



Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy Podcast.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're your hosts, Fluxx's, co-founder Kerrin Mitchell, and Neon One's Tim Sarrantonio. We've spent our career learning how to leverage technology and data in the social sector to better connect and serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

Kerrin Mitchell:

In this podcast series, we profile leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry experts to explore the fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most formative topics and trends that shape the present and future of philanthropy. Welcome, welcome. It is season five, I can't believe it, on Untapped Philanthropy. And today we have the incredible Trista Harris joining us again on the show. She, as you know, is a visionary in the world of philanthropy. She's known for her groundbreaking work on Future Good, where she empowers leaders in our community to envision and create a brighter future. So we wanted her back on. It's a crazy time. The world can feel very divided right now. And we had the good fortune of having Trista join us actually as a keynote speaker at our 2024 FluxxCon. And I thought, what a wonderful way to talk about the future, bring something forward that holds both optimism as well as meaningful action and bring that back to the community today, especially in the time of the new year with some new strategies, new ideas, new leadership. We thought we'd dive right on in with Trista. So thank you, Trista, for joining us. Once again.

Trista Harris:

Thanks so much for having me. Always excited to talk to you about what's coming next.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I love it, and we're so thrilled to have you. Tim, I know you had a chance to talk with her last year, but this is a voice of someone that we refer back to constantly on our show, so couldn't be happier to.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I think that what I liked about our time last time was almost like a realistic grounding to help navigate the coming year, and that's why we're so thrilled to have you back, especially in a time where I think people are looking for clarity on what the hell is actually happening.

Trista Harris:

Is there a little bit of disruption? Now we could talk about that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Just a smidge.

Kerrin Mitchell:

But what's really compelling I think, is this idea that last time we were able to focus a lot on these futurism tools. So check out that episode if you haven't already. But today I would love to kind of, now we've done an intro in the first Trista episode. This one, I'd really love to understand some of the experience of what's changed in the last year. What's brought you to influence a new perspective, a new



feeling, a new action that you believe that our industry's taken. So maybe we can just reflect on the last year and get your take on some experiences or influences that have come forward for you.

Trista Harris:

Yeah, I spend a lot of time with folks in the sector, and I've talked to hundreds and hundreds of people in nonprofits and foundations to get their perspective on what's coming next. Sometimes those ideas are really well-formed. They are coming from a conference stage and somebody's got slides and they have the research to back it up. Sometimes the ideas are in the happy hours and the unformed thoughts about what people are feeling in this moment and what they're noticing. And we also at Future Goods spend a lot of time within organizations. And so we get to know staff and board members really deeply and get a picture of what's happening at the micro level within individual organizations. And then our job is to look at all of those bits of information and figure out what broader trends is that showing us about what's important to the field moving forward.

Tim Sarrantonio:

A lot of this, I think always comes down to the futurist lens, still kind of needing the balance with the practical realities. So even, I don't want to necessarily put you on the spot also from last year to remember all the things we talked about, but where in your work, where are adjustments needing to get made heading into 2025 in, we'll just kind of reduce it down to, the model in a way.

Trista Harris:

Yeah, I think there are two really important things. One is attacks on the social sector. So we had HR 94-95, which is just the beginning of attacks on our field. And I was reflecting back to a signal of the future that I received about 15 years ago. I was at an Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy conference in Indianapolis, and we had a reception that was at some restaurant and they had a sign that was like, we're welcoming emerging practitioners in philanthropy and we're waiting in the lobby for the room to be ready. And this guy that was just going to the restaurant walked in and he saw the sign and he goes, is this guy, is this you? And we were like, yeah, we're the philanthropy people. And he goes, oh, philanthropy, the ones that are sucking the life out of society. And I was like, I had never previously heard a bad word about philanthropy.

So I was like, what do you mean? And he is like, oh, you're those folks that don't pay taxes and just take everything out. I was like, what a crazy message. What is happening? What a weird experience. I will say for all of us that have been around for the last couple of years, that is not a unique experience anymore. That philanthropy that at its base is love of humankind. It's the most basic human instinct of helping another human that needs help is suddenly under attack. And I think that says a lot about the state of our country and the state of our world, but I think it's an important thing for us to pay good attention to in the sector that we have to be really clear about what we're doing. We often use shorthand and try to use the buzzwords to describe what we're doing, but that it really needs to get down to that love of humankind is the work that we're doing all the time.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's really interesting to kind of hear you also talk about that repositioning in a way.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's Exactly what I was going to say, Tim. I was about to talk and I was like, yes, that's exactly the repositioning, the rebranding. Right?



Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, and because to share, one of the things that I started getting more involved in is, as last September I became share of the Fundraising Effectiveness Project, which on this show we've talked about a few times as chair, I'm going to continue to talk about it, but we added a government relations subcommittee with Shannon McCracken of the Nonprofit Alliance. And where she really zeroed in for me was we have to talk about this differently, especially with the incoming changes on the hill. That you can't just assume everybody gets what you're about. And if anything, it's even more critical, like you're talking about to assume, oh, it's actually a fight. It's actually a reframing for even our very existence anymore because Kerrin, what are you seeing on your side? Because there's a lot of people freaking out right now.

Kerrin Mitchell:

But here's the thing is you can counteract the politics and crazy behavior that we're seeing where people are erratic and throwing around jargony terms with data. Data's the great equalizer here. The more we can help people tell the story, tell the impact, build structures, and that's even a call to us as technologists, and we've been having this talk at Fluxx hugely, is how do we become an impact, not impact management technology, but how do we start to support that impact informed work? How do we start to and utilize a lot of the AI and a lot of things that are now letting us tell this story better in ways that gave us visibility to risks or to partnerships or to things that never existed before. We get this ability to drive a data connections and partnership in a new way. So it's a very interesting thing because I think of as a great decider, and as much as it seems weird to say data is a great equalizer, it does help people like ACLU, Planned Parenthood folks like that. Our customers, to be honest of ours, that are wonderful drivers of important things in the community to tell the story so that they can get there and say, no DC this is what we do, this is how we work, this is our results. And I think it's an interesting thing that combined with storytelling gets you to that answer. Whereas before, I think there's a lot of jargon, and I'm not saying that anyone is at fault for doing that, it's just the default is to talk in circles around it.

Trista Harris:

We all go to the same conferences and talk to the same people, and I've come up with the same shorthand and the challenge that that is not widely understood outside the field. And so we're sort of speaking in an echo chamber. I think the place where it is most evident in this moment is diversity, equity, and inclusion. And so we have a shorthand in the sector that my foundation or my nonprofit centers, DEI, because we know the rest of that theory of changes. If we do that, then we ensure that we reach the hardest to reach. And then our big goal about health access for people that live in Southern Minnesota will be able to be successful because we've used this frame, but what we say is we're focused on DEI. And so I think it's the extending the narrative to tell the story about how all those pieces come together. And I think in this moment there is so much conversation about DEI, like it is a new thing. It is literally the center of what this country is built on. And I think a lot of folks have been really thoughtful about how to tell that story. I just saw a statement that Hakeem Jeffries made where he said that it's our core American values.

Tim Sarrantonio:

American values.

Trista Harris:



And really laid out that out of many one, that's diversity. The 14th amendment, which is providing equal protection under the law, that is equity. And then we pledge allegiance to the flag in the United States under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all is inclusion. So none of this is new, and when suddenly it becomes three letters, it's easy to sort of turn that into a boogeyman. But that is the core of what this country is built on. And to pull that apart really destroys who we are as a nation.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think if we want to go, and maybe we can indulge me with a bit of history, reflection, because what we're talking about reminds me of something I was just reading in David Grabber's, *The Dawn of Everything*, and it was about how even western liberalism, if we go all the way back to Rousseau, right, the French Revolution, and ultimately he was writing about there's liberty, but there's also equality. And even the core elements of our democracy has its roots, not in Western philosophy, but actually what indigenous Americans were doing to organize their societies. And where that push and pull even comes down to what do we do with resources? Ultimately this comes down to resources and some of the really core discussions that were happening to make the Constitution in the first place was a bi-directional conversation between folks of the Seven Nations and founding fathers and all that.

