



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S4 EP8

## Starting a Revolution in Nonprofit Hiring

WITH

Alfonso Wenker  
and Trina Olson  
*Team Dynamics*



INTRO: [00:00:04]

You're listening to the Fund the People podcast. I'm your host, Rusty Stahl. Each episode, we serve up nutritious, delicious alternatives to the nonprofit starvation cycle. We're the only show focused 100% on investing in America's nonprofit workforce. So whether you work in social justice, social service or something else, we've got something for you. The guests and ideas you'll get access to here will help you to drive equity, effectiveness and endurance, in the social sector. So let's get cooking.

RUSTY: [00:44:00]

Welcome to the Fund The People podcast. My guests today are Alfonso Wenker and Trina Olson from Team Dynamics. **Alfonso is co-founder and president of Team Dynamics and is a seasoned executive leader and facilitator of transformational organizational culture and strategy campaigns.** Trina is co-founder and CEO of Team Dynamics, and is a two-time non-profit executive director with a track record of building and retaining teams across race, gender and sexual orientation. Alfonso and Trina knew of each other before they met and, according to their website, when they started training and coaching together, their energy was palpable and I think you'll hear that today. So with that, I'm excited to welcome to the show Trina and Alfonso.

Welcome Trina and Alfonso, could you each briefly introduce yourselves and give us a sense of your career motivations and your journeys? And welcome to the show.

ALFONSO: Thank you, Rusty. It's good to see you, it's good to be with you. I'm Alfonso, I use he/him pronouns, I'm president and co-founder at Team Dynamics, and career motivations, it's a powerful question. And I think **specific to our conversation today about our book Hiring Revolution [A Guide to Disrupt Racism + Sexism in Hiring], I have had a through-line in my career that has been about talent development, recruitment and specifically working inside of philanthropy, primarily asking the question: who works here, why do they work here, and are we**

representing the communities that we care about. So, my motivation relative to this conversation and the book is really I feel that question has remained asked, but unanswered. And so an increasing impatience with commitments to changing the face of who works inside the field and very little impact related to that intent. So motivations are personal, as a queer person of color, but also just professional, like how long as a field can we look at the data about who is leading and who is here and just continue to be okay with not changing that.

TRINA: [00:03:00]

And I'm Trina, I use she/her pronouns. I am the CEO and Alfonso's co-founder at Team Dynamics. So when I look at my career arc, I think what is sort of most obvious in retrospect is that I'm motivated by issues, people and places. So I've worked all over the US on purpose. I worked inside the field of nonprofits, so I worked in eight different nonprofits, I was counting because I was like oh what's true about that? And I've worked on issues that have really mattered to me, my family, my friends, my community, sometimes have impacted me personally, and sometimes have been about other people, other lived experiences, other bodies. So I think right now I'm at a phase of my career where I really want to be creative. So it's something I'm super motivated by, including solutions. I'm pretty goal-directed as a motivator, so I'm very curious how far we can get in our lifetime of closing many of these enormous inequity gaps. And I like being around people who are trying hard. So I've gotten to work in a lot of different formats and settings, and leadership roles and I love learning from smart people around me.

RUSTY: [00:04:18]

I'm really excited to have you both on the show. I'm a fan of your work, and thank you for bringing all your experience and thought leadership to this conversation. I wanted to invite you to tell us about your company Team Dynamics.

TRINA: Yeah. So in 2017 Alfonso and I were working near each other and with each other sometimes. So we were both in executive leadership roles and we were finding all sorts of ways to use our vacation time and our weekends and working with other mentors and leaders in the region and me as a white woman, Alfonso as a man of color, we were really starting to build a practice. And so for the past six years, Team Dynamics has been a national strategy firm, we are based here in the Twin Cities but go all over. We focus on supporting US based nonprofits businesses, organizations and leaders who are really interested in living their values in race and gender equity. So for us, as people who have led big teams, we recognize that policies don't magically turn into practices and that culture is being co-created all the time and so we spend our time leading retreats, coaching executive leaders, building and sending people through a robust training program. All in the service of having tactical solutions to actually have their values and mission aligned with their day-to-day work.

RUSTY: [00:05:55]

Wow, that's pretty powerful and not easy to get to sometimes, unfortunately.

TRINA: [00:06:01]

Thanks for naming that. We have discovered that over the course of our time and it also continues to be really interesting and motivating to be this up close to leaders who are trying hard.

RUSTY: [00:06:11]

Totally. Alfonso, what motivated you to write the Hiring Revolution, the book we're going to discuss today?

ALFONSO: So the origin story of our book "Hiring Revolution: A Guide to Disrupt Racism and Sexism in Hiring" is an interesting one. As business owners, as entrepreneurs, as lifetime, you know, career-long trainers and facilitators, I don't know that our joint strategy was a book. For sure we both have written things before and sometimes we understand people can learn and change because they get motivated by something that's written down. But I would say **the book started from a place of like anger and frustration**. As equity consultants, people were hyper fixated on something we felt was very solvable, which was the demographic mix of their candidate pools. **The constancy of the question: how do we diversify our candidate pool was just overwhelming and pretty annoying, because we, first of all, just don't like that question. So, the root problem of that question was people don't have the ability to be specific about the kind of diversity they're talking about**. When we would do follow-up questions it was: we're having a hard time moving women from mid-management into executive level positions. It was: we think we don't know any trans people or we're having a hard time recruiting and retaining people of color. And so first of all, what we were saying is you're asking the wrong question for a problem that when probed you can really name it.

