



Kerrin: Hello, and welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy podcast. **I'm your host and Fluxx co-founder, Kerrin Mitchell.** I've spent my career exploring technology's role and amplifying impact within our social sector, and more specifically, helping funders to learn to leverage technology and data to connect and better serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

In this podcast series, my team and I will profile social sector leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry futurists to explore this fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most critical and formative topics and trends that shape philanthropy both today and tomorrow. We hope this series leaves you inspired to think and act through a more collective and visionary lens.

Today, we turn a discerning eye to some of the movements, trends and shifts happening in philanthropy, from the perspective of an expert impact strategy advisor. **This week, I'm thrilled to welcome the head of partnerships of dotOrg, and the founder of Every Purpose, Leah Bernthal. Leah hi how are you?**

Leah: I'm doing really well.

Kerrin: Leah, you and I met through an incredible mutual friend, Michael, years ago in San Francisco. And I was totally enchanted with your vision and passion for our sector. And so naturally, I decided to be quite selfish and keep you as a friend. So it is awesome to chat with you today, as always, but I am so happy, we've been able to stay close as both of our paths and companies and lives have evolved.

Leah: I'm so excited to be here. So much has changed since we first met not only in both of our personal lives but also just in the impact in philanthropy and nonprofit space. So I'm excited to have this conversation.

Kerrin: Awesome. Well, let's give the audience a little bit of background on your professional evolution and current efforts. Do you mind quickly introducing yourself in your own words?

Leah: Definitely, I would say I'm an organizational strategist and social entrepreneur at heart, my personal mission is to create the next generation of bold businesses and philanthropists driven by action, community, and transparency.

Kerrin: So diving further into CoachArt, I mean, let's take a look at it this incredible org. It's one that you started with, obviously, the mission to provide online arts and athletic lessons for kids impacted with chronic illnesses. And now it's expanded to over five cities, and now something as impactful as COVID has really brought forward the need for these technologies, these groups, these opportunities to not just connect with people, but with information, can you give me a little bit more information about the organization, its vision and where you're taking it?

Leah: My journey began when I co-founded CoachArt at the ripe old age of 24. CoachArt is a nonprofit that creates transformative arts and athletics communities for families impacted by chronic illness. I had been doing management consulting after college, and really just found myself in a place where I wanted more purpose, more meaning out of my day-to-day work. And luckily, a very close friend of mine, Zander Lurie, he's now the CEO of Survey Monkey and I had grown up together, and we both had a passion for working with chronically ill youth.



And we basically came up with this idea and started as very bright-eyed, young 20-year-olds thinking that starting a nonprofit would be a fun side project and what has turned into, I would say, one of my life's works, which is now 20 years in an organization that helps 1000s of kids, not only in California but now across the country. And that's really what gave me my first foray into nonprofits.

Kerrin: Obviously, your intention was to start it in one direction, but obviously changing with time, you know, these things take on a life of their own and the needs of the community can really define that. Tell me a little bit about that evolution for you.

Leah: We started CoachArt as social entrepreneurs before that was even a thing because we both came from business backgrounds. And so we always ran it with board members and with budgets and with the mindset of being more like a mission-driven brand, but it was an amazing education.

I ran everything from Executive Director, as well as programs operations, fundraising, and more. When you're starting off with a one-person team that expands to two and three and grows from there. So I just really had an amazing grassroots nonprofit experience. We grew that and then spent much of the next 15 years working to help grow and expand CoachArt, but also working with other nonprofits, whether it was a friend's Board, or schools, and I just really devoted myself to the nonprofit space.

Kerrin: It's fascinating to watch the evolution of social entrepreneurship, big corporations, CSR departments, and wanting to really move the needle forward in this space. At Every Purpose, you have a mission to create the next generation of businesses and philanthropists to help drive impact in our community. And I know you work with a lot of different nonprofit businesses, board of directors to execute on this vision, tell me a little bit more about where you see that going, how you help the community, and where people should be reaching out to you to potentially learn more.

Leah: In 2015, I switched gears, much of which was from my frustration with the lack of funding to nonprofits to actually give us the tools to advance our technologies to move forward. And so I started advising funders, companies and foundations. And that was really the beginning and the ethos of Every Purpose. Every Purpose is my consulting my impact strategy firm. And I've worked with foundations, and really also focused on startup and early growth companies on building purpose and social responsibility and giving back into their core business strategy.

So really just looking at the other side of pushing funders to really understand what it is that nonprofits need, how employees should engage with them what they should be funding, to help nonprofits meet their missions, and advance into the 21st century.

Through that I was able to collaborate with conscious individuals and businesses, and really learn a lot about communities and purpose-driven strategy, and how to build sustainable programs.

