



Region IV Public Health Training Center
A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING CENTER NETWORK

Leading Public Health Podcast: Leadership Journey Series

Episode 2: Networking with Samantha Cinnick MPH, CHES

Liz Kidwell (LK): Welcome to Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. Through this podcast, we explore current leadership, challenges, strategies and ideas to help build the capacity of the current and future public health workforce. In this series, we will be meeting with public health professionals to discuss the journey of leadership. My name is Liz Kidwell, and I'll be your host as we explore topics relevant to public health leaders at any stage of their career.

LK: Today, I am thrilled to be joined by Samantha Cinnick. Samantha is a health educator currently working for the Health Resources and Services Administration, or HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau on strategic plan implementation and program development. She received her Masters in Public Health in Health Promotion Research and Practice from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health in 2017 and is a Certified Health Education Specialist. Since graduating, Samantha has held public health positions in academia, philanthropy and government, primarily focused on training and technical assistance programs for current and future leaders of governmental public health and health. She's here today to talk with us about the importance of professional networking to achieve your career goals. Thank you for joining us, Samantha. We're so excited to have you here with us today.

Samantha Cinnick (SC): Thanks, Liz. I'm happy to be here.

LK: To get started, I wonder if you could just please tell us a little about yourself and your current role.

SC: Sure, happy to. So professionally, I have experience researching, writing, and developing training on public health and healthcare workforce topics. Most of my career has been around assessing the needs of governmental public health workers. And figuring out how to support current and future leaders in governmental public health by providing them with training. In my role now, I'm a program development specialist with HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and I've transitioned from developing training on topics like social determinants of health, health equity, change management and many others, and figuring out how to better incorporate those topics into our own programs that are designed to advance maternal and child health outcomes. In addition, I've served in many different elected positions within the American Public Health Association or APHA, and I have a pretty strong interest in continuous quality improvement frameworks that focus on strengths-based organizational change, like action learning and appreciative inquiry. I'm really passionate about fostering creativity and innovation among public health and healthcare

professionals and driving positive change in public health using those strengths-based framework. On a personal note, I am a runner. I completed the Chicago Marathon last year, and I'm passionate about traveling. And I have two puppies at home named Kaya and Chewy who keep me busy and active in Northern Virginia.

LK: Great. Thank you so much for sharing that. I am also a runner and also have a dog and I'm sure many of our listeners can also relate to those things. So that's really great. I appreciate you sharing some personal aspects so we could kind of get to know you better.

So can you tell us a little bit more about your leadership journey and really how you got where you are today in your public health career?

SC: Sure thing. Leadership is definitely a journey, right? I definitely consider myself an early career professional still. I do have seven or eight years of experience in public health, but I'm still very, very early on in my journey. As long as I can remember, I have always been driven to be a leader. I've been interested in "running, things," being the person in charge. I wanted to make change. I wanted to make things happen. I was somebody in high school and college who would join clubs and sororities and student groups and run for leadership positions. But as I went through graduate school and a lot of my public health internships, volunteer roles, my first job; I realized that leadership isn't really about being in charge. It's really being the person in your organization, in your group, in your team, who's prioritizing the growth and well-being and success of the people you're working with. So, you need to be the person who helps a team or an organization determine their values, and then help drive people to achieve common goals through those values together. I would say in terms of getting to this brand of servant leadership, I've been lucky to have a lot of students, interns, volunteers that I got to work with, but also bosses and senior leaders and supervisors who helped me grow in this area. So many of the people I've had the pleasure of working with are really caring, understanding and empathetic mentors, and they've nurtured me to be that type of servant leader who is an active listener, focuses on building community, and creating that shared vision that you can articulate to your team, and help them, you know, encourage them to follow that shared vision. I even think about my people who are outside of my public health journey. My own mom has given me advice about servant leadership and she always says, "If you want to go fast, you can go alone. But if you want to go far, gotta go together." And I really try to live by that in my own leadership style.

LK: That's really awesome. I love that quote and I feel like that could really resonate with a lot of people. So you kind of touched on this a little bit in just what you were kind of saying, but could you expand on who or what really inspires you in your work and what impact have they had on you becoming a leader?