And it was ultimately about why are you organizing your society around resource allocation like this? And we're still having that conversation and it's about people who say, yes, it's important for me to have my freedom, but not at the expense of someone in the streets having a very difficult time finding shelter, finding food, these types of things. It's about whether our definition is a yes and one. So I think this is maybe Kerrin a good time to shift into its 2025. Trista, what do you see in here that's really kind of helping you decide this? So I don't know how we want to kick into the actual

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yeah, I mean I think just Trista, I'd love to hear how you, I think the major buckets, if you will, of things that you sort of say, this is kind of how I'm starting to tranche out information to make it digestible because like you said, we can go any which way. And this episode is hilariously, I'm so excited to see where it goes because I think we could take it in any number of directions. So I'd love to hear your,

Tim Sarrantonio:

You're good to keep us on track. So

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yeah, we're using Trista as our guidepost. What should we be looking at Trista?

Trista Harris:

Yeah, I think there's three big pieces, and we've talked about too the sort of protecting the sector and that is really large as making sure that you are a member of many of the membership associations that are doing the lobbying work and really telling the story about the value of the sector, that the power of us altogether in this moment is important. Also as individuals that work in the sector, you better be calling your elected official all the time and telling 'em what great work is happening and what we expect of them as they represent us. We are an important part of the economy. We are the safety net that holds this entire country together. I gave a speech years ago in Sweden about the future of philanthropy and they had a very sort of nascent philanthropic sector. And so we've got this and here's what's coming and blah, blah, blah.



And the first question from the audience was, would you have this robust philanthropic sector if you had a functioning government that took care of its citizens? And I was like, huh, really? Boy, that's a great question. The answer is no. So thank you and I will take my leave. And so we've got to remind our government officials that we are the duct tape that is holding the society together. And when it comes to protecting organizations, there is another piece that is literally protecting organizations that is safety of office buildings, that is safety of digital footprint. It is all of those pieces. I am on the board of the Tides Foundation. Years ago, a gunman came to attack the Tides office and luckily was speeding on the way and got pulled over before he was able to commit that attack because he saw on Fox News that Tides was the center of all of the bad things that were happening in America because they support progressive nonprofit organizations. The danger is real to organizations and our sector, and we have to take really good care of the physical and mental health of our staff members in this moment

Kerrin Mitchell:

At Fluxx. It was actually interesting because Trista, you and I had chatted about this at FluxCon and it really struck me because one of the things that I think when you think about I probably can't do all four of the protect people, disrupt and disobey and drive things in defense, civic union institutions and build alternatives, there's things that are going to be your superhero kind of power within all of those things. And it was really struck me because as much as I was like, well, obviously Fluxx, we build alternatives through unlikely partnerships. That was my like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I got that. But what I was really struck by is when I sat down with our team and we talked about protecting ourselves, we realized we are a hundred percent remote. We have 16 different locations. Some of them are in places where we have LGBTQ folks that are in kind of southern states that whose rights may be more in jeopardy faster than maybe someone who like me lives out in a more progressive state.

They thought it was such an interesting thing for us to go through and think, well, where do we have to make sure we're showing up for ourselves for our people? And it was such a beautiful inward moment to say, what are we doing to make sure they are as safe, as structured, as protected in their space as they need to be to feel like they can contribute to society the way they want? And I thought that was a really compelling thing that I honestly hadn't put that lens on until you explicitly said it's something I intuitive was like, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's covered. But then we started thinking through the attributes of where people are at, what is their geography, what are the various things that make them them, and is it a place where they're going to feel safe? Do we need to be aware of where things are changing for them? So I thought that was just such an interesting point that I implore others to think about because you start breaking it down into layers and it becomes a very important exercise for your folks.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I want to add to that a bit and pose something for you Trista too, in terms of there's a responsibility in many ways that companies like Fluxx, Neon One for who I represent have to the sector. Yet if we look back and step back about the larger macro economic influence, we have more private equity coming in to the actual technology side. There's questions about large technologists and their influence on the things because we have servers that all of us need to put things on. And so there's these larger questions of ownership and mutual responsibility that we have versus the profit that might come in or the pressures from the business that might come in, or even leadership that might not understand the nuances of our sector. How can even companies like ours navigate this in a way that you could be more like Fluxx and Neon I guess, but there's always going to be this pressure.

