

Happy, Healthy Nonprofit People

WITH
Beth Kanter
Author



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 [00:00:34]

In today's episode, **you'll get practical tips on creating happy, healthy, nonprofit workers and happy, healthy, nonprofit workplaces.** In fact, I'll be talking with the woman who wrote the book on it, **the author of the Happy, Healthy Nonprofit: Strategies for Impact Without Burnout.** You'll get tangible tips and tools for preventing burnout at the individual and organizational level. **We'll discuss how the issue of happiness and healthiness has changed and gained more attention in the nonprofit workforce over the last six years since the book was published. And we'll talk about how artificial intelligence may become part of wellness in nonprofits** from the perspective of someone who also wrote the book on AI in Nonprofits.

Beth Kanter is a well-established international nonprofit thought leader and author. With more than 3 decades of experience in nonprofit sector emerging technology, training and capacity building. She writes the popular **Beth's blog, which was one of the first nonprofit blogs established in 2003.** Her first book, **The Networked Nonprofit, introduced the sector to a new way of thinking and operating in a connected world.** She has delivered training to nonprofits and keynote talks globally on topics such as workplace, well-being, disruptive technologies and mission driven work and the use of AI for productivity. So please help me welcome Beth Kanter to the show.

BETH (00:02:11)

Thank you so much, Rusty. I'm looking forward to the conversation.

RUSTY (00:02:16)

Yeah, me too. I'm sure people will be excited to hear about your books and you know, all the things you've been talking and thinking about for years. So it's a real privilege to have you here. And I was curious to just get started, I think of you as somebody who has taken this deep, long term dive into technology in our sector. And so I was curious how you and your coauthor, Aliza Sherman, came to the idea for writing this book.

BETH (00:02:45)

Great question. You know, it didn't start off on the whole concept of well-being and self-care in the nonprofit workplace. **It really started out with the concept of technology and wellness and us spending so much time in front of screens.** Mind you, this was before the pandemic, and both Aliza and I have been early adopters of technology. So we were sort of feeling the impact of that. So we started talking about writing a book just on that topic. And as we started to explore it more, we started to realize that that was a component of well-being and, well, that lots of people have written books on it, but we thought that a more valuable book for the sector would like widen the lens a bit and talk about other aspects of wellbeing, whether for individuals who work in nonprofits or embedded in the nonprofit culture.

And it was a book that was almost a passion project because I was writing a lot from personal experience. I've been through my, and recovered from my own burnout. And this, I'd say, was over ten years ago. And the way it manifested to me was health issues. And I'd gone to see my doctor and we'd get all those blood tests and everything, and my numbers came back for cholesterol and blood pressure and they were just not in the normal range. And so as they do in medicine, they don't immediately put you on drugs, which is good. They try to, you know, take a look at lifestyle first. And so she said, well, you know, if you started walking a little bit more and maybe paid attention to eating more healthily... and I'd heard all this stuff before, but I decided to listen to her, and that's when I started putting a Fitbit on my wrist and measuring my steps. And I started slowly getting up from my desk and stopping work. No stopping those 18 hour days and taking a break. And before I knew it, I was walking 10,000 steps a day, 15,000 steps a day, sitting it in here and there. And I went back and got my tests done and all my numbers came back into the normal range, the healthy range.

And then something else happened. My mood changed, right? And people noticed and I was actually more productive. And that got me excited about **this whole notion of well-being and that it's not just a nice to have, that it can be an essential part of helping you sustain yourself and still get a lot of work done.**

RUSTY (00:05:15)

Well, I love that. I love that you both sort of started with the tech issue and then let things go where they led naturally and took this expanded view. The book integrates tech, health and sort

of tech well-being into your framework that you present, but it is way beyond that. So actually, before we go further, I have a question that I've thought of while you were talking, which is, if you don't mind, I'm just curious you know, your bio mentions you started one of the first nonprofit blogs, Beth's blog. And I was curious, what were you doing before you became this expert on nonprofit tech and what led you to start the blog?

BETH (00:06:05)

Well, I've worked in tech for I'd say 15 years before that. But that was during, you know, the so-called Web 1.1 and actually America Online and online conferencing. And I was working at the New York Foundation for the Arts on a project called Arts Wire, which was an online network for artists and arts organizations and I was there as a trainer and a network builder. So I was doing all kinds of things like introducing the modem and email, and this is in the nineties, to artists and arts organizations. And then we did a round of helping people launch their websites when the web debuted and then strategic technology plans. And we worked both in New York State, I was a circuit writer, I must have put 100,000 miles on my car driving through different cities and working with local arts councils and their constituents. And then we also had some national arts organizations that we worked with.

And then from there I got involved with something called the Circuit Writers Project with Tech Rocks, which was sort of broader doing this work, but more broadly in the nonprofit sector. And the reason I started the blog was I thought it was fantastic as a way to help me learn how to write better because it was easy to update and I viewed it kind of as a private journal, and I was just writing down stuff that I was learning about web 2.0 and I didn't even look at people subscribing to it. And then I looked in, there were, Oh my God, there's 5000 subscribers. And I was just doing it more to improve my learning and to share what I was learning about social media in the early days.

