

# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

## SESSION 181

### MAKING MARKETING WORK WITH A LEAN TEAM

WITH **STEPHEN BARKER**

**BETH:** Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky. Welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am here with Stephen Barker.

**STEPHEN:** Hi!

**BETH:** Stephen is the director of marketing communications at Marillac St. Vincent Family Services, and he's also the communications co-chair of an organization called YNPN Chicago. Stephen and I connected when I saw a post about a talk that he did for YNPN, and I loved the subject matter and realized we had to get him on here to talk about it. Stephen, thanks so much for joining me today.

**STEPHEN:** Beth, it's such a pleasure. I'm such a big fan of yours. I said on Twitter yesterday, I hope I don't fan boy out on you too much.

**BETH:** It's so funny, because I'm just sitting here at my desk with my microphone so whenever I talk to anybody about being on the show and they've actually listened, it's a thrill because you sit here by yourself, and you don't know if anyone is even out there.

**STEPHEN:** You are loved, believe me.

**BETH:** Oh, that's so sweet! Thank you so much! I'm so excited to have you on here today.

**STEPHEN:** I'm excited to be here!

**BETH:** Because you're involved with the young professionals world of nonprofits





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and people who are doing that in communications, and I just think that that's a great perspective to bring to the conversation that we are having here today. Why don't you just talk briefly a little bit about your work and your work with this organization and your work as a young person coming up into this world.

**STEPHEN:** Sure, yeah. So I think I'm getting close to like edging out of the ...

**BETH:** I'm not gonna be able to say you're a young person soon?

**STEPHEN:** Exactly! I'm 34, but going to a lot of our networking events and things that we do with the YNPN Chicago, I'm starting to realize how old I am. So yeah ...

**BETH:** It happens to all of us!

**STEPHEN:** Yep, yep. I don't mind it though. Older and wiser! So, I guess maybe I'll tell you about Marillac St. Vincent and then tell you a little about YNPN Chicago. Marillac St. Vincent Family Services, which is the beloved organization that I work for here in Chicago, we've been working basically in the social service, comprehensive social service space for over 100 years in Chicago, and we kind of address every stage in life, prenatal all the way through senior citizens. I think our bread and butter program would be our early childhood and our after-school programs, but we also have a wide range of services in community outreach. We do food pantries, we do case management and goal-setting with adults. We have youth services so it's just sort of sprawling social services. We serve somewhere between 15,000-20,000 people a year here in Chicago so it's a big operation. So that's my day job, which there's so many, from a marketing communications standpoint, we're always looking for stories to tell. There are so many stories to tell here. I'm really lucky as far as that goes. Then with YNPN Chicago, which is my nonprofit side hustle if you will, is a networking and professional development group here in Chicago. We're actually part of the fastest growing professional organization in the country, professional development organization in the country, which is the YNPN National. There are 49 chapters in Chicago right now.





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**BETH:** So what does it stand for?

**STEPHEN:** There are 49 chapters in the US. YNPN is the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network.

**BETH:** Got it.

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, like I said, fastest growing network of young professionals in the country working sort of in the social sector, nonprofit sector world, and in Chicago, we're one of the oldest chapters in the network, and basically we put on three or four professional development/happy hour networking opportunities for young professionals working in the nonprofit space per month, and we also support in a number of different ways, but basically the whole idea is to support folks that are working in the nonprofit space and help them do their job better and also attract talent to the sector, which is really important, you know, for nonprofits to be able to keep a dream and pipeline of talent to their organizations. So that's kind of a little bit about what we do, but like you said, I'm the communications co-chair for the group. I sit on a committee of four people, and we all sort of work in the communications and marketing space within nonprofits, and I love it. We've got a squad of cool people doing really cool work with YNPN Chicago.

**BETH:** What's your background in communications? Did you study it in school? Did you learn it on the job? How did you end up with this communications role in your organization?

