



# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

## SESSION 171

### CONGRATULATIONS ON BECOMING A NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR! NOW WHAT?

WITH ROIANN PHILLIPS

**BETH:** Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky, and welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with RoiAnn Phillips. RoiAnn is the communications director for an organization called HealthConnect One. We had a really interesting conversation when we first connected with each other about the fact that RoiAnn is a new communications director and came to this role from a really different background. Any of you who have been long-time listeners of the podcast might remember the first chunk, probably even the first year of episodes that I did I started off asking everyone, “How did you wander into this work?” because as you know many of us that are doing communications, doing marketing, inherited it. I often call you all slash-marketers and many of the people that I talk to come from really different backgrounds. RA, I want to thank you so much for joining me today.

**ROIANN:** Well, thank you, Beth, for having me on.

**BETH:** RA, because I don’t always do this anymore, but because we’re specifically talking about the fact that you’re now working as a communications director and that’s not necessarily what you signed up for the day you went to college, I think it would be interesting to jump back into that and tell everybody how did you wander into this role?

**ROIANN:** It’s a very random path I took. I did go to college. I majored in theater arts and I find that theater actually informs everything I do, because in part I’m an introvert and so to get up on the stage and make myself understood, which is a skill I’m pretty sure I learned in theater; at any rate, I did theater and then to support my theater habit, I went into temporary secretarial work. I did that for quite a long time, gained some technical skills and whatnot, and then I started





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

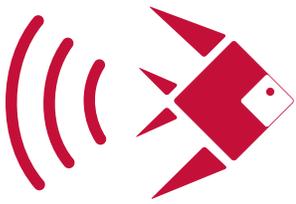
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

working full time for Lambda Legal, which is a civil rights organization for lesbian, gay, bi, trans and HIV-infected people. I did that for about eight years. It was fantastic! I did outreach, I staffed the legal help desk, so I spoke to a lot of people who were facing discrimination in the midwest region, and then I got to do some outreach and education to address the issues of discrimination and that was incredibly gratifying. At that point, I left the work force entirely for about two years to adopt my daughter who is now 13 years old.

**BETH:** As I say “congratulations.”

**ROIANN:** Oh, she’s awesome! I tell you, the energy of 13 is quite something and that actually informs my work, but I’ll get back to that later. When I went back to the work force, what I really wanted to do was be home with my daughter, so I sort of keep my head down. I went back part-time. My partner at the time was in real estate and we needed the income. We needed the health insurance and so I did that, but I really didn’t want my skills or talents to be leveraged because I didn’t want to be, I tend to be over committed and I didn’t want to do that because now I had a daughter at home and I wanted to put my energy into raising her. Well, somewhere down the line I guess I got a sense that one of the things I did here effectively was write, and so through my writing I was given the website project. So we were, I don’t even remember what platform we were on. This was 2009. I was given the website project and we went on to, it’s irrelevant, but we went on to a locally based tech platform for the website and I was in charge of making it happen, not the tech end, but the content. That’s really where my role in communications started. So as I was gathering all together all the input from internal and external stake holders and writing things and finding the video and photos and all of the supportive information that would inspire and engage people, different aspects of communication work sort of spun off of that and so soon I was asked to start proof reading proposals. I was asked to interview people and it grew so that I became, what do they call me, program and communications coordinator. Somewhere along the line I went full time. Then I was communications manager managing all of the digital platforms as that was





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

growing to be a thing and then eventually just recently became communications director. So that's my story.

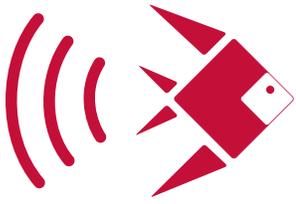
**BETH:** I bet a lot of people that are listening can see a lot of themselves in that, that sort of wandering journey from programs to sometimes a lot of people end up doing development at first and sometimes still are doing development and it's hard to not jump in and say "yes" when there's such a huge need for it, and we're gonna talk about that today and about how you end up doing a job that you didn't necessarily have the most traditional path to get into, but before we do that, I want to ask you the thing that I like to talk about with all of my guests. We talk about participation here and now that you are squarely in the role of communications, when you think about the work that you do at HealthConnect One and even what you've done over time, what does the word "participation" mean to you, and how does it show up in a way that helps the organization thrive?

