

S4E1

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SPEAKERS

Valerie Johnson, Monique Curry-Mims

Valerie Johnson 00:07

Hello, and welcome back to beyond philanthropy. I am Valerie. I'm here with Monique.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:12

Happy New Year.

Valerie Johnson 00:15

Happy New Year. I do the millennial pause at the beginning of our episode. So I'm just laughing at myself. Monique is laughing. Like, take a deep breath and pause and then start talking because I don't want you to hear my inhale on the - it doesn't matter. So Happy New Year. We are back for season four.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:35

Wow.

Valerie Johnson 00:36

Four. And this season, we were a little scared about how we were going to top season three, because Season Three was really awesome. We had some great guests.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:46

Yeah, yeah.

Valerie Johnson 00:47

But But we think we got it. So our theme for the season is shifting power.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:54

Shifting power.

Valerie Johnson 00:57

Yes, so. So shifting power. So we kind of fell into this theme at the end of last season, the more we talked about disruption, the more we realized that true disruption requires a shifting of power, it requires power to be shifted from the people who have too much of it to the people who do not have enough of it. Yeah. So Monique, what does shifting power mean to you?

Monique Curry-Mims 01:27

I mean, I think she just really said it, right? It's very, well the definition itself is simple right? To be able to take power that's been inherent, or just assumed and be able to distribute that into people who don't have it, or people who have it, but it's being stripped from them in that in the way that like, Oh, we've had all this power, and now they're taking it from us. It's like, no, like, I'm a person and I have power in myself and in my community, and you've just been taking it away through gentrification or whatever else. Right. And like I said, like the definition of a bit of it, I think it's easy the action or an implementation of it. I don't think so much. And I think that's why we as a people struggle with change, or even with homeless, they like terminology, I don't want to go down this whole trust based philanthropy thing, right. But you know, what I just read, there's now a new term, because we have to move past trust based philanthropy to care based philanthropy. And I'm just like, come on all this all this is it's just us being equitable humans, treating people the way that we want to be treating them, treating them as humans, treating them as if we care, treating them without trauma, shifting this power. So I think that if we really sit down and understand like, where power has been derived from how we maintain control over it, to be able to say, Okay, let's break down these barriers, I think that it will allow for power shifting to really happen. But like I said, it that it is easier to say and define than to do 100%.

Valerie Johnson 03:17

Yeah, especially as the white person in our duo, I think change is scary. Losing power, Losing control, is also scary. So if you have a lot of privilege, if you have power that comes with your privilege, shifting that power to someone else is scary. It's the same thing as you know, not going for grant on purpose, because that grant, you could get if you wanted to based on the reputation of your organization, but that grants not for you. So it's that intentional, stepping back when you could step forward. That is really difficult for people who are accustomed to stepping forward or to taking control.

Monique Curry-Mims 04:04

Stepping back, instead of stepping forward, I like that.

Valerie Johnson 04:08

Yeah, so that's something that I've, I've kind of been working on. Personally, I guess for the last couple of years like I so I've been in my role now for five years, I have hiring capabilities and learning how to not be a one person show instead of a team because I'm so used to doing all the things myself so learning how to step back and say this person is going to do it differently than me but they're going to do it well and that's okay. has been a struggle. And I also am on the have been on the board of the Association of Fundraising Professionals officially not where the last five days. We're recording on January 5, I was done on the 31st but there's the intentional stepping back there to like I had a lot of power over who our speakers were I headed up our Programming and Education Committee like, I could very easily say it's going to be me, or it's going to be this friend of mine, or it's going to be this person who we've already gone with several times, because I know they're good. And having to kind of

step back and allow someone else to step into those roles, or like taking a chance on someone who I have never worked with before. It's been interesting. Sometimes, most of the time it worked out, I'll say most of the time it worked out, but it was definitely scary. And there were times where I was like, Oh, I just want to say, Screw it. I'll do it myself. But I didn't. Most of the time.

