



# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

## SESSION 164

### WHAT STARBUCKS HAS LEARNED ABOUT PARTICIPATION

WITH MIKE LENDA

**BETH:** Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky, and welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with Mike Lenda. Mike is currently the National Director of Mobilization at Compassion International, but before he did that, Mike worked at a little company that you might know called Starbucks as the Group Marketing Manager. Mike and I have known each other for a little bit over a year when he found me through my podcast, had me come out and talk to his mobilization team at Compassion about participation. We stayed in touch over the year and have recently been talking about his work at Starbucks. As I dig deeper into this topic of participation and started to explore whether this is just a nonprofit phenomenon or something that goes beyond that into ways that all kinds of organizations can understand their community differently and work from a participation-centric mode from the inside out. Mike, I'm so excited to have you join me here today. Thanks so much!

**MIKE:** Oh, thanks, Beth. It's been great to get to know you and glad to be a part of this podcast that I first discovered you on.

**BETH:** It's funny. I recorded with somebody the other day that when I did my intro call, I said, "Hi, this is Beth," and he said, "I know! I listen." I thought, "Oh my gosh. This is weird."

**MIKE:** That is great. Well, I'll have to remember to actually remember this isn't a podcast I'm listening to, but participating in.

**BETH:** Right, exactly. So you've got to keep talking this time.

**MIKE:** Right. Well, thanks again.

**BETH:** So in your case, I used to always ask people how did you wander into





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this world because many of us didn't get degrees in nonprofit management and things like that, but I want to re-institute that question for you because you have had part of your life over in a for-profit world and part of it in this nonprofit world. So can you talk a little bit about how you ended up at Starbucks and then also what made you move on and start your work with Compassion?

**MIKE:** First off, starting at Starbucks, I was a huge fan of the brand. I was a customer long before I was an employee as I would travel. I was working in marketing and PR and working for various agencies and supporting different clients around the US and I would always look for a Starbucks because I knew they would have an experience that I would enjoy. They had coffee that I enjoyed and I could count on them. Some of my friends even said I had an internal Starbucks detector because I knew where they were in the neighborhood. So I was collecting city mugs as I traveled, various ways of realizing that I was truly a fan. So it started there with Starbucks where I was actually between marketing jobs and I found myself going out looking at what direction I was going to move into next and I was standing in line at Starbucks somewhere after the sixth or seventh interview for a job I knew I didn't want. I don't know if you've ever been there.

**BETH:** No, unfortunately, I've been employed by myself for too long!

**MIKE:** Good! Having the disappointment of standing in line at Starbucks, going I'm gonna reward myself for enduring this job hunt, and I got to the counter and the guy behind the counter said to me, "Hey, Mike, good to see you. Wow, you look really dressed up today. Would you like your usual mocha?" It was like a light bulb that went off in my head that I really never sensed before, that it was a place, too, this wasn't just a coffee shop that I was picking up a cup of coffee, but that the barista behind the counter knew my name. They knew the beverage that I liked, and they knew that I typically don't wear a suit when I come into there, and it was at that instance as I was sitting in the cafe pondering what it was about my experience at Starbucks, and why I was trying to hunt for a job,





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that they shot a job application over to me and on it was written, and it was in the form of a paper airplane, “You’re here all the time. You might as well work,” and it got me to thinking. At first I was afraid because it was a brand that I love. I’m like what if I start working here and I found out how it’s really done and I don’t like it and I have to avoid it on every corner for every trip I take. So it took me a little while to fill out the application to say why don’t I do this until I find something else, and before I knew it, I started as a barista part-time and quickly decided I didn’t need to look for anything else, that I fell in love with the brand and the company even more. Moved into operations, into management and then into marketing. Then what I saw, the transition from working at Starbucks to then working in nonprofit, is that the values that Starbucks lived internally and externally in caring for their community and caring for the world and having specific social responsibility for the work they are doing and selling coffee both for their employees, for their customers and for their farmers, in many respects I felt like I was working for a for-profit nonprofit, that they really were living it. So when I went from moving from for-profit to nonprofit, it seemed like a natural transition because the passions of Starbucks, which were things like water and they have the brand Ethos water, HIV/AIDS research was always a strong pillar, education, ethical sourcing for farmers, all these different elements were a natural transition and actually from Starbucks I went and worked for an organization that focused on HIV/AIDS and water work in Africa. So it was really an outpouring of my work at Starbucks that enabled me to actually transition to the nonprofit world.

