



**Use your North Star to be Value-Add & the first-ever Philanthropy
Doctorate with Cindy M. Lott, Esq.**
Season 1, Episode 10

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Transcript

Speaker 1:

Welcome to Asking for Good a podcast for people who want to make a difference. Hear stories from seasoned nonprofit professionals and volunteers on how to begin or further a career in making the world a better place.

Speaker 2:

I'm Katie Pooser, a career fundraiser committed to making the nonprofit sector better. Let me tell you about our guest today. Cindy M. Lott Esq. is clinical professor of philanthropic studies, Director of the Professional Doctorate and Philanthropic Leadership and Stead Policy fellow at Indiana University's Lily Family School of Philanthropy. She was associate professor of professional practice and academic director for nonprofit management programs at Columbia University's School of Professional Studies where she developed the program and curriculum for the MS nonprofit management. Now, this is where I discovered Cindy many friends, colleagues asking for good podcast guests, they were her students and part of her staff. I am thrilled to have her on the show today. Cindy is a font of knowledge about the nonprofit sector and as you'll hear, she is dedicated to the professionalization of the field and creating the supporting applied research to move the sector forward.

Speaker 2:

In our conversation, Cindy provides a framework for managing your career path pointers on how to use LinkedIn for research during your job search reviews, how to do your due diligence on a potential nonprofit employer. And we end on the idea that no matter your role, if you're involved in non-profit work, you'll be part of fundraising for the organization. Cindy's full biography is on our website and it's in the show description of note is how tactfully Cindy has leveraged her experiences to create a remarkable career in the non-profit sector. Get ready for an engaging conversation. I think you're gonna wanna take notes. Welcome Cindy, to asking for good.

Speaker 3:

Thank you so much for having me, Katie. It's a pleasure to be here.

Speaker 2:

I'm so excited for our conversation. Let's dive in. You're building your second academic program for the nonprofit sector and I want to hear more about the program. But first I think it would be helpful if you could share with us about your career path. And I know you and I have had the chance to talk about how our career paths are informed by and reactive of where society is relative to diversity, equity, and inclusion. So as you talk about your career journey, I hope you'll incorporate this concept.

Speaker 3:

Sure. No, it's incredibly fundamental for all of us to be thinking about, especially those that have had extra benefit in life by birth or through other means. It's really, really important something I talk to my own grown children about. You noted in the bio, in the show notes I've had a really varied career and I have to say that's, that is one thing that I think probably turned out pretty much as I thought it would <laugh>. I didn't know what it would look like, but I knew you know, people are built differently. Some people are built to be specialists and kind of go way deep in a career and keep at that one thing and keep moving towards the specialist aspects of it. I was not that person. I've always had a lot of different interests that showed up very early in my life to be able to incorporate professionally.

Speaker 3:

Many folks have interest into a lot of them. Educationally, I have to say most of <laugh> have eventually evolved into some part of my work. Even when I was in college, I actually was a comparative literature major as an undergraduate at Indiana University. I put myself through school and I had a lot of interest within that. I did in a relationship with the arts. I studied music and languages and literature. Obviously I loved to write. I for a long time thought that I might be a writer and I realized in college and I was at IU for about three and change years before I graduated and moved away, that I really wanted to be able to kind of recombine how I use these skill sets and think about how I wanted to use them for longer term. So that became kind of a theme in my own career and it's one that I think I can offer up to other people who are younger in their careers and thinking about it.

Speaker 3:

There are components that are skill sets that I would call kind of structural to any career. And those are great things for you to hone no matter what type of position you have. And that should be reflected in resumes, which I think we're gonna talk about later here in the podcast. But then there are the, the areas that really float your boat, if you will, the things that you really wanna study, the things you wanna spend your time on, and kind of finding the mix of those two things over time is what makes a really interesting career, at least it did for me. And so I decided to take a year after college and really think about what I wanted to do. I had thought that I wanted to go on and get a PhD in literature. I planned on moving overseas. I had all sorts of different things I was thinking about, but the reality is that when I was in school, putting myself through college, I was working as a resident assistant and I ran into a ton of really interesting and important issues that young people deal with.

