



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S3 EP4

Got a Burnout Story? Let's Hear It!

WITH

Betsy Leondar-Wright
Staffing the Mission



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INTRO [00:00:03] You're listening to the Fund The People Podcast, I'm your host Rusty Stahl. On this show we serve up a healthy nutritious alternative to the nonprofit starvation cycle. If you work as a funder, a non-profit, or intermediary, we'll help you invest in America's nonprofit workforce to drive equity, effectiveness and endurance in our nonprofit and social justice community. So let's get going.

PILOT AD: Folks, Fund The People is cooking up a very exciting new program: The Funding that Works Academy, which will offer online courses that teach our new Talent Investing Framework right from our website. Our initial courses will focus on the fundamentals of talent investing, and there will be versions available for foundation professionals, foundation board members, nonprofit professionals, nonprofit board members and folks working in intermediary organizations, like consultants, educators and membership associations. We want to give our podcast listeners early access to this great new program, so if you fit into any of those broad categories that I just mentioned and you're interested in helping us to pilot the course, please send an email to info@fundthepeople.org and write Pilot in the subject line, you will get special early access to our cutting-edge content and help us make improvements to the course before rolling it out widely. So remember just email me info@fundthepeople.org and write Pilot in the subject line, and we'll get back to you with details. Thanks!

RUSTY: Welcome to the Fund The People podcast, this is your host Rusty Stahl and I'm grateful for your time and attention. I know you have your choice of radio stations, so thank you for tuning into WFTP. This is season 3, episode 4. **Today, we're exploring talent investing principle number three: address the problem, not just the symptoms.** To hear all eight

principles of talent investing listen to episode 1 of this season.

In this episode you'll learn some quick, easy actions you can take now to help researchers address the lack of philanthropic support for the nonprofit workforce and the burnout that results from that deficit of investment. I speak with Betsy Leondar-Wright from Staffing The Mission. Staffing The Mission works in the same space as Fund The People to address poor working conditions in the nonprofit sector and engage funders as part of the solution. Staffing The Mission has a survey out in the field for funders specifically to take and an opportunity for nonprofit folks to share their burnout stories. Betsy discusses these resources and more in this episode.

Before we get started, be sure to subscribe to the show on Apple Podcast or wherever you listen. And remember we email folks on our mailing list about new episodes plus other great resources, so head on over to fundthepeople.org and sign up for our mailing list. On the website you can also find all the podcast episodes, show notes and links and access free original content and tools from the Fund The People tool kit, including our Talent Justice Research and Tools on Investing in Intersectional Racial Equity in the Nonprofit Workforce. So I really do hope you go and visit fundthepeople.org it's a beautiful website with lots of good stuff in there. Now, here's my conversation with Betsy Leondar-Wright.

All right. Well, I'm pleased to welcome Betsy Leondar-Wright to the show. Betsy, thank you so much for joining us.

BETSY: [00:04:16]

I am so glad to be with you Rusty.

RUSTY: [00:04:19]

That's awesome. Well, we've been in conversation and in solidarity with one another between your organization Staffing The Mission which is part of Class Action, its parent organization and with Fund The People. So I'm glad finally we are now here together on the podcast. Tell folks about what Staffing The Mission is.

BETSY: [00:04:41]

All right. Well, we are tackling the problem of low paid and otherwise just terrible quality nonprofit jobs. Nonprofits are so important, they're 20% of the whole US economy, and we rely on nonprofits for so many essential things and we by and large, people who work for nonprofits are paid less than for profit sector, lots of people give tons of unpaid hours and people burn out of nonprofit jobs at a rapid rate. And this is especially important if we're looking for racial equity. There's rising leadership of people of color tackling racial justice and social justice progress for our country, and it's really difficult to make a career if you have a family to support, you don't have well-off family members to fall back on, it's really hard to make a career in the nonprofit sector. And there's tons of talented idealistic people as Fund The People always points out, that would really love to stay in this sector and find it basically impossible, it's too low paid, too long hours.

And so Staffing The Mission works on supporting nonprofits to improve their staff jobs but of course what you hear is: “we would if we could but the problem is funding.” And so we work with the philanthropy sector about how to make grant-making more supportive of good jobs at the grantee organizations. So that's our two main audiences, it's nonprofits and foundations and other grant makers.

