

PERColator-Profile-with-Alice-Phillips

📅 Wed, Feb 07, 2024 5:09PM ⏱ 34:18

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

myla, people, alice, labor relations, career, mentor, percolator, labor, session, talking, lera, contract, business, manager, loudest voice, sitting, podcast, questions, great, part

SPEAKERS

Matt Greer, Myla Hite, Alice Phillips



Matt Greer 00:10

Today we welcome Alice Phillips to the PERColator Podcast as a next guest in our PERColator Profiles series where we get to learn from experience labor relations professionals. In this conversation with Matt and FMCS, mediator Myla Hite, Alice shares advice, stories and tips that she's learned over her decades long career as a union leader, including as the longest serving business manager of IBEW Local 483. Alice is truly one of the great and groundbreaking leaders in our field. Alice will also be featured during a session at the upcoming Northwest LERA Conference, which will be held March 28 and 29, 2024 in Tacoma. Register today at the link in the show notes if you haven't already. We hope you enjoy the episode.



Matt Greer 01:05

Hello, hello, hello. Welcome to the PERColator Podcast. I'm Matt Greer, one of the podcast co hosts. And today I'm very excited because we have the next in our series of PERColator Profile episodes where we get to know an experienced labor relations professional in our field. So today, I'm very honored to welcome Alice Phillips to the podcast. Hi Alice, how are you today?



Alice Phillips 01:28

I'm doing great. Thanks for having me.



Matt Greer 01:31

Great. Thanks for being here. I really appreciate you taking the time to join us and chat for a bit. And today we have an extra bonus because we also have Myla Hite a mediator from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service with us today. Hi Myla, how are you?



M Myla Hite 01:45

Hi Matt, I'm fabulous. How are you doing?

M Matt Greer 01:47

I am doing great. It's a sunny afternoon in early February. It's kind of rare for our part of the world. Right. So yeah, thanks for you both being here. Myla, I was thinking that you might be our first returning guest on the podcast. So I just wanted to acknowledge that I think that officially makes you a friend of the podcast whether you want to be or not. So I just wanted to let you know that you had that title now I believe.

M Matt Greer 01:47

I just need to say, Matt, that I feel very honored to be a friend of the podcast, the PERColator podcast. I think that's fabulous.

M Matt Greer 02:11

Excellent! Good, glad that you see as an honor. So all right. So for profile episodes, we do have five preset questions that we're going to ask Alice as we go along to learn from her long experience as a labor professional and union leader. I thought we'd start off maybe one of the reasons why we're doing this in this timeframe is that the Northwest LERA conference is coming up in just a little over a month. On March 28 and 29th of 2024. I'll be putting a link to the registration website in the show notes for the episode. But Alice is going to be a featured guest at one of the sessions at that in person conference and Myla, I think you're gonna be part of that as well. So I thought maybe I'd give you a chance just to kind of give us a quick preview about what that's going to be like for our audience.

M Myla Hite 03:07

Well, I'm really excited that Alice accepted our invitation Matt, to come and be at the conference. It's really her session, the way that we envision that, is having the opportunity to gain some insights from someone who has been a distinguished labor leader within the area who can bring to life, you know, there's there's labor relations theory, right? And then there's actually the practice. And Alice's experience, she's distinguished, she holds the distinction of being the longest serving continuous business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. In addition to serving on a variety of committees, and leading the labor movement in various capacities. She's been the chair of the Tacoma joint labor committee, and she's been the vice president of the Pierce County Central Labor Council, in addition to many other things, so we're excited to have her so that she can share insights, practical tips for those who are coming up through the ranks behind her. So we really thought that this would be an opportunity to learn lessons from the past, from someone who's lived it, in order to help others forge their pathway into the future. So thank you, Alice for agreeing to do this with us.

M Myla Hite 03:13

M Myla Hite 03:13
God, that doesn't even sound like me my Myla.

A Alice Phillips 04:40
Oh, Alice, you've lived it. We've watched it. It's you.

M Matt Greer 04:52
Well, I'm sold! Definitely I think that sounds like a great session and hopefully this podcast episode might be a little bit of a preview of that because I think we're gonna touch on some of those themes, but Alice I know when we were talking a little before we hit record, you, you were inspired maybe a little bit by certain celebrity for the spirit of that session. So if you want to say a little more about that I thought was kind of interesting.

