



Find Your Passion and Go Boldly with Blake Johnson
Season 1, Episode 5

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Transcript

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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.

Katie Pooser ([00:15](#)):

Hello, I'm Katie. Pooser a career fundraiser committed to making the nonprofit sector better. Welcome Blake to asking for good where fundraisers share their nonprofit know-how and career advice.

Blake Johnson ([00:29](#)):

Thank you, Katie. Hi, good day.

Katie Pooser([00:32](#)):

Good day. I'm glad you're here. Well, let's get started with a little bio reading. Impressive as it is Blake Johnson is current currently director of resource development club services for boys and girls clubs of America, elevating fundraising for youth development, facilitating workshops and ensuring fundraisers, seeing themselves what he sees in them. In his 20 years in resource development, he has worked with nonprofits, political campaigns and even his law school advancement office in the mountains of Vermont. He had stents in DC at the us departments of justice and interior. He completed a social justice fellowship with the society of American law teachers and his dedicated himself to social environmental and economic justice and civil and human rights work, raising millions in major corporate and planned gifts that impact vulnerable populations and include more people in the national conversations around those issues. After living in nine states, he now calls Encinitas, California home with his fiance, their dog and chickens Blake. Your career is, and I'm sure listeners who are thinking about getting their start in the nonprofit sector. Wanna know how did you get started or how did you know that you wanted to start yourself on this career path in the nonprofit sector?

Blake Johnson ([01:57](#)):

<Laugh> that's a great question, Katie. And, and again, thank you for having me. And I think it's your listeners think about how their career gets started. It's nice to hear it, that there can be a lot of pathways to this. I'm always happy to talk about how I got started because it was humble. My beginnings were humble in Omaha, Nebraska, graduating, great university, and then looking around thinking, oh, I'm gonna stick around a second. And I thought to myself, well, it'd be great to do something meaningful, full. So I was like, well, you know, let's look around. I start, I opened, I think,

gosh, I think idealist is around at that time, but I opened a, a nonprofit job board and looked to see what was out there. And the nature Conservancy was hiring right there in Omaha, the Nebraska chapter. And I thought, well, this would be a great way to know whether or not I belong in nonprofit work because that is a nonprofit.

Blake Johnson ([02:48](#)):

I've heard people talk about. They say they like it. It does good work. I've heard about it before. And I joined their team as an administrative assistant and a development assistant, just an entry level position. I fell in love with the staff. I fell in love with the mission. I, and I really started learning that that 30% of development support I was offering them was fun and fascinating. And I loved talking to donors. I loved getting to interact. I loved the fact that we had San crane tours pulling these donors who had never been in a bird blind before, out in the middle of nowhere, Nebraska in grand island, the most, one of the most beautiful areas in our country for the migratory bird pattern and to talk about it and to, and to see what kind of work was being done to really change the world. And at that time I was thinking those, and I don't think that ever changes it. You just changes to how you do it right in nonprofit work. And so, you know, fast forward to now and here we are.

Katie Pooser([03:48](#)):

Wow. And I love that you took this entry level job and were just willing to soak it all in and find what mattered most to you. You said you were only part of development support team for about 30% of your time. So you had this chance to kind of take a peek into development.

Blake Johnson ([04:07](#)):

Oh, Katie and the people that were involved in it, like, I don't think they noted this day, how much they molded my opinion of what this work means. I mean, I think about them all the time and you know, what you reminded me, I will commit to, to you right here right now to tell them, thank you, you know, soon, because I think watching them work, they did it. What I felt like was flawlessly. And I know now what they were going through, I know that they were, that they had their own bumps and failures and they doubted themselves and all these other things. But I, from my perspective, they were poised and wonderful at their jobs and they were so knowledgeable. And I think that is what got me deeply into the thought that, you know, figure out what your passion is and explore it, do what you can for it.