So we were getting frustrated that people couldn't talk about what was missing from their teams and for a bunch of reasons: myths about legality, people thinking they're being diplomatic or polite or thinking it's like racist to say there aren't a lot of people of color in our candidate pool, so just a bunch of reasons. And our answers just kept getting longer and longer. And what we realized was between the two of us, given that we're both mid-career, I'm 36, Trina's 42, we have hired more than what would be usual for people our age. So Trina, working on issue campaigns, was on an annual basis hiring dozens of people. And then, I ran a fellowship program for five years where I got to look at amazing talent across race and gender who were ready, willing and able to come into the field. So, saying, like, I'm looking at 150 applications every year, Trina's building brand new teams that are mixed across race and gender every year, but people who claim they're committed, seem to not be having the impact they want.

So we said, it's how you do it and the only way to get it all the way out and up being the format of a book. We couldn't do it in a blog post or a podcast episode or a conversation and we just said, let's map it out, let's lay it out. If we got to do all the things we know how to do in a hiring process, that we know actually work, we might be able to sketch a flow out for people.

RUSTY: So, it really came from practice, from your own experience. That's great. That whole thing about there aren't enough people out there to hire is such a deficit based mindset, that is just so frustrating and such a big part of this whole deficit based approach to nonprofit works. It's

like there's not enough qualified people. All of these myths and mindsets that really hold people back from supporting colleagues and finding and identifying and mentoring and hiring people. So...

TRINA: [00:09:54]

And Rusty, what drives me just bonkers about that is A, it's fully untrue and then B, it's devoid of taking responsibility. So it's blaming sort of like a really esoteric other, rather than saying: okay, so let's say my nonprofit is focused on language preservation, let's just pretend, right? If I don't have relationships with Lakota and Anishinaabe people, that's on me. It is not: Oh wow, I don't know if anybody's interested or I just keep sending it out into the general internet and hoping for somebody to come back without recognizing people in body's like mine, with names like mine have done a lot of damage to trust across communities. So the idea that folks would just come running is just devoid of self awareness about the context that we're in and it's not taking responsibility for moving through how segregated we are and therefore how much proactive relationship building and repair we'll need to get done in order to build meaningful relationships enough for anyone to ever say, yeah, I'd be interested in leaving the thing I'm doing to come work with you or for you. So, we really hope that in reading Hiring Revolution, folks feel incredibly empowered and **the reason Alfonso and I decided to make it essentially a guidebook, like a playbook you just follow the flow and you will get a good outcome, is because we wanted to show everything we did. There's nothing we need to hide or make proprietary. When folks talk about this as being hard or complex, it's easy but new. So there isn't actual rocket science behind how to do this but it takes a number of paradigm shifts, both sort of mentally, socially and emotionally in order to just imagine building and retaining a robust team differently.**

RUSTY: [00:12:02]

The onus is on us as employers and organizations to build those relationships. Now, this show's about nonprofits, my sense is that the book is much more broadly focused or available to anybody who's an employer. How do you all see nonprofit employers if at all distinct from for-profit employers on these issues or more broadly?

ALFONSO: Well, context really matters. So, it's hard to talk about an entire sector as being readier or more able to participate in the Hiring Revolution. But what I know about nearly 20 years working with and in nonprofits and philanthropy is we have in some ways fewer shoulds or fewer constraints on how we do our work. So what am I saying? Oftentimes in corporate there are incredibly large and highly structured talent and HR teams, where recruiting and talent management, and learning and onboarding sort of happen across multiple people or multiple functions. And so, you're just trying to motivate a lot more stakeholders. In nonprofits we have the benefit of allegedly being super people-centric and oftentimes our HR shops aren't as big or as complex and so we're making it up. And so when it's only a handful of people deciding to do different is just that much more possible because there are fewer stakeholders to motivate and then to help realize the new way of being. So I think the opportunity for us in the nonprofit and philanthropic space is to always remember, we're doing things a certain way because a human made it up. And because our HR shops are smaller oftentimes in the nonprofit space, there's just like fewer humans who made up a thing that are super attached to the way of being, right?

So, the opportunity is to say, oh, we have all of these practices for how we do recruitment and hiring and they're made up and we can change them. I'm not saying they're all bad or they're all wrong but we are overly attached to systems or processes or structures that somebody created that were correct or useful or created ease at the time. There's just enough people who are committed to our mission that could say, oh, we're missing our goals. And so that's what I think the beauty of nonprofit and philanthropic work is if we're truly mission based organizations that care about people in community, we're the kinds of people in the US economy who can say let's stop doing hiring in a way that hurts people in community. Like, we're poised to be the ones who actually do it because we allege that we care more.

TRINA: [00:14:57]

And Alfonso, as you are talking, it made me think of three sections in the book that I know you and I wrote with our experience in nonprofits in mind specifically. So the first is when we talk about compensation. So, way too often there's a pattern that needs to be disrupted, which we hear out loud in a room when we're with a hiring committee or we are with a board of directors who is responsible for making an executive higher. Folks in nonprofits for way too long have been comfortable underpaying people. So this belief that we can't actually compete for top talent for a nonprofit or that our stakeholders or donors would find it unconscionable if we paid people properly, the unintended impact is that the only people who can take these jobs somehow have access to other cash or capital, through their family, through their spouse, through intergenerational wealth transfer, through their whiteness, through something else. So, we really want to talk to folks because the workforce is crystal clear right now. Flexibility is everything, trust is everything, being compensated fairly, consistently and a full compensation package which includes really meaningful benefits is how folks are making decisions to take jobs, right? So let's have a real conversation. This might mean, we need to adjust our mission a little bit or our strategic plan, or we need to hire less people but at higher pay rates. So I think when we talk about recruitment and being super honest about pay upfront and then through a conversation about actually making a hire, that's one of the pieces.