A Alice Phillips 05:13
Me and Myla were at breakfast, and we were kind of discussing what the vision was for this LERA segment. And as we were talking, it just dawned on me that Oprah has this Super Soul Sunday, where she, you know, just sits in this beautiful garden, and interviews, people, and they just have a very heartfelt discussion on whatever topic they're having that happens to be the topic of that show. And I, you know, I just like those, when you're listening to a speaker, not just rattle off statistics, but really talk about what it's like to actually do the work. Because it can tell you A, B, C, D in a book, but I'm telling you, when you get out there, A, B works, and then C goes off the rails. Right? So what do you do then? That's, that's what I liked. I just, I just like it when people just have conversations about life.

M Matt Greer 06:14
Yeah, that really sounds excellent. I hope a lot of our listeners will consider coming to the Northwest LERA conference and joining that session, I think, just for the record, I think you're scheduled for Thursday, the 28th at 11:15am slot. So for those of you who might be curious, you can I'll put some links into the show notes for that. Great, well, thanks for that preview. So if we're ready, let's go ahead and get into the questions for the PERColator Profiles. I'm really excited to hear your responses on these Alice. So the first question was, you know, we've maybe started this a little bit already. But tell us about your labor relations career, and what are you doing these days?

A Alice Phillips 06:49
So my labor relations career, you know, if I would have sat down and written out what I wanted out of my life's career, I would have shortchanged myself, because I would not have predicted that I would be the longest sitting business manager for local 43 and a female on top of that. So my career as a labor person is, it's actually quite a surprise. And I did it by doing just showing up day after day after day. And I wouldn't have traded a day of it. Even the pandemic, I would

not have traded a day of that career, because it's been very fulfilling and rewarding and frustrating. At the same time. What do I do now? It most people know I've retired after 30 plus years. And most people that know me know that I'm into a couple things, dogs and running. And so that's pretty much what I'm doing little projects like this. I'm still on the Pierce County Central Labor Council. As the Vice Chair. I still sit on the Clover Park Technical College Board of Trustees, but mostly I play with my dogs, Rosie and Coco. And I run a lot. I run ultra marathons. So I'm up in the hills. If I don't answer my phone, I'm usually out on the trails.

M

Matt Greer 08:22

And how many miles is an ultra marathon? I should know that but I don't know.

A

Alice Phillips 08:25

Right? And ultra marathon is anything over 26.2 miles. So they normally start about 50k which is 30 miles and go up from there.

M

Matt Greer 08:35

Okay, that is truly impressive. Okay. Well, that sounds like a pretty a pretty idyllic life, you got the one for you there kind of give you a little bit of the labor relations stuff going on, but also a lot of time on yourself. That's great. So yeah, Myla may have mentioned that, but how long were you at IBEW in that role overall?

A

Alice Phillips 08:56

And I'm I'm probably gonna mess this up. But I think it was it's close to 22 years, 23 years on staff at the local union.

M

Matt Greer 09:06

Cool. All right. Well, the second question we have was, kind of trying to kind of delve into gain the wisdom we have from the previous generation. So I'm curious if you have a mentor from earlier in your career, and you know something that you kind of take away from from that person and kind of brought with you throughout your career.

A

Alice Phillips 09:26

You know, I really don't have just one, because there are there's so many different kind of facets of, of my career. One is being a female in a in a male dominated trade. So I had a mentor for that and it happened one of them happened to be Myla, that I would call up and, and go off about something somebody said or or you know, you know, this guy just stepped in front of me and was like, I wasn't even in the room. And she would always come up with some sound advice on, on how to get through, how to maneuver those things. There was Rick Hite

was the business manager that hired me. And he has remained and still remains a mentor of mine. Oh, there's just, there's just a number of them. I'm also most people know this I'm also a recovering alcoholic addict. And so I have my sponsor that I talk to when I have those problems. So I don't think I would, I would suggest to people not to shortchange yourself, to make sure that you have a number of different people that you can, can turn to and, and bounce things off of, because I don't think one person is enough. If that makes sense, because there's so many different prospects that happen. Victoria Woodard the mayor of Tacoma is is another mentor of mine, I I've called her when I've had some issues where I just I, you know, with the with the Black Lives Matter and, and labor or race relations in Tacoma, and she's been a great source of inspiration for me. So I have a number of them.