Blake Johnson ([04:55](#)):

And to me, I was like, well, first of all, any passion's gotta be funded. And I knew that. So I was like, you know what, let's use some skills we have and, and develop those into what those conversations can be with donors and development and strategy and fundraising. So it was a good, it was a good move for me. And I did have a list, Katie, of what it meant, like what were the things I liked the most and you know, what it was, I, I believed in conservation and, you know, environ, mental conservation, I thought, you know, who are those organizations? And what, how do I feel about how would I rank them that I know. And then I thought about youth development and, and then some human rights issues. And I thought, you know, these are all. And to this day, that's where I've worked. And I stayed true to that list. I created back in the early two thousands and I look back and I think, wow, I, I have not strayed. And I've gotten to do all these really exciting things with this really transferable skillset.

Katie Pooser ([05:50](#)):

That's great. I love the idea of kind of writing a list today and seeing in 10 or 20 years, if you've drifted it all, or if, if you're really still true to those core values and the core ways you wanna see the world change. Well, you mentioned using that fundraising skill in other places and as fundraisers, I think you'll affirm this. As soon as you tell somebody that you're a fundraiser, people say, oh, I could never ask anyone from and well, that's just simply not true. It's just a skill. And so I'd love for you to share with us a memorable gift that you got to use this fundraising skill in creating.

Blake Johnson ([06:29](#)):

Yeah, well, you know, and I think what's funny about that and, and I'm gonna comment really briefly on the people say, oh gosh, I can never ask people for money. Cause I think you you're more right than anything. Like, and if I was sitting outside of the profession, I would think that I would, I would say, oh my gosh, look at all these people, they are so poised and confident and they have all these magic skills about that just act, just make money of beer. And we all know now you, and I know, you know, from the other, it's not how it works. We have developed our ability to create relationships. And so I think one of the, my favorite, you know, nonprofit gurus group of gurus is the Vertus group. I think you probably heard of that. Most people, most people in the profession have, have cross. Yes.

Katie Pooser ([07:16](#)):

Yeah.

Blake Johnson ([07:17](#)):

I, you know, and, and this is, I'm not being hate to say this. There's no blog here outside of my personal development was improved by looking at their white papers that are free online and looking at the, a asking to ask information that they put out there. And I really felt like, you know, when we think about ourselves in nonprofit and joining force, that's making the world a better place in that servant leadership model and all these different ways. We envision how we are going to have a good life and contribute. It's thinking about this concept of asking to ask. And at some point asking to ask is saying, you know, would you be willing to consider, right, is in asking really asking to say, that's my favorite phrase in fundraising? Would you be willing to consider a proposal? Would you be willing to consider whatever?

Blake Johnson ([08:06](#)):

And that is being generous to the people you're working with, who are trying to do good as well. And you're in the position to shepherd their goodness into the world, to shepherd their story into the world and, and create it for them. And I think that is where, when I talk to people about board members, I work with a lot of boards director and they say, ah, I don't like asking for money. And we start talking about what that really means though, what are you asking for? And I think that asking for a to ask model comes up a lot and the respect of the people you're working with and developing a relationship to help them do good because is their story, right? People give because they have a need to do good. So I think you tap into that, you get it going. And that is a fundraiser's key to success is how you, how well you can do that in a loving, caring kind way that still gets the dollars on the table.

Blake Johnson ([08:55](#)):

And I think one of the major, one of the big gifts I was able to raise in this kind of model was, was a little bit asking to ask. It was a little bit marketing and, and outreach. And so I was about, I wanna say about five, four years ago, at this point I was with a human rights law firm and we were working in about 16

countries. And we had, we, we were working to address the needs of survivors of genocide and mass atrocity crimes, just heavy stuff. So, you know, when, when you're talking about this stuff and you know, it, it depends on your mission, right? But we, our mission was, was heavy if was providing, providing for those of some closure and, and trying to keep survivor centric model of this and in doing so, we crossed all these interesting pathways, pretty consistently, including blockchain and this tech tech revolution.