**ROIANN:** Well I'm gonna start with HealthConnect One and what participation means here to me, and that's collaboration. So we are working towards earth equity. We're working primarily in low-income communities and communities of color, and we need people to both partner with us working with their own communities on the ground. We need people to tell their stories. We need people to financially support this work, and those are the three main areas I guess people have a quick access to participate in this work. Yeah, I think that's all I'm gonna say right now.

**BETH:** That's great. That's really interesting. So when you say "collaboration," does that mean both people outside and inside your organization?

**ROIANN:** It does, although I really was looking at it through a lens of how people externally can participate in the work. By telling the story, by amplifying the values and philosophies that we advance, by sharing about community projects that are particularly inspiring to them, by contributing financially to the work,





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

by partnering with us, bringing us into their own community either for a small training or for developing a program that's really gonna meet the needs of moms and babies there.

**BETH:** Right, and so when you're dealing with these potential collaborators, I'm sure that a lot of them are people that make up your audience and as you go into this communications director role, what we're finding when we talk to people is really knowing your audiences is so critical. What is the spectrum of your community and the audiences that you need to connect with?

**ROIANN:** So the two primary audiences I would say are practitioners on the ground, and by that I mean anyone in a professional, para-professional or not professional role who is invested in the health of moms, babies and families, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color. What that means in the real world is we will, and this is program side. I'll get to funding side in a minute, in the real world, so we partner with hospital personnel, we partner with activists. Most of our work centers around community health workers, which is essentially a person in the community who is a leader in some way. That might be the person that you go to for advice on what doctor is taking new clients right now or the person that happens to know who broke up at the end of the block and why. We will work with people like this in the community and give them the skills and resources to educate and support moms and babies during pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and early parenting. So anyone who is sort of in that maternal health realm, who is a community activist, who is a community leader, who is employed somewhere around maternal and child health and community agency or hospital or social service center. That's the program primary audience. On the funding side, it's individual donors, again people interested in the maternal child health or interested in community-led strategies, someone who is interested in community empowerment and foundations.

**BETH:** I think it's interesting as we kind of have this conversation around what is the job of a communications director, what's interesting about it, what's





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

challenging about it, to have that sense of like what's the scope of the work, what are you trying to accomplish out there in the world. So in your new role, what is exciting about it for you? Why did you decide to take on this?

**ROIANN:** I love stories. I like people. I like witnessing the connections between people. Our work is really all about those one-on-one connections. That's how we ended up with the name HealthConnect One is because it's about the connection between a mom and a baby, about the connection between a community health worker meeting a doula or a breastfeeding care counselor and the mom. It's about the connection even between the supervisor and the doula or the breastfeeding care counselor or the community health worker who has been supporting the families. So every step of the way being able to witness that connection and encourage people to share their stories about that connection has really changed the trajectory of their life, that's unbelievably inspiring. So that's the main reason that I'm excited about the role. For me personally, there's a lot of growth. I'm a white woman involved in work that primarily impacts communities of color. In doing that, I have to learn to be humble. I have to learn to listen to other people more than I listen sometimes to what I think is right because I don't know what's right in the communities. The people we're working with know what's right in their communities, and so for me, that's been a challenge and an opportunity for tremendous growth and so that's also exciting about working in this agency and having a leadership role and understanding that leading doesn't always mean knowing.

**BETH:** That is so key, and I love how you say that. I mean, how you talk about this new role about communications, it doesn't sound all that different from maybe the way a program director would talk about their job, but one of the things I find interesting and that of course I struggle with as somebody that does marketing with organizations, is that in a lot of nonprofits, marketing is either considered a bad thing or it's just a scary, terrifying thing. In your organization, what is the sort of culture and belief system around the value of marketing?





