



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

SESSION 153

LEAD LIKE A CHAMPION

WITH ANIKA RAHMAN

BETH: Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky. Welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with Anika Rahman. Anika found me online, and she's doing some really, really interesting things. Anika has this amazing, amazing background working with all kinds of fabulous human rights organizations, the Rainforest Alliance, the Ms. Foundation, United Nations Population Fund and through all of that, she's had some really fascinating opportunities to lead a great variety of organizations. One of the things that we've really noticed from listening to all the different people talk on this podcast is how important leadership really is. So I thought with all of Anika's experience leading all of these fabulous, interesting programs she'd be the perfect person to bring on. Anika, thank you so much for joining me today.

ANIKA: It's an absolute pleasure, Beth, to be in this conversation to discuss one of my favorite topics, leadership!

BETH: I think it's so great. What people actually say to me all the time is, "a really critical factor of driving participation is leadership buy-in," and so I thought I would just kick us right off and ask you, when it comes to the leadership roles that you've had and the involvement in things that you've seen, how do you see leadership play into participation?

ANIKA: You know, I think they are kind of integrally connected. For me because I've been a leader in human rights, social justice and movement oriented fields, when you're leading, you're also talking about the participation of stakeholders trying to increase people's engagement and you can call it engagement or you can call it participation, but it's about motivating people to see the mission of your movement and your organization and to participate in it actively.

BETH: I love that. It's so funny. I had Dr. Adrian Seger on a couple of months ago





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

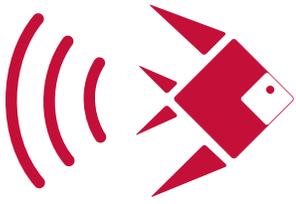
and one of the words that I struggle with a lot is people talk about involvement, engagement and participation interchangeably, and he came up with this brilliant term that I just love, that participation is engagement in action. I thought that was such a great way to talk about it. What sort of things have you learned about leadership from being on the inside and also on the outside of organizations? You've had these two roles. You've both been in organizations as a leader, but now you're working in consulting. I'm curious if you've learned any sort of observations about what kind of leaders are needed in organizations in order to inspire participation.

ANIKA: Yeah, excellent questions. I think that both being a leader and being in a context and then consulting with leaders and helping them gives me more of a 360 view of leadership, and I think one of the things I realized is that leaders are powerful, they are meant to be inspiring and they should be inspiring and leaders have to have people trust them, believe in them and believe in their values. I think when you're a leader yourself and during intense periods, which is what leadership is about. You know and understand the role you have to play and sometimes you may forget the power of the position, which I see from the outside and I realize that, wow, in looking at a leader you see this person is powerful and in order to follow them or participate or engage with them, you have to trust them and you have to believe in their vision and kind of almost believe it's your own vision, and I think that's also one of the big opportunities a leader has to present a vision that others can not just buy into, but believe it is their vision for their life and how they want to conduct themselves.

BETH: That's such a powerful way to put that because I'm constantly feeling like I'm trying to discuss the difference between a mission and a vision with a lot of organizations. The word that you talked about earlier was about you've been involved in movement organizations, and I really feel that when you're connecting this idea to a vision, any organization can be a movement organization.

ANIKA: It's true. I mean you're absolutely right. We have some "classic"





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

movements. We have the environmental movement, we have the women's movement, we have the LGBTQ movement, we have the human rights movement, civil rights movement. So these are historically established movements for social change and I think of the planet as being part of our social change mission too to preserving the planet and they have inspired the vision of a life of equality for all. The vision of a planet and people aligned really moves millions of people and has resulted in very powerful social political movements around the world.

BETH: That brings up an interesting question for me. What is it the thing that makes something a movement as opposed to say an organization that's trying to cure cancer? What is the difference between a movement and those kind of couple of categorizing things and how did those things get to be that way?

