



DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

SESSION 160

BRANDING GETS YOU TO THE STARTING LINE

WITH JENNIFER MARTINDALE

BETH: Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky. Welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with Jennifer Martindale. I clearly had a great time at the American Marketing Association Nonprofit Marketing Conference because I met the best people, and Jen did a fabulous session on innovation and where those ideas come from, and she is fabulous and I loved her talk so much that I decided I absolutely had to have her on the program. Jen, thanks so much for joining me.

JEN: I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me!

BETH: What is your exact title Jen?

JEN: Sure. I am technically the Chief of Marketing at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco.

BETH: I love that, especially because you talked a little bit about what that actually means in your organization because not every organization has somebody who is a chief of marketing. In the kind of work that you do, why did they create that role and what did that mean for you?

JEN: Well, I was the first person in the organization, in the marketing part of the organization to have a C-suite title, and my purview in the organization is quite broad. By virtue of it being marketing, I oversee all of the external facing communications that represent the organization, so everything from advertising to publicity to corporate communication strategy. Also all of our digital platforms, including the website and social media channels, and I also oversee our visitor experience strategy. So what does it feel and look like and feel like when people are with us in our bricks and mortar location in San Francisco? I jokingly say,





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“Maybe I’m really more of the chief brand officer,” because marketing to me always sounds a bit like a reactive role, like something has been created and then I am here to push it out into the world and market it, but by virtue of the talk I gave at the AMA conference as you heard, Beth, really I’m working much further upstream in the processing my organization, and that’s what I spend a lot of time talking about.

BETH: The one thing I didn’t say is that your organization is Yerba Buena Art Center in San Francisco. So in a cultural organization, one of the things that you do have is sort of two sides of the house. There is the development and fundraising side, which most nonprofits have, but one of the things that I find so interesting about culture organizations and schools and hospitals is they’re the kind of nonprofit that has to generate active participation, has to get people to show up and stick around and get involved. In the work that you do, what does participation mean? How does it show up so that your organization can thrive?

JEN: So we’re a bit unique in how we think about participation and it ties back to the brand strategy. I mean there’s very obvious ways we keep track of participation in terms of attendance, in terms of donations and in terms of membership, but the very nature of our brand is based on a long game. So our brand strategy, which I’m sure we’ll talk more about in a few minutes, is about this idea of using art and culture to generate shifts in society. So we believe culture precedes change, whether you’re talking about political change or changes that we’re encountering as a society just in general, we find that culture always gets there first and culture is where public sentiment is formed and kind of lead the way. So when we think about that and think about participation in addition to people having a relationship with YBCA, we’re hoping they’re actually participating more broadly in the world. We’re trying to create a movement where people are more actively participating in the civic life of their community, where people are reaching out across difference and finding ways to work together to make the world a better place. So we don’t lose sight of the long





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game here and the world we think art and culture can play in creating a more equitable hopeful world for everybody. So we're really looking at 5-10-15 years, what will the role of our work today be a generation from now.

BETH: I think that's such a great way to look at it because one of the things I do all the times we try and explain to people what does branding really mean, one of the ways I often describe it is this bridge that connects your mission to your vision. It's helps you create that pathway that lets you get to where you want to go. I love how you talked about culture being such a big factor of it. It's one of the things I'm really noticing in this year's set of podcasts, in the work that we're doing with our clients. We're talking about building their brand. This idea of culture is coming up more and more and so you said culture precedes change. So in your work, what does culture actually mean? How do you define this kind of culture that you're trying to create before change can happen?

JEN: That's a great question and we get asked it a lot. I mean there's culture in the sense of art, which is the one you probably think I'm usually talking about, but when we say culture, we talk about those things that surround us in every day life from the images we're exposed to, to the sounds we hear, to the stories that are told, to the music that's taking place, to the spaces that we're occupying, so we're talking broadly about culture. Those intangible things that make us who we are as a society. That's what we're trying to shape and we're trying to change the dynamic of what that culture looks like, to be one that's more equitable than it currently is.