**STEPHEN:** Oh, my origin story, which is actually can I say is one of my favorite parts of your podcast, getting to hear people's journeys because I think one theme I kind of pick up on is people have winding journeys to get us to the space for some reason.

**BETH:** Right. I used to always ask people how did you wander into this work.





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**STEPHEN:** Yeah, yeah. So I am definitely no different. Going way back, I'm a self-taught graphic designer. My first job was at my hometown newspaper in Haynesville, Kansas, where I worked on the layout and the design and what was at the time called Adobe Pagemaker ...

**BETH:** Oh wow!

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, aging myself, again. But in college I was actually a musical theater major, and but my work-study group through my entire undergrad was doing PR in marketing for the School of Performing Arts. When I moved to Chicago after college, I kicked the can around for awhile doing acting in storefront theaters and basements for a few years, but I paid the rent by freelancing in graphic design and PR for various publishing companies, theaters, local businesses, nonprofit organizations and so on. So you know, the starving artist thing kind of stopped being cute, and it was time to bear down and seek full-time work and embark on a new career. I just wasn't getting a lot of interviews with agencies, like ad agencies, which is kind of where I thought I wanted to go. I just didn't have the right kind of background, the right kind of skill set for that, but I was getting interviews in nonprofits and I thought, "Huh, this is interesting." You think about nonprofits, you think of people sort of on the ground, doing the work of case managers and social workers and teachers and conservationists. You don't think about the fundraisers and the marketers and the communicators and the people working at finance, all of the back-end folks. So I hadn't really thought about that, but it turns out nonprofits think graphic designers are magicians. So there actually is a lot of opportunity for people with my skill set. I've been with Marillac St. Vincent for five years, and I love it. My entire world is nonprofit work at this point.

**BETH:** That's so great! In this work that you do, especially from your perspective as somebody that's been young and working with other young people in this community, what does the word "participation" mean to you at this stage of your career or in the things that you see with your association or with your clients?





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I'm always curious about how it shows up in people's worlds that makes their organizations thrive.

**STEPHEN:** Right. So I doubt my answer to this question will break any new ground, but you know, as someone who works for a mission-driven organization made up of people who fervently believe in what we're trying to accomplish here, you know, you can't help but to want as many people as possible to take part in that work and advocate for it and support it and give their time to it. You know, in a perfect world where you're being effective in whatever it is you're trying to do, whether it's environmental conservation or protecting women's reproductive rights or feeding the hungry, whatever, participation on the part of the donor, the volunteer in that work comes from a sense of gratitude, I think, and they're saying I'm grateful that ... I'm grateful for that change that's taking place because of this work and you know, now I'm willing to get my hands dirty, join the front line, open my wallet and boost your signal because I share your values and I believe in what you're doing. I do think it comes down to gratefulness. So yes there are those who they might buy a raffle ticket at your gala or they share your Facebook post once, and those things help. They genuinely they really do, but that's a different kind of participation that I would define more as impulse effort, and what we strive for I think is that emotional commitment to our cause and that comes from gratitude and that takes a person to a deeper level of participation. So long winded answer, but I do think it kind of comes down to that and as far as from a young person's perspective, I'm kind of at an experimentation phase in my career. I've been doing this for five years, and I'm kind of a throw everything at the wall and see what sticks kind of person, and I think we're at a stage in our life where there's lots of failures among the many successes and that's actually a really good thing. I think we should be willing to make mistakes and it's all sort of for that greater goal of getting people to participate, getting people to be engaged, but along the way, I think it is important to experiment and it's OK to fail at that.

**BETH:** And it's so great that you have that attitude. I can tell you for me,





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personally, that's not an attitude that I came up with. I thought I had to do everything perfectly, everything right. I spent way too much of my career avoiding making mistakes, and I feel like I'm at a point where what I've learned now is when you avoid making mistakes, there's a lot of things you don't try. It keeps you really safe, but it kind of keeps you hunkering down in the center of things and that's not a really great way to do things, that you have to experiment. You have to be willing to fail, but that can be so uncomfortable for so many people. I'm just curious. How did you get comfortable with that sort of sense of exposure that failure can often bring?