**BETH:** I think that’s so interesting, that Starbucks is a really big company, but there’s lots of big companies and not all of them run themselves that way. Was Starbucks always a company that had values that were clear and written down and communicated out to their staff and their community? Were they always interested in sort of this social responsibility stuff or did that grow over time?

**MIKE:** From my understanding and from my experience it was from the very beginning. Even when they were a small independent coffee shop in Pikes Place





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in Seattle they were always focused on giving back to their community. So I saw that as they grew, what Howard Schultz would say, and I know he's recently passed the mantle off as CEO, but he's still imminently involved and the values he built the organization on still live today. How do we grow big and stay small and in order to do that, it was really about living that in the community. Whether pastries were donated to local food banks or the grounds from the coffee donated to local gardens for fertilizer. There was always this element of how do we take with what we have and invest back into the community even at the very early ages. How do we support the things that our community is doing and be a part of the community. So those values continued to deepen and evolve as the organization grew, but it really does stir up that store level and embody getting the right people in the store to support the brand and the mission to live out those values.

**BETH:** I think that's such an interesting perspective that starts at the store level. One of the things that comes up that people have reported to me over and over again as a shift that organizations need to make to really embody participation is this idea of championship and they report it in a couple of different ways. They talk about things like leadership buy-in, but they also talk about the idea that it's got to permeate through an organization to create this shared vision. In your work with Starbucks, how did things get between Howard's vision and a store's ability and interest in executing things in a cohesive way?

**MIKE:** There's a couple different ways. I would say training was a big piece, where they often instill a lot of training and resources to the store managers to ensure that they were equipped to live without. I would say one of the things that I remember where they would bring together store managers from around the country and really around the globe where the ones I remember attending in Seattle where when you're the store manager in a certain store or even a certain district or region, you sometimes feel like you're on your own island operating your own business because in many respects you are, but when you're sitting in Key Arena with 10,000 store managers, you feel like you're a part of something





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bigger, and the inspiration that Starbucks led with and inspiring store managers and staff to live out those values really was a focus of the organization. I think it was led by them. I remember when Starbucks launched the Green Apron book. It was kind of the book that spoke to the values that they wanted the employees to live, which included things like being welcoming, being involved in your community, being genuine, being considerate to others. When they launched those behaviors that they wanted the employees to live, they created these small cards where you could recognize each other for living out those values. So if you saw somebody welcoming a customer or being genuine to somebody or being involved in their community, it was a way to internally recognize that, but the way it started was when senior leadership would come into your store and recognize you because it didn't make it weird.

**BETH:** Yeah, it wasn't like this corny thing that you should do anymore.

**MIKE:** Exactly. Suddenly your vice president was handing you this star to put on your apron or handing you a little card to put in your wallet and it felt like ongoing recognition of these values that when you are seeing them portrayed and you're acknowledging them, the greater likelihood of them being repeated and so I think how Starbucks built those values was not just putting them on a sign on the wall, but living them out and the leadership saw value in prioritizing that. I think when I was there, some of the values they would always talk about was the very first thing was to create a great environment in that store where people felt respected and heard and known and the way they would always say that is "If we create a great environment in our stores profit will come." Most organizations would say, "Profit is number one; we have to focus on profit." Starbucks inverted that. They said if we create that great experience for our employees and for our customers, profit will come.