BETH: These things that you're talking about, these aren't little things. Like this is big, world shifting kind of stuff. What was going on at the organization that made them say, "this kind of innovation is a priority"?

JEN: It wasn't a stated priority for YBC when I arrived. So I joined the organization in early 2015 and I was really lucky in that I was hired by a visionary CEO, Debra Cullinin. And Debra's quite unique in the art field in that she didn't rise up through





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the ranks as a curator or as a fundraiser. I mean, at her core, she's a brilliant community organizer who happens to use art and culture as the vessel to do her work. It helped that I had a non-traditional CEO in place when I was hired, but innovation wasn't a stated priority. The YBCA was known in the art sector for taking on pretty ambitious, unproven arts programs and making them work. So I knew the spirit of innovation was in there, but it wasn't until we began the process of really building the brand strategy that it became clear that there was an opportunity to more overtly claim innovation as one of our core competencies and as I've mentioned to a lot of people and possibly even you, YBCA sits in the heart of downtown San Francisco and San Francisco is hands down the most innovative city in our nation, if not on the planet. I mean this is the place where all of the great thinkers and builders and doers are flocking to build the future and I just thought it's such a shame that no local arts institution has really decided to lean into this spirit and try to apply it. Why can't an arts center be as strategically innovative and future-focused as a tech company? What would Y Combinator look like if it were run by an arts institution? So those were the kind of questions that were circling in my mind and when I joined the organization and started to learn more about it through this kind of brand archaeology that I did, which is really just understanding the founding story, the historical ethos of the organization and what drove it to where it was and innovation was there. It was just never stated.

BETH: I love that you are even referencing something like Y Combinator and for anybody that's listening that isn't of that world, Y Combinator is a San Francisco-based high tech emerging tech incubator, and I think it's so interesting that when you were looking at who could we be and who could we model, you didn't just look in the nonprofit space. You went and looked outside to see what cultural things, like what's having an impact on this city, on this world, on where other innovations are coming from and you didn't limit yourselves to what you maybe should be or the role that an art center is expected to play.

JEN: That's absolutely right, and in fact we overtly state now that one of our





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ambitions is to completely re-imagine the role an art institution can play in the community it serves and at its core, we're aiming to be a cultural incubator and really surface the break through, game changing creative ideas and actions that can help inspire a better future. I can't try to replicate what someone else is already excelling at in our field. They do what they do in a way that YBCA could never replicate. I could never out-MOMA the MOMA. They do what they do. So I made it really clear to the team when I came on board that this was not about while we can admire and should admire our peers in the art world, we cannot replicate. We need to forge our own path and that means looking outside of the sector for inspiration.

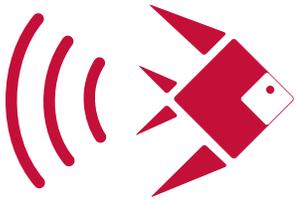
BETH: You know, it's so true because at the heart of what brand is and even what having an impact is, is claiming your own space and putting your own stake in the ground. I'm always amazed when someone describes their organization by saying things like, "We're like the MOMA of the west." I was even in a networking thing years ago where I stood up and said what I did and then the person next to me stood up and said, "I do what Beth does," and I just thought, "Wait, you're a marketing company and you're gonna describe what you do as a reference to what another marketing firm does?" That's so un-branded and crazy. You should find out what's truly distinctive about yourself and own that space because everyone is unique.

JEN: That's right, that's right. That spirit of trying to replicate what others do is the antithesis of branding.

BETH: Exactly! Yes!

JEN: Branding is about finding your special point of difference and leaning really hard into it. I made it clear from the beginning that that wasn't what I was here to do. I was here to help define what makes YBCA, YBCA and what we do that no one else can replicate.





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BETH: I think that that is kind of part of it, is that the organization was willing to bring in somebody that said, “This is what I want to do that is different. If this isn’t what you want, don’t hire me.”

