

## Perspective

I had the pleasure to serve on a dynamic panel with exceptional people who share my vision of responsible policy last month and subsequently asked to discuss my distinct vision on policy advocacy in action based on my own experience. I did not hesitate to say yes because it is my keen observation that while words absolutely matter- actions are essential to the soul. It is our shared human experience that makes us vulnerable, empathetic, willing to change our viewpoints, allows us to listen and what makes a true community.

I have always been a natural advocate. If you ask my family -they will say emphatically that I was "different!" But I did not feel special at all- I felt empowered to educate the people around me to make the world better. Too idealistic right? Yet that is what it takes to be a gladiator. You must have a willingness to serve the greater cause and understand that everyone does not share your vision and moreover has a right to NOT agree with your position.

### **What worked, what didn't, how long did it take, what advice would you give others.**

Policy became personal to me when my daughter was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are no words to describe what the beginning felt like. It was lonely. I did not understand her disorder. No one understood it. I remember thinking about other women. My specific thought was if you are in a stable relationship, and you have equity and you have support and it's this hard how is it for other people? That began my journey to Advocate on behalf of others.

In the beginning but work was my candor. I simply shared my story. I talked to anyone who would listen. I explained the challenges of getting access to quality therapy and the financial burden of carrying it. Explain the mental health components associated with caring for someone with autism spectrum disorder and the lack of resources associated with it. So, I said in the beginning being honest helped. And it did. But after a while people get sick of hearing your story and then you must creatively find a different solution. I decided to reach out to other legislators, leaders and community advocates who shared my story. I spoke with them directly I asked them to fire themselves to be honest and share their story as well and most importantly I asked him to fight for funds and to change policies that would help families like ours without hurting the community. I think you must be mindful when you're advocating that everyone doesn't have your specific challenge. You don't want to put yourself in a position where you're combative. The better approach is to understand that advocacy must be weighed against societal concerns. It was not helpful when I pushed too hard. Having a pragmatic approach to policy explaining how it should be funded and who should pay for it and why with data insignificant support as a more positive way of pushing policy.

It's always an interesting question when someone says how long it takes to make an affective and persuasive call. I don't think there's any time limit on that. Some advocacy is short-lived because there is an event that is so overwhelming, but it forces us to change. Conversely sometimes issues must stew. People must think about how they are impacted who they know why it matters before they are willing to support and contribute to change.

Here is my advice for what it is worth. Patience. If you truly have a vision to change no matter what the issue is- you should be willing to mark your path until you are able to see the harvest.

**“If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded”**

*Maya Angelou*

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