



Source Episode #9

OECTA President Barb Dobrowolski: Women Leaders in Education

Episode Highlights

The path to leadership is often a winding one with unexpected turns – sometimes you just have to jump right in and get involved at whatever level you can. That’s how Barb Dobrowolski got to where she is today, as the President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA).

In this episode, you’ll learn more about Barb’s leadership journey as she touches upon work-life balance, channeling her inner Susan Hopgood (President of Education International), kindness as a leadership quality, and more.

How did you get involved in the union and what motivated you to pursue leadership roles?

BARB DOBROWOLSKI (BD): I’ve been very involved in the union almost from the very beginning of my career with a work-to-rule in my first year of teaching.

After that, I continued in my involvement. The work spoke to me, and I really felt that I need to advocate for teachers who don’t advocate for themselves a lot; They always put students first and forget about themselves.

So, as there became leadership positions available, I realized that, “Hey, I’m the person to step up to this, so I’m going to”.

What does the advancement of gender equality in leadership look like today?

BD: When I started, the people who were in leadership positions – especially principals, superintendents, directors – were so dominantly male, and back then, we were still a predominantly female profession. And so, I think that women didn’t picture themselves in that role; They didn’t have as many role models.

Now, when they look at four women affiliate presidents in Ontario, I think that they’re saying, “Yes, this is for me, I can do this”.

I know that role models are incredibly powerful and important. I can enumerate all of my role models, right from the beginning of my career; some of them were male, but the female ones were more important to me.

What advice do you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in their teacher organizations?

BD: I think that you have to find your own leadership style and be true to yourself.

I’d also say that kindness is not a weakness. Sometimes it takes more strength to be kind than you’d imagine. But, I think that, too often, people don’t think of that as a leadership quality and I’d like people to think of it as a leadership quality. It certainly can be and should be, in my mind.