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**ROIANN:** Right. That's a tricky one. You and I talked about that by phone not long ago. We're really making strides. I would say about a year ago, many people in my organization, well and most nonprofit people I've spoken with, they are afraid of the word. There's this perspective that marketing means we're gonna try to sell them a car that they don't need. What I try to do is explain that marketing is simply letting people know that we need this and these are the ways which we can support the work they want to do. So it isn't so much about trying to get people to believe that they need us. They need us or they don't. It's more about communicating what it is we do so they can make a choice about whether they hire us frankly.

**BETH:** So true. We even find that in our business. Very early on when I started my company, I realized that education is the most expensive form of sales. If you have to teach people that they need you, it's gonna feel like a struggle a lot, but when people understand that they need you and you're communicating things from their perspective so they understand how to access stuff they need and want, it really changes everything. So this role, this communications director role, is new in your organization, right?

**ROIANN:** Yes.

**BETH:** What made them decide to create a position like this?

**ROIANN:** That's a challenging question. I think we have a very, very strong staff, and everyone on the program team is really connected to the communities in which they're working and very responsive. Our work is responsive. It's intentionally responsive and so I think somewhere along the line we started to understand that we needed to have a cohesion in the way that we talk about the work. We're not just doing community-based doula work, which is a hybrid of what you might be familiar with the doula supporting a mom through pregnancy and childbirth and a community health worker role. So it's a community health worker who is the doula. We don't just do doula work. We don't just do trainings





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

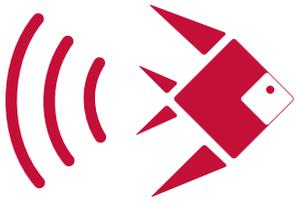
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

for hospital personnel around breastfeeding. Really we have a higher purpose, which is about community-led solutions. It's about amplifying the strengths in a community. It's about giving people power over their own health and their children's health. It's about equity and ensuring that resources are available and that strengths are valued in all of the communities we're working in. So I think we began to understand that we needed a bigger microphone and we needed cohesion. So they decided that a Communications Director position was important to bring both of those things, the amplification and the cohesion.

**BETH:** That's great. One of the things I feel I see a lot, once an organization gets to a stage where they have a development channel that's separate from a communications or a marketing channel and you end up with a director of communications and often a director of marketing or it even happens at the VP level, that you have these two separate channels. How are you navigating working with people that are in the development world? A lot of times we see an organization grows into these roles, they get really silo-ed and there ends up being this sort of fiefdom feeling of pushing where the communications track is kind of butting heads up against the development track. How are you guys navigating that in your organization?

**ROIANN:** Well we have 12 people on staff. It's a fairly small staff as far as nonprofits go. I literally share an office with the development manager. I meet weekly with the development director. I meet weekly with the program director. This morning before I got on this podcast, I created a graphic to support the annual appeal that the development department is running. I went literally out for drinks about a month ago with the development manager and decided what the email campaign for our annual campaign was going to be. So we have a pretty close working relationship. They understand that I will not always be about bringing in the money, that I'll sometimes be about pushing a social issue or that I'll sometimes be about promoting one of our partners, and I understand that they will always be about bringing in the money. So there's a give and take around that.





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**BETH:** How did you get to that point? I think that's where everybody wants to be. Let's go out for drinks together, respect for each other's role. Do you think that there's anything special that you guys did or in the way you shifted your thinking to allow this relationship to form?

**ROIANN:** Well, while there are many challenges to having come into this role from the ground up, I think one of the strengths is I had to create a department from nothing. So it was important for me to develop trusting relationships with every single colleague. I needed to work with each person to make sure that they knew when they could come to me so that I could make sure there was value to their coming to me and they began to see the payoff on that as well and so I think that this relationship we have between the development department and myself is because it was all organic. I don't want to also ignore the fact that I genuinely, well I genuinely like all of my colleagues, but the development manager and I, he and I really clicked so that certainly adds to it, but even without that, I think that it really has to do with the fact I had to make a place for myself and so to make a place for myself meant strengthening each and every relationship with each and every individual colleague and this is what came from it.

