

Today Counts Show Episode 67

Jim: Hello everyone and welcome to the Today Count show. I am Jim Piper. Just recently, we were on a coaching call. There was, I don't know, 20 to 30 of us on the call, and our special guest for the evening was Erin Porteous. Erin is the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Metro Denver. She is an amazing leader, a delightful person. You will enjoy this interview. You will learn things about the Boys and Girls Club that I bet you did not know, and you will learn some amazing things about leadership. You will be encouraged. So, go ahead and get ready. Here we go.

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Welcome to the Today Counts show. Today does count because it impacts, it influences your tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. The Today Counts podcast is sponsored by the generous donors of the Lead Today Community. I'm your host, Jim Piper.

I'd like to introduce you folks to this wonderful woman named, and she is the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Metro Denver. So, everyone, say hi to Erin, wave or whatever you're going to do. Erin, I'm glad that you are with us. Let's see how this goes. Can you introduce yourself just a little bit? Tell us what you want us to know on the front end.

Erin: So, it's a pleasure to be here tonight among an old friend, Jim, but many new friends as well. We kind of met each other serendipitously, as Jim mentioned, through a mutual connection and have formed just a wonderful friendship and for me, Jim, as a mentor over the last year, year and a half. So, I'm Erin. I live in Denver, Colorado. It's snowy behind us right now. I'm the CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs in Metro Denver. Just a quick hand raise, has anyone ever heard of Boys and Girls Clubs? Any familiarity? Okay, we'll get into that a little bit more later.

It is a non-profit, and so during the day, I think of it as 10,000 kids on my watch during the day, and then when I go home in the evening, I have two kids on my watch. Both roles are equally demanding of my time and energy. My hobbies used to be long-distance running, perfection baking, and reading really great novels. Now, because of little ones, it's dabbling in those hobbies but really just trying to get on a good night's six hours of sleep uninterrupted and chasing little ones around. So, life looks a little bit different for me in the last few years, but it's always chaotic and always fun.

Jim: Now, Erin, how many kids did you say besides the two that you have at home, the two little girls?

Erin: So, 10,000 kids go to Boys and Girls Clubs. It's kind of like running a small school district when you just think of the incidents that can happen on any daily basis when you have that many kids in your buildings, and that's just in your Club. That's not nationwide. That's just your Club. Yeah, so across the United States, there's four million kids who go to Boys and Girls Clubs. Here in Denver, we serve 10,000 annually. When you factor in families and siblings, we're close to 20,000 kids as our community impact.

Boys and Girls Clubs have been around for 150 years. You likely know the hand symbol, but you may not know what we do. We started here in Denver 60 years ago. We were a place for boys to get off the street. There was a high amount of gang violence in Denver in the early 1960s, and so a group of gentlemen came together and said, "We need a place for these boys to go to be productive." We opened the Boys Club of Denver. I actually have a couple of staff members who are staffed now but have a boys club logo tattoo on them. It was a way of life, it's a rite of passage, and it establishes really deep bonds between kids and adults.

The irony of being the first female CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs in Metro Denver is that we serve kids from six all the way up to 18. So, kindergarten until they graduate from high school. When I was six years old, I wouldn't have been allowed at the Boys and Girls Club because we were not yet serving girl members, and so we've had quite a journey. And today, we have programs that look very different than they did in the early 1960s, but our roots have stayed the same and that's establishing strong relationships and bonds between kids and adults, making sure they have a safe place to go, and ensuring their basic needs are met. So, for some kids, it's just literally having a safe place to be; for others, it's ensuring that they have a hot meal for dinner that's free. It's homework help, it's sports programming, it's helping kids get into college. It really is a myriad of opportunities and activities for all ages so that they can thrive and empower them.

Jim: Now, that feels overwhelming to me. So before we dive into that deeper, let's not skip over those two little girls you have at home. What are their names and tell us a little bit about them?

Erin: So, this would be a great time to have a photo. I don't have a photo handy. I have a four-year-old. Her name is Lily. She just turned four. Her next birthday, she'll be 17, the way that her attitude and the way that she acts. And then I have an 18-month-old that is not far behind. While she doesn't have some of the skill sets her sister has, she has no problem throwing a little punch her sister's way when needed to get a toy back. And I think she can be able to fend for herself. As you said earlier, Jim, I think she's an ox. I mean, she's just an ox in the making.