The second piece is Alfonso and I experienced first hand a lot of what we refer to in the book as pageantry. So it's a lot of for show. It's a lot of I'm going to introduce you to this person, introduce you to this person, you're going to get dressed up four times, you're going to tell stories, you're going to make people laugh, you're going to make people comfy, you're going to tell people who you know. So there's also sort of this intimacy that sometimes is unearned, but we make a lot of assumptions. And so there's a kind of pageantry inside nonprofit hiring processes that we've been a part of that often gets talked about as like casual meet-and-greets, but are in fact, fully tryouts or first dates, if you think about it that way, right?

And then the third thing for nonprofits in particular Alfonso and I have both experienced what we refer to as versions of a purity test. So we want you to want this job for the same reason we want this job and if you talk about anything other than mission, vision or values, if you want to talk about the fact that you and your family are just really interested in moving to Portland or Houston and that's why you're looking in the area, or you have responsibility for caregiving for aging parents and that's why you need flexibility or you're really working hard to pay off some

student loans or save for a house, okay. It is okay to have different incentives to work and still be excellent and excited about a mission.

RUSTY: [00:18:29]

Yes, thank you for those three additions there. So while we're on this topic about sort of hiring and nonprofits and in philanthropy, you both obviously have experience in this space and I was curious, you know, given our focus here at Fund The People, if you have thoughts on how you think grant making and fundraising might be done differently so that we had more and better investments in the nonprofit workforce. Because, you know, sometimes an employer say wants to do the right thing in terms of pay or benefits, but they feel like they don't have the money to do it or they don't have the backing from their board or their funders to do that. So I wondered if you could just, you know, give some thoughts on that.

ALFONSO: [00:19:25]

I have a lot to say. First, I think I want to acknowledge... (I don't *think*, I DO want to acknowledge...) that I don't know there's much I'll say that other people aren't already saying. So when it comes to any of my grant making friends who are listening, I don't know how many more of us need to say, fund flexibly, fund gen-op, fund multi-year, fund like you want us to win, fund to like you want the world to get better. The reports have been written, the cases have been made, the panels have been had, it's whether or not philanthropy wants to get off the diamond and do differently. And of course, on this podcast, other places, folks are making that change. It's just not happening at a pace that feels believable to me yet. Our belief in what is safe, what is risky, what is possible, like we just need to shift in there. In the book we talk a lot about starting to have more honest conversations about the expectations of a role and the dollar amount we believe should be budgeted for. So, part of it is, if an organization believes that the dollar value of this work is X, X needs to go into the budget. And if we don't have it yet, we're not ready for that role yet. So, too often, we're getting an outsized amount of labor for less money. So if you are an executive director or a board chair who's sitting there saying well, we would pay you a hundred thousand dollars if we had it, you're exploiting labor and that's just what's true.

RUSTY: Mic drop, end of show.

TRINA: [00:21:01]

Alfonso has only been thinking about philanthropy for, you know, 15 plus years in a really close way. So I get to bear witness and learn as we go.

RUSTY: [00:21:09]

Oh my gosh. Yeah, yeah. That was great. It's a really good point. It's a choice to either exploit people or wait and you know, figure it out.

TRINA: [00:21:21]

When we get to talk about if our own legacy and funding in perpetuity and having an organization that's around a really long time is more important than carbon sequestration or having an alternative to public safety in the country or dealing with guns. It's like, hey y'all! Do



we want to just keep feeling the pain? Are we going to band together and fund solutions at the scale at which they're required.

RUSTY: [00:21:52]

On the funder side? I see. Okay, yeah.

TRINA: [00:21:58]

Yeah. So to get the workforce in place who is creative and open to game-changing solutions and not business as usual, but collaborative across the community. We want workers who aren't just willing to partner in community. But what we talked about a lot from an asset based perspective is the reason we believe in having a mixed team across race, ethnicity, religion, class, age, gender, disability, immigration and more, is because there is so much value in a person with lived experience. I can only ever live in my body, right? Meaning there was a period of time when I was an executive director on an immigration based and focused organization. Cool. I became an expert in federal advocacy, fundraising and more, right? And I have zero days lived experience as an immigrant. So unless my team was mixed across experiences I have and didn't have, I wasn't going to know enough or be creative enough with creating solutions. And so again when we think about why do we imagine you should hire differently, it's not to create a cute photo, it's not because you feel embarrassed about being homogeneous, it's because you will be better at your jobs when you have a mix of experience around you, because you just will be more innovative, you will be more creative if you're not forcing assimilation, but you're asking, inviting people to bring their variety of experiences to make us all smarter.

RUSTY: [00:23:29]

Amen. Okay, so getting back a little bit to the book. It's in three parts or three and a half parts. So I wanted to start a little bit at the beginning. Now we've already touched on onus it's on employers to build relationships and be representative. And so we talked a little bit about what some employers say to you is the problem versus, you know, what you're saying back to them. But in the book, can you share a little bit about what you layout as the problem in the world of organizations and companies? What's the problem out there and do you think it's gotten worse or better or stayed the same in the last couple years since you wrote the book?

TRINA: [00:24:14]

Yeah, so super baseline is that racism and sexism have been threaded and embedded in what people think of as professional standards for hiring. So racism and sexism is hidden in plain sight, it is happening at every layer and therefore we are achieving the same impact which means black, indigenous, people of color, women, fem presenting folks and trans folks are being consistently under hired, underpaid and under promoted. So that's the problem in a nutshell and Alfonso can definitely layer on.

ALFONSO: [00:24:49]

So, the research that Trina really led in part one was just to try to look at the modern day stats. So, we have this belief, you know, if any of us believe in like the moral arc bends or like

progress overtime, or maybe we feel like we're around more different kinds of people across lines of race and gender so surely we must be getting better... **When we look at the data, the data point that really stands out to me is around pay parity, and between white men and Latinas it would be eight generations before pay parity.** So none of us on this Zoom would be alive. Most of the people who I think nobody on any foundation or nonprofit boards would be alive. So eight Generations is a long time

RUSTY: [00:25:40]  
It's a very long time.