RUSTY: That's awesome. There's so much there. It is interesting to think about how we use technology to communicate to others, but also how we can use it just to improve our own skill sets.

BETH: Yeah, and we can do that with A.I. too. And I know we're going to get to that in a bit.

RUSTY: Right. For me, the podcast is an opportunity for me to both reconnect with people, to have conversations, like you and I haven't talked in years, but this is like, when am I going to get an hour with Beth to just pepper her with questions? This is my shot. And it's helped me also learn a little bit about interviewing to some extent or kind of public speaking in a virtual context, which is really different from being in front of an audience.

BETH: And I like doing podcasts because, you know, since the pandemic, I don't know about you, but I haven't gotten to as many conferences and see people, you know, and you have to really make a concerted effort to set up a virtual coffee date or something, to like have these kinds of conversations that maybe in the past we could easily have face to face. It's starting to

come back, but I still think we're all a little bit isolated and maybe a little lonely and points of human connection are, you know, families. Yes. And also professional is really important.

RUSTY (00:09:00)

Totally, yeah. This podcast started during the pandemic. It started in fall of 2020 because our public speaking opportunities had totally dried up. And I thought it was a way to leverage, you know, the tech to get our message out to a wider audience in a more longitudinal fashion. You know, you do a speech somewhere, basically that's the only time it's heard. You put up a podcast, people can find it in five years and might find some value from an episode.

BETH: That's great. So you didn't do any sourdough bread baking?

RUSTY: I never did. I never did. Although now I'm like, I should have learned how to make pies or something. That was, that's my chance, I lost my chance. So let's talk about the Happy, Healthy Nonprofit more. So the book is divided into these two kinds of major sections, focusing first on the personal well-being and then second, organizational well-being. And, you know, the sector tends to treat these pretty separately. I don't know, maybe our whole society thinks about these as kind of binaries, but I feel like in philanthropy, if we think about individuals in the nonprofit sector, we tend to focus on like leadership development or professional development or self-care. And then if we think about organizations, it's, you know, organizational change management or capacity building or, you know, strategy or all these, but they're totally different domains of practice. And you really try this kind of bring them together, but you deal with them separately as well. So I was curious to hear, you know, if you can think back to when you wrote this book as you wrote it and organized the book, what did you see as this kind of interplay as you did your research between happy, healthy people and happy, healthy institutions?

BETH :I think when we talk about workplace well-being it is a both/and, because you have to work on organizational culture, but you also have to work on individuals. Individuals are important. And I think at the time, and doing some of the initial research, I think there was a lot of skepticism about just focusing on the individual around self-care or a kind of feeling of like, that's not really important. Again, this was over ten years ago, ten years ago-ish, 2015, 2016, and so it was seen as something separate. But we really thought that they were intertwined, right? And I think it is important when we're addressing burnout that you also begin with the individual and address that piece of it. And then fast forward a few years later, before the pandemic and 2019, the World Health Organization cited burnout as an occupational workplace issue, not an individual disease, if you will, or problem.

And then it became the, **it's the responsibility of the organization to prevent burnout of its workers and the contributors to burnout aren't solely the responsibility of the individual. There are other contributors and those come from our workplace culture.** So we can have a toxic organizational culture where people aren't treating each other very well, can be maybe a transactional culture or just people who aren't nice to each other. People of color not being treated fairly or having to suffer through microaggressions. So, toxic organizational culture, workload, unreasonable workloads (I know that's something familiar in our sector), lack of

autonomy, so that when you feel like you don't have control of your schedule, when there's constant kind of emergencies, fire drills... You set it to, on the day I need to complete this and all of a sudden, you know, your boss dumps something else on you, or everybody's pulled off the one thing and has to go to something else, I don't know if that sounds familiar. Lack of clarity in job roles where there's not a clear RACI chart of who is responsible, who's implementing, who's consulted and it's all kind of mushed up that creates a lot of stress, or there's not clear manager communication or delegation.

And I think a lot of that in the nonprofit sector, a lot of us aren't trained to be managers, right? We kind of learn it on the streets. We could probably benefit from some formal training around that. And so it takes more than just like kale smoothies and massages to overcome and endure burnout. It also takes a healthy workplace culture and really addressing those root causes and those root causes come with costs. If you have this kind of culture going on, people are I think it's like 30% more likely to be seeking another job, 52% more likely to take a sick day. That adds up. Nowadays we should be thinking that our organizational culture in a way is our brand, with lots of these sites that are out like Glassdoor and others where people are talking about what it's like to work at an organization. And if you want to attract the top talent, you want to be a great place to work. So that's why I think it's a both/and.