Speaker 3:

And also thinking about how higher education really handles mental health issues. For example, crime on campus. And it led to me being really fascinated by things like, believe it or not, jurisdiction, how it is we think about the layers within our communities within government, who handles what problems, how do they talk with each other. And I eventually made a decision to go to professional school and then I even did a lot of research among the different professional schools. And I knew that I wanted to teach

eventually, but I did not wanna go straight through and and only be on the PhD market. And kudos to all who do that. It was just not something that I decided I wanted to do. So I wound up really being interested in policy. That's what the upshot of it all was and my writing skills and critical analysis, logic, all of those things came in handy right then the following year matriculated law school and I wound up graduating from Yale Law School and I did a clerkship, a judicial clerkship where I spent a year an appellate clerkship, a really good one.

Speaker 3:

Thinking about writing, thinking about do I wanna do this as a law professor? This is what they do all the time. And I said, No, I actually do wanna go to practice. And so after my judicial clerkship, I went into legal practice. And again, here's another aspect of my work is that I realized that I wanted a lot of skill sets, even though I wasn't sure that I wanted to be in a law firm, I was very, very interested in what I was learning. And I did a lot of pro bono work and I did a lot of outside studying on different types of issues. One of the things that strikes me very early on, I think everybody, when we think about DEI issues and we think about kind of where we sit in society and what tools and what benefits we've had or, or non-benefits for many people in this audience that may be thinking about, I really saw that and began to see that more clearly when I took a class that's required in all law schools.

Speaker 3:

And it's something that I would never have thought of. I, in fact, I didn't really think about it until this podcast. I took a course called Civil Procedure that everybody has to take. And the thing that fascinated me, and it was just absolutely the highlight of my first year of law school and I had a great professor for it, was that it really showed me that we have systems that literally decide who gets in and who stays out, who gets to speak in court and who doesn't. Yeah, who gets to be represented and who isn't and the entire, the title of the course that everybody takes civil procedure. And it was there where it really started hitting me that the procedures and the systems and the structures that we have set up have been in place a really long time. We have whole rules published about them and they really dictate who gets to do what in our American society in terms of the legal system, which of course is a reflection of values and everything else that we hold dear in this country.

Speaker 3:

So that, I think that was apart from being a resident assistant where I worked with lots of different people from all different walks, I was very grateful for those experiences over the years. I think Cpro actually really began my thinking about I actually wanna work at the structural level. I wanna work at the level, I often say the lever level, <laugh>. I like thinking about it, working with people that are helping set up systems that are more equitable, that are giving more access and that are trying to small de democratize what's happening out in the world. So I think that was, you know, every step of the way. If I look back, there have been realizations and I think that's, that's part of what we all have to realize in our work world, particularly with equity issues. We're all learning all the time and trying to be really open to what you're hearing, being open to criticism, being open to realities, even if it's not your reality is just really, really important.

Speaker 3:

And so I think part of my message there is for everybody to stay open and keep communication open. It's really the only way we learn. Which leads me to, the other thing that I was really interested in all these years was higher education. For a long time I thought I might try to be a general counsel in higher

education institution. I wound up being a general counsel later for political nonprofit and I really, really love higher ed. I view it as another aspect of the structural work that I've done over the years. Someone recently asked me, cuz I've done a lot of thinking about innovation within institutions. Higher ed in particular can be highly bureaucratic and it's, you know, like the law has a lot of precedent. It's hard to move the ship <laugh> a lot of things in common between those two fields.

Speaker 3:

And I've wound up integrating them over time in my own career. But I think one big aspect is just realizing that you have to stay flexible in your career because you don't know what's coming and that's a good thing. You just have to be open to opportunity and thinking through what comes next for me and how can I be of most use. I'm very high on the highest best use of your own skills in thinking what really keeps you on what I call your north star. And so for that, even for someone like me that had a, a winding career, I've had a North Star for a long time and for that I'm very grateful because I always wanted to do work out in the public and think about how to do the best good and move things forward for civil society. I may not have always succeeded, but that's at least been the star I've been following.

Speaker 2:

That's great. And I think that the North Star has led you to starting this excellent, exciting, first of its kind doctoral program at Indiana University and it's called Professional Doctorate and Philanthropic Leadership. I can't wait to hear more about this innovative program. And can you tell us about the program? What kind of students are coming to this program? What are they learning?