**STEPHEN:** Right. So you know, I think when I think about failure I think about sort of the day to day minutia stuff of just doing this work. The Facebook posts that don't perform well, the landing page that's getting no traffic, the event that no one attended. Those kinds of things, but there's also sort of inter-personal failures and that's kind of where I struggled the most. I want everyone to like me.

**BETH:** Right, yeah.

**STEPHEN:** It is my, I would sway, in interviews you say, "What's your greatest weakness?" I think that's probably mine. I want everyone to like me. I get anxiety if they don't, but when everyone likes you, I think that's a strong indicator, not whether they like you, but I think it's a strong indicator that you're not taking risks, not just in your work, but in your inter-personal relationships. For a young person who is trying to build their network, that is so important to take risks and to go out there and ask tough questions of your senior leadership and of your peers and not take everything at face value, and I think those are the people that emerge as leaders. Those are the people that get a seat at the table. You know, the people who are willing to stand up and say, "I have questions about this, and I'm not gonna settle for a wishy-washy answer either." So I think that that is kind of, at least with my generation, I still fall within the millennial generation, I'm at the top part of that, but I think that that's what I see a lot among my millennial peers and the generation coming up, is we question things. We don't take





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anything at face value. Just because this is the system that we've been operating in for you know for time immemorial. That's not the reason for why we do it.

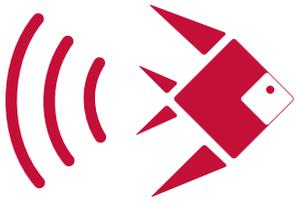
**BETH:** I think that's such a huge asset. That's funny. We have a big white board here at the office with all those jargon words like "put a pin on it" and things like that and we're so sick of hearing. Exactly. Honestly one of the top words on that list is "millennials" because I can't think of another time when a generation of people were so ...

**STEPHEN:** Picked apart, analyzed.

**BETH:** What's the word? Like stigmatized. Pegged, or somebody tells you who you are, and it's so crazy because there's diversity among anything, and people often miss the amazing uniqueness. Like that whole thing you're talking about, like the world view of your generation, and I was gonna say it's so incredible. It's the things you won't just accept and take for granted and push things further is a great skill to have, and it's something I've actually had to work on. I'm a Generation X, and I've actually had to work on not just like doing a really good job so that my boss will approve of it, which is very common in my generation, and then I went out and started my own business, which I don't have that anymore. So you have to find it in different ways, but to see other generations just completely leap-frogging over that, and it not even being a thing, it's fascinating that you have to like just let go of it, and look at the advantages that different modes of thinking bring into an organization.

**STEPHEN:** Absolutely, and I think the last thing I would add is just in Chicago, we have one of the most robust social sectors in the country. You know, one of the most robust nonprofit spaces, I think, in the country. People are really doing great work here, and I think that that is being led by young people. I think that there is a real energy in the sector and particularly among my peers sort of in the communications and marketing space. I am challenged all the time to think





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outside the box, to try new things, to not just go with the status quo and I think that you know, I think that it's important for us to keep that going and to not lose that, despite whatever the political ... whatever the headlines are or whatever is going on in the news. Just keep chugging forward. That's kind of my mantra.

