



HER LEAD

FOUR THINGS I LEARNED AT THE HERLEAD ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC SERVICE AMBASSADOR WORKSHOP

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In this article women is spelled womxn. *Womxn is used, especially in intersectional feminism, as an alternative spelling to avoid the suggestion of sexism perceived in the sequences m-a-n and m-e-n, and to be inclusive of trans and nonbinary women*

Womxn who pursue careers in policy and advocacy are the most resilient people I know. After all, politics is a career path filled with conflict, unequal power dynamics and instability. The stakes are incredibly high — if you fail at your job as a congresswomxn, lawyer or activist, people could lose their healthcare, houses or humanity as a result.

For the longest time, only men with privilege could afford to accept the consistent risks and inconsistent rewards of a political career. And we've seen what happens when privileged men make all the decisions: vulnerable communities get left behind. That's why we need more women, particularly womxn from marginalized backgrounds, to enter politics. That's why my passion project, Homegirl Project, trains and amplifies the next generation of girls of color in political leadership. And that is why I applied for the HERlead Leadership in Advocacy and Public Service Ambassador Workshop: to learn how I can get better at making political advocacy accessible for all.

During the workshop, I was honored to learn from female trailblazers in politics, including a lawyer advocating for human trafficking victims, the NAACP youth programs director, a senatorial chief of staff, and a nationally-recognized advocate for youth impacted by gun violence. Their wisdom deserves to be shared, so here are my top four takeaways from the Ambassador Workshop.

When it comes to planning effective advocacy campaigns, it's important for leaders to figure out what their goals are, who they're targeting, and which tactics will best suit their causes.

There's no shortage of ways to advocate for a cause, whether you're phone-banking, getting out the vote, striking or writing op-eds. A framework like the Midwest Academy strategy chart, which identifies modes of radical action including education, advocacy, direct service and direct action, can help you strengthen your own plan. Ask yourself: how can your campaign make people aware of their own power, win tangible victories and alter power structures?

**RADICAL ADVOCACY
REQUIRES PLANNING AND
STRATEGY.**

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2 SEEK MENTORS WHO WILL SHARE THEIR POWER WITH YOU.

Policy can often seem like a white man's club, which is why as young womxn, it's critical we have mentors who will fight for us and help us overcome our institutional disadvantages. It's important that our mentors are willing

to share their privilege with us, by sharing job opportunities, donors and connections. This kind of resource pipeline has permitted men to maintain power for years, and womxn need to do the same. Seek mentors who will not only help you decide your path, but also use their resources to get you where you need to be.

Although I always knew I wanted to influence policy, I had no real knowledge of what a job as a political leader "looked like." During the Ambassador Workshop, I was introduced to a variety of potential career paths, including working for a nonprofit, an elected official, or on a campaign; working as a lawyer; or being a public educator. I observed that such careers are often non-linear and varied: all of our mentors had worn multiple hats in the past, and they all pursued very different education paths. This is good news: it means that change and inconsistency are perfectly normal for advocates, and you don't have to have everything figured out right away!

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO BE A CHANGEMAKER. 3

4 ULTIMATELY, YOU ALREADY HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED.

Entering the workshop, I had big ideas for a future advocacy campaign for Homegirl Project, but I was afraid I didn't have the right resources, connections or credibility to pull it off. "I'm worried that I'm

missing a lot of the pieces," I remember saying.

"What are you talking about?" my mentor Jamira Burley asked. "You have all of it right in this room."

We talked it through as a group, and I realized she was right. Thanks to the mentorship network I had created — in large part through HERlead — I realized that the adult leaders I might need for my campaign were all just an email or introduction away. By brainstorming with the six womxn in the room, I figured out nonprofits that could help me acquire material and training resources. We shared notes on how I could model from other successful campaigns and pitch to various media platforms.

I realized that as womxn, we're conditioned to think that we don't actually know what we're doing, and that we need to hustle hard to figure things out on our own. Every time I participate in a HERlead event, I feel a little more liberated from that mentality. I realized that, based on my own experiences and connections, I had everything I needed to be successful. You don't have to figure things out alone — if you lean on the womxn around you, everything will fall into place.