Blake Johnson ([09:47](#)):

A lot of what we worked on was figuring out how to get people connected internationally outside of governments who were checking what they were doing, right? So it's like, how do you get real stories from real people who are suffering and tell their story and, and get them some relief. And one of those, you know, and there's all these new technologies today, and we hosted a blockchain and human rights seminar, kind of a, a workshop where we pulled in some of our really incredible resources at our disposal. You know, some this in credible guy from Stanford, who's the editor of the blockchain journal. There sat on our panel along with a number of other industry, folks that work in cryptocurrencies and blockchain, and then human, our human rights certians. It's a great event a few weeks after that. And we, and we recorded it. So we made it available to everybody after the fact. And we kinda just posted it. We did our social media and we had, it was well attended. End of the day, I get this phone call kind of out of the blue a couple weeks later. And it's this donor advisor who's saying, Hey, do you accept cryptocurrency? And I said, well, I, I don't know. <Laugh>

Katie Pooser([10:51](#)):

Yeah, I maybe

Blake Johnson ([10:54](#)):

Perhaps, right? Yeah. So like any of these calls, do you kind of, you kind of like, well, how about let's talk a little bit, right? Let's see where your interests lie. And AF after a while it came to light that he witnessed that the donor talked to his advisor and said, you know, listen, I've got all these resources. Let's figure out where we can make the most impact. And he gave them some ideas about what he cared most about. This advisor have found us. And so, you know, end of the story, fast forward, a bunch of conversations, donor discovery work on our end to make this person feel comfortable with a proposal, you know, and I did, I ended up saying, well, would you be comfortable? Would you consider a proposal to help fund us? If we figure out what you, you know, align with your interest and, and the interest being that of can we accept cryptocurrency? And then he put another caveat in it that said, you know what, not only if you can accept cryptocurrency, but I will give you more if you're willing to spend it in crypto costs. Oh, wow. Right. So for a lot,

Katie Pooser ([11:56](#)):

So not just liquidate the asset, but actually use the asset to create the programming

Blake Johnson ([12:02](#)):

And yeah, exactly. And serve our mission. Right. So, you know, and of course my fundraising mind just started and anybody's mind, right? You're thinking about how do I resource probably resource our mission? What we do that. And you immediately start to think of a, I wondered how many resources this, this donor really had because, you know, qualification is a question that fundraisers have to ask themselves all the time is this person, you know, qualification being, is this person ready to, to give it a meaningful level for our organization and, and the time that we have to give to this donor. So it's a back

and forth, and I'm qualifying this person. I'm thinking about all those ways. We could include them and turns out our travel budget needed the help. And there was a website that accepted cryptocurrency for travel for hotel and airfare and, and car rental.

Blake Johnson ([12:47](#)):

In my mind, it started to come become more clear. And I thought, what if we could take all these things we do naturally, we have an expensive line item at, at, at our organization taking depositions of clients, of survivors, of mass atrocity crimes, all over the world. What if we could reduce that budget item and reallocate our cash expenses to other things we need and grow our organization like that. And, you know, the pitch went, went about like that to this, to this donor advisor. And, and, and he said, you know what, let me take this to my, to my person and see what they have to say about it. So we did it and I can say, you know, comfortably and happily and proudly at this point that that organization stepped up to the task, figured it out with the help of some folk along the way with some resources we pulled in. But we were able to turn that donor's interest into service on the ground. And there were people in Western Africa who were able to have their voices heard because of the conversations we had about cryptocurrency and aligning with donor interest. And I think that was really

Katie Pooser ([13:52](#)):

Cool. That's a great story. And through you worked with a donor advisor, which has some real benefits and a few drawbacks, I would say, you know, the donor advisor is this liaison or intermediary between the organization and the donor. And it means that every step of the way you are having to really and ensure that your communication is totally solid with that donor advisor, because it's a game of telephone. They're going back to the donor with the information you gave them to have the conversation with the donor.

Blake Johnson ([14:28](#)):

Well, and, and Katie, I think you, you hit something important on the head when we're talking donor advisors. It's like any other really that we're developing, whether it's directly with the donor or through an intermediary, it is so useful to build trust because what you're doing as a fundraiser, you know, we have a code event. And I think we stick to that code. Very few people that are advanced in the profession at this point went to school to be a fundraiser. There are only now starting to be degrees. You can get that really approach what it means to do develop resource development, work a nonprofit. What binds us together are these professional responsibilities and, and welcoming new people into the fold who can do this work well because they are, they embody what those professional responsibilities naturally tend to produce in a person and, and to produce in a profession.