JEN: Yeah, and that’s a hard conversation for people to have. I mean, in nonprofit marketing I think sometimes rightfully we’re so grateful that we get to work for the organizations that we do and so grateful that we are able to find a way to do this work that’s so important to the world that sometimes we set aside our own personal ambitions and service of that important work, that I’m a really firm believer that as marketers we spend our entire lives building other people’s brands and that’s a really noble cause, but we can’t let our own brand suffer, too. To me, I’m at the point in my professional career where every opportunity I choose to take on has got to be a service to my personal brand, which is all about growth and development and not necessarily going somewhere just to replicate something I did somewhere else.

BETH: I think that’s a really important message to get out there because I know this whole show is about successful and exploring ideas of nonprofit communications. There are a lot of nonprofit marketers and people that have marketing responsibilities even though that might not be their background or their training that listen to this show and I know that there are so few true roles for marketing in an organization and it’s hard to not say “grab onto what ever is offered to you” and to really focus on what do you want to change in the world? What do you want to do? Why are you interested in the communications and message spreading aspect of a nonprofit and to not compromise just in the hope that somebody will let you sit near the table.

JEN: Yeah and I’ve spoke to so many people at the AMA conference we met at a few weeks ago about that struggle and what you do when you’re just so happy to be there, but perhaps at the same time you don’t feel like you’re being set up to succeed, you’re not being surrounded by the right team or the right talent or the right resources and you know in your heart you could be doing so much more





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and adding so much more value to the organization if you could just figure out how to reframe the perception of marketing within that organization. That's what I've been spending a lot of time lately mentoring and coaching other people on.

BETH: Right and even though there's not a lot of understanding or necessarily even expertise with a background of marketing in many nonprofits, brand is something that is often sometimes harder for people to wrap their heads around. When you started to talk about it and use that word to figure out what that meant to your organization, did you have any resistance to the idea?

JEN: Yes. YBCA is an organization that is known as being pretty punk rock, like pretty anti-establishment. I mean, it's really the modern soul of San Francisco in many ways and what people think of San Francisco and with that attitude comes a very deep natural skepticism of anything that reeks of being overly corporate or overly contrived and the very word brand falls in that category. I really had to baby step my way and baby step the organization through the branding process for it to work. If I had done like a "rip off the band-aid" moment, it would have completely alienated our staff and our other stakeholders. So it was a very methodical process we went on where we would kind of tackle one piece of the brand, make sure it had sunk in and we had full alignment and then move on to the next and the next. So we started with something really simple, which was just trying to reset our mission statement, which had been pretty neglected ...

BETH: Like all the group projects.

JEN: Yeah, right. It wasn't actionable. It wasn't differentiating. It wasn't really reflective of what we were doing so first thing we tried to do is reset the mission statement and that was a few months in the works. Once that happened, we moved on to the brand promise and once that happened, we moved on to defining our audience and then we launched a new visual identity and then we put together a strategic framework for the organization. We did it so methodically and with such transparency that it was a journey of about 18 months





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to get all of those pieces in place. Just to get them to the point where the building blocks were in place and we hadn't even started activating a brand yet.

BETH: I think that that's such an important thing for people to hear. One of the things I tell people a lot of times is that branding isn't a project, it's a process. It's a pathway that even after you get to that starting line, then you start living it and then you see what you've already defined actually works when it's out in the wild and where continued adjustments need to be made.

JEN: Yes, I have the same perspective that you do on branding and I always tell people it is a marathon and just having the brand strategy in place is when you get to the starting line. That's not the end. That's the beginning.

BETH: It's so important.

JEN: Commitment, a long-term commitment.