**BETH:** That's so true. That leads me to this question that I always ask everybody that I talk to. So when you were there, what did the word "participation" mean to you and to Starbucks in your work? It's a weird word and everyone defines it in





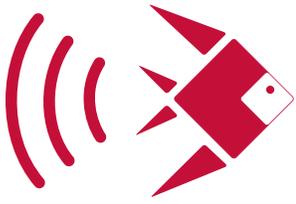
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different ways. In the end, they were trying to sell more coffee, but along the way, between attracting people and getting them to take that tactical action, what sort of participation did Starbucks value?

**MIKE:** Yeah, one of the things that they used to say is, “We aren’t in the coffee business serving people. We are in the people business serving coffee.” They lived through that. So, participation, as you said earlier and as I was saying, too, it started at the store level and it started with personal ownership. So it meant everything from participating in the needs of the employees, which they called partners, as you are a partner in the business. That’s part of your benefits by getting stock options, but you have a voice. So with that being the starting point, there’s a program there called the Cup Fund, which enables partners helping other partners that if you have financial issues, if you have certain needs, it’s kind of an internal financial resource to support one another through hard times. When there would be tragedies or hurricanes or disasters, it was a way across the company partners would rally to support one another. It again even started in the store. Volunteerism is a key component of the fabric of compassion, and Starbucks puts their money where their mouth is and matches the hours that their staff volunteers back to the organizations to which they volunteer. So they don’t always say, “I’ll go volunteer.” They say, “We’ll put our money there because you’re taking your time to give, impacting your community. We will match your hours with our dollars.” So participation started that side, but then on the opposite side, by living that, it’s inviting the customers in, inviting them into activities within their community. When I was a part of the marketing side of Starbucks, it was the ability to be where our customers are and people like them. So it was building a library in communities that were in need of resources. It was sponsoring our exhibits and community events and again giving back to the community and participating in that community, but also bringing the community together and sure there was an opportunity to sample some coffee and enjoy the Starbucks products, but it was a conduit of bringing the community together. Starbucks desires to be a place of conversation, a place of community and it’s the products that bring the community together, but they come back for the





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community.

**BETH:** It's really so fascinating because I bet there's a lot of people that are listening that have no idea, have never heard of all this stuff and as you're driving by the window to get your coffee in the morning, you don't realize what's necessarily behind it. It does make me think. How are these two things linked together because Starbucks has had this exponential growth selling coffee that's more expensive than coffee that you can get in other places. I'm just curious. How much do you think this focus on experience and the experience that people have and the way you're describing participation is, I call it the through and through approach. You can't make participation happen on the outside unless you're willing to focus on participation on the inside and this idea that they are inviting customers in and treating their storeowners like it's OK that that's your little fiefdom. Go on and enjoy, do your thing and building the sense of shared value, but that it's championing an idea from the top down and from the bottom up and all across. When somebody approaches a business like that, what happens? What's different? What was different? What were they able to accomplish that you think had maybe stemmed from that?

**MIKE:** Well, I think what they were able to accomplish was to be a part of the conversation and be intentional of growth. It doesn't mean that the entire journey of Starbucks wasn't without challenge or hasn't been. I remember being there during the season of having to close 600 stores and re-focus and re-focus on the core being coffee and being focused on growth in a more healthy way, but that didn't necessarily change the values. It was also a re-focusing on "why are we here" and "what is it that brings us together." I recently read an article about Starbucks and their current initiatives. Moving into communities where there may be less of a likelihood for there to be a Starbucks because you think of Starbucks typically being in a high traffic area or a high economic area where there's a lot of coffee consumption or a certain level of economic wealth or whatever. What Starbucks has actually always been a part of is when I was reading this article, I realized back in the 80s they partnered with Magic Johnson to move





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into many developing communities to bring Starbucks as a stable job as well as a community meeting place in communities where people would not necessarily expect a Starbucks to be. They're still living that today. As I was reading an article about how they've opened stores in Ferguson, Missouri, and other places out west that typically you've not seen a Starbucks, but as Howard toured some of the areas, for example hit by Katrina back in the day or visiting Ferguson, realizing that we, and I still say we ...

