

Allyship means many things to many people. To Martha Hazen Schumacher, allyship means embodying the persona that you put out in the world when the world isn't watching you. Rising Professionals of Color co-chairs Annyce Brackins and Christen Blackledge had a chance to “sit down” with Martha in a virtual interview to share her thoughts on Women’s History Month and this year’s topic of “Moving Forward Together! Women Educating & Inspiring Generations.”

Martha is the President of Hazen Consulting and the Hazen Institute for Leadership Training (HILT), creating global strategies to elevate social impact and philanthropy. As if her credentials and current role aren’t enough to speak for her professional experience, she is also past Chair of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Global.

But her many hats were not the center of our conversation, as we wanted to delve deeper into her mindset while wearing those hats during each season of her life and her career, and how that mindset set the tone for her advocacy today. How does Martha stay true to her values, while making, reclaiming, and resuscitating space for others?

We asked Martha to recount a story of a woman leader who shaped her. Without hesitation, she said “Mama-san”. She recalled proudly how her mother founded the Hikone/Ann Arbor middle school program, a life-changing cultural exchange experience involving more than 1,000 middle school students in Japan and the U.S. over 40 years. She also talked about how her mother’s resilience and activism left a lasting impression on her from the age of 10, when she was working tirelessly to get the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) passed.

The day of our interview would’ve been Mama-san’s 95th birthday, a heartfelt reminder that her presence, wisdom, and unwavering spirit continue to guide Martha’s journey. Her mother’s dedication to peace and building community are not just memories, they continue to be a living force, shaping Martha’s purpose, fueling her advocacy, and illuminating the path she forges for others. She emphasized the importance of lifting up other women in her career, through hiring, mentoring, and supporting women in leadership roles.

When asked how her current season embodied the theme of International Women’s History Month, Martha shared that throughout her career, she has prioritized lifting up as many women as possible. Martha is a founding member of International Women in Fundraising (IWF) and a Global Advisor to the IWF Purple Mindshift Program. Through this organization, she has mentored dozens of women in fundraising around the world, and through HILT, she recently created full-freight fundraising conference scholarship opportunities to help remove financial barriers for fundraisers living and/or serving in marginalized communities.

Martha’s dedication to equity and inclusion extends beyond just the programs she supports. It is embedded in how she approaches her work, the partnerships she forms, and the conversations she initiates. She challenges organizations to be transparent in their hiring practices, ensuring salary ranges are posted and equitable opportunities are *truly* available. “If they’re not showing

salary ranges, I have to question their commitment to equity,” she said. For Martha, allyship means taking action, even when it is uncomfortable.

Her leadership journey has been defined by a willingness to step into new spaces, even when she felt unsure. She recalled how she took on a major gifts officer role at Greenpeace based largely on her ability to connect with people and listen deeply. Years later, that same willingness to push past classic imposter syndrome fears led her to become one of the first female vice presidents at Defenders of Wildlife, based in Washington, D.C. At just 32, she stepped into an executive role in a field where women were often underrepresented at the highest levels. Instead of focusing on her own success, she prioritized advocating for fair wages and mentoring women on her team, helping them to grow in their careers.

When asked what advice she would give to women aspiring to leadership roles, Martha emphasized the power of active listening (with constituencies, in donor relationships, and in all peer-to-peer interactions). “Listening isn’t passive, it’s an action,” she said. “It’s about being present, actually hearing and understanding what the person across from you is saying. And it’s about making space for voices that need to be heard, then using your own voice to amplify them.” She also encourages women to recognize their worth and not hesitate to take up space, whether that means negotiating salaries, stepping into leadership positions, or challenging outdated systems.

Martha Schumacher continues to embody allyship in both words and action. Her career is a reflection of what it means to advocate for others while staying true to her values. As we celebrate Women’s History Month, her journey serves as a reminder that progress happens when we actively make room for others, lift up and support those around us, and commit to moving forward.

To learn more about Martha’s commitment to allyship and advocacy, please click here: www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7236734716417073154.