RUSTY: Makes sense to me. I think you make a very compelling case that it is a both/and and I'm so glad you are making that case in the book and today, because when we were starting Fund The People one of my advisory council members said you've really got to pick a lane, is the ultimate outcome of this work about helping individuals sustain themselves and build careers in the nonprofit sector, or is it about organizations and helping organizations like to develop their talent or like invest in their people? And I was like, how can you separate? I didn't understand how one could separate those things out. I don't think we can. I still believe we can't.

BETH: It's a symbiotic relationship. So...

RUSTY (00:15:00)

Yeah, totally. **One of the people who we had early on on this show was Dr. Christina Maslach from Berkeley, who has been studying burnout for years. And so if folks who are listening are interested, should definitely go back to our season one from December of 2020, we'll put a link in the show notes to hear from Dr. Christina Maslach, who we called the "guru of burnout".**

BETH: We reviewed a lot of her work and referenced it a lot in our book. Yeah, she's one of the pioneers of workplace burnout.

RUSTY: She really is. It was amazing to have her on. And I wish more people, you know, checked her out because I think she gets across that message that you were also sharing of this is an organizational, institutional, workplace issue, burnout, it's not just an individual situation.

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RUSTY (00:17:02)

All right. So, you know, I think there's a lot of great ideas and really tangible tips and practices in your book. Could you share some of the key messages for our listeners who are thinking about their individual well-being, their organizational well being or both, and share some of what readers can get from the book?

BETH: Absolutely. So let's start with the first bucket, which has a hole in it and there's water coming out that goes into the other bucket. But the first bucket I'm going to talk about is individual well-being. And I think **the very first step is understanding if you're burned out, recognizing it.** And in the book we have the nonprofit burnout assessment. It's set up actually based on Christina's research that identified the different criteria for burnout. So you have physical symptoms, you have emotional symptoms, and then there's attitudinal, right? And then eventually it impacts your work performance. What we did is we made it into kind of a quiz, you would answer these different questions related to the symptoms and they were on a scale and then you wound up with a score that would place you in one of the stages of burnout, because burnout happens in stages.

So first, you're actually passion driven, right? That's the first stage of burnout, right? Because you have all this energy and you love what we're doing and we have this in our sector. We are so committed to social justice, to our missions, to making sure whatever our nonprofit is doing, that it happens. And that's why we work in this sector. I mean, it certainly isn't the pay, right. But if we don't take care of ourselves or if we're in a system, in an organization that is toxic and has some of the things that I mentioned earlier, then we get to this kind of I call it the yellow stage.

So if the first is green, we're going to get to yellow. And here we might be feeling a little tired, maybe worried, set the alarm to get up and work on a Saturday. But now it's a little bit difficult. Have a couple of lattes and get to work and then if we don't take that time for ourselves and pay attention to our bodies or mitigate stress that's happening, we get to the orange stage and here we might have actual symptoms, physical symptoms. Maybe it's not able to concentrate, maybe we're getting sick more often, maybe we have a short fuse (crabby as my kids would say). And then **if you don't pay attention, you get to the red stage and that's where you're really burnt out. You're depressed and you're not good to yourself, you're not good to your**

family, you're not good to your organization, and you're not good to the people you're serving. And the thing is, if you get to that last stage, it's harder to bounce back.

So the assessment can tell you where you are and begin to make some changes. And organizationally, it can be used to have some insights about what periods or time of year might cause some burnout. Can we make some changes? It's like an earthquake early warning system, right? So it's better not to let it get to the red zone. From there, **we get into the fun stuff, which is the solutions**, right?

And if we talk about individual well-being, we are talking about stuff like, well, the first thing is the health triad, all the things my doctor told me: get enough sleep, that's important for your immune system. You know, eat, you know, healthy, you know, plant based...

RUSTY (00:20:35)

I'm still working on those two, sorry what's the third one?

BETH: **sleep, diet and exercise.**

RUSTY: Yeah, I'm working on all three.

BETH: Well, that's why I love my Apple Watch or my Fitbit, because I have metrics on all of this. I have sleep metrics, I know what I'm eating and I know my exercise. And I know what the research says for me to have optimal health, especially as we age, we want to pay attention to that. But I think there's like, it's not a triad, it's I think a four legged stool and the fourth is **technology wellness**. Like, screen time can be dangerous for us. Too much of it, too many back to back meetings, screens late at night, the blue light from the screen disrupts our production of melatonin so we don't get a good night's sleep. We don't get to show that deep regenerative sleep and also it ages your skin. So, I mean, when I read that, I said, well, I'm going to kind of watch my screen time.

And then, then it's like **having outside interest so your whole identity isn't wrapped up in your work**. And I know that's so difficult and for us to, like, remove our sense of serving our communities from our own identities, but we need to do that. And it isn't that we don't care about the issue, but we're dealing with systemic, difficult issues and just because we take a day off to regenerate doesn't mean it's not going to get solved. But we will have more sustainability and more resilience to solve them if we take the time off. It's so important.

