

Meet a Maestro: Nicole Baran

Posted By [Lisa Regan](#) on 01/17/2012

[Nicole Baran](#) is the founder and Executive Director of [the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness](#). This cutting-edge Bay Area non-profit trains organizations and institutions to develop comprehensive approaches for responding effectively to relationship abuse. The Center consults with universities and professional organizations on issues ranging from policy change to grant implementation to training programs. With the range and depth of her advocacy, along with her pragmatic focus, Nicole has created an original model for a successful non-profit. We spoke to her about how institutions should think through the issues surrounding relationship abuse, as well as her Center's consulting work more broadly.

What was the origin of your involvement in domestic violence issues?

After my MA in English, I taught high school girls and about half of them had dated boyfriends who committed relationship abuse against them-- they were only 15. What I found interesting is that all of the prevention programs were targeted towards girls even though 95% of dating violence is perpetrated by men against women. I decided to get my MSW to research teen dating violence prevention and ended up becoming alarmed by the fact that the approach to domestic violence was so victim-blaming—by social workers, police officers, lawyers, judges and others who are in positions to help survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. Since most organizations focus on crisis, I started a non-profit so that education and training would be the primary focus and professionals would have access to in-depth training, rather than a generic DV 101 workshop.

Your non-profit, the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness, developed a model for college campuses to address relationship abuse and sexual violence that you started at Stanford University. You also teach a class on violence against women at Stanford in the Feminist Studies Program. What are some challenges that a college campus presents in terms of addressing these issues?

Universities often don't understand the dynamics—that the survivor experiences an ongoing threat from the perpetrator or retaliation, and that she may have very valid fears about moving forward with a charge. One of the biggest challenges is to help

administrators prioritize holding the perpetrator accountable while ensuring the survivor's safety.

For universities, what is the solution?

Universities are often afraid of reputation and liability—if they want to avoid negative media around violence against women on campus, they should allocate enough funds to prevent, rather than just respond to, sexual assault and relationship abuse. In order to broaden the safety net, with limited resources, they need a full team of comprehensively trained professionals, so that they can advise students and reduce liability; educate students to seek help or become active bystanders; and empower administrators to hold perpetrators accountable. And that means training—not just of crisis staff—but at multiple levels of the university. My organization works with those various layers, to train staff in both prevention and response.

You consult, in fact, for universities, among other organizations. What kind of training do you offer?

We provide training to professionals such as residence deans, HR managers, judicial affairs staff, law enforcement, counselors, medical staff and coaches. If a university has received a federal government OVW grant to create a sexual and relationship abuse program, we can help them outline and achieve their grants goals; identify gaps in their approach; and determine how to allocate resources effectively and efficiently.

We also provide consultation and manuals for universities—for instance, on how to develop an internship program; design a comprehensive training schedule; or create a Men Against Violence program. Anyone can inquire about these offerings through Maestro Market.

You also do workshops on relationship abuse for a variety of organizations, beyond universities.

We believe that any organization or profession is affected by relationship abuse, whether it's part of the job to respond to the issue, or a corporation losing millions of dollars each year due to lost productivity and increased absenteeism because they don't have personnel policies on domestic violence. Since one in three women will experience domestic violence at the hands of her partner, it affects a wide range of businesses and professions.

Yours is a policy advocacy organization as well—so what kinds of policies would you like to see instituted?

There are policies within each professional sector that, if instituted consistently, would truly impact the safety of survivors and the prevention of relationship abuse on a broad level. I advocate mandatory training for some key professions that don't have it already—namely, HR managers, doctors, lawyers and judges—and more in-depth training for those who do.

What are some of the specific tips that you give in your training?

While all of our workshops include strategies to hold perpetrators accountable rather than blame victims for something someone else has chosen to do, we tailor each presentation to the specific professional population, and I often bring in co-trainers from that profession. For example, if I'm training law enforcement, I talk to them about investigative techniques and how to identify a dominant aggressor. If I'm training lawyers, it would include relevant laws and safety tips when working with a client obtaining a restraining order—such as asking the bailiff to give a survivor time to leave the courtroom safely by ensuring the perpetrator stays an additional 15 minutes.

You mentioned personnel policies. What might those include?

For HR managers, we provide samples of policies and protocols on how to respond if an employee is experiencing relationship abuse. Often simple strategies can be implemented: giving photos of a perpetrator to company or building security; voluntarily changing a survivor's office phone number; or allowing leave or schedule changes for survivors to go to court or counseling.

What's a general tip for anyone who wants to help end violence against women?

Basically, I encourage everyone, from parents teaching kids, friends talking to each other, or guys in the locker room, to stand up against sexism, because sexism makes women objects—and by making them objects, they become rape-able—and we can stop that. The majority of men do not choose to rape, control or hurt women, which means that it is not inevitable.