ANIKA: I think that's a really great question and one that I wish I could answer in a very intelligent way, but I'm gonna give it a shot. I think that the movements that I've been involved with and engaged with have come out of societal needs and identification by people that these are large scale problems that require large scale solutions, large scale participation that always comes from a social political need, identified need. Whereas, for example, when you're talking about curing cancer, it is a really important thing in and of itself. We want people to live a healthy life, but it's not viewed as being "political," whatever that may mean today, that civil rights, human rights, women's rights, the environment, climate, mitigating climate change. These are viewed as political. Maybe movements are associated with issues that are less controversial. I don't know, and when we're talking about poverty reduction, all of us agree with that. I don't think there's anyone out there probably that says, "You know, we should just let this happen. We should have hunger around the world," but the strategies you might deploy to address it could be controversial and then we're talking about a movement, I think.

BETH: That's really interesting, and part of this is the reason I do this is to bring on experts that know things, but I also think there's a lot of value in just raising





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

the questions and having a discussion and seeing what everyone thinks about this and how does any nonprofit establish support. They have to get people to buy into their vision. It's the same thing whether you're working at this global socio-political level of trying to mobilize the world or whether it's something that's in your community. As the leader you can't get people to walk your path with you and to believe that the things you are important and should be fixed should be fixed, then it's hard to gather support to do that.

ANIKA: I absolutely agree with you. So the issue of vision is crucial to all nonprofits, whether you're talking about cancer prevention or you're talking about another illness or you're talking about poverty reduction in our community housing development because what leaders need to do and I think most of us are doing this is present the world and their community with, this is what the world could look like. This is the world we want. Even in our community, we want a community where everybody is healthy, safe, where everybody lives in housing with basic amenities because we want people to live a better life. It's always about taking it to an inspiring vision, not just mission. Vision and mission are very different things.

BETH: Now how do you define them? I have a way that I define them, and I'm always curious about how other people discuss them, the difference between them.

ANIKA: Well, I think an organization has specific mission which is gonna capture both what its immediate goals are, immediate meaning long-term and how it's gonna do it. Whereas the vision is a much broader idea of where you want to get to in the world and by the world I don't just mean global. I mean like how is your mission contributing to your vision. So we have a vision of a world of equality. Alright, well when I say that, there are probably millions of organizations that believe in that, but then their mission statement has to narrow it down further that reflects them, their work, their constituency, their stakeholders, their participants in some way. How do you distinguish the two in your work?





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: That's very much like you. What I typically say is, "Your mission is what you're doing today," like the work you're doing today to solve the problem, and "Your vision is what the world will look like when you solved it." It has to be this big, giant, exciting, momentum-building thing. The vision is what gets people on board because they say, "I want to make that happen." Nobody signs up because their dream is to stuff gift bags. It's hard because the slog of getting something done and reality is for many organizations, that vision is near impossible and may never happen, and so I think people sometimes struggle with creating one that's big enough to get people motivated and excited and build that passionate movement level support.

ANIKA: You're absolutely right. I think that for the causes I worked in, I've had the luck I guess of these causes being embraced by their movements. However, they also had adversaries. There's always a flip side to everything.

BETH: That's interesting. That brings us back to the idea of to get there you've got to have all these key things in place, but it really is about this vision and a leader of an organization has to either set that vision or embody that vision because in your case, you weren't the founder of all the organizations. You came into existing organizations and so that brings up an interesting question. When you move into a leadership role at an existing organization, how as a leader do you take that mission, take that visionary leadership on yourself when you weren't the one that necessarily defined it in the first place?

ANIKA: Well it's interesting, Beth. I've had both experiences where I was actually one of the, in a startup for the Center for Reproductive Rights, I was one of the co-founders also, and then I've done as you said, got into organizations which were founded by somebody else or at different stages of evolution and I think that the issue, it's pretty easy for me because I have always in the organizations I've chosen to work for, brought into their mission and their vision and because missions and the vision remain the same, but missions need to be adapted to





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

changing circumstances, the strategies, your constituent base. To me, if you buy into the vision, the rest follows and your job as a leader is to really think of the most effective way that you can accomplish your mission in a current political situation or social situation.

BETH: When we're talking about this idea of building the trust to make that happen, how does that happen internally? Having your team and your staff behind you is really critical. In your experience, when you both found organizations and then had to create a team, you also became a leader of organizations that probably had some team members already. In the different experiences that you've had, how have you gone about building that trust with an internal team?