**BETH:** Right, which is a perfect segue into this topic that we were led to talking about, how nonprofits, especially in the marketing world, the marketing side of things, can make things work with a lean team. The reality is what we've seen in a lot of cases, and I'm sure you've probably seen this, too, is that the communications and marketing functions of an organization often gets inherited by the young people of an organization. Sometimes it's this assumption that "Hey, you're young. You know all the techy, widget-widgety stuff. You do it." Sometimes it's because you don't have the power in an organization to say no. Sometimes it's just that organizations are lean, and everybody just has to step up and do things, but more often than not, it's a lot of times nonprofits are working very, very lean, and we always call them slash marketers. You know you've got somebody that's like program manager/empty the trash cans/do all the marketing. More and more we're seeing that that's just the status quo for organizations. So it's this interesting juxtaposition of these layered on, do a hundred things jobs, on top of a young person who has less experience working in general, less experience of understanding of necessarily strategy. Just because you haven't been out there that long, but yet this role that includes decision-making and creativity and some things that you probably do very naturally or some things you don't know at all, falls to busy young people.

**STEPHEN:** I'm really excited to talk about this because it's kind of one of my hobby horses, just this general topic and I think that, this is my theory. So I think within the nonprofit space I think nonprofits are still sort of in their marketing infancy. Aside from sort of the really big name brand nonprofits that we think about, like the ASPCA and you know, the World Wildlife.

**BETH:** American Heart and all of the big, big you know





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**STEPHEN:** Charity Water.

**BETH:** Right. They're only 10 years old, but they, Charity Water is run by a promoter.

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, yeah, yes. Exactly. I love that model. But because we're new to it, I think the reason why we're new to it is because you know historically work around sort of, around charity, around change making, around all of that, it's very sort of just grassroots. You pool your resources where you can get them and it's all about the service. It's all about the work. You know, looking at my own organization Marillac St. Vincent, we were started by The Daughters of Charity in 1914, and, you know, sort of the culture around their programs, it was sort of put your head down and do the work. It was treat people with dignity, yes, and do what you can to provide for them and just make it work. We're not here with our bullhorn telling everybody how great we are. So because just sort of I think that's unique to nonprofits, there's this learning curve around marketing and communications, and I think people are starting to figure it out. I really do. I find that my peers in this space and people who aren't even in marketing and communications function area with my organization, they're starting to have a little vocabulary around sort of branding and around social media. It's kind of in the air. People are starting to understand that it's important, but yet we're not quite at a place within the sector to know what the tools are and also what the workflow is. So if you'll indulge me, I'll just kind of tell you like a day in the life, like what I do.

**BETH:** Oh, yeah! People would love to hear that!

**STEPHEN:** So for starters, Marillac St. Vincent is a \$13 million dollar annual operating budget organization. I love hearing people's annual operating budget cause it's one of those markers that kind of tells you a little about what you're working with, and I don't know, I'm sure a lot of your listeners are familiar with Kivi Leroux Miller who does the nonprofit ...





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**BETH:** Yep, she's been one of our guests. She's terrific!

**STEPHEN:** Oh yeah! She's awesome. When she does a nonprofit trends report every couple of years where you look at annual operating budget, how many people are on your staff and what percentage of your communications team or what percentage of your staff are dedicated to comms. So Marillac St. Vincent, I will say, but we are on the sort of lowest end of the spectrum with one communications person.

**BETH:** For a \$13 million dollar organization?

**STEPHEN:** Yes.

**BETH:** Yeah, so all of you who are listening that are like \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 organizations, it's like it's fascinating. You get bigger, but this function still doesn't grow.

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, yeah, and I think the numbers will show you there are a lot of nonprofits that are doing it right, that are trying to figure out in order to sort of build your capacity skill of your programs and gather the resources you need to do that. You've got to boost your signal. You've got to invest in marketing and communications and advertising. We know that from countless studies that advertising works. So a day in the life of Stephen. Because I am the only person, I maintain our website, our social media, all of our public relations efforts, all of our internal communications. I create video content. I write appeal letters, support special events with print collateral and signage. I'm gonna keep going here because I feel that this is important.