And experiencing joy, having things that make you happy. I do a lot of art. You know, my spare time during the pandemic, being stuck in the house, and being in California, where we have a temperate climate, we have hummingbirds. So I put hummingbird feeders on my window so I could watch the hummingbirds, and I could take a look out from in between Zoom meetings and watch hummingbirds and it gave me a lot of joy. Time for reflection, time in nature, time with other people. Social connections are also a social determinant of health but also they give us energy, sometimes they steal energy depending on the relationships. But it's our neighbors, it's

our family, it's people in our communities. So all of those things are really important around individual wellbeing.

When we shift over to organizational well-being, there's a framework in the book called Five F's, and they're all F-words we can say. I mean, you don't bleep people out right?

RUSTY (00:23:09)

No, we won't bleep you. Even if you say something that's an additional F. That's okay. That's what I like about podcasting, too.

BETH: Right. You can say f words. I once said when I was presenting early on in, I think it was 2006 or seven, I was on the stage of a large nonprofit statewide conference, and it was part of a story I was telling where there was not an F word, but an M word and yeah, there was an F word too, and it was a screen capture of something. And it was all part of the story about people pulling together, and it was a tweet, and I actually forgot and I read the tweet out loud and then I stopped myself and I said, Oh my God, I just dropped the F-bomb on the stage in front of a thousand nonprofit leaders. And they all gave me a standing ovation.

But anyway, the **five F's of organizational workplace well-being are: Function, Friendship, Feelings, Forward and Fulfillment. Does everybody have what they need to Function?** Do they have a desk that's ergonomically correct? Do they have not too many back to back meetings? What about the workloads? You know, all of those things.

Friendship, do people like each other at work? We don't have to be all best friends and do everything all together all the time, but we have to generally maybe get along and like people and respect each other and **that's what creates that kind of sense of psychological safety and so important, I think, for pulling together as a team, especially if work gets stressful.** The next F is **Feelings**, right? Feeling appreciated. And this is especially on leaders too. How are you giving positive feedback to your people, giving them a sense of appreciation? How are you encouraging other people to appreciate others? And not everybody likes to be appreciated in quite the same way. In fact, **there's a book by Dr. Gary Chapman called The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace.** He wrote a book called The Five Love Languages that's for couples, but this is you know, some people want to be told they have a good job. Some people maybe want, you know, a gift card to go to Starbucks, or somebody wants a plaque on the wall, or somebody wants just one on one saying you've done great. So you have to really **think about how are we all appreciating each other.**

Forward, this is the professional growth and the leadership skills. How are we learning? You know, we think about learning and we think, okay, K to 12, graduated from college, we're done learning. But there's so many opportunities for personal growth. And we just talked about that, how I started my blog because I wanted to write, you started the podcast because you wanted more speaking opportunities. How are we allowing our people to move forward, right, and creating environments for them to learn and in the right way? Like not all people want to take a class, right? Maybe someone needs a coach or maybe someone wants a book budget,

RUSTY (00:26:10)

Very personal. Very different, depending on need and, you know, both the job that you have, where you want to go in your career, what you think you know, what you don't know. I mean, so many variables on that front.

BETH:

And then finally, **Fulfillment**. And I think we do this pretty well and that's **being connected to the mission** because I know I've heard a lot maybe from fundraisers when they're only focusing on the numbers, that's when they get burned out, not focusing on the why they're fundraising for this organization. And you know, how many of us actually take the time to stop and have a conversation on our team about like, why are we doing this work? Why don't we care about this issue? So those are the five Fs: function, friendship, feelings, forward and fulfillment .

RUSTY:

Right. And I mean, there's just so much more we can't get to in more depth and detail, and it's not just opinion, you cite so many sources of research for each thing and go into these frames, but then also give people, like processes for how to implement each one in their life, in their organization, which is great.

BETH:

And I just did want to add one thing in all of this, especially on the organizational side, that **leadership behavior and mindset is contagious** in all of this, so **if leaders are doing something, I call it stress-suffocation, if they're stressed, they can amplify everybody else's stress. And that may normalize the stress on the team.** And if the leader's working nonstop, then that becomes normalized, like answering emails or sending email directives at midnight on a weekend (obviously not taking the weekend off) that's, you know, a signal to people that we should be working all the time. So leaders really have to be bought in and boards too, you know, into this way of working.

RUSTY:

So that's definitely a part of the book and a good conversation for teams to be having about that and for leadership teams. So one thing I wanted to ask you about is the funding dimension, because, you know, this show is about how we invest in the nonprofit workforce, and that can be how funders are funding nonprofit workforce supports, so it can be money, it can be time, it can be other forms of "capital", social capital. It could be how boards are investing in their staff, it can be how executive directors, etc. So we know that a big contributor to burnout is the impact of this kind of funder driven cycle that we often in the sector refer to as the nonprofit starvation cycle. And, you know, if nonprofits have an organizational strategy and plan for well-being, there are costs to that. And so, you know, you talk of in the book that there are free and low cost resources out there, and that's great. But also, if we're encouraging folks or institutions to develop good people systems like H.R. departments, or retirement benefits and things like that, those costs really are significant. So what do you see as the role of fundraising and grantmaking in advancing well-being in nonprofits?