**BETH:** Which says a lot. It says a lot that you still think about it that way.

**MIKE:** I am proud to have worked there, and I think that Starbucks sees a responsibility to be a brand that for their size, they leverage their size for good and it doesn't mean that coffee doesn't play a key role and the products don't play a key role because they always try to be innovative. They always at the same time too have always strived to take great care of the farmers and ethical sourcing and being great stewards of the product, but at the same time, the importance of focusing and staying true to the core of who they are. I think that's what's enabled them to grow and what's enabled them to create that experience. I think I saw that personally where I still remember one customer coming in and you'd be surprised how habitual people are. They come in at the same time every day and order their same beverage. I still remember years later a customer named Lisa who would come in and order her double shot of espresso over ice and we would talk and exchange pleasantries. There was a season where she didn't come back and we wondered where she had been, and when she did return, she said, "Well, can I tell you a story? The reason I used to come in all the time was I experienced a tragedy in my family. My son died tragically in a car accident, and I had a really hard time even leaving the house and dealing with the grief, but I would come in every day, and you would call me by name and you would make me feel happy and you guys would talk to me, and just for a moment I would forget about the grief that I was experiencing." To me on the other end, I thought I was just making coffee and making pleasantries with a customer, but because Starbucks affords the opportunity for baristas and customers to get to





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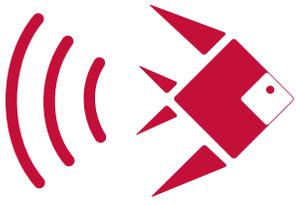
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know each other and it becomes, it shrinks your community and helps you for Starbucks truly be that third place. That idea of third place was you have two places you could go to: your home and your work. What is a third place that could be created where you would feel known, you feel comfortable, you feel like you could relax and be yourself. Starbucks strives to be that and for so many people it is that. I can't think of any other place that I say is "mine." My Starbucks is a common phrase that people say because they take the level of ownership in a unique way. I think that says something about a brand.

**BETH:** It really does and definitely makes me think like what can other people learn about this. So you then went from that, this very holistic experience working there to working in nonprofit and now you're at Compassion, which is a very large nonprofit. A lot of times when people think of nonprofits, people, I'm sure not our listeners, but other people outside of our bubble, think that nonprofits are really tiny small regional local organizations, but some of them are large companies as well. What do you think that you learned from working at Starbucks that is still serving you well now that you're at a nonprofit, but another nonprofit that's another large organization?

**MIKE:** Yeah, a couple of things that I have thought of over the years is so many people will say, "Oh, your work must be so fulfilling to work for a nonprofit," and it is. I'm thankful for that, but just because I work for a nonprofit doesn't mean my work can't be fulfilling regardless of what your title is. It can be fulfilling wherever you are. It's the environment in which you make it. There are challenges on the nonprofit side too. Just like at Starbucks when we would ... there are conversations around competition and growth from other entities, what I was always proud of is when Starbucks would say there's enough for all of us. There's enough customers to go around for all of us. I think that was a position that they held true to and it's interesting. On the nonprofit side how often we are fearful of collaborating with other nonprofits or we're fearful of they're gonna steal our donors if we collaborate. How we really need to continue to have, not have that idea of scarcity, but have that idea that there's enough to go around for all of