M

Matt Greer 11:23

Right, I'm hearing a union leader kind of call out a political leader, kind of somebody whose view

A

Alice Phillips 11:31

Can you hear people falling off their chairs?

M

Matt Greer 11:34

I was wondering what the response might be out there in the audience, maybe we made some news here. So that's right. That's right. Congratulations, Myla on being named as a mentor for somebody who's so prominent, that's really, really impressive. So do you have anything you want to add to that Myla, no pressure.

M

Myla Hite 11:52

I really loved what I was send out about having the different resources that you could go to for many different things, you know, and I really honestly think that that's part of valuing diversity, right? That seeking out different perspectives. I mean, when I think of a mentor, I think of someone who's going to help me think outside the box, who's going to help grow me, who's going to help develop me, as opposed to, you know, going to just a friend and venting, because if I go to a friend and vent, they're going to tell me, I'm perfect, right? They're gonna tell me I'm right, they're just gonna reinforce me. So I really love the concept, and I think that's a great tip for other folks on having many different people that you can go to. And, you know, some of my best mentors, were people that I didn't see the world the same way that they saw the world. And that's the strength that you can have within that relationship.

M

Matt Greer 12:53

Yeah, that was a great point. Lots of wisdom in both of your responses there, I think. Not thinking of one mentor, but the constellation of people that kind of influence our lives and careers, and all the all the others, it's really great to think about that way. All right. Well, the

next next question we have unless you had anything else you wanted to share on that? I don't know if you want anything?

A

Alice Phillips 13:14

No, we're good.

M

Matt Greer 13:16

All right, what negotiations or labor relations tip have you learned that you'd like to pass on to others who might be an earlier stage of their career? Is there anything in particular, it can be more than one thing, but just what kind of tips do you want to pass on?

A

Alice Phillips 13:31

God, I could, I could write a whole book on this.

M

Matt Greer 13:36

That could be a good retirement project, maybe.

A

Alice Phillips 13:38

Haha, yeah, sounds like work. I, there's a couple. Um, and, you know, the, the order of these, I think would depend on the person and their style. For me, it was the number one thing that I needed to do was manage expectations. So if you go, if you're going to the bargaining table, and you're telling your team, whether it's labor side or management side, if you're telling your team, we're gonna go and we're gonna get this and we're gonna get, you know, a \$900 million raise, and we're gonna get, you know, all of these medical improvements, and we're gonna get, you know, 90 days of vacation and all of these wild expectations, and then you go to the table and you can't deliver, you get you have some questions to answer, like, Why? Why did you tell me you could do this when you can't? And why did you tell him you can, you know, so you really need to manage the expectations when you're going to the bargaining table. And that doesn't mean you can't tell your members or your managers that hey, we're gonna go in and try to get this. It just means that you need to be realistic and use numbers, statistics, market values, those kinds of things, to really kind of line out where you think you're going to land at the bargaining table versus where you're hoping to. I had one of my mentors and this, this happened to be, he has passed on now. But he was an manager for Asplundh, John Dettl. And he, he taught, he told me, he goes, you know, we just finished a contract. And he looked at me and he goes, I'm not happy with this. And I said, Well, I'm not happy with it either. And then he looked at me and said, Well, I guess we got a good contract, then. So, so what it means is, nobody got everything they wanted. Because anytime you get that kind of shift to one side of the table or the other, you're going to have a very unhappy group of people. And we don't want to do you really want to have a bunch of employees that are that angry and feel betrayed? It's not very productive. So if we can get to the middle of the table, usually everybody walks away,