Speaker 3:

Yes, I'm really, really excited to have just joined Indiana University's Lilly School of Philanthropy. They are the only school of philanthropy in the world and they offer the only PhD program in the world in philanthropic studies. And now they have launched or they've asked me to help them launch but they now have approved by the state Higher Education Commission. And they then hired me and we are now taking applications for this new doctoral program, professional doctoral program called the, we call it for short colloquially the Field D. And this program is definitely a professional doctorate program. It's for people that have already had years of leadership experience, at least five, many of them have even more that I've already seen in our applicant pool and they have to have had a graduate degree of some form. So this program is three years, two straight years of classes.

Speaker 3:

It's all asynchronous so people from all over the world can take it. It is built for working professionals in that way. And then the third year you're working with your director who's me and your faculty committee around creating and, and developing and writing up applied research. A PhD program is really thinking about new research in an area gap filling what is not being yet been researched within a field professional doctorate in, in this instance with the Field D is about applied research. We are expecting people to come in with leadership ideas about what big issues need to be tackled in our sector. And as of now, after about 30 years of officially being considered a field, a very interdisciplinary field granted, but in terms of a field, we think about all of the research that is being created now and there is a lot being developed out there now.

Speaker 3:

This degree is the first degree to really take that knowledge and start applying it to the big picture, the wicked problems as we call them. And think about how we can actually have students producing in their applied research dissertations and projects what they would like to put back out into the field. And when you say that it's an innovation, I could not agree more, my hat is off to the Lilly School and to the Dean Amir Paek and the faculty that really saw the need for this some time ago, they've managed to now have it happen. We are launching it. We are currently in the process of accepting applications for the first cohort. After this inaugural cohort is chosen, we will very quickly look next summer, be opening for the second cohort. It is a capped cohort, so we are looking to be able to choose from among many, many qualified applications we know, but to have a really diverse student body and a very diverse both academic and practitioner based faculty.

Speaker 3:

So it is an innovation and it's also an investment in the sector. And for that, again, hats off to the Lilly School dean and faculty for seeing that these are not intended to be projects that sit on a shelf. These are projects that we want to be put back out into the public domain, even if the applied research project is around one very discreet area where we are hoping that these projects can be extrapolated upon by others in the field and move them into reality. But to really highlight there is a lot of research, it's time now to start really using that research in an applied fashion. And I've spent a lot of years now kind of sitting at the intersection of academics, policy makers, practitioners in thinking about how they talk to each other. This was a really great opportunity for me to now feel like I'm in the mix with moving people's their work into actual project work and again, putting it back into the public domain. So I'm really excited to see what students and applicants I should say at this point, come up with for their potential and proposed applied research projects. We are looking to have aspects across our field. So very exciting.

Speaker 2:

It's a thrilling description you're giving here. As someone who's been in the field for half of those 30 years, I have seen hundreds and thousands of professionals who want more, they want more tools to understand how to do their work better. So this body of research and these applied projects are gonna really matter and they're going to change the trajectory of the sector. I'm also thinking about another pillar of your work and that's continuing the professionalization of the sector. You wrote a piece in the non-profit times and we can include that in the show notes about the professionalization of the sector. Will you talk about this concept generally and give our listeners some things to think about as they decide which courses, certificates or degree programs could be right for them?

Speaker 3:

Sure, yeah. So there's a kind of an ongoing debate and there has been for a long time about whether it's a good thing or a bad thing to have professionalization in our philanthropic and non-profit sector. I don't dismiss at all that there's a lot of nuance there and some of it is definitional, What do you mean by, you know, is it worthwhile, is it not, et cetera? But I will unabashedly come down on the side that more education in something that you intend to do that stewards billions of dollars every year through our country and also globally can only benefit from more education <laugh>. So that's speaking of someone who's an educator you're, you're never gonna hear me say less education is better. The question, and, and so that's why I say it may be definitional what people mean by professionalization, but when I say professionalization in the sector, what I mean is that I think it is really, really incumbent upon our sector to have stepped up, which is exactly what has happened here at iu.