Monique Curry-Mims 05:34

I mean, I think that I mean, I think that's a good. I mean, it's so good insights. I think that, you know, a lot of people, especially in this space, they'll be like, Oh, shifting power. Oh, we're talking about foundations and shifting power to - and yes, we are talking about that. But I also think within nonprofits themselves, there's much opportunity to step back so that the organization can move forward. But I am. I don't know if I said this before, probably. But you know, I don't believe nonprofit, executive directors should be in that position for 10 years, more than 10 years, at a 10 year mark, it's like, okay, it's been a decade, right. And, you know, change and, you know, look like the census and impact, and it takes 10 years to really measure right and understand that trajectory. So if you haven't been able to make the change that you want it to make in 10 years. It's time and even if you weren't, you made that right. So now let somebody else come in and make that change, right. And I think that there are people who have been places for 35 years and 25. And it's just like, great, doing good work. But you're, you're holding on to this power, that there are other leaders that are well equipped to handle that and to take it in a different direction for the times that we're in. So I think that stepping back to step forward, the organization and to step forward other people, I think it's very important, I think that, you know, we have to look and do almost like an assessment of, you know, how much power we have, like, I know I have power, you have power, right? And how that shows up, and how we can even take a step back, you know, we don't have to be at the helm of everything. Like at this point, people come to me for projects, and I literally just refer them out, like, you know what, this would be great, but like, I know someone else who is really good at this, or someone who I want to get the chance to, or whatever the case may be. So really understanding what that is, or even speaking like, oh, no, I don't have to speak at that, you know, or owning my time at this point. And be like, You know what, I'm not just doing this, because I'm being asked to I know, there are other people that are as experienced or even more experienced, that can handle this, and I'm not going to disrupt what I've got going on right now, just so I can just hoard everything,

Valerie Johnson 08:12

We are pretty good at it. Personally, I would say we've we've practiced we've, we've leaned really hard into raising other people up and passing opportunities to other people. I don't think everybody else is good at that. And, you know, that kind of runs top down in a nonprofit organization. So just like an executive director should be making space should be stepping back should be moving on, you know, especially after a decade, like making space for other people. It's, it's all the way down like it's Yeah, so I'm a team of three. And we have a couple of participant-focused events every year. And each of those events has a planning committee. And for the first couple years I was here, I sat on all of those planning committees. And eventually I was like, I don't need to be here. But it could be a really good opportunity for another person on my team to learn how to work across departments and learn how to stand up for the things that are important to us as a department in these events. And, you know, helping to coach them, like they'll come back from the committee meeting and say, I really think we should be doing this. But nobody said it. Why didn't you say it? Like you're a committee member, you're allowed to speak up.

So it really like runs all the way down. Like no matter how big or small your organization is, you have to give people opportunities to take a step forward. And also don't hold people back based on like past. I don't know, like, I think we get really stuck in that. Well, they weren't good at this thing. So we're not going to advance them to the next level. Like give them some training in that thing, or give them another opportunity to try that thing with better supports next time before you just knock them out of the running for something.

Monique Curry-Mims 09:53

Oh, but can we also give people credit where credit is due Hmm, because a lot of this, especially when it comes to, I'm the executive director, and I'm the face, you are the leader of a team of people who are doing really great work. And a lot of times, the work that is being touted was not even your work. Someone else that you've hired that's extremely smart and capable, came up with a program idea or something idea. And you said, this sounds great run with it. And they ran with it. And they brought all the pieces together. And it got, you know, acclaim and PR and funding, but you're the one that speaking to it, right? You're the one that's standing up in front and getting the awards and all those things. And it's just like, yeah, you led the organization and made sure that, you know, it was operating effectively. But it was not you that came up with design implemented, ran or anything with that program, all you did was just sign off on it and said, Yep, that's a great idea to run with it. And I think that that's causing a lot of burnout in this space, from the nonprofit level to the foundation level, because even on the foundation level, it's a lot of program officers. They're doing a lot of this work. But as the President's and as CEOs and executive directors that are getting all of the speaking engagements in the shine, and things like that. So I feel like shifting power within our own organizations is crucial. Because if you can't, if you can't clean up your own house, there is no way you're ready to clean up society.