satisfied. So that's one of them. And then and the next one, I would say is don't avoid controversy. If somebody is unhappy with something you did, you said, or the way he behaved, go to that person and find out why. It may be that you learn, you may learn something from them, that you need to change about yourself. Maybe it's the way that you behave at the table. Or maybe you don't have a good poker face, maybe your maybe a comment that you made felt caustic to them. I remember I was a new rep, and I had gone out to talk to some members that were out on the crew. And I had a shop steward that was just he was a super shop steward. I just, I mean, he just helped me and taught me so much about that workgroup. And I made kind of a, you know, a joke, like out on the cruise about how how do you guys feel like working alone without, you know, with Joel here, I'm not going to use this need. And this comment that I made, really hurt his feelings. And he came to me and said, you know, you made me feel really small out there. I'm like, Whoa, I was just joking. Everybody knew I was just joking. You know, I'm sorry. And, and he goes, but you're, you know, you're the business rep. And that's when I realized you don't get to take the hat off, that once I accepted that position as a business rep or a business manager or an HR director or a labor relations person, you don't get to take the hat off. So when you see somebody, you need to treat them with the respect that a business manager or a rep would would extend. And so by facing that controversy, and really digging into this, and just instead of blowing this guy off and saying I was just joking, guy get a life. I listened to him and I took the information in and I realized, wow, I got to make some changes on how I approach my members, the people that I've worked with for years, I have to treat them differently now, because they see me differently. Those are the top two things I would say, which really have nothing to do with how you present your issues, right? That's kind of funny.

M

Matt Greer 18:22

Yeah, it's not like the nuts and bolts is more of the cultural part, I guess, or the kind of the respect piece. So I think that speaks highly for both of you, and and Joe, I think was the name you use. But the fact that the Joe felt comfortable coming to you with that criticism, I think there was something about you, that you were, that he could do that with and then listen to that and change. It's really, it's one of those things that's really challenging to do for me, that's for sure. And I think in general. So that's great, great advice. All right. So the next question does involve more storytelling as well. So we put it out there as an option. So either tell us a story about either a spectacularly good bargaining experience where you really showed and you really kind of got a great, great deal and you really felt good about yourself. Or a spectacular, terrible situation, bargaining situation. And what you wish you would have done differently in hindsight, so you can answer one of those or you can answer both if you want to, it's up to you. But tell us a story.

A

Alice Phillips 19:22

I think I'll I'll tell you the bad one first. This was and I'm not going to use the names because, you know, we're we still represent that particular company. So we'll call it Brand X. How's that? So, so I met Brand X and they had hired a labor management company. And after this company came in to bargain with me. I did the research and found out they were typically someone that people hire to come in and break the unit. They didn't have a very good reputation. From the labor side, but they were promoting it, but they were they were management, they were trying to, you know, that was their niche. And this is an example of me not managing expectations.

They, they wanted concessions on everything. Retirement, wages, vacation, sick leave, they wanted a zipper clause for those of you don't know what a zipper clause is, it says that the only agreement we have was within the four corners of this of the pages. So if you had 15 minutes of cleanup time, and it's not written in here, you don't get that. Or if management has historically given you a turkey every Thanksgiving for the last 100 years, if it's not written in this contract, you don't get that anymore. So there's no past practice. And so as this thing pulled out, it just got uglier and uglier and uglier. And I had people yelling, we're going to go on strike, we're going to go on strike. And I had other people members coming to me saying, you know, I can't afford to do that. I can't afford to do that. And it just, it just blew up. And it got to a point where I didn't feel like I had control anymore. I felt like I was just kind of going with whatever, whatever happened to come along. And we took a couple votes and the all the, you know, they all fail. And then I went to the group and I said, we're at a point now where we're almost there, they're going to claim an impasse, they're going to claim that we're not making any progress. And so we need to make a decision. So we're going to vote this contract. And I'm also going to take a strike authorization. And normally what I do is I put the strike authorization and the vote together. Because if you're going to vote yes, on the contract, then you're going to vote no on the strike. And if you vote no, on that contract, you're voting yes, for a strike. But there's no use of voting no, on the contract and no on a strike, because that doesn't make any sense, right? We're gonna go back to the table, back to the table and say, well, we voted no, but we're not going to do anything. So I had some very strong personalities that took me away from the decision that I knew was right. And that was to connect the vote, the strike vote and the contract voted together. And so I voted on separately. And guess what happened? I know you're gonna be shocked. Right? Here we go.

M

Myla Hite 22:32

I'm on the edge of my seat!