Jim: How is she feeling lately? I know she's been struggling.

Erin: Yeah, thank you. She's had some health concerns, but she's doing great.

Jim: So that's good to hear. I mean she's been in the hospital in and out a few times I think here recently, so I'm glad to hear that. So she is at home and under the care of Mom and Dad?

Erin: Yes.

Jim: Good. Well, tell us about the mission of the Boys and Girls Club because 10,000 kids, what's the mission? What are you trying to accomplish?

Erin: So really, we serve kids that come from all types of backgrounds, but a lot of them have vulnerable situations. And so it could be that there may be a role model in the household, a positive parent relationship maybe with both, but oftentimes, our kids can come from circumstances where housing may be at risk, where they don't have access to reliable transportation, where they live in food deserts or areas where there's not green spaces and parks for them to go and play. And so when we think of the vulnerable communities in which we serve, Boys and Girls Clubs is a safe place. It's a consistent place that kids can come every day after school to be able to get their needs met.

We all remember back from college when we studied Maslow's hierarchy of needs. For us, we think of kids in three areas: some are just in survival mode, right? Who's going to pick me up tonight? Where will I be this weekend? Those types of things, and we're there to meet kids at that point. For others, they're in strive mode. They're able to focus on their grades. They're looking ahead. What do they want to do maybe after high school, go get a job, go to college? And for the top, we consider that thriving. Some of our kids are in that part of the pyramid, and there we're able to help them get into college. I was with a kid last week who, at the sixth grade, we had taken her to a college campus. She then went on to graduate high school, go to college, and she is now a staff member for us. And she was just recalling, "I didn't even know college existed." For many of our kids, they're first-generation high school grads and certainly first-generation college-bound. So, it's incredible and it's humbling to live in the day and age in which we do and see some of the circumstances that our kids face, the obstacles they overcome, but honestly, really, the grit and resiliency in which they exhibit every day to overcome those challenges and have incredible stories up ahead.

Jim: I think you told me, I think it was over my cold bowl of chili last time I was in Denver, and you were enjoying that burger, as I recall. I think you mentioned to me that this costs about 20 million dollars a year to care for these 10,000 kids. Did I get that right?

Erin: That's right. It is. Just a quick sidebar, for any of you who ever go out to eat with Jim, certainly, this is you, Rhonda. I mean, you know when McDonald's got sued because the coffee was too hot? It was like because of Jim. He's the one that requests it to be that hot and then, you know, turns around and sues them and makes them-- I think the guy sent his chili back

three times. It was warm; it wasn't hot. But I don't know if it had to be sent back three times. Anyway, I'm just giving him a hard time because you all know him.

So, yes, our operating budget is 20 million dollars a year. We charge two dollars a year for a child to come to Boys and Girls Club. The average kid is spending four hours a night in our care. Obviously, it costs significantly more than just that two dollars, but we just want them to be invested. So, we are able to raise our operating support primarily through the generosity of our community: individuals, corporations, foundations, a little bit of government funding. But it's a braided fundraising strategy to be able to underwrite our programming so that the cost of child care doesn't fall on our families.

Jim: Well, let's back up the truck for a minute because you just-- Most people that are on this live podcast right now have their microphones muted, but you just said, if I heard you right, you charge \$2 a year. So there must be some sort of parameters of who qualifies, what families qualify if they're only paying \$2 a year. Can you tell us about those, those qualifications in those families.

Erin: So the qualifications are, you have to be between the age of kindergarten and 12th grade, those are the qualifications.

Jim: Oh, I knew that.

Erin: But when you think about the families who use us most frequently, the average household income for Boys and Girls Club family here in Denver is about \$30,000 a year. For those of you who live in this community, you know that we've seen a lot of change in the last decade, housing being one of the greatest and so, you know, you're not supposed to spend more than I think the numbers about 7% on childcare. Well, between rent prices in this town now and everything else, that's nearly impossible. And so being true to our mission here six decades later is ensuring that everybody has access to Boys and Girls Clubs. And the financial cost is never part of the equation. And so that's a little bit about the challenges that our family space. We have a number of kids who walk to the Boys and Girls Clubs, we have some that take the bus, we have a few members that will get on public transportation, spending anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half to get to their Boys and Girls Clubs because it means that much to them and the experience is that impactful.