Trista Harris:



I think a piece of it is really spending your money in a way that matches your values and ensuring that the providers that you are using are protecting your data, care about the same things that you care about, are investing their profits in ways that strengthen the issues that your organization cares about. I think that is one of our huge responsibilities. And often when I talk to foundations where they think about 5% of our endowment goes to mission, that other 95%, where is it invested? Are you investing in something that's creating worse outcomes for the issues that you care about? When I ran a social justice foundation, we were invested in different mutual funds, and I remember asking our advisor during one of our meetings, I don't recognize this company in the alternative energy fund. What do they do? Oh, they do oil fracking in North Dakota.

Okay, well we have grantees actively fighting against that in the moment. Can you explain to me why you have our dollars invested there? And he's like, I didn't think you'd like it, but the returns have been great. So I was sort of waiting for you to let us know that it was a problem. And so then we got a new investment advisor, but that is not unusual. And so there's power in the dollars in our organizations. There's power in the dollars as individuals. Are we spending our money and giving our attention to platforms that are uplifting society or are they destroying democracy as we speak?

Tim Sarrantonio:

A budget is a moral document. It's one of my favorite phrases to keep coming back to. Well, one of the things that I know keeps coming up and will keep coming up in terms of even impacting on the economy and stuff like that is also the role of artificial intelligence. If we're okay to move on to our next trend perhaps. How do you see this impacting jobs? I think that's the biggest thing because a lot of the work that I'm focused on is even what are fundraisers who help fund a lot of these missions? They're worrying about AI and they're grappling with its role and not whether they have a job. Some of them think that, but well,

Kerrin Mitchell:

What their job looks like, what is it?

Tim Sarrantonio:

What their job looks like? So where are you seeing this? And Kerrin, I'd love for you to also come in with your perspective.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Oh, I got ideas, but I want to hear first.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Oh, I know you do it. It's Trista's show.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Kerrin. You're not just shush, Kerrin. Trista, I would love to hear it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I want to hear it after. But

Kerrin Mitchell:



Yes,

Tim Sarrantonio:

Paint the sandbox. Give us the rails that you see.

Trista Harris:

I think on the fundraising side, very early last year I spoke to a association that manages all of the folks that do the fundraising letters for the sector. And normally I'm the only futurist talking at the social sector conferences. I was the closing futurist. There was an opening futurist and there was four sessions about AI in between. And so my little side of, have you heard of Chat GPT? It's like, you guys got it, I understand because it can make all of their jobs go extinct overnight. And we did an activity during that conference where they used Chat GPT to write a fundraising letter and the first version was crappy, second version. They made some revisions and it got much better. Third version was amazing. And somebody in the audience raised their hand and was like, it doesn't have a ps. That's where you raise the money is the ps.

And they said, add a ps. And then when it was done, the whole room groaned like, oh, we're done. We're absolutely cooked. And what I think is important for folks in the social sector to understand is AI is going to create more jobs than it gets rid of. There's data from the World Economic Forum that said that AI by 2030 will create 170 million new jobs globally while eliminating 92 million positions resulting in a net increase of 78 million jobs. And so when we talk about technology and you lose these jobs and they disappear, there was not a social media manager job when I was in high school. That was not a career path that you could have. We can't even begin to imagine the types of jobs that will be created because of these tools. And I think in the social sector, there's been a little bit, especially in the fundraising side of, oh, we're going to lay off a staff member and use AI instead.

And the silliness of that is that you can't just leave a handful of humans to take all the human work and then you have this robot that does just the robot work. What you really need is every single staff person using AI to take repetitive tasks off their plate and to leave space for people to be creative and to develop relationships and to come up with new solutions. AI can never create anything new. It can only take what already exists and repackage it and hand it to you, but it can't come up with new solutions to move forward. And that is all that we do in the sector. So use AI to create that space so that you can solve the big problems that your organization's working on.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I see it that same way, which is foundations are notoriously awesome at hiring \$50,000 consultants to come in and do reports on things. And that data analysis, those tasks, those structures where you're looking and not just you're not cutting costs, you're avoiding costs because all of a sudden you have this beautiful, insightful, curious slice and dice capability where you can ask questions of data that never existed. So I hope that to your point, automating repetitive tasks, absolutely expanding the capabilities by fostering that innovation with the LLMs and the Chat GPT. Sure. But being able to move us to a place where we see growth in the sector, I think it gives us time back, and I know everyone says this, but it gives us time back to actually do things like be able to real monitor things and change, again, move away from grants management to impact management, get away from worrying about these consecutive or sequential tasks that we're managing, and be able to look at things for trends that are actually circling back and giving us information on the validity of the impact in general.

