

Giving Growth Podcast - Ben Webb of International Justice Mission, hosted by Greg Sobiech (full transcript)

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<Intro>

Greg Sobiech

The empathy bridge powered by stories is what connects us on an emotional level. So that takes a certain skill set to like get that.

Ben Webb

Yep.

Greg

It takes experience. I think it takes also failure. I think it takes...

Ben

A lot of that. A lot of that.

Greg

Years of, you know, being in marketing. It also takes execution. What are you hearing?

Ben

The not-for-profit sector is having a moment where it's having to reconcile itself in the fact that it's becoming increasingly irrelevant to the next generation. You're seeing no increase in the percentage of giving.

We're seeing like a drop-off or an aging demographic of donors over time. There's a transformation that needs to occur where we start to reconcile being people-centric rather than saying fundraising and marketing. And you could even go like revenue generation and programs.

If you look at it and go, well, actually we're in the business of people. Who are the people within our movements? On the donor side, they're not just wallets.

They are lives and their families and their stories. They are talents. And there is grace actually to be found.

Not-for-profit work is brutally hard and there's grace to be found with that audience group as well as the others. And how do you take a holistic picture of who it is that we're serving? How are we crafting a unified experience that is core and true to our brand, but then delivering that in ways that is relevant, valuable, i.e. personalized to the audiences?

Being the different donor segments, the different donor groups, or your staff, or the beneficiaries that you're serving, the people that you're serving on the program side, or the

problem that you're trying to resolve. There's people involved in that. I love thinking of every not-for-profit as many movements.

Movements towards seeing children thrive. You've got movements towards seeing injustice resolved. You've got movements towards seeing the environment destruction being resolved.

And people are getting caught up in these moments of time in these movements. As an organization, if you see yourself as a movement, then you realize that you're only as successful as the people within the movement. And those people aren't just your employees.

They're not the ones taking the salary. In fact, if the door's closed, who is still going to hold the torch? And how do we serve the movement versus just utilize one subsection as the funding engine for what we would classify as the movement?

<Podcast begins>

Greg Sobiech

Ben Webb, thank you so much for joining me today.

Ben Webb

It's a pleasure.

Greg

Fundraising versus marketing.

Is there a tension?

Ben

Yeah, absolutely. In the not-for-profit sector, at least I found there's a tension between understanding what marketing truly is, what it should be versus how it operates within organizations, and then fundraising as a byproduct of either marketing or a partner to it. And who leads and who follows?

What's the tip of the spear versus the follower? And I've seen multiple diagrams and how people dissect a funnel or a journey map and go, well, fundraising sits here and marketing sits there. Or marketing is the creative services.

Fundraising is the actual thing that drives the economic engine of the organization. My particular perspective is that it's actually all one and the same. When I've served as head of marketing for for-profits, your department is focused on being a growth engine for the organization.

In not-for-profits, they go, well, you're a service department for the fundraising. I was like, no, my job is to see growth come. I can work in partnership with fundraisers.

And there's some really fantastic talented ones. The ones that focus on one-to-one relationship cultivation is fantastic. They're like, it's like a sales department, if you will, for a for-profit organization.

But marketing in its truest form should be driving that bottom line growth. And so there's this tension. And I think the not-for-profit sector is having a moment in time where it's trying to reconcile with the tension.

We didn't see ourselves as marketers historically. We saw ourselves direct response. Fundraising was a big thing that was focused through the early 2000s.

It's still key there. Whereas like tried and true modern marketing really has revenue generation baked all through it. And so you're talking around product design, development, service offering, experience design.

Those key elements should all ultimately drive revenue, which in the not-for-profit sector is raising funds. The tensions there, I've spent many years with lots of conversations around who's on first. Ultimately, I think it's a partnership that needs to sit together.

But within the not-for-profit sector, we have to wake up to the fact that marketing actually is a growth driver for the mission versus a service department for graphic design and video development, etc.

Greg

I think what you're saying is that marketing isn't a cost center. It's a demand generation department.

Ben

Absolutely.

Greg

That works side by side with fundraising. And I like your marketing versus sales sort of analogy because when you look at for-profit companies, especially B2B, and in some ways fundraising isn't a B2B business because it deals with a handful of high value donors like B2B companies deal with. But in that classic for-profit company, sales and marketing often don't get together for reasons that make no sense.

They're both in revenue. They should just be called revenue department. And the separation between marketing and sales or marketing and fundraising, I agree with you.

It's a little maybe outdated. Have you seen ways to get marketing and fundraising to start from a point of understanding? Is there a connection that enables them to not be overly tactical?

Because I think people get in trouble when they get tactical. Is there something philosophical that can connect marketing and fundraising?

Ben

Yeah, absolutely. So the way I found this to be successful is I've got a framework that I'm actually rolling out an international justice mission right now, starting with the insight, starting with the audience that we're serving. So insight driven, concept led, powered by story, scaled by technology, monitored and assessed.

