



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

SESSION 115

BECOMING A BRAND CHAMPION

WITH JENNIFER GOODSMITH

BETH: Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky, and welcome to Driving Participation. Today I have Jennifer GoodSmith on the call with me. Jennifer is the vice president of marketing and communications at The Morton Arboretum, and she just went through a pretty intense re-branding project that has had some really, really interesting outcomes, and a lot of times when we talk about branding, we talk about the process. We talk about the project. We talk about the people, but Jennifer can really speak to why. Like why she did it and what came out of doing it along with some of the process pieces. So, Jennifer, thank you so much for joining me today.

JENNIFER: Well, thanks, Beth. I'm glad to be here.

BETH: I was so thrilled to hear about what you did. So can you start us off by before you get into talking about the project itself, how did you wander into this world of nonprofit communications?

JENNIFER: Well, I've been in nonprofit communications my whole career, and I go back a few years. So when I was looking for a job when I got out of college, my father, who is a management consultant, sat me down and he said, "You find a job that you think sounds really fun because if you're gonna work, you're gonna work a long time." So when I was looking for a job, and of course this was back in the day when we actually looked it up in the newspaper and circled it in red ink ...

BETH: Oh yeah, me, too.

JENNIFER: I thought this job at this HMO sounded kind of fun and it was a marketing assistant and so I kind of stumbled into this. Fast forward two years. I had a wonderful mentor at that place and I did pretty much soup to nuts, but



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

you know, two years later I was bored out of my eye sockets, so I went back to my father and my father said, “You know, it’s your responsibility to come up with a way to make it interesting.” So I proposed doing an in-house newsletter, I proposed doing press releases and I self-taught myself how to engage with people, which meant we should find out what people think so therefore you do surveys. So it just sort of became this organic thing for me, and I just continued on. I personally believe in the four ‘p’s, but I added a fifth ‘p’ and that’s passion and I find great passion in mission-related work of nonprofits.

BETH: That is something that I always see with people is that most of us that do this work do it because we want to, and I don’t always feel like I hear that in corporate work.

JENNIFER: Right, right, right.

BETH: It’s different and it’s quirky and it has its own uniquenesses, but it’s also not 100 percent different than the work that our corporate counterparts do, especially at an organization the size of yours.

JENNIFER: I’ve been in different-sized organizations, and I’ve been in higher education and I’ve been in health care and now I’m in you know, we’re essentially a cultural institution, even though in our freedom we see ourselves as a living museum, and when I started making the transition from place to place, I was convinced I didn’t know anything about marketing until I realized marketing is marketing and I don’t care where you are. The kind of things we do to market our organizations, even as a nonprofit, well maybe we don’t have as many resources, which requires us to be a little more creative in how we market, but marketing is still marketing and I think there is great value to that because it helps us. I like to learn from corporate marketers because I like to see if I had a kabillion dollars how I would spend it and then I ratchet that down to what can I take out of it to make a difference for what I’m trying to do, which is to find out what people want and then give it to them in any organization I work for.



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: I think it's so important that you said that because I do the same thing. I spend a ton of my time looking in the new media spaces, in what's on the horizon and what's in the current space because nonprofits don't always have the capacity to necessarily go to all the conferences or consume all of that information and it needs often to be translated a little bit into their language of their world, but ultimately it's a lot of the same stuff and I find it so funny because it's so funny when you're working in nonprofits to feel like the poor stepchild. If we only had this and if we only had their money, but actually there's lots of places in corporate America that departments don't have the money. Nobody has all the money to do all they want to do and there's plenty of places in corporate organizations. My mother is a librarian and she was working for an enormous pharmaceutical company and she was, in the corporate world a librarian is called knowledge management and she came to me one day with this brochure, like a tri-fold brochure she was working on to communicate the services of her department. I mean, it was one of those moments where I realized everybody is the same and tons of people don't have resources because nobody budgeted this thing that needed to be done and so she kind of had to do it herself.

