

Leadership Profile: Diane Cornman- Levy, Executive Director of WOMEN'S WAY, in Philadelphia

Valerie Roiz 23 January 2018

As an intern in Diane's organization, I have had the pleasure of getting to know this dynamic and fierce leader, day in and out. Her commitment to gender equality and economic security makes WOMEN'S WAY lucky to have her leadership. She brings more than 30 years of political, fundraising, and nonprofit experience to her role in the organization.

As I sat down with Diane, I was pleased to listen to her explain her passion for fairness and equality for all.

How Diane Describes Her Leadership Style and Tips to Fundraising

Diane believes that telling a story and having empathy is the key to running a successful nonprofit. One has to believe in the mission they are describing rather than trying to "sell it." Success is all about relationships and understanding the collaborative process. She emphasizes that understanding a funder's needs and hesitations is the best way to secure funding and carryout your

organization's mission. Putting yourself in your funder's shoes creates trust and a joint process where both parties in the relationship benefit from a new initiative. Asking for money is not her clear objective, she wants to excite someone to believe in her mission, and she believes money will follow.

Diane believes in a "Shared Leadership Model." She believes everyone in an organization needs the resources and encouragement to carry out their everyday tasks. She believes in autonomy of every department and empowering her staff to take leadership. Feedback from every staff member can grow an organization immensely.

As an executive director in an organization in a restructuring and strategic planning phase, she finds it imperative to not cut any one out of the organization. She lines up every employee's needs with the organization's mission for a connected and collaborative leadership approach. She focuses on the growth of the organization through data-driven decisions and modern approaches to communications and outreach. She is currently spending her time rebuilding WOMEN'S WAY's visibility within the community and plans to develop strategic partnerships within the community to achieve equity for all.

"I lead by helping other people become leaders."

How did Diane Become Involved in the Nonprofit World and Become the Executive

Director that She is Today?

As a child, her parents were very involved in social justice work. Her parents instilled this core value in Diane and her siblings very early in life, making achieving social justice a driving force in all the work she does. This laid the foundation for understanding the inequities that are prevalent in society and guides all her decisions and actions today.

She began her career in health care as a physical therapist in Chicago and began as a professor of physical therapy at Thomas Jefferson University. In 1991, when homelessness in Philadelphia was at an all-time high, she began volunteering with Project HOME, an organization focused on assisting the homeless gain better access to healthcare. She then went on to establish a program for the homeless in Philadelphia, by working with her students to provide physical therapy services.

Diane knew she had a calling so she left her full-time faculty position to open her own nonprofit organization helping artists with severe mental illness. Diane and her husband remodeled an old warehouse and opened a community center in North Philadelphia called Journey Home. This community center expanded into selling artwork and providing afterschool programs and summer camps with absolutely zero nonprofit experience. Diane then went on to run for the seat of State Representative of the 168th District, where she secured the highest

percentage of votes on the Democratic ticket. Between 2007 and 2015, Diane served as the Executive Director of the Federation of Neighborhood Centers (FNC), a non-profit organization that provides health and human services to more than 35,000 disadvantaged individuals per year.

"I did not have a mentor, I did not have a teacher. I did this all by myself, by tossing myself into the fire and using my commitment to social equity as my drive. Learn by doing is my motto."

To learn more about Diane's work with WOMEN'S WAY and their continuous fight for gender equality, visit womensway.org.