BETH: One of the things that I hear from people that have been on this podcast over and over again, they talk of this idea of if you're really trying to create participation and build a brand that has participation within its DNA, you need what they call a leadership buy in. I've kind of turned that idea of championship and one of the things that you and I have talked about is that's not exactly a finite thing, that yes you need that, but sometimes there's a struggle. Sometimes if you're waiting for everyone to say yes, nothing ever moves forward. How did you navigate the waters of buy in to get enough support to move forward, but without kind of waiting for a quicker level of everyone is in agreement before anybody can do anything?

JEN: Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, you obviously need some degree of buy in at the onset. Without our CEO that I mentioned earlier and what I call her will to change, my job from the onset would have exponentially been more difficult, but because she and I saw eye to eye on the value of brand, I immediately had permission to start the strategic process. In our case, most of





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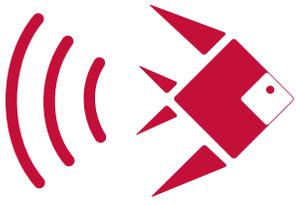
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the stake holders of the organization were fairly supportive during that brand strategy phase, that 18 months I talked about because that was just words. I wasn't scaring them yet. I was like these are words on a page. We hadn't done anything with the words yet. I think people gave me the benefit of the doubt and because of their love for this organization wanted to participate in that process and kind of came along, but once it came time to apply the brand and bring it to life through our deeds and actions, that's when you start to see that skepticism rising back to the surface and that uncertainty because there's a concern, a rightful concern, that you're gonna try to change how they try to do their work, which is true. The whole point of putting the brand at the center of the organization so that it radiates throughout everything we do and everything we touch, not just messaging, but our offering and how we move in the world. So once we had the brand strategy in place, I'd say that's where the, not lack of buy in, but just the skepticism started to come back to the surface because people started to question what does this mean for what I do? What are you going to try to change or do differently in the area I view as my realm or my territory? So the first thing I had to do is I recognized I had to get one quick win under my belt. I had to get one thing in process that would prove the value of this brand or otherwise it was just gonna stall out. So I had to kind of be very choiceful and say, "Where's the one place where I can get a quick win to have this brand walk the talk out in the world and therefore do two things?" One is prove to the community that this isn't just a marketing thing, that this is truly us telling the world who YBCA us, but secondly get that internal confidence that brand can help. Brand makes things better. It's not here to be a burden or something that makes your life harder. It's actually here to open up more opportunity for everybody.

BETH: How did you choose what to do?

JEN: Well, I got lucky in that concurrently to all this brand work we were doing, our membership program had kind of stalled out. We weren't seeing a lot of growth in our membership base and so we had this kind of secondary kind of





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work happening where we were doing quite a bit of research with our members and trying to understand what was working with our membership program, what wasn't and I knew at some point these products were gonna have to dovetail. I just didn't know exactly how or when that was gonna happen so I let them keep moving. We were doing this membership research and through this research we uncovered a really important insight that I really grabbed onto with like a pitbull and would not let go of and it's the idea of recognizing the context in which the art center is working and by that I mean San Francisco is the most expensive housing market in the country. People are leaving this city in droves because they just can't make the finances work. When people are laying awake at night worried about just making their rent, they're simply not thinking about engagement with art and culture, much less making a donation or buy a membership to a cultural organization. That just feels like a luxury they can't entertain. After hearing member after member talking about the financial choices they were making in their life just to survive in this city, it was a light bulb for me. It wasn't just about tweaking a benefit here or tweaking a benefit there. If we are truly going to change culture and use culture for a catalyst for societal change, we need to address this very real challenge that's happening in the community from a place where we authentically can. I wish I could buy a house or lease an apartment for everyone in the city that wants to live here. I obviously can't do that, but I can make it a little more easy for them to make the choice to participate in art and culture. So coming out of these groups, we saw this opportunity to create what's now known as our pay what you can level of membership, which is totally honor based. Basically you give us whatever you can afford annually, whether it's \$5 or \$50 and you'll get access to all of our visual art galleries and exhibitions and some other great benefits. So this idea surfaced ...

BETH: Yeah, and how did that go over?

