



Original illustration by Gillian Goerz, "Sabrina Favaro."

# WOMEN *and* PHILANTHROPY

A dialog with Sabrina Favaro

By: **Angela Bhutani** \_\_\_\_\_

Sabrina is a third-generation member of the Longo grocery business family. Rather than deciding to work in the family business, she pursued a career in the healthcare field, currently working closely with long-term care homes. She is a trustee-at-large of the Longo's Family Charitable Foundation.

*Angela Bhutani (AB): Sabrina, through your participation in annual Longo family assembly meetings, you expressed an interest in being more involved in the family's private foundation and are now a trustee-at-large. What skill sets do you bring to this role and what did you have to learn to prepare for it?*

**Sabrina Favaro (SF):** My experience working in long-term care facilities and having worked briefly in children's services provided me with a deep understanding of how not-for-profit organizations operate as well as their needs and challenges. This helped me when coming into my role in the family foundation. I also learned a lot from being involved in the foundation, especially from our Foundation Co-Chair Rosanne Longo. With her, I have been able to participate in conversations with organizations that are not within my range of expertise, an example being mental health. Listening to

Rosanne interview these organizations has been very beneficial for me. I learned the right questions to ask to better understand the needs of not-for-profit organizations, and to understand how the foundation's grants would provide maximum impact.

**AB:** *I understand that you took courses in financial terminology to prepare for your role as trustee-at-large. Were you advised to do so, or did you know naturally that this would be important knowledge to acquire?*

**SF:** My reasons were two-fold. I knew that strengthening my understanding of financial terms would help me in my "day job." When I started working in children's services, we had funding grants available for certain organizations and I was responsible for ensuring that the recipient organizations were using the funds as they were intended. I was also interested at the time in playing a more formal role within the family foundation. I emailed our family's advisor Gwen Harvey to ask if there were any courses that would make me more prepared to join the Foundation. She suggested an online course through Stanford University in the U.S. It happened to be a free online course that was strictly geared to donors to help them assess charities. The course lined up well with my stage in life and everything that I was interested in doing.

The course walks the donor through financial statements, to better understand the information presented and help provide donors with the ability to grade an organization against others on metrics such as percentage of revenue that is directed to administration costs. It also covers other important factors in making decisions, for example making sure that your values align with those of the recipient organization. Now when we receive a proposal, and I'm reviewing their financials, I can have a meaningful conversation with management of the organization and understand

these concepts at a deeper level.

**AB:** *After taking the course, did you change the way that you approached decision-making at the foundation?*

**SF:** Before taking the course, I simply looked at the organization's mission and



**This group is really inspiring to me, because it is gender specific and I think that it gives me more confidence to put my hand up and be more involved in decision-making at the foundation.**



if it sounded good to me, then it was something that I thought we should be interested in. After taking the course, I asked more questions and started paying more attention to the financial statements. More than anything, I found this preparation gave me more confidence. In the

past, I assumed that since I didn't have the financial understanding, I might as well just not ask. Now, while I still might feel I could be asking a basic question, I ask it. Most of the time, people tell me that it was a good question.

**AB:** *Do you feel any uniqueness at all being a woman within the group of trustees, and in having another woman (Rosanne) as a mentor?*

**SF:** I happen to be the only female in my family of my generation in our foundation meetings. I do sometimes feel I'm speaking more than others on "soft skill" items. I don't know if that's a gender thing or if it's just due to different career paths.

It does help that, as my mentor, Rosanne happens to also talk openly about some of those soft skills. I've also been impressed with her involvement in a group "Women and Foundations" where she shares ideas with other women who are interested in philanthropic impact. This group is really inspiring to me, because it is gender specific, and I think that it gives me more confidence to put my hand up and be more involved in decision-making at the foundation.

**AB:** *I think that it is important for each of us to step up and own our expertise because we ultimately end up (even unknowingly) acting as mentors for other people. So, beyond our own development we should be aware of how we are developing others behind us.*

**SF:** Yes. I find that women tend to naturally take other women under their wing and "show them the ropes." In most cases they don't see it as being a mentor, it's just something that women do. I find that now that I have a child of my own, it's helpful being around other women like Rosanne. It's important to me to see how she balances her family and the work she does for the family foundation, and how she achieves both but keeps the two separate from each other. **M**