JENNIFER: I think it also gives us an opportunity to sort of brainstorm and to think about how to do things differently. So my perspective in the new stuff is we look at it and then we decide if it's worth our time and energy, but we don't always find that we need to be completely cutting edge, but we can be on the cusp. On the cusp works really, really well for a lot of organizations, except I must admit that we are all over Pokemon Go, and I already have 70 Pokemons, for research purposes you understand!

BETH: Absolutely! For research purposes.

JENNIFER: Because we have a lot of Pokemons and a lot of gyms on our grounds and we're a safe place to do it so there was an opportunity for us. You gotta understand what the latest, newest craze is.



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: I think that's a really important thing. It's funny. Like I hadn't actually planned a show around this Pokemon Go thing, but this show is going to be going out in the next week or two so it's the thing right now and you have a giant space. The Morton Arboretum is an open space and that is an interesting thing that we should probably talk about, that decision of "Do we capitalize on this thing that could be the next big thing?" or it could literally just be a momentary blip on the radar.

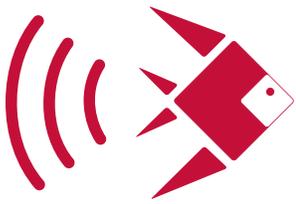
JENNIFER: Right, right and our conversation with our leadership team which we've already had is, "Are you kidding? Don't talk about Pokemon," and they're watching people walk around with their phones in their faces. So our message is "You can be outside and you don't only have to be playing Pokemon. You could enjoy the real nature as well." I think there are opportunities anyway you look at it and I think that's part of the fun. You've got to have fun.

BETH: I think that is part of it. Sometimes there's gonna be something you think is stupid, that you think is silly or your leadership thinks is just ridiculous, and I get that it's at the point where this is not aligned with our brand. This would be against what we do, but the problem I think a lot of times that people face is that it doesn't suit someone's personal taste or interest level and so if they think it's ridiculous, they're gonna ...

JENNIFER: And a lot of support

BETH: Throughout an organization.

JENNIFER: And we had that conversation because you know people in our room in our leadership meeting, they're like "Oh, I just don't understand this," and I'm like "We aren't the target audience so the audience is actually an audience that we would love to engage to come and spend some time here at the arboretum." It's a younger audience. You know, anywhere from 10-year-olds to, well, OK, I'm not gonna tell you my age, but there you go. It is spanning across because



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

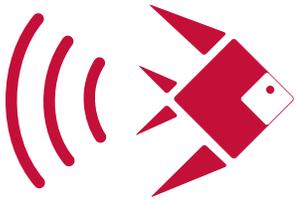
families are coming and playing together. So we do have a staff session at noon today to walk our staff through the grounds playing Pokemon to get the nuances of how to do it here.

BETH: Oh, you have a horrible job!

JENNIFER: I know. Isn't it terrible? It's terrible! My data plan is going a little out of whack this month, but that's not the point.

BETH: Exactly. That's not the point. I was gonna say all the service companies are gonna love it because everyone is gonna have to up their plans to go just kind of do all this. So yeah, that is always an interesting thing. Where do you fall on this realm of trying to do things and it's hard to sometimes convince people to do things that they're not comfortable with or not interested in because the world's interested in it and that definitely does fall into a little bit of this concept of branding. How much of it do you focus on what's going on internally and how much of it's externally, but that does lead us to my big question that I like to ask everybody because this whole "Do we jump in on this Pokemon craze?" is part of this. What does participation mean? What are you looking for? What's important to you?

JENNIFER: So I think for us and I think one of the key parts of branding for us was why do you need to brand? We're nearly a hundred-year-old organization. We have a brand. So really what I see, I see marketing as find out what people want and give it to them. So in order to do that, you kind of have to figure out what people want. You have to engage them in a conversation about what's right, what's not and then you need to tell your own story that fits whatever it is you want to tell. So engaging people together and figuring it out just brings a lot of synergy to the organization. So when we started branding, a branding conversation here, it was really about how to get people on the same page and we need people. I want to build and brand ambassadors with our internal staff. I think it's essential to who we are even though people come here and the number



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

one thing they like about our organization and visiting the arboretum are the people they find here. So getting those people engaged in the process of brand was an important and probably the most important part of how to get everybody to participate and what we found was the more we talked to them and we went back to staff seven times in the course of the year to just talk to them at a lot of different touch points. Sometimes it was a focus group. Sometimes it was just listening to them talking. Sometimes it was brainstorming new ideas. Sometimes it was reviewing information. Sometimes it was brand bingo because you have to continue that engagement. So for me participation is really engaging people to come along for the ride.