JEN: Well, it took some cajoling because I had no science or data to back up that this would even be financially viable for us. I just had a strong conviction that this was exactly the sort of gesture that would help solidify our brand for





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the community. So I talked to our CEO and chief of development and our team and basically asked them to take a calculated risk with me. We did a very soft launch with no promotion and just put this membership out there to see what would happen and in less than six months it had more than doubled the size of our membership base with out cannibalizing. Without cannibalizing, the more expensive levels.

BETH: That's incredible!

JEN: But if that risk hadn't paid off, if we did this test and it hadn't worked, we might be having a different conversation today because the branding journey is such. It's moments of successes that get you to the point where the whole organization has confidence in it. That quick win gave us the confidence that maybe we were on to something and could continue to use it to drive more innovation.

BETH: I'm just so appreciative of how honest and transparent you're being with what you're sharing because that is so true. I mean, everyone who is listening I know knows how hard it is to get support behind your idea. I mean everyone's got a board who may come from a completely different background or may be on the board for their own reasons and to say, "I'm gonna do this thing and I'm gonna have absolutely no data to prove to you that it's going to work. Let me try this huge thing that is a massive financial risk." That's not an easy thing to get people to agree to and if it didn't work, and it doesn't sometimes. Crazy ideas doesn't work. How did you, knowing that you didn't have any data and that you didn't have any way to prove to people that it would work, you were just saying this is a hunch based on all of your research. I mean, you did have a ton of research that said this is a massive problem. This is a problem and if we don't do something, things aren't gonna get better.

JEN: Well going back to my idea to change, there's nothing like fear to create will and when you see your membership program stalling and the tried and true tactical band aids you could put on it to revive it aren't giving you the growth you





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need or want to see to have a healthy, thriving membership community. You're I think more open-minded to a calculated risk and I was in a situation where you know, we had stagnated and if people wanted to see growth, I told them we have to innovate our way out of this. We can't just copy whatever the organization down the road is doing for their membership program because people are gonna go there. We're not gonna trap them by offering a parody product. We need to innovate our way into a uniquely YBCA approach to membership.

BETH: That's so critical.

JEN: And that's community centers and that's where "pay what you can" came from.

BETH: Right. That is such an important thing for people to know. I've heard things like schools tell me, "Well, you know what's really special about us? We really care about the kids." Isn't that sort of like required for entry, and that's a key thing. You're not gonna differentiate based on something that is the stakes just to walk in the door and if somebody else already owns that space, you can't just railroad over top of that without something different or vast amounts of money to just obliterate, but even still, at some point, any amount of money runs out and that's not enough if people's experience of that brand doesn't live up to what they want.

JEN: That's right, that's right. And the way I've been talking about innovation with my organization and the need for it is this isn't about looking for something other people are doing well and trying to replicate it and it's actually also not about looking at our own deficits and trying to fix them. It's about recognizing what we do really well and leaning into that. That's the only way we'll be successful. It's not about fixing a deficit.

BETH: I've never heard anybody explain it that way, but that is exactly how I look at it. When we focus on branding, I always describe it like a target and when you're telling me that your audience is everyone, basically you're shooting for the





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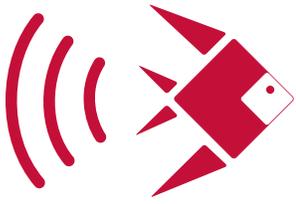
outer most ring on that target and if you're shooting for that ring, the chances that you're gonna miss it entirely is pretty high, but if you know what your center is and you shoot for it, you've got everything from the center all the way to the outside ring that you have the potential to hit with success and that's so much more sustainable, but you can't be everything to everyone. By focusing on your members, the people that were already taking the actions that were desirable and important to you and demonstrating that they valued you and understanding what were their limitations and doing more and moving to a deeper level for you and then supporting them, but look at what you did with that. You didn't say, "Oh my gosh. Our membership is dying with people from San Francisco. Maybe we should be marketing to people in Portland and getting them to come down to San Francisco to go to our museum." But then there's that natural ... I've seen that so many times of people saying, "What we're doing isn't working. Let me just pick some random other and shoot for that because it's sort of like a scramble," as opposed to really looking at what's working and how you can build up and grow from like this place of a central place.