ALFONSO: So you really look at the data and you say, I feel like I live in a world where people are more racially equitable and there's more gender justice. That might be a felt sense for some people, but then when you look at the actual experience of who makes it through a hiring process, it's still true that black and brown candidates who whiten their resume are two times more likely to make it through a process. It is still true that we're eight generations for latinos and white men to have pay parity, right? So even though it might feel like racial justice and gender justice are on high volume, the data doesn't actually tell us that the conditions have gotten better in terms of who gets hired, who gets paid, who gets promoted?

RUSTY: Yeah. That's really powerful. Eight generations is a really long time considering that most of us don't know anything about people three or four generations ago or what their lives were like.

TRINA: [00:26:44]  
Yeah, the descriptor we ended up using and we worked with a great publishing partner and editor to help us get our words right. But the correct way to describe the pace of pay parity is glacial.

RUSTY: Okay. So let's move into the sort of second part of the book where you really take people through the process concretely of thinking about kind of the hiring process. We all know and I think you did a great job of giving people tools and nuts and bolts and very concrete things to do, because this problem can be kind of overwhelming and you really emphasized starting before you start, that this is really something that's not about the hiring process or writing the job description or sending it out. It really has to start way before that. So, can you talk a little bit about, you know, what needs to happen in terms of thinking about equity and preparing way before you start the search process?

TRINA: [00:27:42]  
So the good news is this is really fixable, and it's really fixable fast. So when we think about what needs to be different, it isn't necessarily the pieces of the puzzle, it's how you approach doing the puzzle at all. So, absolutely you have to plan, then you have to build up materials, you need to recruit and organize and find your people, you need to interview folks, you need to make an offer, right? So the arc of what needs to happen from somebody's retiring, somebody's leaving or we need a new role filled, to there's a body opening up a laptop one day, like we got



to get to and through that whole process, right? And so what we layout is sort of a chapter by chapter approach to how to disentangle every location in the hiring process to ensure that we're stripping out the racism and sexism that is embedded or has been normed.

ALFONSO: [00:29:02]

And so, Rusty, you were saying, you know, you're the first person to say "start before you start" and I really like that, I'm feeling attached to it. So I'll be quoting you on that moving forward. But I think oftentimes our instinctual or gut reaction when it's time to hire is to write a job description. Oh! The budget has been allocated or we've identified a need, let's get to writing that job description.

RUSTY: That's definitely mine. My instincts would be like, let me sit down and think what is this person going to do for me?

ALFONSO: Totally, totally. And like that makes sense, sort of in a lot of ways because you're like, oh, it's time, we've got the green light, like, let's get to work right? The challenge there is a couple of things. One, if you're still working from your 2019 boilerplate template job description, stop immediately. If you're trying to solve a 2023 problem with a 2019 tool, you're going to fail. So first of all, we work from these templates that are part of the reason why women, people of color and trans folks are not as successful in our processes. So, we came up with a planning tool, its initials are RPDR and if you are someone who watches RuPaul's Drag Race, it is also how people tweet about RuPaul's Drag Race, so that's how we remember it. One of the first things we have to do is RPDR. So first R is we recognize our biases. What are all of the assumptions we've made including literally whoever the group of hirers is, everybody stop, close your eyes and imagine this role. You all imagined a person that has a race and a gender, is that congruent with our goals and our values? Most of the time we say no. So that's R, that's recognize our biases.

Then we start to imagine all the things we might need to tell someone in the posting so that's P for post. So we're not actually writing the posting, we're just trying to come up with the biggest flipchart full of what are all of the pieces of information we think someone might need to say I might like to work there. And notice the framing: what would someone need to know about us? One of the threads of the book is stop treating candidates like lying liars who are trying to cheat and steal, right? We've all read the job post where we feel like demoralized and beaten up at the end. We're like, do they think I'm awful? They don't even know me, but I've read this and they're talking into like all of my vulnerabilities, right? So, from an asset standpoint, what would someone need to know to say I want to work here.

Then D diversity and everyone's going to say no, inclusion; no, equity; no, belonging; no, justice; no, liberation. For sure I mean diversity, and here's what I mean. What is the current demographic mix of our team? That's what diversity is. What's missing, what would be the value add if a person with a different set of demographics joined. We're particularly interested in combating racism and sexism, so we in the book look primarily at race and gender demographics. So count, who's around? Who's involved? Where in the organization? So we've

done a ton of work with higher ED and they're like, hey we have a ton of folks of color in like security, food service and custodial work. We're like great, how many of those are decision-making roles and they're like none of them. Okay, so at what level are we talking? So that's D.

And then **the last R**, given our current biases, the things we want to be able to say. So someone says, we want to work here and post, our demographic goals, **do we have the relationships necessary to successfully complete this search**. So those are some big questions that we need to ask before we write a job description and put it out on the internet.

RUSTY: Thank you for laying that out and the book offers all kinds of support of tools to help folks do that reflection and process. And yeah, again, I think comes back to that theme of the onus is on organizations and employers to be attractive places that people, diverse people would want to come, would have an incentive to come work there, instead of the other way around. And when we think it's the other way around we lose, we lose people, right away. We lose before we start, I think. Why would anyone want to come work here and what incentives do they have?