BETH: I love that. One of the things that you said was you're a hundred-year-old organization and you have a brand. Can you explain what you mean by that?

JENNIFER: So I'm gonna actually tell you the story of the process I used when I was interviewing and so what I do when I interview anywhere is I did as much research as I could find on Google as we like to say and I actually researched information to see what people in the public would be saying about the arboretum. They talked about the 1,700 acres and that it has 9 miles of roads, which are perfect for biking, and 16 miles of trails, which is beautifully groomed and perfect for hiking and it has trees from all over the world. All of which is true and it's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful place and then I read our strategic plan and the strategic plan did not talk about the place. It talked about the work in caring, protecting and serving trees because that is and the scientific work that we did to support trees, not only, we're outside of Chicago, not only here, but around the world. To me, that was this important realization that people who come here love the place. They love it! So we have a strong brand, but we have a quiet brand and I think that was the point for us that if you don't know us, you don't know us. If you do know us, ya kind of love us. So that was a fabulous opportunity to say, "Let's take a step back and say we are really strong. We just need to let people know about us," so we were strong and quiet at the same time. That was a tough sell job because those are such opposites that people are



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

like, “How can you be strong and then be quiet at the same time,” but people do recognize that we were not as well-known as we could have been. We are about 20 miles outside of Chicago, and in Chicago to some that feels like we’re in a completely different state, which we’re not. So I think that that is kind of where we started with all this is you know what is your issue and for us it wasn’t a bad issue, it was an opportunity. That’s why I took the job. I saw there was a lot of opportunity. The second thing is that we were just about to launch, in a few years we were gonna launch a capital campaign so we were in the very preliminary stages of developing our capital campaign process and I have in the past done brands that have been very closely connected to capital campaigns and it’s fabulous for a couple of reasons. Capital campaign is a way to share some of the brand and costs because it actually has a direct support. We were trying to raise our philanthropic profile. It’s a pretty good outcome of brand as well. I think those two things together made it easy for us to say, “We’ve been around for a long time,” but the thing we didn’t need is a logo. So we have a logo. It’s been around since 1970 and honestly, I didn’t think we needed to touch it because not everybody in the world understands what the word “arboretum” means, but our logo has an oak tree in it and actually a staff member drew it in the 1970s and it tells its own story. It’s got a leaf, it’s got an acorn, it’s got a full-grown tree so that’s past, present and future and I didn’t see any reason whatsoever because it was well-known, it was well-engaged throughout our whole environment. It was on everything. There was no need to do that, a brand, a visual brand identity.

BETH: So no that brings up a very interesting question because I’m sure as you know people don’t really know what the word “branding” means. Every time I ask people “What’s your number one question about branding?” the number one answer I get back is “What exactly is branding?” and when I go out and start having these conversations around branding, the other questions that come up are “Well, how often should I change my logo?” and it’s all graphical visual stuff so the difference between the visual branding and the strategic branding is very confusing to most of the world. Did you have trouble inside your organization having people understand exactly what the project was that you were doing and



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

why you wanted to do it the way you did it?

JENNIFER: No, we actually didn't, and I think that's because we actually had done a brand in 2007.

BETH: OK, so you had some history with it so the people who were there kind of knew what the drill was.

