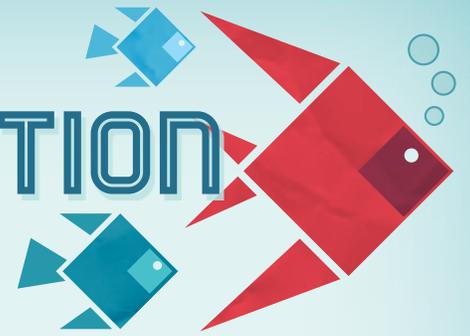


DRIVING PARTICIPATION

with Beth Brodovsky



SESSION 008

BUILDING THE PIPELINE FOR NONPROFIT SUPPORTERS WITH GAIL BOWER

Beth: Hi! This is Beth Brodovsky. I'm here today with Gail Bower. I'm lucky enough to have known Gail for many years. Gail is the president of Bower Consulting. How are you today, Gail?

Gail: Fine, thank you. How are you?

Beth: Thank you. It's so good to talk to you. I'm so lucky, when I have a chance to do a call with someone who I've known as long as you and I have known each other.

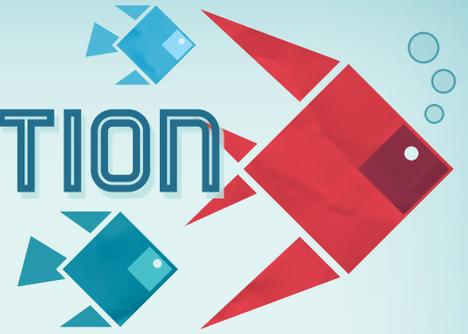
Gail: Thanks! Well, thank you so much for having me.

Beth: Absolutely! So, Gail, you do so many interesting things with sponsorship and all kinds of different things with organizations. Can you just tell us a little bit about your company and the type of work that you do?

Gail: Sure! Absolutely. Again, thank you again for having me. I love talking about engaging audiences because, really, in a nutshell, I spent my entire career supporting clients engaging more deeply with audiences, so that's the short version of what I do. The longer version is a couple different things. I try hard to pull all this together so it's not a blah-blah-blah, but the longer version is, I'm the author, first, of a book called *How to Jumpstart Your Sponsorship Strategy in Tough Times*. I currently have a consulting practice called Bower & Company Consulting. I work with organizations to help them transform the complexities that they face today into strategies that result in sustainable revenue, gross and greater value for the organizations or for the constituents or audiences or customers that they work with. My expertise is in strategy, marketing, corporate sponsorship, events, and generating revenue, which has been culled from experience working with consulting and coaching clients

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nationwide, and also, from twenty years of hands-on experience as a freelance writer and event producer. In those two capacities, I advise both for-profit and nonprofit firms. At the same time, I have this sort of parallel life where I served as a producer on some of the country's most renowned multi-stage music festivals like The Newport Jazz Festival, The Newport Folk Festival, The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, The Essex Music Festival, and even the largest free events for both of President Bill Clinton's inaugurations.

Beth: Really? I have to say, I've known you for years, and I did not know that.

Gail: Yeah, I did!

Beth: You've done so many interesting things that really touch on all different aspects of getting people involved.

Gail: Exactly. Exactly. It's always a little trick, but I think my experience working on the festivals all these years plus applying things and learning things through other clients I worked with, because I worked with associations and charities and social services organizations and small businesses, large businesses, multi-country global corporations. There are a lot of things you learn working on festivals that can be really applied. One of my colleagues, I was thinking while I was preparing for our discussion today, one of my good friends from the festivals always says, "Life is a festival."

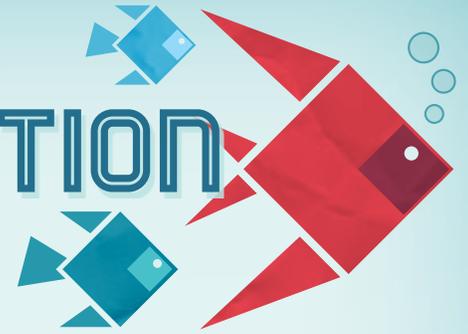
Beth: That is very true!