So five key steps. Those steps both inform best practice across all of our marketing efforts. So regardless of the department that you sit in, if it falls within the marketing structure, it's an agnostic framework.

It also can cross different geographies, right? So we're an international organization. So we have to deal with localization.

And if I come in with too much of a nuanced framework, it might not work in the Netherlands as it does in the United States, as it does in Australia. And then when it comes to fundraising, the same framework can be applied to what they do. So insight driven, what is the need of the person that you're serving?

If I'm in a for profit, I would call it the customer. But the need of the donor, what is their relational need? What woke them up in the morning and said, I feel compelled towards this mission and to give myself the freedom to reach out or give of my hard earned dollar or take a coffee with a relational manager?

What was the motivator behind that? That's the same thing that marketers get from segmentation personas, journey maps, those insights. So making sure that before we start with anything, we go, are we being insight driven?

And using that language, I find crosses the departmental, crosses the aisle, if you will, the departmental divides. So you can sit with somebody in direct response fundraising and go, we need to build out an AdWords strategy with X agency, and we want to do this mail out. Well, what is the insight that's going to drive the concept where the asks get tied to that framework that sits at that level, I find as a unifier, gives us a lexicon as well.

So we know that we're talking the same sort of language. And then underneath that, there's freedom within the framework. Well, this means X to you, like for me, I have to get started with, who is the segment?

Then what is the persona? Then what is the journey? Then what is the key touch point?

And I break it down. Whereas somebody in fundraising might not go that granular, but they've still got insights that they can pull out of the relationship that they've got, the donors that they've had experiences with, the phone calls, the emails, the analytics, et cetera, that they're gathering. And so that gives us this starting point.

How do we find that common ground?

Greg

As a non-native speaker, I do find that often in marketing, but also like in the business, it's hard to use simple language. So when you say insights driven, I hear need. What's the need?

Now at International Justice Mission, can you give me an example of how one may think about the need maybe from a fundraising perspective versus a need from a marketing perspective? Or maybe 10 years ago or versus how you think a need should be defined tomorrow?

Ben

Yeah, totally. So from a marketing perspective, when we're looking at segments, segments are large swaths of people. So we're taking an audience of millions and we're putting them into six to eight categories.

And so if I start there, or even if I move into a persona, the persona might take the 10 million audience, brings it down to a million-esque people. The persona gives that reality that breaks it down to around 500, 600,000 people. That's still a mass group of people.

Whereas relationship management comes and goes, I know Jeff, I know his son, Tommy loves baseball. And the reason why he loves the Dominican Republic is because his son's favorite baseball player was Dominican. And there is this heart connection.

And that's the reason why the mission popped because he was searching charities in the Dominican Republic and boom, that's where it popped up. So same thing, different ways of getting into it. I am not meeting with donors every single day.

I'm not forging those relationships. I'm looking at data. I'm looking at collations of data that is represented within some form of aggregate persona, if you will.

Whereas our donor managers have that direct understanding of who they are, what makes them tick. So I would say to get really, really granular, it comes down to honoring both sides of that information. To go, I love that you know that about Jeff.

And if we have to craft a message for him, because he is a principal level donor, he's going to cut us a big old check, then all day long, let's make sure like, let's go get some signed baseballs from some of our ambassadors, etc. And bring them as a value add in that exchange. But I can't take that as an example for 600,000 people when I'm talking on mass.

So I'm not going to craft an entire campaign for six months around that. You wrestle with that tension. So you can help set the right altitude, if you will, with the conversation, especially when you're looking at like cross-functional gatherings, where we have to build a campaign for major and principal level donors.

People love to give their subjective opinion. My job as a marketer is to move from the subjective to the objective and be able to find the commonality of insight to be able to make sure that it's effective for the broadest audience possible.

Greg

So if I think about like mass donors at the bottom of the classic giving pyramid, let's say they give, you know, 10 bucks a month on a recurring basis. Every charity uses a different language sometimes, but let's say mid-thousand bucks a year, major 50 plus, right? And from there, even more.

Is there a campaign that bridges a gap between all those audiences? Is there a message, your wish, marketing and fundraising could align on? And I imagine there are many, by the way, there are many segments.

Can you give me examples of one or several where whoever I am, there is this narrow slice, you know, that goes top to bottom that would resonate with that message. But it's a message that is not how we normally talk to donors.

Ben

This is where the brand geek in me comes out. Let me do a prelude to my answer. Rather than focusing on not-for-profit examples, if you look at the last 60 years of individual giving trends, it roughly has been capped at around 2% on average per GDP.

For the last 60 years, not-for-profits haven't done a great job at breaking through to the other 98% of GDP availability when it comes to mobilizing movements, et cetera. I've said this to some of my peers across other organizations, and some of them agree and others kind of get a little shocked. But I don't care what happens in the not-for-profit sector when it comes to marketing, because we're not breaking through the noise too often.