**BETH:** It is.

**STEPHEN:** I deploy all of our digital and print ad campaigns. I write, photograph and design all of the content for our email marketing campaigns. I assist with





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recruitment for our programs. I order promotional materials for our community events like T-shirts and water bottles. I order the business cards for everyone that works here. I have to lay them out in Illustrator them and send them to the printer. All of this happens in-house and there is no budget for outsourcing. So I have to remain nimble. I have to keep the calendar. I've got to stay focused because it's just a lot to put on one person, and this is just kind of the nature of the beast within the sector. I think that it's time for nonprofits to start thinking differently about this function area and what role it's gonna play to help you achieve your mission.

**BETH:** I'm sure that everyone that's listening is going, "Yep, yep, yep." One of the things I was ...

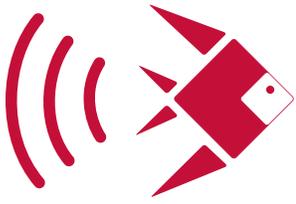
**STEPHEN:** They're also playing the tiniest violin for me. Yeah, yeah.

**BETH:** Like yes we get it. We all have to do that because it's so true and so part of the problem is the labor. That's just a lot of work that has to get done. So we all know that it's a lot of work, so we're just gonna table that for now, but there's another aspect to that, that they're basically asking you to be what I like to call a marketing unicorn and it's really hard to be equally good as a graphic designer and a copywriter and a web developer and a videographer and a PR specialist. Oh, and by the way, on top of that a strategist.

**STEPHEN:** Yes! Can you please think big picture now. I'll get to the big picture after I get through the 12 new business cards for our new hires. I'll get to the big picture stuff after I make the fliers for the program.

**BETH:** So from you perspective in doing this and probably also having friends that are in the same role through the groups that you're involved in, what are the problems that come up? What are the challenges of that in the role? What happens to a nonprofit when they're expecting one person to deliver that breadth of services?





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**STEPHEN:** So you know, I can only speak for myself, but I do think that, it's happened to me. A burnout is inevitable. It will happen at some point. You get overwhelmed. The email starts piling on, the requests are piling on, and it's gonna happen. So I think it's just first when you're starting out, it's accepting that, and not sort of beating yourself up that it's not all getting done. So there's one thing, and the other thing is just managing expectations. Can you actually restate your question? I don't want to digress.

**BETH:** My question is really what are the problems that happen? Either for the employee or for the nonprofit. What goes wrong or what is the potential pitfalls of having one person, having that expectation that this one person that you hired, who has five years of working experience or one, can handle not just the time, but the ability to be as good of a graphic designer as they are a writer, as they are a PR person? It's a pretty wide swath of skills that you're trying to manage.

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, so I think the point I wanted to make before I lost my train of thought was around expectations. So the problem is that your senior leadership team, your executive director, your CEO or what have you, your director of development, whoever sits in those seats, they have outsized expectations around what can actually be accomplished across all of these different channels. I think that the way that you solve for that, and we're talking about what the problem is, is you look at what your programmatic goals are. You start there. What is our mission? What are we trying to achieve? How does marketing communications help us do that? It might just be deploying one campaign for the entire year. It might just be really focusing in on that single one or two or three big picture efforts in order to be effective. You know, even within my organization where I've been for five years, I think we're moving into that sort of mode, but we are still kind of caught up in the day-to-day minutia of all of the millions of things that have to get done that it falls in the function area of communications, but it's really not helping move the ball down the field in terms of building your awareness, making new friends, filling your programs, making sure you're that meeting the needs of your grant contracts, all of this stuff that marketing can





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help with. You know, I think that the goal is to become hyper-focused on one or two different campaigns.

**BETH:** Right. I totally agree and I think especially when you have a lean team, you can't do everything. You can't be everywhere. I guess my concern about that for people that are in this role is when you have one, two, three, five years of work experience, and you're maybe at the end or the bottom of the totem pole, you can end up kind of in this role where you're basically saying, "Would you like fries with that?" You're getting folders dumped on your desk. We need this. We need this. Your job is to execute and do. How does somebody who maybe only has a few years of work experience that are in the role, but they're expected to just get this stuff done, get the ability to step up and maybe even get the ear of the right people so they listen and they're not being told, "You just need to figure out how to get it all done." How do they get that influence with the right people so that things can actually move forward?