A

Alice Phillips 22:35

Ready? They voted no, on the contract and No, on the strike!

M

Matt Greer 22:39

Of course.

A

Alice Phillips 22:40

So I went back to the table and guess what management did? Okay, I know. So sit back on your seat a little bit Myla. They implemented the last best and final, which happened to have that zipper clause in there?

M

Myla Hite 22:54

Why am I not surprised?

A

Alice Phillips 22:56

I look back on that. And that is, you know, and I've had a wonderful career. That is that is the, the I really feel, I hate to say this, because I'm feel like I'm missing something, but that is really the biggest regret I have in in my career. As far as contract negotiations go, I'll put it that way. Because I really, I should have done things differently, and I didn't. But you know, that was, for the first time in my career, I'm looking at taking a bunch of people out on strike. And I will hope that there is no labor leader that takes that step lightly. Because the impact is tremendous. On both sides. So that was my worst. My best, and I'm going to use the name on this one because they're no longer in business. And that was Click Network. I organized that group of people and then I negotiated their very first contract. And, and it was a struggle. It was I mean, because you're starting from blank pages. But we got really good discipline language we got we got outsourcing language we, I mean, it was just a really good, healthy package for this new group of employees and and they were they were happy, management was happy except they didn't really like the outsourcing basically, we said you can't lay off and outsource at the same time, Right? Which is, that's pretty strong language, but in the telecommunications field, it's really easy to outsource all of those installers and in we could look at a bunch of people without work. So on that that was that was a story of two sides that really wanted to get a contract that was healthy enough to retain the employees that helped build that network. And it I think it went, well, it went super. So these are my stories

M

Matt Greer 25:11

Super! Unfortunately we're in audio format, so you can't see the big smile on Alice's face. Thank you, we really, really enjoyed that experience. That's great. And I also want to thank you for sharing the the other story as well. I think that everyone in this field has had experiences where they feel like, how you described how you felt, in that, that situation. So hearing it from you, somebody like you and your unequivocal successful career, and you still had moments like that I think is really important and valuable. So I really appreciate that.

A

Alice Phillips 25:40

Yeah. I mean, it's you try to go through, I try to go through my life and in the evening, when I look at myself in the mirror, say, I have no regrets for today. And I mean, if you can go through your life with no regrets. That is huge. But this, this is, this is going to be one of them. You know, 20 some years of labor relations and in that's the biggest regret I have, I still think that's pretty good. But I wish it would have came out different.

M

Matt Greer 26:11

Yeah, I think we've all been there. I won't speak for Myla, but I know I have.

A

Alice Phillips 26:16

I will add one thing to it, though. So the CEO of that company was terminated shortly after that

contract was finished. And I'm still here. So I'm gonna take that as a win. Haha.

M

Matt Greer 26:36

All right, well, we had the last of our preset questions here. So what advice else would you give to yourself, go back 22 or 23 years, 25 years, whatever it is that you kind of were starting out your labor relations career as a brand new negotiator. What advice would you give yourself?

A

Alice Phillips 26:55

Yeah. And you know, I think I'm going to correct myself because I think it was 28 years, that I've been on staff. It was closer to 28 years. So, god if I went back in time. You know, I got, again, I have to tell you this little story, that when Rick Hite asked me to come on staff, I almost said no. I almost said no, because, you know, I am a trades person. I, I worked with my hands. I was, you know, I'm a journeyman tree trimmer, by trade. And coming into an office setting. I just that was so far out of my comfort zone. That I almost said no. And then I had one of my mentors tell me, that's what you have staff for? They'll, you know, make sure that your letters are businesslike and, and all of that stuff. So so I did I did go in, thankfully. What would I give my? Trust yourself. Trust your intuition. Do what's right, because it's the right thing to do. But when you do that, make sure you're ready to explain why you did it. And, you know, that kind of that kind of goes back to the company that I was just talking about that where I wish I had done things differently. I let people influence my decision when I knew what I should have done. My gut was telling me to do this. And I didn't do that. So. So I think I would, I would tell people that you're telling myself when you make a decision, and you're making it for the right reasons. And you can explain why you're doing it that way, then that's what you need to do. And don't let those outside forces influence your decision. Because you're you're talking about a group of people, not just one or two individuals, and sometimes as union leaders or as, as labor relations people, we let the loudest voice in the room steer us, especially on the labor side, because most of us are elected, right? So it's the loudest voice in the room that we we tend to lean towards. But you know what, when we lean towards them, and it goes to crap, it just turns into a garbage pit. Guess what that loudest person in the room is nowhere to be found in you're going to be held accountable for your decision. So you need to make the decisions based on what you know to be right, what you know to be true. And what you know, to be the way to move the unit, the people forward, not just the loudest voice in the room, and then go to that loudest voice and find out why does he think what you're doing is wrong or why does she think what you're doing isn't correct. And then that's that's the not avoiding the conflict, right? Going to them and saying look at I understand where you're coming from. Let's share ideas here, try to tell if they can convince you that you don't maybe, you shouldn't go this other way. They may have some good advice in there. But if you can explain to them why you're doing what you're doing, you might turn them into a cheerleader.