And so to use a great example of what's that can move across audiences, Nike's Just Do It messaging platform. They have a key tagline that connects to the ethos of their brand. And then they can use that in the context of their sub-brands, their segments, their different audience groups, their different product offerings.

It maintains relevance and value because it's still very true to the core of who they are. And then they apply it in ways that is relevant and valuable to their different audience groups. So Nike SB can have Just Do It, and they've got, I think it's Eric Costin as a key skateboarder is, you know, kick flipping off a 10 stair.

And then you've got that Serena Williams is doing it for tennis. They use ambassadors to be able to relate the ethos of the brand to their sub audiences. I haven't seen too many not-for-profits do that very successfully, at least in a way that deeply resonates with people.

We're working on this at IJM. From a messaging platform standpoint, one of the, this is kind of like early days, this is actually isn't public yet, but I'll give you a little sneak peek. This is actually just hot off the press in the last 24 hours.

But we've had this phrase that has bounced around the organization for the last 20 odd years, that actually is very true to who we are. And it's until all are free. That's ultimately why we exist.

Moving that from a nice little catch phrase, actually positioning it to being a messaging platform, having that deeply resound with people. And we've tested this across many different audiences in an ad hoc way over the last 20 years. And really when I came in at the start of the year, I was looking through the brand work and looking through like some of the previous things that the CEO had written in the speeches and TED talks, et cetera.

My head of creative called me up and he's like, I found I just do it. And I'm like, okay, dude, you can't, that's a, that's a strong claim. He was like, it's until all are free.

And as soon as he said that, it connected deeply with everything that I had read. And I've spent the last couple of months actually meeting with leader after leader after leader going, when you talk to this audience, when you talk to the government official, when you talk to

the survivor, when you talk to the CEO, if it is a B2B relationship and we're trying to get a CSR funding, does the words until all are free deeply resound with them ultimately encapsulating who we are. And every time it's like, yes, this is because it's true to our brand.

And so coming back to it, it was like, what are the key things that can move across the audiences is, is your brand relevant and valuable in a way that is understandable across those audience groups. And then you move down into what is the products and services that have to get more nuanced but that core messaging, that central brand identity needs to be strong enough to carry because people see organizations as a singular entity, not-for-profits trade ultimately off of the economy of trust. It's not finances, it's trust.

We need time, talent, and treasure from people in all of those things correlate to trust. And if I come in to shoot another podcast with you tomorrow and I have a full head of hair and an American accent, there is this thing of like, hold on a second, there's a little bit of something that creates a conflict with like, are you the person that I thought you were yesterday? We do that in not-for-profits very often is we try to make our brand relevant, but we actually start to crack at and fragment the core ethos of the brand.

And there's some things that have to be held true. It's about having that consistency cultivates trust. And then underneath that, you communicate in a way that is relevant and valuable to your specific audience.

Greg

I often talk about the need for personalization because you talk about the fact that in fundraising, obviously there's a CRM system and every conversation is probably denoted, right? And if it could be recorded using ChatGPT and summarized, we would love to do it. It just wouldn't be really trustworthy to do.

But I think we would all love to do this if I'm in fundraising. I know I would if I was doing it. So I need to know that this donor's son loves baseball and this baseball player is from DR. So that's important to remember, but that's one-to-one. Well, how do I connect until all are free, which resonates with me, by the way, I think it's very emotional. Like you feel it in your bones. But how do you merge that into personalization?

And the second step in your framework was audiences. Is it the same message for everyone? Do you then start to, I'm going to use the word personalize it for the sense of different segments.

Now, how do I almost bridge like the emotional storytelling that comes with brand with the tactical approach of direct marketing, which is audience segments? Or is there a connection or?

Ben

There absolutely is. When you step through the framework, you start with the insights.

So who are they? Why are they interested in what we're doing? And what is that interest?

So insight driven, then you move into the concept, concept being what is the big idea that we want to communicate? Where do we move them from one state into another state? So if

that inherent need that they have is to feel as though they're living a life of purpose, they're living a life beyond themselves.

Can our concept encapsulate that and move them from one state to another state? So that's what makes a concept quite successful. Then the third step is powered by stories.

So this is where not-for-profits can thrive. And when it comes to personalization, this is where a huge amount of investment has to be made and optimization in terms of being able to capture these stories of transformation. Not-for-profits are sitting on the most incredible stories, more often than not, I'd argue in humanity.

You're seeing like the most destitute and broken, transformed and live lives of freedom and flourishing. You're seeing children captured and ravaged with the worst forms of violence go on to represent the need of transformation within their nations, within their governments, like the best human interest stories. But there are different things that connect with different people.

So you've got different pathways. So how are you telling stories that connect the concept to the individual in a really beautiful and intent way? And so our job then is to go, well, it's not one story encapsulates everything.

You've got to tell multiple stories. There's multiple different angles and it doesn't always have to be around the beneficiary of the not-for-profits programs. It could also be transformation stories of staff.