BETH (00:29:26)

Sure. So, when we started off writing this, I did, you know, I tested the concept out with a number of people, and I kind of got pushback on it. Like there wasn't...those are soft skills. Even on the organizational side, because I wasn't talking about like, how do you do financial management and create a spreadsheet. But we were talking about relationships in the workplace and that was like that soft stuff, right? And kind of this whole thing reminds me of working in tech in the early days that there was kind of initial resistance to paying for technology. Can you imagine 30 years ago, there was: why should we pay for computers in a nonprofit workplace and pay for training for them to use it? That seems like something extra. And now it's moved like, well, that's a really important piece of nonprofit infrastructure and that should be funded and that should be part of general operating, and we should be providing general operating support for these things, like not just like starving it and just be staff and meager benefits, but it also needs this infrastructure. **Technology is one piece of it, professional development and then also workplace wellbeing, it should all go together.**

So I really think, I don't know if that was, as much as ten years ago or something that was recognized. I think we're moving in the right direction, I think we have to move a little bit further. And when we talk about trust based philanthropy and kind of like the shift more to funding general operating, and not having everything be its little project and sneak in our general operating costs. So I think that's where we are, I don't know, you probably have a better sense of this.

RUSTY:

No, I think that's a spot on diagnosis of the issue. In fact, **I wrote a journal article in the Foundation Review called The Soft Stuff Doesn't Have to be Hard** because I get the same pushback about from funders, not all the time but definitely from some, of how do you measure, how do you make a connection between investing in staff, people, in an organization and better programmatic outcomes of that organization? Is there a line between the two? If so, is it possible to measure it? And so that's what the article is about. And I tried to show there is a line and you can, and here's a bunch of foundations that have evaluated some kind of talent investment, and it shows incredible results in terms of the value that it can create for people and organizations.

But the bar is set so high, the skepticism is so rampant about this, that I often feel like you have to turn the mirror on people themselves and say, well, if you were paid really shit wages at your foundation, how long would you be there? So when people kind of think about it from a personal vantage point, it makes sense. But often the incentives for funders are not to address those issues. One way we've kind of been framing that is that foundations and grant makers see their sort of, their due diligence in their grant making job as looking at the financial health of a grantee and the programmatic health of the grantee, and we need to add this third leg of the human health of the grantee. That's got to be part of the job of grant making.

BETH (00:33:02)

And I think there's definitely a way to measure it and I wholeheartedly agree with you. And we, I mean, I talked about it in the book a little bit because like, there's just a disconnect between understanding good morale, that's kind of soft, right? But **good morale, you have an engaged, loyal, motivated, productive, resilient staff that's going to be dedicated to your mission, getting things done. Those inputs are going to hopefully, if managed well, lead to better outputs in the community or the mission impact. And it's going to have another spin off effect in that if you have a bunch of happy and really loyal, committed, passionate, engaged employees, they become then advocates for the organization and the community. And that then helps the organization increase its reputation, which may help them fundraise more, or maybe attract more people to their cause, more donors, more volunteers, maybe more board members.** So I think, like if you take a theory of change approach to it, you can definitely measure it.

Things like your turnover rate, like how often you're filling positions, and that it comes with a cost because you know this, everyone who's listening probably knows this, if you've ever hired somebody, it takes time and then it takes time for them to get up to speed. And you're less productive in that amount of time. If you have a burnout bin, you have maybe people out there at the coffee shop or whatever saying, you know, it's a terrible place to work, and word gets around and people who are really good at their job don't just apply to the job because of the job or the salary. I mean, those are important. But then, I see this, I coach a lot of people and want to know what it's like to work there? And work gets out if it's a toxic environment. So I definitely see connections.

And then it's important, you know, when I first started writing this and researching it and talking to people I want to write this book and it's going to be called Be Happy, Healthy. It's going to be about workplace well-being and for individuals and the workplace and I was told by someone, a funder who should be nameless, Oh, that's a bunch of hippie shit -I said an S word- but to your original question, I think the attitude starts to change. I know there is a group called the Wellbeing Project, which consists of different funders who are talking about this and how to best support that in nonprofits. So there we're making movement, we're making progress.

RUSTY:

Yeah and what I love about what you said there is you kind of making the negative case with, like the bad things that result from not investing in people or treating people poorly. But then there's also the positive case, as you're saying, with the kind of logic model, that if you do treat people well, you get better results for the organization. So I think it's important to talk about both, sort of the negative of not investing and then the great things that can happen from investing in people. Yeah, thank you for adding that and whoever that funder was that thought this is all "hippie shit", I hope you're listening and I hope you've read Beth's books and listen to this podcast and that you've changed your mind since then.

I've been wondering, you know, at Fund The People I've been advocating, you know, wages. How can we get funders to help nonprofits improve salaries and benefits? And it's a big lift for organizations and their funders to try to do that. It's an expensive commitment. So I've been

thinking like if, let's say, people's wages actually went up and benefits were improved, does that actually improve well-being, and does it actually help with burnout or is it really about workload and all these other factors and you could pay people well and still have a toxic workplace?