Kerrin: The most recent chapter of your world exists in this head of partnerships at dotOrg. And this is really what might be the combination in many ways of what you were trying to accomplish, obviously, at the grassroots level with CoachArt, at Every Purpose with the dissemination of information into the donor community. And now taking that into technology. It's it's pretty exciting next step for you. Tell me more about that.



Leah: So all of this work, which really was an intersection of nonprofit philanthropy and technology, led me to where I am today, which is working as the head of partnerships for dotOrg. At dotOrg we are a brand new nonprofit tech company, we are in the process of building the most modern, intelligent, and holistic platform with nonprofits. And for nonprofits, it's really important to me that they are a fundamental part of informing what are the tools and the technology and the data they need to accomplish their goals, and building a platform and a data insights and intelligence tool that will help them meet their missions, and put the power of technology into the hands of the nonprofits. And also at the end of the day, be able to increase the funds, they raise, engage donors volunteers, and the sky's the limit really, if we can allow organizations who understand the issues on the ground, to have the technology to be able to just run as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Kerrin: I love that. And I think this is really interesting, because a lot of folks that we talk to on the podcast, but even just in my day-to-day at Fluxx come from the lens of the foundation, and they all dance around this idea of innovative ways to change up and really help nonprofits but I think oftentimes it's still that perspective from the nonprofit itself. That's what's missing. So taking into account the actual context of how people fundraise, all of that needs to actually support nonprofits not just sort of give them ways to make things easier to submit to foundations about enabling them at their core and the grassroots realm.

So I think that's really cool that you guys are doing that. I think it's something that perspective wise, I am seeing a lot of momentum shift in the foundation space to understand that more and I look at partnerships with folks like dotOrg and others as the future of really how to really bridge that from foundations and nonprofits – it's actually about the technologies oftentimes working together to help aid the collaboration of those groups so heavy with some of the realities that you've seen around nonprofits. You know, what kind of plague them in their advancement. So if we were to start solving this issue of how do we increase collaboration help them pull things together? Where have you seen challenges with process operations or development in the past?

Leah: there's a couple of really big bullets for me in this area. Number one is nonprofits are understaffed and under-resourced especially when it comes to technology, data, and software.

There was a study done by Nonprofit Pro, their 2020 nonprofit leadership impact study that said that 58% of nonprofits indicated that they did not have teams or tech capacity or the ability to invest in tools and software to enable better insights and strategic decisions for meeting their mission. It's just, it's a staggering number. And you know, from all of the 20 years of work that I have done in the nonprofit space, it's really true, the budgets and the resources to have teams and to have the tools that are available in the for-profit sector, just they don't exist.

The second I would say is a need for overall digital transformation. We are now living in a much less predictable and fast-changing world for nonprofits. I think we all know it's very challenging to change course, to iterate, and to do things in a different way easily. Obviously, there are regulatory issues.

But there's also the place where they can develop partnerships, they need mobile readiness, there could be expectations on how do we have digital marketing strategies, and all of these things take professional development, they take people on their team who understand these new sectors that are changing constantly. I think that the third point in this area for me would be



the lack of data insights, data to demonstrate to donors the impact of their contribution data, to understand the issues and how can they iterate their programs. And how can they evolve what they're doing so that they continue to meet their missions in the best way possible.

I think we're all aware of how quickly the issues in our communities are changing and escalating. And it's very hard when you don't understand the data around that to be able to address those issues. And I would say there are three more high-level points here. One would be weak tech infrastructure, they just don't have the security, they don't have integrated systems. Often, they're slow and outdated, their software can't scale with them. And they're just overall tech stack and tech infrastructure isn't working well. And then there's also a lack of mobile readiness. I mean, everyone nowadays, half of what they do is on their phone, whether it's watching TV, spending money, you know, shopping, doing their banking, and why not have your volunteering, and your donating, and access to all of that and quit communication and nonprofits have very little mobile readiness. So all of that combined, I think creates a culture where there's a lack of understanding of technology and how quickly it's changing and how to use it. And there's a fear of change in the nonprofit sector.

Kerrin: Right. And then you take something, again, these chronically understaffed, under-resourced organizations who are trying to update their practices, and then you add a factor of just life happens, or in the case of 2020, COVID, hits and all bets are off. I mean, these are interesting ways where, in some in some manner, they are triggers for change. And a huge factor is how to hold continuity for the community and ensure that the resources are getting the right spot. We can definitely unpack COVID for days on end, I know you've had a couple of places where you were able to take some of those events and expedite some of the big changes you just talked about. Would you be open to sharing a little bit about some examples you've seen of that, or perhaps a specific example where a group you've worked with has been able to take a metabolic event like a COVID and be able to take it somewhere really much more helpful, or perhaps in a positive direction?