Like a lot of the times, these incredible hero stories or even purpose-driven connections can be found with the staff that you have inside your offices. I think the big key thing is with Powered by Stories, when it comes to personalization, the way I would summarize it is, how do you find the empathy bridge? So the quest for water, it's one that a lot of not-for-profits are rightly so trying to resolve is the issue of clean water around the world.

And a lot of the times, at least historically, you would see a lot of videos of a young adult or a child in Africa hauling a big bucket for miles and miles and miles to find clean water. And it's an absolute true and tragic situation that needs to be resolved. But me, as a white, American-living, Australian-born individual, the truth of my reality, if I get really raw and real, my truth is, okay, so I wake up tomorrow morning, my family is gone, I have lost all my money and my health is in the toilet and I get fired.

So like, Job-level destruction, my world is over. What happens? Well, my parents live in Australia.

So I get deported from the country. I move to my parents' house. The government gives me free health care.

I have access to clean water. My parents live two minutes from the beach in Australia. And I rehabilitate myself with free health care and I go on government-assisted living that provides me a couple of hundred dollars a week.

Bad situation. But in my worst case scenario, I'm not walking 15 miles for clean water. So it's really hard for me, if I'm being very honest, like, I hate the situation exists, but it's really, really hard for me to emotionally connect with that.

Because I've never really been thirsty. And this is the scandal of grace and like, there's a whole other debate that we can have around why this exists. This is just, I won the geographic genetic lottery, if you will, that is a part of a broken world.

So then... And if I may...

Greg

Thank God. Right. Absolutely.

Like, yeah. Yeah. I mean, I feel very grateful and fortunate that we won that lottery.

Ben

Like, absolutely, that there is this deep appreciation for it. So flip that from the not-for-profit sector and go, like, me now working and going, I have to motivate somebody like me on that quest. Well, how do I connect it?

Imagine being thirsty. Well, it's hard. Like, after a workout, I've wanted a drink, but I haven't woke up with cotton mouth and going, I can't get access to water.

Imagine not having access to healthcare. That would suck. But like, the worst I've had is a couple of hour wait for the doctor because my daughter broke her wrist or whatever it was.

I've never truly been in a place of desperation. So the empathy bridge is where do you find those emotional connections? So an example that I saw, I didn't make this, but I saw this happen while I was working at Compassion.

There was this video and they were talking around sponsoring a child and it was the longest waiting child. And they were trying to connect to the moment of like, imagine waiting for a long time for a sponsor. Well, I've never gone through that experience.

I've never needed to be sponsored, never gone through that experience. But there was this one video where this natural moment was captured that made the video a huge success. And it was when the project leader came to the home of the child and told the child that they had a sponsor and they gave them the sponsor's information.

And the parent, the mother sat there and grabbed the photo of the sponsor, put it to her head and started to cry. Me as a young dad at the time, messed up.

Greg

I'm actually like, I actually feel it the way you're describing it. I feel it. Absolutely messed up.

Ben

What I wouldn't do for my child. So the issues of the child is one thing, but the heart connection with the parent, that's the empathy bridge for the product, for the connection. Why sponsor a child?

Well, if you're a parent, what would you do for your child? If your child was a need and the only way that they could get the opportunity to flourish is if somebody came in and supported and gave generously. My goodness, like how would I feel towards that individual?

My world would be just completely pivoted. Finding those moments is really key when it comes to personalization. So this powered by stories, our job is to find those moments and go, well, that piece connects with you and I because we've got children.

But for somebody that's 18, that doesn't have kids, they're probably watching this going, well, that's nice. And that's, that's, that's a beautiful moment, but it doesn't have the same empathy bridge for them. And so what's another story that can connect with that person?

It might be of the individual that took a year before going to college to do some advocacy in their local community, raise funds and be able to build a water well in a community and they represent living a life of purpose. And that connects with somebody. How do we tell those stories as well?

They're unified by the concept that is informed by the inside. And so walking through those steps moves it from being something that is lofty that sits at the organizational level. It comes down into what is really practical as a brand to be personalized then to the individual.

And how do we move somebody from a position of indifference into a place of purpose?

Greg

One of my dreams when I finished school in 97 was to work for McKinsey. Yeah. Okay.

Great show. And, you know, probably in retrospect, maybe it was a good thing that I didn't, you know, it's funny how things happen for a reason, but I like frameworks, right? I like frameworks, I like visual things.

So if I think back to that audience, to the giving pyramid, and I have these different audiences, and I think what you're saying, which I didn't think about before is that if I want to tell different stories to different audience segments, again, using that direct marketing language that relates to direct mail and digital and anything else and email. But I need to tell a story. But in that story, I have to bake lots of empathy, but empathy for the recipient and for the giver.

Yes. So I have to be empathetic towards just my reality and what resonates with me. And I have to be telling stories that explain the purpose for which I exist as a charity.

And that's something I haven't heard before, frankly. It's because I think to your point, we get a little righteous when we think of that image of someone carrying a bucket of water 15 miles. It's also a little stereotypical, frankly.