I think that's the thing I'm really excited about. Obviously I could have a whole episode on this where I just rant and rave about it, but I do look at it right now, 2024 was in this sort of pilot phase where



everyone was testing things out in the enterprise AI world and be like, does this work here? And how do I use Chat GPT? And it was piloting one-off things. We need to quickly get away from that and start thinking about what are we trying, what are we actually trying to do? Not what can it do, but what are the things we want to look at with risk management with, especially with the opportunity to start looking at if data is paramount and we want to start looking at trends, we also need to look at fraud, other things like that. Keep thinking bigger about where those things can exist.

And there's an app for that at this point. So I'm excited about what that means for our community. But I do think what I have noticed is we launched a bunch of stuff in AI tools and it is a one-off organization that's adopting it right now. There's still a lot of reluctance. So it's also on us to start saying, well, how do we ensure that we are safeguarding and giving them trust in the systems that they know that they're not in a position where their data's going out? Especially with philanthropy, you're getting a lot of folks that can't, I mean, there are a lives at stake if certain data gets out. So there's a lot of places where I think philanthropy will always have a role as much as other industries might come crashing down with AI, philanthropy is going to be important and it will continue to be important. And how we evolve it is going to be very interesting. Again, that's another episode for another time.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, especially because everything we've mentioned so far are private companies, and right now what's really messing all of them up is that the most emergent open source model is Deep Seek, which is generally maintained by the Chinese government. So let's be real. All of the options from a public good standpoint are not great, and I absolutely don't have an answer here other than knowing this still. There's a lot of transformative possibilities here, but we can't wait for Sam Altman to go,

Kerrin Mitchell:

Please go ahead.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Oh, right. I forgot about the social good task thing. I guess I have to add that too, right?

Kerrin Mitchell:

There are people moving at responsible paces, though. I do think Amazon, for example, is looking at things from an enterprise perspective the way Chat GPT isn't. So I think that's interesting. But then you look like today actually, I mean, I don't know, this will air a completely different day, but today, this morning was the day that Nvidia lost about 580 billion dollars in market cap today because of essentially wipe out due to losses. And yeah, it was a huge warning. So in that nobody knows, and that volatility, you have to be prepared for things to be walking forward and running for it and then sprinting back if something goes wrong, like Chat GPT, I know one of our competitors sprinted ahead did it right away and they had data issues and then they had to run as fast as they could back to the starting line. So you really have to be responsible in that adoption. And I think sourcing, to your point, people that have the values you have aren't just running at the new shiny thing, but this is what's important to us as a vendor, as a partner, as something that aligns to you is going to be super important. You got to have that conversation.

Trista Harris:

I think the piece that's completely been missing in the conversation about AI is how is humanity going to benefit from AI? So what we've had is companies say, here's my tool, use my tool, and then people



freaking out and saying, your tool is going to ruin the environment, my job, my life, my data, whatever. What we haven't done is radically imagine what we want a future with AI to look like. And I think that's where the social sector can really step up and the future that I'm hopeful for. With the industrial revolution, we went from 80 hours a week to 40 hours a week of work. We use this new technology. I think with the AI and robotics revolution, we can move from 40 hours a week to 20 hours a week of work and that we use those tools to fill up that balance.

We transform the way that we pay people so that we're paying them for full-time work for that part-time and for those additional hours that people are raising children, taking care of elders, engaging in democracy, creating art, being a part of their community, that is the beautiful future that I want. And you see lots of jokes where they're like, I want a robot or AI to be able to do my laundry and cook, and instead it's making art and writing. That is not what we want AI to do. We get to decide how we use these tools.

Kerrin Mitchell:

We get to do that. We get to decide where that focus is. And that's the big thing is there are moments where when you look at these small decisions that get made in a vacuum a year or two before people realized that they had that tentacle effect, but something like this where we have this beautiful market in cooperative economy of nonprofits, what a perfect model for AI to sit in where it's open, transparent, assisting knowledge extensibility. What an interesting time for us to make sure that it's not sitting in the hands of a giant corporation that's going to be trying to create, let's just say some cloud or something like that is their own proprietary thing. Let's get ahead of that.

