

Valerie Bailey Crossroads Consulting, LLC

BY MELANIE PLEND / PHOTO BY MICHAEL MOORE

After 37 years with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), Valerie Bailey (pictured) could say she grew up with the national nonprofit whose mission is to engage children in conservation.

But the day came when the call of something new and exciting mandated she leave the nest and venture out on her own.

The result? A solo practice consultation practice called Crossroads Consulting, LLC, where Bailey offers services such as interim executive director leadership, strategic planning, organizational assessment and human resource expertise to nonprofit organizations. And she does this all with an eye towards “service to others and challenging ‘what is’ to create ‘what might be’” according to her web site.

A long career in nonprofit

Bailey started with SCA in 1978 at its office in Charlestown, New Hampshire. The organization, dedicated to engaging youth in conservation, was the precursor to the Youth Conservation Corps, now a federally-funded program.

“(My job) actually started out as a three-month temporary clerical assistant and by the time I’d left the organization, I’d served as the senior executive in two different CEO transitions and was the executive vice president for a number of years prior to my departure,” she says. Today, the organization engages 4,000 to 5,000 young people each year in conservation opportunities, lasting from two weeks to 12 months. SCA now has offices in New Hampshire, Virginia, California, Illinois, Alaska, Pennsylvania and Washington State.

Bailey says the vast majority of her time was spent on the administrative side of the organization where she learned about management, leading human resources, insurance, contract management, lease arrangements and facilities. She says as she grew with the company, she became increasingly more involved in strategic planning for the organization.

Working closely with the organization’s

board of directors led Bailey to be very adept at board relations, which she enjoyed. “Because of my human resource experience I obviously had a lot of staff engagement which I found to be really rewarding,” she says. “So I have this broad range of experience. It was pretty fun stuff.”

At a crossroads in her career

Bailey says in her job capacity at SCA, she traveled all over the country and fell in love with many national parks and forests. But after a while, a realization started to settle in.

“As I matured in life, shall we say, I knew that at some point I wanted to step away and really spend the last years of my professional life doing something different,” she says. “And I had always been intrigued by the notion of doing consulting because I had the fortune of working with top notch consultants over the years and I had learned from them and was always appreciative of the work that they had done for us.”

While still at SCA and as she looked toward the future, Bailey says she realized that she had the skills, desire and ability to be a consultant. To be on the safe side, she first consulted with some trusted colleagues who were candid about her consulting skills.

“They all thought I could do it,” she says.

Bailey left SCA late last year and took the holidays off to get a few months’ rest before she started her new endeavor in January. Once she opened Crossroads Consulting LLC, she gave herself a deadline: One year to make it work and get a steady stream of clients.

One of the challenges, right out of the gate, was her lack of a strong local network in the Monadnock Region, she notes. So she used her national network to drum up clients. “At the same time I had some good friends who began to make some introductions for me in New Hampshire and Vermont,” she says.

Business training under her belt

Bailey also took a business start-up class at Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship in Keene.

“It was six weeks of a half-day class every

Friday and I was joined by about 10 people ... from all kinds of different businesses: for-profit, nonprofit, just all kinds of different ideas and people at various stages of development and thinking,” she says.

The combination of the business skills she garnered from the class, as well as the discussions with other start-up business people, was “immensely helpful,” she says. “(I was with) all of these people struggling with the same questions.”

Going through the curriculum of the program helped Bailey, and all the participants, she says, take a hard look at why they were starting businesses, their passions, and how they would ultimately measure success. The class was also helpful in helping Bailey to articulate and hone in on her vision for Cross-

roads Consulting, and better understand the financial benchmarks of start-up businesses.

Bailey’s very first client, Great Mountain Forest in Connecticut, has benefited from her expertise in strategic planning. She’s also held several pro bono consulting sessions and is the part-time interim executive director for the Community Alliance for Human Services in New Hampshire.

“Going forward is the big question,” she says. “It just continues to be about getting myself out there, working with nonprofits, hopefully helping people in these organizations strengthen their path forward and (of course) building my business.” ♥

Learn more: www.crossroadsconsulting.services.



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