

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CONSULTANT...

Eleanor Ross

En tant qu'employeur appuyant l'égalité des chances, le conseil municipal de la ville de Toronto introduit un programme d'activités pour offrir l'égalité d'accès à tous les emplois, les salaires, les promotions et la formation. Le programme vise particulièrement les femmes, les minorités raciales et ethniques, et les personnes handicapées.

Eleanor Ross, la conseillère responsable de la formation, examine certaines stratégies créés pour enlever les obstacles qui restreignent l'accès aux emplois et aux promotions. Pour démontrer ce que c'est que de faire partie d'un secteur pour l'égalité des chances dans l'emploi municipal, elle décrit une journée dans sa vie au travail.

People ask me: "What do you do?" When I tell them I'm a program consultant in Equal Opportunity for the City of Toronto, they often ask: "What's that - what do you mean?"

My usual answer goes something like this. The Corporation of the City of Toronto has committed itself to providing equal opportunity and has mandated a program of activities to provide equal access to all jobs, wages, promotions and training. As one of a number of consultants in the Equal Opportunity Division, I/we work on strategies designed to remove barriers which restrict employment and promotion opportunities. Although our program addresses all employees, it is aimed particularly at women, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. My colleagues work in the areas of Research, Policy Development and Recruitment; I am the Consultant responsible for training.

Perhaps my description of a recent working day will help to clarify what it means to be part of a large Equal Opportunity division working in the municipal sector.

The first two hours in the morning were spent in preparation for the next day's presentation on "Detecting Bias" to be made to Equal Opportunity Departmental representatives. A document written by two members of our staff which is designed to assist management in understanding systemic discrimination, "Detecting Bias" describes systems and/or practices which make employment and/or advancement difficult for certain groups of people. Not encouraging women to apply for positions because they do not look strong enough, for example, gives rise to systemic bias. Height and weight requirements for police officers and firefighters effectively prevented many women from applying for these jobs in the past. If bias is present in communications and language use - for example, written notices in English only of city services provided to the public - people are made to seem invisible, less valuable; programs and services become irrelevant and/or inaccessible.

Presenting topics such as "Detecting Bias" to employees who are the elected representatives from various City Departments provides them with training in important equal opportunity issues. They can then take this understanding of the issues back to their workplace to be shared with their co-workers.

Our INTO program (Introduction to Non-Traditional Occupations) took up the rest of my morning. This is a program for women that we are now ready to embark upon after two years of preparation. During this time, a questionnaire was devised and distributed to all women employees to elicit their interest in non-traditional work. There was a very positive response and, for those who indicated interest, we will be holding a series of information sessions. Drawing from those participants who are truly interested in training for a non-traditional occupa-

tion with the City, we will provide a training option.

Later in the day, news came (in writing) from the Personnel Division that two women gardeners had successfully achieved permanent employment status through the promotion process. These two women had been working for the City on a casual basis for many years, which meant that they had very little status, very few benefits, and employment usually only in the summer and lay-off in the winter. As the majority of our permanent status gardeners have always been men, this news was a cause for celebration at our next non-traditional women's network meeting. This network is run by our division for women who work in non-traditional jobs. They meet to discuss common concerns such as harassment and obtaining permanent job status.

During the day a call came from a woman who wishes to be a firefighter. She came in and we talked. What prospects can the City offer her? Our first woman firefighter who has successfully passed both the written and the tough physical exams is still waiting to be called up from the reserve list. Although she has received a lot of publicity, waiting is difficult: she must continue to keep in shape by weightlifting three times a week and doing aerobics daily (improving and maintaining upper body strength is essential if one is to become a firefighter).

Our City Council has approved an affirmative action program to ensure that a proper proportion of new jobs goes to our three target groups. This means that women will be encouraged to apply for the job of firefighter if they can meet the qualifications by passing the rigorous physical tests. As the woman visiting me weightlifts and power lifts, she could be a very promising candidate for firefighter when the next job vacancy is advertised.