Trista Harris:

Also, the moment to talk about AI taxes and robotic taxes, because we create this moment where it is about massive shareholder value, which a bunch of it just got wiped out and we'll come back soon enough. A bunch of that value should be going into our society to replace the funds that these dollars are taking out of workers' paychecks as layoffs and things are happening. And so if we don't have those conversations early, it is very hard to pull that back later. And I think that that's where the social sector needs to step up.

Kerrin Mitchell:

It's so interesting too and where those, and how that sort of structure is set up. I only bring this up because when there's a big debate a long time ago, and I can't remember the guy's name, so I'm going to attribute this wrong, but it was this whole thing where they're debating when social media came out and they're like, should we make our money through ads or through subscriptions? They chose ads and think about the downstream effect of that one decision of how things are priced and what happens. And all of a sudden we have this TikTok economy and all these kids running around like nutball, ADHD people with ads constantly being fed to them because that's a long time ago in a galaxy far away, we decided to a pricing model the wrong way. There are decisions that are coming up that we need to be aware of and think through that, to your point, many miles down the road so we know our behavior structures are behaving the way they should. Tim?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, yeah, no, gosh. I mean, my mind is just racing because ultimately I think if we have a red thread, much of this is about how we just decide to organize how we work together. That's really, it's that simple. And I think what another thing, if we're thinking about the industrial revolution, the issue back



then is that we were able to identify and you got Taylorism, which is basically like, I can look at every minute and it's going to produce on my factory line, 12,000 widgets, yada, yada, yada. We've shifted now though to knowledge work as the primary driver, but we still treat it in a Taylorist model of tick, tick, tick, activity tracking. And if you just extend this out to the social goods space, we're still prioritizing for major gift officers how many phone calls they're making, not the quality of the phone.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Oh yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio:

How many times they picked up the phone, which now with AI, you could tell the AI pick up the thing, call the person, burn the relationship, et cetera, and so forth. So we're prioritizing the wrong metrics here from the get.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's exactly the conversation I was having yesterday. It's hilarious. Annie and I were just talking about that. It's like what are the right ways to talk about when we talk about economies of scale, yes, you can talk about what's being omitted from the budget or avoided or whatever, but this idea of what are the actual insights you're doing? How do we make it extensible? What are we tracking? Yeah, people have it all wrong right now. So maybe that's the 2025 trend to get your metrics right, man.

Trista Harris:

It's all that you can measure is not what matters and things that matter, you can't always measure. So I think especially in the social sector, transformative innovations often come from the things that you are not measuring because you've got to try an idea out and see what happens as a result of it. And we lose our bravery about that because in the grant application, you said, I'm going to produce this many widgets of activity and it doesn't leave any space for, I ran into this idea when I talked to somebody, I realized that is the nut that we've been trying to crack, and we're going to figure out how to scale it. That's where real amazing change happens.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So we touched on this in last year's episode, but what other tools have you been seeing, especially maybe we can use it if we want to use AI, we can do that. It could be analog too. What do you think is actually a good set of tools for budding futurists going into 2025 where they can pick up and say, I'm going to get some clarity here because I have this way to organize my thoughts?

Trista Harris:

I think the most important thing to do is to set aside 5% of your time for the future. So you have to make time for the future in your present. It doesn't have to be all your time. And I understand that there's a lot of stuff that's happening now and a lot of fires that people feel like they need to put out. You continue to do that, but a little bit of your time needs to be about radical imagination. And during that time, just a couple hours a week, set a Google alert for yourself future of whatever you're working on.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So you mean next quarter, right? You're just focusing on next quarter?



Trista Harris:

No, 50 years in the future. So long, long, long term future.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I think that's important because you have to define just how cathedral thinking we want people to go.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right.

Trista Harris:

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We've lost that in many ways where at best we get a five-year plan.

Trista Harris:

Let me get on my soapbox about strategic planning for a second. My frustration with the way that our work and planning happens in the field is that we look backwards over the last five years to guess what we can accomplish over the next five years. And everybody that's in those processes has a full desk and they dream very small. I could squeeze out 2% more gifts, I could do 3% more programming. I can just squeeze a little bit harder. And what instead I think you need to do is start with that space of radical imagination. And so in our visioning processes, and we now have a program called Future-Proof where we teach people how to use these tools within their organizations. You start with a 30 to 50 year vision of the future. If you are a hundred percent successful, what does that look like in the world?