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us. I think the biggest challenge I think we have from a nonprofit perspective, especially we're a compassionate holistic child development organization focused on releasing children from poverty in 25 countries around the globe and sometimes what's hard about that is at Starbucks, it was our mission to convince you of your need for a cup of coffee or your need to come in for that respite. In the nonprofit sense, my mission is to convince you to meet the need of somebody who you will never meet in an experience you may never have and so the challenge of telling the story to help you identify with that person is unique to what I had before. So there continues to be the need for us to find a way of how do we meet our donors and supporters where they are as opposed to expect them to come where we are. I think that translates for profit and nonprofit, how do we know who our customer is and what their why is to get involved in the first place as opposed to assume that they are going to support us just because we're doing great work or we're serving great coffee. I have consulted with many people who have opened coffee shops out west, have asked me questions. The first thing is have a great product. You can have a nonprofit coffee shop that there's a number of those around the US, but if it's not great product, people are gonna come the first time and think, "Oh that was a nice idea, but I'm gonna go back to the coffee shop I like because I like their coffee better." The same thing on a nonprofit side is have a great program, make a difference in the communities that you're making and then create that great experience for your donors that encourages them to bring others into the story too. So it's been interesting looking at both sides of the coin and seeing Compassion is over 60 years old, and at the same time, I'm proud to work for an organization that's continuing to figure out what is it like to innovate. Just because what got us here isn't gonna get us there and so what is it that we're gonna continue to need to do to understand where the organization is going and to meet the needs of our supporters. Bring them in the participation circle as well.

**BETH:** Absolutely, and it's so interesting in some of the work that you're doing and that I've been able to participate in with you, I have really been just fascinated to watch the innovation, to watch how people are embracing it and





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it's funny. When I came back from our last time together, I remember thinking, "Oh, if people just figure this stuff out then they'll grow. That the answer is to understand these kind of things and that will help people become a big organization," and then after spending a few days with a big organization I realized, "You know what? Everybody has these challenges." It's not that you're gonna get big and it's gonna miraculously go away, and one of the biggest things I remember hearing when I was talking to some of your team is that in the very beginning of the conversation, somebody said something like how do we get people to do what we want them to do, which every business, every nonprofit, like every nonprofit says that. We're doing this thing that we believe and we know is great. How do we get people to come along on our ride? What was so amazing about the innovation session that you had was watching your team, watching your community, watching all these different people in just a few short days completely shift their thinking into what you were just talking about. How do we provide an amazing experience first and trust that if we do that good things are gonna happen and that the right things are gonna happen and the desirable actions that we want people to take will occur out of that experience. That's really hard to get to that and to believe that that's true.

**MIKE:** Oh, very much so, because you want to know by doing that, some of those things are really hard to measure. Now I remember back at Starbucks, too. What is my ROI for building a library or what is my ROI for cleaning up the park? It's bigger than what can be measured on a spreadsheet. Same thing that when we measure mobilization at Compassion, it's more than just the amount of money raised or the number of kids that are sponsored, but how does it more deeply engage those people in their experience? Do they write their sponsor child more frequently? Do they share in their community? Do they let other people know about what they're doing or do they keep it personal? I think there is ... it's easy for us to think that we know what the right formula is to get somebody to do something, but at the same time, we have to start with understanding what was their motivation in the first place to get involved. Where are they as opposed to having them meet us where we are and just deliver what we're wanting them to





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deliver?

**BETH:** Right. Part of why I started this podcast in the first place was so that I could explore and talk to people about from that point where you attract somebody to the point where they do “the thing,” like whatever that big thing is that you want them to do. What are the steps along the way, and one of my podcast guests a little while back, Adrian Segar, said, “Participation is engagement in action,” and I loved it. I was like, “Oh, you finally encapsulated what I need because I feel like everyone talks a lot about this word ‘engagement,’” but one of the things that I’ve seen is that people will say, “Oh, I have an engaged community because we’ve got ‘x’ amount of hits on our website,” or “I have an engaged community because people are liking things on Facebook or showing up at an event.” So I’ve been curious about, OK, that’s great, but how do we know the difference between engagement that’s just nice. Like, oh, isn’t that sweet. They did this thing. Oh, isn’t that nice. Somebody wrote a letter to their sponsor child. So how do organizations know what’s the difference between engagements that are things that just happen and engagements that are actually moving people forward to become more deeply involved, to move towards that ideal thing that you want to happen? Have you seen any of that? Do you have any thoughts on that?