I think there are many stories behind that. So it feels somehow wrong. There's something wrong with that.

But that moment of that mother kissing, that picture of being thankful for the donor is real and universal. And there are probably many other stories like that.

Ben

How do you connect to the humanity of things? It's not necessarily the byproduct, but the actual deep, intrinsic humanity. So the idea of living a life of purpose, what was I created for?

This is a question that rattles around the hearts and minds of tens of millions, regardless of your faith background or if you don't have one, et cetera. There's this, what was I made for? That's a universal question.

Why is there injustice? That's a universal question. The love of a parent, universal theme.

The relationship of friends and the power of friendship. I saw this fantastic concept through Colgate, actually. So the toothpaste company, their whole company's focus is around healthy teeth and gums.

And so their concept is, well, what power of a smile? They told multiple different stories underneath it of, one of them was a child's first day to school. He hops on the school bus.

He's walking around and can't find a seat. And this girl looks at him and she's all coy, but there's a seat for him. He sits next to her.

They just look at each other and smile. And there's this initial connection. Everybody's had that moment of walking into a room and feeling alone.

And then when a smile connects with you, you go, oh, okay. Like I'm seen. People want to feel seen.

Bringing it down to the root humanity is where the most powerful concepts can be found. And for not-for-profits, there's this thing that there's this analogy that I like to use. I'll run this little example with you.

So I call it how to be a good friend. So you and I have just met, like we've actually just met. This is the first time we've met in person.

So great conversation. This is really interesting. And I say to you, hey, you want to go out for drinks after this?

We'll go out, we'll find a bar somewhere, go out for drinks. You're a nice guy. You're like, sure.

So it's great.

Greg

I've got an hour.

Ben

We're good. Sure. We get there, we get to the bar and I go like this.

I don't have my wallet on me. You're a nice guy. What are you going to do?

Of course. Great. I spent the whole time talking about myself.

I don't ask you a single question about yourself. I don't ask about your family. I just rave about how great I am.

But at the end of the conversation, I go, hey, do you want to come to the movies? I got two tickets. It's on Thursday night.

Just so happens to be a movie that you want to see. It's in the local region. And you go, great.

I'll be there. We go there two nights later, we get to the door of the movie theater and I go, forgot my tickets. We're there.

What do you do? You're like, I'm going to buy the ticket. Okay.

I get the ticket. We go, we watch the movie. I still don't ask you a question about yourself, but at the very end, I say to you, hey, I'd love to have you over for dinner.

And you go, okay, great. Bring your wife, bring your kids. This is great.

Saturday night rolls around. You come to my house and on the way there, I text you and I text you and I say, hey, we don't have any food. Can you bring all of the food?

You're already driving. You have that conversation in the car, which is like, what's going on with this guy? You pick up some pizzas, you come over to my house.

And again, I spend the whole night talking about myself and you spot around the house, moving boxes. And the conversation topic comes up and you go like, what is those boxes for? And I go, I'm moving tomorrow.

Kind of prompting you as to like, will you come help? The human reaction is what? Like at that time, it's kind of like, well, have fun with that.

I'm not going to like, that sucks for you. Let me inverse the story. So I got great conversation.

Hey, come out for drinks. Don't even bother bringing your wallet. Drinks are on me.

And then while we're out for drinks, I ask you a hundred questions about yourself. Tell me about your wife. Tell me about your kids.

And then I say, hey, I've got two tickets for this movie. I think you and your wife would love it. You were talking about X, Y, and Z here.

Here's the two tickets, but would you love to come over for dinner on Saturday night? Uh, and you're like, great. So you go watch the movie.

I text you straight after the movie. How was the movie? Hope you guys had a fantastic time.

Like this guy really interested in my life on the way for dinner. I go, Hey, what's your favorite kind of wine? You want to come over?

Like, would you love red? You love white. I'm going to go crack a great bottle from the cellar.

You come over and then we spend the night. It's dynamic. There's lots of questions.

We're back and forth with each other, getting to know each other. There's a lot of connection there. We've had a wonderful evening.

And then you spot boxes and I go, "Yeah, I'm moving tomorrow." Human reaction. How can I help?

Greg

Because you pay it forward, right?

Ben

Exactly. There's this idea of relevance and value. There's a value exchange that has happened. We found a relevant connection in our relationship. We got to understand each other.

The value exchange then has been, well, hold on a second. This guy really cares about me. He actually knows me.

I have some spare time. I have opportunity to contribute — human nature is, I want to naturally start to contribute again.

Greg

Yeah.

Ben

Not for profits: Hi, we're really fantastic. Here's our mission.

Can you give us some money? Oh, you've only given us that amount of money. Can you give us more money?

Oh, you've only given us twice. We want you to give every single month. Oh, you've given every single month, but you haven't given a major gift.

How about you give a major gift. Also, let's just tell you how fantastic we are. And by you hearing how fantastic we are, you should feel good enough just to keep giving us money.