SC: Definitely. And I love that I'm doing this podcast with you at the Region IV PHTC because one of those people is actually, a past director of a regional PHTC. I would say, you know, what draws me to public health, there's a lot of things, but in terms of the people who inspire me, there's really three people in my journey so far who have had a big impact on me becoming a leader. That first person is a PI I worked with at the regional Public Health Training Center in Region 2. Her name is Dr. Marita Murrman and she was not only the PI of that PHTC, but also the director for my MPH Certificate in Health Promotion Research and Practice. And as both my supervisor and professor, she just gave me such an enthusiasm and energy for public health, I have never worked with

somebody who is so, you know, aflame, right? Somebody who was just so passionate and excited about the field. She was always looking for more ways to leverage the resources that we had, to understand the diverse needs of public health professionals in our region, create more effective trainings. She just always wanted to do more, and I really love that about her. And she was one of my most engaging and memorable teachers and really one of the best, some of the best classes I ever took were with her. So, when I think of, you know, really digging down deep and motivating myself, instilling a great work ethic, I think of Dr. Murrman, whenever I need that dose of motivation. So she's definitely the first person who inspires me in my work as a public health professional.

LK: I love that. Thank you so much for sharing. And you mentioned that you have a couple other mentors that you've worked with over the years.

SC: I had a second mentor who is not a complete 180 from Dr. Murrman but had a very different leadership style than her that I really admire. So I got to work with Dr. Kris Risley at the de Beaumont Foundation. She was the former managing director of their Workforce Development Center, and she's currently an executive leadership coach for public health professionals, and she taught me the importance of empathetic leadership and building a strength-based culture. She had an amazing vision for our Workforce Development Center, which was really to create a leadership development program for health departments that would focus on recruitment and retention, organizational transformation, but using a strength-based approach. So instead of focusing on deficit-based problem solving, she was really trying to focus people's problem solving towards what's already working well. And how can we build upon what's working well to, right, enhance recruitment or retention at your health department? And she had a really novel approach to this during our leadership seminar called Appreciative Inquiry. I think watching her take a risk, try to incorporate a new way of thinking into change management and continuous quality improvement, just instilled in me this idea that it's OK to try something new. It's OK to think about the strengths just as much as we think about the negatives that are going on in public health. And if we do that, we're able to really come up with amazing solutions to problems creating joy through or creating change, I should say, through joy and pride and excellence in our work. And I try to channel her energy all the time when I'm faced with challenges or roadblocks by asking myself, kind of what is going right in a situation. So very different leadership style, but one that I try to emulate quite a bit.

LK: Thank you so much for sharing that. I think that that sounds like some really important and interesting work that you accomplished together. And then you had, I think, one more person that you wanted to touch on.

SC: Yeah. The last person that I draw inspiration from in public health was a recent team lead that I had and really my first, one of the first people that I started working with when I joined the federal government. And she is somebody who, you know, whereas my first two mentors kind of gave me this enthusiasm, energy, empathy, leadership style. This person, her name is Alyssa, taught me really about implementing strategy with compassion. Strategy plus relationship building is what I call it. And she's one of those rare people who can see the path forward on a project, see where we're supposed to end up, but do it in such a way that she has brought people along on the journey to get there by building relationships, making sure everybody feels comfortable with the process. And I would say that the way that she did, that was so much fun to watch, especially in government, which can have a lot of bureaucracy, and she just got people on board with new initiatives and new

ways to do things. And Alyssa really showed me the power of creating and communicating that shared vision and making sure that her colleagues needs and feelings were acknowledged as she was bringing them into something potentially new and scary.

LK: Yeah, it sounds like you've had the opportunity to work with some really fantastic individuals, and I really appreciate you sharing your work with them and how working with these different people has really shaped your career, because I think that that's really important. And that's kind of what we're here to talk about. So really continuing with this idea of mentorship, do you have any advice about where to find mentors, especially someone maybe early on in their career?

