Applaud People in Public Service

The Path of Public Service

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

00:00:01 **Katie Jensen**

I'm Katie Jensen and this is The Path of Public Service from Applaud, celebrating people who have spent their lives working in Ontario's public sector.

00:00:10 **Katie Jensen**

This is part two of our conversation with Claudette Miller, a retired member of the Ontario Public Service. In this episode, Claudette shares what she's learned in her career.

00:00:19 **Claudette Miller**

Communication skills, interpersonal skills, being resilient, just learning to get along with a whole different lot of people, many different kinds of people.

00:00:31 **Katie Jensen**

On remembering that the world of public service can be a smaller one than one might think.

00:00:35 **Claudette Miller**

In an organization like this, there are many people who are related that you would never know that these people are related. They may be husbands and wife, or brother and sister.

00:00:45 **Katie Jensen**

And a tip that might be useful for graduating students.

00:00:48 **Claudette Miller**

But it's important when you get into any organization that you get to understand the culture, find people.

00:00:57 **Claudette Miller**

That will help you help to guide you and to show the rope, so to speak, in any new environment.

00:01:04 **Katie Jensen**

We start by exploring how Claudette maintained a good work life balance.

00:01:08 **Claudette Miller**

I think I found ways to balance my work because outside of work I had many volunteer experiences, I was also studying. So to me, that was important in terms of balance in my career. And I also had a strong faith community and you know, I must say throughout my career, I balanced it with studying as well as doing a lot of volunteer work. One of them included pastoral care at the York View Life Care Center.

00:01:38 **Claudette Miller**

And so on the Sunday evenings, I would actually go to that particular nursing home at the time, and for people who are of the Christian faith I would actually visit them in their room and just have a conversation with them, read a scripture

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

from the Bible that was their favorite passage of scripture. And any songs that they like, I would sing for them and just have a a conversation with them. So I did that for for a year back in, maybe I can't remember now, in the 2000s or something like that.

00:02:09 **Claudette Miller**

But then when my schedule became so busy, then I stopped.

00:02:13 **Claudette Miller**

At one of my churches I attended, I also was a chair of a scholarship and bursary awards committee, and was also the chair of a Christian education committee there. One of my interesting volunteer experience was being treasurer for the federated health campaign, and that's when I was human resources management secretariat. There is also an award called The Edge Awards and I was one of the evaluator for the submissions.

00:02:43 **Claudette Miller**

Another one was the HRO Awards of Excellence Committee, and I also proofread all the certificates that would be handed out to the successful candidates. I was a mentor for the career bridge national internship program. In fact, there's an article that was documented in that particular magazine.

00:03:02 **Claudette Miller**

I've been the keynote speaker, the guest speaker at various ceremonies.

00:03:07 **Claudette Miller**

I also worked as a tutor at Alpha literacy center. Just some of the, all of the, volunteer work that I did.

00:03:14 **Katie Jensen**

Can you talk about the importance of volunteer work?

00:03:17 **Claudette Miller**

I think it's important to do volunteer work. It helps to round out your experience and just brings you in connection with, you know, different people to learn about their experiences and to see how you can help them. Because many times in your volunteer work, you're actually helping.

So I remember when I spoke at one of the Annual scholarship award ceremony, I was encouraging young people to not give up on their education, no matter what obstacle they come across, but they should always persevere and to be diligent in in whatever their endeavors are.

Applaud People in Public Service

The Path of Public Service

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

00:03:55 **Katie Jensen**

You've also encouraged young people through working as a program coordinator for the Ontario internship program. Can you talk about what that is?

00:04:02 **Claudette Miller**

So the Ontario internship program allows graduates from colleges and universities to work in their Ontario public sector for about two years to get work experience in the OPS.

00:04:19 **Claudette Miller**

It's a very competitive process where you have maybe over 5,000 students applying. And I believe from those 5,000, about 100 or so people, students, would be chosen to work in various areas such as in business and finance, in program areas, in IT, and in policies. So I was a program coordinator that went to colleges and universities and promoted the program, telling students about the program and encourage them to apply. And then, if they are successful, then of course they would be an intern in the OPS.

I also attended orientation sessions, held orientation sessions with those students and basically worked with them. Anybody with questions or anything like that, they could always call on their program advisor to help them as they were going through the program.

00:05:25 **Katie Jensen**

What advice would you give a young person today who may just be graduating and might be asking themselves, “OK, should I join the public service? Should I go private? What should I do in the workforce and why?”