JEN: Yeah, exactly. That's really wise what you just said.

BETH: Tell me, how did you move from this place where you built this brand and you started to live it and I love how you talk about how this branding and innovation effort gets you to the starting line, but then as you moved forward these, I call them the cattle shoot, this sort of frame work that you put around who you were, how did that help you begin to define what you do and what you don't do? What you could get involved with not because of this framework that you might not have even considered before? How did it impact your programming and your other initiatives?

JEN: Well, it was certainly and still remains a journey, so you're right about that. I think once the membership launched and people saw this is what we mean by our brand strategy, this is what it means to use art and culture as a catalyst for change, to actually try to change the culture we're existing in. This is the sort





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of gesture I was talking about. It gave people something tangible, which was fantastic and then there's a high degree of trust that had to happen because the last thing I'm gonna do is walk in and tell a curator how to do their job or a fundraiser how to do their job or an events person how to do their job. All I can do is give them the framework and the decision-making tools to work within and then trust that they're going to implement it. So we did a pretty rigorous indoctrination period. Once we got to the end of that 18 months of getting all the brand building blocks in place, we did a pretty intensive indoctrination period that culminated with an all staff retreat where we actually spent 12 hours together, the entire organization going through a circuit of exercises where people had to essentially practice putting the brand into practice and it was a safe space where people could talk about where the brand might take them and sometimes I thought they were a little off the mark, but sometimes I thought they came up with things that were incredibly insightful and incredibly powerful that I never would have gotten to as a marketer. So we did this indoctrination where we could basically dream together and come up with the way that this brand could come to live, but it wasn't like a decision-making meeting. It wasn't a yes or no. It was let's dream together. Let's all try to understand this and let's commit to trying to apply it. So everyone goes about their work, right. Well, you know, 12 months later, we just had another retreat on Monday, another retreat on Monday. This is 12 months after the indoctrination happened and we were reflecting back on everything we've done over the last 12 months and it was remarkable. I mean, we have started to change everything from the types of artists and collaborators we're choosing to work with to how we open up our public spaces for the community around us to how we actually think about trying to make real policy shift in our city through our civic engagement work. So it has started in the last 12 months to actually come to life where I would say there's at least one moment or one program or one gesture that's been deployed in each department that is a great example of the power of this brand.

BETH: That's amazing!





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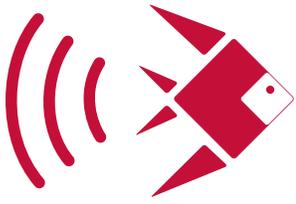
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JEN: It's incredible!

BETH: What do you think you did, like between the indoctrination, brand retreat and Monday, what did you do? Was there anything that you did to support and encourage and sort of shepherd along this change because you know, sometimes there can be this feeling of the brands are or that it's a set of restraints that are put upon people? Do you think it was just we did this amazing retreat and people just ran with it? Or did you do anything else to kind of help encourage it?

JEN: Oh, that's a great question! I mean, this was and remains a daily task of reinforcement. We learn, by we I mean myself and the CEO, learn very early on that we can't just say something once and expect it to stick. So we revisit the brand pretty regularly to the point where, so we have every other week we have an all staff meeting. We all have breakfast together, it's a place to talk and reflect on the work we're doing together, it's a place for them to hear from our CEO about what's coming up, what we're working on and it's become a really powerful platform for us to continually remind people of what we're running towards as an organization. So there's that. We are literally very verbal. Secondly, we have shifted to working in a pretty cross-functional way. When I got there, we were heavily silent, heavily silent. There was not a lot of interdepartmental collaboration, but through a fairly natural process, we realized to make this strategy work that we're claiming we're committed to, we have to start working together differently. So I am in constant meetings and in communication with my counter parts that are running the organization from curators to the fundraisers to the operational staff. There's a lot of cross-functional meetings and conversations happening that weren't happen when we started on this journey. So we had to literally change the way we worked together to do this. If I have limited conversation and communication about curators, there's no way that we would be able to turn this in a different direction, but we're working in a cross-functional way now where every few months, our curators are actually coming to our entire team including marketing and sharing their thoughts and ideas for what they want to be doing two, three, four years from now and that's a moment





