

Event Recap: CSPS Equity Spotlight – Nathalie Laviades Jodouin’s Journey

Background: On January 17, 2024, the EDI Forum hosted an informal professional development event for CSPS employees to learn from Nathalie Laviades Jodouin’s journey in the public service, and gain insights on leadership and EDI in the workplace. The event was organized by Ranilce Iosif, Anna Candido, and event MC Tansy Etro-Beko, with support from Junie Saint-Fleur and Billie-Dhelia Laforest. This event recap has been edited for brevity.



Tansy Etro-Beko: Nathalie, please tell us a bit about yourself; the person behind the titles and how you came to the public service.

Nathalie Laviades Jodouin: I was born in Colombia—my mom is Haitian and my dad is Spanish. I started in the public service through the GC’s student recruitment program 25 years ago and have been with the public service ever since. Outside of work, I’m a mother, wife, and proud Franco-Ontarian who loves to dance and is a fan of boy bands. I take work seriously but I don’t take myself **too** seriously.

Tansy: Reflecting on previous years, can you tell us about a pivotal moment that shaped your career? If you could return to your initial stages in the federal public service, what advice would you give yourself?

Nathalie: I thought about this question, and a pivotal moment in my career was when I decided that I felt ready to become an executive. I did not really plan my career. Becoming an executive was not a career goal for me. However, my supervisors saw things in me that I did not.

I accepted the challenge, even though I did not think that I was ready. And I tried, but I did not succeed. So I asked for an informal discussion to find out what elements had kept me from succeeding. This informal conversation helped me a lot. I was told that all the elements were there, but that they had the feeling that I did not really want to advance to an executive position. And in fact, I knew that was true.

That experience confirmed for me that I was ready to advance in my career, but that I was blocking myself the most. So I gave myself one to two years to get ready and to get what I needed to increase my self-confidence. I asked for training and a twinning (job shadowing) experience. So, 18 months later, I reapplied for another executive position, and despite the fact that this second time I was pregnant, tired and had nausea, I succeeded.

One piece of advice that I would have given myself would have been to pay attention to my internal conversations concerning self-confidence. It is important to validate and confirm our perceptions about ourselves and what others tell us. You also need to prepare yourself and equip yourself with more tools. And this second time, I knew that I wanted it more than the first time.

Tansy: Could you tell us a little about your leadership style?

Nathalie: I have a tendency to observe and listen a lot. I create the environment for people, and I always think about the environment I am creating for them. My work **is** the people. I am like an obstacle remover, I focus on creating the environment for employees to be their best and to bring their best.

Tansy: We know people in equity-deserving groups face barriers in rising to the leadership level. How did you rise as a leader in a way where people saw you in the right light?

Nathalie: Rising to the next level tends to happen when there's a confluence of readiness, the right opportunity, and the right timing. There's a little sprinkle of magic in that for all those things to come together too. You might feel you are ready for the next step, but the timing, the job position, or your readiness is not there.

Critical for rising up: Ensuring I was doing my substantive job really well. One can aspire to many things, but you have to stand confidently in what you are doing in your current role and know you're doing it with excellence. Give no one an opportunity to say you're not performing. Being a good human, respect, and integrity, are important aspects too. This is especially important for people from equity-deserving groups, whose respect at times is sometimes denied. We all deserve respect but historically some are not given that. In some circumstances, you have to command respect.

Tansy: You have worked on EDI challenges for several years (thank you), and you have seen the progress and the resistance still there. What can we all do today to advance EDI?

What advice do you have for coping with the remaining EDI challenges?

Nathalie: We all have a role to play, not just leaders or those who work in EDI. We must advance the values that align with EDI. We must ask ourselves questions. For example, how do we make room for inclusion in our environment? At the management level, perhaps there are more resources, but each public servant has to do their part. How do our everyday behaviours reflect EDI values?

It is also important to get involved in different employee networks because that shows us how different perspectives matter. You also need to educate yourself. Even though I am a Black woman, I have a lot to learn about Indigenous realities, people from the 2SLGBTQI+ community and people with disabilities. I am responsible for understanding the intersectionality of everyone.