TRINA: [00:33:05]

And I think Rusty, you had asked us, because we had started writing this book years ago (a book takes a while, come to find out from the inside) and what has sort of changed or shifted and I think something that Alfonso and I are really grateful for is that **the Covid-19 global pandemic as well as the murder of George Floyd by police and then the following racial uprisings just helped highlight stuff that was already true**. So it's not that anything particularly new was happening, it's that all the sudden it got really clear that the US capitalist economy is not set up to honor the reality of how much caregiving we all have to do in our lives, whether that's young people or other adults, right? That this is a workers market, so if employers are behaving like people are going to walk over gravel on their knees to work for you and only you, you've lost it, right? So, workers right now in our economy, in our context, they got a lot of choices and it's not that all the choices are the same, but between folks being ready, willing and able to do entrepreneurial work, really thinking about a career that's made up of multiple jobs, potentially multiple jobs at one time, in simply being unwilling to work somewhere that doesn't feel good. **And so workers are really clear, the values of the organization, the values of their leaders, how they are trusted, treated and paid well**. This is a place where we're competing for top talent. If someone's applying for work, they're applying everyday to multiple organizations. So we have to get over this obsession with folks wanting to work for us and only us as the key thing that makes somebody a good fit.

RUSTY: [00:35:00]

So moving along in the process. So as organizations publicize these opportunities and try to get people to come and apply and as they search out job applicants, what are some of the things that people should be thinking about and doing as they go?

TRINA: [00:35:18]

Being really precise rather than really general. So what we learned is that “spray and pray,” so here I'm going to BCC a message to everybody in my contacts list or I'm going to just post this on LinkedIn generally, means that in our experience, our candidate pool consistently got whiter and less qualified. So folks have no problem applying for jobs they have no business having and when we are hyper precise and really focused that's where we get the candidate pool that we need in order to feel good about our process. Because I want to be really clear, for Alfonso and I it is a win in the Hiring Revolution if by the time you get to the end, you're really proud of your process. We are not saying never again hire a white person. We are not saying never again hire a man. What we're saying is you had such a solid process that you were earnestly and genuinely talking to folks from a variety of backgrounds that would all potentially make a big impact at your organization. Right? And that you weren't operating out of scarcity, you actually learn from abundance.

So Alfonso wrote out his exact email templates that he uses and put it in the book and actually created a chart of how he did referrals in order to expand a set of relationships to get us the candidates that we needed.

RUSTY: All right, so no spraying and praying, but being intentional, precise, relationship driven, perhaps.

ALFONSO: [00:37:15]

Yeah, the way we say it in the book is you have to think like an organizer, like a community organizer, which is who do I know and do they share interest in the thing that I'm trying to change or fix? So, a blind carbon copy email doesn't necessarily yield the results you want, because you're not having an actual relational exchange where you get to say, hey Trina. I really care about this role and I care about these kinds of people applying and potentially getting the job. I think you care about that too. Is that true? And Trina is like, of course I do and I'll say, will you send this to three people and tell me their name so I can watch for them, and she can say of course I will, because it's all the psychology that also comes out of fundraising which is we don't ask because we think we're bugging people and the truth is people would rather be asked and have to say no, knowing that you didn't hold back from asking them.

So, whatever story you're telling yourself about well, that would be annoying to people. Well, it's annoying if it's not reciprocal, it's annoying if you don't know me, it's annoying if we haven't established the relationship, but because you care about me and I care about you, there's stuff I'll do for you that I won't do for strangers.

RUSTY: Right, it's counterintuitive but it's like I feel respected if you ask me for money or help with this job search or whatever it is, because it means you value my participation or perspective or relationships.

ALFONSO: Totally. Yeah, I'm going to respond if I see your name in my inbox, Rusty, versus a name I don't know, I'll be like ok that's another stranger. I'll get back to them, not like, oh! It's Rusty.

TRINA: We found that people panic that the pool of candidates then won't be big enough. But as soon as we just dig and ask like to follow up questions, folks were like boy it takes a lot of work to sift through sort of junk applications and people we will never hire. So why would we move them on in the process? And so, this is also that place in white dominant culture where we obsess over quantity rather than quality. And so that idea that you can reach out and get a really robust pool and it will include folks you don't know, but they will come from really reputable sources of people that you are now in network with, right? And that could be true when it's a national search, that could be true when you're looking to expand your pool across industry because you're looking for different perspective, that could be true if somebody has a different issue expertise or regional expertise than you have right? And so we also think organizing takes a level of cultural humility that's really important, saying I'm certain I don't know people who fill in the blank, who live in blank, but I do know you and I have reason to believe because you went to grad school there, because you used to have this job, because I know who your spouse is, that you might know somebody there. And so the number of times Alfonso and I, I swear to God Rusty, get asked like where's the super top secret list so I can just like get two candidates of color. I'm like I'm sorry. Do you think there's just like a list for only white people? Like how silly does that sound when you actually hear it? Like there's a newsletter or something that goes out. We're really clear that once you get good at the Hiring Revolution process it's a faster and less laborious than the current way folks are hiring. So, often times, folks will say, isn't it a lot of work to send like six separate emails? It's a lot less work than sifting through 200 applications of people I'm never going to hire, right? So, you're going to do the work at some point, do you want to do it on the front end where you're getting quality or do you want to do it on the back end when you're in a panic place saying hey we have to make this hired by May 5th, and we don't feel good about our finalists pool, but we're going to pick one of them anyways and it's not going to work out. So it's just prioritizing where you're going to put your energy and effort since you have to put it somewhere anyways.

RUSTY: [00:41:02]

Right, so you can either put it up front on quality or put it at the end when you have too much quantity and not enough quality or not enough right fit anyway. Okay. So, You've done the work before the work, we've started the search. What equity issues should leaders consider as they design and execute their interviewing and hiring processes.

