



A PODCAST WITH RUSTY STAHL | S6 EP2

## How Funders Can Support Nonprofit Workers in the Age of Burnout - Part 2

WITH

Jennifer Roller  
*The Raymond John Wean Foundation*



### INTRO (00:04)

Welcome to the Fund the People Podcast! I'm your host, Rusty Stahl. I'm President and CEO of Fund the People, where our mission is to maximize investment in America's nonprofit workforce. We give funders and nonprofits cutting edge ideas, research and tools to help drive equity, effectiveness, and endurance in the social sector. So let's start the show!

### RUSTY [00:34:00]

Welcome to the podcast folks, today's episode offers a view into how foundation executives can integrate talent-investing deeply into their philanthropic approach and how they can work with grantees in a practical fashion to ensure that they are motivated, incentivized and have the funding they need to pay appropriate thriving wages. **This is the second in our special three-part series based on Fund the People's presentation at the Center for Effective Philanthropy Conference in Fall of 2023.** Our session focused on how funders can support nonprofit workers in the age of burnout.

These episodes feature our panelists, three incredible women of color foundation CEOs. Our previous episode featured Jamie Allison from the Haas Sr. Fund. **Today, we're talking with Jennifer Roller of the Wean Foundation** and next week features Desiree Flores of the General Service Foundation. Each of their episodes documents a unique and important approach to talent-investing.

So let me give you a little bit about Jennifer Roller and her relationship to Fund the People and then we'll get going. **Jennifer Roller serves as president of the Raymond John Wean Foundation, a private foundation which seeks to empower residents in creating a healthy, equitable and economically stable Mahoning Valley in Ohio.** A lifelong resident of Youngstown, she earned a bachelor's and master's degrees from Youngstown State University.

Before joining the foundation Jennifer served as the Director of Upward Bound at her alma mater Youngstown State University. Joining the wean foundation in 2007, Jennifer served in various capacities before assuming her current role as president in 2014. Jennifer leads the foundation's efforts in building and strengthening strategic partnerships with Mahoning Valley stakeholders. She promotes courageous conversations and resident led approaches to social problems. Under Jennifer's leadership the foundation has moved race, equity and inclusion to the center of its work with an explicit purpose of creating an equitable Mahoning Valley.

Now, Jennifer, I want to tell you, is one of the foundation CEOs who has really taken a consistent interest in the idea of talent-investing over many years, well before the pandemic and this current era of burnout. She and one of her colleagues from the Wean Foundation participated in two of Fund The People's National Funders Retreats: one in New York in 2016 at the Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund; and the other in California in 2017 at a retreat center called Cavallo Point. In Spring 2023 Jennifer participated in Fund The People's pilot cohort, testing out our online courses for the Funding That Works Academy. And in fall of 2023 Jennifer was a panelist on our session at the Center for Effective Philanthropy Conference. Moreover the Wean Foundation became one of the first foundations to officially be a dues-paying institutional member of Fund The People so, thank you Jennifer and Wean Foundation for your leading edge practices on talent-investing. I know you're going to enjoy it. So here's my conversation with Jennifer Roller.

(music)

RUSTY: Jennifer Roller, thank you for being here on the Fund The People podcast with me.

JENNIFER [00:04:20]

And thank you for having me Rusty, glad to be here.

RUSTY [00:04:24]

Yeah. I'm excited to have you on and excited to invite you to share a little bit about yourself before we dive into our topic at hand. So I always ask guests here to share what motivated you or sparked you to get involved with nonprofit and social change work.

JENNIFER [00:04:46]

Yeah, thank you for that. I put it in two categories, one is like what happened and then what I'd know to have happened now later, in reflection. So what happened is I went to undergrad and I thought (and bear with me, 1986, 18 years old), I thought that if I got a degree in Psychology, I would be a psychologist and I learned otherwise whilst I was there. And so I ended up getting jobs at family services and getting a social work degree and just having some initial exposure that way. And seeing some things right away like, oh if I ever was in charge or I was ever, you know, responsible for this, it would look differently. And then, there was a woman, Mrs. Barrett, and she was the community social worker at the housing project where I grew up and she just built family. So whatever, somebody needed to go to camp, somebody was having trouble with the judicial system, somebody needed food, whatever it was, she built families. And so it was years later when I was asked to speak at her Memorial, and I'm thinking wait, this is how a lot of

this happened not just for me, but for other people who spoke. I was like, I wasn't the only one, there was like countless social workers and case managers and case workers in the space, that I think she had her own little Mrs. Barrett School of nonprofit leadership.

RUSTY [00:06:18]

Wow, that's incredible, and I see what you mean about looking back and seeing those earlier influences in hindsight. Which does happen when you go to someone's Memorial too, you kind of see all the things they did. So tell us then, you know, a little bit about your career journey. You got this social work degree, what you did then and how do you end up in philanthropy? Give us a, give us the short version of your life.