SC: Absolutely. I think when we say the word mentorship, people right away get a little afraid. Like, who should I ask to be my mentor? But I would say that there are more people than not who would be very interested in mentoring young or early career public health professionals. Some of the first places that I would tell somebody to go find mentors in our field is to start with their own organization or the people that you work with. Many large organizations already have some type of formal mentoring program that you can take advantage of. I know in my organization there's something that's put together by HR. But also, don't be afraid to ask your senior leaders, your bosses, or your boss's boss. There's a pretty good chance that if you reach out, they're they want to share with you their successes, their challenges, the obstacles they faced. Because most likely they have something from their past experience in your organization that they can share to help you with a similar problem. That's the first one. The second place I would say to look for mentors is a professional organization that fits your career goals and once you find that professional organization that fits your values, that fits your career goals, get involved as much as you can. I know that the professional organization that I have been the most involved with the American Public Health Association. It has its own program for mentorship called Mentor Match. But, even getting involved in APHA, being an elected leader, serving on committees, you will meet new people, people who are often very advanced in their careers, who want to help you and want to build their own networks. And so, I think that's a great place to look for mentorship. Let's see where else? Where else can you find that? Really the opportunities are endless. The third place I would look is social media, that sounds a little silly, but being active on LinkedIn or some other social media platform is a great way to meet people and see what other people are doing. I like that LinkedIn now shows on the newsfeed portion of the site not only your own connections, but connections of connections. So, you can start to see the news stories or posts from people who might be a second connection to you. And if you see someone on those platforms that you want to emulate or that you want to learn from, is doing similar work to you, I don't think it's, I think it's fine to send them a message and see if they would be interested in either a formal or an informal mentoring relationship. And even if they can't mentor you, I'm kind of somebody who doesn't take no for an answer. Ask one or two people if they'd recommend. Ask if they'd have one or two people they'd recommend you reach out to. And this last one is a little bit of, I would say self-promotion, but I think it's a good way to find peer-to-peer mentors. I would encourage public health professionals to apply for awards. I would encourage you to apply for awards at philanthropic organizations, professional organizations. If you think you've done something that deserves recognition, go for it because some of those recognition programs, they already have benefits in there, like in-person networking, attending conferences, honorarium for professional development opportunity. This is a great way for you to not only honor yourself, make sure that the things that you've been doing as the

public health professional are getting recognized, but then it gives you a place to learn and meet new people, and I would say it builds your network in terms of other peers who are doing great work just like you.

LK: I definitely agree with that. I think that that's some really great advice and insight and I really hope that this can help some of our listeners who really might be working on trying to kind of get their footing in public health and trying to form those connections with others in their field.

So, I want to dig deeper into networking, and I wonder if you could tell us from your perspective what value do you think professional networking has had or has on someone's career journey in general?

SC: That's a great question and I want to preface my answer by saying that there's, there's definitely a need for organizations to participate in equitable and inclusive hiring practices and base their hiring and promotion decisions on a candidate's skills and ability to do their job. And also, you know, giving people the benefit of the doubt, right, that the people could be trained to do the job as well. I'm not an expert in human resources or hiring practices, so I'm only going to speak from personal experience about how professional networking has brought value to my career journey. But the way that networking has brought value to me and the way that I've built my career, is in a couple of ways. I think the first way that I have gained value from developing professional networks and professional relationships is it has increased my awareness of the types of jobs that are available to me in public health and health education. By talking to people who have been in different organizations, have worked in different sectors, it gave me a sense of what can I apply my degree and my skills to that I wouldn't have known if I hadn't talked to those people. That's the first one. The second one, I would say, by cultivating those professional relationships, I've increased the number of mentors and contacts I can reach out for advice on professional development. Whether that's, you know, I need somebody to read my resume or my cover letter, I need someone to practice interview questions with, I want to learn more about this organization I'm interested in applying to. So that's the second way it's given me some value. And then lastly, it's increased the number of people who know what knowledge and skills I have to bring to a future job, so I think that every time you talk to a professional connection, you're giving a mini-interview. You're telling them about things you've done. You're giving them, you're giving credibility to your skills and knowledge. You're showing them what you've accomplished, and they then can vouch for you to others. They can vouch about you to their organization if you ever wanted to apply there. So those are some ways that I have personally have value added to my career journey around building those relationships. And I think these are things that could be applicable to most public health professionals.

LK: Yeah, I definitely agree. I wonder if you can expand a little bit on how networking has really helped you throughout your career. I'd love to hear more about that.

SC: Again, prefacing my response because you know networking is important, but it's definitely not the end all, be all of getting a job, of building a career. For every position I have held, I have also spent many, many hours, you know, engaging in professional development to improve skills. I have written and rewritten resumes, I've prepared for interviews with friends and colleagues, and I've even practiced negotiation tactics with HR professionals, right? However, even with all that preparation in one way or another, I can trace all of my professional roles back somehow to a networking opportunity that I took advantage of. And that really is my entire public health career. I

know the very first job that I had was as a program coordinator for the HRSA funded Region 2 Public Health Training Center. And so, Dr. Marita Murrman, one of my closest mentors and people I really credit with starting my career, she was my professor at Columbia University. And when I applied for internships and a graduate research assistant position on her grant, you know, I was a graduate student of hers. And she saw the work that I did day in and day out in her classes. So, as her student and also working on deliverables for her grant as an intern, she saw my writing and my communication skills. She knew what my knowledge level was in training and technical assistance development. And she knew that going into the year after I graduated, that her grant for the Region 2 PHTC would be up for recompetition, and most likely she was going to need some good writers to help her develop that grant application. And so, developing a relationship with her as my professor, as my, you know, intern, a preceptor, I had a leg up on other candidates because she really had a sense of my writing portfolio and my communication skills. So that familiarity really helped me get into that, that first role.