JENNIFER: And it was a visual identity so it was really, but there were so many great lessons learned from that so it really established how we used photos and make sure we have people in photos because we want to engage people with the nature and the beauty of the place, but we had a tag line and I think half the people probably said to me within my first week of work that they hated the tag line, and it hadn't been used for a long time because some people really, really hated it and so but what I didn't see was you know what the message is. So branding to me is really how an organization tells its own story and you know, it's all about differentiation. I think that's what you hear most when people say "what's a brand?" How does your organization differ from the one next to it? I mean, if you think about I just gave a presentation on branding and I showed REI, Kohl's and Nordstrom. Three stores. They're all stores and they all sell clothing. What's the difference between those three stores? That is how you differentiate. Nordstrom's is known for customer service, Kohl's is for value clothing and REI is for outdoor clothing. So they know who they are. That's what brand is. It's finding out who you are as an organization. So we really, really focused on messaging. So getting everybody on the same page for messaging was the only sell I had to do and people were like, "Oh yeah, I get it." Particularly since you've got to make a promise, so I'm a huge, huge, huge believer in brand architecture and we probably spent most of our brand development time identifying what you know our position was, what we were promising people, what our personality was and you know while those are sort of buzzy words and internal speak, what they did do is it gave us an opportunity to sit down with our staff, our volunteers and our leadership and our members and say, "What do you think of us? What do you



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

think we are? What do you think we do? What do we do better than anyone else? What single idea can we do better than anyone else?” and you know when you sit through enough of those, things bubble to the top and those are the words that we used. So for example, we were really trying to elevate this understanding of what science means to this organization because of the scientific work we do. So our position, so how we looked at who we are is we’re the champion of trees. We’re global scientific research, leading education initiative strengthens our connections to the brilliance of the trees now and for future generations. So when I think about that, it’s a lot of internal speaks, but my pull outs are we’re the champion of trees, we do global scientific so it’s not just local. It’s global, but we also are a leader in education and we love the fact that people come here to explore. Those I think are really critical and then when you think about what our promise is gonna be, what is that single thing we do better than everyone else? We’re a living laboratory. We’re the brilliance of trees of champion, protected and shared season to season, generation after generation and I think the key to that one was living laboratory and I think part of the reason this resonated so well is a) we heard it from so many people and we used their words.

BETH: That’s so key right there. OK, so you had a group of people inside your organization that probably had strong ideas and opinions. You had a strategic plan and then you had people outside of the organization that maybe had different words and language and opinions about who you were. Sometimes I think when people go into branding, I mean I’ve heard people talk about it, that it’s about figuring out who you are and who you want to be and then kind of finding that audience and sometimes people talk about it and they focus on the external research. I’m a believer that it’s about merging those two things together, about learning what you all think you are and learning what external people think you are and then looking for where those things match up. How does that work in your organization?

JENNIFER: So you know, I’ve done branding for a couple of organizations now and it’s been different in every place. I think what we needed because we had



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

just gone through a pretty in-depth branding process a few years earlier, five or six years earlier, what we really needed was to have an internal connection, and so we started with talking to our internal audiences and from that we identified what the representation of our brand and the theme was, which was you know we are the champion of trees, but then we took a step back because we had not done any external research and we took a step back and we did some research with key influencers and then we did some research with an informed general public and the reason we did it later is, part of it was kind of money. Part of it was we really needed to get a sense. We weren't looking to identify who we were. We were looking to identify how we talked about our organization and so going out to the external public a little bit afterwards to help us refine some of those messages was I think worked well for us because we knew in our hearts who we were and how we needed to speak about ourselves and at the same time, we also knew that we had to listen to how other people heard us and so I think that's pretty key. You need to be aware of your audiences just as though honestly our members are different from people who are here for the first time, who are different from people we work with in the scientific or collection work that we do to protect trees. They're just all different messages. So we have a series of messages that we use that sort of tell our story, but it's a different story to every audience.

BETH: That brings up a really good question because you know the thing I think people struggle with a lot with messaging, branding, marketing, but especially in this branding world is I call it the idea of being narrow. You know, not wanting to talk to everyone. People always say, "We want everyone to know who we are. We want high awareness and value from everyone in the entire world," and even if I can back people off from that, I recently looked at some brand work that someone was working on and there were 18 different audiences in it. It's really, really hard to speak equally and to be all things to 18 different audiences, so I'm a firm believer. You really have to narrow that down and make some decisions from a branding level about what's your primary message? Who is your primary audience? How did you guys address that? How narrow did you go with your



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

primary audience and your kind of core message?