ANIKA: Building trust is about being authentic. It takes time and it involves revealing yourself because often as a leader you have to make decisions that you know the details about what happened and why you did it and you for legal, political reasons, you can't reveal it to other people. So as you say, trust is crucial, but even if people don't know about the details, they know that you made the decision with the best of intentions and with integrity and professionalism. So it takes time because you can't expect to walk in as a leader where people are a little afraid maybe of leaders and like wondering what is this person going to be doing and just think that everybody is going to trust me and know why I made that decision. So it takes time, it takes communication. It takes making a complete effort to communicate regularly. If it's the senior management team, then you're talking about one-on-one meetings, keeping that door always open, making sure you learn about them as a human being. They learn about you. I think overall the people on your team have to understand you as a human being and that you're here for the right reasons, that you're here for the mission, that you have this deep sense of integrity about the mission and that's what you're about and it takes time for people to understand that about you at the human level.

BETH: I think it's interesting what you said about this weird difficult combination





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

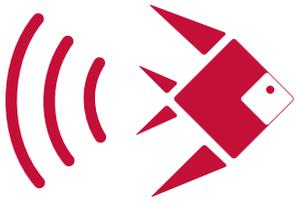
that leaders have to deal with, which is a balance of openness with things that they can't talk about. That's got to be, that's tricky to both be perceived as somebody who is open and transparent and vulnerable so that you get to know them and trust them and believe that they have this best interest of both you as a potential employee and as the work at heart while also understanding that there's things that may be happening that they're not going to be sharing. That's absolutely critical. I've been a leader for, I've been a boss, shall we say, for 28 years and just in my little tiny world go through that with my staff and making sure that they trust me and believe that I will sustain this business and sustain their work and bring them good things to do, while also knowing that there's tons of stuff that I can't talk to them about. That's just in my tiny little world. I can't imagine how that must be amplified when you're trying to impact change in the world.

ANIKA: Yes, you're absolutely right. It's a delicate balance. It's daily judgment calls, but I would say that that title becomes a lot easier if you inspire people and people feel that they can trust you. They say that one of the most important characteristics is not really the skill set, their IQ, how smart they are, but really how much you trust them. That's what we've got to hone in on as leaders and the trust has to come from understanding the person and understanding what motivates that person and keeping that front and center so that when you don't get what you want let's say you're a team member or you hear something, you'll be like, "I know her as a leader and I know this is what motivates her. I may not understand what went into it, but I trust that she did it for the right reasons."

BETH: Yeah, I think that's critical. When it comes to this communication and this vulnerability and openness that you need to build trust, is there a point where you can go too far in the other direction? Is there a line where being too open can be damaging to leadership?

ANIKA: Yes, I absolutely agree that being too open, so I think it's got to be this





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

idea that we're open, we're listening, transparency and be able to give some response, even if the response is, "Hey, I'm not able to give you further details, but these are the values that drove me." So you're absolutely right about that and one of the things I think we haven't talked about is how leadership is also different for men and women.

BETH: Oh, interesting! Yeah, OK.

ANIKA: It's a huge, I was just having this discussion with a friend and colleague who has written many books on leadership, and, of course, I've been around a lot of people thinking about leadership, and there are significant gender differences, especially because women are not in leadership roles to the same extent that men are, and it depends on of course what sector you're talking about. In general I think you know that ...

BETH: We're all pretty aware of that. By differences, do you mean differences in how they actually act and perform or differences in how they're perceived because of their gender?

ANIKA: Both.

BETH: So why don't you kind of talk about those things.

ANIKA: Well, I think that women when it comes to leadership, leadership is about an exercise in some form of an exercise of power and women, and I know this is a very broad statement, so I'm saying it ...

BETH: Don't send in any letters people!

ANIKA: Exactly. We also know that women have not been in leadership positions. If you look at political office, you look at Congress, you look at CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and why is that? I think it's because women have not felt empowered or not been given the opportunity. This is a very complex terrain





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

they're in, but I know it's both culture and how we get formed by our culture and how culture also sort of influences the way people view us.

BETH: I agree. I really feel like saying, “Well nobody gives women a chance,” is way too simplistic of an answer because I am a woman. I've been in charge of an organization, but I know I have struggled significantly with, I guess, claiming my authority would be the best way to say it, to be able to walk into a room and say, “I know this.” What they call impostor syndrome often. I have no idea if men feel it, too, because I'm not a man, but I know many of the women that I know that are business owners and leaders and amazing talented incredible women, if you really ask them how they feel inside, it's very different than what they have to cultivate and work very hard at in order to do the work that they do.