JENNIFER [00:06:49]

So I will just build on Mrs. Barrett, right? For some time I thought I was just here, there and everywhere, but there's this constant theme when I realized what my purpose is, which is being a resource. And for me, I've really narrowed it down, like what it means to be a resource and for whom. And it's just like these traditionally under-resourced people, whether it be students, I worked at Youngstown State University, I was a foster care director of a program, I worked at General Motors as a foreman in the paint department, which is a whole nother story and a whole other lifetime... But even that work, when I started to work with students, I would tell them everyone needs a job where you make a lot of money and you're really unhappy, because no one could ever tell you that money isn't everything, you really have to experience it. And so, while of course we needed to sustain, in terms of joy and happiness it isn't everything. And so I'm glad I had that experience early on.

I landed at YSU, leaving General Motors, took half the pay but I found my people in higher education. And so I worked there, but again some of my early work started to bubble up with working with family. So connecting them to systems whether it be Social Security or jobs and Family Services or just the local pantry, that was still so much a part of my work there. And so I really loved it and I stayed there for about a decade because I also found -I was moving quite a bit before I came to Youngstown State- that if I work at a university or somewhere like that, you could switch departments, but then it didn't mess with your PRS or your retirement or your vacation time, like all of those things stayed intact. So I was quite strategic that those things were important to me and I needed a variety and I think it really helped to get me to the place where... At the time the foundation was very insular and they hired their first president, who I met through my mentor, and he wasn't from the area and was looking to engage the community in a way that the foundation hadn't before. So all of those experiences that I had had previously: I was born and raised in this town and I know a lot of people and a lot of people know me, like that was my super power when it came to my now grand predecessor. And how I could really use that as an advantage of where the foundation was trying to go. And so a lot of times for me, people (and I think I may have shared this with you before) like, they look at when you work at a foundation in that it gives you the credibility in a community, but quite honestly the way the foundation does its work with wanting to work with residents, having resident-centered approaches, I give the foundation credibility, because I'm one of their own.

RUSTY [00:09:54]

Wow, so you met the president, now you are the president.

JENNIFER [00:10:01]

Yeah, and that was such a wonderful thing. Like, to this day, sometimes there are like pictures on my phone of us at events or something will just pop up in my calendar and I'll just shoot him a text or something. And so for him to give me a shot, I didn't know this thing they call philanthropy. I was not familiar, the work I did in the University was grant funded through the US Department of Education and then I had some access to funds through a local trust, but that was the extent of my understanding or knowledge of philanthropy in the valley, was this trust. And like I said, even then I didn't call it that, and him giving me the opportunity, like seeing that in me, changed the trajectory of my career. I very likely would have retired from a very safe and meaningful university job.

RUSTY [00:10:57]

So Jennifer, tell us about the Raymond John Wean Foundation. Where did it come from, who is Raymond John Wean, what kind of foundation is it and the scale of resources and staff and sort of, give us the basics.

JENNIFER [00:11:10]

Okay, great. So Raymond John Wayne Senior was an industrialist and he made his head of success in the flat rolled steel industry. And so he contributed to the Mahoning Valley, or specifically Warren, because this is where he had a success. And similar to a lot of family foundation, when the family moved to different geography, the funding followed them. That was the case until like 2006, the foundation undertook a strategic planning process with Policy Link and at that time 95% of the funds went elsewhere and 5% was in the Mahoning Valley, and after that planning process it completely flipped on its head, 95% here locally and 5% beyond. And just a couple years ago we phased out the Legacy Grants which were those grants that were made in honor of the founder and so **now 100% of the funds are distributed here in the Mahoning Valley, specifically within the areas of Warren and Youngstown, Ohio. The endowment is just over 80 million dollars and our contributions to the community whether it be grant-making or capacity building is about four and a half million dollars a year.**

RUSTY [00:12:32]

Great. And can you tell me, you're sitting in front of an amazing painting, I believe of a factory, can you tell us what that is?

JENNIFER[00:12:41]

So because, it is a steel factory (I'm turning around looking at and trying to talk about it) I only noticed recently that this factory in this painting is on fire. So all of the art, and you'll have to visit sometime, all of the art in the building is commissioned through the Butler Art, Butler Museum of American Art here locally and it's throughout the building, all of our halls, all of our conference

rooms and so yeah, it's just a way for us again to acknowledge the contributions and we're a steel town still, so, it's kind of cool.

RUSTY [00:13:20]

Many of our listeners may not be familiar with where you are and where you're from. So tell us about Warren and Youngstown in Ohio's Mahoning Valley.

