COMMUNITY RADIO SHOW

"Strengthening Communities in an Intergenerational Environment"

Community Radio Show Text

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TODD: Welcome to the December Community Radio Show, "Strengthening Communities in an Intergenerational Environment." My name is Todd Wellman and I am with Public Allies, the Community Strengthening Training & Technical Assistance provider of the Corporation for National & Community Service. Today's call is sponsored by Strong Communities, the premier community strengthening institute held on March 22nd & 23rd in Milwaukee, WI where you learn to increase buy-in from stakeholders, create more sustainable programs, and expand the capacity of your organization. For more information, visit www.regonline.com/98814 or call 414.273.0533 x20.

TODD: For the first 25 minutes or so, Amena Johnson, Training Manager for Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning Training Network in Philadelphia, PA, will share how to create a more intentional intergenerational environment.

Intergenerational work is more prevalent than anyone thinks. Most workplaces are an eclectic mix of the GI Generation, Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Yers. Learning to identify and nurture the unique qualities of the different generations can enrich your workplace, revitalize your volunteer experience and foster rich dialogues that otherwise may be lost. Today we will hear how to create environments that intentionally nurture intergenerational work so that we can increase people's contribution to your organization.

Amena Johnson previously was with the National Conference for Community and Justice Delaware region as the Program Manager. She has also served as an AmeriCorps member in Delaware with Public Allies and she is a Certified Instructor of Trainers for the Girl Scouts of the USA. Amena received a BFA in Drama Therapy from Longwood University and an MS in Organizational Leadership from Wilmington College.

Please welcome Amena to the show.

TODD: So Amena, what inspires you to do your work?

AMENA: I think it has a lot to do with my personal background. I'm an only child and my mother was the closest person to my age. In the household we had people with 78 years difference between the oldest and youngest person. I really had this interest for working with people who were older than myself. As I got older, I started working more with youth as well. My life has been multigenerational setting. Paths shouldn't just crossover when the kids go sing at the nursing home. Also, when important things like singing visits happen, what do the two sides measurably get out of it? Also, my grandfather used to go out with me to help get people to vote. I was also a camp counselor and a volunteer at a nursing home.

TODD: Before we go on, can you first list the various generations you usually refer to in your work and then define the word 'generation'?

AMENA: Sure. There are four main generations I refer to. The first is the GI or Greatest Generation (1925-1945) (WWII, Pearl Harbor, Depression). The next group is Baby Boomers (1946-1964) (Civil Rights, Woodstock, Assassinations). After this is Generation X (1965-1981) (Challenger, Berlin Wall, Rodney King). Finally, there is Generation Y (with many other names) (1982-present) (Oklahoma City, School Shooting, 9-11).

Generation usually refers to a cohort of people born in about a 20 year time period. The people are held together by environmental factors like war, technology, and pivotal events. The Greatest Generation, also known as the GI Generation, was defined by the second world war. The difficult part of defining who belongs in a generation is that there are people born on the edges of official generations. Such that, people born officially in one generation may relate better to different generation. For example, while the Baby Boomer Generation starts with people born in 1946, someone born in 1945 may well identify as a Baby Boomer.

TODD: Are there people who don't want to identify with any official generation?

AMENA: Yes. That's fine, too. Generations are a loose way to help people gain a general sense of people's backgrounds. It's a good way to point out to Generation Xers and Gen - Yers for example that while people in the GI Generation use computers Email might not be the most effective way to communicate with them based on generalities garnered from many of those people's lives.

TODD: Explain to us what you mean by "Intergenerational."

AMENA: Well technically it's at least two or more generations working together towards a common goal. But it's also everyday life. Even if they are working with specific populations, the adults are working with one child generation, but still multigenerational. There are four generations in the workplace today and it's the first time that's ever happened. So intergenerational work is more important than ever.

TODD: What are some tips for people to nurture intergenerational work?

AMENA: Well, before we go there, I think we have to cover that this is about Asset Based Community Development or ABCD work. ABCD believes that each person has talents and abilities to give, and that it's a good idea to create situations in which people have the chance to give those gifts. In this vain, intergenerational work questions the power dynamic of who is allowed to be sharing talents and gifts. For example, in a mentoring relationship, it's so often an older person tutoring a younger person and the younger person is seen as a vessel to be filled. ABCD work points out that it's not just about the youth learning from the adults, but that reciprocal relationships are possible.

TODD: Ok, so what are some specific applications then?

AMENA: Here's a list of ways to recognize intergenerational work:

1. Well, from the tutoring example, practice reciprocity. For example, perhaps the tutoring is about math, but the student gets to choose that the math will be applied to something in her life like sports and math. It's about setting the stage as one of discussion and respect and not just teacher / student.

2. If you are going to have people working on a project, what do you know about those people? Ask them questions about what they like to do and what important events in their lives influence their service.

3. If you are trying to attract a specific audience such as 50 plus but only end up with 20-somethings, review your recruitment methods. For example, if you are only recruiting via Email, you may be missing a large segment of the population.

4. Take stock of your own organization and recognize how many generations are involved. Then, ask the different groups of people to brainstorm in small groups about the best ways that they feel valued in the workplace.

5. Define roles that are clear and meaningful to participants. Someone who is 5 and someone who is 18 are going to have different levels of experience, but you can still make things meaningful and not just opt for childcare while the real volunteers are working.

6. Practice equal recognition. If you give the adults a plaque, don't just say that the kids are cute.

TODD: Can you mention a specific program that really illustrates the work we're talking about today?

AMENA: Yes, in fact, here at The Center for Intergenerational Learning we have a program called SHINE. It links college students with immigrants and refugees who are age 50 or older. In community centers, churches, the students tutor these older adults in English, history, and civics. In turn, while perhaps not always formal, the students learn about that person's culture and life. Good example of a reciprocal relationship that's not just about the young person gaining something from an older person.

TODD: Can you talk for a moment about conflict that can arise in trying to facilitate valued intergenerational settings?

AMENA: Well, a lot of conflict arises from stereotypes. An example is that "Gen X-ers are part of the Slacker Generation." What's not understand or looked at regarding stereotypes are the social beliefs behind the actions of people in different generations. For example, the word "slacker" is used for Generation X-ers because they appear to have a poor work ethic, but in contrast, Generation X-ers see themselves as having a sense of work-life balance that previous generations should imitate. Gen X-ers believe "we are going to play as hard as we work."

To take this further, looking at generations previous to Gen X, The GI Generation had a more industrial society in which people had to work longer hours ad do more manual labor. World War II is also seen as a one of the GI Generation's greatest accomplishments. Baby Boomers did not have success in war to leave as their legacy so they took on work as their greatest achievement. Because of this, Generation X-ers were the first generation of latch key kids and they saw their parents working a lot for little return in the face of the great downsizings of the 1980s. So, GI-ers and Boomers might call X-ers slackers, but X-ers see themselves as healthy.

To go even further, you can apply this to Generation Y, they are the most supervised and planned for generation ever. This is why Generation Y-ers may seem annoying in the work place because they are used to high supervision so they might consistently ask for advice on every step and check in with their bosses a lot.

You can see how a single stereotype can have a lot of background to it—and a lot of actions taken because of it.

TODD: Can you share a story about a situation that you saw go from bad to good?

AMENA: Sure… (Amena share story about Gen Y incident).

TODD: Thanks for that. We're now going to go to audience questions. To maximize our time, remember that when you're asking Amena a question, please limit yourself to questions regarding today's topic instead of sharing best practices or stories from your work.

This text serves as a reference for the Community Radio Show but it does not serve as an official transcript of the recording.