



Margaret Seidler

Title: Organization development consultant and master trainer

Age: 57

Hometown: Charleston

Education: Bachelor of arts in psychology and master of public administration, both from the University of South Carolina

Hobbies: Spinning, yoga, bridge

Her practice is “about recognizing that tensions are a natural part of life.”

Seidler goes national with group conflict management work

BY ASHLEY FLETCHER FRAMPTON
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As an organization development consultant, Margaret Seidler helps businesses and groups understand the tensions that exist among them and find ways to manage them.

Whether it's departments within a company that are at odds, individuals who clash, or interest groups with incompatible agendas, Seidler helps those involved see beyond an “either-or” mentality.

She preaches that recognizing competing values can help groups move forward instead of polarizing them.

“It's about recognizing that tensions are a natural part of life,” Seidler said.

The philosophy that drives her work also shapes how Seidler sees the world. She often thinks and speaks in terms of polarities, as she calls them, when reading news stories, talking politics — even when discussing the benefits of yoga.

Her Charleston-based consulting practice had mostly local clients when she started it in 2001. But more recently, Seidler's work has gone national.

Publishing her first book, *Power Surge: A Conduit for Enlightened Leadership*, in 2008 has helped Seidler expand her reach, she said.

She has worked with the U.S. Chamber of

Commerce, the American Public Power Association and the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association, to name a few. Her work with the Municipal Association of South Carolina has led to an upcoming speaking engagement with the National League of Cities.

Seidler said her goal is to take her message, which is as applicable to office politics as it is to local and national politics, to as many key leverage points around the country as possible. She wants to give leaders the tools “to bring disparate groups together in the name of some higher purpose,” she said.

Key to Seidler's philosophy is the idea that people can better grasp the complexities around them if they can see their own skills and personality traits clearly.

Ironically, her consulting career was sparked by the cold reality that she did not know herself as well as she thought she did.

While working at S.C. Electric & Gas in the 1990s, Seidler took a leadership assessment test. She saw herself as a great leader and gave herself high marks on the self-assessment.

“Apparently I was one of the few people who felt that way,” Seidler said.

While Seidler ranked herself highly on leadership and communication skills, her colleagues and supervisor gave her ratings near the other end of the scale.

The assessment was a wakeup call for Seidler. She was struck that in leadership, it's not

just intentions that matter — it's also important how one comes across to others.

Seidler was determined to unlock the skills of leadership and effective cooperation with others. She began down that path in a new position at SCE&G, as an internal consultant. She continued with internal and external consulting work in Atlanta and Minneapolis before moving back to Charleston.

Along the way, she sought formal training in organization development. In 2009, she became one of 12 certified polarity management masters in North America.

Lately, Seidler has made another kind of training part of her life. Most days she spends some time at the gym, teaching spinning classes, practicing yoga or lifting weights. She said exercise helps her maintain the energy she needs to work for days at a time with clients, often in the spotlight and in intense situations.

Though the work can be demanding, Seidler said she finds joy and meaning when clients figure out a resolution to their conflict.

“The best part of my work is when I experience people seeing something that they weren't able to see before, that they've expanded their thinking,” Seidler said. ■

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