JENNIFER [00:13:29]

Yeah, in Ohio's Mahoning Valley. So, the valley encompasses quite a few counties and so there's Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana and some on the periphery. But all our work is done primarily in Warren and Youngstown. So, several decades (I used to say several, but I guess now it's like four decades) of tremendous disinvestment in the urban areas of these two communities. And so right now, you know, trying to think population-wise, Youngstown is a city of about 60,000, just over 60,000 people. It was a city built for a quarter of a million. And Warren has 39,000 people. And so over these decades it has become older, smaller and poorer. The median income for both is just thirty thousand, thirty thousand five hundred dollars, which is more than 100% less than the median income for the state. So it is a community that is in a lot of ways distressed, we try to really build on the assets, in terms of there's a strong and rich cultural community in both cities. There's been a lot of investment in terms of making sure those communities stay alive. They're the best people, sometimes I say, that you've never meet, because it's really small and it sounds very small towny, it sounds like everybody should know everyone. And I'm always amazed, I'll go places and go: I don't know you, like how do you not? But it's so, I think it's a great community. There's some tension, if I can say, between the two cities even though we're so close. You don't use them interchangeably. You don't apply a program that you would in one in the other, folks take that very personally. When the foundation first hired me and they're like, she's from Youngstown, like it was a million miles away, because we're in Warren, downtown Warren, and folks would ask me do I drive in every day. And there's a funny story. I was doing grassroots work with one of our organizations we were funding, and the older woman who was running everything, wanted me to do a garden. So it's like fine, we'll do a garden there, but they would like basically pick on me, like oh, of course, she doesn't know how to do that, she's from Youngstown or I would pull the green completely out of the ground, like, oh honey, you're just supposed to pinch it off. Leave her alone, she's from Youngstown. So there's that fun little rivalry between the two cities, but we do our best to bridge gaps.

RUSTY [00:16:05]

It's always that way, right? the closer you are to another Community or another group the more they seem like your archenemy.

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RUSTY: You know, you and I have known each other for a while now, and I was thinking back and I wanted to recognize you and thank you for being one of the foundation CEOs who has taken a consistent interest in the idea of talent-investing over many years now, and way before the pandemic and this sort of current age of burnout and crisis that we've been in. So I was thinking back, I remember you and a colleague from Wean Foundation participated in a Fund The People gathering in New York State in 2016, then you came to one we did in California in 2017. Just earlier in 2023 you participated in our pilot cohort for the Funding that Works Academy. You just became our first official institutional member of Fund The People since we opened up the idea of a membership for funders here. So, very thankful for that and excited that your foundation is the first one. And then you and I were on a panel together that Fund The People put together at the Center for Effective Philanthropy Conference in early November of 2023. So, I feel like we've kind of been on this journey a bit together and I was curious to hear what motivated you to participate in all those programs, and you're not based on the East Coast or West Coast. So you had to travel in both directions to participate in those initial gatherings, and I was curious to hear, you know, what value you took from those and how you've used those resources that we tried to offer to develop your own kind of stance around talent-investing in your own practice as a foundation president.

JENNIFER [00:19:08]

Yeah. Well one, I'm so happy, I didn't know that as far as being the first institutional member and like, we could get a plaque for that, my board meeting is next week so I want to make sure I add that in there. You know, see how things aren't by chance or coincidence. We had a woman here serving, she was covering a maternity leave and she reached out to you all and there was something coming up, the training, right? the first one. She was gone by the time it happened. So we then reached out, because her emails of course came to me after and we're like, well she's not here, but can we go and you guys are like, yeah, come on. We didn't know about you. And so, I need to send her a note, her name is Melissa, because it has been quite the journey. We came and I think it was so well organized. I mean, I think the amount of people... we did drive but it was just like New York, so it wasn't too bad for us, like five or six hours, but there were foundation executives that we didn't know so there was an opportunity for us to network and just peer learn on that level, without all the programming. And then it was so intentional, we learned as we went, there were opportunities to ask questions and I think at the time there was so much to be done, I was new as president, to be able to do it in real time versus go to a conference and then you come back, but your work is waiting for you, so you just have to put your conference stuff in the folder and put it in a drawer, put it away. Like we had enough that we worked on while we were there.

I also remember us having conversations with nonprofit leaders who gave us a first-hand, like they didn't have anything to risk because we weren't their funder and it was at the beginning of my journey as president. So I think you guys caught us in the nick of time to really shape some of the thinking as we were learning it. So I feel like in a lot of ways learned the right way to go from the start rather than having to undo some edits. So then when we came to California and like that was a no-brainer, like of course we're going back. I remember seeing the cohort for the training that we did in the summer. I think I've reached out to you directly to like, we want to be a part of this conversation. And again, I think for us it's the practice of being able to do it versus yes, podcasts are great, webinars and the like, but there for a moment, the 990 little snapshot. And for this work that we get to do with you all at Fund The People you apply it, and then you know take what you can use and leave the rest and I think that's the approach we've taken and it's worked really well for us.

