

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Judiciary and the Unified Court System. I'm John Caher. Today's program is another episode of Diversity Dialogues with Susan Goodman. Today, Susan's guest is Michelle Foggie, Chief Clerk at the Bronx Supreme Court Criminal Division.

Susan Goodman: Okay, Michelle, thank you so much for talking with us today. What three words would you use to describe your current role?

Michelle Foggie: My role basically is to manage the court system and make certain that all the parts are intertwining properly and that there's a consistent flow as far as the process is concerned and our service towards the public. I see myself as a puzzle piece filled with many, many pieces. We all come together with our single parts doing our job and that's what makes us the Unified Court System. We all have a role to play and we make certain that we're all fitting properly.

What I do every day that I feel is most important is that I go around the building and I try to speak with as many people as I can on a regular basis. Just to be visible and let them know that although I may be the chief I am still a human, approachable worker.

Susan Goodman: How would you define diversity? What is your personal definition of diversity?

Michelle Foggie: My personal definition of diversity would be a cohesion. We have to understand that every individual is unique and diversity recognizes that individual aspect of everyone. Individual differences. In this, we all blend together as a single unit but still have our own little quirkiness about us. Many things go into who you are, what you are, where you come from, your history, where you're looking to go, things of that nature.

Susan Goodman: How would you say you encourage people on your staff or how do you bring out the uniqueness of each individual? Not only staff but, the community you serve too.

Michelle Foggie: Well we have diversity training in the court system, bias training, really.

Michelle Foggie: In dealing with people on a regular basis, we try to acknowledge differences. We allow individuals to flourish in their differences. And if you find people that are really good at what they do, you allow them to be mentors in certain situations. We have personal evaluations of people and in doing these personal evaluations on a regular basis you can then note how a single person has been able to shine in an area that wouldn't normally be recognized. To allow them individually to shine is one of the ways that I think that you allow diversity to come forward.

Susan Goodman: That's great. What would you say you like most about your job? How long have you been in your job?

Michelle Foggie: Four and a half years. I've been in the court system for almost 30 years.

Susan Goodman: Wow.

Michelle Foggie: I'll be coming up on my 30-year anniversary.

Michelle Foggie: The thing I like most about my job is the personal interactions. I like that I still deal with people and we can have conversations, we can speak about our differences. We can disagree and come to a conclusion or agree to disagree and then move forward in our own vein. Even in that the paperwork aspect, you can express yourself individually in making requests, how you build your team.

Michelle Foggie: But my favorite portion of my job is dealing with people. Dealing with the workers that we have. Our staff. We have a great employee base in my court, and since I basically grew up in the system, I've come through the ranks, it's nice to kind of reach out and touch each of them on a regular basis to just say hi or in passing let them know that you're still there for them. I've done that job. I'm not asking you to do anything that I have not done, so that personal aspect of it is something that's really been dear to me.

Susan Goodman: What would you say your biggest achievement to date is? I mean, it can be personal or professional.

Michelle Foggie: In my personal life, my biggest achievement would be the success of my children. I have three children and they were technically raised in the court system. Being a parent and a full-time worker is very difficult, so to watch them flourish and succeed is one of my heartfelt accomplishments. I have so much to thank them for because in parenting I learned so much about myself, and I bring some of those same qualities into my role as a chief clerk.

Susan Goodman: What kinds of things?

Michelle Foggie: In dealing with fairness-

Susan Goodman: Patience, probably.

Michelle Foggie: Patience. But basically, in trying to get a person to understand that you are your best when you're well-rounded. You don't have to be just one individual thing. You can be a musician and a court clerk. You can be a Pilates instructor and a data entry clerk. Little things like that. You can be an officer and a tai chi student. Just letting them know that there are other things out there besides work. Work and life put together brings a well-rounded person. They both need to be balanced.

Susan Goodman: Could you describe a typical day in your professional life?