Katie Pooser([15:23](#)):

Well, as to your point of the idea of very few people in the field now have official training. The, before entering the field, you were actually the first person to ever hire me as a fundraiser. And I did not have a degree in fundraising and I was neither

Blake Johnson ([15:42](#)):

Do I, Katie, neither do I

Katie Pooser ([15:43](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah. Right. I was freshly home from a stint in the peace Corps and thought maybe fundraising would be good for me. And I was trying my hand in politics too. My resume passed your desk and we had some interviews and I got the job, but why on earth? Did you hire me,

Blake Johnson ([16:05](#)):

Katie? I remember this so well, I distinctly recall the, your peace Corps service, but you were an, are a, a shining star. I think

Katie Pooser ([16:17](#)):

<Laugh> thank you.

Blake Johnson ([16:18](#)):

Well, you're welcome. And you need to know that, and we all need to know that there are people out there that see us and see through resumes and through job application sites, into what you're willing to say you care about most. And I think what I saw, and if you'll let you know, I'm glad that your listener has a chance to hear a little bit about you, because you had a lot of clear emotional intelligence. When we talked, you were quick in being able to listen, answer, analyze, and comprehend. And I think you had some pretty good references. And the combination of all that together was an easy call to say, listen, a, this amazing shining star is willing to come to Topeka, Kansas, which is where we were at the time. Yeah. And B willing to put in the work at, to learn, develop, and grow. And you did that and you did that beautifully and you did it quickly. And you, that is why I think you will easily be more successful than I will ever be Katie <laugh>.

Katie Pooser ([17:26](#)):

Well, you know, I'd hope to be as successful as you so compliment accepted. Thank you. And

Blake Johnson ([17:33](#)):

Authorized task.

Katie Pooser ([17:35](#)):

You know, you mentioned two things, one references, and also the willingness to grow. And so on the reference front, I don't recall who my references would've been then, because we were much younger then, but I do remember having volunteerism as part of my experience before trying out the job, the, the job market. And I think the idea of, you know, having some references that are within the nonprofit sector are always to your advantage.

Blake Johnson ([18:06](#)):

Absolutely. And, and I would say, you know, I'm not terribly sure you didn't include someone from your university experience

Katie Pooser ([18:14](#)):

Like a professor. Maybe

Blake Johnson ([18:16](#)):

I think that might have been the case. You know, what sticks out of my mind this many years later is that they volunteered information about you. Cause you know, you, you can tell pretty quickly when as, as someone that's a higher manager or looking to bring someone on board that where their reference, how their references really feel, you know, and, and you'll know there's some that can't say too much and that's fine. You probably don't want to use those. If you're a job seeker, you probably want to use someone that can actually speak to can really can really get a little deep about what your talent skill strengths, you know, are and where they would be for, or an organization in their opinion. And I think you have that. I think people spoke to your level of organization and I distinctly recall people spoke, spoke to your level of passion and commitment to what you do, that you throw yourself in. And that really spoke to self start and the things that you really need to be a fundraiser, you know, cause top of the list, you can learn to do what it takes to be in our profession. There are, there are lot of tools out there and they aren't always expensive and they're not another degree and it's not always a master's program or a Juris doctor or an MBA. It can be simply that you went ahead and took a course on planned giving.

Katie Pooser ([19:28](#)):

The other thing that you mentioned was the clear ability to learn. And from my shoes, I remember in the job interview process being asked if I was available for a specific training on a specific weekend. And I thought this is wonderful because this organization wants to make sure I have the skills to be successful.

Blake Johnson ([19:50](#)):

Well, absolutely. And every job interview is give and a and a take you're interviewing them and they're interviewing you. The organization offered you some trainings to be at a certain place at a certain time and guide your education, show you what they wanted you to learn, to be able to be successful in delivering their mission. And I think that is a good question to ask, you know, cuz this really speaks to a good interviewer and I've had the great fortune of, of hiring some incredible human beings. You at the top of the list, among many other amazing people. And I think what they did in an interview is really truly a conversation. They came to it willing to say, I am willing to consider putting my time energy effort in life, into delivering your mission for this organization. Now you tell me why I should do that.