ANIKA: Absolutely. I think it's not just your experience. Research shows that women have these issues and issues around power and negotiating power, projecting it and dealing with it. In fact, I was in a meeting where someone who is a management consultant said something very interesting where she was just talking about the different responses of men and women to the question of how would your boss rank you on a scale of 1 to 10? Ten being the greatest, zero I guess being the worst. Research showed that men, American men ranked themselves as 11 or 12.

BETH: I have two sons. I totally understand that.

ANIKA: American women came in around 6 or 7 and they said, “Well, you know,” and British men came in at 8.5. So it tells you something about self-perception and how people, how leaders think of ourselves. There are obvious issues around this, and I think women definitely have a tough time and it's brought on by the facts.

BETH: Yeah. So whether you're a man or a woman, people don't start out as leaders.





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

ANIKA: No, they don't.

BETH: How does somebody who may be listening to this today that isn't yet at the executive director or president role or at a stage where they consider themselves a leader, how would that person begin to cultivate this mind set so that they could move along in their career and move in this direction?

ANIKA: I think that's a great question. I think leaders are born out of necessity sometimes, but people sometimes are gifted with this. I think it inherently comes, the way you cultivate leadership begins with yourself and looking within yourself, finding the confidence, finding what drives you. Where do you want to be a leader? How do you want to be a leader? Being aware of your strengths and weaknesses and then deciding this is really what I care about, this is what I'm really good at and this is where I want to be a leader. So it begins with an examination of the self and being aware of yourself and how you are in the world and how you want to be in the world.

BETH: I think that's a really good point because you don't often do that, especially when you're kind of younger in your career or really just anybody. Sometimes it's just like you think, "I'm just gonna get through this day and to not take a step back and look at like what are my goals? What do I want? What do I need to embody or embrace ideologically to get there?" can be challenging. I know that it takes a lot of times mindset changes and really shifting the beliefs about what is possible and what you're capable of and we tend to not put limits on ourselves and say, "I couldn't do that. I know other people can, but I could never do that," or "That's so amazing. They're so much better at this than I am." I don't know if that's gender-based or not, but I think it's so human-based. It's so hard to see the world from somebody else's perspective and get out of your own way.

ANIKA: Yeah, you're right and I think leadership doesn't mean you're just the best at something. It actually means that you bring together the best people, that they





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

look to you to bring them together and unite them around a common vision and mission. So I think leadership is truly about working with people, motivating them and seeing your role as such. I think that, I've been reading a lot about how the 21st century idea of power is changing. It's not top-down. It's a diffused network where you as a leader, your role is to bring the best together in a network way, give them that independence, but be connected into a broader mission and vision. So I think it requires, in my opinion, a paradigm shift.

BETH: Huge, absolutely. One of the things I really want to make sure we talked about today, the role of failure for a leader. I know so many people, myself and many people, pretty much everybody that's ever been in the situation, it's a huge struggle. This thinking that to be a leader you have to be able to do everything right and you have to have all the answers. What do you see as the role of failure on this path to leadership?

ANIKA: I think failure is crucial for learning, for humbleness. I don't know if I'm saying that word correctly, but it's crucial to cultivating and being a leader because you know, nobody is perfect and part of being a leader is to face difficulty, maybe not overcome it, but know at that moment, but then rise and continue to deal with the challenge because somebody who has never failed would be so freaked out at the first failure. I don't know if you know like in Silicon Valley for startups, venture capitalists don't give people money if they haven't had a failure before.

BETH: Right, I've heard that.

ANIKA: I think that it's because failure in some sense means that you've been pushing yourself to your limits. You are not in a safe comfort zone. You're pushing limits, you're innovating, you're doing things differently and in today's world, I think in any world that is a sign of moving things forward, moving the needle. Now maybe you've been moving it in this way, but it has taught you a lot of lessons about resilience, about moving forward, about innovation. I kind of wish





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

that the rest of the world and including nonprofits and philanthropies would embrace Silicon Valley's almost requirement of failure as a pathway to success.