**BETH:** I think that's really great advice because it does take work to work with people and not every circumstance you're gonna necessarily like your partner on the other side of the hallway and you still have to work together and how we can cultivate this world more and not looking at it as giving something up or somebody overruling your ideas that is this synergistic collaboration that we all want it to be knowing that it's not going to be perfect, but how can we move towards that because the reality is that a person in your community, someone that is one of your own audiences is gonna come in and look at your organization and decide what they think about your organization and whether they want to work with your organization, it's the whole spectrum of what they see and they don't care what the departments are set up inside. You did come to this. I'm trying to ask questions today, the kind of question that if you were sitting down here with somebody that was in another nonprofit and was maybe also new in





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

their role or believed this is a role that their organization needed, what are the kind of questions that somebody else would be asking you. I'm curious about what are the things that because you didn't come from a marketing background, it's not like you did marketing at a for profit and then came into it here or that you studied in college and then have had progressing roles in the marketing PR communications role before you came here. So because you came to it through this meandering nonprofit pathway, what is it that you struggle with because you don't have what maybe other people would consider a marketing background?

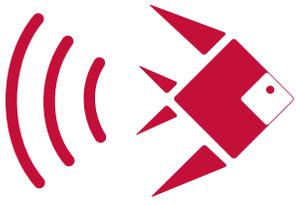
**ROIANN:** Some of it is understanding literally the language of marketing. I think there's sometimes an expectation that I'll know what various acronyms mean and I don't so I'm constantly Googling it. Creating audience personas at the beginning was very challenging for me. I didn't understand it. If I'm not talking to that person as an individual, I have no idea what their interests are. What I started to do was to talk to people directly, who among your individual donors, for example, would it be beneficial for me to talk to that will sort of give me a sense of 60 percent of your donors, and then I can talk to that person, like literally talk to that person. When we have the opportunity for me to attend some of our national gatherings and then I literally have one-on-one conversations with the people that we're trying to reach in our communications and our marketing and when I have those one-on-one communications with them, then for the next year or two, I've got that in my head as I'm trying to develop a video or develop my own set of questions or tell a story. So that's been one of the biggest things, is just to break down some of that stuff and audience persona is a very alienating concept, but it just means to know who you're talking to.

**BETH:** Right, it really does.

**ROIANN:** Literally get to know who you're talking to.

**BETH:** Right, and I feel like a lot of times, especially people in marketing companies that, like we work mostly with nonprofits, but when people throughout the listening base in the country are working with all kinds of





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

different partners on this and there's a lot of marketing-ese that sounds a lot like, as we call it, consultant speak. Brand equity and you know, all these things, and I find a lot of times there's this balance between, "I need to learn that lingo so that I know what I'm talking about, and feel like I'm a professional and can work with the professionals," but there's other times I feel that a lot of that lingo just creates a bubble around something that someone is doing to make it seem very important and specialized and that you can't do it.

**ROIANN:** Right, but I tell you one thing that is really helpful as I learn the language is that I can Google the concept and get sort of this crowd-sourcing idea about how to do a thing. So for example, I am going to need to write a marketing plan. It's going to be the first marketing plan that I've ever written. I know that it's a marketing plan. I can Google marketing plan. What goes into a marketing plan? Template for marketing plan. But if I don't have the lingo to that, I can't get the benefit of other people's expertise as I'm trying to develop my own.

**BETH:** I'd say it's really helpful for me to hear. I always feel I learn as much from the people that I talk to because we do work in branding and time and time again I'm always questioning do people even know what the word branding means? Should I even be using this word branding? Should I break it down and come up with something different when we talk about audience personas and we often will call them your perfect person profile. I'm constantly questioned whether is that the right path? Should I be trying to speak about things we do in language that a nonprofit communications director who was a theater major can understand or should I be trying to educate people around these are the right words to use so that when you're looking for help, here's where you go to find it.

