

Ascending Leaders Reach For Success

By Margie DuBrow, Director

Both Alissa McBride and Carla Neal entered the Nonprofit Ascending Leadership Program at a critical point in their professional careers. They wanted to prepare for the move to executive positions. Even with a decade of experience under their belts, they thought there was more to learn. They found what they were looking for in seminars on leadership styles, team building, financial management, measuring organizational results, and career development.

“The program really helped me with my confidence,” said Carla Neal, who serves as Program Director at Turning Points for Children. “It helped me see there is more than one path into leadership.”

Alissa McBride, Community Prevention Coordinator for Family Services of Montgomery County found the topics to be on the mark. “You seem to have your finger on the pulse of what organizations are dealing with,” she says. “I was really pleased with quality of the presenters. All the presenters had a lot of energy. The workshops were very interactive.”

For Neal, the seminar assignments helped bring more clarity to her role within the organization and her long-term goals. She explained, “I interviewed our CEO and learned more about how he made his decisions, and why. It was really helpful. There were a lot of intangibles for me – not really believing I could be a CEO. Now I feel that I can.”

That’s just what NELI director Margie DuBrow hopes to hear.

“One of our biggest concerns is that as people make the shift to senior management, they don’t get the support and training they need to be able to think from an organizational point of view. It’s quite a leap, going from running a department to leading an organization. We want to help middle managers think from a systems perspective. They also need to be aware of the ways challenges and responsibilities change when they become senior managers.”

According to research done by the Bridgespan Group, employee development is a weakness in many nonprofit organizations.

“When asked to consider the statement, ‘We have development plans for current and future leaders in our organization,’ the average score was almost 18 percent lower than the overall average, suggesting that respondents considered this a great weakness within their organizations. Only 6 percent of respondents felt it was an organizational strength.”

DuBrow says the program is focused on improving these numbers by helping ascending leaders in their overall career planning process.

“Some of our alumni participate as panelists in a coaching session where they give valuable insights about how middle managers can recruit mentors, to help them in their careers.”

“Others give advice about how they can effectively present themselves for job interviews that can lead to a promotion. One of our alumni co-lead a workshop on managing organizational change, using a case example drawn from his agency. They really enjoy giving a hand to the next generation of leaders.”

DuBrow adds, “Our whole purpose at NELI is to help people gain knowledge about best practices in their field in a way that is very practitioner oriented. We want them to learn concepts that they are able to take back to their jobs immediately. “

Kathrin Brellocks, Director of Public Health Programs at the Maternity Care Coalition, agrees. “The workshop on delegating leadership was very helpful. It made me much more conscious that I need to let go more, trust in other people more. Now I give suggestions, but let staff try their own way of approaching a problem.”

Brelloch also found deep value in attending the program within a cohort of her peers. She says, “Being together in a group of peers who were dealing with similar challenges felt really good. There is so much you can learn from the experiences of others! You can’t replace that.”

McBride encourages her peers to participate in the program. She says, “It is really important to have the overall perspective of what it takes to run the agency. Having the broader perspective makes us more effective as leaders. Make time for this because it is worthwhile.”

The Nonprofit Ascending Certificate Program is currently accepting applications for the 2012 class due November 30, 2011. For more information visit www.brynmawr.edu/neli/ascending_leadership or contact Margie DuBrow at mdubrow@brynmawr.edu