ALFONSO: So, there's a couple of really important pieces where the train kind of falls off the tracks for orgs that we've seen try to implement the Hiring Revolution. One is trying to involve everybody because we somehow think that's inclusive or democratic, so we've conflated a lot of people involved with we're going to somehow make a more inclusive, unbiased or equitable choice. Here's what's true, one person alone can make a racist or sexist choice and a bunch of people together can make racist and sexist choices. So **more people meeting the candidate doesn't mean you're less likely to make a racist or sexist choice in the process.** So we've talked about the tools in the book, **there's 21 Hiring Revolution templates, tools and resources, they're all available in PDF for free on the hiringrevolutionbook.com website.** So one of the most important (well they're all really important) but it's incredibly important that you don't skip the

hiring helpers worksheet which lets you say who's around, for what reason, when and why. Because too often I was a part of a candidate meet and greet, so then I decide I'm a fully voting member of the management team that's going to decide. So we don't tell people why they're around so that everybody thinks I'm a deciding voice or vote when, oh, that was just for people to get a sense of who's around here, it wasn't about the rest of the staff deciding. So who's around, when, why, how, what do they do.

The other piece and Trina already talked about it, which is we have to stop the pageants. We have in the nonprofit space especially decided that we are going to put people through a gauntlet of activities, to put on a show to show how much they care. And we've gotten really far afield from activities that help us to understand is this person ready, willing and able to do this job. If the activity doesn't answer, get us more information about are they ready, willing and able to do this job? Then cut it. If you already have an answer to something, don't do it again. And definitely don't start from: well, we should certainly have three rounds, a phone screen, an interview with HR and then an interview with the hiring manager. I don't know why, so think really clearly about your hiring helpers. And then cut out the stuff that is truly pageantry that is about performance and not about understanding someone's capability. There's too much that preferences bombastic front of the room self-promoting leadership. There's too much that reinforces extroversion as a skill set that we think is up that should be a part of every job. There's too much that relies on people being likable or relatable. And if we keep those things in, **if it becomes a popularity contest, white folks and men are going to win the contest every time** because we have proof right now that the winners of contests like that are, primarily white folks, and masculine presenting folks.

TRINA: [00:44:39]

And **one of the things about interviewing that we try to help folks organize their thoughts around is past, present and future.** We say pretty early on in the interview process you will get yourself to a candidate pool of people who could all now do the job. So, our finalists, let's say it's three people, let's say, it's six people, I don't know, but our finalists pool. We are now done interviewing about qualifications because these folks, we have decided through our rubric, are qualified, they're all qualified different because someone's 28 years old and somebody's 48 years old, and somebody's worked in this industry before and somebody hasn't, and somebody is from St. Louis. and somebody's from Ghana. So everybody's different but they're adults, they're grown, they understand what the job is. You understand what they can do, they could all do it, they would just do it differently. So for us, **really solid interviewing should be about getting to know somebody's approach, their approach to problem solving, their approach to handling conflict, their approach to raising money if that's part of the job, their approach to rigorously researching and embracing new technology. It depends on what the job is.**

And so, way too often, we have noticed that interview questions are like 90% about the past. So, what have I already done, what can I prove? Well, here's what we know. Different cultural communities will or won't (quote unquote) take credit for whole things when they were part of a process, not like the lone ranger in a process, right? Women and people of color are absolutely

underpaid and under promoted. So it's really likely that we have hit all sorts of barriers. So if you're just looking to me to prove that someone else has already found me impressive. I've been an executive director twice, somebody had to let me take a shot at it the first time, I was as ready as I could be without having done the job, somebody had to actually give them the opportunity to do the job.

So we think, past present and future **so past, what is it that you want to know about what they know how to do and can you divorce how they learned it from how good they are at it.** So move from the arbitrary stuff of like five to seven years of management. I might have managed for seven years and been like bad at it the whole time. So what do you need to know about what I've already done? Great. **Present, what given my career and given sort of my stage in life, my interest in learning, trying, practicing, doing, doing at a different scale, based on what's going on with your strategic plan, your budget, shortfall, like whatever is happening for the organization.** What is it that you're going to need presently so the next three to five years. And then future, do not be asking people where they see themselves in 10 years. None of us know, we might have some goals, but if the last five years told us anything, it's that there's a lot of surprises. So **future could really be about energy, excitement and goals around management, goals around content creation, goals around building and running a campaign to fruition,** like, okay, right, but like spread it out so it's not just show me in the past how other people have already liked you versus **what you have done, what you are doing, what you could do.**

RUSTY: [00:48:05]

It's great, none of us knows, that's for damn sure. Even like what do you want your next job after this to look like, you know, like in 3 years where do you want to be headed kind of thing, it's an exciting thing to ask someone because it stops that whole thing about, which I think you've talked about on your podcast, about pretending they're going to be here forever or in this job forever. But actually acknowledging that this may be a stop on a journey that takes them elsewhere as well. So I don't know. I think about that as well as part of that future. I like that, you know, why are we spending all this time on asking people to sell themselves when not everyone is comfortable selling themselves or is good at selling themselves, but may have a lot of value, nevertheless.

TRINA: [00:48:53]

And also like here in Minnesota, we live near a lot of folks who come from cultural communities where humility is the highest held value. So it's not actually about comfort or discomfort, it's that in their culture it is inappropriate, it is actually a sign of arrogance and it is a sign of not paying attention if you are pretending you know more than you do, If you are inflating your sense of self, if you are speaking as though you believe you are better than other people. So, again, it's not just you know are people good or bad at selling themselves, it's for whom is that even appropriate from a cultural or values perspective.