Gail: It really is, I know. There are a lot of things that I learned.

Beth: It is. It's really interesting. What's really good about what you've done is, you're out on your own, you run your own business but you've worked with a lot of different nonprofits, but you also worked in corporations. I know one of the things people ask me all the time when I talk about building engagement and driving communities and

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creating participation is that they say, “You work with nonprofits.” Much of my work is like yours, but getting people involved has such a value for all kinds of revenue-generating events and programming that it’s interesting to see how your skills and the things that you do cross both the for-profit and nonprofit line.

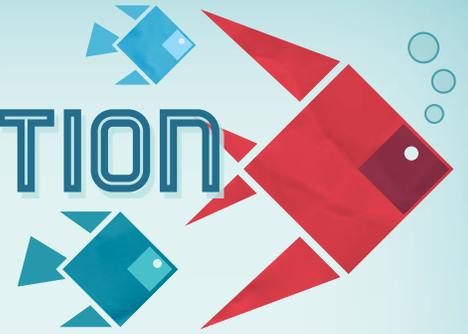
Gail: I’ve always looked at events as two things – as a key way that you can engage audiences into your work, into any organization’s work, whether it’s for-profit or nonprofit, and it’s really interesting. As I’ve spoken really all over the world, there are a lot of people that don’t really value events, which is kind of nuts to me. I think events, first of all, can be a great way you engage people. It’s also a great way that you can communicate with people, and I also see them as strong assets for organizations. By “asset,” I mean something that’s really delivering a strong business outcome, whether it’s revenue or whether it’s building engagement or communicating, but it’s delivering some outcome that’s measurable and important to the organization.

Beth: I love what you just said about defining an event as a way to draw people into what your organization is about. What I hear so much, especially from nonprofits, is, “You need to have an event because it’s a big money raiser.” It’s so focused on that. I’ve heard other people also say, “An event is the most expensive fundraiser you could possibly have.” So, your take on an event as something that brings people into your orbit and helps you share what you’re about as just one of the other important aspects of doing an event is really interesting.

Gail: Right. I do a lot of work also with organizations and event producers in evaluating their events or evaluating their organization and really looking at their revenue overall and where it comes from and whether it’s really good revenue, because there’s some revenue that’s not good revenue. A nonprofit organization in particular is going to be measured not necessarily by profitability, although obviously, organizations need to be in the black; to break even is not enough. You have to generate sustainable revenue above and beyond your expenses, because you have to build your business and you have to have reserves and so on and so forth. You

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want to have revenue that's positive and cash flow that's positive. I take a look at organizations to see what their revenue is all about and how that revenue works. Nonprofits are also measured on their impact, which is, of course, how they're very distinct from for-profit organizations. That piece of it, how their impact is determined, can also be looked at in one's events. Often, the money-raiser events have very little to do with impact, which doesn't mean you kill them off, actually. The ones you kill off are the ones that have nothing to do with impact and nothing to do with generating revenue, but the ones that generate revenue can start to siphon off energy from the rest of the organization that's really delivering impact. It's always really important to try to get those events to deliver more of the impact that the organization is created to deliver. Engaging audiences can be a really good thing, or communicating about the messages of the organization. There are a lot of ways to do that, but it's a really important piece in developing an event so that it doesn't just become a money-raiser and it starts to lose its importance or relevance or significance in the organization, and therefore drain staff resources or interest or board resource and interest.

Beth: That's a really, really good point. So, what are some of the things that you do to help people figure that out and begin to adjust their programming so they can bring that in? Do you have any sort of suggestions for people?

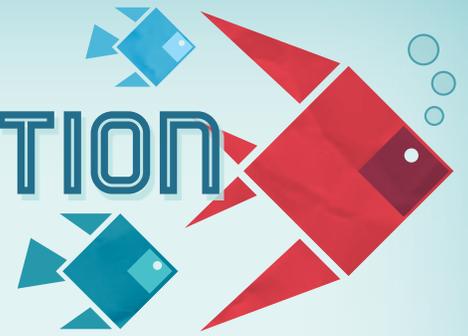
Gail: Well, it all really has to start with strategy, and unfortunately, a lot of organizations start events – smaller organizations start events, and I just wrote an article in my newsletter about this about a half a year ago which I called "Put a Bird on it", so if anyone has ever seen the hilarious show Portlandia or if anyone has seen old movies – I'm sorry, I'm not going to remember the name of the movie, but if you know old movies, maybe you'll remember the name of it. There was a Judy Garland film, Let's Put on a Show. Do you know what that movie was?