Later I am in touch with another woman, a planner who is interested in our Women and Management Course. This training course, available in two parts, is open to all women in the Corporation; it analyzes personal and organizational power, communication issues and negotiation skills. The course is very popular, providing a forum in which women can discuss and discover if the management route is the one that they wish to pursue. I suggested to the woman that she attend one of our Women's Network planning meetings where her past knowledge and good ideas would give impetus to our revived network organization. (This network ran successfully for several years, for senior women; we now plan to extend it to include all women in the City of Toronto Corporation.)

Other courses that are my particular responsibility are Wen-Do, a self defence course for women; and Coaching and Counselling in an Equal Opportunity Environment. The latter is a 3-day course put on by the Equal Opportunity Division, and is designed to help managers and supervisors learn the concepts of the City's Equal Opportunity Program – as well as to acquire coaching and counselling skills necessary to communicate effectively with employees and develop a working knowledge of the employment provisions of the Ontario Human Rights Code. English as a second language in the workplace is for employees who want to be more fluent in English. It is a program co-funded by the City and the Toronto Board of Education. The course is work-related and uses language which employees will encounter in the perform-

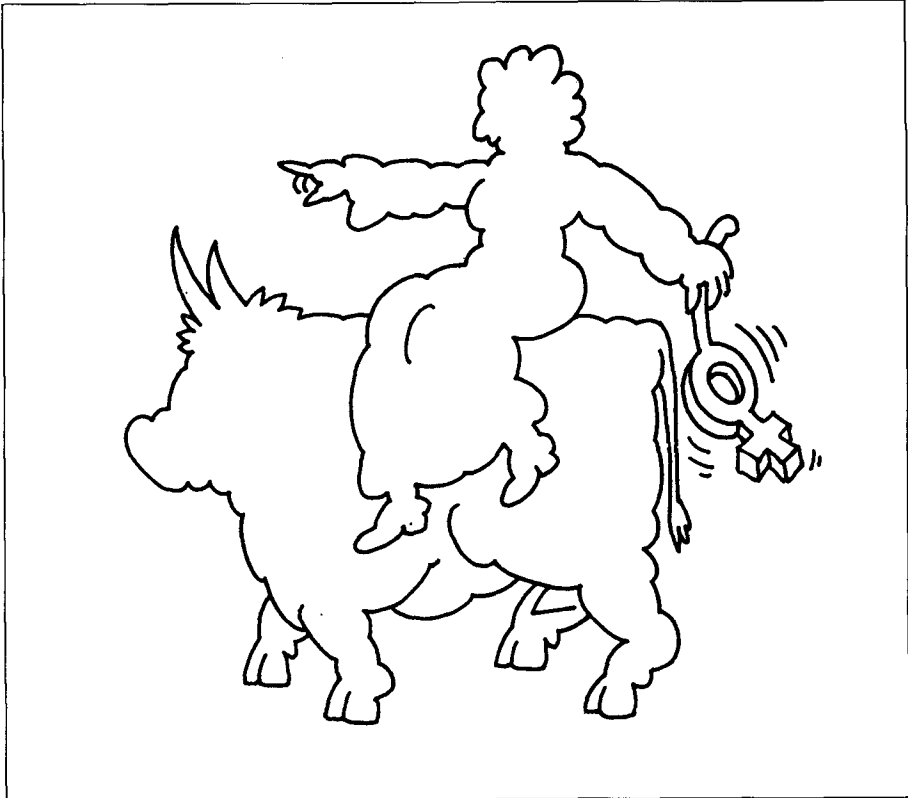


Illustration by Christraud Simeon

ance of their everyday tasks.

I finally left City Hall that day at 6:00 p.m., after hearing the Task Force on Contract Compliance examine implementation strategies for a contract compliance policy. This means that all City Boards and Commissions, as well as any organization in receipt of public funds would provide equal employment opportunities. Although the City of Toronto has had a Fair Wage Policy since 1911, contract compliance would further extend constructive and positive labour practices,

particularly as they impact on the three target groups: women, visible minorities, and people with disabilities – yet another step on the way to implementing equal opportunity for all citizens of Toronto.

**Since this article was written, policy to implement contract compliance was passed by the Council. The City's first woman firefighter starts active duty 6 January 1986.*

Eleanor Ross works as a program consultant in Equal Opportunity for the City of Toronto.

NOTABLE WOMEN RECORDS AND TAPES will be distributing independent recordings by Canadian women through an annual mail order catalogue.

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