And then we wonder why people cancel or they don't engage over a long period of time. It's roughly five to seven years, depending on the organization, is lifetime value. Why does that attrition rate occur?

Greg

Yeah.

Ben

Because we're not good friends. So to boil it down to like the essence of human relationship, you were talking about before around like what resonates with you as a father of daughters.

If I use that information to guilt you into a first gift, and then don't give you anything else that connects to that initial motivation for the next five years and go, but why? Like you're kind of a bad person because you're not giving. That's not on you.

That's on me because I haven't delivered relevance and value to you in a way that is sustainable. And so not-for-profits have got to recalibrate themselves to go. It's not just about us and our mission.

We can't do this without them. And for them to get involved in what we're doing, it means that we have to have relationship and relationship means that we've got to be relevant. So they've got to connect deeply with the mission of what we're doing.

And then there has to be a value exchange. It can't just be one way because that's how relationship breaks down. If you look at like Hollywood relationships, some of the hottest people in the world, why do they break up?

Relevance and value. The value exchange breaks down. Is that that mutual beneficial relationship?

I could look like Brad Pitt, but if I set up a cultural date with my wife and said, make me a sandwich and you go to work and I'm going to do nothing, it doesn't matter if I'm relevant. Without that value, the relationship will be destroyed. So how do we market in a way and tell stories in a way that drives you deep value, connects to the humanity of the individual and forge ultimately lasting relationships that are mutually beneficial.

So for somebody to be involved, say with IJM, what I want them to feel is a part of a movement and a community that is transformative and not just for the people that we're serving on the programmatic side, but for them as well. They're living a life of purpose. There's meaning and value to it.

They are being transformative and I cannot be successful without them. The programs cannot be successful. That child that is trapped in slavery, being abused, cannot be released unless somebody wakes up in the morning and it says, today I'm going to be generous and I'm going to move on behalf of that child.

That equation breaks if that doesn't happen. So for them to feel valued in that is the biggest part of my job to say like, Hey, you have a purpose. If your purpose resonates here, then wonderful.

And then how do I make you feel connected and growing? And you're deepening your understanding of both what we're trying to achieve from a mission perspective and your contribution to that mission. And how does that play it in your own world as well?

Storytelling then takes a completely different lens. It doesn't just become about, let me brag about how great we are, or let's look at the fantastic work that's happening over in X. It becomes more about how do I connect with the heart of the individual?

How do I, and the audience that is watching the video, how do I connect to their heart? What makes them tick? How do I give them something and then trust that in return, if they have been moved, they will be moved to contribute to what we're doing.

And you actually get a deeper value exchange out of it anyway, versus a, can you just go away gift? And that's really what sustainable not-for-profits need to focus on.

Greg

There's so much in what you shared. There is the donor and there's the, let's call it customer, the person that we're helping. And there are many points of connection between different donor segments and the needs of the audiences that we have.

The empathy bridge empowered by stories is what connects us on an emotional level. So that takes a certain skillset to get that. That's one side of the brain to understand what you just said.

It takes experience. I think it takes also failure. I think it takes years of being in marketing.

It also takes execution. How does one operationalize it? Because then we're talking about data and creative and technology.

And then you add to it again, where we started, which is how can marketing and fundraising align on that? And then you have this whole thing happening with the people who we want to be the next generation of major donors, Gen Z millennials. They don't care about charities in my experience.

They care about the purpose. They care about exactly what you just said. They care about the stories.

This could be three more hours of us talking about these topics. What are you hearing?

Ben

Ultimately, what I'm hearing, if I play it back to you, the conversation of innovation has bounced around, I mean, every sector, but the not-for-profit sector is having a moment where it's having to reconcile itself in the fact that it's becoming increasingly irrelevant to the next generation. You're seeing this with things like no increase in the percentage of giving.

We're seeing like a drop off for an aging demographic of donors over time. There's a transformation that needs to occur where we start to reconcile being people centric. And so rather than saying fundraising and marketing, and you could even go like, then revenue generation and programs.

That's another divide that sits in not-for-profits in different ways as well. It's like they make the money and they spend the money or however you want to frame it in the crudest sense of the word. That if you look at it and go, well, actually we're in the business of people.

There's a transformation that needs to occur where we look at the holistic picture of who are the people within our movements. And it's not just the people that we're serving or the people that are executing on the work. On the donor side, they're not just wallets.

They're not just bank accounts. They are lives that, and their families and their stories, their experiences, they are talents, they are opportunities. And there is grace actually to be found.

Not-for-profit work is brutally hard and there's grace to be found with that audience group as well as the others. And how do you take a holistic picture? So as you're walking through those details of like, what does the divide look like?

And how does the insights play out, et cetera? I'm looking at the meta-narrative underneath it to go, there's this moment in time around a transformation within the not-for-profit sector for us to go, how do we look at the holistic picture of who it is that we're serving? How are we crafting a unified experience that is core and true to our brand, but then delivering that in ways that is relevant, valuable, i.e. personalized to the different audiences, being the different donor segments, the different donor groups, or your staff, or the beneficiaries that you're serving, the people that you're serving on the program side, or the problem that you're trying to resolve. There's people involved in that. How do we look at all of them collective in a network to say like, this is actually what makes the movement.

