

TRIBUTE TO SUE DE LA ROSA

Sue De La Rosa joined the Sierra Club staff in 1983 when our headquarters was over at 530 Bush Street, the staff size was just one quarter of what it is today, and the Human Resources “Department” consisted of her alone.

When Sue joined the Club, it did offer basic health insurance to employees, but there were no 401K plans with employer matches, dental benefits, vision care benefits, maternity leave, week off between December 25 and January 1, and no labor contracts.

Sue was among the first HR professionals to focus on the needs of same-sex domestic partners (as they were called) as covered dependents for insurance purposes. She worked directly with Kaiser and lawyers to help create a legal definition for the insurance plan purposes and was instrumental in getting Kaiser to agree to include coverage for same-sex partners when they had never offered it before.

Under Sue’s leadership, as the Club grew, as employment law changed, and as employees wanted a greater say in their workplace environment and benefits, she was the driving force in putting up-to-date reforms in place.

Sue was also seen as the go-to person to help solve any human resources problem, whether you were an employee or management. If there was a wrong, she would seek to right it. If something was unfair or inequitable she would point it out and dedicate herself to fixing it. If something was amiss, she would put an end to it. If something was shared to her in confidence, you knew she would keep that confidence. Even in chaotic times, Sue remained a strong employee advocate with a calm and balanced approach

Sue pioneered the Sierra Club conducting salary surveys to determine just and competitive compensation. Employee satisfaction surveys and 360 degree reviews for managers were other reforms initiated by Sue. As Chapter staffing grew, she developed the program to train chapter staff managers. As management became more complex and demanding, she organized management training sessions. She also was one of the first senior managers to press for a comprehensive approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. When employee grievances were filed or litigation over employment arose, Sue was always the point person to help resolve the dispute fairly.

“She had a deep appreciation for the volunteers and the Chapters,” remembers Dana Hayes, who worked with her for 12 years. “I was always impressed by the care, time, and dedication shown to our Chapter Leaders at our trainings. Sue had an amazing work ethic. She never wasted time or had time to waste. She was great at maintaining confidentiality, respect, and privacy for situations and individuals. To borrow a phrase from Al Gore, Sue was the ‘Lock Box’.”

In the Sierra Club or anywhere else it’s so easy to take your health care, commuter vouchers, dependent care and child care support, vacation, and other benefits for granted unless they go wrong. As a result too frequently we fail to sing the praises of the Human Resources Department and its Director and instead just hold them up for criticism when things don’t work as we expect. As Sue leaves the Sierra Club we are all learning how dependent we have become on her skill, leadership, compassion, and dedication. Thank you, Sue, for making this a great place to work for over 30 years.