**STEPHEN:** Right. So one thing I'm gonna be doing this year is actually, it will surprise you, but we don't actually have a written marketing communications plan.

**BETH:** Oh, I'm so shocked!

**STEPHEN:** Yeah, right, right, right. So I have my editorial calendar, and I have sort of my over arching goals that I'd like to achieve this year or in past years, but all of that stuff gets put on the back burner. When there's a big donor visit, and they need some kind of unique piece of print collateral created for that one donor. So everyone else's priorities are constantly taking precedent over yours. So I think the very first thing I would say is you've got to put on your big kid pants and you've got to advocate for yourself and what priorities are and that might mean brushing some shoulders. That might mean saying no, and I think, I know that's hard for me. I think that's hard for a lot of people, but it's really putting sort of standing firm and saying these are what my priorities are, but if you're gonna





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do that, you've got to do some legwork leading up to it. You have to have one-on-one meetings with your program directors, with your senior leadership and you've got to say, "Hey, look. Here's the things I want to see happen. Here's how I think it's gonna help the organization. How are you going to help me do that?" And before you send that email asking for that unique piece of print collateral for that one donor, before you send that email, ask yourself, "Where does this fit within Stephen's big picture?" and if it doesn't, then OK. I'm gonna open Word and create that unique piece of print collateral for myself, and it doesn't have to be something flashy and crazy. It's just gonna get the job done. I think the point is, is really making a plan, communicating that plan to all of your key stakeholders and then sticking to it, and that's me preaching to myself.

**BETH:** Right. So that can sometimes be hard, saying, "Hey, this is what we need to do." We have a new client right now that we're trying to improve a process because there's an email that goes out once a week that takes about three hours to put this email together, which is not that long considering, but for one email? If you think of that, it's 12 hours a month. That's a lot of time dedicated to one tactic that is barely functional. So it's really challenging to kind of get all this stuff done. How do you get the support of the right people in an organization so that they can back you? I have seen that if you're kind of fighting from the bottom, it can be very hard to get people to follow new rules, adopt new systems, stay with the program that if you can get the leadership at an organization to say, "This is how it's going to be," so that you know when you say "I'm sorry, you didn't get your submission in for the email in time, the email went out without it," that your head is not gonna roll. You know that you've got the backing of people that say, "These are our priorities, this is how much we're willing to spend on this activity," so that we have time reserved for other things, like you said, that are our strategic objectives, and that your times doesn't get consumed with everybody's personal objectives.

**STEPHEN:** Right. I think my answer for this is pretty simple, and I think it's just around building trust and the way you do that is, for me, and it's gonna look





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different for every single person in their different role in their organization. We're all unique snowflakes. But for me, it meant spending time on the ground, in the food pantry, in the learning circle in the birth to three classroom. It's taking time to understand the needs of the client. It's taking time to get to know the program directors and the case managers and the teachers and it's about building relationships and that takes time. When I need information, when I need a story or a piece of content that's gonna help us achieve this marketing communications objective, it's so much easier to have those bridges built to be able to jump on the phone and say, "Hey, Ms. Howell, I need someone that fits this profile. Can you put me in touch?" and they all start to sort of understand also what the work is that you're doing. They start to kind of grasp what the work actually looks like, and, in doing so, I find that people give me my space, and surely there are the last minute things that come up. The "Hey, we need this; hey, we need that," and I think I have to understand that and I have to plan ahead knowing, that I'm gonna get interrupted because that's just the nature of the beast. When you're serving over 15,000 people a year and you have roughly 12 programs kind of sprawling across every stage in life, there's just, there's no denying the scale of it and there's no way of ignoring it and burying your head in the sand and saying, "None of this is gonna get done." You just have to do your best.