Speaker 3:

To say we actually need another form of learning and a higher level, not just credential, but the actual learning that is going to be going on in terms of applied research. We're the first, but we won't be the last. There are lots of other groups out there in higher education and other areas that are giving learning in various aspects of organizational leadership, et cetera. But this is the first one to really say that the work you do can be taken to a higher level. It is important for people to think about whether this is the type of path for them. But I will tell you, when I started, I, I've actually started two other things. This is the second degree, but I also started a nonprofit legal clinic many years iau law school. And even then people were saying, well you know, isn't it really just an accretion of different types of law and why would you need something specific to non-profit law?

Speaker 3:

Well actually it is a thing. And that was back when even law firms were still not even having non-profit law kind of divisions or thinking about it. And they'd pull down when they needed to on people from different aspects, all of which can function that way. But over time, most major law firms now actually have an area of nonprofit law within their, their firm. And similarly in our field that is more and more what we're seeing, which is that there are special things about this field. There's a reason why it's a third sector, right? And I think it's not for everybody, but it can be for the 25, we're going to admit something that says, I intend to take this to the next level, the higher level. I have years in the field or a field where it is related to this type of work and I am deeply committed to it.

Speaker 3:

And I think that there are better ways that we can be handling some of these big questions out in the field. Issues around inclusivity, issues around policy and advocacy and how we've lagged in that in our field for many years. Issues around how we think about networks and community based philanthropy, the rural urban divided times, all sorts of issues on the international front. Some of it again is structural and some of them it may be around very specific areas within our field, whether it's youth violence whether it's climate issues, name your thing, you know, equal access and education, anything that you can think of, this is specific area of interest. We've got people that are interested in taking a deeper dive there. And we also have people that are interested in thinking about structural challenges and opportunities that we have in our field. And yes, you can get other degrees that will help you with that too, but for those that really wanna take it to a doctoral level, that is what we're offering now.

Speaker 2:

Great. Many of our listeners are on the cusp of a big leap, whether they're deciding to apply to this great Phil D program, maybe they're finishing up a degree and they're applying for their first ever job or maybe they're thinking about coming into the nonprofit sector and applying for their first job in the sector. You've talked about schooling and continuing education options, so I'd love to hear your insights on the job search itself. We could start maybe with your overall perspective and include a framework that I think is genius that you've created.

Speaker 3:

I guess the first thing that I would say to people that are really thinking about shifts right now, there's a couple things. One is that I would say if you are on the very young end just coming outta college or a couple years after that, try not to stress so much around the specifics of what the job is. Every position you ever hold you can learn from. Learning is an absolute value. It's not because it comes from good

situations or bad situations. You are learning something about yourself and about the field. I often say that the first five or so years of a career, frankly are learning what you don't wanna do because you didn't have a lot of choice perhaps at the time or you were new enough. Maybe you had lots of choices but you just didn't know which one to choose.

Speaker 3:

I think there's a lot of pressure at times on people to just know what they wanna do and you can't know that until you start going out and trying things. Speaking as an educator, I can tell you that even education and formal classroom training is still only gonna get you so far. You have to get out there. I often feel lucky that actually I worked all the way through high school, college, law, school, everything, <laugh>. I've been working a long time and I've had a lot of different positions and I can assure you at least in my career, that sometimes the ones you most think you want are the ones that you're like once you get in them. But the beauty of a career is that the serendipity of it all can really be amazing. And if you wanna call it networking, fine, but being a connector and being open to people and talking to people, I think studies show that people that kind of work on the edges of their disciplines actually have more creativity.

Speaker 3:

But just honing in only on one thing and thinking you've got this one thing that you wanna do, you might get that one thing, but you might also really be limiting yourself for down the road. And also for thinking about how do I integrate with other people on different topics? And that's important when you're early in your career for for sure. For those of you that are further on in your career, I know, I mean, finances are finances. If you need a job, you gotta get one, no doubt. But I always tell people, even if you can't find the thing you want, at least volunteer in the area that you are interested in and make sure your resume actually reflects those skills. Not just what you did and the title. What did you actually do? What value were you bringing to that position? Sidebar, one of the simplest things I ever tell people is that when you go interview for a position, you are there to help them solve a problem. They post a position because they have a need. Don't go in saying you have a need <laugh>. Oh, and that need, that's obvious

Speaker 2:

And usually that need just based on nonprofit timing is yesterday. You know, they're not, they're not looking to hire someone in three years. They needed this filled

Speaker 3:

Right there. You never go into a nonprofit or an organization within our field and they say, No, we've been mulling over what to do in a couple years with this position. You know, we're thinking about structural change. So we thought we'd bring in some people just to, you know, it's not like that. It's like we need something now. And so when you go in, yes you have a need, you wanna get a job, you need to be hired. But you also need to really think how, I think if you frame it as how am I solving a problem that they have now, that's to me one of the easiest ways to think about how to make a resume that looks just like a litany of positions into something that actually says, here is what I know how to do and here is how I learn new things that I don't know how to do.