RUSTY: [00:06:34]

Great. So as folks can hear Staffing The Mission and Fund The People have a lot in common in values and in our approach and you're doing some interesting stuff that we wanted to talk about and share with our audience on this segment. So, one of the things you're doing is this survey of funders. So, can you talk about what the survey is, and why should funders fill out this very important survey?

BETSY: [00:07:00]

The survey is a collaboration between Class Action's Staffing the Mission Project and Fund The People and we need to know before we can work with funders about how they can change to support grantees' staff, we need to know what the prevailing practices are right now, both the problematic practices such as low overhead limits that basically block nonprofits from paying administration and development staff living wages. But also the best practices. There's a lot of innovation happening in the philanthropy sector, trust-based philanthropy and a lot of racial equity initiatives. And so there are exemplary practices out there, and we need to know about those before we start issuing recommendations. We'd like some positive stories to profile, and we would also like to see how prevalent are the problematic practices.

Yes, so the survey is online. It's got a simple URL, it's a tiny URL, tinyurl.com and then it's funders against nonprofit burnout. We've been going out and talking to people in the philanthropy world about this and there is a real concern about how bad nonprofit jobs are and how difficult it is to fully do diversity, equity, and inclusion in the nonprofit sector because of the poor quality jobs. There's a lot of concern. And I think there's a lot of people who would like to do something about that and the first step that a funder can do is fill this out, it's totally confidential, we will not reveal any identities, of course, and it takes only about 15 minutes and once we get enough foundations taking it, we will issue a report saying what's going on in this sector.

So, we found one inspiring example of a foundation doing the kinds of things that we're recommending. At the Boston Foundation they have a collaborative called Skill Works made up of many funders that fund workforce development, and they are requiring their grantees to take a self-assessment survey about their job quality, sponsored by the Jewish Vocational Services. So, they assess what are the HR practices, what's the pay, how many best practices aren't being done by their grantees and so they're able to support them to improve how they treat their staff.

RUSTY: [00:09:41]

Great, so that's a great example of how the survey can help to capture not only the challenges that funders face internally to help nonprofits fight burnout, but also some of the good things that are happening. So again, folks, to get to the survey, you go to

tinyurl.com/fundersagainstnonprofitburnout and we'll post that in the show notes as well, so you can just click and get right to that survey at tinyurl.com/fundersagainstnonprofitburnout. And as Betsy said, Fund The People is partnering with Staffing The Mission to get as many funders as we can to fill out this survey. So please, if you are a grant maker or you work at a foundation or you have friends who do, please share the survey information with your friends and please do take the survey yourself. I'll say it again, tinyurl.com/fundersagainstnonprofitburnout.

So you're also at Staffing The Mission collecting some of the stories from nonprofits about what's going on in the field with **burnout and that feels very highly urgent and relevant right now, but it's also something that's been happening a long time before the great resignation and the pandemic and everything else that's happened in the last five or six years. Burnout is an epidemic or pandemic or whatever you want to call it in the sector.** And so, it's important to hear from people about their experiences. So tell us about what you're looking for, what you're doing collecting these stories and how can people contribute.

BETSY: [00:11:33]

We are asking people who have been burnt out both currently in a non-profit job, who might want to talk about it confidentially, or people who left a job and now consider it a burnout experience to just tell us what happened, tell us what was hard about it. And we have only posted one pair of videos, we're collecting them either in written form or in video form and the one that if you go onto the Staffing The Mission webpage at classism.org, you can see the videos made by two people. Marnie's story I could summarize and say Marnie was hired for a part-time job, at a small progressive nonprofit that she was passionate about. She earned twenty eight thousand dollars because it was supposed to be a part-time job. Rapidly she discovered it was way understaffed and she was not only working 40 hours a week, in a typical week she was working more like 50-55 hours a week, and all of the things she was doing weren't in her job description for which she was getting twenty eight thousand dollars a year, and she was in an expensive area, near a big expensive city and so it was just a completely unworkable situation and she ended up feeling really bitter towards them, even though they were wonderful people, wonderful work.

Yeah. That was just shocking to hear and so **the goal of our call for nonprofit burnout stories is that we'd like to create a channel for the voices of the directly affected people by this major problem of nonprofit staff burnout. And we also would like employers to feel taken aback.** Like, oh no, I'm doing what burnt those people out, and funders to feel how serious this is if you're a funder and you pay no attention to the quality of the jobs, you're just like I want to give to this cause and they're promising that they can have this huge impact with a relatively small amount of money, that's great, I'm going to give this grant, what you're being oblivious to when you do that.

