

## Thoughts n Leadership from SSHS Project Directors - Mary

Jean: We're honored to welcome Mary Steady as our next guest on the Safe Schools Healthy Students Project Director podcast. And for years, Mary led New Hampshire's Initiative as its greatest champion. So, welcome Mary.

Mary: Thank you. I'm very happy to be here with you.

Jean: Mary, let's jump right in with a two part question. First, how important do you think it is for an effective leader to also be an effective communicator? And did the New Hampshire Initiative typically communicate to different groups of people, different audiences, from students to parents to teachers and all the way up to state agencies and policymakers?

Mary: So, the first part of your question is, it's extremely important for effective communication. I think that was probably one of the highlights of our project, and that the reason we were able to move it from a grant to a project to actually systems change in New Hampshire. We were able to rally support from teachers, parents, policymakers, around that.

Jean: So, diving a little bit deeper, how did you typically communicate with different audiences?

Mary: The first thing that we did is we made ourself visible, whether that was in person with people, online, print, audio. We weren't sure exactly our message in the very beginning. We knew that we wanted to make sure that there was a comprehensive school mental health approach in schools, how that was actually going to come to fruition wasn't clear at first. But, as we continued to listen to people, and listen to our various constituents it helped us guide our project because we were able to take whatever practices they felt were necessary, and make policy changes. So, one of the things that we ended up doing was taking this complex model and making our message very simple and clear.

Jean: So, I just want to acknowledge that you mentioned the importance of listening to your audiences and your stakeholders. That's something that a born communicator inherently knows to do. Understanding that communication isn't a one-way street, it's really a two-way street. So, I would describe you, and everybody who worked on the Initiative, as born communicators. But for those who feel that communication isn't necessarily easy to do, do you have any recommendations?

Mary: Be a risk taker. Communication, I don't think is necessarily easy for me. I can be shy by nature at times, but really listening to people, watching them with your eyes, also watching their body language so when they could relate to something you're making a mental note that, that was a message that rang true with them also. And then, being able to take that message, understanding how your project relates to that, and then feeding that back in a way that they would understand.

Mary: It's very important to have your authentic voice because when you go to deliver the systems change within your stay. You have to make sure that you're following up with what you delivered and if it's somebody else's message and you're unclear of their

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message, then the promises won't come to fruition and you won't be able to live up to that. So, making sure that you're authentic, that ... so you're using your voice, that your message is simple, that you're listening not only with your ears but your eyes to body language and you're asking a lot of questions. This will allow [inaudible 00:03:52] to have this really deep connection with people and help you avoid misunderstandings.

Jean: Again, I wanna acknowledge the listening part especially because when we think about communication and we don't always think about listening, listening allows us to really collect sort of, added anecdotal data in a way about our audiences, their need, their wishes and how they ... and what the message is gonna be. So, I wanna thank you Mary for joining us today as a guest on the Safe Schools Healthy Students Project Director podcast. Your leadership has been absolutely invaluable for the state of New Hampshire. Thank you so much for joining us.

Mary: Thank you and I was delighted to be here.