Jim: So Erin, I wrote down a couple of notes, as you were as you were explaining this. I know that generally speaking, there's-- Rhonda and I were just talking about it maybe an hour before we came online. We know several people here in San Antonio where when their lease expires when they're renting, some of them are looking at several hundred dollars of increase a month if they're going to stay. When you are speaking of the housing crisis in Denver, are you speaking of cost? Are you speaking of availability or both? Or is there something else to it?

Erin: All the above. An important article came out two weeks ago on housing, saying to keep up with the demand of people moving to Denver and the number of affordable houses that we need for the families here now, builders would have to be putting up 50,000 new homes a year. Right now, the largest affordable homes builder is putting up about 300 units a year, that speaks to the chasm between supply and demand, which just pushes all sorts of issues. It pushes on transportation, it pushes on healthcare, it pushes on childcare, We're growing at lightning speed. But the cost of everything alongside that, including housing is skyrocketing. And so nobody feels that more acutely than the Boys and Girls Club families. And so we're aware of that. And in the midst of that, we're committed to making sure that regardless of financial circumstances that every child we serve has access to engaging and enriching opportunities to empower them and inspire them to be the best that they can.

Jim: You know, I don't know what everybody else is thinking. But one thing we have to do is, you know, push away guilt when we when we hear this, but at the same time recognize the amazing favor and grace that many of us have when we are not facing this kind of a situation. So I just want to take a break for a minute because this is, you know, as a fixer, as we were talking about it, I think you kind of cut the last part, Erin, when you came on and joined us in our kind of micro coaching session about temperament. We were talking about introverts. Both introverts and extroverts can be very passionate people. But speaking for the crowd of introverts, when I hear stuff like this, I go inside. And a lot of kind of things happen to me. I have to fight off shame, I have to fight off guilt, I get angry, I don't understand how this happens. So I want to set that aside just for a second, whether I should or shouldn't be going through those feelings. Let's try to lighten up just a little bit and then we're gonna come back into the depth. I promise we'll come back in the day. So how in the heck did you become the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Metro Denver?

Erin: So I'll tell you a quick funny story up a little while ago, a couple years ago, my high school marketing teacher said, "Hey, can you come back and talk to marketing classes?" "Sure, I'd be happy to." So I go on and say, "Hi, I'm Erin. I've worked for Boys and Girls Clubs. We're a nonprofit. Does anybody know what that means?" A young man raises his hand. He goes, "Yeah, it means you work for free." I said, "Well, you know, meh." [laughs] There's a lot of misconceptions out there about nonprofits.

But you know, the reality was, when I was in high school, I would have had the same response. I really didn't know anything about the nonprofit sector. But I grew up in a home where my dad was a teacher, and my mom was a nurse. And so I saw that just servanthood to people, helping people helping kids. And what I didn't know at the time, what was being modeled for me, and really what was molding me is that desire to use my skills to grow up and help people and for me, I'm passionate about kids. And so I'm lucky to find a job, if you will, it's not really a job, it's a life's mission that dovetails dovetails very, very adequately, with my personal values, and then my professional values.

Jim: Can we talk about you a little bit more? I wasn't planning on this but--

Erin: You know I don't like this topic.

Jim: I know you don't.

Erin: But we can stay there for a little longer.

Jim: As a friend, and you know, I love you, I just want to press into you. For those listening, Lead Today works hard at really seeing the fingerprints of God on every human being. And one way that we do that to differentiate one person from another, the uniqueness, if you will, is we use this thing called temperament, which we believe is found 1000s of years ago, and the Old Testament found that there and that's why I'm kind of stubborn in what I use, but in the assessment that that you took Lead Today, and I'm so excited about getting getting ready for your playbook and getting working on your playbook. I'm excited about that. But you're an ENFJ. And there's really no question about it. I mean, your assessment came out pretty clear. And just working with you talking with you even praying for you, you have an altruism side to you, where you yourself, have even struggled with this weirdness of--

Let's see if I can explain it. You know, leadership is we put words to things, right, we put words to things, but God has always brought human beings in the right place at the right time, to solve problems to represent a redemptive spirit, you know, that that he has. And I think what we struggle sometimes as leaders is that it's-- Maybe the reason why you're saying you feel uncomfortable is because somehow the attention gets drawn to us. And what we want to try to do is we're trying to drive the attention back to the mission. We're trying to drive it to the mission. But because very few people do that, it kind of creates this Hollywood thing for leaders, which puts a bad taste in our mouth. And want to differentiate that.