It is that reminder that Alfonso walks us through it in the book, it's not if we each have bias it's how and where our bias shows up, right? So like in an interview process, if we get real judge because somebody only answered the questions we asked them versus someone then went on



to say more and more and more until you cut them off. Okay, what does that mean? Who decides, right? How do we rank order somebody's passion or talent or excitement. But if you picture, I don't know, a 32 year old asian woman who's 5'1 and a 46 year old white man who's 6'4 it's going to hit different in an interview, their voices will sound different, their volume will sound different, their presence will be different even on video. So we really say imagine a lot of kinds of bodies, because if you can't hear through sort of people's affect into the essence of what they're sharing, you are going to walk away with that weird feeling of like, I don't know, he just kind of like had leadership vibe about him, then like oh, isn't it interesting who keeps getting filtered out of different parts of the process and who in interviews we straight up find impressive and less impressive.

RUSTY: [00:50:50]

I wanted to ask you about first of all, you mentioned yourselves as like equity consultancy. Do you do search when you're engaging groups on these issues? Is it more helping them on the internal side, is it any part of this process? I'm just curious, I'm sure people will want to know.

ALFONSO: Yeah, good question. So to our friends in the search industry we are not coming for your jobs. We don't do searches, we don't run searches. So **our work with teams is often to help them deeply investigate and interrogate their organizational culture and ask in what ways does our organizational culture reinforce racism and sexism**. So that could be our grant-making strategy, it could be how we run the staff meetings, it could be how we do hiring. **The places where we've intersected with search has been really exciting and really powerful**. Some of what we're hearing from our search firm friends is that **the book actually creates permission for organizations to do stuff that search executives have been asking orgs to do for years**. So we don't assume that questions we're posing in the book are not questions search firms haven't asked, we also know that **search firms' ability to run a racially or gender equitable process has a direct correlation to whether or not the client is ready to run an equitable process**, right? So search firms want this, search firms are ready to do this, search firms can do this but they need the permission from the clients.

And so we've had some really beautiful and lovely experiences where we're sort of sandwiching, where we're working with like a board or an exec committee or a search committee on some training and some coaching to get ready to bring their search firm in. And then we work at the same time with the search firm, and then afterwards we support the exec team or the board to onboard that person. And so it wasn't by design any of those times, it just happened. Like the staff were saying, hey we want to do some equity training at the same time a major executive transition was happening. So we've had some really, just like I said beautiful sort of passed the baton, back and forth relationships with search firms.

RUSTY: That's fantastic. It seems like a very good nexus of skills and processes happening with that. Because as I was going to ask you about any distinctions between sort of using a search firm to do these searches versus doing, you know, an internally managed search and I think there's such an interesting dynamic too about search firms that are relationship based themselves, or network-based, and what the limitations or opportunities are within those kind of

search. I think of them sometimes as gatekeeping kind of agencies, in a sense, I mean they can be gatekeeping or gate opening. So I was just, yeah, curious for your thoughts on search firms versus no, and how do you pick a search firm and any of that.

TRINA: [00:53:55]

We write about it in the book and we write about it from personal experience. So as a former executive director I have been hired because a search firm came out to get me and include me in a pool, right? So I talked about from the candidates perspective, **the benefits and challenges of working with the search firm, and then the benefits and challenges of working just internally with folks.** For Alfonso and I, **it is not a hard yes or a hard no. It's entirely functional, is your team big enough? Does it have enough resources?** Is it parking enough time and cash to do the search? So if for some reason you are big enough to do it yourself, saying that you are sort of, you know, looking for a national search, you are looking for a candidate pool that you know, the first round is 36 to 100 people. So, based on what it is you're trying to achieve, do you have that in-house first of all, so it's functional. And then do you have the relationships.

So like Alfonso said in RPDR, **oftentimes the function of search firms is to introduce you to people you couldn't have found on your own.** So that's the point, their job is not to hire for you, their job is to get you people, right? And so we talked about how oftentimes we will partner with like the chair of the search team internally, the HR person internally, and then the search firm person to be able to say, okay how is this group functioning as a team and are we clear about everybody's distinct roles. So that idea again that, you know, mostly search firms are being asked, required or demanded, saying we need you to get us a candidate pool that's 60% people of color, that's at least 45% percent women, so that idea that search firms are being asked to do a lot, but then again on the backside folks are pretty trepidatious about having complex conversations around money, around moving reimbursements, around benefits. And so, to also have sort of a third party to be able to talk to about some of the complex things that is not necessarily what for any reason, your board chair or your committee chair would be practiced at having those conversations at all. So, **it's just about what do you have in house and where is their value externally that you could borrow from.**

RUSTY: Great! So we've gone through sort of the hiring process. Now we've got our people or person. A few episodes back this season we had on Mala Nagarajan of Vega Mala Consulting, it was season 4 episode 6, and Mala shared her work and ideas on embedding equity in non-profit compensation. So, one of her recommendations is to no longer negotiate salary with incoming employees, but to set compensation based on the roll itself. So I was curious what you all think about and you already mentioned, sort of figuring out what the dollar amount for this role makes sense, but if you had any further thoughts on that question around negotiation and equity.

ALFONSO: It's a tricky one. I will say there's what I wish could be true and then what the current reality is. So we are people who 100% advocate for posting an amount in the job description, like full stop, post the salary amount and we are against not telling people that you could be open to going higher. So what's true, is we always when we in the past have hired, we

have posted the amount and we've said to our candidates we have a budget that we could go higher but no more higher than like 10 to 20 thousand dollars, right? So can it be arranged? Can it be the conversation starts at X? I think the challenge with we won't negotiate if we can is a couple of things. We won't negotiate if we can presume we know better and best about what someone's current financial or economic standpoint is. So we may meet someone who we think we would absolutely love for them to join the team and we do have another ten thousand dollars and they need seven more to be able to say yes. I would hate us to have that miss, so how can we communicate that in the most transparent but also as flexible and organic way as possible. So I think we should all start experimenting with some language like we anticipate in between 95 and 115 for this job, we have budget to go as high as 125, we don't plan to spend that full 125 necessarily but we don't want 115 to stop you from applying, right? So it's like a lot of words, but it's more specific and it's more honest.

