

Leadership Profile of Nora Lichtash, Women's Community Revitalization Project

Jennifer Olney 20 January 2020



"Leadership is about creating a culture where each of us is willing to take calculated risks and learning from all outcomes -- victories and disappointments."

Nora Lichtash

Nora Lichtash has been at the helm of the Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) for more than

30 years. WCRP was founded in 1987 as Philadelphia's first, and only, women-led community development organization, with the goal of finding ways to improve the neighborhood and better the lives of local women and their families. Over the past 30 plus years WCRP has established itself as a leader in advocating for equitable, healthy community development while supporting women who are most impacted by unfair policies and community disinvestment to develop leadership skills.

Throughout these more than 30 years, Nora has been fighting alongside community members while also growing WCRP into the leading organization that it is today. However, when you ask Nora how she would describe her leadership style she answers simply that "she wouldn't." For Nora, leadership implies that she knows some things. But, more importantly, she knows that she also needs a lot of different voices at the table, especially the voices you wouldn't think of first. From the start, she knew that in order to thrive, WCRP needed to center the voices of people who are experiencing the issues they cared about, and that they would have the best idea of how to make change. This recognition led to the development of an important part of WCRP's work, and a focus for Nora throughout her career -- leadership development. Recognizing that women and families who are most directly impacted by unfair policies and disinvestment know first-hand the dramatic impact leadership can have on everyday life, Nora has worked

hard to develop and support low-income women with necessary leadership skills to lead the fight for the resources and policies they need.

While Nora is quick to highlight the importance of partners and working with people with lived experience, she also acknowledges that over the years she has learned that in order to be a leader, “you have to take up your space.” You have to remember that there are things you know and that you have value to add. You have also have to know, as you step into your space, that you will make mistakes and you have to be ready to be called on them. However, she doesn’t let this fear of making mistakes inhibit her ability to make decisions. According to Nora, “Leadership is about creating a culture of where each of us is willing to take calculated risks.”

Instead, when things don’t go her way, Nora tries to focus on what she can learn from the experience and how she can document that learning. As she knows from her more than three decades of hands on experience -- things are going to happen. However, she doesn’t let it slow her down.

When asked how she measures success, Nora shared that “success is holding onto values and parts of the model that work, even if it’s hard and others think it’s stupid.” One of the values Nora and WCRP hold dear, is excellence. For her, success is a continuous celebration of wins and not being hard on yourself when things don’t

work out. She finds joy in working with the people she spends her days with and knows that the work they are doing matters. However, she is also mindful that it's not enough to just exist. It is important to continuously question what value you are bringing to the space and how you can do what you do with integrity.

Author bio

Jennifer Olney currently serves as the Community Investment Officer for the Partnership to End Homelessness at the Greater Washington Community Foundation (Community Foundation). Through this work she brings together the public and private sectors to advance effective and innovative solutions to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring in Washington, DC.

Prior to joining the Community Foundation, Jennifer worked on national efforts around housing and homelessness as the director of Networks and Programs at Funders Together to End Homelessness and the development coordinator for the National Alliance to End Homelessness. In these roles she worked with funders and partners across the country who are dedicated to ending homelessness.

Jennifer earned her bachelor's degree in communications from Clemson University and completed her master's in nonprofit leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. In

her free time, Jennifer enjoys traveling and a great meal with family and friends.