So, I've just been kind of struggling with that because I think we need both. We need real nuts and bolts economic justice inside organizations, but we also need that organizational culture shift to great places to work. So just curious for your thoughts on sort of wages and wellness. Are they totally separate spheres or do they, you know, can they interact? How do they interact?

BETH (00:39:35)

You know, when I was thinking about your question, I thought, oh, he's asked me about can money buy happiness? And we know back ten years ago there was a study frequently cited, I can't even remember who did it, one think tank or another, it was around 2010 that stated we needed to make \$70,000 a year to be happy. And we really don't need any more than that to have a happy life. And of course that's been recently updated, I think to about 100,000 if you adjust for inflation, depending where you live. And then I thought, well, what's the average nonprofit salary? Is probably below that. I mean, you may know better than me, but I agree with you that you need both.

We need a fair wage because that adds stress, you know, especially if you're, maybe you're a single parent or you have kids in college, **why aren't we getting paid what we're worth in the nonprofit sector? Why are we stigmatizing it with low pay in a way?** And then not only that, we add on the kind of insult of these toxic cultures and, you know, overwhelming workflows that are just too much for one person to do, you know, that's just a trip to burnout or, having all these things that go on in the environment that also contributes to the burnout. So it makes us more subject to burnout. So at least we should try to address all of it, especially the money.

Now, that's easier said than done, right, because it's not cheap. And I was maybe thinking about the study, maybe you saw it, that came out during the pandemic, maybe 2021. It was in Connecticut and it was done by the statewide organization that supports all the social work agencies, some of them were government. It was about the high rate of burnout. And something like 90% of them had turnover, and that there were all these highly trained social workers who have a master's degree and a set of specialty skills were making less than what you could working at Wal-Mart, and were leaving social service agencies to work at Wal-Mart because Wal-Mart was providing benefits like education, debt repayment and better health care insurance and all these other like kind of perks.

So it's kind of like **I don't have a solution to this, but it's kind of like, are we going to just starve this sector into, you know, extinction? Or are we going to recognize that, you know, that we are professionals, we're experts at this, and we should be paid a living wage.**

RUSTY (00:42:05)

Right, and especially when those social workers and their institutions are being paid by government in many cases, to deliver the social safety net for the country on behalf of, you know, taxpayer dollars. It's maddening that that's how we run our social safety net. If we want the private sector, which is the nonprofit sector in part, to deliver the public sector's mandate to keep Americans alive and safe, how can we starve this sector into oblivion? That's crazy. I haven't seen that Connecticut study, I'd love to find it and if we do, we'll put a link in the show notes to this episode.

So just to move to the next question here, because we could keep talking about the wages stuff for a long time. So the book was published in 2016. Obviously you did the pitching for it and the research before that, but there have been, you know, major changes in our society, starting around when it was published or when you were writing it, but since then, obviously the pandemic and the great resignation and everything since then. If you were writing an updated version in 2024, what would you subtract or add? How do you think nonprofits and their funders should be thinking and behaving these days to build happy, healthy nonprofits?

BETH (00:43:31)

Great question. I'll start with a little story. So the book was published in 2016. We started researching and writing it probably at the end of 2014 and I was really passionate about it and I was not getting a lot of passionate responses and reactions to the idea. And this is coming off of doing a book on social media that was like this is the thing that people wanted and it was very in demand. And then I kind of pivoted just a little to this because I felt it was really important and kind of like, "meh" right? So we published the book in 2016 over the summer, it was right before that election and you know, it got a little bit of traction, but not a great amount of traction, and I just thought, well, okay, there it goes.

And then Trump was elected and all of a sudden everybody was talking about how stressed they were. And I remember doing a little thing, kind of resist, rest, you know, rejuvenate. And all of a sudden I got so much demand for workshops around, you know, avoiding burnout and self-care and, you know, so that was like the first stressor. And that was going on more and more, especially in the circles I work with, because a lot of the nonprofits were under attack and working on issues that were stressful to work on during Trump, and still are stressful to work with, but it was a big shift going from Obama to Trump. And then it kind of became a little bit more accepted. Then all of a sudden, the pandemic started and then just the stress levels went way up and the stress of pivoting. People talked about how they weren't that busy during the pandemic, I was never busier, like pivoting everything to online workshops. It was interesting to see how the environment changed and now there was a recognition for this topic and for this type of advice.

So, well, I would say if I were to rewrite it again, all the advice is all great, right? And I think **what's happened since would help me make a bigger, bigger and better case for why well-being for nonprofit individuals and in the workplace is important. I think the WHY has gotten much sharper. The advice I think a lot of it's the same and maybe there's a little bit more to say about like hybrid work schedules and, you know, technology**

wellness around the screen. And I think there's going to be more to say as AI starts to get adopted.

