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Leader Interview

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I interviewed the Senior Director of Partnerships and Special Events at Special Olympics Maryland, Sharon Perfetti. I met her through the work that I did with Cool Kids campaign as she was previously a part of their staff. Through my interview I also learned that she had been working in the nonprofit sector for the past 15 years. She started with an organization called Annie’s Playground, and then went on to Cool Kids Campaign and then more recently she became a freelancer that helped other nonprofits get started and set up. She was working as a freelancer from her house and decided that she missed being around people and took a side job at Camden Yards where she would organize and recruit nonprofits to raise money through their concession stands. A high school friend of hers is the Director of Operations for Special Olympics Maryland and when she reached out to her to invite some of their staff to a game, Sharon was surprised to be offered to come work with Special Olympics. When I asked how she decided she wanted to work in the nonprofit sector, she explained to me how, alongside her community, she started the Annie’s Playground organization. At the time she was a stay at home mom, and she received news that her friend’s six-year-old child was hit and killed by a drunk driver leaving the circus in Baltimore. The community came together to raise money and she was asked to be the General Coordinator and President. She noted how the sector chose her and from that point forward she was hooked and stayed in the nonprofit world. Next, I asked her what a normal day looks like for her, she described how nonprofit fundraising is so event focused, and every event is so different, which adds up to a lot of variety in her day to day work. She said that answering emails is something she does consistently, but otherwise she is always planning and traveling to different events. Lastly, she added how they do a lot of physical work in her organization because events tend to be off site, requiring lots of loading and unloading of trucks and setting up. Next, she described her leadership style as very lowkey and how she enjoyed working with people who are self-motivated because she doesn’t like having to keep people on task. When I asked how her leadership style helps her work with others within her organization she said that everyone there is pretty self-motivated and professional, which is nice because they all understand what needs to get done and they pitch in to help each other achieve their individual and mutual goals. She said that a self-serving person wouldn’t last at Special Olympics because it is obvious when another staffer isn’t pulling their weight. To my next question she elaborated on how people within her organization have similar leadership styles and how they work well together because they do not use aggression to get their way. She explained that the best part about working for a nonprofit organization is that most everyone is their to make a difference in someone’s life, she stated that all nonprofits have great missions and believing in that cause gives you a great reason to go to work every day. Like the speakers we had in class she agreed that the hardest part of working in a nonprofit is raising money, since there is so much competition and it is difficult to get people to choose your cause over another. Lastly, we discussed what she feels is the biggest change amongst nonprofit functioning in recent years. She voiced how she noticed that tax laws have changed, making it harder to get a write off for donating, which affects some people’s motivation to give. And she also cited how there are new nonprofits being created everyday which makes for a lot more competition. And the very last thing she noted was how social media changed the way that they can make an impact on their potential audience.