Blake Johnson ([20:40](#)):

And you know, and you phrase it well and you phrase that question by asking good questions. Like what is the professional development involved here? I want to learn and grow. I am strong at the skillset and I want to develop further in these skill sets and, and being able to say that clearly and not sell yourself short, but sell yourself up to the right place you need to be so that they understand. If you make the commitment, you're making the commitment to that for the mission to the people you'd be working with. And you kind of expect the same thing of the organization.

Katie Pooser ([21:14](#)):

You mentioned the idea of hiring several people over the years. And I'm thinking about those folks who are listening, who may be in the private sector and thinking that maybe they wanna make this trans or jump into the nonprofit sector, but they're not quite sure what it's really gonna look like or what it really means. Maybe could you talk to the idea of either people who have just blown it outta the water or fit right into the nonprofit sector or what you could expect coming from private sector into the nonprofit sector.

Blake Johnson ([21:50](#)):

I've had the pleasure of a number of conversations even recently with the organization I work with currently where I'll, I'll be invited to sit in on a panel or, or I'll be asked to, you know, have some side conversations with finalists for various fundraising roles from entry level, all the way through to, you know, chief development and philanthropy officers. And I think the common trait among those candidates and you see them right away, candidates that are in banking or finance or candidates that are coming from program oriented side of a for-profit organization where they're, they're delivering programs for services, or I changed my line of questioning a little because I know, I mean, I can see it right there that they don't may not have a lot of nonprofit experience, but guess what I'm gonna look for. First thing, did you serve on a board of directors?

Blake Johnson ([22:41](#)):

Were, did you volunteer for a nonprofit you cared about, I wanna see that you are living some part of the passion that you need in nonprofit work and development work to be successful in your previous positions and your previous experience and drive. I highly encourage. And you know, what, if those things don't exist, it's not that they can't, but I can't tell you it's really, it's one of the things that I suggest to candidates when they say, well, do you have any questions for me just directly at, at the end I would ask, you know, what are, what are your passions? And can you speak to them? The folks that are on a board of directors, that's your opportunity to say, I serve on this board of directors of a small organization that helps services for the blind and, and, and site impaired. And, and the same goes through just flat volunteering, which a board services volunteering. But you can just, you can also just sign up and I can tell you, there are a number of organizations that would be thrilled to have you and your expertise and your connection to your company. Gonna be really important to me as an interviewer, looking to explore where your passions lie and where your talent are for the position that you want to get

Katie Pooser ([23:46](#)):

It, the idea that you have to be able to see what is going to be internally motivating to a candidate is extremely important because there's obviously compensation or benefits that the organization can offer. But if you can't readily see how a candidate is driven towards the mission, you're going to quickly find that that candidate fizzles out that their energy for the mission for the work is gone after the excitement of the new job has worn off.

Blake Johnson ([24:18](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah, it continues on. And I mean, I would put the question back to you, Katie. What's on your list of pass your nonprofit passions.

Katie Pooser ([24:27](#)):

Personally, for me, it's all about economic disparity and figuring out why do we have enough calories in the world that people still go hungry? And that manifests itself in a lot of different ways, from healthcare to youth development, to environmental stewardship, there are a lot of elements that go into you, the reasons why we have enough calories, but we still have hungry people.

Blake Johnson ([24:51](#)):

I love the succinctness that you were able to say that, and it was on the tip of your tongue. And I, and I do believe that there are, there is no specific nonprofit worker or nonprofit development officer. There are

only people that can care deeply about those issues in the world. And I, that's what I love most about. And I think a good fundraiser is able to do that. Anytime. Hopefully I can do the same thing at any given time when I'm in an organization working for their mission. I think your candidates and your listeners are going to really appreciate having thought those pieces through because that's the sustaining line through your career. And it will vary a little bit. You'll, you'll wonder it's about doing good in the intelligible ways that you and I can make that change happen in the world. And, and I think being able to explain that is to your parents, to your partner, to your family, to your niece or nephew at any time, that's the start of being a good fundraiser are those pieces because it just evolves. They have to be able to trust us and they have to be able to listen to our story.