LK: Do you have any other kind of examples of how different types of networking and different people that you've met have helped you, kind of, throughout your career?

SC: I do have. I have several examples. Maybe I can talk about one or two more. My second job was with the de Beaumont Foundation as a program officer and that was quite a shift. You know, I was working as an employee on a grant at Columbia University and I had not even been thinking about a job in philanthropy. But while I was working on that grant, the Region 2 PHTC, I had seen the de Beaumont Foundation CEO as a speaker at several conferences about public health workforce development, and while I was at those events, I spoke to their new managing Director for Workforce Development, that was Kris Risley, I talked about at the beginning, and I'd met her at an APHA conference. And really, those were just conversations asking questions of those two people. And so, the next year, really after that APHA conference, I noticed that the de Beaumont Foundation had an opening for a position with their Workforce Development Center, and I felt very comfortable because I already had a relationship with Kris, to contact her and ask her more about the position, you know, get some more information before applying. And I think that really helped me to write a more compelling cover letter, get prepared for interviews with the de Beaumont Foundation. And if I hadn't made that connection with Kris, I would have been going into those, you know, into writing my resume and cover letter and interviews with a little less information. And so, I think that really helped elevate my application. So, the last example I have of networking setting me up for a position, for a job, is actually my current job. So, when I joined the federal service, you know, I was working in a different bureau. I wasn't working for the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. But an old colleague of mine from the de Beaumont Foundation, she was working in the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. And so, for about two years, when I knew that she came to HRSA, same agency, we kept in touch by having a monthly lunch on our calendars, and we would share what we were learning as new federal staff since we were both new to federal service and keeping each other in the loop about what was happening in our respective bureaus. And overtime, our conversations about the Maternal and Child Health Bureau were really inspiring me to move away from creating trainings. I was creating trainings at the time on primary healthcare data for internal staff, which was interesting work, but you know, maybe not as aligned to my health education background. And she really inspired me to move from that to applying for a job in MCH program planning and strategic plan implementation. And if I hadn't had those monthly lunches, I don't think I would have

learned as much as I had about the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and I don't think I would have been as inspired to apply for a job there and then move over to that bureau.

I think overall networking has helped me showcase my different skills. I, you know, I could show those skills to Dr. Murrman as a student. It helped me prepare really intentionally, for job applications and interviews at the de Beaumont Foundation and at the end of the day, just having a monthly lunch with a colleague that I really trusted helped me determine where I needed to have a career change. And these are just some of the many, many ways that networking can help public health professionals with their career journey.

LK: I think that's really great. I love the idea of something as simple as a monthly lunch that's just on your calendar. I mean, that's something that sometimes people don't think of and it can be something that's simple and that's networking. So, I do think that that's important and I'm really glad you shared that. So since this podcast series, we're really focused on the leadership journey, many of our listeners likely are just getting started in their public health career. Though our listeners are probably going to be a wide range on where they are in their career, but thinking about people who are just getting started, what advice do you have for these early career professionals on really growing their network in public health?

SC: So my first bit of advice to your question, I might get some pushback from your listeners when it comes to mental health and setting boundaries, but my first piece of advice would be to say “yes” to as much as you can without sacrificing your mental health or your personal boundaries. That's the first one, and the reason I say that is it sets you up to do things you didn't think you could do. I've had many leaders and supervisors who asked me to step up to do something, and it was the first time I was ever going to do it and I would just think “What? No! I've never done that.” I've never applied for an APHA student award. I've never been an APHA elected official. I've never, you know, moved and lived in DC. Write a blog, a research article, a book chapter. I've never done, who's going to listen to me do that. You know, I'm never going to be a guest on a podcast. All of those things. Right? And after you get over that, kind of initial, like, “I can't. Why me? Can I do that?” Just say “yes” and just say “yes” because if you don't say “yes” to those things, you don't end up being where you are in the future, right? Like I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't said “yes” to the people telling me, “Hey, you should, you should think about doing this.” So that's number one. Number two, when you are networking and I do think this is really important, try to ask more questions than providing statements in your conversation. That sounds a little silly, but this is kind of wisdom from my mom again, “People love to talk about themselves.” and it really is true. When you're getting to know people, be as curious as possible and enter those conversations with a beginner's mindset. You're going to be amazed at what you learn and what you find out, so come in, no assumptions. Be open to new ideas and perspectives. It's going to unlock things for you and relationships for you that that you didn't even realize. Listen to what they have to tell you. Build questions off of what they just told you. It's going to be amazing where the conversations turn to.