**ROIANN:** I would say both.

**BETH:** I knew you were gonna say that.

**ROIANN:** Because I need to understand what it is you're telling me, but I also





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

need to be able to take it and run with it later.

**BETH:** Right. That's really helpful to hear. For me, I don't want to patronize or belittle my community or people that I'm talking to by calling things "perfect person profile" if what I'm really saying is, "We're gonna teach you how to do audience personas," but on the flip side, I don't want it to be opaque to people and go, that's a specific one. You really hit that one very well, that audience personas. We teach about that idea a lot, and I actually just recently recorded an episode with somebody, with Chris Blockus. If any of you are listening and are listening to this and you haven't listened to the one with Chris Blockus, we're talking specifically about how he came to a class that I taught, took what he learned and did gangbuster stuff with it. Amazing, amazing results and he'd never really heard of the idea of personas before, and the challenge is how do you get people to learn things when they see something like audience personas and go, "I don't know what that is and I don't even know if I need that," versus helping them absorb and get benefit from something by calling it something that feels familiar. It's like this seesaw that you don't really know what the right point is in the middle.

**ROIANN:** All I can say is I feel your pain.

**BETH:** Well, that's really helpful! So now that you're in this role, you're doing this. You said that you're getting ready to write a marketing plan. Of the things that come up in marketing, what sort of top of your list, what are you trying to learn the fastest?

**ROIANN:** Right. About our competitors. Do we have them? We like to all play nice in the profit world so reality is sometimes another organization is gonna hired and we're not. So who are those other organizations? What do we have that's unique? I guess that's it, the unique selling proposition. What is unique about us? Why would somebody want to hire us as opposed to somebody else? Why would they want to hire anyone to begin with if what they really want is for their





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

own organization's staff and volunteers to do good in the world? Why would they need us to begin with? So it's some of those figuring out how to articulate what's unique about us, what impact we've made in the world and what impact we can make for them.

**BETH:** I think that is such a great thing to be asking yourselves, especially because we talk about branding so much on this podcast and people will come to me and say, "We just did a rebrand," and I'll say, "What did you do?" and they go, "Here's our new logo on our new website." If you already understand what's unique, you're like, "We got this, we're clear on what's unique about us and we are attracting exactly the right people for exactly the right things," that's a great project to do, but a lot of times, people are at the stage where you are, but they don't choose to address it in the right way. They don't choose to actually look into it. I was teaching last week and examining someone's mission statement, and it was so interesting to me that we were doing a strategy session at the very beginning of the branding project, and they said, "Our mission statement really talks about what our staff does. It doesn't talk about what happens because we exist." I thought that was such a great revelation for them because the reality is that's how most mission statements are. People look at their mission statements as the thing that is like their core communication tool, but in many cases, it's like this group project of mess that has like 25 commas in it that doesn't really clearly help connect people to this why, this distinctiveness that you're talking about.

**ROIANN:** Yes.

**BETH:** So I think it's great that you have that in your head and maybe you don't know exactly how you're gonna address it right now, but that it's buzzing around up there and making you think we need to know why we're here and we need to make sure we're communicating why us. One of the things I often tell people is if they have a tag line or if they're playing around with ideas for a tag line, when you know who your competitors are, take your logo and put it over that tag line and see if it's just as believable. It's a funny little tactic because we have people





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

that have come up to us and like we'll talk to schools. We do a lot of work with schools. They'll say, "You know what? We are really special. You know what's really unique about us? We really care about the kids," and I have to stifle myself and not start laughing in front of them because that is a special and unique and wonderful thing, but it's not truly unique, and it's scary. It's really hard to dig past that surface level of what you do and find out what you do that is urgent and important and meaningful to your community in a way they just don't feel they can get anywhere else but with you, but when you get it, it's magical. So in the stage that you're at right now with the work that you're doing, what do you wish that you had that would really help?