BETH: I so agree. I mean, I feel like I was raised and I really was a believer that it was my job to do things right and looking back now, I very much feel that I've caused myself more trouble by being afraid to fail. I feel like when I've been like too worried about how it would look or "I don't want to do that because I don't know exactly how it would look and it may not work out perfectly." What ends up happening in my life I find is that I back off and then don't do things because it's too risky, and I might fail and imagine like what doesn't get created if people aren't willing to try things?

ANIKA: Exactly, and I think that we need to embrace the idea that leaders are stronger and better after success.

BETH: Right. Why do you think, I mean it really feels taboo to talk about it. I know it's taken me a long time to even get comfortable talking about it. I feel like I almost had to actually have a couple of failures before I got comfortable talking about the fact of things that didn't fail. Like the first time something failed I was embarrassed and mortified. It was really hard to get up and do the next thing, but one of my favorite proverbs, I think it's a Samurai or Japanese proverb, "Fall down 7 times, get up 8," but in general I think when you're in this sort of spotlight on you leadership role and really anybody in any phase of life, our culture doesn't want to talk about the failures. Why do you think that is?

ANIKA: I think it's a really great question and I think it begins again with our own, like you said embarrassment and awkwardness because we've all been trained to be hyper-achievers and hyper-achievers aren't supposed to fail, almost by definition.

BETH: That's what I always used to think.

ANIKA: Yes, right. I think what we really have to do is change people's thinking





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

to think it's all about learning, that we are constantly learning. The day you stop learning, I would say is the day that we're all in trouble. Part of learning is failure because it's just a fact of how life works and that enables us to learn. We learn so much about success and ourselves in the act of failure, that this should not be a taboo subject, just like mental health issues were 20 years ago. It's a necessary part of life and I think it's because we are not willing in some sense I think Silicon Valley embraces failure because they're about innovation. They're about the next new idea. They're about disruption whereas the rest of the world is less about disruption. Let's keep everything together and pretend everything is just fine, but if we did that, if we had that and we didn't have the disruptions Silicon Valley, you and I wouldn't be talking via Skype right now.

BETH: Exactly, and that's the thing. That's where the innovations come from. So just out of curiosity, I always love to have some sort of tactical things in there. Do you have any sort of tips for ways, like how have you survived mistakes and been able to pick up and move forward?

ANIKA: I think that the first thing I do is acknowledge the mistake and with mistakes and failure, some sense of loss, frustration, anger, you have to allow yourself to feel all of that, and I think it's also important to know that is it almost never just you. There is something structural in the world. If you were around for a recession and you have to downsize staff, is that really your fault? In every situation it's not just a reflection on you. Like for example, when a tsunami happens and people get washed away. Well, there really is nothing you can do to blame that. It happens. So I think that not to see yourself as the problem, but rather to see it in context and allow the feelings and then realize that there's another day, there's another challenge, there is this mission that you care about profoundly and that you've learned from and then think about the learning you've had from that situation, how you would do things differently and then apply it in the next situation.





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: I think that's so huge because it's so easy to get stuck and let it get you down and not move forward and I'm sure that a lot of leadership, people in leadership roles also take a lot of responsibility in that and feel that everything is your responsibility, therefore everything is your fault. That's so debilitating and it's so hard to get past.

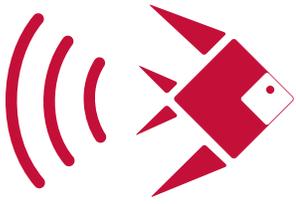
ANIKA: Yes, as a leader, you are ultimately responsible. You can't pass the buck if something ...

BETH: I think some people like me made a career out of apologizing for stuff that I didn't personally do.

ANIKA: But I think to be honest about failure or mistakes and say, "Hey, listen, this happened. What are the lessons learned?" It's not about finger pointing. It's about what did we learn, how are we gonna do things differently. So let's say we were having or investing in researchers and action and that didn't achieve its goal, why didn't it and how would we do this better and how do we explain this to ourselves, to our stakeholders, our trustees, our board members because people have hundreds of examples today of failure. I think in our country right now we are a divided country and we are talking a lot about our failures. Everybody has a different explanation really about why it happened maybe. So we've got to live through it and learn.