RUSTY [00:22:07]

That's great. The sense I got looking also on your website at the race equity and inclusion journey that the foundation's been on, it's like you have that timeline and you show we participated in this training ,we supported this training, we helped these people get into this training. It was clearly a learning, intentional learning participation process as well as an internal change management kind of process.

So, you coming to those gatherings, like reaching out, be like, how can we participate, it reflected that same, what I sort of gathered from your website of that like learning approach to leading and to changing a foundation along the way, which is amazing.

JENNIFER [00:22:51]

Thank you for that. **I think we do like we say, we walk it like we talk it. And I think it's so important. I think it when we're working with our nonprofit partners, it gives us a level too of not just like we know already, but like it doesn't always go right, no matter what we're doing. Like our leadership journey, our race equity journey, the talent-investing. It doesn't always go right. A lot of it is experimentation and we're learning as we grow.** When we do it the way that we have thought, it seems to me it gives us a lot of empathy and compassion from when we're asking them to do the same thing. Our nonprofit partners that is.

And so I remember one of our grantees we were asking about a lot of questions because we wanted to see where we could show up in capacity building and we asked about a succession plan and he brought his application and he had left it blank and he said what do you want me to say here? And I said, I want you to answer the question. He's like but if we haven't, what should I write down? Write down the truth. But, he was like, I know that that's not the answer you want and I don't want to put that on paper, so can you give me a different... And I was like, here's the thing, we don't have one either and I know how many times we've tried, and I know that how challenging it can be, and other things become more important, and it gets put on the back burner and you do something else that you know how to do and that you can do relatively quickly or efficiently. And I think if we had tried so hard and had failed a couple times too, was like well, you need one! You know, might be the approach that a funder would take, well get it done and then let's talk about it. It's like, no, we've been there, we know how challenging it can

be, here's what you might try. We can keep having the conversation versus shutting folks down. And that's true, like I said, race equity, learning, leadership, anything that we have made a priority in our work, just how we've done it, and it's kind of hard to not do it that way when you can't advance, you're like, all right well do that again, rinse and repeat, I guess is what they they say...

RUSTY [00:25:03]

Right. Well, there's so much there, so many threads we could pull. I'm not sure I heard this or not. But did you say that gentleman was responding to a question about succession planning that was part of your grant application? So, you're asking those kinds of questions.

JENNIFER [00:25:23]

Yeah, we're trying to do... And again like **this learning, some of the stuff we try work, some stuff doesn't stick. But the training, the development, I can't tell you enough. Even this summer on those calls, the cohort, I would walk away and something would have sparked a thought and then it's a part of our next staff meeting or we get more information and we put it on the board agenda. Let's just see where it goes.** So I think any opportunity that we can continue to take I keep saying the same thing because it's true: just learn as we grow. It's so important because there is, there's a lot to be done and there's so many ways you can go, so just do something.

RUSTY [00:26:08]

That's great, that's so great. So as I kind of referenced early, we have the privilege at Fund The People to collaborate with the Center for Effective Philanthropy to put on this session at their conference, right over Halloween, about how can funders invest in nonprofit workers during this age of burnout and crisis. I got to moderate and you were one of the presenters, you know, you shared kind of a beautiful and brief synopsis of what talent-investing looks like at the Wean Foundation, and I wondered if you would share a little bit of that approach with our listeners and even if you want the story that you shared in that case about someone's salary or compensation package...

JENNIFER [00:26:55]

I would say that, just like we just noted, there's so many ways one could go when working with nonprofit groups and I will elevate that to like partnership. **We fund less groups now for more significant amounts and I think it allows us to do a better job as a staff to get to know folks.** We have two levels. We have community investment grants over 5,000 and those up to 5,000 which are our grassroots grants. And at one point it was very robust the numbers of grants, but I also found myself out in the community and I'm like: hey you! because quite honestly it was becoming so many I didn't know people, and then when they would start to talk about their work, it would bring it back and then I can have a conversation. And that's not the way we want to do our work. Because we also know that so much of it is rooted in trust and to be able to have conversations with people, with folks ongoing helps us know what kind of assessments we need to make in terms of capacity building or future funding or what have you.