And what I think I would do differently would be instead of writing the whole book, I would become the editor, because there have been more and more people talking about this in many different communities that I talk about, it's always in philanthropy circles, in communities of color, in certain fields, fundraisers, for example. So there's been a lot more people doing coaching on it, talking about it, writing books about it. **My colleague Meico Whitlock just published a book called When Work Doesn't Love You Back.** I wrote the foreword, you should have him on. So there's more people talking about it, so I would feature their voices and so that's what I would do differently.

RUSTY (00:46:34)

Fantastic! Good new guest idea, thank you. We could definitely link to that book, I would love to connect with the author. So, I want to make sure we talk a little bit about so-called artificial intelligence. You have been out there talking about AI in the nonprofit workplace. So **are there connections between adoption of artificial intelligence and organizational and individual well-being** that folks should be aware of?

BETH (00:47:05)

Absolutely. This is where my last two books kind of intersected and we're still early, but **at the rate of change and the amount of change or impact it's going to have in workplaces as we begin to adopt this, we really need to be thinking about it. As humans, we really need to focus on these soft skills and on human centered workplaces, that's going to be like not negotiable. Because, the brilliant thing about this technology is that it's going to be able to really improve our work experiences by taking some of this gut, grunt work out of things**, right? Repetitive, exhausting tasks like, for example, do you get long email threads? Okay, this is my personal productivity vampire. I hate having to read through everything and figure out, well, what? What is it that I was supposed to do? But like now, with generative AI being embedded in our basic tools like that, you can click a button and it can summarize the email thread with a link to the original, and you can ask it: draft me an email that's a summary and what the next steps are. You edit it and send it off so this can save a lot of time, you know, reading notes, right? That's always a chore. Now there's tools, I can take meeting notes, can schedule meetings, so it can help us be more efficient, although **I think people shouldn't just focus on the efficiency, because we don't want to get into the trap of just using it so we can just do more, faster and better. We want to use it for learning, we want to use it to improve the job experience.**

Now generative AI, I don't know if you've put your hands on it, but it can do great things like summarizing things and it can help you write drafts or edit drafts, and it can also help you learn to be a better writer. That's the way I like to use it, I submit my draft and I ask it, how can I improve this? So **it can be a great learning tool. So we have to really think of ways to use this technology where we're encouraging learning because that's the way we're going to adopt it, and when it does free up time, we called it the dividend of time, that we're**

shifting those that amount of time and we're shifting it into more mission critical work and more relationship oriented work. And we always, always want to maintain human connections. We don't want the AI to replace human interaction, either with external partners or internally. You know, as there's a joke going around, I don't know if you saw it where somebody is using the AI tool to write the email and the other person reading the email is using the AI tool to summarize the email because it's too long.

We don't want to go too much into AI mediated communication between humans, right? Because we'll lose a lot, especially new people who are just joining our organization or younger people in the field. Now, what productivity research is saying about AI is that it's really going to help generalists get better at a task and so is that going to eliminate the need for more entry level jobs, so what about bringing more people into the nonprofit sector? And those that get through, you know, if someone's using chat GPT to get feedback on a draft they've written but not have that conversation with their manager, they're kind of losing out on that ability to get feedback and have a mentor and improve. And so I think we just have to be careful about overreliance on the tools at the expense of human interaction and that we don't want to use the tools to just increase efficiency and do more and more and more. We want to repurpose that time into mission driven work.

And the other piece that I'll share, I was just at the **Microsoft Global Nonprofit Leaders Summit, and there was a talk with the chief economist at LinkedIn, her name is Karen Kimbrough, and it was a fireside talk with Meg Garlinghouse who's the head of Social Impact at LinkedIn,** and LinkedIn, and I didn't realize this but it's obvious when you think about it, they have tons of data about jobs and what job skills are in demand. And so **they were able to do a lot of projections on the impact of jobs as we adopt AI.** Everybody is scared that the robots are going to steal our jobs. They're not. It's going to change our jobs or disrupt our jobs and disrupt doesn't mean get rid of the job. It's changing tasks and changing and disrupting tasks.

Okay, so **they were able to slice some data out specifically for the nonprofit sector: 12% of nonprofit jobs will change over the coming years as AI is more adopted, and 34%, I think 32%, something like that, will be disrupted** and again, disrupted doesn't mean we're going to fire all of our fundraisers. It means the fundraiser's job, maybe there was 20 or 15 hours of doing desk research on major gifts prospects and maybe the AI will reduce that to 5 hours a week or to 3 hours a week, whatever it is. So that frees up more time or disrupts the tasks so they can repurpose it to something else, like doing the actual cultivation of the donor, for example. And so when this starts to happen, what's going to become more important, and I'm talking maybe it's six months, maybe it's a year, maybe it's two years from now, reskilling and continuous learning. We have to begin to reskill people in our sector, not just to put them with the technical skills to do the AI, like prompt engineering is one of them, how to ask the AI questions to get it to do the things you want it to do. But we also have to focus on soft skills, right? And **the most in-demand skill, nonprofit skill, according to LinkedIn economic research data is, person to person communication, communication, collaboration,**

creative problem solving and critical thinking. So we also have to invest in training and development around that for our people and make sure that we prioritize that.