Michelle Foggie: I normally get to work anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half early so that I can kind of get my mind geared up and wind down, answer any emails or any paperwork that's left on my desk. Then I'm ready for whatever comes at

me. By the time 8:45 rolls around, there's phone calls, and there's people coming to my office, or if I don't have a scheduled meeting or something of that nature, I am going throughout the building to check on what's going on in the various departments. Checking with operations to make certain that there's no issues as far as the building is concerned. Throughout the day I meet with my administrative judge, either in person or we have conversations over the phone to make sure that we're all on the same page and everything is flowing properly.

The goal is to make certain that the day is as eventless as possible. In checking in, in various areas, you find out where there might be a little flare that you need to pay attention to, to possibly put out a fire before it ignites. In doing that, comes my favorite thing, personal interaction. That's why I'm able to do that. Just kind of reach out to everyone and let them know that I'm available to them. I make sure before I leave the floor I go and speak with my administrative staff to let them know that I'm here, to see if they have any issues, and to let them know that I'm available to them if necessary.

The day normally goes through with a lot of interaction either verbally or in person, via emails. There's emails to ... I'm sorry, to answer. Then as the day comes to a close you still have time afterwards. I normally don't leave the building until about 6:00-6:30 because I'm trying to kind of wind down and see if there's anything that I missed, anything that's left in the building that has to be addressed, any paperwork that I need to get started so I can have a jumpstart for the next day.

Susan Goodman: Wow. It's a long day.

Michelle Foggie: It is a long day. It's very satisfying though. It's a satisfying job in that you have a goal for the day and you hope to accomplish everything throughout that day. It's not just those things that can be put aside.

Susan Goodman: Who would you consider a mentor?

Michelle Foggie: In my personal life, I had a very special friend who did not have the opportunity to work. She was a stay-at-home mom, and not because she had children. Her mother took in foster children and then her mother became ill, and so she had that job of taking care of those foster children on a regular basis. But she was very, very focused and she was very good at managing and keeping things in line, and encouraging people, and pushing them towards getting their best self out there. I can say that she's the one that motivated me to be the type of person that I am.

In the court system, I've had many managers that were very influential --seeing things in me that I did not notice within in myself, and helping me to bring those out. I've had quite a few of them. I had John Devita in Family Court. He was very instrumental. Steve Clark and John Murray in Supreme Court when I first came into the system. I had Stephanie Smith-Bullock, who was in the HR department

who kind of took me under her wing and gave me a lot of information as far as HR and administration was concerned. I've had quite a few people that were instrumental in assisting me in getting to the seat that I sit in now, and I'm very grateful for them.

Susan Goodman: Michelle, how would you advise prospective applicants to the court system and/or those who wish to advance within it?

Michelle Foggie: I would basically tell anyone who's coming into the court system not to sell themselves short. To take every test, to apply for every position that they feel they have the qualifications for, and to study hard and move forward. Don't worry about getting stuck in a single court. You can move in a single court or you can decide that this court doesn't work for you and there's a possibility of you trying a different court and seeing if a path works different for you in there.

I would say because the court system has so many opportunities, take advantage of everything that's available to you. A lot of people think that, "Well, I've taken this test and I'll stay in this category throughout my whole career." Don't think of yourself in that vein. I came in as a clerical and moved throughout the clerical system, and it's one of those things where if there is an opportunity, open yourself to it. It may not work for you, but if you don't jump at the opportunity you'll never know.

Susan Goodman: Just the last question. Before you leave the position, which hopefully, will be a long time, what would you like your greatest achievement to have been?

Michelle Foggie: I would like my greatest achievement to be I've allowed people to become their best self and move into positions that would afford them opportunities of growth and the ability to express themselves. I would like to have a strong, solid, I guess, departmental system in place.

Susan Goodman: Okay. Thank you so much, Michelle.

John Caher: Thanks for listening to Amici. You'll find all of our podcasts, which now number more than 50, on the New York State Court System website at www.nycourts.gov, and you'll also find many of them in the iTunes podcast library. If you have a suggestion for a topic that ought to be covered on Amici or someone who ought to be interviewed please give me a call. I'm John Caher and I'm at 518-453-8669, or send me a note at JCAHER@nycourts.gov. In the meantime, stay tuned.