Valerie Johnson 11:31

Yeah, I - so this is so dumb that I care this much. I think that we had an all staff meeting, we have quarterly all staff meetings. And one thing that we're kind of bringing back that we we lost touch with throughout the pandemic was every department gets an opportunity to kind of do a little shout out a little good news, like a tune in. Here's what's going on. So three of the departments that stood up, stood up and shared some good news. That was good news that I directly supported them with. So one person was like, Hey, we finally have an administrative assistant for our program. We're so excited. It's been nine months without somebody, this is great. I did all of the reviewing of resumes, the tiering of candidates, the initial interviews with all of those people and pass them three candidates and said all you have to do is interview these three people and pick your favorite one. Nowhere in that shout out Did they say thank you to Val for helping us with this or another one was talking about. It was some kind of material we we made something marketing wise that ended up supporting what they were doing. So they were going on and on about how great this was that this thing happened the way they wanted it to. And nowhere did they say and thanks to Val and her team for designing the marketing pieces that made this happen. So it's like it's dumb. I realize it's dumb. Like, I know I did those things. But no one else knows I did those things. And it's that not being afraid to recognize the people that helped you get to where you are or help you have the control and the power that you have. So really is like what you were just saying, like you need to make space, you need to recognize people, it's burning people out. It really is burnt and I was so so like, more upset than I should have been like I walked out of that meeting like feeling super dejected, even though it was all good news. And it gave us all positive things. And I know

that I played part in those things. But I was just like, well, they're 150 staff here. And none of them know that I helped with this.

Monique Curry-Mims 13:40

I can't say I'm in it. But I had for a very short while joined a journal club. And then me and some friends decided to start our own journal clubs. So we were like, Why are we paying for this journal club. But anyways, when I was in the other journal club, it was set to a playlist. So before you came on, everybody recommended a song, and then a song and a prompt. So when that song played, we wrote to that prompt why that song played. And there was this one, this one song that was called take up spaces. So there's this woman, I believe her name is Tony Jones. And she does affirmation on music, which never heard of, in this song just like spokes to the point where like, I couldn't even write I was just like, yes, yes, yes, yes. And like what I was writing was basically the lyrics to the song. And while you know, I admit that I do have power and privilege in some places. I think that one, there are spaces where I coil because I'm like, whether it's imposter syndrome, or whatever the case may be, and I'm like no, like 2020 forum taking up space. And I think that in instances where people feel as though they're not being given power, or it's being taken away from them or they're not getting the recognition, I think we need to take up space I think we need to be like, hey, yes, congratulations to whatever department I'm glad I was able to support you guys in this. Like that. I'm glad you were able to go along. And they're like, all right, they'll did help, you know, because I feel like if we just we shouldn't be having these conversations, even though like this is a public conversation, but like, we shouldn't be having these conversations behind closed doors around like, I'm not getting credit where credit is due. in my, in my last like, nine to five job. I put on the largest Gala, I was talking about galas, but like, right, but I put on the largest Gala, I found the location, I did a taste testing with the caterer, I handmade all of the centerpieces, I picked the band, like I did all those things. And then when it came down to the end of it, and there was talking about how successful it was, the executive director gave all of the credits to the to a board member. And I'm like, all she did was come with me to the tasting and pick a cold soup that I hated over a warm seat like that was all she did, like, and I'm just like, like, oh, well, we gotta make them feel. And I'm like, But now when the board is saying to you, what does Monique do? And you just gave my credit to everything that I do to somebody else? Well, that's why people question right, and so then you work harder. And then it's just like, well, if you're not getting the credit, but everything is successful, you've either led or had a hand in, but you're not being recognized for it in any shape or form other than quiet pat on the back. Like that's like there's an epidemic of that in our space. And like I said, it runs the gamut between nonprofits and foundations. So this is not just a nonprofit thing. And I think that we as the worker bees, or the people being stripped, need to speak up and say something, and take up that space. But I think that the people who have all of the inherent power, who are the people who are the heads, or the trustees, or the billionaires or whatever the case may be are able just to take a step back. Like, I'm just going to sit, and I'm going to learn and I'm going to listen, and I'm going to let you take credit, and I'm gonna let you run and how can I support you in that.

