

BOARD STUDY

La Montañita Food Co-op

Board of Directors Meeting – October 20, 2015

Topic – Diversity, Equity, and Privilege: Part 2

Led by: Pauline Lucero, Guest Speaker

Description of Topic: At last month's Board Study, the Board discussed issues of diversity and equity in the co-op's membership, staff, and on the Board. This Board Study is part two of two. Pauline Lucero shared insights based on her one-on-one conversations with several Board members and her reading of the minutes from the September Board Study.

Pauline Lucero Introduction

I am a life-long New Mexican, and I have lived in Albuquerque since 1985. I am the mother of three children. My formal education includes a Masters in Counseling. I have a lot of experience serving on Boards and working with Boards, including serving as the past Board President for Enlace Comunitario and as incoming Board President of Emerge New Mexico. My introduction to cultural competence was through a family advocacy center where I was a therapist. I also work with adults with disabilities, primarily with Spanish-speaking families. I have also worked a lot with Native American communities around the country. Rosemary Romero is a friend, and made the connection.

I want to thank you, the Board, for your efforts. The goal today is to further your conversations about diversity in the La Montañita organization.

Framing the Conversation

I believe that cultural competence is a journey, not a destination – a process, not an event. Cultural humility is key. This means that you are always open to learning and also open to the many different types of diversity that there are. Diversity is so much more than skin color. When we think about ourselves and the many hats we wear in our lifetimes, we can see that diversity encompasses race and ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, and others. While we may have privilege in one area, we may not in another.

Every single one of us as a human being has had an experience of being marginalized. And it feels awful. If we can remember what that felt like, we can be more ready to hear what it is like for other people. One of my favorite quotes: *We want to be judged by the intent of our actions. We want to judge others on the impact of their actions.*

We have a common goal. We don't want anyone to feel attacked or judged. Someone in a workshop once said, "I want to participate in sticking my foot in my mouth." Mistakes are okay. Groups don't get very far when individuals feel defensive.

Diversity training is not like getting a CPR card. It is an ongoing process.

Theme 1. La Montañita Policy and Practice

- La Montañita does not have a diversity policy in place. This might be something to think about. (What if a decision was made that policies should address the needs of young families, for example?) A Board member points out that La Montañita has a policy only in the sense that there are no policies that exclude anyone.
- Who do you want your Board to reflect? Enlace Comunitario recently decided that they needed a member of the LGBT community on the Board, and that they needed more men on the Board, so they strategically recruited men and people who identify as LGBT.
- At last month's meeting, you discussed the fact that La Montañita does not currently collect any demographic information on its member-owners. If you started to gather information on the demographics of your member-owners, what would you do with it? Why would that information be important to you?
- Do we want the Board and staff to be reflective of the membership? Do we want our membership to be reflective of New Mexico's population as a whole, or the communities in which we are embedded? If so, we need to know the characteristics of our members. What areas of diversity are you going to focus on? Race and ethnicity? Sexual orientation? Gender?
- There is a stereotypical "co-opper." We need to be aware of the diverse needs and different opinions of our member-owners. We make assumptions that aren't always correct about who they are and what they need. How to introduce ourselves into communities that may not know we exist or who we are, or have their own assumptions that the co-op is "a bunch of white hippies who drive Subarus"?
- People like to go places where they feel welcome—where they see themselves. Opportunity: The more diverse our staff are, the more welcome new employees and member-owners from diverse backgrounds will feel. Eventually that will impact the composition of the Board.
- There are ways to operationalize an interest in welcoming a more diverse membership. And then it would be important to track the change. For example, "Yo hablo Español" signs can be effective.

Theme 2. Having Cultural Humility and Awareness

- In New Mexico, it is important to remember the cultural differences between native New Mexicans and recent Mexican immigrants. If you want someone on the Board to help represent the Hispanic population in New Mexico – which Hispanic population?
- There is a model called Community Readiness out of the University of Colorado. People would try to address a problem by pouring resources at it, and the projects would fail. Why? They realized that if they didn't meet the community where they were at and just threw money at the problem, real change did not happen. In order to move a community, you had to know where they were on a continuum and had to have the strategies to move them to the next place. It's important to move more methodically or slowly than to push things through. Success usually requires that you achieve buy-in from a community's leaders.
- It could make sense to make some changes in marketing or product selection to meet the needs of a more diverse community, but one note of caution - Doing little cosmetic things can backfire, especially if you don't include the important people in that community, and you're using their culture without their permission. Relationship-building is very important.

Theme 3. Self-Awareness

- To what extent can you have a successful change in an organization without wrestling your own personal bias? Self-awareness is important to being a human being. Biases are learned. Self-awareness is important in the hiring and supervisory processes.
- The Google video that Board members watched in preparation for Board study showed that over time, a little bit of bias made a significant impact in an organization. The video refers to an online Implicit Association test to help individuals recognize their own biases:
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
- Self-awareness can result in change. Start tracking what you eat and the money you spend, and you will start to see changes in your behavior.

Theme 4. Consequences of Diversifying

- When we include people who are different from us, it is a lot less cozy, and certain organizational practices and policies might need to change. In some organizations, the dress code has needed to change to welcome a more diverse staff.
- When you start to diversify, some people will leave. This can happen at the board level. These are volunteer positions, and if someone no longer feels like it is a fit for them, there is not a lot keeping them. People can feel like they will no longer be relevant. It can be difficult—because what you are talking about is sharing power.
- And sometimes people will voluntarily step away because they recognize that there needs to be room for other perspectives and backgrounds not currently represented.