So, I think if we're going to be in a position to negotiate, we should communicate it outwardly in some way, and there could be really good reasons why we start someone lower or in the middle of their range. For example, we've got candidates who've done this once, twice and 0 times. We want to start you in the middle of the range because it's your first time doing this and we want you to actually have substantive raises over the course of three years. So we don't want to start you at the top of your range knowing it's your first time and we won't have a financial way of acknowledging your growth in learning this job. So also being able to just say and I think for me what's behind it is like not making people do the guesswork, so put as much as we can out there but also talk about the places where we're flexible and ultimately the goal should not be to get a deal.

What we know is true is that people of color, women and trans folks are historically underpaid. And so, for trying to get a deal where again we're getting the deal on the backs of worker exploitation, where we say we're okay with the fact that you've been historically underpaid, we're so glad to save a little bit of money on your historic underpayment.

TRINA: There's a section in the book too, near the end, where we talk about identity and negotiation and we talk about identity and benefits, right? And so, when we think about total compensation packages, part of what often needs to be up or open whether you think of that as flexibility or negotiation is up to you. But as Alfonso said, there are some very real and well-documented realities, like people swimming in credit card debt, medical debt, student loan debt, folks who are in the sandwich generation needing to take care of young folks and elders, folks who have historically been kept out of the housing market, folks who have been historically kept out of the ability to pay for advanced degrees. And so that idea that we have to have a this is how much I get paid number. But oftentimes, there's some negotiation there, for folks to say yeah, what I care more about is I need an additional week of vacation, so I would adjust my compensation for that. Or what is your professional development look like, I'm trying to get a side certification at the same time, could that be part of my compensation? My kid needs to be picked up every day at 3:45 and you say work doesn't end until 5... So there's no reason to be rigid just because, but to say, okay great, if now I'm imagining and you're actually imagining us working together, here's sort of the range of how we do that. What do you need? Is

it access to a particular set of prescription drugs because somebody in your family is diabetic, great.

Again in a US capitalist economy, we rely on our workplaces for a lot more than just the money that comes in our check. And so, to be able to have an open conversation, our recommendation in the book is often to have that confidentiality with an HR person rather than always be talking to who might be your manager, because there's no reason to believe that your manager if you're like a program tech is an expert in your HSA, so depending on the full compensation package, just be open to receiving and believing when somebody tells you they need something in order to say yes.

RUSTY: So we've gone through part 1, part 2, and then we've just touched on the hiring negotiations, which is part 3. Do you want to say anything about the responsibility of revolutionaries?

ALFONSO: Well, we close the book with a love letter to all of you revolutionaries, and I think you'll have to get a copy of the book to read that love letter, but the important piece that we'll leave you with relative to the responsibility of revolutionaries is: **as revolutionaries we don't wait for someone else to give us permission**. Especially in nonprofits it can be really easy to point at the executive team, the ED, the board, the funders, and we've done all of those things here in this interview today. But what's true about the revolution is there are more things that any one of us who touches a hiring process are responsible for that we don't ask permission for. So, don't wait for somebody else to say, hey, Rusty, I think it's a good idea that you engage in the Hiring Revolution. **Look at the aspects of the process that are yours, that you get to do first draft of or that you get to implement and start doing them different immediately**.

RUSTY: The book is the Hiring Revolution. Can you remind people where they can get it?

TRINA: [01:03:40]

Absolutely **hiringrevolutionbook.com** book website, you can order copies directly from the website. So that would be great. Also, if you're somebody that prefers to listen, we have done the audio recording so you can listen to it on **Audible**. And for folks who prefer an e-reader, you can also download it on **Kindle**, so really anywhere, you get books. [hiringrevolutionbook.com](http://hiringrevolutionbook.com) is the easiest place to place your order.

RUSTY: [01:04:12]

And you all have some other things going on. You've got a podcast, you've got a Hiring Revolution Retreat going. Can you, want to say anything about either of those?

ALFONSO: Yeah. So, **we have four seasons of our podcast Behave**, Behave is all about workplace culture behavior, equity and inclusion and the easiest way to listen, it's not sequential. So Trina and I will pick a topic about workplace equity and go all in on it. If you head to **teamdynamicsmn.com**, and then search our blog for like keywords, like conflict, transparency, accountability, different episodes will pop up and you can listen to them there, so

teamdynamicsmn.com. And **this week, we're wrapping our first ever in person Hiring Revolution Retreat**. We're really excited, we'll probably post on our blog a little bit about that experience. We're doing a deep dive for a couple of workplaces and so we'll have stories to share about this first cohort of revolutionaries who are ready to take the full revolution into their HR teams.

RUSTY: That is fantastic. So many ways to get the content and so much that also you've made available free in terms of these tools and resources on your website as well. So thank you so much for sharing all of it with our listeners today and thank you for all the work you're doing in the world.

ALFONSO: Thanks for having us Rusty.

TRINA: Thank you.

NEXT EPISODE TEASER [01:05:38]

I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Trina and Alfonso and I hope you find the Hiring Revolution resources useful in your work. If you don't need them, share them with someone you know who does. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for our next episode with Katie Tetrault of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We'll be picking up our special series Smashing the Overhead Myth Once and for All and in this installment of the series we'll be exploring how the Annie E. Casey Foundation transformed their practices around nonprofit, overhead and indirect costs with an eye for equity. Stay tuned.

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