**ROIANN:** More time and more staff and more bandwidth.

**BETH:** So if you got that, this is sort of, this is such a great opportunity for me to get to talk to somebody in your world. If somebody said "RoiAnn, we're gonna gift you with this magical more time, more staff and more resources," what do you think you would spend that on? What would you do with more time and more people right now?

**ROIANN:** Interview more people, use some of the stories that we have, actually edit them and pitch them and get them on media and Huffington Post and get on the phone with reporters and really tell stories about our work in a much broader way, and actually, I do have that luxury because in January I get a new communications coordinator. I could not be more thrilled!

**BETH:** Congratulations!

**ROIANN:** Thank you!

**BETH:** So your organization not only said, "Hey, we need to move somebody up to this leadership level position," but they're giving you minions.

**ROIANN:** Yes, because otherwise, how am I going to focus on strategy and still





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

manage to advance all of the campaigns that the program department or the development department continues to want, still manage to develop content for and manage and analyze the website and social media platforms and email. How can I do all of that and strategize with just me?

**BETH:** OK, so now I know everyone that is listening ...

**ROIANN:** They're jealous!

**BETH:** They're super, super jealous because that's what happens. You get so excited because finally the organization recognizes communications as a separate discipline that is needed and valued and then they're like, "Great, here you go. Take care of it." I'm sure what everyone wants to know is how did you get them to buy into that? How did you get them to see that one person can't both be the executor and the strategist? It's like you've got to flip your brain into two completely different compartments because there's one role that's about looking up and out and then the other world is about looking inward and down and getting that stuff done and it's hard to keep all of the wheels moving when you're doing both sides. I remember when I first started this business and I would spend all day sort of talking to people and selling and networking and then getting projects and then all night doing it. It's exhausting, but it's hard and necessary, yet people understand we just brought you in and we thought you were gonna do all of that stuff. What happened that made them see you needed the support?

**ROIANN:** I wish that I could give you one magical answer. I don't know...

**BETH:** Everyone else wishes you could, too!

**ROIANN:** For three years, that's essentially what I was doing. I was managing communications and I was getting more and more strategic about how I was managing communications, but the capacity was still limited, and we're human beings. The capacity will always have limitation on it.





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

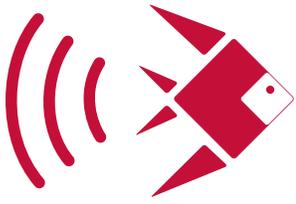
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**BETH:** I tell people that all the time. It doesn't matter. You could have a multi-million budget and there's still a limit.

**ROIANN:** But part of it was literally an internal communication campaign on my part where I would say, "I would love to do that, and what's gonna happen if I do that particular thing that you think is valuable in the world, is this other thing that you think is valuable in the world, will that happen? Which one would you like for me to do?" You know, I was kind about it, but I did that a number of times. Somewhere along the line our board decided that we needed a professional communications strategist, and so we hired a consultant. I had the privilege to actually be the person who made the decision around the consultant. We had a fantastic set of two consultants from a place called Wonder Strategies For Good. I cannot say enough about them. They were incredible and they worked with me for about six months and they worked with my executive director and they had an incredibly inclusive process through which they identified some of our key messages and came out of the entire engagement with a set of recommendations that included increasing communications capacity, and it flew. The board loved it. They see it, the executive director and the board I believe, see it as an opportunity to really get our name out there and they understand that if they really want to make a splash, they're gonna need to have the staff to do it.

