

Interview with Caylee Dodson, Founder and Executive Director of Restore OKC

Introduction

On September 18, 2024, I had the opportunity to interview Caylee Dodson, the visionary founder, and Executive Director of Restore OKC, at their office at 2222 NE 27th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73111 after participating in the Restore OKC Coffee Tour.

Restore OKC is a community development ministry focused on building relationships and fostering restorative justice in Northeast Oklahoma City. Our conversation revealed her profound insights on leadership, community engagement, and reconciliation.

Leadership Skills

I began by asking Caylee about the leadership skills she finds most essential. Her answer was brief yet poignant: "Humility." This simple word encapsulates the essence of her approach to leadership; recognizing and valuing the diverse perspectives of the community she serves.

Leadership Style

When describing her leadership style, Caylee emphasized that it is communal. "We run an organization that is about the community," she explained, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and allowing community members to have a voice in decision-making. This approach not only empowers individuals but also fosters stronger relationships within the community.

Handling Disagreements

Caylee offered valuable insight into managing conflicts within her team. She pointed out that reconciliation cannot occur without first navigating disagreements. Central to their

organizational culture is the understanding that differing perspectives are a natural part of their work. She mentioned that when hiring new staff, they discuss strategies for addressing disagreements to ensure alignment with their mission. Caylee acknowledged the inherent racial dynamics within her team as a source of potential conflict, underscoring the importance of addressing these issues candidly and constructively.

Leadership Challenges

Caylee shared a poignant experience that illustrates the complexities of her role. An employee had sent an email expressing excitement about acquiring land from a family associated with the Black Hebrew Israelites. This communication inadvertently implied a controversial stance that was deeply hurtful to some members of the community. Caylee described the painstaking process of reconciling the miscommunication and the emotional fallout it caused, showcasing her commitment to sensitivity and community healing.

Recommended Books and Resources for Student Studying Nonprofit Leadership

When I inquired about resources for students studying nonprofit arts leadership, Caylee recommended two essential books: “Welcoming Justice” by Charles Marsh and John M. Perkins, and “Reconciling All Things” by Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice. In terms of general leadership principles, she highlighted works by Bernice Boyd and Cedrick Gray, emphasizing that successful nonprofit leadership requires character, humility, and a deep understanding of the community’s needs.

Reflection on My Leadership Journey

In reflecting on my leadership journey, I resonate deeply with Caylee's emphasis on humility and communal engagement. Learning to embrace disagreements as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles has been crucial to my development. The importance of fostering an environment where diverse voices are heard echoes my experiences leading group projects and initiatives. Caylee's story about reconciling community hurt has inspired me to approach challenges with compassion and a commitment to understanding various perspectives. Her

recommended readings will serve as valuable tools in my ongoing education as I strive to cultivate a leadership style rooted in service, authenticity, and connection. As I move forward, I hope to embody these principles and contribute positively to the communities and people I serve.