

For my first professional interview in the event management course, I connected with Nicole Stephenson, who is currently the VP of Operations and Events at The Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry. Nicole started in the marketing department at the radio station. The station did not have anyone to manage events in the company, so the role fell on her. She also created events for the Chamber of Commerce, planning parties and her daughter's birthday. Through her time with planning events, I learned that event planning is a people-person job, which helps others feel satisfied with the experience. Her connection with the customers was based on hosting events for networking, which made it easier for others to talk, ensuring that everyone had coffee for morning gatherings; as well as wine or soda for evening events. If there is an event, there will always be a programming piece, so questions are always involved. Furthermore, the programming piece must be strategic, as it relates to creating a space where everyone feels comfortable during the execution of the event that is planned for the guests.

Her successes in her career were highlighted through meeting the Associate Director at the University of Pennsylvania and teaching Business Administration. She could network with others, which enabled her to teach at Wharton and validate her credibility within the university. Furthermore, she received an award for maintaining her job for ten years, which made her feel honored for achievements after seeing her family and being able to attend the ceremony. This was important for her throughout her career because she could not spend as much time with her family due to the focus of ensuring that others were satisfied with the events marketed to them. Therefore, this inspired her family to work hard to achieve their goals, while inspiring others to follow their example for their potential careers in the industry. Some of the obstacles that were encountered in her career was that she started young, as she graduated in 2008. She was hired for less money for jobs that required more experience in the field, which took longer for her to gain trust with her colleagues. Even for those with disabilities and women had more challenges to

receive the opportunities to feel included with the success of the company for the future. Men had the chance to prove people wrong, while women had to constantly prove themselves that they were worthy of the role that they earned, which became more of a challenge for her as she advanced within her career and wanted more opportunities to become successful in their career.

The advice Nicole gave students interested in a career in events is not to be intimidated by the time it takes to produce events. Also, not to discount all the people who helped you at the event due to the significant fact that everyone matters, while receiving the respect that they deserve. In events, everyone has a role that is important towards the success of the company and the retention of their customers. As the VP of Operations and Events, her day-to-day schedule changes frequently; as event prep can be busier, while the event itself can become more hectic due to the steps that were required to ensure that it runs smoothly. They can be planning for four events, she oversees ensuring that membership is managed (along with the finances and sponsorships being maintained), she oversees ensuring the venue, marketing and gaining speakers, meeting the speaker, communicating with the board members, and being able to connect with others is her role in The Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry. Her favorite part with working with the Chester County Chamber is collaborating with the people in the community and understanding more about their culture. Also, through improving the workplace, filling the work gap, ensuring that there are equal opportunities for everyone; so, everyone can receive a chance to work and to make a difference for their community.

Her career has inspired others to learn more about event management by making the job look fun, making a difference for her community through building diverse communities within gender equality and neurodiversity, and bringing DEI into the picture. As for now, there is no DEI intern; however, Nicole focused on being more personable and professional about the role that she contributes for the company. Also, they currently have an intern that helps them with the

current issues that are impacted in the organization. Through this, women were able to get promotions and jobs that they would have never gone for due to the promotions that were featured at the event that was attended. This encourages future event managers to believe that inspiring others is one part of the job and creates a memorable experience for the guest to enjoy for a lifetime. The current events that are being planned are the State of the Country, which commissioner addresses what impacts them, executive insight; which is planned in March, that highlights the CEO of Wawa, CHOP, and the Leadership Insight; special events, such as the Galentine (for small businesses for women through selling jewelry, wine, or through people's needs that are supported in the business); youth leadership with undergrad and high school students; and government affairs, which keeps the community updated about the government. Moving forward, the skills that college students will need to succeed in the event industry are organization, detail oriented, prioritization, problem solving, personable, effective communication, and people skills. Thus, being an event manager will come with its successes and challenges, however; you must be willing to face the challenge head on and to work with your team to create events that captivate the customer and encourage them to return to your business, which is the goal to work towards and to maintain through the success of the team.