00:05:36 **Claudette Miller**

But it's important when you get into any organization that you get to understand the culture. Because when you're in university, it's as if you're behind some glass wall, for example, and you're being taught all of theoretical information is being presented to you, which is good. But then when you enter the workplace, you now have to make the adjustment for reality.

00:06:02 **Claudette Miller**

So it's good for you to know the kind of organization that you're working with. It's good to you for you to find people that will help you help to guide you and to show you the ropes, so to speak, in any new environment. It's also important to to just listen and understand and seek advice and guidance from people who you can trust.

Applaud People in Public Service

The Path of Public Service

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

00:06:26 **Claudette Miller**

And there are many people in the workplace that you can trust and will give you good advice. You may come across some that it's better that you be cordial, but it's probably not best to say too many things to them. You got to know how to use wisdom when you're dealing with individual, and you always have to maintain a positive aspect to yourself.

00:06:47 **Claudette Miller**

We all go through challenges in life, but I believe one should try to be positive as much as you can and we can help others do that.

00:06:58 **Katie Jensen**

How do you develop trust with colleagues while also being mindful of workplace boundaries, and not getting too personal or off topic away from the work?

00:07:07 **Claudette Miller**

Well, you know what I always find when you approach people, you can always get a sense very quickly as to whether or not this person wants to engage with you, or whether or not they do not want to engage with you. For example, when I joined the Ministry of Energy, which was my first job in coming to Toronto, there was a group and they met at lunchtime for Bible studies, and that was the first group that I joined.

00:07:37 **Claudette Miller**

And from there I developed a lot of friendship with people in that community because we had something in common and there they would help me to understand the environment and the workplace that I was in. So when I'm dealing with my colleagues, for example, you knew how to approach them, how much to say, and how much not to say.

00:08:00 **Katie Jensen**

From the outside, the public service would seem to have a lot of rules and regulations for staff to follow. How did you find ways to take creative approaches to your work in a more restricted environment?

00:08:09 **Claudette Miller**

As a manager, you want to make sure that your area is efficient and that your staff is doing their work to the best of their ability.

00:08:20 **Claudette Miller**

So where you saw some deficiency, if you could develop solutions or ideas and bring it to your manager and say for

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

example, I think if we did things this way, this would help my area or help the organization. So that was the approach that I took.

00:08:39 **Katie Jensen**

Looking back at your career overall, what are some of the key lessons that working in public service has taught you?

00:08:45 **Claudette Miller**

Well, my career in public service taught me a lot. It taught me about management, that's where I got a lot of my managerial experience. How to manage various types of people. How to, as a manager, to manage your staff and also manage that interaction with your senior manager that is above you. And sometimes there would be maybe conflicting situations, but you always have to balance them for the interests of your staff as well as for the senior managers that you work with. And it also taught me great human resources management skills again, again just mentoring stuff. In terms of finance, I learned a lot about managing finances, what it looked like in the public sector.

00:09:43 **Claudette Miller**

I also learned about new initiatives to help the OPS become a better place. You had, for example, employment equity, you had to pay equity, for example. I learned the art of, maybe, fundraising for the the United Way campaign, the federated health campaign.

00:10:04 **Claudette Miller**

I learned great skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, being resilient, and just learning to get along with a whole different lot of people, many different kinds of people.

00:10:19 **Katie Jensen**

You've since retired from the public sector. What are you doing now?

00:10:22 **Claudette Miller**

Presently, I'm a student at Canada Christian College and School of Graduate Theological Studies where I'm pursuing a doctorate in ministry. In June of 2022, I graduated with a Master of Divinity, and I was also the valedictorian of the graduating class.

00:10:48 **Katie Jensen**

When did you know that it was time to leave and pursue early retirement?

00:10:52 **Claudette Miller**

Making that transition through early retirement was not something that was

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

on my mind, but I had three experiences in the workplace that convinced me that it was time to transition out of the Ontario public sector.

The first experience, I was actually sitting in a large auditorium listening to a talk, and I felt as if the speaker was talking directly to me.

00:11:20 **Claudette Miller**

And there is something in particular that he said, I can't even quote it verbatim right now.

00:11:25 **Claudette Miller**

But it resonated with me and it convicted me to start thinking about taking early retirement to make this transition, which I did.

00:11:34 **Claudette Miller**

But I was quite resistant because, I said to myself, I don't have anything to do if I retire early, I'm sure I'm going to be very bored. Because I wasn't planning on having a new career, for example, or a new hobby or anything like that. So I quickly dismissed the idea.