The way that I would summarize it is, I love thinking of every not-for-profit as mini movements. Movements towards seeing children thrive. You've got movements towards seeing injustice resolved.

You've got movements towards seeing the environment destruction being resolved. And people are getting caught up in these moments of time in these movements. As an organization, if you see yourself as a movement, then you realize that you're only as successful as the people within the movement.

And those people aren't just your employees. They're not the ones taking the salary. In fact, if the door is closed, who is still going to hold the torch for what you're doing?

Well, more often than not, it's those that are advocating on behalf of the voiceless. And so you've got to look at the holistic picture. And we're in this moment of time to reconcile, well, then how do we serve the movement versus just utilize one subsection as the funding engine for what we would classify as the movement.

Greg

Again, back to consulting. If you brought in a Deloitte or PwC consultant, they would probably say it's an organizational change. Yeah.

Like some transformation, right? And again, it's both about a vision and then operational alignment. And again, I go back to the premise that we started with, which is how do I get fundraising and marketing to align, to recognize that this is needed, that it has to be transformative.

I think that comes with some degree of sacrifice. Something has to give, there's a cost. I don't know what the cost is, but it will cost you something.

And then how do we come out on the other side? And I love how you said it's a movement. This is a very complex, multidimensional thing that you're describing.

How do you start or what can one do?

Ben

Give a damn about people. Like to boil it down to in the simplest sort of way. So I've worked for, I mean, I've worked large scale organizations with thousands of people, multiple different departments, et cetera.

There's a real power in sitting down with somebody and asking them questions if they sit in a different department, why did you sign up for this work? The not for profit sector, everybody has made a sacrifice. Like I'll just start with like, they don't pay as well.

Like if you're good at what you do, you're taking a pay cut. And if you're increasingly good, it's increasing pay cut, if you will. So you've always got this thing of like security that sits there.

And then we're dealing with stories that most humans might only hear once or twice in a lifetime on a daily basis. And then if you've been in it for any period of time, you've witnessed, or you've seen it, or you've met, or you've tasted, you've experienced that heartache, that pain that breaks you, you don't get into the work for fame, glory, and money. Like it's not that there is this intrinsic thing that you wake up in the morning and go like, this is the reason why I'm called to this work.

I think calling is such an important driver, especially in purpose-driven work. So by understanding what was the calling for that individual, hearing their story, and then using that for them to help them see themselves as a part of the movement, because the movement really is the encapsulation of what that calling is. Like you with this podcast, a large part of what you do is focus on not-for-profits and wanting to advance them.

Why not-for-profits? You've talked about you service not-for-profits and you're very generous with them in different ways. Why do you do that?

That's connecting with you in that level and going like, I actually really care about understanding what that is. And then telling you my side of the story, which is like, this is the reason why I do this kind of work. Well, you and I actually work in two different industries.

You could see that as like, well, two different departments, if you will. There's a lot more commonality. Finding commonality, giving a damn about people, and then using that as the bridge to see themselves and yourselves as a part of a singular movement helps us bring things down to a granular level.

How I'm doing this at IJM, a mentor of mine, when I first started, he said, people are waiting. They're waiting for us. There's a child that's sitting in a room right now with a locked door and a webcam in Indonesia.

She's waiting. There is men chained next to a pit. There are women coming home frightened for their lives because they're in abusive relationships.

There are people walking down the street concerned around when a siren rings, like they're waiting and they might not be actively sitting still, but there's this deep yearning in their heart. They're waiting for somebody to show up. Our job is to show up and to go, you don't have to wait anymore.

And while I'm sitting around faffing about with my KPIs or brand new framework or nice little white paper or conference, et cetera, et cetera, that child's still waiting. The child's still, she's still there. She's still waiting.

The webcam's still turning on. So that puts a fire in my chest to then go, well, how do we cut through the BS and actually get straight to the point? Like there is a mission here and we're either doing this or we're not.

Like it gets really black and white. It gets really binary when you put that need front and center. And more often than not, I find that that's the thing that crosses the aisle.

Like, are we a part of a movement? Well, I debate the concept of movement. You could get into the philosophical conversation as to like, what's the meaning of the word movement?

Well, hold on a second. Let's put that to the side and just go, do you agree that there's a child waiting for us right now? Yes.

Okay. And you want to do whatever you can within your God-given gifts and talents to be able to serve that child. And so for you, you're an accountant, same thing as me.

I'm a marketer. I don't have the skillset to be able to go in and work with police forces and litigate against these violent crimes. At times I wish I did, but I can't.