JENNIFER: I think we started out with our primary audience being an internal audience because I wanted to build brand ambassadors. So I wanted to arm our scientists who were reaching out across the globe with the message that highlights who we are, but I also wanted, we have about 400 staff members and 1,300 volunteers who help run this outdoor museum and we have over a million people a year who visit. So it was really important for us not only to talk to our members and be consistent in what we say to our members, but those people who don't know us and so my primary audience are getting people who don't know us to love us and I think we then the second half of the project is we spent a good year reaching out within the Chicagoland community to key influencers to share information about the kind of work we do that people were not always aware of, but those messages were the same. You know scientific research, the living laboratory, inspired explorations. You know, the education component to the work that we do here and I think because our messages were pretty tight, it helped us tell the story that we wanted to tell.

BETH: I think that's really what that key is. A lot of times when people ask me about branding, they talk about "How do we get key influencers to pay attention to us? How do we get our stories picked up? How do we get people to share?" and the answer that they want is "Tell me what to do in marketing. Tell me where to post my stuff on social media. Tell me what to say," and it's hard for people to understand that if you back up the truck and decide internally what you're going out there in the world with, you're already armed with everything you need. Not only does it tell you what to say, it tells you where to go and who to look for.

JENNIFER: Right. One of the things, you always identify the issues and we had a whole list of goals and expectations, but you always identify the issues that you want to sort of resolve and one of them interestingly is people do not understand what the word "arboretum" means so ...



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: Really?

JENNIFER: Yeah, really. I can always tell when I get a cold call from a vendor who has not really done their homework because we often become an arbitorium.

BETH: Really, an arbitorium.

JENNIFER: So we actually have a giant squirrel costume named Jumpy, of course.

BETH: Of course!

JENNIFER: So Jumpy actually went out and interviewed people and said, “How do you pronounce this word?” and half the people got it right. So what we really wanted was something that said what we did and so I think for us, and it’s not easy to do this, but the theme that we focused on was the champion of trees. So you know immediately what we stand for. We are championing trees. We want you to champion the tree. You could be a tree champion wherever you are and it doesn’t have to be just us, but we believe that championing trees is critical and I think that those three words really did help solidify what people thought about us and we have people coming in to interview calling us the champion of trees, and we have you know and quite frankly even more successful is, so we have an in-house agency to do our design work, our writing and our design work and everybody, all of the information flows through our office, so we actually do edit messaging and tone and consistency across all of the work we do, but the last couple of months, we started having people come up to us internally and say, “Would you mind if we change the name of our employee recognition program to the champion of trees award?” and “Would you mind if we did our volunteer award to be called the champion spirit award?” and you know, our annual report, which we call a perennial report because we’re all about perennials, ...

BETH: That’s great, I love it!

JENNIFER: Was year of champions and you know, we don’t have to do this



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

anymore. People are doing it for us.

BETH: Now how do you think it got to that point because that's like the holy grail that everyone is looking for. I mean I've literally been hired to go into organizations at like five years after a brand to kind of re-indoctrinate, reinvigorate the process and get the new people that have come on. I've had people say that our staff has turned over. We got everybody involved. We did focus groups and team meetings and all that stuff and everyone that was here then was into it, but now it's been five years, they don't understand why it needs to be like this, they don't understand. Like it's really easy to get pulled off the mark and in some cases, you know somebody like you is still there that's kind of keeping as they say "keeping the course between the fire hydrant and the driveway," but a lot of times in a lot of nonprofits, the person that led the charge has moved on and then all of that work can get completely you know pulled off the compass point into a new marketing director's vision of what things need to be or "I don't really like that logo" or "I hate that color." You've been in these organizations. I've been in these organizations. Like the new person wants to come in and make their mark.

JENNIFER: So, fortunately I'm still here so ...

BETH: That does help.

