

NOVEMBER 2023 BIPOC AFFINITY GROUP MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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What is your primary responsibility at your job?

My primary responsibility is to develop and implement plans for the future with a wonderful team of people. This requires an awareness of what's happened in the past and taking stock of what's happening currently within my organization, my local community, at the state level, and beyond.

Who has been the most influential person in your career?

Many people have influenced my career, including previous managers, former clients, and people I don't even know personally. I find myself frequently revisiting advice shared by Oprah about striving to achieve the truest and highest expression of oneself and consulting Ray Dalio's book *Principles* and Brene Brown's book *Dare to Lead*.

What's an interesting fact about you and/or your organization most people don't know?

PRC's patron saint and greatest benefactor is the fabulous Sylvester, San Francisco's very own larger than life "Queen of Disco." Sylvester benefitted from PRC's services and in turn gifted his future music royalties to PRC. In gratitude, PRC named its annual fundraising event Mighty Real after Sylvester's signature song, You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).

What was it like when you were just starting out in your field? What obstacles did you have to overcome to get to the position you have?

I started out as an attorney helping extremely low-income people with HIV and severe mental health disabilities get SSI and SSDI. I was making something like \$52K a year when I first started. I experienced the toughest learning curve in that job, just learning how to really listen to people

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and understand their needs, to not take things too personally when they didn't go my way, to anticipate needs, and move effectively through bureaucracy and public systems. It was a really hard job. Sometimes I felt scared of my clients when they acted erratically or yelled at me. I also experienced countless beautiful interactions with clients who were overcome with gratitude for my assistance. Through that work, I noticed undeniable patterns among the people that I helped. I saw that every client experienced extreme trauma, most often times sexual and/or violent in nature. I learned so much about people in that job and saw first-hand how every person is a sum of their experiences. I continued to find satisfaction from that work knowing that my advocacy actually changed people's day to day lives. I just kept on plugging away, trying to do my best in each job that I held. Overtime, I landed in my current position as CEO for PRC.

Do you feel that BIPOC folks are adequately represented in executive/leadership positions in the behavioral health realm? If no, what do you feel needs to change?

I don't think we are, but I think that just means there is incredible opportunity for BIPOC leaders to step into this space. As a whole, the behavioral health sector needs to broaden professional pathways into our areas of work. The staffing shortages we experience are pervasive in every job category, while the behavioral health challenges and needs grow. In order to address this, we need to build new partnerships with private industry, philanthropy, and individual stakeholders to engage in developing solutions.

What advice do you have to BIPOC individuals as they work towards becoming leaders in their own communities? Any lessons learned?

- Nothing beats hard work. Keep going and do your best in every opportunity.
- Everyone has intuition about themselves, their strengths, abilities, and talents. Tune into your intuition and fully embrace it.
- Talk with yourself and continuously challenge your perceptions about people, situations, and beliefs about what is possible.
- Break the molds if you can't be effective as you want to be within them.