LK: That's really great advice. And I can tell you from my own background, I have had the same experience with saying yes to things that I wasn't sure I knew how to do. And sometimes you just learn along the way. And I feel like that is just really where you find some amazing growth. So, I definitely agree with that. So, kind of on the same, you know, note as networking that we were

talking about and you know asking questions and things, are there specific platforms that you recommend where you can really network with others easily?

SC: I think you can network anywhere. I really believe that. Start with a professional organization. For me it's APHA and actually almost every state has a local public health association. So check out your state's local PHA if you can. LinkedIn. I would say even going to local university and college campus events. Even if you're many years out of graduation, if you have a nearby university or college campus, they often have free events in public health or related fields that you know, could be doing something related to public health. That's a great place to meet people. And I would even say outside of the field, don't be afraid to go to community events like town halls, organizational mixers, talking to people on the elevator, Reddit. Any space where you like to do things. As an example, I've joined many running clubs where I've met people who work in other health or related agencies in the DC area, and it's been a great way to meet people as well.

LK: That's really, really great advice. So, and on kind of a more general note as individuals think about their careers as a whole, what is some overall advice that you would give?

SC: Looking back on the past seven or eight years of my career, one big turning point for me around thinking about my career journey and my learning journey has been identifying my core values. I think it's really important if you have the time and resources to work with a professional coach, a life coach, a therapist or even a friend or a colleague that you really trust to identify 3 or 4 core values. For folks that aren't as familiar with what core values are, they're really the governing concepts that help you determine if your career and really anything in your life, could be relationships, day-to-day decisions, are aligned and true to who you are as a person. And, taking the time to define my core values with a therapist a couple of years ago helped me prioritize what really mattered to me as a person and recognize what actions, what behaviors I was taking that was getting me closer to those core values or taking me further away from those core values, including in my career. So we use those life values, I use those life values to identify my really important life goals and a lot of those include my career journey. And I was able to notice where was I committed to my career journey and even when I had those lulls in motivation, I could reflect on the work I had done so far to move me closer to those goals and it felt good to know that those actions are aligned with my core values, and the motivation returns. You feel a return and you feel the commitment over and over so that would be kind of a big picture thing that everybody should do when they're thinking about their career journey.

LK: Yeah, definitely. I think that that's really great advice. I think I'm going to take that advice for myself because I don't think I've ever thought of it in that way. But I really think that is important because it kind of helps you get to know yourself which at the end of the day, that's, you know, really important to kind of drive where you're going to go in your life.

So as we get towards the end of our time together, we are a public health training center. So we're always, you know, focused on continuing education and I would love to hear about one of the last trainings that you've participated in that you felt like was really influential to you.

SC: I have participated in so many trainings. I love, I love public health trainings, comes with the territory of being a past PHTC alum, I think. Let's see, one training that I've attended, it wasn't recent, but it really had an influence on me, was a training on action learning coaching. This was a

multi-day training that taught a small group of people how to become action learning coaches. And action learning is, action learning coaching I should say, is the facilitation of a small group or a team that's working together on a real-world problem in order to take action, but also to develop leadership skills and to make change within an organization. It's a really interesting framework and the coolest thing about this training was that the coach, they teach you, that the coach is only responsible for two things, which sound very simple but are very difficult to do. One, intervening with questions to that team when they see an opportunity for learning or growth, an opportunity for the group to improve their performance. And two, enforcing the group's one rule which is that statements should only be made in response to questions, which is very difficult to do. And so, this type of coaching really changed my way of thinking about collaboration and communication, and how teams work together. If you want to learn more about my action learning coaching experience, I talked a little bit about it on another podcast which is called "10 Minutes to Better Communication" with Anne Marie Liebel. So definitely check it out if you're interested in action learning, learning more about what it is and that communication piece, that that's a good podcast for you.

LK: Thank you so much for sharing that. And for our listeners, we will be sure to include a link to this other podcast that Samanta just touched on in our show notes. So just check that out in the show notes.

So Samantha, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I've really enjoyed our conversation. I feel like I've learned a lot. I hope our listeners also learn a lot and I really appreciated just this great conversation that we've had. And I thank you for being here today.

SC: Thanks, Liz. It was a great conversation.

LK: We hope you enjoyed this episode of The Leading Public Health, a podcast from the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University. We value your feedback. So, please take a minute to complete the evaluation located in the show notes. Thank you for joining us.