Speaker 3:

Are you a fast learner? Do you communicate well? Do you know how to write? Do you know how to interact with people? Have you done some management? Even if it's just a small amount, even if you managed volunteers or you did something in another field, but you did some form of management. Those again are skill sets, the structural skill sets that you need for lots of different types of jobs. And so I think, again, it's this theme I guess in this podcast as I'm answering these questions is think about your North star. But there are different ways to get there and sometimes it's about the skill sets and sometimes it's about saying, I'm deeply knowledgeable about, you know, youth justice, whatever your thing is, you can find ways to combine those over time and in your resume, tailor your resume to the place that you are actually applying.

Speaker 3:

If you're mid-career, you should not be having just one resume. There need to be at least a couple versions that you use and tailor for different types of positions. So with that, I think the framework you're talking about, it's, it's kind of in my rule of thumb, but it turns out, it seems at least to have been useful to a lot of folks over the years. And if anything, maybe it sages a little bit of some of the fear of oh my God, I'm not gonna get the right job right outta school or right outta my master's degree or whatever. So first off, I will say this, if you have a brand new degree and or you have a great labor market and churn, which is something that we're actually experiencing right now, we don't know exactly how long this will last. Now is the time to think about if you've been in a position for a while, now is the time to really think about is it time to move into another level?

Speaker 3:

You only get a shiny new degree for so long. So that's just an added bonus. You'll always have the credential and the learning, but it's extra when you've just gotten it right. So it's something to think about. But I mean, the framework that I would recommend thinking about is this. There are the skill sets that you learn that you're interested in and that you think you could be good at and you're not gonna be good at everything. So stop trying to be one of the great mysteries and also opportunities in a career is to figure out what you're not good at so that you can go find complimentary professionals and colleagues that can actually you two or you three or you eight actually make each other better at what you do. Right? Absolutely.

Speaker 2:

I wanna underline that you will never be good at everything, but if you have the self-awareness and even address it in a job interview to say, I'm not the strongest at calendaring or report writing, but I am really good at thoughtful marketing pitches or whatever it is. Yeah. Knowing that and owning that is gonna take you so much farther than what Cindy just said, trying to be good at everything.

Speaker 3:

Right? And no one will actually believe you either, by the way. So I mean, I'm way into my career and I can still own things that I'm like, yeah, not so much on that, but I love working with people who are awesome at fill in the blank, right? <Laugh>. So that's really helpful. So that's the skillset part. The next part is the context in which you do your work. That's the second aspect to what I think of with this framework. And that is the environment that you're deploying those skills where, not to the specific employer, but what type, and I'll give an example in a minute. What type of work are you using those skill sets in? And then the last thing is geography. Where in the world literally are you doing the work or what type of community or what type of environment are you looking for geographically?

Speaker 3:

Because that matters to a lot of people. So my point is, with these three buckets within this framework, skillset, context, and geography, when you're first starting out in your career, be really grateful if you can get one of them. Don't put pressure on yourself to have more than that. If you have always wanted to go live in Boulder, Colorado or in Paris, France, or name your city, then that may be the most important thing to you at that point. And you'll kind of do whatever to start building some form of resume that will show that you know how to work and show up and you can do these skills and that skill. Great. Others of you will say, you know, I've always wanted to do X as a skill. Like I've, I'm good at this and I wanna keep doing that thing, but I'm not really sure what field I wanna use it in.

Speaker 3:

Right? So now you're picking skill set, but you don't quite know the context yet and you may or may not be where you wanna be in the world. The next piece though is to say in second part of your career, when you're mid-career and you're thinking, I wanna go back to school, or maybe I already have my graduate degree and I'm thinking next steps here. It's a good rule of thumb to think that you'd like to at least have two of those things. So let's say by now you're partnered with somebody and you've got a dual career relationship going on, geography may not be the thing that you get to choose, or it may be the one thing you know for sure because your partner has to be in a certain place. Right now, you may not get all three of those right in a row because the priority has been geography.

