

Leadership for Real Life

DECEMBER 2017

Hello, it's Michelle Marcellus again. I'm sure a lot of you have heard my name. If you don't know me personally, I've been a consultant for the Erie County Board of Developmental Disabilities for a while now. I have Cerebral Palsy. I live on my own with the help of a staffing agency in Sandusky. I have a Bachelor's Degree from Kent State University. I graduated in 2005. I majored in Human Development and Family Studies. I am sharing this background about myself so that you all understand where I am coming from when you are reading this article.

Throughout my life, I have been a part of many self-advocacy groups. These groups have been important when moving through the stages of my life. In my years as a self-advocate, I have learned how important it is to be able to handle situations at work, at home, and with friends with appropriate social etiquette. Social etiquette tells us how we should treat other people in our lives. Social etiquette means lots of different things. It teaches us that we should behave differently with our friends and family at home than we would in the workplace. Many times in life, we are faced with the fact that we have to work together with people on a team, even though we may not like everyone on our team. Sometimes, conflict happens, and we have to know how to deal with that.

When I heard that Dr. Kitty Brandal was coming to the Erie County Board of DD in November 2017 to present a two-night course called "Leadership for Real Life," I decided to attend and share with all of you what I learned. Dr. Brandal has been a previous presenter and a good friend to the Erie County self-advocacy group. She is the president of a company called Corporate Compass Training and Development. She has over 20 years' experience training and teaching the U.S. Navy and business world. Dr. Brandal specializes in emotional intelligence and management. She also has expertise in diversity awareness and leadership development, everything it takes to become a strong leader. During her presentation, I learned a new way to think about conflict.

A conflict can be any disagreement we have with another person. Depending on how you handle the disagreement, it can either turn into a conflict or an experience you can learn from. Dr. Brandal taught me that, when it comes to conflict, we either throw it back at the person or group, duck to avoid conflict, or choose to "catch it" and work through the issue in some way. She showed us that a helpful hint when trying to work out a disagreement is to ask questions like "What questions do you have for me?" and "How can I be more supportive of your feelings?". It is also a good idea to ask the other person or group questions that start with "you" and not "I." This can help make people feel that you care about their opinions. It also is very useful when building an organization, working on a committee, or doing a group activity. During these types of activities, it is best that all of the people involved understand the group's goal and know the outcome that everyone wants. If this does not happen, it could cause conflict or disagreement. If conflict occurs, focus on what everyone involved can do together - not what you can't do.

When being a part of a group or organization, it is very valuable to learn to accept that someone will always make the final decision and that it may not be your favorite choice. I feel that being a part of a group or organization is a privilege, and it can teach us things about life and ourselves, even if we don't like the things we learn. Knowing that you were able to voice your opinion, even if it's not the one that the group chose, will teach everyone to have respect for the process and for others. Being respectful to others, no matter where you are, is an important part of social etiquette.

I'm glad I was able to be a part of Dr. Brandal's course and pass along these lessons about how to get along with others in many areas of our daily lives. I hope that you all can use these lessons every day.

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