**MIKE:** Well, I think there’s a couple things. As I’ve been a part of Compassion for the last two and a half years, I realize that even though I’m a part of mobilization strategy and leading that team, mobilization is happening everywhere and to say that just my team is responsible or a part of the mobilization journey is incorrect. From the moment that the person hears about Compassion, throughout their entire journey, mobilization is happening everywhere. My biggest mantra that I say around the organization is “no dead ends.” Just because you ... now Facebook has integrations for fundraising. There are other ways for you to get involved. We need to determine what is the next best journey for them? What’s their next yes? What could that be? All with the realization that that may be enough for that person. I think one of the mottos that Compassion had earlier was a network





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of individuals who would essentially apply and be a part of a group that would commit to a fundraising and getting kids sponsored and getting kids involved and volunteering. It's kind of like Hotel California. You can check in and you checked out, and we expected that once you raised your hand that you were always raising your hand, and I think to realize that we have to evaluate people and their journey and realize that this may be their journey for a season. This may be their journey for them forever, but we can't make that same assumption about everyone and realize that everyone may be on their own unique journey, and what our responsibility is to offer that best next yes for them to consider at whatever point in their journey that they're in. So I think that's where I've been trying to encourage the organization and we're hoping to go is really to provide that journey for them, the right on ramps and the right off ramps and it's okay for there to be an off ramp and to know that we get to be a part of that journey and to know what is it that our donors value. Also beneficiaries, which are the children that we serve. What best builds that connection with that sponsor so that they feel loved and supported and known by someone else. I think it's definitely a ... it's a journey of discovery, too, as our organization grows.

**BETH:** I think that's so true. We talk a lot of times about branding in my organization and to get people to realize that it's not a project, it's a process. It's this un-peeling the layers to reveal who you are, and that sometimes the answer to that doesn't show up overnight. You're not just born, and then you're finished. It's so interesting. So many of our listeners are nonprofits. We have consultants. We have all kinds of people that are listeners to the program, but many people are working in nonprofits and building them and growing them. What can they learn from your experience about participation at a for-profit company like Starbucks? What should other nonprofits learn from what they do and how can they benefit from the insight that you gained there?

**MIKE:** Wow, that's a lot of pressure! I would say I think what I continue to come back to is to know your story and know your why. Why do you exist and to stay true to that. I think there's success that I saw of Starbucks and the success I have





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seen of Compassion is that they are both organizations that haven't wavered from who they are and even though times change, products change, there are many dynamics around both the for profit and nonprofit entities that changed. They've stayed true to who they are in their mission and it's easy to get swayed by mission drift and different offerings and the trends out there or nonprofit interests. Obviously there's a lot of focus in the nonprofit world around human trafficking and rightly so because it's shocking to see where we are in this globe, in this world with trafficking continuing to be such a terrible situation we find ourselves in. Yet at the same time just because that's such a focus, does it mean you need to find a way to pivot to meet that. What I've seen happen over time too is when I was working for an organization that was focused on Africa, any time there was a natural disaster somewhere else or a political situation somewhere, people would pivot and focus on what is the news telling me I need to focus on, but I would encourage everybody to not let the news cycles focus your mission because the news cycle just waits ten minutes and it will change. It's getting so much more desperate all over the place where it's easy to be noisy and follow the noise, but by doing so, you will continue to weaken who you really are meant to be. So I think that's the big focus I would say.

**BETH:** That's perfect because we talk about that all the time, about how it's so easy to get pulled off your center by other people that want other things from you. We often call them the haters, the people that leave your organization because it's not right for them, and then people go, "No wait, wait." I say it's like chasing your ex-boyfriend. It's, "No, honey, I can be different," and it's so easy to let these external forces and that value of understanding your why, which we call your brand, is so much more powerful than an updated logo. That's not what it's about. Your logo can change. Your colors could change. Even, I call them your lowercase "stories" can change, but you need to know your capital "Story" so that there's something that connects your mission to your vision that is the bridge that helps people follow you along that journey and join you in your manifesto.