Speaker 3:

Just as an example. And you may say, Yep, but I really, really wanna be able to do communications and I'm happy with that, even if it's not specifically in the field I'm after or the specific aspect of our nonprofit or philanthropic field. When you get to be my age the hope is that you actually get at some level, all three, that you've had enough choices over time and you continually kind of move in a direction that leads you to the place that you're looking to be. So I'll give an example here. It's very easy in the law, but I'm gonna try to give an example where I, the example I always give in the law is that if you decided you wanna do criminal work, you know, you may learn criminal law, it's the same law, but then you figure out whether you wanna be a prosecutor or a defense attorney, right?

Speaker 3:

And do you wanna do it in Omaha, New York City or at Houston, Texas or somewhere internationally, right? So it's, it's simple there. In, in terms of an example in our field, I would say people come in again, back to this theme with either skill set that's structural versus a field interest. What I sometimes call the verticals. So you may be a communications specialist, you loved your communications degree undergraduate or you were a business major with communications minor or something and you really love it and you wanna work in it. It may take you a while to figure out, do you wanna do it in an advocacy organization? Do you wanna do it for purposes of working with a foundation? Do you think about working with government and trying to figure out how to communicate there? That's the context piece that you're still figuring out. Or you may have taken a job right out of college and done something in one of those contexts and thought, oh, it turns out I am really good at writing.

Speaker 3:

Who knew? Like I thought I was, but now I really know it because people keep utilizing my writing and they keep giving me more writing assignments. It turns out I might be really interested in doing this communications thing, right? And so over time you will figure out those three buckets and try not to put

a lot of pressure on yourself that you have to have more than one or two at any given moment. And just because you picked something, now you, this particular generation actually knows this better than anybody. Your average of staying in a position is something less than two and a half years as I recall statistically. But you know, even when I was growing up, the generation above me for the most part took a job and stayed in it.

Speaker 2:

The gold watch generation. Yeah, it was stay until you earn the gold watch 50 years an organization. Yeah,

Speaker 3:

I was lucky. In particular, I mean my parents were big in volunteering in communities and I had all that growing up, but I also watched my folks do different things over time, but I watched my father in particular utilize kind of his North star and do it through different means over time, but that was not common when I was growing up. And so I think knowing that you can move into something, add value to the place you are, don't just use it as a platform for something else, but add value. Decide what you wanna get out of it, Decide how you wanna best use your skills and then move to where you need to next. I think that's another very discreet piece of advice I would give people is that when you apply for a job, at least later in your career, you should already know pretty much what that job is that position's gonna look like on your resume two years from now.

Speaker 3:

You should already know at least the basics of what you're gonna get out of it, apart from what you're giving them, what you are getting out of it. Because part of the issue there is if it's not that if it turns out to be serendipitously wonderful in other ways, bonus, but if it turns out it really is not meeting your needs on what it is that you need out of it, that's fair game for you to go to your employer and say, Here's the thing, you know, I'd like to talk again about this and see if you could utilize my skills this way or I could get some professional development. It's another thing that you can use to negotiate with employers. Sometimes in our sector in particular, the pay is not what you're after, but one thing you can say is, I need professional development. I want that written into my contract that I have X days or X money or I have access. Because again, every position that you have earlier in your career should be scaffolding for you thinking about how do I move to the other areas that I'm interested in? Some of which you won't yet know, but it helps to have had that scaffolding to be ready for whatever else may come.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. And when you have the scaffolding, you can make a better decision. You don't just see this opportunity and think, should I do it? I don't know. You actually have some predetermined thought around what you're looking for, what your North star is when you say that you should know what you wanna put on your resume for the job that you're applying to. I often ask applicants, how does this role fit into your own five year plan? Because I want to see that applicants are being thoughtful about how this job fits into their whole world.