**BETH:** What would you say for somebody that was coming into a role like yours that also maybe didn't have a traditional background in marketing or design, but was kind of learning it as they go, what does a nonprofit marketer need today to be able to do an effective job?

**STEPHEN:** You know, I think that whatever your skill set is in terms of those like hard skills, you're gonna bring something to the table that's valuable, whether you're a writer or a graphic designer or you're that relationship person who has a crazy network with like business leaders and your different peer groups. That's really valuable. They don't even know how to open up Microsoft Word, but they have a lot of friends and a huge network. That's valuable. So I think it's really leaning into what skill you have. For me, I'm a writer and a designer and that's





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what I lean into. I can't be anything else.

**BETH:** Right. How does somebody like you, OK, these are two skills you have pretty strong. How do you learn the other things? What are you doing to build your skills in the areas where you aren't as naturally strong so that, of course, you lean into the things that you're strong at, but sometimes you've got to do the other thing.

**STEPHEN:** So I'm gonna go back to organizations like YNPN Chicago are so important. As you probably know, nonprofit organizations don't have huge budgets for professional development. It's just a fact. So you've got to look for these opportunities, like Chicago offers for instance, \$10 and \$12 professional development sessions. The one that caught your eye that I did. It was a nonprofit 101 sort of crash course in nonprofit marketing that I did for YNPN Chicago, and that was a \$10 professional development course for our network, and that's how I learned. It was through spending a lot of time on webinars, listening to podcasts like this, listening, absorbing, finding those resources, being scrappy. That's also just having a network of peer support that I can shoot an email and be like, "Hey, my senior leadership is wanting to do such and such campaign. What do you think about this? Is this something you've done before? What worked for you? What didn't?" Whatever it is you're trying to do, there's someone that's done it before, and they've done it well, and they've succeeded, and they've also failed. So it's finding those people that you can trust and rely on, that you trust and know their expertise to be able to just make a phone call or shoot an email and get the information you need. You can't always Google something.

**BETH:** Exactly, and it's so, so true. I'm on the board of our local AFP chapter, and I run the marketing council, and I actually put this group together consciously of all the people that had development/communications, things like that in their title, thinking that in addition to being the committee that actually helps the organization, we can also become a bit of a peer group for each other, and I was so excited. A few weeks ago when one of the members of our group sent me an





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email and said, “I’m stuck on ideas for getting new things for this one event,” that she was having, and they weren’t getting enough sponsors, and she just wanted somebody to bounce ideas around from, and I happened to be in the city one day just a couple of blocks from where she was, and I said, “How about if I swing by and we do a 15 minute brainstorm?” and we did. It’s just so cool to realize that, like you said in the very beginning, when you build relationships with people, they’ll do things for you, but it all really comes down to you need those people to reach out to, but you’ve got to put the time into it so that when you have a need they’re gonna be there for you.

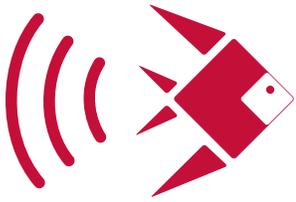
**STEPHEN:** Yeah, absolutely. As a really nice sort of side effect, you also learn a lot about your programs and it helps you do your job better. If you’re not acutely familiar, if you’re not your organization’s expert on what your organization does, you’re failing at your job, and I think that’s a harsh way to put it, but you have to be the person that can recite your mission statement chapter and verse. You have to be the person that understands your messaging architecture, and you’re the protector of all those things, and you’re the person who should know it better than anyone else at your organization. So that’s another way to help you get to that sort of space being the expert is by spending time on the ground and building relationships.

**BETH:** So we’ve talked a lot about how to get in at the strategic table, how to get buy-in and learning the skills so that you can do this whole job better, but as we’ve said, there is still an awful lot of work to do. As we wrap up here today, I would love it if you could maybe give us your best tip for everyone for what’s the best thing you have found that has helped you as a marketer just manage your workload?