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of discussion. It's not necessarily a sign off meeting. It's a moment for someone like me to say that's a really interesting choice. Can you talk to me about how you see this aligning with our brand and why you made this choice. If they can't confidently articulate that, that's a moment of pause. Not from me. They don't report to me, but it's a moment of pause for our CEO certainly to think, "You know what? I probably need to talk to the curators about that and if they feel invested in this particular program, how might they strengthen it to be closer to the brand?" So we're just working in a completely different way now than we were before.

BETH: How do you think you built that trust? Because ultimately, that's what it comes down to, is the belief and the trust that this is good for them and that you're not going to railroad over them? Everyone that I talk to almost exclusively has brought up this idea of collaboration as being key to participation. Huge! It's one of the top three things that comes up and so I'm always curious about what was something you think supports your ability to go from silo-ed to collaborative?

JEN: I jokingly say this, but it's true. I'm not afraid to be a bully. I say that only because if you are not willing to step up and make your voice heard and frankly fight for what you think needs to be done to live the brand, everyone will roll over you and so part of it is honestly being unafraid and having enough conviction to speak up. Another part of it is honestly having the seniority over the organization to be at the right table at the right time. I also talk to people about the importance of titles in marketing and how shameful I think it is when I see a nonprofit where there is a chief level job that is finance or fundraising or other operational job in nature, yet they have a marketing director. If your marketing leader isn't up here with the other operational leaders of the organization, it will be very challenging to make this work because at the end of the day, if someone has more seniority than you in the organization, it's incredibly challenging at times to get them to listen to you. So I think there's just very practical things to keep in mind when they're looking at their own organization and part of that is





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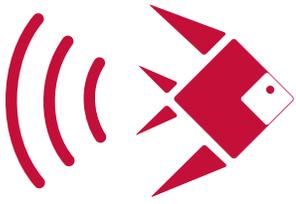
how is it structured and where is marketing situated.

BETH: I think that is a really, really important thing and it is a hard thing to move, but it starts with awareness and a sense of what are the roadblocks to having this happen. A lot of it is attitude. When marketing is looked at as executional, not strategic and go make social media work, you know, or it's like a coordinator level position, then you're not gonna be able to make impactful change.

JEN: That's right and I talk a lot about the fact that not every nonprofit is blessed with a visionary leader, whoever the leader is. If it's a CEO or whatever the title happens to be, an executive director, not everyone is blessed with a visionary CEO or a bold CEO who is willing to take a bat at marketing. I never met a CEO who doesn't want to make more money, who doesn't want to get more funding, who doesn't want notoriety and so I often say to people, "You have to make the business case for brand and you have to make the business case for innovation," because some people won't get it otherwise, but if you can show them the possibilities and opportunities that this shift will bring to the organization and to them, you will have a better chance.

BETH: Exactly. That's what we always say. It's about we need to understand what you value and in a year or five years, what do you want to see your organization looking like and how do you see yourselves getting there, and then it's a matter of determining can an innovative approach to your brand be the conduit for that because maybe for some people it's not the answer. Ultimately it is thinking what do you want as an organization. When people hear brand, they think that's a lot of work for a new logo. I hate to say it, but a lot of times, I mean, I do this all the time. This is what people still hear. I've even had people tell me, "We need a new brand," and what they really mean is, "We want to update our newsletter," or a lot of times, website. When they tell me they want to do a new brand or they'll use a website as a conduit to chance the strategy of their organization and I'm thinking a website is a tactical place where you put the decisions that you've made. It's not a place where you make the decisions!