And I've seen you and we'll get to this in a little bit. But I've seen you struggle as a leader because of your altruism, where you really just want everyone to get along and you want heaven on earth now. But it's not here now. And well, it is in the sense of the representation of believers that are leaning forward. And so I'm just kind of giving you a warning that I'm going to be diving into this a little bit more and asking you questions, you know, like leadership questions because you know the group that's watching tonight, we're all students of leadership. At Lead Today, we work hard at avoiding statements like good leader, bad leader. We try to say instead, I practice good leadership, I practiced poor leadership, try to differentiate the skill from the person so that we can all grow.

So you have brought-- You did this, I did not do this, Erin. You did this. You already did this, you brought tension into this, at least to me. You know, I'm thinking of 10,000 kids in Denver, and I go, "What the heck am I doing right now? Well, why am I even here? Why am I even in my office? We got to fix this now?" Right? So it stirs stirs things up. All right. So now let's go ahead

and dive back down. How do these kids get-- How do they go from school to the Boys and Girls Club? How do they get from point A to point B?

Erin: We're located in neighborhoods that we know are filled with kids that we work closely with our school district partners. So, kids, when the school bell rings, they can walk right over to their Boys and Girls Club. And for a number of our club locations, we're actually inside schools. So when the school bells ring, they don't have to go anywhere; we're right there.

One of the things that's unique, and you talk about that call to action and you talk about leadership, isn't this, like, once you're a leader, you're always a leader, right? It's almost like leadership is just these micro moves that we're always going through in life, and we're trying to make better micro moves and more good micro moves than bad micro moves. But all leaders do both. And I'll just tell you a real moment. When we look back, we're approaching 700 days from when COVID began, and all of us have these professional and personal moments that rise to the top for us, whether it was missing a birthday, not being able to say goodbye to a loved one, an extra embrace we were able to give.

For being in the kid business, when everything was shutting down mid-March in 2020, we were faced with a really tough decision. Right? At that point, none of us had much information. Whatever decisions we were making in our businesses and our lives, they had really short life cycles because then more information was coming, and so you had to change the plan again and change the plan again. We made the decision that we were not going to just shut down, and we were not going to lay off staff. So, when COVID first happened in the first couple of weeks, I went to the leadership team, and I said, "We gotta do something, right?" The biggest crisis at this moment is number one, kids are at home, they're not in schools. But we put out surveys and found the immediate needs where our kids needed food, and our kids needed basic hygiene items.

And so, I called the food bank and I said, "What's your greatest need?" And they said, "We don't have any volunteers. Our volunteer system is shut down. There's no corporations coming over." I said, "Well, how about this? How about I bring my staff over? They work with your staff. We get food boxed up and out the door. You guys are meeting your need, and then we can meet the needs of our Boys and Girls Club family." And so, immediately, our staff went into action. They went over to Food Bank of the Rockies and worked there for a few weeks. And once we had a little bit more stability, once that time horizon got slightly longer, we immediately reopened the doors of Boys and Girls Clubs.

And that was a really scary time in leadership. There was nowhere else to look around to see what people were doing. Most of our school districts were closed, but we felt very strongly our kids needed a safe place to be with adult supervision, with hot meals, and they still just needed to be able to be a kid, especially in a really scary time. And so, we reopened the doors of Boys and Girls Clubs, and for a year where you saw schools that were open and closed and vacillating between those, we were open all day. And if a kid needed a place to be, there could be a room where we had 20 kids who were in 20 different classrooms representing 10 different schools. And it's a point where I look back and I'm really proud because the call to action was

scary, and it wasn't made by me alone. It was made by a leadership team who said, "We have to forge forward and we have to do the best that we can for our kids because they deserve it." And we were willing to answer that call. That's a great story.

Jim: That's a great story. Let's assume, let's hope that the pandemic is an anomaly. Historically speaking, it could be, but you never know. Setting that aside, if that's even possible because I know we're going to come back and visit it again, but what from a day-to-day perspective are the greatest challenges that you face as the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club and affecting your mission?

