Although growing up in urban America, his industry expertise is deeply connected to agriculture, spanning over thirty years as a senior executive working for three major global agriculture brands.

Franklin is a published author, as his global leadership book “Coffee With Cleo” was launched in June 2020. Cleo’s book highlights Ten leadership lessons from his 30 year global business executive career with John Deere, Case-New Holland and Mahindra, through artful & engaging storytelling. It showcases how one can navigate challenges successfully in our ever-changing, fast paced, tough and complex business world by using an innovative entrepreneurship mindset and proven framework to improve not just your livelihood, but more importantly your life.

Franklin is also an entrepreneur. He founded Franklin Strategic Solutions (franklinss.com), a global consulting business that focuses on leadership development, business development, business/brand strategy, keynote speaking, and executive coaching across all business and non-profit industries.

He also founded the Franklin Leadership Foundation, with his undergrad alma mater Morningside College as the foundation partner. The foundation partners with businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organizations to develop future leaders through internships, scholarships, and mentoring access for students to top business leaders. Franklin also serves as an adviser and investor for several new business ventures from vertical farming, STEM education technology, equipment solution manufacturing, to multi-sided digital platforms.

Prior to creating Franklin Strategic Solutions, Franklin spent eight years with Mahindra as chief marketing officer and EVP of strategic planning for Mahindra Americas. During his tenure, he led new business development, strategic planning, marketing, corporate social responsibility, market research, product development, and dealer development for North America and South America. During his tenure, the company doubled their brand awareness, increased revenue by seven times, and is now ranked among the top three tractor manufacturers in the 0-120 horsepower tractor industry in North America. Franklin's game changing and innovative brand growth strategies also spanned internationally as he helped develop Mahindra's acclaimed "Come Rise With Us" global brand strategy.

His brand building contributions helped propel the company to new levels of recognition, resulting in Mahindra being ranked number one in Marketing & Advertising for eight consecutive years in the annual Agriculture Equipment Dealers Association (EDA) Survey. Other awards include the American Marketing Association Website of the Year Crystal Award, the Indo-American Corporate Excellence Award for Corporate Social Responsibility, the World Fest Remi Global Advertising Award, and the Grand Prix Advertising Award in Japan. These efforts landed Franklin, along with his colleagues, as the first entrants into Mahindra's Hall of Fame for business performance, distinction, and excellence in 2017.

Before joining Mahindra, Franklin served as vice president of sales and operations for Case New Holland Agriculture North America. His career also includes twenty-one years at John Deere, where he held numerous strategic, finance, sales, business development, operations, and marketing executive leadership roles. Franklin served on the board of directors for Mahindra Agriculture North America, Mahindra's Global Diversity board, the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM) Finance, Vitaliga Farm Technologies, and the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) foundation board of directors. In 2016, he received the Honorary American FFA Degree, awarded to members who have demonstrated through their contributions the highest level of commitment to agriculture, focused on developing the next generations of farmers through local and national community partnerships.

Franklin earned a master's degree from the Kenan-Flagler School of Business at the University of North Carolina and a bachelor's degree from Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. He was inducted into the Morningside "M-Club" Hall of Fame in 2018 as one of the school's all-time leading scorers. Franklin also teaches at the University of Houston Marilyn Davies Business MBA School as a senior corporate fellow and currently serves on the board of directors for Texas Future Farmers of America (FFA), Laddering Your Success, Keaton Township Project IYOTA Ag-Solutions, Explore.US, and Morningside College. He and his wife, Lois, reside in Cypress, Texas, with their family.