Beth: No, I don't think I know that one.

Gail: Okay, well, anyway, so either way, it's the same thing. It's like Let's Put on a Show, and so people in the organization have already drilled down to the tactical

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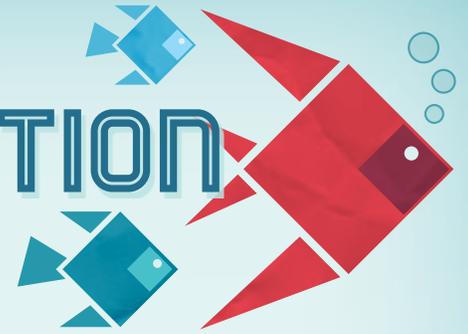


level. They're down at the tactics. Let's have an event! But they haven't really thought through whether having an event is really driving what the goal is. Therefore, there's no strategy, and therefore, it's very disconnected from anything else that's happening in the organization. The first, most important thing to do with deciding to have an event or producing an event is to have a strategy. Therefore, the most important thing to do is to figure out why do you want the event? What is the outcome you see for the event? Then, once you know what the overall goal is or the outcome is for the event, then you start creating the strategy so that the event is designed to meet those outcomes. If you already have the event, and there was no strategy, and somebody just put a bird on it or let's just have a show, it was that kind of an approach to producing the event, then you might want to take some time to go back and see really what the point is. The same questions – what is the outcome that you're trying to derive? Then, you have to create programming designed to do that. Obviously, with an event, programming is really what drives people to come to an event. They know that it's going to be a good experience for them or they're supporting something that's really important to them, or it's really important to somebody in their life. I work with a client, for example, that's a national organization, and it's a disease organization, so a lot of people have lost somebody to this disease, or they know somebody with the disease, so they rally a lot of people around this topic to support the research of a cure for the disease. The programming, again, drives the attendance, and then, you really have to figure out the messages and the whole communication around it to make sure you're engaging on a lot of different levels, and to make sure that you're really putting forth the impact. So, for example, a disease organization often has an education part of their mission or an advocacy part of their mission, so the event experience can be used to communicate about that disease, or communicate about the successes of the organization in funding or in research outcomes or whatever, and engage people along the path of where they want to go so they're part of the story of the organization. The characters in that story are sort of brought to life in three dimensions.

Beth: That's a beautiful way to really describe it, and one of the things I talk about a lot, as you know, is driving participation not in a, "Let's just get people to show up

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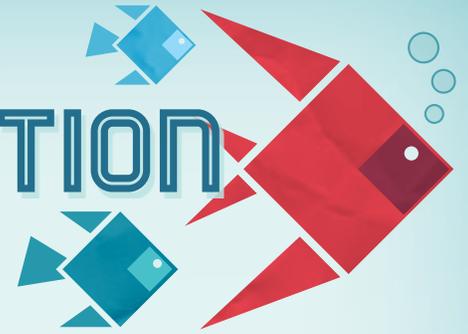


just because,” but as a means to an end. How does involvement, how does getting people to participate actually matter to the goals of an organization? Whether that means showing up for an event or donating or registering for classes or whatever the goals are of an organization. In your experience with the different types of work that you do, how have you seen that getting people engaged at this level, getting people involved and bringing them into the story so they feel like participants or members or whatever you might want to call it, how have you seen that to matter in an organization?