Valerie Johnson 17:15

So there's a foundation that we've worked with for a couple of years, and I've interacted with them recently, twice, once to ask the program officer that we work with, if they'd be interested in doing a funders forum for AFP, which is basically the funders panel that we do, you know, every six months or so. And the person, the program officer that I talked to immediately said, like, Oh, our executive director

would probably be the best person to do that. And I was like, Well, yeah, but I think you have the knowledge, and the relationships. And you would also be a good person to do that. So I kind of handed that off to the person and didn't really think about it again. And then our nonprofit is doing a strategic planning process. So we just sent out requests to some of our funders to be interviewed, as part of the, you know, fact finding, you know, opinion finding part of the process. And we reached out to that executive director, same Executive Director, and they came back and said, our program officers would be much better equipped to handle that and should be on the panel. So I, I like seeing positives and negatives here, right, like the program officer didn't feel empowered to do any kind of panel or speaking on behalf of the organization. So is that because they're feeling impostor syndrome? Or is that because the executive director is the only person who was allowed to do things like that? Not sure. And then on the same wavelength, I love that the executive director knew that they didn't have the direct experience with my organization to provide a really strong strategic planning interview, and pass it to the program officers. It was like they were they were two really like not matched experiences with the same organization. So I'm not sure like, if it was impostor syndrome, if it was the executive director, or both,

Monique Curry-Mims 19:13

no, I, I recently had a conversation with a foundation, a Family Foundation, a trustee, who was really like, I need help like I need I want to be able to be a better leader and understand my program officer, my staff and understand if it's me not being a good leader, if it's a cultural competency that I'm missing, if is what is off so I think that and I applauded her for even like identifying that and saying, like, I need help, can you recommend some you know, coaching for me because I want to fix this so I can be better. I know a lot of people have that kind of reflection, but at the same time Not a lot of people have that kind of reflection. So if you're like, oh, that's the program officer, and they're the person, they're the people that meet. But at the end of the day, when it comes down to the decision making, they don't have power in the decision making space, they're just making sure that you guys crossed your T's and dotted your eyes, then why would the program officer feel empowered to do that? Because basically, I'm just the errand person, right? Like, I'm the person who's gonna go out and do these things. But at the end of the day, I don't have any decision making powers, right? So there's, so there's a miscommunication or misunderstanding of responsibilities. It's like, I'm giving you autonomy, but like only as much rope, as I'm giving you can you be autonomous, and now they're like, Oh, this is now outside of that rope lane. They're either because they don't want to do it, or because they don't have the interaction with you to even answer your questions with other persons. Like, that's not even what they have me do when I'm with you. So you know, so yeah, there's, there's a lot of that that I think is happening. But it's also a lot of that that's being fixed, where there are program officers that are getting, you know, more decision making power. You know, leaders, I think, I think, within the next like three to five years, it's going to there's trending to be a lot of transition of power, in terms of, you know, leader stepping down because of just everything in the world. It's an interesting time to be in philanthropy, it actually has to be on Earth. There's a lot of things going on right now. With power. A lot of things. Yeah, there's a lot of things going on right now.

Valerie Johnson 21:34

So I do want to kind of go through some of the themes that we're going to go through throughout this year. But before we do that, I feel like we've touched a lot on really low level power shifting, like what we've done personally, what people can do now on a more personal level, and of all of those things. So