So I'll start with that, but then **as we go into how we then apply what we're learning, equitable compensation kept coming to the forefront** and I think what I shared when we were together, one when I was trained in this work, we were looking at 990s with scrutiny. How much does that person make and for how many years and that's just the way I was taught almost 20 years ago. Now, I understand we're looking at things like this is not okay and **somebody has to do something. And what I'm learning is that somebody is us.**

And so in this particular case there is a nonprofit that the foundation had funded significantly over years, multi-year general operating funds, and it came to our attention that the executive director was grossly underpaid and I didn't know, again at that time what's my role in this? Am I allowed to say something? Who do I say it to, how do I advocate for this leader? And so I took that conversation up of course with him first and then we brought in the board chair to just have conversations. And we framed it, or I did with his assistants, that it was less about this individual person, because of course we didn't want to jeopardize anything in that relationship, but it was about, it was putting the foundation's investment at risk. Because we all know what it costs if someone leaves and has to be replaced and the gap that it causes. And they were in favor, but I think what was really interesting about it, before we got to them being in favor and our being able to utilize funds to increase his salary, it was we already asked so much of the foundation. You already contribute so much. So if something has to be at a deficit they were willing to allow it to be the salary of this executive director and we're like, no, that's not how this works either.

**So as a part of that journey, like one of the things we do internally, we do our own three year salary study at least every three years. And so that's something that I adopted and started to practice here at the foundation and now it is catching on with some of our nonprofit partners, and so we can make sure that we're keeping pace with the market and when we're not close those gaps** before we're trying to fund an organization, which we did last fall, that folks were literally being made \$11 an hour. And so the first grant out the gate was to bring everyone's compensation up to at least a livable wage, and then we could use other funds around programming and projects and the like.

So that's a lot, I know. But how we're trying to do the work is again, I'm going to just keep going back to the cohort, we believe and we are doing something, and we're doing things right and in order, and it's still not enough. So when we start with that leader, yeah that's a good start, then what else? And so I think I shared that we have a fellowship at the local University and we learned that those students were being paid \$12 an hour. We also admit that that's an issue of racial equity. We know that black and brown students typically can't afford to take a paidless or low-paying fellowship or internship and so they won't apply, or for the time period that they're involved they can't leave a well-paying or even a decent paying job to only do this for the summer. So we worked with the administration, got those increased, but not only did our program to better the students who participated, it caught on with another foundation. That foundation matched the Wean Foundation's hourly rate and then another fellowship within the School of Business matched both of ours. So it just is a matter of somebody go out of here, go out in front, and folks wanted to do the right thing. Now whether they wanted to do the right thing

or now it made it competitive for the students, I don't care. I don't care about your intentions behind it, but the rate being at the end of the day is what we all landed on.

RUSTY [00:32:37]

It might have been shame, it might have been competition, It might have been, oh, we can do that. We haven't paid any attention before...

JENNIFER [00:32:48]

So let's just land on how do we get there. Those are some examples. Last year, same thing, I think we try to elevate. Like last year and again, it's not just all true, it's altruism, but not true, right? So last year, you know as a foundation, we have to contribute 5% and we were falling short and so, let's come up with some ideas to do this differently or do it better. So we took all of our community investment grantees, those over 5,000 dollars, and we know that folks even though the pandemic is over, we know folks are still struggling in a lot of ways and so we just offer 10% additional funds at the end of the year. No one had to request it, you didn't have to fill out an application, there was no reporting, just apply this to mission-driven work and that was it. And so it was a big deal for us to do it. When we made the calls we were like, wait what? What is this? And with that enthusiasm from our board, was behind it 100%, I think someone even said like why didn't you think about this sooner? Well, that's a good thing, like you should've thought this years ago.

And so this year we're doing something similar. We've made the recommendation and we'll see what happens at board meeting. I'm encouraged that similar to that 10% this year, we have tweaked it, earmarked it for equitable compensation. Folks, we will ask that they report only because we want to learn from what they did and see if that is something that we can then do something with in future years. And then we, again I'm listening to the webinars, we tweaked it even further because I also now have a greater understanding of how smaller organizations still get the short end of the stick. And so this year we're doing it around equitable compensation and because there are a couple smaller nonprofits who were funded that will still look different for them. If you were funded, there were two smaller ones: 30 thousand and 70 thousand. Well 10% for equitable compensation isn't a whole bunch. So what we did for those two organizations, I put in a special request that they get 30 thousand dollars to do it, to just make it somewhat more equitable to our significant funding levels, for some of our partners, for the strategic partners in particular. Again, we're experimenting a lot.

RUSTY [00:35:18]

That's great. And I'm so glad you mentioned that not only you're focusing those extra dollars on equitable compensation, but also, shifting to some level of getting feedback on that, or some reporting back about what they did. Because I was saying to one of the other panelists who I interviewed for the show -Desiree Flores- that they don't ask for any reporting back on their healing justice supplemental grants. And we were talking about how the lack of stories and data, qualitative or quantitative data about the value of talent-investing efforts by funders is something that we've noticed here at Fund The People, the lack of the stories and data, which makes it harder to then make the case to other funders that they ought to be doing this.