Gail: It’s absolutely critical! It’s one of the most important things that an organization is set up to do. If you’re not engaging audiences, if you’re not building participants at some level, if you’re not actively recruiting people to be part of your organization or volunteering or fundraising or whatever, then, frankly, you’re on a downhill slide, which is not a good thing. To me, the three most important things about engagement, the three critical pieces that are most important for an organization to engage audiences, fall to me, the three things. One is revenue. Whether it’s a for-profit organization or a nonprofit organization, if they’re not engaging people who become passionate about a product or service in a for-profit, or the mission of the organization in a nonprofit, they’re not going to generate revenue from funders or from individual donations or sponsors or event participants or whatever. The revenue piece of it is critical. It makes the difference between staying in business or not, so it’s what fuels all organizations, for-profit or nonprofit. That’s number one. Number two is that it really continues to build the pipeline for people who become funders or supporters in some way – I’ll just focus on the nonprofit. It builds this pipeline of people that are needed to run the organization, whether they’re volunteers or they’re actually making cash contributions, or they’re major donors, or they’re funders from an institutional foundation. Building that pipeline and always having new people into the mix is really important. Unfortunately, a lot of organizations get to a point in their life cycle where they stop paying attention to bringing in younger people. It’s not deliberately; it’s just something that happens for all of us. We always have to look at the fact that we’re all getting older, and we’re probably used to communicating with people around our own age or older than us, but we always have to remember

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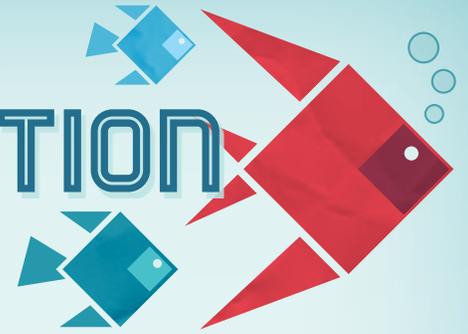
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to communicate with people who are younger than we are and bring those people into the fold in ways that they want to be brought into it. Otherwise, the organization doesn't exist. One of the festivals I worked on was the Newport Jazz Festival in Newport, Rhode Island, and George Wein, who's still going in his mid-to-late eighties, started the festival in 1954 – in fact, it celebrates its 60th anniversary this year in 2014. He started the festival in 1954, so the festival celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2014. He got to a point about fifteen years ago where he became very concerned that a lot of the really great jazz artists were starting to die off. Rosemary Clooney, Miles Davis, and some of these major jazz performers aren't with us any longer. At the same time, the audiences that were coming to his festival were aging as well, and he was growing concerned that the jazz, this musical form, this genre that he's completely devoted his life to, would die out beyond his own life, and he certainly didn't want that to happen. One of the things he did with the Newport Festival was to create a second stage that would give an audience two more adventuresome jazz musicians and attract younger jazz artists, so existing jazz patrons or jazz lovers could hear some new talent that was coming into the marketplace, or people that were involved in jazz or had a new twist on jazz, if you will, but also, it gave a chance for some younger people, the audience of these artists, to come and hear some of the jazz greats. Somebody that might want to hear some really cool, new jazz artist could then come and hear Diana Crawl or Tony Bennett and hear some of these jazz greats that have been with us. He actively started cultivating. An event needs to go through that sort of revitalization. It goes through life cycles where, at some point, we need to have some new energy, some new strategy, and some deliberate audience development work so it keeps the event vital and it keeps the stories fresh and it builds this pipeline that I'm talking about. So, number one is revenue, number two is pipeline, but number three, the engagement of audiences is also important to bring new perspectives so that you can evolve. By building this pipeline, by attracting new audiences all the time, it brings you new people that have new ideas, new thoughts, new experiences, new perspectives, and that keeps your work vital. It keeps your work evolving. As you start to learn what's important to them or what they need or what they've experienced or witnessed in their lives, then your organization can evolve to meet their demands. Now, evolution doesn't take place overnight; evolution takes place over time. For example, we're

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starting to see that the changes in our own demographics in the United States, that there are more immigrants coming to the United States, the Latino population is increasing, and so that's going to change the way that we conduct our behavior in life. For example, somebody just told me recently that the number one condiment is, what do you think?

Beth: Salsa!

Gail: Salsa!

Beth: I actually know that one.

Gail: When we grew up—

Beth: It used to be ketchup.

Gail: Yeah, it was probably ketchup, mustard, and mayo, in some order of those three.

Beth: Right!

Gail: Now, thankfully, it's salsa. That's just one example, but having new people in our world, in the world of our organizations bring new perspectives so we can continue to stay relevant. To me, those are the three critical pieces of engagement and why participation is so important.