JENNIFER: I think that the fact that I do think it started with people hearing themselves. The process we use, and this is a process point, but it's an important one. The firm we used, their process to share our messaging platform was actually to write a book, and it was a black and white book and when they presented the book, they said, "OK, sit down. I want you to close your eyes. We're gonna read you this book and it takes about ten minutes," and I'm like I think I visibly rolled my eyes. I'm like "No, that's OK." No, we're gonna read it to you and I'm like, "Fine." Did you hear my eyes roll? Fine, and you close your eyes, and you just absorb yourself into these words and these words are the words that our



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

people said and our people wholeheartedly believed and one of the things they brought to our attention was that you know our personality, the essence of our organization is that we are disciplined because we are a scientific organization. We are disciplined. We are confident because we are among the best in the world at what we do. We really are and we are recognized within our own organization and other organizations like us, but we are wildly passionate about trees. So that personality sort of came through in this storybook they read everybody to the point where we went to our CEO and said, “You have to listen to this,” and he’s a PhD, so he is very much a scientist, and when I told him we were gonna have him close his eyes and listen to this book, his eyes did roll. So, but he did it and it was so incredibly powerful that I actually read it to everybody I could possibly read it to because I’m a believer in it and it was really designed as an internal piece. Not to be used externally, not to be shared, not to be developed, not to be, but we turned it into an actual picture book and I am actually leaving our discussion this morning to go present to our incoming group of staff and volunteers. So I talk to every single staff and volunteer person for half an hour. We converted it into and that’s our message platform, right, so we converted it into a book about the champion of trees. If you want to read it in print, we have an actual book of the original book that we hand out to every single person. I don’t read it to them. I have them read it, but we turned it into a video and then we do the second video of our staff saying why are you a champion of trees. So I think you know the key is that it’s so ingrained so it’s a part of HR’s application form.

BETH: Wow, really?

JENNIFER: Yeah, their mission ...

BETH: The application?

JENNIFER: Yeah. So their mission, so our HR has a mission statement. Employees read them. Our champion of trees, protecting them and preserving them. They are passionate about trees and nature and support the arboretum’s position in a



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

variety of departments, including research, collections, education, development, administration, horticulture, marketing, retail operations and visitor services. Can you imagine a world without trees? Neither can we. So it's so ingrained into that, into so many areas that's what helps it, but then you gotta have fun with it so we got capes that say "I'm a Tree Champion." These are probably for the little kids, but they're very popular. You know, every t-shirt has the champion of trees on it and our shirts get worn a lot.

BETH: Oh, people will do just about anything for a t-shirt.

JENNIFER: Yeah, I know. It's great.

BETH: That's kind of one of the key things is that you know, what I'm starting to talk more even about in branding starts out kind of looking like a marketing project, but to make it work, it needs to be an everybody project. It's an organizational project. It needs to be and the word "culture" has come up more and more. I always say that your brand isn't what you show, what you tell or what you do. It's what people see, it's what they hear and what they experience and that experience is really where things get left off a lot of times in branding projects because like you in many cases. You bring in the consultant to help you with the message and sometimes help you with the look and then a lot of times, they like, whomp, put that report on your desk and they're out and living this brand becomes the role of the people that are in the organization so this is what you've done to kind of steward this and recognize that it's not like a switch that you flip, that like today we are a brand. How long ago did you actually launch this message?

JENNIFER: We launched it internally in February of '15 and then we did it publicly on Arbor Day in '15 so it's been a full year, about a year and a half. So you know, launching it internally first of course we have to do a breakfast of champions so you know you totally feed people all the time. I continue to give swag out so I a couple times a year played brand bingo, which really is just bingo and then in the

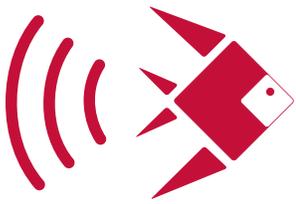


DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

middle between the games I ask a brand question and you can win brand stuff and you know, you've got to have fun with it. I totally agree with you, Beth. I think that the brand is an umbrella for the organization, and I think in our organization it's been embraced that way. Our senior leadership has embraced it. Our board has embraced it, and in fact, our board funded this in a way that they hadn't funded anything like this before and that's because they believe in the power of it and one of the things that I think is so important is that 61 percent of people prefer to give to well-known nonprofits. Not necessarily the most effective, so really part of what we need to do is to raise our own profiles because we want people to pay attention to the good work that we're all doing. I think because we had such a strong position and engagement with people, every single survey that we do, the satisfaction and event surveys that we did, number one ranked was the quality of the interaction with our staff and volunteers. That in and of itself is a success so really all you need to do is keep telling the story and asking for new stories.