So, the fact that you're going to be gathering some information I think, literally, would be so beneficial if that information, obviously without necessarily identifying organizations but in aggregate or, you know, some stories that are anonymized, stories of the impact of that, could be so useful. **There's a publication called Inside Philanthropy and there's a journalist, Dawn Wolfe, who's been covering the issue of compensation and how funders are or are not investing in non-profit pay and working conditions**, and she's looking for funders who she can highlight as sort of doing that intentionally. So, you know, you could actually share some of those stories perhaps with Dawn, or others, to get the word out to the field to your colleagues.

JENNIFER [00:37:10]

I would love that. I think that's so powerful, like being able to spread it. I was trying to think of the term, we have a young woman who just started working with us around our race equity and inclusion work. I was saying it about our impact report and it's really data-driven and I was like, I understand like we're just behind in terms of a true narrative, and she comes from academia, she just got her PhD, and she told me that it was called something. She's like, I would love to work with you all's communications folks because I think too often they're done in silos within an organization, and she got all excited yesterday on a call. So I'm going to give her this information too. And I think too for us, like to have them report out or share out, is another way we currently call it, which I love that term, like "share out", is I want them together in a space just really going in and hearing from one another, like again in ways that I have benefited and we didn't tell them what to do with it other than ear market for equitable compensation. But if you want to bring everybody up to scale or whatever you want to do, we want to learn from that and not be prescriptive, because it would only include the things that we can think about, and so where's the creativity and experimentation. Here's an opportunity, like you've been wanting to do this thing, so see if that, if this could also get you there.

What I also found, like when we were first thinking about whether we could suggest that, specially earmarking it for a purpose, my first thought was: is it responsible, like is that responsible for us to do it and is it something that can't be sustained? And I remember waking up the next day and my first thought was of course that's what old thinking, traditional, patriarchal, like you're all set, like all of those things that of course that's the kind of thinking, it was we can't do it because what would happen if we didn't do it again? How many great ideas get shut down because of that. And so when someone is trying to not just surviving, the actual worker at the organization, what if everything they wanted to do for their family was like we just can't do it. But somebody has to have some vision and creativity. it's a passion and enthusiasm around let's try this thing. And sometimes we've got to worry tomorrow about how we pay for it tomorrow and that probably isn't a popular approach in business and how you do your work. Sometimes it works too. So we're experimenting.

RUSTY [00:39:49]

No, I think that that is exactly, like getting over that hump of what: we're not going to do this every year, so if people raise salaries then what's going to happen next year, so you don't do anything. So nobody's salaries go... It's like this trap of thinking that stops funders from making

those investments. It's like nothing is sustainable if it never happens, right. But I do think that that is a major challenge that in my thinking, like people ask that question a lot. Like well, what if we do this once, you know, is there going to be a cliff for those salaries? And, could be, but if you're upfront about it and say like: plan to do this in a way where you're going to have to not just rely on us, but we can help at this initial stage. Or you know, just being I think, up front and enable people to make choices with their eyes open. But you're thinking there may help me and others unlock that kind of challenge.

JENNIFER [00:40:53]

It's similar to me, like our race equity and inclusion journey. Like initially I thought folks, I don't know if I thought this initially, but I came to think, I think you're asking me these questions to shut me up or shut me down. So how will you measure this, how will you know it was successful, what will you do next? Like all of those things just get you go to further further back into the corner and be quiet. And then some things are just saying I don't know either, so let's figure it out and find out together. And I think so many things like whether it's education, like all of the social ills that we're trying to solve and they're not getting better, and some approaches that should not still be used after all these centuries. Nobody is asking, though, well that didn't work, why are you still doing it, why don't you do that differently? So I don't want to be silenced by questions that you don't know the answer to either, so...

RUSTY [00:41:52]

Right it's definitely the fear of the unknown that keeps people from taking action. So, cheers to you for not letting that stop you.

JENNIFER [00:42:04]

Well, thanks. Speaking of fear, right, like on the panel when I was in CEP that you moderated, I was looking at who else was joining us and I was looking at the foundations and their work and I was like, and then there is little old Wean... And so I did, I had to do this thing with myself as like you guys are doing good work, I mean so much self-talk! Like even the morning of the panel, I felt like: we are doing the best we can and we are all at different journeys. Some of us have been added, some of us have larger endowments, like all of that is true, but if everyone just does their part... I was so inspired by the work, the questions, how folks are doing it, where they started, if you're even starting. Because some of this can you just be, you don't have to, that's true too. My son is trying to teach me, my son is teaching me that you know, two things can be true at once, and that's true too. You don't have to do anything at all. And how's that working out for us?