00:11:53 **Claudette Miller**

But then, when the current government came in under Premier Ford, he offered a package to people who would be eligible for early retirement or who wanted to leave the public service. And after I did some research, I realized that I qualified for early retirement.

00:12:13 **Claudette Miller**

But again, I dismissed the idea of early retirement because I felt I had nothing productive to do. And even though I started completing the application, because one had to submit an application for early retirement, I quickly shelved it because I didn't see any point in doing it.

But the clincher came for me when I hired a new employee. And in fact I was not even on the hiring paddle at the time, I was on vacation. But when I came back, I was told who was a successful candidate that would be joining my unit.

00:12:47 **Claudette Miller**

And I was also told the day that she'd be starting, and of course she'd be meeting with me on her first day. But as I came into work that morning, I noticed a young lady sitting in the lobby and someone I had never seen before. So I approached her and I said “OK, I'm Claudette Miller, the Operations Manager, and we have a meeting today. Your manager, he comes in at about 9:00 AM, so why don't you come to my office with me and then I can begin the

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

orientation process with you." And so she came to my office and I went through some orientation with her and just talking small talk about my career. She was asking me how I got to this position etc., and I explained to her what I had to go through some of the things I did.

So, it was about this time that her manager called and asked if I knew where she was, and I told him that yes, she's in my office and she would be coming to see him momentarily.

00:13:47 **Claudette Miller**

And as she got up to leave my office, she just looked at me, and in a small voice, she said, "You know, Claudette, I don't know why I should tell you this, but I will. There was this wonderful lady who could have taken early retirement a few years ago and she didn't, and she passed away soon after that."

I was really taken aback because of course I was contemplating early retirement. When she said that to me, something resonated with me on the inside and I felt I really needed to listen to this advice.

00:14:23 **Claudette Miller**

When she left, I became emotional. I closed my door because I knew I have faith in God, and I knew this was His moment. If it was His timing of actually telling me that it was time to leave, this is the moment that I need to actually complete the application for early retirement.

I submitted it to my director, and everybody was surprised that I was actually taking early retirement. The application was approved and then, you know, all the the wheels were put in motion for me to to transition out of the OPS. And I must say they had a very nice send-off party for me, because that was before COVID when everybody could meet in person. And so that was just a wonderful experience. So I left my career on a high, but also kind of wondering now what is going to be next.

00:15:16 **Katie Jensen**

Do you find that your Ontario public service work has followed you to your new career in any way, despite having left the government?

00:15:21 **Claudette Miller**

In fact, one of my colleagues who worked for the Ministry of Energy, or Environment, he's also a Presbyterian ministry. And while he was in the workplace, he was actually taking courses at Knox College and completed his Master of Divinity at Knox College.

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

And so now he will call on me to conduct services for him on a Sunday at a Presbyterian church in Rexdale. So all that's very interesting.

00:15:51 **Katie Jensen**

Can you leave us with something about the Ontario Public Service that anyone interested in the service should know, or might have a misconception about, or that you just think is really cool?

00:16:00 **Claudette Miller**

The Ontario public sector is such a big organization.

00:16:05 **Claudette Miller**

But I think when you've been there a long time, you realize that in a way, it's kind of small and each ministry has its own culture and you'll find, in an organization like this, there are many people who are related that you would never know that these people are related, they may be husband and wife, or brother and sister. So even though you're in a big organization, it's very important that you don't talk ill of people, and try to be always positive in your communications, because you never know who you could be talking to, even though you think it's a big organization, it could still be small in a certain way.

00:16:48 **Claudette Miller**

Ontario Public Service is a wonderful place to work for, you can develop your career as far as you want to. There are so many opportunities. What I really like is that you don't have to stay in one ministry, you can move around as much as you like and get new experiences. There are always so many projects to work on. If you look at my resume, you'll see the amount of volunteer work that I did in the Ontario public sector. You have the opportunity to take a wide variety of courses. So it gave me a rounded experience. There was never a boring moment for me. In fact, I put in so much time in the OPS because, for whatever reason, I was not blessed with the family. It's a wonderful place to work for. The opportunities are endless.

00:17:41 **Katie Jensen**

Thanks for listening. Applaud is proud to showcase the dedication of those who make decisions for the greater good and strive to leave the world a better place for all Canadians.

00:17:51 **Katie Jensen**

All personal views expressed by guests and our host are their own. Applaud will continue to recognize those in public service, offer a kaleidoscope of perspectives, and operate in good faith to build trust with Applaud members and

EP08 P2: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

all public citizens. You can share
feedback on this episode by visiting
applaud publicservice.ca.