M

Matt Greer 26:56

Yeah. Wow. Great. Yeah, that's great advice.

A


Alice Phillips 28:20

 Alice Phillips 29:29


Yeah. Awesome. This is great. You need more questions.

 Matt Greer 29:05


Well, I gave you the five preset questions. But what I didn't tell you is that we have five wildcard questions that I have numbered one to five, and so I'm going to ask you to give me a number from one to five, and I ask you, hopefully a fun question as the last question. But I know what do you think one to five? What do you think?

 Alice Phillips 30:45


Three.

 Matt Greer 30:45


Three, okay. All right, here we go. It's also an interesting one. So what did you listen to, like when you were getting ready to go into a bargaining session, in your labor relations career when you were, like, you know, either gearing up for a big bargaining session or kind of or, or coming down from it?

 Alice Phillips 31:13

Oh, this is going to crack you up. I am a huge Pink fan. So usually what I do is I'll crank up one of her songs and and, and just get lost in the lyrics. And and usually it's, you know, and there's one song that that I can't I'm not sure I'm gonna get the title right but it's trouble. I think that's the name of the song is trouble. That's, that's what I would do. And then of course, I'm, I wouldn't classify myself as being a strong part of any organized religion. But I am a spiritualist. And so of course, I always pause before I go in and, and ask for guidance and and ask that those spirit guides speak through me and asked for what's best for the group and not myself. But yeah, Pink's it. Okay, you need to get cranked up. That's the girl that listen to.

 Matt Greer 32:18

A good balance, a little bit of Pink, high energy and also the centering moments, the spiritual moment. That's great. Great, thanks Alice, you did great with that kind of on the fly question, I'd have a hard time answering that one I think on the fly. So that's great!

 Alice Phillips 32:35

I'm always better off the cuff. If I have to give a ABCD presentation, I, I call it squirrel-itis, it's where I'll be reading my little notes, and I'll have everything laid out. And then something over here will get my attention and will be totally off subject for God knows how long but it but just sitting and talking to people, it's my favorite. I love it.

M Matt Greer 33:01

Oh, well, I could tell it definitely comes through even in the Zoom recording. So I really enjoyed talking with you. And I guess I wanted to open up to either you or Myla, if either of you have any closing thoughts or anything that you want to say before we before we end?

M Myla Hite 33:14

Well, the one thing I want to say is that if folks want to take advantage of Alice just sitting and talking off the cuff, we also have some preset questions, but I'm really looking forward to seeing the at the LERA session,

A Alice Phillips 33:28

Awesome. Thank you for inviting me here. This has been a blast. Hopefully I get to be a friend, a friend of the podcast.

M Matt Greer 33:35

You shouldn't have asked, because now I am going to find a way to bring you back.

A Alice Phillips 33:41

And Myla, I'm looking forward to it. I think we're gonna have a blast! I don't know about everybody in the audience, but we're gonna have a good time. Hopefully they will too.

M Matt Greer 33:51

I think they will. So great. Thank you very much. I really appreciate both of you taking the time to do this and it was great talking with you. So see you at Northwest LERA!

A Alice Phillips 34:01

All right, thank you.

M Myla Hite 34:02

Thank you, Matt!