Down the road what also is going to happen, this is what they're projecting, is instead of having career ladders where I am a nonprofit fundraiser doing, you know, major gifts solicitation for education, that's my job and I'm going to do it as a, you know, admin on that, and then I'm going to go to my next job as a manager, and then I'm going to be a director and then I'm going to be a VP, but I'm going to stay in that lane. What's going to happen is because of the AI kind of democratizing skills, and we're going to delegate some of those skills, like some writing or editing, could mean that we can, we'll have more mobility so we'll be able to plant our seeds in a different garden, right? And it's going to start to break down maybe silos between marketing and fundraising. I mean, that's the kind of, the optimistic view. So are we in the nonprofit sector prepared for this yet?

RUSTY (00:54:20)

That's your question to me. Well, I don't know. I mean, I love that you're giving us a framework for how to use it well, because I think we're going to need that. I haven't really dived into it. I've experimented a little bit, but not really used it in my work. With chat GPT, so I see how powerful it is. I'm just skeptical about sort of, you know, the preparedness of leaders and people to use this well. And I imagine there'll be some generational, you know, resistance and difficulty in retraining or re-skilling people who are already well-established. But most of those senior leaders have those soft skills, that's why they're successful as senior leaders, the relational work that you were talking about.

BETH (00:55:15)

But on the AI side, it's really important for us to be experimenting with it because we won't understand its limitations or its benefits until we put our hands on it. So we need to put our hands on it before it puts its hands on us. And that's also a shift, too, because it's very versatile and people are integrating it into their workflows in different ways. And **there's, of course, caution, ethical concerns, responsible use that we need to be aware of with not putting private information in public models, understanding that they the generative AI can make stuff up, and we don't want to be asleep at the wheel and just, you know, push a button, have it do its thing and not check it, because we need to, humans always need to be in charge.** So there's those pieces of it. And we need to begin, and I know there's resistance to that, oh, it's another technical thing or oh, it's going to be so hard. But there's no experts in AI, it's really, everybody is learning, we don't know what this technology will be able to do, it's a level playing field. So it's wise to begin, I mean, be skeptical, yes, but put your hands on it and understand what it can do and what it cannot do.

RUSTY (00:56:25)

All right. I'll report back to you. I appreciate that, and I'll take that seriously. So I respect so much your expertise in both of these areas we've talked about. And I know we've squished AI to the very end here. So there are other podcasts you've been on talking about this more extended and **The Smart Nonprofit**, that book, does that deal with this as well?

BETH (00:56:50)

Yes, it does.

RUSTY: So, folks who want to learn more about what you're saying can check out The Smart Nonprofit book and then are there other places, is on your blog should people look or?

BETH (00:57:03)

Two places. I am writing my blog not as frequently, I'm trying to do human generated posts, not machine generated. And you'll see the typos that proves it and minor lapses of punctuation and grammar, so you know that it's human developed. Also **follow me on LinkedIn, that's where I'm sort of keeping up with the conversation around nonprofits and AI and the research that's out there**. So you can find me on LinkedIn under Beth Kanter **and www.bethkanter.org**

RUSTY: bethkanter.org that's where the blog lives.

BETH: Yes.

RUSTY: Okay fantastic. So that's Kanter with a k, fantastic. So you told us, and people can find the books wherever they buy books, I assume.

BETH (00:57:49)

Yes, and you know, there's a link on my site. There's a little section that says books and you can find a quick link or just type it into your friendly bookseller website and you'll find it.

RUSTY: Fantastic. Do you have any other projects or products coming up you want people to know about?

BETH (00:58:05)

I am doing a lot of work around training, ethical use of AI, effective use, how to get started, organizational adoption strategies, how to use it responsibly and ethically, even at the board retreat level. So that's where a lot of my work is these days, and then also continuing with the workplace wellbeing piece as well.

RUSTY (00:58:28)

Great, so if people want to get Beth, some of your time as a trainer, they can visit bethkanter.org. Beth, thank you so, so, so much for being on the show. I really appreciate it.

BETH: Well, thank you so much, Rusty. I really appreciate it.

RUSTY (00:58:53)

Thanks to Beth Kanter for joining us today. We are so fortunate to have Beth looking out for all of us in the sector. Coming up next week on the show, I'll talk with Yolanda Coentro, who leads the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. It's one of the fastest growing training and professional

development providers in the sector. Their motto, Progress Powered by People. I can't wait to share the conversation with you, so I'll talk to you then.

OUTRO [00:59:23)

Thanks for listening to Fund the People Podcast! Visit fundthepeople.org and click on "Podcast" to find a transcript for this-and other-episodes and all the links discussed in the episode. If you enjoyed this episode, we'd really appreciate a 5-star rating and a quick review if possible on Apple Podcasts - it helps more people to find the show. Thank you for driving change in our communities. Remember to keep your tank full, take care of yourself, and take care of one another.