Leah: Yeah, definitely. CoachArt is actually a perfect example of this. I'll take it back. Just a couple of steps on our technology evolution. So for our program essentially we match volunteers in arts and athletics with chronically ill youth. This took a tremendous amount of staff time to coordinate times and lessons in 2012. We did a study and we realized that if we built a platform, basically a volunteer matching platform, we could help three times the number of kids with the exact same staff. We spent years applying for funding trying to get grants And support to build out this app and the platform and nobody would invest in us. Nobody believed it was a program that hadn't been proven. We didn't have metrics around it.

While on the for-profit side, companies like this were exploding and everywhere. Having chronically ill kids and volunteers match on a platform in 2012 still wasn't a reality. So we spent the next number of years raising funds independently. And in 2018, we launched coach Ark Connect, which is our volunteer matching platform. Through that in the first year, we gave out 8006 lessons in 2019. With one staff person we expanded from, we were in LA and San Francisco, we expanded to San Diego, we increased our lesson hours in one year with our platform to 12,969. With one staff person, we gave that many more lesson hours, then comes 2020.

COVID hits our programs, we're all in person. And we basically looked at our board looked at our executive director and our talented team, and we said, figure it out, we can't let this population and these students who need us more than ever, not have the transformative



experiences that we bring through these coaches and these mentors. So we basically moved everything virtual by spring of 2020. Every single one of our lessons, our primary fundraising was two major galleries, one in LA, and one in San Francisco and made over 75% of our budgets. And so we moved everything from our events to our lessons, obviously not traveling.

And in 2019, we gave more lessons in one year than we've ever given in our 19-year history. We gave 18,200 lessons last year, we spent 300,000, less on special event venues, we did two virtual galas. And we essentially just tasked our team and made sure they knew that their jobs were secure. And that we were committed to meeting this mission and gave them the tools to be able to figure out how do we fundraise online.

And how do we do our meet our mission and serve our constituents? And it's just it's been incredible. We not only did all of that we expanded to five new cities, because we were virtual, all of a sudden, but we also didn't need to be in person. So we expanded to New York, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, and Portland. And what it's taught us is that the idea of expanding not only our programs, which we knew worked in person but to a virtual setting is now allowing us to reprogram our volunteer matching platform and expand nationally. So we're looking at 2021, you know, the silver lining of COVID, that forced us to really rethink how we were serving our families, how our volunteers were connecting with their students. And we are going to be reprogramming so that any kid and any volunteer anywhere in the country can come together through the CoachArt Connect platform for an arts and athletics activity. We're also thinking really differently in terms of our fundraising and outreach to volunteers. we've engaged cosmic, which is an amazing digital strategy firm in Portland, Oregon. And they're helping us think about how do we bring this into every market across the country. So you know, looking at something like COVID, which a year ago in March, we had no idea how we were going to help our students. And if we would lose all of our volunteers and really thinking about what's the technology? What are the tools available? And how can we make this work so we can not only survive but thrive in this new world and environment.

Kerrin: Right, and so many of you know, folks obviously struggled with the exact same thing that you had to overcome. And I think the creativity you guys brought was so incredible. And to that degree, I mean, having to continue to evolve. And how do we support them? So what are some of your ideas around where technology can be that hand reach out to serve and connect folks? What are the technologies that kind of excite you in that new realm of things people maybe should be looking at employing as they think through what is this new space?

Leah: I think that this intersection of nonprofit philanthropy and technology, one of the most incredible things that it's doing is it's essentially democratizing the entire system in the past.

But now it's really because of technology. Because of all of the virtual and fundraising that's going on the online fundraising platforms are making it so easy to give every month or to give even small amounts all the way up to large amounts. I think that those types of virtual fundraising, and online platforms are truly changing. I mean, you look at Classy and you know what they had a billion dollars in donations go through their platform in 2020 fledgling, it's a company that I've worked with in Los Angeles, they're the charitable giving partner for Zoom, they're looking at all different ways to embed, donating and fundraising into Zoom into every live stream platform.

So you know, really this coalescing of how technology can enhance and grow, giving volunteering the whole space, I think mobile and app-based volunteering is going to skyrocket. I



think that there's going to be a whole lot of opportunities for nonprofits to work with platforms and tools to start to look at real-time data and impact metrics, which of course, then they can use for looking at donations and funders.