**MIKE:** I think that goes back to what I said earlier about Starbucks' viewpoint





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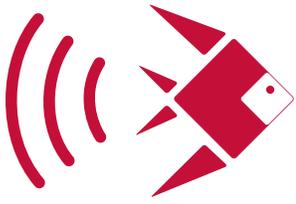
on there's enough for all of us. How do we live that out? How do we collaborate with other nonprofits and to collaborate is tricky. I saw Starbucks do that from a for-profit perspective and bringing other entities in and on the nonprofit side it's tricky. Somebody has to be willing to go second or somebody has to be willing to maybe compromise on being top tier or main focus to realize that one plus one could actually be three.

**BETH:** Exactly. That's synergistic of being more than the sum of your parts.

**MIKE:** We really could do a greater good together than we could do apart.

**BETH:** It's so true and the interesting thing is over the last year, I have noticed that collaboration has become even more of a trend. When I first started recording this, people were really nervous about it. People talked about collaboration very much from the perspective of fear of loss and in the last year I have definitely noticed a trend of seeing collaboration as playing to win and I just want more nonprofits to think that way. I think there's so much sense of coming from a place of poverty and poor us and we can't, like aversion to risk, and if we can learn anything from for-profits, it's that how do we take some of the experimentation that you said Starbucks tried and when it didn't work, they didn't look like it's a failure. I'm gonna pack up my bags and go home. It's how do we re-focus? I call it ... how do you set the guidelines so that you can ride your tricycle between the fire hydrant and the driveway? What's your lane that you want to be in, that you want to be an expert in? As we've gotten to know each other better, I've learned what your unique spin is on how you solve your problem and that you're not trying to be any of the other organizations that on the surface might look like they solved the same problem, but you're different. One of the things that you have is a certain size and there's other organizations that saw similar things, but are bigger than you and some that are smaller than you, but what I've seen really helps organizations thrive is to look at what they are and what they're great at and look for that place where it intersects with your community's values, wants and needs importantly and urgently. Or those things





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that you can uniquely do and what they uniquely want to overlap. There's magic!

**MIKE:** Right, right. Definitely, definitely. I think that's something that we need to continue to focus on and again something that Howard had said at Starbucks that I believe is applicable to every organization is success is not an entitlement. Even in the day where store growth was busting at the seams and stocks were splitting, there never seems to be a bad day. He would always remind us of the days that he remembers he didn't know if he could make payroll and they were taking coffee from store to store because it was hard to figure out how to balance inventory. Just because I'm very fortunate to work for an organization that is growing and is meeting the needs of the children we serve, we can't take that for granted. We have to continue to be thankful and also keep our eyes focused on our mission and those we invite into it.

**BETH:** The final thing that I want to ask you because the reason I brought you on is you are this unique person that has both this very comprehensive nonprofit experience, but also this well-regarded, well-known for-profit experience. I asked you what nonprofits can learn from for-profits, but the reason I wanted to bring you on here is I was curious. After years of talking to people about how participation works and how it's valued in nonprofits, what can for-profits learn from embracing participation? What could other corporations that are out there that maybe didn't start up with Howard's motto of embracing the experience. From the work that you've done at Compassion and what you did know from how Starbucks ran, other organizations that are out there, other companies that are out there, is there anything that they can learn from participation?

**MIKE:** Oh, I think like we said earlier, I think it starts behind the counter, behind the desk, in the four walls, of the staff, of the organization and one of the things that I've seen over the years is Starbucks having this trending hashtag, to be a partner and how they take pride in what it means to be a partner and employee of the organization and when you search that hashtag on Twitter or Instagram, you see that it's everything from store managers celebrating what's





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

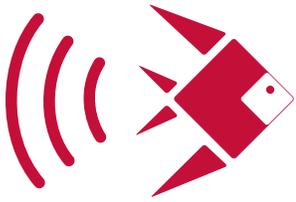
happening to people starting their very first day at Starbucks as a barista and that they're proud to be a part of a brand that they have been a customer. I think every organization, for-profit or nonprofit, has the ability to instill that pride to be a partner and that ability to say the value of what it means to work in this environment and so I think part of that does start with having that great work environment that people look forward to coming to, but it's not just the environment. Obviously I was drawn to the brand. I was drawn Starbucks for the product, for the environment and then when I worked there it exceeded my expectations. That's why I think so many organizations are looking for the survey or whatever sort of internal employee survey to take that pulse of how do my employees feel about working here. If you're not doing that, you're missing out on hearing your most important customer. I think that's an important thing to know. Feel free to ask your employees, but also when you ask for feedback, you've got to be prepared to receive it.