BETH: I think that's so true. It's funny. One of the things I've been encouraging organizations to do a lot of is to create an experimentation budget, to kind of build up the failure muscle. Whether that means with what you're posting on social media or taking your annual appeal and peeling off 20 percent of it and trying a really different message as opposed to staying with the same thing, that taking a safe, like a reasonable amount of time, energy and money and cultivating the spirit of experimentation, I feel like that might be a palatable way to kind of practice failing without labeling it as a negative term.





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

ANIKA: That's true. I mean, what I've done often is call it a pilot, I said, "Let's do a pilot project or campaign and see how it goes."

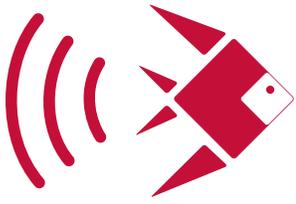
BETH: That's a great way to talk about.

ANIKA: And if we succeed, here is what we're trying to achieve and often times I found that most of the pilot projects, campaigns, research, whatever you want to say, has not been done before. So it really is a way to learn and you learn what you did well and what you didn't. Even when you're talking about fundraising, you're talking about mobilization, you're talking about advocacy. This is really important because as you know, we're also living in an age where there's constant innovation so today when you're talking about any mobilization or you're talking about participation, we have tools that are constantly evolving and nobody knows, for example, if that's the best tool. So how do you engage in social media to increase participation? You've got to think about your audience, your demographics and social media is constantly evolving. So you have to understand that in the way and age of an experimentation.

BETH: Right. So I want to wrap us up kind of getting back to this big picture idea of what impact this has on organizations and one of the ways that I've looked at it is when people tell me they need leadership buy in to make participation happen, I really believe that what they need is not just buy in, they need champions. What have you seen that is different, that changes in an organization when the leader is truly championing ideas?

ANIKA: I think that when a leader is truly championing ideas, you get much bigger, greater overall institutional buy-in because then people are focused on "Oh well, if I trust this leader and I believe in him or her, and she says that this is really important and this is an important strategy and we understand the risks and the rewards, let's go for it." You'll get greater teamwork. I think if the leader indicates that she's open to innovation and new ideas and wants to hear from





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

people, you get a really great product, whether the product is a campaign, a report or whether it's fundraising or strategy. It's gonna be so much richer, which will result in much greater impact.

BETH: I so completely agree. Anika, this was a fascinating discussion. I am so thrilled that I had a chance to connect with you and share all of your knowledge and insight with our whole nonprofit community. If people had questions for you, how can they get in touch with you?

ANIKA: I think the best way to be in touch with me, Beth, would be via my website and I'm gonna spell out the website name.

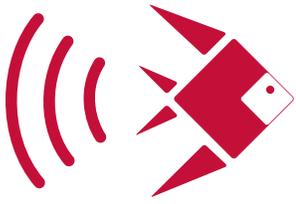
BETH: You can just say the website name because we will put it on to the show notes page.

ANIKA: Great! It's AnikaRahman.org, that's my website. You can also connect with me on LinkedIn and of course on Twitter by just searching for my name and follow all the things I'm talking about and I also want to thank you, Beth. This has been really a fascinating conversation in what I think is the most important issues that all of us in the nonprofit and philanthropic contend with and are living and learning about.

BETH: I completely agree. I started this podcast 100 percent focused on marketing and communications ideas, and the reason we're having this conversation is because in an effort to have those conversations, this idea of leadership just kept coming up over and over and over again. So I'm trying to make sure that I'm listening and hearing and bringing forward the ideas that everyone is sharing with me so that we can have a really complete and thorough discussion on what it takes to get people to show up, stick around and take valuable actions in organizations so that people can thrive and exist to do the work that they were meant to do.

ANIKA: Absolutely, absolutely.





DRIVING **PARTICIPATION**

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: Thank you so much for joining me and contributing to this conversation, bringing your insight and thoughts. I truly value having you here and I'm sure that everyone that's listening got a lot out of this as well. Thank you for joining me and thank everyone that's listening, and we'll see you all next time.

ANIKA: Thank you, Beth.

NONPROFIT
TOOLKIT

GET ACCESS TO OUR
MASTER CLASSES
ON DEMAND

CLICK HERE TO PURCHASE