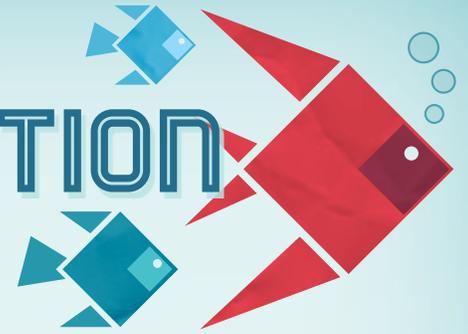
Beth: Those are great. Those are such great ideas.

Gail: Thank you!

Beth: The other thing I always like to ask is, on the flip-side, you talked about the three critical things people need to bring in, and you've given a great example of

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what somebody actually did that was really successful in keeping a program or event alive and evolving and engaging new audiences and bringing new participation.

Do you have an example, or can you just sort of describe something that failed or approaches that people are taking that aren't working?

Gail: That's a good question. Let me think.

Beth: In general, where are people going wrong in their approach to participation? I mean, anything from choosing to not make changes, obviously, is one.

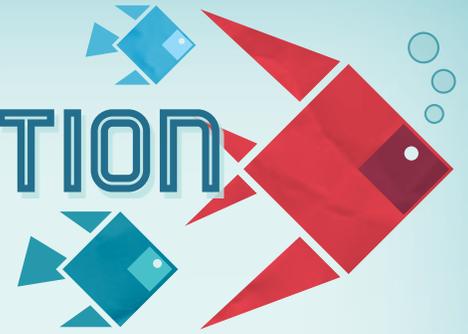
Gail: That really is a big one. I've done a whole webinar around the life cycles of events, but here's another one that I think is really critical. There are several examples that I could think of, and I can give a couple examples, but I'll start with this one because I think it's the most relevant for smaller organizations and small to medium organizations. I don't know how to say it other than an overly concerned need to be thrifty or dollar-wise and pound-foolish.

Beth: Focusing too much on what they're spending it on and not what they're going to get back from that.

Gail: Yeah. It's not even so much what they're going to get back. It's just not even thinking. This is an example – several years ago, I met somebody who was on the board of directors for a small nonprofit organization, and she came in contact with my work and saw one of my events, and really thought the event was really great, and really wanted my help in producing an event for this organization that she was on the board of. I met with the folks by phone, actually. We just spent a lot of time on the phone and not in person, which, to me, was a red flag. There was a lot of fear. They were trying to make the decision on bringing in additional event resources for the organization and to have somebody else produce the event. In this example, what they were doing was, all of the board members and all the volunteers of this organization were basically producing the event, which was designed as a fundraiser,

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and there's particular things – if the event's purpose is fundraising, then there are a set of activities that go with that. I'll circle back to that in a second, but all the volunteers and all the board members were involved with producing the event and making sure it had zero cost to it. What that meant was, all these volunteers – board and the other volunteers – were getting all the food donated, the facilities donated, the printing, everything you could possibly pay for, for that event, was donated, so that it made money. In theory, this sounds like it should make sense. I'm not faulting them; that sounds like a logical thing to do.

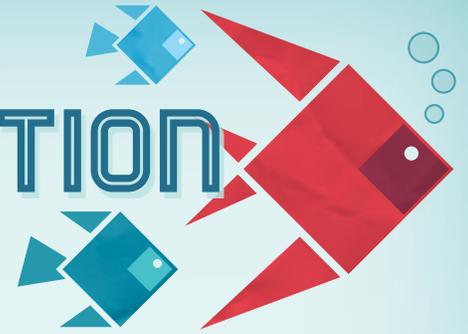
Beth: Right. You can understand why someone would have that rationale.