I think one thing I want all of our listeners to think about is how controlling are you. Monique was talking about ropes, and when when they have a long rope or short rope with the people who work for us. So I have had two people now in back to back in a position at my organization who were so micromanaged, that they were verging on traumatized. When they came to work for me, now, I am also a type a controlling person. So I am imperfect. But I know this about myself, and I try really hard not to be that person. The end, my team now knows that like the only time I'm really going to be nitpicky is when I'm really stressed out. And usually if I'm like, can you change that one word from this to this? They're like, are you okay? What's going on? Really bad day, like what's happening. But when they first started working for me, it was every, every single little thing needed to be approved. Like, if you're a marketing person, I trust that you're going to be able to write social media posts without needing all of them to be approved. Like, if you want to question language, if you have a question about direction, if you want to talk about theming, like, I'm so happy to talk that out with you. But you're the expert. And you ultimately get to make that decision. So to have people who were like terrified to send a quick tweet without me reading it was like, so mind blowing to me. And I thought maybe it was just like this one person at this one organization that was like making things difficult for the person that I was supervising. So that person eventually moved on to a new role, I hired someone new. And we've started the same process all over again, they also came from a micromanager. And they also really struggle to like, do things without me seeing them first. And you're doing these people a disservice first of all, and second of all, like you're taking all of that you're taking all of their power away, and then you're taking all of the credit for all of their work. And you can't have that both ways.

Monique Curry-Mims 24:06

caveat. Because I recently had a conversation with someone who does not micromanage. And everyone is missing deadlines and waiting until the deadline date to say, hey, I need two more weeks. Right. And I said to her and it sounds like you need to micromanage or at least be a little bit more. Hey, where are you on this deadlines coming up? Because they it's been a couple of years now. Right? So I think that we need to understand who our team members are. Yeah. We are working structure that works. Maybe there needs to be monthly or not monthly, but weekly check ins are like, you know, Monday morning meetings where we're setting the agendas and we're talking about goals and deadlines, things like that.

Valerie Johnson 24:56

I love they use that example because that is actually what I do with my team. We have Monday check ins.

Monique Curry-Mims 25:00

like so yeah, like, I think Monday check ins are an awesome thing, just so that way we start the week off as a team, and everybody's on board if you need help, whatever, you know, whatever, right. And that also prevents the micromanaging. But it keeps people on task, right? It keeps everybody on the same page. Because I think a lot of times we, we, whether we have the power or don't have the power, we're not always considering the impact of our work and our powers on other people. So I think that being able to have that team check in. And I also like, when what my coaching clients, I'm always like, you have to do team building, right? Like you have to once a quarter, go do something fun, because it can't just all be work, because it's going to add to animosity, it's going to add right, like you have to, or, you

know, maybe there's a foosball table in the office, and people just hop on games or whatever, right? Like there has to be something that allows for people to not just be worker bees all the time. And not that we have to be this happy go lucky family. But I feel like those power imbalances come in play where it's like, I'm the boss, you're the employee, where's my work? Here's your work. You're my boss, let me do what you say, right. And that's where burnout happens as well, because we're not really taking into consideration the human side of the work that we're doing, especially in this space, the emotional trauma that it already has on most of us. Oh, yeah.

Valerie Johnson 26:27

We don't want to get too far into the themes that we're going to be talking about this season, because obviously, we're gonna be talking about those in the actual episodes. And we have some really exciting guests again, this year for you. So we are going to be talking about women in leadership, we're going to be talking about trust in philanthropy. We're going to be talking about endowments and participatory models and mission align investing. And some of those buzzwords that are influential right now that have a lot of opportunity for shifting power, but perhaps are not yet shifting power.

Monique Curry-Mims 27:03

because they're not. That's why we're talking about them to actually utilize the foundational definition of them to shift power.

Valerie Johnson 27:12

Yes, that. So that's what you have to look forward to. We've got some really great guests, we're going to be ultimately coming to a place of moving from allies to coconspirators.

Monique Curry-Mims 27:25

Yes.

Valerie Johnson 27:26

And shifting power to a place where you're not just saying you're an ally, you are participating. You are co conspirator.

Monique Curry-Mims 27:35

Exactly.

Valerie Johnson 27:36

So that's our hope for the season. We want to get you there with us

Monique Curry-Mims 27:40

when we invite you along for the ride over the next 12 months. Want to thank you guys for putting up with us this month. And sticking with us through season four. And if you didn't know now, you know this has been beyond philanthropy. See you soon