What is different as a result of the work that you've done? And every single organization that I've spent time with, everybody thinks they have the same vision of the future until they start talking about it, and then they realize that they do not. So there's that saying, you can send a man to the moon, how come we can't solve poverty? Do you mean poverty in the United States? Do you mean globally? Do you mean for families? Do you mean for individuals? Do you mean the federal poverty line? Do you mean living wage? What is it that you mean? So often in our organizations, we each have a different picture of the future, and we're working really hard towards it, which means all of our efforts are diffused. And then the other part of the visioning is externally, what does it look like? And then that time point 30 to 50 years in the future, what would you have to look like organizationally for that to be true?

And that process of re-imagining what your work has to look like and then working back into the present and saying, what are we already doing that's aligned with this future? And what are we doing that's misaligned? And things that are misaligned are usually never bad things. Nobody's asking you to start a nuclear waste dump if you're running a nonprofit or a foundation. They're asking you to do good things that are slightly misaligned with the future that you're trying to create. And so when you start to take those things off your plate and just do the activities that will get you to the very specific future that you're trying to create, one, you're focusing your energy in a way that didn't happen previously. Two, you're building expertise. So I can't tell you the number of organizations that it's a little bit like if you gave a mouse a cookie where we started as an economic development program, but then we realized that people needed housing and people that needed housing needed good city design.



And good city design is also about education and children. And suddenly you have a thousand programs and you stop doing that core work where you really could have made a transformative difference. And so I think it's important for every single organization to have a 30 to 50 year vision of the future, and that they are working backwards into this moment and saying, what am I going to do right now that will get us closer to that future? Because all that volatility that we are facing in this moment, you can actually harness that volatility to get you to that future faster. And for most of our clients, that 30 to 50 year vision only takes five to seven years. So it does not take 30 to 50 years to create huge transformative change. It takes a much shorter time period if we are all focused on the same things.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So what are some of the obstacles that you're seeing people come across as they move through these exercises or perhaps even through this next year? What do you see as the biggest things they're going to face?

Trista Harris:

I think the challenge for folks is burn out. So across the board, people are tired because they're constantly in reaction mode. And if you don't have a clear picture of the future that you're trying to create, and instead you're just trying to stop bad things from happening all the time, that is not a way to get up to work every day and it will wear you out. The other challenge is that our brains make connections when we're bored. So when you're in the shower, all these ideas start to bounce together, and suddenly you have this insight, the challenges that we're hardly ever bored now. So when I gave that shower example once when I was giving a speech, this guy was like, well, actually, I have this thing in my shower that makes my phone waterproof, and then I can watch. And I'm like, stop.

We need a minute to be able to think and to not constantly have information that is coming in so that our brains can actually process that. So within our organizations, how are we building space for boredom? At Future Good. We use a 12 week year process where we've got sprints that we have for 12 weeks where we're focused on really specific things that will get us to our 30 to 50 year vision. And then we have a one week time period between those sprints where we are resting and rejuvenating and we're looking backwards at what we've accomplished, and we're looking around the corner to see how we need to build our skills for the next sprint that's moving forward. And I think within our organizations, if we don't build that wiggle room, we are never going to have the transformative innovation that we need to solve problems instead of just making things 5% less terrible.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I've radically reorganized my workday after reading Cal Newport's Slow Productivity because of exactly what you're talking about. I spend the first hour of my day. I literally toss my phone sometimes, especially this morning when I was really feeling it. But to just not have that incoming ping, ping, ping, ping, ping. And I think it's hurting our kids. We know that when it comes to that point, but we have to model the good behavior too for ourselves. And I think even those little things to reclaim that time is critical. I know that we can talk forever, Kerrin, but maybe we can ask one more question, one more trend perhaps, and then shift into our new game.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yeah, we do have a new game for you, Trista. It's different than last. We're so spicy and fun that way.

Trista Harris:



I love it.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Or actually, well, in terms of a trend, or actually I leave it to you, is there anything that you want to make sure that we cover today that you would want to make sure that you've imparted on the audience before wrapping up and maybe coming back next year? Because we're going to have you every year if we could.