**STEPHEN:** Yeah.

**BETH:** Besides patience and understanding.





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**STEPHEN:** So I have to confess I don't have a super great answer for this. I am terminally ADHD. I am so distracted by shiny objects. I am someone who, I start 12 projects in the day and I might finish one of them. So I think that I wouldn't want to lose that part of myself though because I think it makes me good at my job, and I think it helps me with my interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and ideas are what feeds me and what energizes me. I don't want to lose any of that. What I will say is the thing that I would teach people or what to tell people, the number one thing is to be kind to yourself and to take care of yourself. We spend so much time in YNPN Chicago in our board meetings just talking about self-care, and I think that that is for me, that allows me to have a clear space to get some things done every once in awhile.

**BETH:** I love how you mention that. You know we don't have time to get into the whole distracted working conversation here today, but the fact that you have a facet of yourself that you're choosing to look at as an asset and to not be down on yourself or blame yourself for what you can't do, that you're looking at it as "this is what it enables you to do," and I think from a self-care and a self-growth perspective, that is so healthy because there are things you can't change about who you are and you have to learn to work with and not against.

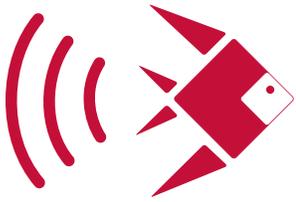
**STEPHEN:** Absolutely.

**BETH:** This was such a great conversation.

**STEPHEN:** I had a blast!

**BETH:** Thrilled to have you on here. I know that this is a topic we're going to be coming back to more and more as I have evolved on this podcast, as we've evolved in our work and especially with what I'm doing with my nonprofit toolkit, building out the training tools to help people that are, as we call them, slash-marketers, get the ability to become a marketing pro. I'm becoming more and more interested in this situation, this person that didn't come from a marketing





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background and has to scale up really fast to figure it out, and so I love talking about this. I am sure I'm gonna be doing more shows on this subject. Thank you so much! If people have questions for you or want to know more about YNPN, how can they get in touch with you?

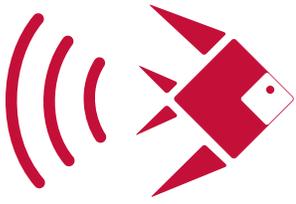
**STEPHEN:** Sure. So a couple of things I just wanted to say really quick. I wanted to give credit to Justyna Krygowska. She's the communications director of the Andrew Goodman Foundation in New Jersey. We met up at the NTEN technology conference in New Orleans last month, and it was actually her idea to meet up and form a group who comes from lean communications teams. So when you and I first started talking, Beth, that sort of kernel of an idea came from Justyna bringing that group together, and I need to give her credit for that.

**BETH:** Maybe we'll have to bring her onto the show.

**STEPHEN:** You really should. She's a smart gal. I really like her. Then the last thing I'll say is you can get in touch with me. I'm a pretty casual tweeter, but I tweet a lot from [@svenbark](#), which is my personal one, which is s-v-e-n-b-a-r-k, svenbark, Stephen Barker, and then also from [@YNPNChicago](#) and [@MSVChicago](#). I would say real quick just to plug YNPN, like I said, there's 49 chapters in the country right now. We have one in Canada actually now in Ottawa, but join a YNPN chapter. Most memberships are really low cost. We're talking \$25 or less or in many cases the membership is free. Join a YNPN chapter board. Join a committee. Get involved, build your network because that is the best way to learn and it's the best way to sort of continue and grow your career in the nonprofit sector when you're at this age. So check out, just Google your city and see if there's a chapter near you and then you can find YNPN Chicago if you're in the Chicago area at [YNPNChicago.org](#).

**BETH:** Well, we will put links to you and to YNPN on the show notes page. Stephen, thank you so much for joining me today and sharing your experience with both me and our whole nonprofit community. I truly appreciate it.





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**STEPHEN:** Yeah, it's my pleasure. Thanks, Beth!

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