BETH: That is really it. It's so huge. So if people are listening to you and saying, "Yes, I want to be there. I want to be at a place where my staff is engaged and sharing our story and that the people who come through HR are willing to read that statement and say yes, that's what I want to sign up for," that people want to be basic part of your movement. You know, I kind of explain it that a brand is and the way that you've done it, it's like you have like a manifesto in three words. That's the thing. It's not about the tag line, it's not about, it's about how do you rally everyone from the people that know you well to the people that should know you around something that everyone can really have an emotional tie in to. It's not, you didn't hit like the science on the champion of trees and that's really hard because you've got you know, probably a hallway full of scientists that you know could easily have said, "Well, you know, that's not really technically what we do," and let's add a few more commas and some words and some descriptive horticultural language in there because that is who you are. It's underneath it, but you were able to kind of I don't want to say sum up, but capture is really I guess the word.



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

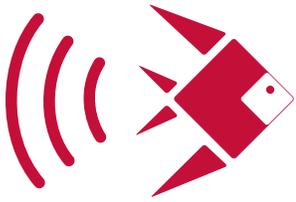
JENNIFER: I think what we did, exactly. I think what we did is we engaged the motive part of our story because I think that was the brilliance of sitting down and reading this story, listening to the story, not reading it. Listening to it because we all do this particularly if you work with words a lot. You're gonna be like, "Oh my God, there's a comma missing," "Oh that's not the best word," but what you do when you sit and listen to something is it brings images to your head. I think that's the beauty of closing your eyes because you see the place and your favorite tree from when you were a kid or anything that evokes you know this. It's not a cathedral. I mean the wording was just eloquent in a way that doesn't, that sort of makes you think in your own heart what you're talking about and you know, it's trees, not a forest of them, nor a parkway or a backyard shelter, but a cathedral of trees that humble you with their grandeur. Trees that inspire you with their grace. Trees that restore you with beauty. Trees that take you to a place you've never seen before, and it's brilliant.

BETH: That's lovely.

JENNIFER: It is lovely and those words, the tone is very soft, but the message is not so we use, there are so many words in here that we use. Can you imagine a world without trees or one of my favorites is we're more than a walk in the woods. That's exactly what we're talking about. So I think having that and then being consistent in that messaging is so critical for telling the story the way you want the story told and you can fashion your story any way you want. You just need to have a conversation and agree to it so that everybody's on the same page.

BETH: So, how do people get started? If somebody wanted to be where you are, what advice would you give somebody who was at the very kind of beginning stages where they're thinking you know what? This could help us.

JENNIFER: I think, I'm a big believer in brand, I'm a big believer in a strategic plan so if you don't have a strategic plan or a vision, I think you need to actually have



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

an institutional commitment to what you want to be and I think that's key for me. Now most organizations have one, it might take a little bit of rethinking about it and it's a great opportunity to have those conversations, but I think the other place you start is what do you think your issue is? Do you have an issue? What are you trying to solve with this campaign and campaign is a tough word because I don't want people to think it's just you know an ad campaign although that has to be a part of it obviously, but what are you trying to get across to people and what is your story and if you could sit down with your staff and say "tell me your story about this place. What does this place mean to you?" and just listen and do it at different times of the day, give them cookies and just listen because you've got to get them there somehow. I think we probably had about 80 percent of our staff voluntarily come to these sessions. That's huge.

