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Report: NEA Higher Ed Conference (April 1-3, 2016)



I had the great experience of attending the NEA Higher Ed conference in San Diego, California. The conference was held at the Sheraton from April 1st to April 3rd, 2016.

One of the highlights was the session I attended on Friday afternoon. The session was called Building Power Through Membership Engagement. It was facilitated by Josie Malik and Elizabeth Maloney of CCA, as well as CFA's Susan Green Kim Geron. The session highlighted the importance of telling our stories. We also shared best practices regarding membership engagement. It was a very productive session.

I also had the opportunity to co-facilitate a workshop session on Saturday afternoon. Cecile Bendavid, Cathy Jeppson, Carolyn Inmon and I created a workshop on Understanding and Developing Solutions to Issues Affecting Women in Higher Education. Cathy discussed equal opportunities for career advancement, and Carolyn discussed domestic violence. My topics were campus safety and faculty bullying. I developed a checklist of safety issues that all faculty should be concerned about, including quick communication between security and faculty, safe lighting and landscaping, and proper training of safety procedures and equipment. We also discussed "mobbing," which is bullying from certain factions of faculty against others who disagree

with them, and the effect this has on morale and health. We have since been asked to repeat the session at the NEA Representative Assembly.

Perhaps the most valuable experience of the conference was getting to hear the keynote speech by Steve Pemberton. Steve Pemberton is the Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion and Global Chief Diversity Officer for Walgreens. He is also the author of the book *A Chance in the World*, in which recounts his experiences as a bi-racial foster child. Pemberton's keynote address during Friday dinner was about how his main role models growing up were his teachers. They helped him along the way through high school and college, and he attributes much of his success in life to them. He reminded us that as educators, we don't always know how our words and deeds inspire and affect the students in our classes. I was so impressed with the speech, which had me in tears at times. I would love to have him at a CCA conference in the future.

Mr. Pemberton also facilitated a diversity workshop on Saturday morning that I found to be eye-opening and inspiring. He spoke about assumptions that we make based on what we see on the surface. HE used an iceberg metaphor. People only see each other for what is above the water line, when in truth, there is so much more to every individual that cannot be perceived without a conversation. When we broke into workgroups, I learned new and surprising things about my colleagues – many of whom I have known for years. I really feel that this exercise opened free and honest communication between people throughout the entire weekend.

This was an excellent conference. I met union brothers and sisters from places as far as New Jersey and New York. I gained a new understanding of some people I've

known for a long time. It was a great experience, and it has given me a new understanding of diversity. I will carry the lessons I learned here throughout my career.