And then, of course, as we've seen through social media, and all sorts of online peer-to-peer groups and platforms, the ability to really have a call to action and to bring communities together behind a cause, and major campaigns. And so I think that and then finally, on top of all of it, I think the ability to start to utilize storytelling and video and AR and augmented reality and virtual reality in their content to really touch and see and feel, the work that they're doing for nonprofits to communicate that out to supporters and donors, and volunteers and advocates will really be the next piece of how to engage the world and what they're doing.

Kerrin: So what is your suggestion to us? You know, what are the ways that someone like Fluxx can show up for nonprofits to help demonstrate how amazing they are and what their story is, without having to write these like 30-page papers that, you know, people submit and get read and then get logged somewhere into a file folder? I mean, where do you see that plain? And you mentioned things like AI and augmented reality and stuff? Is that part of what you envision would be included in sort of grand submissions? What's your kind of if you had a magic wand? What would that look like?

Leah: Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, the role that you play is you have, you know, you can start to be thought leaders and encourage funders and foundations to think outside the box that philanthropy doesn't have to be the lead the way it's been the last 100 years, the Carnegie Rockefeller model, that we can really look at allowing nonprofits, one to Yeah, to submit videos to submit, you know, or virtual reality experiences of what they do on a daily basis of who they're helping of the communities they're serving of their transformative work. I mean, the reality is, no one wants to write or read a 30-page grant application, what if you could bring that to life? What are the different kinds of experiences that you can add?

And how can you color your grant application to really have a lot more, you know, feeling inside of it? I think another thing really, that would be amazing is to be able to actually facilitate conversations between funders and organizations. And from my experience, by the time you're actually communicating, honestly, and openly with a foundation, you're so far down the process that it's so formal... when you're investing in an organization, you're investing in the people, there's so much about having a conversation and creating a mutually beneficial relationship that I feel like his last in the grant writing and very formal grant process.

I realize, of course, that there needs to be steps to get to candidates that are really aligned with your funding values and priorities. But once you really get there the opportunity to sit across the table or, or even in a zoom or virtual platform, and say, what are your goals? How can we help you? How many years would that take? What would happen if we gave you invest in technology? What would you do with some of these things? You know, opening those conversations, you're really essentially getting an embed with these organizations.

Kerrin: Right? It's a two three year-long ball play that we have to take advantage of and the fact that we need to start it now and start it early and started in a sequence that makes sense to help bring kind of hearts and minds around, I think that's the part that we're rethinking approach questioning norms. It is an inflection point. And there are events that we run into that cause us to think differently. What else do we need to change in terms of structures for us to take that



sequential path to, you know, change the culture and move forward in a way that starts to align itself to that conversation you...

Leah: I would love to see philanthropy and funders come from a place that's a little less risk-averse, and fear-based, and really allow these nonprofit organizations who spend day-in-and-day-out tackling issues on the ground, and giving them a little bit of leeway to say, try something new, develop a new app, use some new technology, maybe just maybe we could start to solve some of our issues, if they were given a little bit more future forward-thinking investment, as opposed to what have you already done? What are the programs that are proven? How do you know that will work? Because the reality is, we don't unless we try something new. So I know, it's sort of a crazy longshot idea in philanthropy, almost like a research and development grant, or forward grant, just things to really get the people that are doing the work and are so immersed in the issues, to think about what's possible, and to really push their boundaries on if we had the resources, if we had the technology if we had the data. What would we do? And what could we do?

Kerrin: I could chat all day with you about this. And I think that grantee and nonprofit experience is something that is top of mind, especially as we look at Fluxx and where we need to take it, how do you meet collaboration, not just in a sense of embedding Slack or team something operational but it's about how does that conversation occur? And how do we put structures in place to get that real-time authentic feedback between the teams and have that be something that's not just a one-way request, but rather a collective action. So I'm definitely with you there. And I look forward to actually chatting with you again, as basically.org continues to move forward. And as we at Fluxx continue to sort of build our structure around what that could look like. But I wanted to end the podcast a rapid-fire note. So I'm going to run you through a series of short, quick questions. I encourage you to respond back with the very first thing that comes to your mind. Alright here we go. Knowing what you know, now, what advice would you give your 24-year-old self starting not in the nonprofit world?

Leah: Oh now we're just getting I just say go for it. Give it your all. Give it your heart. And, you know, see where it takes you.

Kerrin: If you could snap your fingers and change one thing about the nonprofit experience, what would it be?

Leah: Leadership could earn market-rate salaries for running multi-million-dollar organization.

Kerrin: Alright, the final one in a post-vaccine world world, what's the very first thing you want to do or experience?

Leah: Going to a concert in a really crowded, hot, awesome venue. Yeah, that's that. Honestly, I don't even care what the concert is. I just want to go see live music.