Erin: You touched on it earlier, and it's part of my personality and then part of the nature of the work. It's hard to go home at the end of the night knowing some of the circumstances that our kids face and knowing what I get to go home to and the privilege of having a home and food and just all these wonderful blessings, and knowing that that's not out there for every kid, and that can feel really heavy, it is really heavy. It's still muted in the chair that I sit in as CEO. Right? I refer to our staff as the First Responders, and I mean that in the highest regard the same way you think of police and fire and those in the medical industry. There's no barrier between a club director who knows that a child is coming in from their car and when the Club closes it's going to go back out to their car. That's a really heavy burden to feel, but I will say in the heaviness of that and we can feel it for a moment, let that be overcome by the joy and the resiliency of kids.

I'll say this quick story. We give out toys to every single kid at the holidays. It's really important to us that kids experience being kids, and I mean, I could spend the next half hour just telling you stories of kids getting toys and their responses. One of my favorites was a little girl selected a bike. There was a purple bike, and it had these cool pink streamers on it and this great horn, and she walked right past it. She went right for the black bike that had lightning bolts on it, and I was like, "Did you see the purple?" I mean the purple bike is so cool, it's got glitter on it, it's sparkly. Don't you want the purple bike?" And she's like, "I don't want the purple bike, I want the black bike with lightning bolts." And I said, "Well, that's really cool. What draws you to that one?" And she said, "Well, I don't have a bike at home, and if I get the black bike with the lightning bolts, my brother and I can share it. I know he thinks that one is cool."

Jim: Wow.

Erin: And so you're just overcome that this little girl is like, "Oh my gosh, let me make a decision that's good for everybody and mostly good for my brother." And that's what keeps you going at all times on the tough days when you feel overwhelmed with email and meetings and some of the minutiae, you go out to a club and you're like, "This is who's gonna run our world." And it's inspiring, and it's invigorating, and they've got great stories.

Jim: What a great story that is. You pick out a gift because you know that it can spread beyond you. What a great thing. We're gonna do a little commercial here. For those of you that are live with us right now, and you wonder what Lead Today does. You've heard me say that we're trying to virus our nation with Christian leaders, and that is what we're trying to do. But this lady here is a lady that we desire to support in every way that we possibly can. We search for these kinds of leaders out, and we do everything we can to support them. But the other thing is, is that they end up turning around and doing what they're doing tonight, which is blessing you and blessing me. I mean, I get so blessed by this, and we need this, don't we?

The second part of the commercial is that as we're now into this a bit and we still have a ways to go, if you've got questions that you want to ask Erin, then what I'd like you to do is just put it in the chat room, and Patty is my co-host, and she's going to be keeping track of those things. And at some point in time, I'll ask her if we've had any questions come in, and then we'll throw those out to you if they haven't already been answered through the process of our questions.

I love what I do, and I love what you do, Erin. And I can honestly say, I don't think I can do what you do. And I think that's a lesson in and of itself, isn't it? I think that we all need to find our place. Sometimes it's in a cubicle in a business because that's where God has us at that time. Sometimes it's starting a business. We just need to be obedient. We need to, as I remember my old pastor saying, "Bloom where you're planted. Wherever we're planted, bloom there," and don't be looking over the fence. There's so many ways we can make a difference.

If your mission impassions me so much that I can lose track of what I'm supposed to do, but I know what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to encourage guys like Jason in Honduras to continue the mission that God put him on, in spite of some of the stuff he's had to deal with with COVID. And he's on this call tonight, and it gets me choked up too. And you shouldn't cry, Erin, because if you cry, one thing you don't know about me yet is I'm a crier. Many a sermon has been interrupted by several minutes because I couldn't get my act together. So I just warn you, watch that next time.

All right, everyone, got a breather. Let's dive back in. You're in the kid business, Erin. That's really what you're in. You're an ambassador for God, the NF is that human face. In Ezekiel's vision, one of the faces in that vision was a human being. You're in the kid business, but what has changed? What has changed in the last, I don't know, 10 years? 50 years? What skills will kids need five years, 10 years from now that's different?

Erin: Some things have changed. Obviously, Jim, when you were going to school, you walked uphill both ways. That's changed a little bit. Nobody walks uphill both ways anymore. We've figured out better pathways to get to our schools.

Jim: I'm pretty sure I am the eldest on this call, pretty sure.

Patty: Yes, you are.