**BETH:** Right, and for people that are listening, I know it can be frustrating to hear that the answer that is probably the answer that you've all experienced, too, is "I brought in an outside consultant to tell them what they needed, and they listened to them." I hate to say it, but a lot of times that's the reality that we're all working with. Part of the reason I quit my job at a nonprofit to go out and be the consultant is that I was tired of the fact that they listened to the consultant say the same things that I was telling them. It's frustrating, but it's a reality and that they could look at that consultant as somebody that's partnering with you and helping supporting your needs, most organizations, they're not bringing in the consultant to replace you because there's not a budget to work with that level all the time, but if a consultant can be used to help leverage what you know





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

happens by helping to support that story so that at the end of the engagement you get what you really need, which is inside help, that can be a really great thing as frustrating as it is that nobody will just listen to you when you're the inside person.

**ROIANN:** That's all true, Beth. That is seriously the experience that I had.

**BETH:** I think the way that you handled it is probably the best way to do it, like have them let you find somebody that you can work with that you trust and that you believe in to help support it. When we do that sort of work for people, that's exactly when it works beautifully, that's what happens. That we have a great relationship, we understand what somebody in your position wants and needs and we're there to help figure out, but also we're there to challenge the inside thinking. I think that could be a really good thing so when you do work with a consultant, it should be both a partnership and also a bit of a challenge that you have to come into it open so what they might see is that somebody on the inside might not.

**ROIANN:** Yes. Actually they were very honest and they created at the baseline what I came to call the scathing memo because they came in and they said this and this and this are wrong and this and this and this are right, and it was the tough love memo, a scathing memo. It was terrifying, but they were so fantastic about finding the resources and the strengths that we have in order to address the challenges the way I identified them in the beginning and that isn't something that we could have done on the inside. We did need them to do that.

**BETH:** It's so true. I remember we did a rebranding for an organization, and at the end of it she said to me that she couldn't believe that there was something inside, something there already that they didn't even see that was a huge differentiator that could be really, really valuable and it just wasn't obvious to them. It's easy to say on the back end that it should have been, but it's not because when you're in there juggling, as I say you're doing all the things it's hard to focus on





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

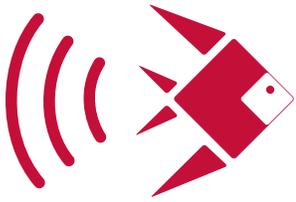
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

that or focus on that or even step back and take the time like doing all the calls to people. You've got to keep today happening and it can be very enlightening as long as you're open to it and I love what you're talking about with your consultants that you worked with, how they didn't just say here's a bunch of problems and here's a bunch of opportunities. They went further to say and here's how if you shift this here and move that there, you could actually take action on these things because so many times, like the reason I think consultants get a bad rap, it's like thank you very much. Here's the report and we'll see you later. You're like great, now what do I do? To work with somebody that says now here's what you need to do to move forward and make that happen, that's exactly what a consultant should be doing for you and I'm so glad you had a good experience. It bodes well for all of us as I say. It's a really important thing. It's often a partnership a lot of times, especially in grant funding. You can't get an employee funded, but you could get a project funded, and you need a consultant to do that so it's like you've got to open your eyes and look at it as we need this. What can we leverage to make that happen? Step one is get a consultant in to help tell us things that we're not seeing that then might lead to you getting funding for the staffing that you want. In the end, that's all good. That's where you want to be.

**ROIANN:** Right.

**BETH:** One of the other things I'm really curious about is your theater background. I'm sure a lot of people that are listening are not the first person that I'm talking to that's in communications for a nonprofit that has a theater background. We hear about theater. I've got history majors. I get a lot of philosophy majors and ironically, my brother was a theater production major and he's in digital privacy now. People always ask him, "Ha, ha, ha. That theater degree, are you using it?" and he says, "I use it every day. Every day that somebody comes to me and says, 'Hey, we have to do this project. You have three days to do it and you have no resources. Go,'" and he's like, "That's where the theater training comes in." I'm curious in your work what do you find was helpful about a theater background that you use every day in your job?