**BETH:** Exactly and not just receive it, but utilize it.

**MIKE:** So I think that's something I've seen Compassion do really well. They have been from a Gallup perspective a sought-after employer. Compassion has done the same thing on both sides of the fence and it's because the people are ... when you ask the employees of Compassion why do you work here, because number one they believe in the mission, and so I think you have the ability to create an experience and hire the right people that bring people in who will stand up for the mission and believe in what you're doing. I remember when I would be hiring at Starbucks. I would say, "I could teach you how to make coffee. I could teach you the nuances of this, but I can't teach you how to care for people," and that's what we would look for. What store growth and what exponential store growth where things would go off the rails is when we would try to find warm bodies because we were moving too fast.

**BETH:** Right. I think you said that is what is so key, though. When I worked for them it exceeded my expectations. I mean, really that's the heart of it right





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

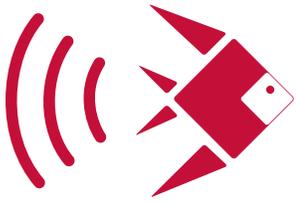
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

there is that it's about creating this culture, this feeling of working there and we often talk about in branding that if you just do message and image, you get a nice visual representation, but if you wrap that message and image with a deep understanding of your audience and incredible and impeccable delivery of an experience that you promised them, that's where it all starts to get together and that together you're the brand. The brand doesn't exist without your community, without your staff, without all of these people. It is executed and delivered on a daily basis from all that. So to create something like that without their participation, it's almost impossible.

**MIKE:** Right, and so it's important to hear what your employees are saying and hear what your customers are saying, and I remember Howard going around and doing open forums at stores and inviting customers in and having them tell him like it is. At the same time, there were websites created of people saying what you're like Starbucks what you'd like to innovate on and that was a really unique platform where Starbucks voice, I believe it was called where you could go on and say what you want Starbucks to work on and based on crowd sourcing. Oh, this is a need for our customers. We should focus on this. So I think being willing to hear from our employees, hear from our customers, prioritize what they feel they need ...

**BETH:** And then take action on it. Even what you said early in the very beginning about how you used the word "partner" and one of the things I heard a consultant say a million years ago was partnership is like a ham and egg sandwich and the pig has a lot more on the line than the chicken. I love that because, well, especially, I'm a consultant and people love to use the word, they love to throw it around. I want to be your partner in this. Oh, really? If it fails, are you gonna go broke? So the fact that when a barista gets shares in the company, that says to me that they're living it. That the experience that you have is in alignment with their values, that they're not using even words and language that have no meaning, that they give meaning to the word "partnership" by actually giving you some skin in the game. That's what's so valuable. Mike, we have to wrap up now,





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

but I want to thank you so much for this incredibly enlightening discussion. I'm sure people are gonna love hearing this interesting interplay of these two organizations and the differences and similarities and how participation can maybe cross the line of what we think it is and that it is a bigger experiential play that any organization can benefit from. If people had questions for you and wanted to talk to you about anything, is there a good way for them to get in touch with you?

**MIKE:** Sure. I'm on Twitter [@MikeLenda](https://twitter.com/MikeLenda) M-i-k-e-L-e-n-d-a or you can shoot me an email at [MLenda@Compassion.com](mailto:MLenda@Compassion.com).

**BETH:** And we will put links to Mike's contact information on the show notes page. Mike, thank you so much for sharing all of your insight with both me and our nonprofit community.

**MIKE:** Oh, glad to be a part of it. Thank you, Beth, for the resources you provide us to do what we do well.

**BETH:** Terrific.

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