RUSTY [00:43:11]

Yeah. No, I think it's so important to acknowledge foundations and leaders who are not necessarily at, you know, have national platforms or massive endowments. I think sometimes institutions are considered more respectable or worthy of attention because they have more money but it doesn't mean they have more or better ideas or practices or things to share. And sometimes I think it's the inverse, that the bigger the institution, the more boring and less interesting their work; and the smaller, closer to the ground you are, the more creativity, the

more care you demonstrate because you live in that community. You can't replace a whole nonprofit workforce in Youngstown, but if you're a big national and global funder, you can just say oh well, we'll just find another organization or find other people to do this project. And so I'm glad you talked yourself out of that self talk because it was really valuable to have you, you and Wean Foundation represented there.

JENNIFER [00:44:30]

Thank you. I found it very valuable. And when you were speaking just now about being in this community, I think about when we first started doing the trend here, the three year salary study, and there was a staff person even at a foundation who had, her position did not keep pace. And so we closed the gap and she was very appreciative and I was like one, don't thank me, right? This is the right thing to do. And two, I think about my little great-niece now, her name is Mimi and Mimi is a fire, oh she's a firecracker.

RUSTY: How old is she?

JENNIFER: She is 10. She just turned 10. But I said to my colleague, I said I won't always be sitting in this seat. So I really need you to advocate for yourself and like these are very sometimes complex, but certainly courageous conversations, you have to have them and then I, they know Mimi, and I was like and I don't want Mimi to have to have this conversation 20 years from now. And she was like I assure you nobody will mess with Mimi and her money.

But I think **that's the thing that continues to drive me around this work. Like I think of those people in my community and I don't want them to keep having to have these same conversations that we should have solved already and we can.** I was also like, when I was taking some notes for this, I was writing in my journal this morning and I had a memory of one job I was making forty thousand dollars a year. As soon as I got hired, I immediately started doing the math: Well if I make 40,000 I get a raise of 3% next year, I'll be making 41,200, and then if I get a 3% raise, I'll be making, you know 44... and I'm literally writing that in my journal this morning and that should have told me something, like if you just got the job and this is the salary you're making and you're already looking to the next three years, like it's not enough.

So those are things that come back to mind for me right now. That's not my struggle currently, but I don't lose sight of it. And I think that's what we should focus on in terms of what would motivate someone to take this conversation or this cause, like seeing the individual in all of this. My husband told me not to, he says stop saying that, like I don't necessarily know how much gas costs, he doesn't want me to ever say that. But the truth of the matter is, I like, put my card in the machine and I get my gas but I don't lose sight of: I'm not watching to see and make sure it stops at 10 or 15 dollars because that's all I have. And I don't take it for granted that I don't have to know what it costs, and make sure in this space, the platform that I have, the leverage, power, wherever you want to call it that I do have, that I'm able to apply it for those reasons. I think we all can. I'm going to, let me just smell it from a soapbox. But I think we all can.

RUSTY [00:47:35]

Well what I appreciate about you being grounded in regular people's experiences that don't have the privileged position of working in a foundation, but what I appreciate about what you said about your approach to talent investing, when you look at those forms 990, which only lists the highest-paid, I think five or so people in an institution, it doesn't list the lowest paid or the median. And so that kind of frustrates me because when we get into these conversations about nonprofit compensation, the controversy tends to be: look who's paid so much, you know, and it's like yeah, but most people are being paid not enough, but we don't have that data. So I appreciate it that you brought up both the executive director who was being underpaid, but also the young people who were making 11 or 12 dollars in those fellowships, who don't have a direct line to the foundation president, who aren't negotiating those grants, who don't have that positional power or access. But you've shown concern for them as well, and the access and entree of people who can't take those opportunities because they're so underpaid. So, you know, I appreciate you looking at kind of both ends of that.

JENNIFER [00:48:58]

I think it's a real interesting perspective that we have, like that, just our staff, like we try to do that in terms of our board and our staff and diversity to help that thought right? To be thought leaders in that, but I also wanted to know like the fellows, like we should be doing so much better. These are the folks who are deciding whether or not this is a field that they would go into. We treat them, like we're going to treat you bad right out the gate so that way you learn to expect, it's awful! And it reminds me of, I was taking astronomy and I had to keep dropping astronomy because I was so bored (sorry), but I would keep taking it because I think there was some interest, but I remember the last gentleman that I took it with he was like: it's our fault. He was like we make it boring. And why would we have these 500 level classes not being vibrant and interesting and take... because we're trying to introduce the field of study to you as a professional also, and we're losing sight of that. And so I think that the same is true here like, shouldn't we be showing off for the fellows of what this sector has to offer and what it could bring? Nope. Like I really, I really think we should be showing out just... And then they would arrive at their interview with an idea of what they should expect and they would negotiate their salaries and they wouldn't just take what somebody had offered, and I think it could really be included into the whole sphere of this, that could eventually...