RUSTY: [00:13:47]

So people can go to the Staffing The Mission website, which we're going to give the URL shortly, and upload right in a Google form about their burnout story, or you can upload audio or video of your story as well to kind of share and add to this collection of data, qualitative data about burnt out in our sector.

So, the last thing I think we wanted to mention here Betsy, was the report that Staffing the Mission put out a little while ago, which has some really important points in it. So I wanted to give you a chance to share with folks about what's in that report, what's it called and all that.

BETSY: [00:14:30]

Yeah, it's called **Staffing The Mission: Improving Jobs in the Nonprofit Sector**, and we did a **survey of nonprofits across the U.S. and analyzed the data about how fair or unfair did people working for nonprofits perceive the pay, the benefits, and communication systems.** And surprisingly, **we discovered that transparency and bad communication about how pay is set, who decides raises, who decides on lay offs, that was what people were the most negative about.** So it's a fascinating study. Our report is full of pull out quotes and things that people told us in the survey and we tried to make it very practical. It's got a lot of how-to information, benchmarks for what makes a decent job, recommendations for what funders can do to make a difference to their grantee staff and including a section called: "What if the spirit is willing but the revenue is weak?" because I've been there. I've been an executive director of nonprofits where I would have loved to give full family health and no way, the money just did not exist. And so a number of suggestions around communication systems and affordable perks that you can do even without an infusion of additional revenue.

RUSTY: [00:15:59]

Terrific, that's great. People are always looking for practical, you know, not only data that can help show the situation and make the case for change but also practical tips for what they can do about it.

BETSY: [00:16:10]

Yeah, **one thing in the works for Staffing The Mission is an interactive workshop that we can customize for a non-profit for a funder or any kind of other organization in the sector.** The strong suit of Class Action is popular education workshops where participants have their hands on and come out with more than an action plan. And so we are making one of those for Staffing The Mission where **the participants will get a checklist of worst and best practices to be a staff friendly nonprofit or staff friendly funder, and they can do a self-assessment of their own organization and come out with an action plan.** So, when that's ready to go live, which will be very soon I think, that will also appear on the webpage within classism.org that Staffing the Mission page.

So yes, your podcast is just wonderful, it's just fun, and a lot of us do rely on it for finding out what's cutting edge in this sector. And so I know you'll have some listeners who will be interested in learning more about best practices, and that's what Staffing The Mission will try to offer, both in writing and in the form of workshops and webinars.

RUSTY: [00:17:30]

That's great. That sounds really good. So let's make sure people know how to find all these resources to fill out the funder survey, to upload their burnout stories, although it'd be nice if you could upload your burnout and get it off of your chest, but at least upload your burnout story.

BETSY:

I think you should invent that!

RUSTY: [00:17:49]

Yeah, that's going to be, that's a future project. And then the Staffing The Mission report and coming soon, this workshop. So I want you to tell folks how they can find Staffing The Mission online.

BETSY: [00:18:01]

Yes, so [Class Action's website address is classism.org](https://www.classism.org). That's our overall mission, it's reducing classism in the world, so classism.org. And then under the program's tabs, one of the tabs -because we have other programs as well- one of the tabs says Staffing The Mission and the links for all of these things we're mentioning are there, there are some burnout stories you can listen to, the report is there, a call for stories is there and the survey link is there.

RUSTY: [00:18:36]

Great. So folks can go to classism.org and then under programs go to Staffing The Mission and you find all of this stuff. Betsy, thank you so much for your work and your leadership in the field and thanks for being here to share that work. I hope to have you back soon when you have more to share.

BETSY: [00:18:56]

That's right. My pleasure Rusty, it's great to be with you and to talk to all your podcast subscribers.

RUSTY: [00:19:02]

Thank you.

OUTRO:

Thanks for listening to the Fund The People podcast where we help you cook up nutritious and delicious alternatives to the nonprofit starvation cycle by investing in the nonprofit workforce. On behalf of myself, Rusty Stahl, our gracious guests and everyone who makes the show possible we hope you enjoyed the episode. You can find links to the resources that were mentioned, guest bios, show notes, and the audio for this episode by visiting fundthepeople.org and clicking on Podcast. Thank you for driving change in our communities, our country and the world. Remember to keep your tank full, take care of yourself and take care of one another.