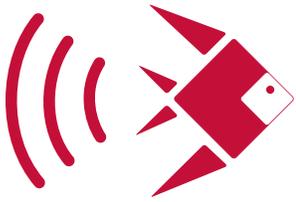
BETH: That is huge.

JENNIFER: And the more you listen the easier it is to get a sense of where their heads are, what they think you should do. There's some great tactical ideas that can come out of it, but you also you know, get an understanding of a primary audience. If you can do the same with an external audience who knows you, that's great, but I think you start with making sure you have an understanding of the institution's position and then you just listen to people.

BETH: Fabulous!

JENNIFER: And then figure out what goes from there. And then alternately when you launch your brand, that's the easy part. You have got to keep it alive. Do what you have to do. We brainstorm all the time about how do we incorporate true champions into everything we do. I mean, I'm looking at my wall in my office and I must have champion something about 50 times.

BETH: That is one of the really hard parts is that what I find is when people haven't really taken that deep dive and a lot of times I say people don't really



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

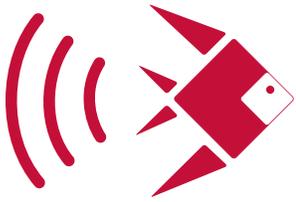
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

know what the word “unique” means that they tend to look at what’s true about them and not really dig deep enough to find out what’s truly distinctive because it’s hard. It’s hard and but when you do, when you get to that point where you find that thing that really both your internal and external audiences, it resonates and they feel really connected to, you don’t get as much of the “We’re bored with this. Can we change the color? Why does it have to be this again?” and it’s so repetitive and it’s hard because people that are inside and seeing something over and over again have a tendency to get bored and want to do something different. I come from a design background. Designers like new, we like different, we want to change, but that breaks it down because a lot of people that your brand is for in addition to your internal and external audiences, is to attract and engage people who are on the periphery and the stronger and more solid you are, the less you’re gonna have to spend hunting down people that don’t know you.

JENNIFER: I think the other thing is, we’re huge on Arbor Day. It is our signature holiday. In fact, our founder’s father founded Arbor Day for the whole country. So we have a strong commitment to Arbor Day, and we are starting to do you know sort of guerrilla marketing outreach on Arbor Day that allows us to show people what our story is. So this year we did in the right outside of City Hall in downtown Chicago, we did a living lenticular billboard which had never been done anywhere and it was made of 9,000 live plants, which we set up for the day and we engaged people. We did a pop-up plant clinic. We gave away trees. We gave away apples because apple is an Arbor Day gift from trees.

BETH: That’s good.

JENNIFER: Yeah, so you have to have some fun with this because I think that you know, people really, you know, it’s an opportunity for you to tell your story and it’s an opportunity to continue telling it in a different way. So year one, we focused really on being a tree champion or every tree needs a champion, but year two we got a little edgier. We did some tale thing. Trees clean the exhaust from this bus and what can you do to get people to pay attention in this world where



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

there's so much ...

BETH: The thing I was trying to remind you of was when you built that core, when you know what you want, everything you say to point back to, all of the money that you spend, all of the time, all of the effort that you spend at the end has synergy. It builds up to more than the sum of its parts as opposed to if you're spending all of your time filling up separate disconnected buckets, it's like they never really reach 100 percent because you're running around going "Let's try this" and "Let's try this," and then "Let's go with this messaging," "Which one of these works?" as opposed to having that central hub in the middle and building your spokes out from that. The energy you can create around that because it's all piling on to the same core message, it lifts you up and spreads you much further and much faster than if you're just kind of hitting them with everything and hoping something sticks.

JENNIFER: Yes, exactly.

BETH: So Jennifer, this was so helpful. I always love talking about this subject and especially with people who have been through such an interesting project and had such a cool outcome from it.

JENNIFER: Well, I love talking about it, too.

BETH: If people have questions for you, what's the best way for them to reach out to you?

JENNIFER: Email probably. jgoodsmith@mortonarb.org

BETH: I will have Jennifer's contact information on the show notes page and thank you so much for sharing all of your knowledge and experiences with both me and our nonprofit community.

JENNIFER: Thank you, Beth. I've enjoyed it.