RUSTY [00:50:36]

Right, because then they're going to be the boss at some point and how they are going to treat other people. That's how we should think of the fellows, the people with no power, no networks, no nothing, who want to break into the field. They are going to be in charge in not too long. So what expectations do we set up for them? Yeah.

JENNIFER [00:50:59]

You just remind me that I have a close relationship with the director of that program and I wonder if they do anything around compensation and negotiation, like those kinds of things.

I also want to ask the question, so back to the 990, I know it's the IRS of course, but like how would we, who would we petition to get a more accurate picture that would include the lowest paid? I'm gonna ask...

RUSTY [00:51:27]

Yeah, that's a good...

JENNIFER [00:51:28]

Wouldn't that be amazing? Right? Just from a conversation for something else, like wait a minute. Because we have it, the information is available, they're just not asking... that's a conversation for another day.

RUSTY [00:51:40]

That's a good point. I like that, action orientations instead of just me complaining about it. Who do we need to talk to? Well, tell me what's next for you and the Wean Foundation, whether it's about talent-investing or equity or anything else?

JENNIFER [00:51:58]

Thank you for asking. I want to do more across the board. The work we did last year, it's not systematic. It was for the grantees in the hopper. I know that like policy is important, but practice is where it shows up. But **sometimes we're doing our work in reverse and it's a practice but we haven't submitted it in a policy, and so I think that that's some work that we need to do internally** so again, when I'm not sitting in this seat... Which you know, I serve at the leisure of the board. I always think in my mind though someone's going to have to work really hard to undo what we've laid out in this last decade. They can but you're gonna have to work at it. So for me, I think in the team what's next is making sure some of the things that we believe can gain some traction or are good ideas, aren't "one ofs". In that we did it that year and let's try... Experimentation is good but there are some things that we can absolutely make sure we keep it, and add to. So I think that is part of it.

Training. I'm looking right now, I learned that the CEP conference that there's a cohort, I love a good cohort, is coming up next year. So I plan to participate. We're hiring a couple new associates, and this is very I think much related to the equity and pay equity work too, we're trying or experimenting with a new model where most folks who come in, if not all, they come in at the associate level, so that they can get a lot of training and development and then have different routes to leadership, either within the foundation or in the sector. **I think we do a really good job of training and development. So I have a lot of confidence that if a person leaves here and they go to another organization they can take all the Wean way with them, we don't want to just keep it all here to ourselves. So I think that we're going to be doing some more training and development of associates.**

And I'm really trying to prepare myself. I just turned 56, I asked my husband, we're the same age, I said, how old are you? He's like, are you serious right now? I was like how old did you turn? He's like, I turned 56, the same age you just turned. But the truth of the matter is I had

said several years ago, like 57 was going to be my sweet spot. And then covid happened and I don't feel like I'm done yet and I feel like there's more work to be done. But I think there's always going to be more work to be done. **And so I want to start making a plan for myself at like 60 to, I need to give someone else a shot. So speaking of succession planning, like I want to go out when I am still doing the thing, I don't want to run it into the ground and be tired.** And then like here now you try your hand at it. No, like I want to. So those are the things I have to start thinking about now so that I can be prepared or I'll always kick the can down the road to what comes next beyond the Wean foundation. And quite honestly, **I'd like to retire and volunteer in this community that I love so much and want to continue to be a part of but in a different way.**

RUSTY [00:55:19]

Wow, thank you for sharing about your own thoughts about your transition. That's really interesting and most people aren't that transparent about that. So, how can listeners learn more and connect with you and your organization, the Wean Foundation?

JENNIFER[00:55:35]

Yeah, by all means, why don't you check us out. **Our website is weanfoundation.org.** I am also on LinkedIn and look for more, we're on Facebook also, social media, the team is younger these days so they are bringing me along. But look for some exciting opportunities to join us. Next year is the foundation's 75th anniversary in philanthropy at the Mahoning Valley, and so we are hard at work planning for some opportunities to just celebrate: celebrate community and residents and you know all the things that we have been working so hard at for the last at least decade, well 75 years!

RUSTY [00:56:23]

So the website is weanfoundation.org and you can find them on Facebook and LinkedIn and it looks like on YouTube too, according to your website. I don't know what's up there.

[00:56:38]

I think we have a couple of videos of some things we have done in the past.

RUSTY [00:56:42]

All right, I'll have to check those out too. Cool. Well, thank you Jennifer for making time and for sharing your learning journey and your leadership approach to talent-investing and philanthropy. I really appreciate it and I learned a lot.

[00:56:56]

And I want to thank you personally Rusty, because you have, and your organization has been a huge part of that learning. And so thank you, thank you for having me.

RUSTY [00:57:06]

My pleasure. Thank you.



## OUTRO

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