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**ROIANN:** So many things, but the spirit of collaboration is probably the biggest. So the scenario that you just spelled out I can completely relate to. I can't tell you how many times like, "Yeah, we want to go there, but we don't have an airplane to fly us there. We don't have any people to help figure out how to get there." To put that all out there and to create it from scratch, that's the kind of creativity you come to when you have a new script, when you have a new cast, when you have the lights shining on you and all of a sudden you have to produce something. I would say the spirit of collaboration and understanding that we're all working towards a common purpose and we each have a different role to play. That's very specific to theater, that we each have a different role to play and just because I may have 25 speaking lines and you have seven, that doesn't mean that I am more important than you because if you don't say those seven lines, the audience doesn't understand what's going to happen or what's happening.

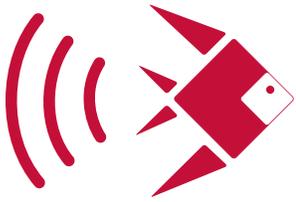
**BETH:** That's such a great analogy.

**ROIANN:** Thank you.

**BETH:** That's really good. Part of the reason I'm really harping on this whole background idea is that I feel like right now we're living in this culture of the kids that are going into college right now and stressing about choosing a major that has a terminal job degree that matches it, and people are coming out of college and looking for jobs and employers are trying to match these things up perfectly, and that very much is the culture that we're in. I feel, as somebody that has kids just out of college now and did pick very terminal degree choices for their careers, if we can all start to see that in so many things that we study we learn problem solving and project management and so many broad things that can be applied to this field, this broad field of communications, of nonprofit work and to think about the variety of people that can come in and not be so narrow about what we want to hire, I think that it would be good for education and good for business all around and it's just sort of my personal campaign.

**ROIANN:** I love it!





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

**BETH:** We need to wrap up now. If the people that are listening are feeling like, “Wow, I would love to become a communications director,” or “Geez, I am a brand new communications director,” what’s one great piece of advice you could give people that are fulfilling a communications role or want to be in the organization to help them take their work to the next level and be more confident and work it like a pro no matter what their background is?

**ROIANN:** I would say two pieces of advice, and I know you said one, but I’m gonna go with two.

**BETH:** I’m totally all for it.

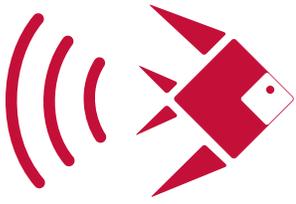
**ROIANN:** One is to connect with people in the field. That has been tremendous for me. I met you through Marlene Olivera with the nonprofit ...

**BETH:** Marlene has been a former guest.

**ROIANN:** Right, and the Twitter chats and that was tremendous for me because I started to understand that people were facing the same challenges as I was facing. It also built my confidence because I understood that I had solved a number of the problems that were being presented in the Twitter chats and so that helped me to see myself as a person in the field. So that’s one. The other is really the confidence piece. Understand that communications is a creative field and any sort of creative background you have, any sort of writing background you have, any sort of understanding of the human condition of people or relationships, that will feed your communications and that is the unique proposition that you have as a communications staffer when you come to organizations. So I would say just trust that. If you have the role, do the role. You are the role.

**BETH:** I love it! That is such great advice. Thank you so much for joining me today. This was so helpful. I loved talking to you, and I really truly believe that getting this conversation out there into the nonprofit community is gonna benefit all of





# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

us and help all of us rise up and be more confident and do this work that really is meaningful and valuable in organizations. If people had more questions for you or wanted to talk to you about how you got there or what you're doing, what's the best way for them to reach out to you?

**ROIANN:** Probably Twitter. I'm [@OPgrrl](#), that's open girrl. I know it's silly!

**BETH:** I'll have a link to that on the show notes page.

**ROIANN:** So Twitter or LinkedIn or email which you can find through my [staff bio](#) on the website.

**BETH:** Perfect, and we'll put links to all of these to get in touch with RoiAnn on the show notes page. Thank you so much for joining me and sharing all of your insight with both me and our nonprofit community. I truly appreciate it.

**ROIANN:** Thank you so much, Beth.

**BETH:** Thanks, everyone, for listening, and we'll catch you next time.

