

John and June



Welcome to our new blog titled, *Left of Center*. Our hope is that we can share with our readers, a glimpse into the life of the nonprofit (social service) sector. Our goal is to have our readers feel and experience the realities of our work. Stories are submitted by our staff and are inspired by real life events. Some stories will be light and funny, others may move you to tears, and others still may move you to anger or action. In *most* situations, we have changed individual's names or other identifiers to protect the guilty.

Each of our stories will start the same ... working for a nonprofit can be a lot of fun but, it can also be a lot of other things. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of working for a nonprofit is that no two days are ever alike. Never. Heck, often the events of one day can move in multiple directions with no sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.

It was my third day into my new position with the organization. I was equally excited as I was nervous. The day started off great. A new funder was interested in our programs, and we had just set a date and time for them to visit to see our mission in action. As I hung up the phone, I saw the reception desk was calling my office. The reception desk volunteer alerted me there were two members waiting patiently, but who insisted they needed to see me. In private.

Two members need to see me in private? Already? I have only been at this gig for three-hours; what could I have possibly done already? Suddenly, a day that seemed to be going so well appeared to be taking a hard *left* turn (see what I did there?).

Instantly, the sweat began to bead around my forehead.

Reluctantly, I walked to the front of the building where I met John and June. A lovely couple, they seemed generally pleased to see me. We walked back to my office where I offered them coffee and a seat. They took both. We exchanged a few pleasantries and then June dropped the bomb – we need to file a report of abuse – our daughter-in-law is abusing us. Yes. My jaw nearly hit the floor (*Author's note: I am not a social worker; however, I often must pretend to be one in the performance of my work*). I was not prepared for this part of the job. Not at all.

With no training for this moment, I prepared myself to take notes, trying to make a best guess at what information would be most important to the Department of Aging, the Police, whoever may be out there in the universe prepared to help me. I started with the obvious, and admittedly, the easiest for me to hear. Victim's name, address, and phone number. Alleged abuser's name, address, and phone number. Okay, but now we're at the defining moment; I needed to know what was happening and I needed to ask them to be vulnerable and talk to me about their abuse. My emotions were running wild. I was sorry this seemingly lovely couple was experiencing trauma and I was nervous as hell that I wouldn't know how to meet them where they were.

With (what seemed to me) obvious hesitation I asked, ‘So, can you tell me what is happening at home? Specifically, how is your daughter-in-law abusing you?’ Right or wrong, the question was on the table. I braced myself ...

With (what seemed to me) zero hesitation June replies, ‘Well, we might be 80 but we’re surely not dead. We might both have snow on the roof but that doesn’t mean there’s no fire left in our basements ... she won’t let us have sex ... and frankly, we’re not happy about it.’

With a huge exhale of relief and probably even with a stifled giggle, I was relieved. Though slightly embarrassed to be having this conversation with a couple that could easily be my grandparents, I was sure I could handle this. After some carefully crafted questions I would learn that intimacy for John and June often ended in injury for one or both (*Author’s note: I am purposefully sparing the juicy details not to protect the guilty, but to protect YOU, the reader*). Based on my newly obtained knowledge, I was able to make some recommendations for some (hopefully) safer intimate moments.

Later that same day, another call came through from the reception desk. John and June’s daughter-in-law was on the line, and she wanted to speak to me. Urgently. This was it. I was about to get an earful. I had crossed a line. How dare I talk to her parents about intimacy.

Again, I was feeling inadequately prepared for the conversation ahead. Little did I know, the call would be not only be pleasant, albeit a little awkward, the call would result in an annual financial gift to the organization. Anyone that would be willing to give an older couple the opportunity to discuss their intimate moments, and then be brave enough to offer them possible solutions to their ensuing danger, was worthy of receiving financial support.

It wasn’t a big gift; \$50. But every year when that \$50 check arrived a smile came across my face and I would fondly remember John and June, literally breaking me in on my third day on the job. (*Author’s note: John and June have since passed; their daughter-in-law stopped sending checks; but the funder who started off that fateful third day remains a loyal supporter still today and I still carry John and June with me.*)