November 2009

A Fundraiser's Newsletter

Special warning!

This issue of the newsletter is devoted to my family slogan, one of my most treasured beliefs and fundamental values: "People eat, sleep and make love in languages other than English, in colors other than white, and in pairings other than opposite sex. I am committed to giving voice to and fighting for that beauty."

So this is a rant. And if you don't want to read my rant about privilege and power - then scroll to the bottom. There you'll find some of the regular newsletter stuff.

White privilege - and other privilege, too

As I always say: "I'm a white, heterosexual, well-educated, affluent, able-bodied woman. I win on all counts except gender. Because everywhere in the world - including the USA - it's a disadvantage to be a woman."

As a white person, I have an advantage over people of color. As a heterosexual, I'm treated better than my gay and lesbian friends. My parents paid for my education - and that education has surely helped position me. It's easier, too, being able-bodied.

My race /ethnicity and sexual orientation are unearned privileges. My education and affluence - certainly some of my own work - are also a result of "affirmative action." The affirmative action - unearned privilege - of my race and the earnings and family support of my mother and father.

Read Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

Read this wonderful article from the 1980s. It's still relevant! You'll find it in various locations / in various formats on the web.

Now she's written two new pieces, both funded by the Saint Paul Foundation: "White Privilege: An Account to Spend" and "White People Facing Race: Uncovering the Myths That Keep Racism in Place."

I urge you to read Peggy's earlier piece. I urge you to read her two new pieces. Contact Dr. McIntosh at the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley MA 02481. wcwonline.org/seed.

What's your privilege? I've told you mine.

Let's quit talking about the disadvantaged. Instead, let's talk
about the advantaged. The all-too-often invisible advantages that we white people have. The all-too-often invisible advantages that men have...that we affluent have...

Once I was presenting a workshop on social justice and philanthropy at the AFP International Conference. I started talking about privilege. I asked the question, "What does privilege look like?" And then I planned to respond to my own question: "Privilege looks like me." But before I could answer my question, one person in the room of 50+ stood up. A white man, younger than me. I asked him, "Why are you standing?" And he responded, "Because you asked what privilege looks like. It looks like me, a white, straight man."

Most people enjoy some form of privilege. The challenge is, do we acknowledge it? Do we recognize that our too-often-invisible privilege is affirmative action? Do we speak out about our own privilege and acknowledge our advantage? Do we speak out against the lack of privilege of others? Let's open our eyes.

Peggy McIntosh opens our eyes to something else - the U.S. myth of meritocracy. She says, "The first part: The individual is the only unit of society. The second part: Whatever an individual ends up with in life must be what he or she wanted, worked for, earned and deserved....Everybody succeeds on his or her own merits."

But that's just false. People succeed because of lots of things, including (and sometimes mostly!) their invisible privilege.

Look around. What race and gender are most CEOs and most boards? What do the most affluent people look like? What do the people look like who fill our prisons? Just think about what money buys. Look around.

What are you doing with your privilege? Read Peggy's ideas. Invent your own. Remember, silence is consent. Ignoring one's own privilege disavows one's own affirmative action.

What questions do you ask about privilege & power?
1. What is power? Why does it matter?
2. How does power affect organizations?
3. How do power and privilege affect civil society and civic capacity?
4. What are the implications of having or not having power?
5. What is the language of power and how does language include or exclude people?
6. What is the responsibility of the individual or group to take power / become empowered?
7. How is power acquired? How do we create power? How do we share power? How do we give away power?
8. How could / should philanthropy serve as an empowering tool?

Do you stimulate conversations with these kinds of questions? What level of risk are you willing (and able) to take? Because level of risk is a thing of privilege, too.
Readings about privilege and injustice
1. Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Your Money for Social Change by Chuck Collins and Pam Rogers
2. You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train by Howard Zinn
5. Hope Dies Last by Studs Turkel
6. The Conscience of a Liberal by Paul Krugman
7. Philanthropy’s Moral Dilemma, Joyaux (PDF on my website.)

Useful information for fundraisers & nonprofits
Read Eric Qualman's book Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business. Really good and so many applications (and implications) for nonprofits.
Check out the Summer 2009 issue of the Nonprofit Quarterly. See: nonprofits and immigration; identifying levers of change; leadership in a connected world; executive recruitment,
Read September 2009 Harvard Business Review: sustainability and innovation; how strategy shapes structure; the female economy; too much information.
Silverstein and Sayre’s article "The Female Economy" is particularly useful for fundraisers. Read the data and make sure you start a women and philanthropy program. Information like:
-- Women represent the largest market opportunity in the world
-- 6 female consumer segments
-- Women make purchase decisions for more than 50% of home furnishings, vacations, homes, cars...
-- Women want to buy products and services from companies that do good for the world, especially for other women.
Want more frequent information about fund development, working with your board, writing better...and lots of other stuff? Read the blogs (updated weekly) on my homepage. You can subscribe to an RSS feed, too.

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