But what can I do? I know how to do behavioral psychology, connect with people, build that marketing campaigns and, you know, incredible creative, if you will, that's what we try to do to connect with people, to raise money, to be able to mobilize those people to do that work. And you as the accountant, you make sure that we're like riders reign, we're integrous in what we're doing, we're compliant, et cetera, vital role.

But can we agree that she's waiting for us to get our stuff sorted out? So can we be quick? Can we be urgent?

Can we focus on the root problems? Having that front and center is a really practical way to keep us focused on the most important thing. Where I really personally struggle in the not-for-profit sector is when people in themselves walk versus run.

And I've been guilty with this myself. I've been in the industry for close to 20 years now. I had a full head of wonderful hair when I started.

And you go through seasons of just desensitization. I've seen it. I'm a part of this.

It's a career for me. I'm working on the promotion. I'm working on getting this funding for this budget, for this initiative, et cetera, et cetera.

That concept of individual waiting is actually more in the background versus the foreground. Being able to calibrate yourself. And I'm having to do this daily now, this daily recalibration back to, I do this.

I've got this image of this child sitting on a bed with a webcam pointed at her waiting. And then that doesn't, I don't want to then be an absolute beast to my coworkers and just

destroy them because they're waiting. But with love and grace, connect with people, but with a sense of urgency to go, let's just focus on the real thing here.

And we're unified in that. That crafts a completely different conversation. It's the platform for a completely different conversation.

I've found you do that over and over and over and over again, creates this consistency, helps galvanize people together, unify us on a clear message, a clear pathway forward. And then you start to see leaps and bounds. And I've learned this through lots of failure, coming in with urgency and railroading people.

And I've failed in that area or not being urgent enough and being focused on my department and my budget versus actually what is going to drive the most amount of results. So getting out of your own way and using the mission, using the stories and the empathy, the thing that connects you to that person, that initial driver, why I got into the sector as a way of filtering into what is the most powerful thing for us to move forward.

Greg

To bring it to close, what I'm hearing, Ben, is that it's hard to think about the child that's on a webcam every day. I could see that destroying me personally, emotionally. I could see that draining me completely because I could see my daughter.

Yeah. And I have three of them. And on the other hand, marketing isn't just a call center supporting fundraising.

Maybe there's a middle ground where we get closer, further away from the operational size of the wallet. I'm just a call center. And I move towards stories and that's marketing and fundraising.

And also as marketing and fundraising, we recognize that there are stories that I need to hear because they create value for me and I can just reverse it and somebody else needs help in this area and it creates value for them. And there is, it's obviously a very tough balance, but there is something in the middle there. But to your point, that's already transformational.

That's actually huge, but it makes sense to me that fundraising and marketing are in the same boat, part of the same movement, serving the same mission, rowing in the same direction.

Ben

They're unified in that way. And if we look at the people that they're serving as a key part of the movement that have hopes, dreams, desires, intent, and we find ways to serve them as they serve us in this movement, that's where you see the greatest amount of value exchange. I was taught to think this way, start with the who, what, and why before the how.

So who are they? What are their needs? Why do those needs exist?

And then you move into, well, how do I solve their needs? But then there's this next step that comes after that, which I think is just the most beautiful gift as a part of being a part of

this sector, is as you go through those, that process, the value of purpose-driven organizations, it's transformative. It's transformational.

Somebody giving regularly is transformative for them. They become generous. They understand the world in a bigger, deeper way.

They're exposed to stories, both negative, but also many positive, hopeful, incredible stories that help them take the color beauty that is creation. But then us as marketers or fundraisers or whomever are transformed as well. I've been transformed by every relationship that I've gathered along the way, not just with my coworkers, my staff, et cetera, but with those donors where I'm like, you're doing what now?

And it's not just the mega donor. Some of the most transformative stories are of the grandma making jam every weekend because she can't afford to give on a regular basis off of her pension. So she gets old fruit, makes jam, sells the jam and uses all of the proceeds.

That's the kind of old person I want to be. And so when you meet these people and you realize that they're not fairy tales, they're real, the how becomes transformative for the movement. And so that's where the greatest value comes.

I think like IJM has the greatest proven model for eradicating violence for the poor. And we have these lofty goals that we've got to plan for. And I believe that we could be successful.

But even if we're not, the transformation that's happened along the way, I've said this to head hunters from other for-profit organizations that have come from me. I'm like, you can't afford me because it's not about money. It's not about like what I get from a value exchange.

And when it comes to transformation, it makes me a better husband. It makes me a better father. It makes me a better friend.

That is the movement. That is the beauty of purpose-driven work. And it isn't held just within the not-for-profit sector.

It's for anybody that decides to actively engage in giving on behalf of others that can't, on speaking out on behalf of others that can't. There's this transformation that happens where you cannot lose. And that becomes the most beautiful part of all of this.

So it's like, start with the who, what, and why before the how. But then just know that the result of all of that is this beautiful connected transformation that I think is the essence of life.

Greg

That was a wonderful way of closing it out. Ben Webb, International Justice Mission. Thank you so much.

Ben

It's a pleasure. Thank you.