Erin: But you know, I think that one of the biggest changes, and I'm looking out at my new friends here, and I think I can safely say this for the most part, is when you look at Generation Z and Generation Alpha, who are all defined as Generation Alpha, they were all-- It started in 2010, so they were all born in this century. They're growing up alongside technology and experiencing it in a way that none of us ever did. Let me give an example of that. If any of us were in school and made fun of at the lunch table, and then it kind of happened again at recess, we knew when we got on the school bus or when we walked home, there was a barrier from that negative experience. We didn't have to deal with it until we went back to school the next day. Then we had to face it again and those mean kids were there. We can all relate to something that happened in our adolescent journey along those lines.

The difference today is that that megaphone potentially of negativity for some kids never shuts off. It's on 24/7. It can be on Facebook and TikTok and Insta. And it's shown, there's a detrimental effect that kids don't have that off button anymore. And in a time when there are so many forms of communication, we're also one of the most disconnected points, right? We don't feel that intention all the time and that intentionality in our relationships and those strong bonds, and that's why amidst changing programs and dynamics and what's important, Boys and Girls Club is so important because it comes back down to face-to-face relationships with caring, trusted adults that you know are going to be there through the great things happening in life but also the really challenging circumstances. That speaks a little bit of how I think being a kid today is different, and frankly, I think being a kid is harder than any prior generation. I'll pause there because I kind of shared a lot.

Jim: Well, no, that's good. And I think that for us who have kids and grandkids, it definitely is something that we don't know. When we did a podcast a week ago, I think it was, or maybe two weeks ago with Brett and Erin Kunkle of MavenTruth.com Ministry that they started, and Aaron said it in a very similar way. She said that this is the first generation where we've got middle school kids walking around with these glowing rectangles in their pockets, and these glowing rectangles are not just miniature computers, but they become something that they can- if they're not taught how to use them correctly, it can be such a detriment in their lives. Just learning how to navigate that, I think we're all still-- I mean, technology has advanced so fast that all of us are trying to figure out how to do that and what to do with that.

Let's talk about donations. You are the CEO of a \$20 million non-profit reaching 10,000 children. That makes me tired just thinking about it. Where does this money come from? I'm gonna just machine gun you here. Let me stop for a minute. I know enough to know this. Whenever I pastored a church, whenever I ran a non-profit, including the one I run right now, I can hire a CDO, what you call a Chief Development Officer. I can hire somebody. I can hire a marketing firm. But kind of segueing from some of the implications that you were stating about social media, no matter, no matter, no matter, I could care less what the marketing company is going to try to

tell me. I could care less, and maybe I'm just doing the old man rant. I know that it all falls on me, and if I can't ask for money, no one's going to, and it's not easy to do.

See, Lloyd Lewan, who also is out of Denver, he started the Lewan and Associates and then sold it to Xerox, a Christian businessman who is my mentor for a long time, especially as I started Lead Today. One of the things that he said that the difference between the first chair and a second chair is that to be a really good leader, you got to be the number one believer. You got to be the number one believer. If you're not the number one believer, then you're disqualified. And when you're the number one believer, that means that even though you get tired of asking for money, even though you get tired of it, and even though you might even hire a Chief Development Officer and give them a checkbook to build a staff and a strategy to help you with it, sooner or later, it comes down to you. So talk to us about that journey. Talk to us about what you've learned. Talk to us about the personalities in which you deal with. What have you learned about yourself as you're having to ask for money? \$20 million doesn't come in by accident.

Erin: So this topic is about money, but I want to frame it slightly different to be about giving. And here's where I'm going to go with that. Earlier, you made a really important point about the roles we are. Some might be CEOs, some might be working at a desk, some might be out programming, some might be behind the pulpit every week. And I learned in my 20s one of the life lessons was I had this idea that if you went on mission trips abroad and you were in third world countries and you were doing that work, it was the most mighty work. No work compared with doing that work, and that work was really, really hard. I only volunteered for a few weeks and found it grueling, incredibly difficult.

I came back and I reflected and noted in myself that my skill set is relationship building and really being a connector, being a bridge between a cause that I'm wildly passionate about and people who can give. And my experience abroad informed me that in the ecosystem of philanthropy and charity and giving, there's no one role greater than any other role. We need missionaries who will go out and do incredible work in countries, including our own, but we need people to pray, and we need people to write checks, and we need people to advocate, and we need people to lift others up, and we need people to write love notes and let people know that we care and they're doing great work.