Katie Pooser ([26:02](#)):

You know, each of us, when we are considering embarking on a career in the non profit sector, we need to think thoughtfully about what our passions are and how we wanna see the world change. And then find those organizations that will allow us to fulfill our personal passions and personal world views.

Blake Johnson ([26:24](#)):

150%. The advice someone gave me was if you're not willing to have a, a relationship with your donor, then you're in the wrong field. If you're not willing to like the person you're sitting across the table from and enjoy having lunch with 'em or enjoy having a phone call in the middle of the day. But if you don't legitimately enjoy saying, our organization has done this super amazing thing. And I thought of you because you've invested in us for the last five years. And I wanted you to know that you made this possible for us. And honestly listening to their answer. You're not in the right place. If that doesn't get you going, then find something else that's meaningful to you. Cuz there is something else. But if you're a fundraiser at heart, you live for those moments, you and you're more than willing to have them over and over again. And it's what drives your passion and performance.

Katie Pooser ([27:15](#)):

I love that something good happens. Who do I need to tell? That's a good check. If you're right for fundraising, that's a great gut to like, how can I spread the word? How can I share this with these great people who also care so much? One of the things that comes up again and again, when I talk to guests and other fundraising professionals is the idea of going to law school or maybe thinking about it and you fall squarely and the having done talk to me about going to law school. Are you glad you made the decision to go to law school?

Blake Johnson ([27:50](#)):

Great question. Because I people ask me with some frequency. I think a Juris doctor is a great resource for you in life. If you're willing to put in the work and the time. And I, I say to them, you know, it depends on your life situation. And I think everyone needs to think about this for themselves. It is three very difficult years of work. You will read more than you've ever read in your life. Most likely you will be challenged to speak publicly most and, and you will end up growing in ways. You never thought possible. Now the converse to this is there's not only this time investment, but there's a, there can be a lot of financial investment. So I think that's where the gray area lies for a lot of people. They say, yeah, I'm willing to commit the time. I'm willing to do my best and make this work.

Blake Johnson ([28:38](#)):

But gosh, Blake, it's gonna cost me \$250,000, \$300,000. I'm gonna have to take time outta my life as well. My family's life, whatever it may be and they're gonna have to sacrifice as well. Okay, fine. If that is you, if that's your question to yourself, consider a, take the LSAT, see how you do. Did you do super well? Do you need to reconsider, are you a standardized test taker, right? Step number one, but then step number two, it apply to all the law schools that send you fee waiver. Those are the schools that are looking for your demographic. Those are gonna be the ones who are gonna be more willing to offer you scholarships to reduce that financial burden, right? And end of the day, have those conversations with other people in your life about what did it mean to them? If I don't practice law, what does that look like?

Blake Johnson ([29:26](#)):

And for me, I went in thinking, okay, I might never practice law. I'm fundraising for all these attorneys all the time. I wanna be able to be eloquent in what I care about. I think law school's the right answer and turns out I went to law school thinking maybe I might get involved in environmental justice. I went great to civil, right? And I loved it. And I had a wonderful experience. And I went to a law school where they had a civil rights program that I loved and professors that I loved and I researched them and I talked to them before I went and they wanted me there. But I ended up serving on the national G B T bar association board as the law student representative for a few years. And I figured I was like, this is my first nationally elected position. This is so exciting.