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JEN: That's right. I still remember one of the very first presentations I made to our staff when I joined was kind of what a brand is and isn't. There might have been a few people who probably thought it was kind of a condescending presentation, but I really felt strongly before we took one step in this journey that we needed to have a shared understanding of what I was pushing us towards.

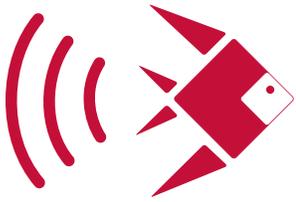
BETH: We'll have to have you come back on and give that presentation next!

JEN: So I was very clear upfront that this was not about a logo or a tag line or an ad campaign, but this was truly about creatively re-imagining the organization by putting a brand strategy at its center.

BETH: Wonderful! So if somebody that's listening says, "Great, Jen. These are all wonderful ideas. How do I begin to enact this type of innovation in my organization?" How would you suggest to somebody that wants to take the path that you've taken get started?

JEN: So, a few things. One is I would try to get a sense of who you think your champions could be, try to sense out if there's like-minded individuals within the organization that are open-minded and are willing to take risks and make sure you make note of who those people are because you're gonna want to be friends with them. The second thing is this will to change that I mentioned, which is really knowing your boss and your boss's boss and if possible, your boss's boss's boss motivations and understanding what they're working towards. What does success look like to them? Then use that to start to build your case for how you can help them achieve those goals. I'm a big fan of case studies. I know not everyone is, but I am really a student of marketing and of brand and I spend a lot of time understanding what's happening out in the world and when I find something that I think would be good as a learning moment for my organization, I flag it. So I would absolutely start looking outside of your field and just broadly at business and marketing and understanding who is really using brand in a way that seems to be driving their business or organization forward and use those as examples





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and if possibly, reach out to the people doing that work. I mean, with the proliferation of LinkedIn and everything else, there's no reason you can't reach out and learn from your peers in the field. I do it every day.

BETH: Me, too. I send LinkedIn invitations to people all the time and for me, the key has been not just hitting that connect button. That's how I've gotten so many people to be on this podcast is I read about something in an article and then I go look for them on LinkedIn and then I send them a note to say I read about this project that you're doing. I'd love to share your experience with our community on this podcast. I've had people from all over the world in fact respond to me from doing these things because people love to talk about what they've done. They love to talk about their projects. You know, the worst thing that happens is you get no response. The best thing that can happen is you make a new connection and have a sounding board to bounce ideas off of.

JEN: Right and even in the middle, if they can't help you, they can empathize with you.

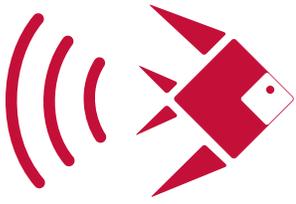
BETH: Exactly, yes! Sometimes ...

JEN: And there is value in that of sometimes just talking to someone who is going through the same struggles or challenges and knowing that you have other people who are trying to work towards the same thing is powerful sometimes.

BETH: Wonderful! Well, Jen, thank you so much. This has been so valuable and insightful for me and I'm sure for everyone in our nonprofit community is so appreciative of all of the insight that you shared with us today. If people had questions or wanted to learn more about what you did, what's a good place for them to find you?

JEN: Sure. The best places for them to reach out to me is either through LinkedIn, which I think my profile is just Jen Martindale.





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BETH: We'll put a link to it on the show notes page.

JEN: Excellent! Or contact me over Twitter. Those are two great places to find me.

BETH: Fabulous! Jen, thank you so much for sharing everything with us. I so appreciate it, and I wish you the best of luck as you continue to innovate in your organization.

JEN: Thank you for having me, Beth.

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