And I say all that because I've found that my skill set is not working inside the Boys and Girls Clubs every day. I'm wildly passionate about it, but my skill set is being a bridge to that work and creating philanthropy and financial support for our clubs. And I've shared this story with you, Jim. It's a Biblical reference, but some of you recall when God said, "Moses, get out there and lead my people." And Moses goes, "No, no, you don't want me. You don't want me. You want my brother. My brother Aaron, he's so good. He's really articulate. He's great at leading people." And God goes, "No, I said I want you."

And I feel that way at times. I don't always feel qualified to be doing this. I don't have a robust pedigree. I'm here because I'm passionate about the work, and I feel that God's put me in this incredible role. And so a part of that is raising money. And as you said, in the first chair, gosh,

there's no fooling anybody. You have to really believe it, and I do. And that's why I wouldn't be sitting in this chair if it was a different organization. This is what I'm passionate about: helping kids and ensuring every child has the opportunity and the activities and the access that other kids in higher economic brackets have had access to for decades.

Jim: As we turn the horse around and head towards the stable, I haven't gone horseback riding in a long time. I'm kind of missing that. I think I need to get out there and do that. I remember last time you and your girlfriend did that to me, Rhonda. She grew up with horses and I did not. She was so mean to me, and her and her girlfriend turned those horses around, headed towards the barn, and I almost died that day because I could not control that horse. But boy, you girls knew how to ride. As we do that and kind of head towards the barn, let's talk about leadership, can we do that?

Erin: Sure.

Jim: What have you learned about yourself as a leader? What would you be willing to be vulnerable about? Because, you know, we're all growing in our leadership, we're all at different ages, different stages. But what would you say your strengths are as a leader? Where do you see room for growth? Is there any difference in leading a non-profit versus a business that is for-profit? What are your thoughts with that, Erin?

Erin: So I'll say, first off, what's the difference? You know, here we are, we're trying to attract the best of the best in Talent to solve these audacious problems, right? Whether it's the kids we serve at Boys and Girls Clubs, whether it's homelessness, it's food insecurity, it's affordable health care, it's housing. I mean, there's just these huge problems that we're trying to solve in the non-profit sector, but we do it oftentimes with a lot less budget, certainly no fringe benefits, and yet we're trying to still compete in a talent market. And that's really difficult, especially coming out of COVID. So that's been an area we certainly feel the repercussions of.

You know, as a leader, what are my strengths? I think I have a good EQ, not an IQ. A good EQ, ability to read a room. Commit to building authentic relationships. The little things matter to me, and I remember those little things about other people. In a world that is just always moving really fast and quick pace, when you take that extra time for people, Jim, you are exceptional at this, it matters, and people notice it, and it means a lot from a human relationship perspective.

Room for growth? I always see opportunities to improve. Anytime there's a- when I have my annual review or otherwise, I'm always probably giving a pretty harsh grade because I keep wanting to move the bar higher. Jim knows this about me. I see everything as urgent. I just want to solve it all right now. And that to-do list gets longer and longer and unattainable. And alongside that, I think sometimes I put other people's oxygen masks on before my own, and that's detrimental to self-help. And in a time right now, calling on leaders to do more and more with less and face harder circumstances in a professional environment and in our world, a kid

environment, it's not sustainable. It's not sustainable to have that type of leadership mentality. You gotta put your mask on, and you got to take a little time for yourself. I'm still learning that, and it's hard as we talked about earlier in this industry when you see some of the challenges others face. It's hard to give yourself time to take that breath inside and come back to the table in a good spot, ready to lead and energized.

Jim: How are you feeling, Erin?

Erin: Well, you always, I mean, you always, you just go for the heart. So, you know, we can't sit here and tip-toe around. You go right for the heart, and it's been a wonderful and authentic conversation and also a heavy conversation.

Jim: I love you. I am so proud of you. I just want to raise up your arms and encourage you to keep going. Stay with us for a little bit, would you? It looks like I saw at least one question come in, Patty.

Patty: Yes, the question is from Jeff. And he says, "Erin, since this is a non-profit and you depend on giving, do you feel like you have a solid footing in what you're doing or is this a constant moving target money-wise? I guess the real question is more about the amount of stress that that can cause and how do you deal with it?"

Jim: That's good question.

Erin: Jeff, in Denver alone, there's 14,000 non-profits now. I think we can all agree that may be a few too many. There's many worthy causes out there. 14,000, there's got to be some duplication in there somewhere, right? And I do think coming out of COVID, especially talking to some of my non-profit peers, it's sad, but there will be non-profits that are just unable to weather it on this side of the storm because numbers are down from a donation perspective, from a program perspective.