Gail: Exactly. However, what they were not seeing and where we were not connecting – whether they engaged my services, it really didn't matter to me – but where we decided it was just not going to be a fit, or I decided it was not going to be a fit was that they couldn't see that their actions were actually causing their detriment. They were spending all this volunteer time and all this board time in doing activities that they didn't need to be doing, and nobody was spending time on the actual relationship-building at the event. Again, circling back to the point of a fundraising event, a fundraising event is really an opportunity. People say they're very expensive, and they are expensive. However, they're expensive only if you look at it from a cost perspective. If you look at it from an outcome perspective, they can be very critical in terms of building client relationships, building funder-donor relationship, and tying people into the messages and the emotional resonance of an organization. Nobody was spending any time on that, but they were spending all their time on getting free food and free napkins and free silverware and free invitations and a free place to have an event. To me, that made no sense. To me, that's a big mistake. There's that old cliché, of course, that you have to spend money to make money, and that's the case with an event. It doesn't mean it has to be super expensive; it just means you have to really leverage the cost so you can do the real activities of an event.

Beth: That's a really good point, and it even sort of goes back to your very initial point of strategy. It sounds like, for this group, they went in with a strategy of having

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a free event as opposed to an actual goal, outcome-based strategy for the event. It sounds like what you're saying is that it's not the idea or the goal of getting some or all aspects of an event donated; it's that, when the tactics, when the execution of that takes over the life of the event, it becomes a distraction and changes the focus to the execution of it, and people lose the purpose of it.

Gail: Correct. I met the CEO of the New York State Nonprofit Organization, whose name is Doug Sauer. Doug was on the board of directors for a client of mine, The National Council of Nonprofits, and when I met him, we met at a reception before this conference, and he said something to me that really provoked me, but I have not stopped thinking about what he said, which is that – and this is a paraphrased quote – but he said something to the effect of, “Most nonprofit organizations are in the sports, entertainment, and food business.” I said, “What?” He said, “Most nonprofits are in the sports, entertainment, and food business.”

Beth: Wow.

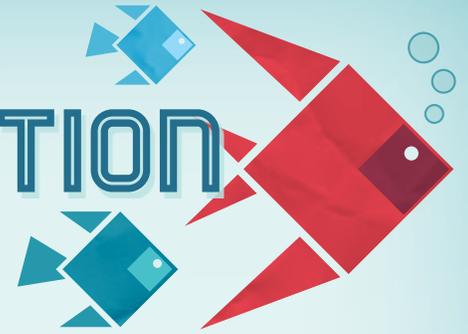
Gail: Yeah. I wanted to start arguing because I just got really defensive, because I'm so passionate about events, but fortunately, I just shut my mouth and let that sink in a little bit. I think that's really an interesting point. That's not the business, that those are not the businesses that they should be in. They should really be in the relationship-building business, and if any of those activities – sports, entertainment, or food – are good means to that end, that's great, but otherwise, people wind up becoming in the entertainment, sports, and food business.

Beth: Wow. That's an amazing concept, and I think we'll probably end, leaving that for some people to think about. These are really insightful comments. Do you have any sort of final thought that you want to leave us with?

Gail: I guess the most important thing – I think one of the key things that I've learned is that, in order for an event to be successful for both the audience and the person,

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and to really be able to be successful and engaging means that the audience you want to bring in show some demonstrated activity or some emotional resonance or connection with the organization or the business. As much as you can give people what they want, to have some emotional connection, or to be involved with some activity, and deliver the messages that are important to you, then you'll be successful. Organizations can be successful with their events; they can be successful with engaging audiences and moving the needle in terms of business outcomes that they've got in mind.

Beth: That is terrific. Thank you so much, Gail. Gail's a consultant, she's a blogger, she's a writer, and she runs fabulous webinars. Gail, can you just put out your URLs for where people can find you?

Gail: Yes, thank you. My main website and the new blog that I've just launched is gailbower.com, and I have another blog on sponsorship that I've had for several years, which is sponsorshipstrategist.com. Again, that's sponsorshipstrategist.com. Beth, thank you so much! It's been so much fun. I could sit and talk about this all day.

Beth: Absolutely! It's been great to have you, Gail, and I can tell everyone from experience that I've followed both of Gail's publications. They're terrific. You can also find Gail's book on her website. It's a phenomenal little treasure that I'd really recommend anyone take a look at. So, thank you so much, Gail. It's been a pleasure to speak with you today.

Gail: Thank you so much, Beth.

Questions? Contact beth@iriscreative.com