

Dear Task Force colleagues,

I have been thinking quite a lot since our meeting about the work ahead of us and how excited I am to be a part of this task force. I have come to some fairly interesting realizations – at least interesting to me. So I decided to use this format of a memo to you as a way to put down my thoughts. I initially thought this would be a note to self – but thought I'd share and see if any of you have been reflecting on the community governance part of your Antioch experience in your continuing life. This is about community – it's actually not about me, although it may seem that way....

While I was a student at Antioch, I was of course a member of the community, I benefitted from all that community provided, but I was never really active in CG, ComCil or AdCil. I voted, I knew who had been elected, I followed things in the Record, but it surprises me now that I did not take more advantage of the learning experience of community and community governance while I was there. Antioch was part of my very shy phase....

But here are some examples of how ingrained community became in the fiber of who I am.

- **Women Executive Directors' community:** In 1975 [after I'd established the DC office of NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League) in 1973], I was asked to be the Executive Director and the national office was moved to DC from New York. Knowing the challenge this would be for a young woman who had never taken a management course, I approached about 8 women who were leading nonprofit groups. I did not know most of them but knew they must be pretty amazing since our generation of women had not been raised to be leaders. I asked if they'd help if I needed help. They all confessed that they also had never taken management courses and I asked if they would all like to meet as a group. We formed a community that met monthly for several years. We helped write each other's bylaws and personnel policies; we helped each other deal with difficult boards and board chairs; we discussed how to fire difficult staff; we brought in experts when we needed them; we were a strong support system. Everything we said in our meetings was in confidence and this became a model of community that I have recreated many times.
- **ConsultingWomen:** For instance, in 1990 after I had my own consulting business for two years, I started being approached by friends who wanted to know how to start a business; how to set fees; how to market and even know how to describe skills and experiences. I said I did not know – that I was just making it up as I went along, but that I'd be happy to meet. Initially there were 7 or 8 of us who met monthly and it was another amazing support network in which we helped each other with marketing messages, wrote each other into contracts and talked through problem solving. After a year or so the group grew, but the men stopped coming. Eventually, we started calling ourselves ConsultingWomen. I believe it is because we were often admitting that there

were things we did not know and that we were sharing what we did know. This is a style that was more comfortable for women than for men – at that time. And in Washington, information is power and sharing information is like sharing power – and that did not happen often.... In any case, the group kept growing with meetings usually around my conference room table; and it morphed to adapt to changing communications with the internet. Now it is an active professional listserv that I manage for over 550 women who have their own consulting businesses in the DC area. Basic membership is free for the listserv, and full membership allows members to post their profiles on www.consultingwomen.com, a website I manage that we use for marketing our work and services. There are numerous subgroups of this community, such as MD and VA groups and the DC and International ConsultingWomen groups that I convene. And in every case, the sub-network is a support group, responding to requests for information, collaborating and helping each other find clients, writing each other into contracts and offering training to each other.

- **Community office space:** The second year of my consulting business, I moved my office from my home to a central downtown location. I signed a lease for 3,000 square feet, many times more than I needed with the vision of subleasing to other consultants – creating a community. I stayed in that office location for over 20 years. There were challenges of managing this community [with ever-changing subleases], but the community spirit of sharing, collaborating and mutual support was worth it!
- **Women's Information Network (WIN)** When I was just beginning my consulting business, I was asked by the Dukakis for President campaign if I'd go to Iowa before the caucuses. The campaign had many 20 somethings and needed some grownups – I was told. I met and worked with an exceptional young woman who was coordinating the Ames region as her first job out of college -- and we became lifelong friends. She and other young women who'd worked in the '88 presidential campaign moved to DC after the election and approached me after a few months for guidance on how to make Washington more welcoming to young, prochoice, Democratic women. They said they'd expected more from the second generation feminists (my age cohort) and did not find us helpful in opening doors for younger women. What emerged at a dinner I hosted with 8 young women and about the same number of my friends, was Women's Information Network, WIN www.winonline.org, a powerful network established to empower young women, create networking and mentoring opportunities and form networks (communities) specific to various careers and issues. I was asked to form and chair the Advisory Council [of mostly former young women] and each year since 1994, the Karen Mulhauser Award is given to the Washington woman leader who has done the most that year to help young women. WIN is a rare intergenerational community.
- Even while I was the national Executive Director of groups such as NARAL, Center for Education on Nuclear War and Citizens Against Nuclear War, I was usually the one who convened coalition and networking meetings. I always thought it was fine that there were many organizations with common goals because they often had different tactics and could offer different doors to enter

the common challenge -- and the policy debates. Some wanted to chain themselves to the White House fence while others wanted to sit in meetings – all are important if they respected each other's goals. I convened the coalition meetings, I organized collaborative efforts to approach candidates for Congress and delegates elected to the Democrat and Republican conventions, I mobilized collaborative networks to engage in voter registration and get out the vote efforts. It just made more sense to me to collaborate – build community.

Women for Obama: Now that I think of it, it is likely that Barack Obama's community organizing background is what attracted me early to his presidential campaign resulting in a contract as Senior Advisor to coordinate Women for Obama in the DC area.

• **National / grassroots connection** Since I was Executive Director of NARAL, I have acted on the belief that a national organization – especially if it has a Congressional agenda – is only as strong as its grassroots. It is not enough to have clever, well dressed, articulate lobbyists – there needs to be strong, active, visible constituent support to promote an advocacy agenda. In a way, even this is a kind of community building. This has played out in the kind of consulting I have done with nonprofits and I suppose it's why I've led the Antioch DC area chapter all these years.

I have often wondered why my whole modus operandi has been to build and strengthen community and coalitions. Now I know – my Antioch Community experience. After meeting with you recently, it is now clear to me that one does not have to be an active, visible member of Antioch's community and community governance to be a beneficiary of this valuable element of Antioch College. I also see why the University never did get it. Its students did not think of the campus as their community. As a University Trustee, I made a point of trying to find community on other campuses – and could not. Students had community back home where they lived and worked.

So, Task Force colleagues, if you got this far.... I'd be curious how Antioch community and community governance had an impact on you. And I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Karen