

LUNA JIMÉNEZ SEMINARS & ASSOCIATES

Personal Transformation
Social Justice
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NANCI'S LISTENING

"No Tolerance"

by Nanci Luna Jimenez



It is an honor to profile Lillian Roybal Rose for this month's LJS newsletter. A Senior Associate since 1995, Lillian is a phenomenally skilled educator, trainer, author, and consultant with over 30 years of experience working with cross cultural communication. Lillian and Nanci's paths first crossed in 1994 when Nanci attended one of Lillian's workshops. Nanci approached Lillian afterwards saying she wanted to learn how to teach what she just experienced. Initially, Lillian brushed her off thinking "she's only 26!" but as Lillian describes it, "Nanci was persistent and one day the moon was full and the tide was high, so I invited Nanci to start traveling with me and

A runner friend of mine recently chastised me for wearing headphones when I go running. He explained that **by doing so, I deny myself uninterrupted time to think** and the quiet space to pay attention to my breath. Not to mention, he continued, the music or news that consumes my attention when I'm out on a run keeps me from noticing my environment and from being truly present. (A value that he knows I hold very dear). I had to admit he was right.

My headphones provide a distraction. They help the time to pass more quickly and keep me from noticing that I still have another 30 minutes to go. They mask my labored breathing (and embarrassment that comes with it). **After further reflection, though, I realized that I mostly use the headphones to "protect" me from sexual harassment.** The headphones create a barrier that keeps me from feeling targeted and from being present-especially if being present means dealing with verbal harassment or catcalls.

I often wonder: what would it be like to go out for a run knowing I would be free from harassment? **Headphones offer the illusion of a "harassment-free" running zone.** They serve a purpose similar to "no tolerance policies" or "hate free" zones that are increasingly popular in organizations.

Usually the campaigns to create these zones happen in response to a grievous incident of harassment. In theory, "no tolerance" policies are supposed to create a safe space for groups targeted by hate or harassment-racial, sexual, religious or sexual orientation, to name a few. Posters and signs that clearly state "no hate will be tolerated here" are visibly placed to reinforce the institutional view that this type of behavior will be dealt with swiftly, publicly, and decisively. The signs communicate that these

assisting with workshops." Before long, Nanci and Lillian's relationship shifted from teacher and student to colleagues.

In 2006, a series of personal events, including being diagnosed with breast cancer, the death of her father, and caring for her aging mother, helped Lillian to realize that she needed to scale back on her professional endeavors. While searching for greater balance between work, play, and rest, Nanci and LJS offered her a viable solution. "Nanci came up with the idea to switch roles, her business would do all of the hard work and I would get to do all of the fun," says Lillian who loves being able to assist Nanci and the other LJS Associates.

Lillian grew up steeped in the spirit of political activism. Her father was the first Latino to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council in 1949 and the first to be elected to the US Congress from the state of California in 1962. Her sister was the first Latina to serve in the US Congress and has done so for the past 16 years. Surrounded as she was by community and political involvement, Lillian says she grew up watching how "when good people got together to fight an injustice, invariably the energy used to fight against the injustice turned inward and we started fighting ourselves." It wasn't until Lillian came across Dr. Erica Sherover-Marcuese and her "Unlearning Racism" workshop that she found a framework and the words to describe what she experienced growing up. She acknowledges this discovery as the "jumping off point for my life's work." From that initial exposure, Lillian developed and expanded her training work with a focus on

behaviors are not part of the "norm" of the institution and will not be validated or excused.

Many members of targeted groups experience some level of relief at seeing these signs. **More importantly, these posters are important symbols that an organization recognizes that this type of harassment exists, is willing to work against perpetuating these behaviors**, and will support targeted groups and individuals when they stand up against mistreatment. It is important to not underestimate the impact-both symbolic and lived-of such statements. They counteract the attitude that you are simply "over-reacting" when you experience outrage at being called a name or interrupt an offensive joke. As a target, your reaction is understood and validated within a larger institutional framework that acknowledges how these interpersonal interactions are an expression of prejudice. There is less of a tendency for a targeted person to personalize his or her reaction ("Nobody else seemed to be upset by that, what's my problem?") or to internalize that she or he is the problem and it's an individual issue ("Maybe it's just me; I bet this doesn't happen except when I am around"). The **messages to individualize, personalize and isolate** are all-too-easily accessible for targeted groups-especially when there is no external, outward collective outrage or action to offset this response pattern.

While this acknowledgement is a powerful first step, there are some potential downfalls to 'no tolerance policies.' These policies **appeal to organizations because they enable the members to interact on a daily level with colleagues and fellow students** with the assurance that, due to the posters, they are "prejudice-free." Members are able to separate themselves from the kinds of people who would perpetuate such behaviors-as if we are all not susceptible. This allows organizations to adopt the attitude that they have done everything "right" and that if these behaviors continue to surface it is the fault of an individual perpetrator, not the result of a larger systemic or institutional problem. In this mindset, if the individual is properly reprimanded, the perception of a liberal, tolerant progressive environment goes untaunted. This is not to excuse the individual or deny his or her agency in perpetuating these acts of harassment; it is to understand that **the root causes run much deeper than an individual's experience**. At worst, this approach does not address the underlying causes of these behaviors and attitudes. At best, it can perpetuate a state of denial.

How can we use "no tolerance" policies to also explore our own intolerance, without fear of reprisal or punishment? **What would need to be in place in an organization to address the root institutional causes of these behaviors**-not so that they go underground or become hidden, but so that they are dealt with, in the open? What kinds of conversations would we need to have with each other to admit where we each carry prejudice? What would make this dialogue possible in your organization?

Recently I did one of my favorite runs along the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon. I've run there countless times-alone, in groups, and with friends. As I made my way down the sidewalk, I saw two men walking toward me. As I went to move around them one of the men moved to the outside, forcing me to run in between them. My first thought was that they were nicely giving me the right of way. You can probably imagine my shock when, as I jogged between them, I felt the pinch of a hand on my rear end. To be honest, it took me a minute to realize what had just happened. My outrage only surfaced as my disbelief waned. **I stopped in midstride to confront my harassers and**

exposing and ameliorating internalized oppression.

In talking about her life's work, Lillian says the most profound and powerful thing she's learned is, "your social justice movement can only be as healthy as you are. If we don't do our own healing, we end up re-enacting the very thing we are fighting." At LJS, we are so privileged to be working alongside Lillian and are grateful to continue learning from her pioneering work to fight internalized oppression and increase cross cultural awareness and understanding.

as I turned, they realized that I was furious. The men took off running.

I had my headphones on.

I invite you to start a conversation in your workplace or school about the value and drawbacks of "no tolerance" policies. Please post your thoughts on our blog at . I look forward to hearing from you.

Send your stories and comments to Nanci's Listening.

Upcoming Events:

Join LJS for our powerful workshops! Follow the links below for more information on how to register:

Barbados

September 23rd, 2009

"You Don't Know What You Don't Know: The Facilitator's Path to Authentic Cross-Cultural Practice"

Facilitated by

Nanci Luna Jimenez, CPF©,
Barbara J. MacKay, CPF©
and Shoshanna Cogan

International Association of Facilitators Caribbean and Latin America Conference Training Workshop

Register [HERE](#) Or contact Kati for more information.

www.lunajimenezseminars.com