Speaker 3:

Yeah, it's a good interview question and, and you're hearing even in your comments and my comments, Katie, that it's a back and forth. When you apply for something, you absolutely need to be bringing that

value to the table. As I said, you're solving a problem for them, <laugh> more than one you hope. But at the same time, they need you to feel at least good and content about the position. And if it turns out that there's this underlying sense of this is not what I wanted or, or whatever, you know, they, the employer needs to at least have some awareness so that if they value you to retain you, they have a chance to do that. Sometimes it's just not a good fit and that's okay. Yeah. That's another thing I would say to people is that if it turns out you went to something and it really just is not a good fit, be aware of that and again, own that and have the conversations you need to have, but there's no point in being miserable. And chances are when you're miserable, you're actually not doing your best work or solving the problem that you had, were supposed to be solving for that employer.

Speaker 2:

Absolutely. It's mutual too. The employer can see it and they think, I want this person to do their best work and I want them to come to work happy and it's not happening. So any quick ideas about what we should be thinking about when we're looking at a job description or an organization?

Speaker 3:

Yeah, so a couple things on that. One is do your due diligence. Nowadays it is very easy for organizations to kind of get started and be gone and they look on social media like they're, you know, fully birthed <laugh> organizations. But you know, it's very much the wizard behind the curtain kind of thing where there can be very little behind the scenes there and you don't know that until you get there. Doing your due diligence means talking to people that you know really researching the particular field or researching the area, researching the people that actually are trying to hire you, et cetera. Sometimes it works to go on a wing and a prayer. If you have that luxury and you wanna go try something brand new and you're like, I don't know, but it's in the city, city I wanna live in and they're ready to have me, great.

Speaker 3:

You know, then go into it with that. It's a little bit like relationships, you know, you can just kind of decide what level you're interested in the commitment, right? And so that's what you need to be thinking about. But doing it, if you, if you really intend to stay someplace and you're giving up something that really, really matters to you on whatever of those fronts, either because you're moving into a new skill set or context or geography and it really matters to you, make sure you do your due diligence. I would also say of all the social media platforms, I believe that LinkedIn actually is really useful on a lot of levels, although it's becoming far more cluttered than it used to be. It was in my own professional career than I remember somebody saying, Hey, join me in this little thing called LinkedIn, but if we get enough people, it'll matter someday.

Speaker 3:

So it's been, you know, just in my lifetime, I'll give you a piece of advice. I've given all my students that have asked, LinkedIn is great for doing research. It's good for finding people and connections that work within a space and really reading what they believe their position is around. I think it's also useful for saying, you know, I think I'm interested in doing this type of work. I wonder what other people's careers looked like that do that. And that's one of the beauties of LinkedIn is that they actually do list past positions. Of course they didn't have to do that, but they do. And I think it's useful for people just to learn kind of what was the career path of different people where I don't find LinkedIn useful and I find people are confused about this on the earlier side of the careers is for communication.

Speaker 3:

I do not believe it's useful to message people <laugh> virtually through LinkedIn. I will take them but most people don't check them that much anyway. I also just think as a general, I think it's useful for a recruitment tool because definitely LinkedIn gets scraped. If you are looking for a job, you can set it to private and you can let people know you're looking. It's most useful as a research tool. And there is still so much to be said for actually sending somebody an, an actual email if you can, or finding somebody who can do a connection, but asking one of your thousand connections to introduce you to their connections can be difficult. I also would remind folks that in this day and age of everything electronic there's an old saw about keeping your resume to one page. That's probably true for somebody who is 24 years or younger.

Speaker 3:

But I will say that these days, because everything's electronic, it doesn't come in on paper. If you go over to a page and a half, you're okay if you've got something actual to say. The other thing I would mention is because of the way that we have recruitment sites set up electronically now, especially with screening devices, make sure two things. One is make sure that you're actually using terms that matter because there is scraping of metadata actually. So don't get super creative with your position or title or all the things. Use the terms that people are using. And again, the way to know that is to do actual research on LinkedIn and to also, I always say the year before you're thinking about moving on in a position, go to sites like council and foundations, the, the philanthropy research network, like other places that actually chronicle philanthropy, chronic of higher education, that push job notices to people where you can put in and define your terms.