Tansy: As an EDI co-champion at CSPS, what is your advice for those in management and supervisory roles for nurturing EDI in the public service?

Nathalie: If you want a higher performing team, hire for diversity. The data is out there showing diverse teams perform well in the workplace.

Beyond that, those in managerial positions have a greater responsibility to educate themselves, to continue growing and learning. All of us need continuous learning but managers have an even greater responsibility. You have a duty of care when you're signing up to lead. Creating the conditions for people to succeed is at the core of what supervisors, managers and executives do. So if you don't want to care for people, don't sign up because, yes, you can do some good work, but you can also do harm if you don't have that desire to care for others at heart.

I strongly believe that that's what creates a more equitable and inclusive environment, leaders who take the job of being good humans seriously. So focus on being the best version of yourself as you can be, and equipping yourself with coaches, mentors, ongoing learning, self-awareness, dealing with your biases and assumptions. Then that piece becomes a lot more natural in terms of moving forward on EDI.

Audience Q&A

Ranilce losif: How have the opportunities for Black women in the public service evolved during your career, not just in terms of increasing their numbers but in providing real empowerment and professional development that lead to senior leadership roles?

Nathalie: I don't speak for all Black women. I am an expert on my own experience. In my experience, it has evolved. I've seen a community of Black public servants grow. Black executives were there before, but they were fewer and hidden in pockets throughout the public service.

Today, there's more diversity around the table and at the executive ranks, but there's room to grow.

I was an EX-1 for 8 years and at that time, I thought that was a regular process, but now I realize that that was not the reality for other non-racialized colleagues in many cases. This is why providing mentoring for the next generation has become an important focus for the Black executive community. We see people get stuck before the EX level, so we make it a point to mentor and guide those in EX-1 positions.

Irwin Bess: I am curious about what your favourite book or podcast is? What is memorable to you as a leader?

Nathalie: The CBC mini-series Black Life, Untold Stories, which gives a huge appreciation for Black stories in Canada's context. [<https://gem.cbc.ca/black-life-untold-stories>]

Leila Ziamajidi: When we're talking about EDI issues in Canada, I think the first step is making people aware of their privileges. I always have this challenge though, how to lead people towards an awareness of privilege. Some aspects are now obvious but there are other things that are less obvious. What are your experiences with this?

Nathalie: We have seen great efforts with the Call to Action, and the New Forward Direction [2023]. You can put measures to increase accountability in this space. But if I put that to the side, I don't think you can force the learning if you have to drag people. I don't think it's going to achieve the objective.

What is within our power and influence in this space is going back to data, going back to research. You take the subjectivity and emotion out of the equation. If people aren't aware—there's a ton of research out there. This helps to give a starting place to engage or not around those issues. It's all about which angle to speak from.

Michael Rutherford: I loved what you said about leadership as caretaking of people. Don't sign up for leadership if you're not ready for that role. We think we can teach those skillsets. Have you seen learning interventions that have helped people with this?

Nathalie: It can be taught if you're open but can't be taught if you're forced to. What helped me was coaching. A good coach and a real coach, different from a mentor, held up the mirror in front of me so I could face my own biases, my own assumptions, challenge me on the way I saw myself and the world. Gave me a kick in the butt to see things getting in my way. They would follow up with me and make me accountable. I was fortunate to have people who early in my career were coaches for me. This gave me maturity, it gave me an understanding of myself, which helped me to be ready later when I was offered a leadership role.

Sometimes we are late to offer leadership and coaching opportunities when the employee is at the right level. The sooner you can start that journey, regardless of title, the better.

Tansy: What is a good surprise that awaits me as I work up in my career?

Nathalie: There will be more people that look like me and you. Also more who look like my husband, my kids. More people from diverse groups.

I've been in meetings with people who have very different interests to me, like sports and hockey—I didn't grow up with that. I couldn't be my whole full self. But now I'm at the table and someone makes a reference, for example, to the 50th anniversary of hip-hop. With more diversity at the table, there are more opportunities to bring your full and real self to the table.

And as you grow in your career, you do the work on you so you can create that [space for authenticity] for whoever is coming next behind you.