For us, we've worked really diligently to be looking at a braided funding model. We're not dependent on any one source. So, if Government funding went away, it would hurt, but we have our other revenue streams to come in. Or if corporations went away, it again would be detrimental, but we would have other fundraising streams. There's a lot of non-profits that just rely on one or two sources, and if those sources go away, they have no way to be able to keep the books going.

We're in a different spot. We're not a charity that's worried about keeping their doors open and can we make payroll. We're very financially sound, and I'm gonna quote the story of the talents, right? The "To much who has been given, much is expected." And Boys and Girls Clubs right now in 2022 is faced with an opportunity to really go out there and do some incredible work because we have a good financial footing and stability. But if we sit here and bury that and don't

do anything, that's not okay. They have the wrong leader at the table if that's what our organization is looking for. We have a lot of kids who need us, a lot of families who need us, and we can be part of the solution. And I feel as audacious of a goal as it feels and overwhelming at times, that's why I've been called here at this time is to face some of those challenges and come with solutions.

Jim: You got a couple more questions coming to you, so, here, here they come.

Patty: From Olivia., "Can you elaborate more on "reluctant leadership" and how you overcame that every day, and how you're doing it as the first female CEO?"

Erin: I think on the "reluctant leadership," I go back to that story of not always feeling like I should be here. Jim knows this now. Now, we're going really vulnerable. But some of you have heard of imposter syndrome, right? Where you don't really believe you're qualified to be doing what you're doing or you're constantly questioning, "Is this really right?" Thankfully, there are amazing pillars in the world like Jim, who you can call in those moments and say, "I'm struggling. I don't think this is where I'm supposed to be. I don't think I'm doing a good job." And Jim sets you down and says, "No, my friend, it's good. It's okay. You know, vent and get it out of your system and get back out there. You're needed and you've been called upon."

And so that's a little bit more into that reluctant leadership. Sometimes we are put in the position because God sees our skills and we need to answer that call. He's sometimes watching to see, "Are you going to step up to the podium or are you not?" And it's okay to be hesitant, but he does want to see us go there and follow through. And I think there's been a lot of moments of that in my career where I don't ever feel ready. And, frankly, especially as a female, it's just somehow sometimes wired in us of, "I don't think I can do that. I don't think that's me." But we have to forge forward, and so that's a little bit more of what that's like.

As far as being the first female CEO, um, it means the world to me. I have a lot of mentors on the board who are females who inspired me. And I'm I'm proud to go home to two little girls who don't understand what I do or what email is or any of that, but someday, hopefully, it inspires them to want to go out and make the world a better place as well.

Jim: We have one more, Patty.

Patty: From Karen, "How do you keep taking care of yourself in such a busy career, and how do you stay fueled?"

Erin: So the old vice was--

Jim: I really want to hear this because this is where we're going to pick up on another day.

Erin: The old vice was Diet Coke and a lot of it. And as with all New Year's resolutions, I really am trying to reach for the water instead of the caffeine. But I will say, probably one of the first, Karen, is just accepting the place and time I'm at in life. Oftentimes, when you're around people who maybe their kids are older or they're just in a different bracket of their time in life, it feels really difficult and unrelatable because the physical demands of little ones at this stage under five, right? Literally can't make the bowl of Cheerios without you. So you have to physically be there.

And so I would say my moments of care come in very micro pieces. Whether that's sitting in the car a couple extra minutes or it's putting them to bed and just trying to read a couple pages of a magazine. I'm not at a stage in the demands of the job or the little ones where I can take extended time, but I have really committed to the micro moves. If we can all picture Richard Simmons in the '80s and he's doing the micro moves, like that's kind of my self-care is. Just the micro moves right now.

Jim: Well, listen, Erin, we're gonna be ending the podcast here, but I'd like you to stay on if you would, just give us an opportunity to say thank you. I'm going to ask everybody to unmute their microphones and we're just gonna real quickly go through the whole group and just have each person say thank you in whatever way they want to do that for spending time with us. I know that we want to have you back on a podcast. You've got so much that God has given you. I wrote down two words. You know I always take notes, and I've already been through three pages here on my little device. I forget what this thing's called, but articulate yet gracious is what I wrote down. And I was touched by your time with us. Thanks again, Erin, for being with us.

[music]

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