Speaker 3:

Just study them. Especially in our field, there are new titles coming around, like look and see what terms do they use for the jobs that you are interested in? And throw your net very widely when you do those searches to have them like daily or weekly pushed to you because one of the things you'll learn is what you're not interested in. You will look at something and go, Oh, I thought that's the kind of job I was interested in, but I, I'm looking at the job description and the tags they use and like, that's not actually that interesting to me. You know, or it's always buried five layers deeper in an organization than I'm interested in. So all of that research can be done early when you're ready to do your resume. As I say, keep it succinct. Use skills based in addition to your titles in your cover letter.

Speaker 3:

No, that in this day and age, some people will never see your cover letter and some people will never look at your resume. They will only do one or the other, but they're not gonna do both. So your cover letter serves a different purpose, but it doesn't serve the same purpose as it did for those of those of you out in the audience who are call it forty, forty five and up. It doesn't serve the same purpose as it did back in the day where it literally was a cover letter to your resume. So in some ways it has to stand alone and be a very brief synopsis of what, where you've been and what you are going for. I was just talking to someone just yesterday about this, and at the end of the cover letter I said, It's a great cover letter, but it submitted one important salient thing and ask, it doesn't actually say what you want <laugh>.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, yeah. And

Speaker 3:

So be clear about that. I think sometimes people get so into the selling of their experience, they forget that last connection that you, Katie and I have been talking about here on this podcast, which is, what do you actually want to do and what are you asking them to do? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so I think cover letter, resume make 'em standalone because you never know what they're gonna actually see in this, these electronic databases. Now,

Speaker 2:

On the cover letter, I have to say, as someone who reads a lot of cover letters, if it's not clear from your resume that you are passionate about the field or the the subject area that the nonprofit's mission is all about, you should explain that somewhere. Like if you are going for a job in youth development and you have no experience in any youth organizations, you need to explain why you're drawn to this youth development mission.

Speaker 3:

I think that's a great point, especially because we have so many people who pivot into the nonprofit sector from some other space. I'll give you an example. I see a lot of lawyers who mid-career are like, I'm not happy in doing this thing, but I love the type of work and I love thinking about these issues. I did a lot of volunteer work on the side, or I one time had a great pro bono client and I'm really interested in doing that. And so I think your resume has to actually reflect it as to your point. That's that's really your main document there, right? You have to assume that people will only see that. But if at the bottom, you know, you've got volunteer activities, then don't just list them, build out why you were drawn to this build out that you've done it consistently over time. You know, there are ways to actually convey that passion while you also convey your skillset.

Speaker 2:

I can't let you go without asking about fundraising as an academic professional or at other points in your career. Have you been involved in fundraising asks?

Speaker 3:

Oh yeah. <Laugh>. So I don't first of all, I, you know, one of the things I do in a course that I taught the kind of the first course at Columbia where I, where I developed the master's degree in non-profit management and taught in that program a great program, I used to say, So how many of you are in fundraising? And you know, a third of the room would go up and then I'd say, How many of you think that you will be involved in fundraising? And maybe another third would raise their hands. And I would say, well, there is our first point of, you know, disagreement because if you were in this field, you are going to fundraise at

Speaker 2:

Some point. Yes.

Speaker 3:

So even for those of us that were not trained in it I definitely looked around for some mentors when I was doing this, but I started I was working as an executive director within a higher education institution at Columbia where when I was at the law school, the law school gave a certain amount for

administrative support and space, but the rest of it was on us to raise money for everything that we did. When you've not been trained in it, which is most people, right? You are learning kind of baptism by fire, you are learning as you go and you're learning from great mentors. It's daunting at times, but I think for those, you know, you think you have good communication skills, you know how to rate, and I think the passion comes through, but also showing that you're gonna steward those resources really well.

Speaker 3:

I can't stress enough in our field, passion is wonderful. It's, it is the basis of what we do, but passion alone will not get you there. You have to have skills and you have to make clear to people that you know what you are going to do, or at least you will communicate well about what you intend to do and how you will do it with these resources. I will just end on the note of saying I am so grateful that there are so many people that specialize in fundraising and that have taught me along the way.

Speaker 2:

Well, thank you Cindy, so much for this extraordinary conversation.

Speaker 3:

I really appreciate that you've dedicated some time to really talk about professional development in this space. Katie, so kudos to all of you and thank you so much for having me.

Speaker 2:

Thank you for joining us on asking for Good. Find us wherever you get your podcasts and please tell a friend, take care.