Trista Harris:

I'll just leave the audience with, this is not the time for anticipatory obedience. This is not the time to pull back from DEI and meeting your mission, that this is really the time for us to double down and to be strong in this moment. I see a lot of organizations that feel like, well, if we're just under the radar and maybe if we stop talking about equity, then we won't be a target. And maybe if we get rid of this one program that focused on one specific population, we'll be okay. And what I will say is that bar will constantly move. So first it'll be about DEI, and then it will be your organization can't serve immigrants, and then it'll be your organization can't serve anybody in Blue States, and then it'll be your organization can't serve women. And that line will continue to move and to move and to move. And this is the time for us to really be in the place of responsibility to our mission instead of just fiduciary responsibility that there's actually a risk that we will not meet our missions if we don't double down on our values in this moment.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's awesome. I agree. We actually, were just having this conversation as well at Fluxx and putting out a statement that is of that level of here's our continued commitment. And I think it's something that, like you said, you have to hold the line for what you stand for. On that note, Trista, we are going to wrap it up, but we always do a little game, as you know. And this year we've decided, and by that I mean this year, I mean, Tim and I decided a couple minutes before this call because we were trying to think of a new fun game. We're doing two truths and a lie. So we kindly ask you to share three statements about yourself. Two of them are going to be true, one false, and then Tim and I are going to guess you ready with no prep? I just threw this one at you, actually.

Trista Harris:

I love it. So the first one is that I am hopelessly optimistic, and I've always been hopelessly optimistic when I was a kid. I got called Pollyanna all the time, and that has continued through adulthood. The second is that I saw one of those alien orbs in Santa Monica over the ocean where I live. And then the third one is that I snuck onto Richard Branson's Island, Necker Island, to learn about the future.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So I love that you, I just want to applaud you for your level of detail on all three. Sometimes people are really obvious about which.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah, very, very convincing.

Kerrin Mitchell:



I liked it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I want the second one to be true.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Tim and I both want the second to be true, but I think that's the lie because I do.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think that's the lie. Then if true, we have to hear about number three explicitly.

Trista Harris:

I have not yet met our new alien overlords, but if they have some new technologies that could be helpful and get us out, all these pickles that we live in, I'm totally open to it, but they haven't come to visit.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So are you legally allowed to tell us about the third?

Kerrin Mitchell:

I love this story. I knew the three was. I knew one was true because I was like, I know Trista and I knew three was true. I knew the story. And I was like, oh, but three is a good story.

Trista Harris:

I was doing a fellowship and they had you set a goal of building your network in some way, and I like to set big, hairy, audacious goals. So my goal was to meet Sir Richard Branson. The rest of the fellows were like, we do not have a Sir Richard Branson connection for you. And so I sort of tried to work my network, and then he was speaking at a philanthropy conference, and I was able to finagle my way into an interview with him. And at the end of the interview, I was really disappointed, and I couldn't figure out why, because a big, hard goal, and I finally did it, and how come it doesn't feel good? And I realized because I was don't know, a teenager, and I saw Mariah Carey's cribs on Necker Island. I was like, that's where I wanted to do this interview.

And it was not the Hilton Ballroom. So I was super disappointed. But it's not good to be disappointed when you have a big goal happen. But the way that things sometimes work out is probably a month or so after that interview, I got an invitation from a futurist network that I was a part of that was hosting, convening about the future of doing good on Necker. And they were doing this invitation only thing. And I reached out and I said, Hey, I just happened to interview Sir Richard Branson on this exact topic. I would love to come to the conference and talk about what we learned. And they're like, that's a great idea. So sometimes you need to create ridiculous goals, and then they show up for you. I've been to Necker twice so far. I'm going again this spring and bringing some folks from the social sector with me. And it's a place that I have learned a ton about what is coming next and what's possible.

Tim Sarrantonio:



Trista, I want to thank you for joining the podcast today. Obviously sharing more about yourself and your work and all things about the future. So we're all set for 2025 for the next 50 years on top of that. But if people want to learn more about you and your work, where can they listen to you?

Trista Harris:

Yep, they can find me at wearefuturegood.com. And we're also, we are Future Good on all the socials.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Amazing. Trista, thank you so much. As always, you're an absolute dream and we are just so honored to have you today.

Trista Harris:

Kerrin and Tim, you're doing fantastic work to make a more beautiful future. I really appreciate it.