Blake Johnson ([30:11](#)):

And I got to talk about all these issues. I deeply cared about, you know, human rights and equality and what L G B T Q I a means in our world and what we're fighting for. Right? And this was this impassioned me. And you know, it led to my social justice fellowship with an organization that was started by a former Supreme court justice, you know, who recently passed away. And it was thrilling work for me. And it solidified the fact. I knew I needed to talk to others all the time about how they can make change in the world. And I love fundraising for that reason. I think it closes the loop for me on law school that I now am in a job where it is Juris doctor preferred. Most of my colleagues do not have a JD and they are smart and brilliant and they teach me stuff all the time, but I get to also help teach them stuff. I know, I feel validated and justified in saying, if you are interested in growing and blooming your life, a Juris doctor is a good consideration, but it also might be an MBA or it also might be a stint in the peace Corps. So I think there's a lot of options out there that could be right, depending on who you are.

Katie Pooser ([31:21](#)):

That's great. The, that there's no singular path, but I appreciate the way you described how valuable your JD is. You mentioned the idea of equality and equity and some of the service you got to do while you were in law school and diversity, equity and inclusion are on the tips of everyone's tongues these days. And I'd like to know how you are seeing diversity, equity and inclusion in the work you do in the nonprofit sector.

Blake Johnson ([31:50](#)):

I, I don't always feel qualified to talk about it, but what I can do is say what my experience is. There are two things that come to mind. I think that are really important. I always have this net interest in leveling playing field. I think we all deserve a shot. I think everyone who has potential should be able to come to the table with their passion and drive and make something happen to make the world a better place,

whether it's for them in their communities or whether it's for communities they care deeply about. I applied to the human rights campaign youth college years ago. And I worked for the human rights campaign because I believe deeply in the conversation in our country in 2004, that we should be considering marriage equality for L G B T. I thought it was that important. It was our moment.

Blake Johnson ([32:40](#)):

It was a, it was a time to say we've had enough, we deserve equal rights. And so that got me going into this, you know, kind of political spectrum where, where I was supporting candidates that really cared about that. And that said, yeah, yeah, you deserve a voice at the table and you deserve the same marriage rights were good or bad. Right? And it was motivating in a lot of ways where I was able to interact with people, fighting for much bigger chunks of rights than I felt I had ever missed out on. And it opened my eyes to the fact that I, you know, we have two ears in one mouth when I'm with someone who is telling their it's important to listen more than I speak. And at this stage now working for one of the country's biggest youth development organizations, I think they do an incredible job promoting this idea of diversity and how important it is to have a voice, even as a young person, because that voice is pure and powerful.

Blake Johnson ([33:37](#)):

And when young people put their mind into it, they can accomplish having it heard. And we have examples of that everywhere. I love hearing now from those young people I love when they are able to say, I've watched our world develop through the last two years currently of the pandemic of the social inequities that have sprunged from that of the question about what, how medical care is received in our country of the black lives matter move. What do they think about that? I can't imagine what that looks like. I didn't experience that as a kid, those conversations were not as evolved when we were growing up. So enable, enabling these youth voices to say, Hey, you grown up, what are you doing to, to fix these massive problems? That to me is two ears in one mouth. It is listening more than you, you speak. And it is important to have that through line in our work as nonprofit development professionals always. And whether that's translating it to saying our board could really use some different voices or whether it's our leadership has had a very monochromatic look to it for 30 years. Why is that there are some hard questions to ask and I think it's okay to be uncomfortable in asking them it's really important to

Katie Pooser ([34:53](#)):

Do it. I couldn't agree more. And I think the nonprofit sector is the right place to be asking those tough questions.

Blake Johnson ([35:01](#)):

I, I love those groups that say, don't do anything about us without us. And great. That goes everywhere. Think about that. As you're, as you're going along your daily lives, are we making decisions for other people without their input and knowledge and desire to have those decisions made? I think that's our bar and we, if we can set ourselves to that high bar in the, the non profit sector, you know, we can lead in ways that are, I can only imagine the progress that we could make worldwide.

Katie Pooser([35:29](#)):

I love that. Don't do anything about us without us Blake. This has been a lovely conversation and I hope very useful to our listeners as they embark on their careers in the nonprofit sector. Thank you for all you're doing in our world. Thank you for your time today. It's been a real pleasure.

Blake Johnson ([35:48](#)):

Well, thank you, Katie. I am honored to have been a part of your nonprofit career journey and I stand the best luck out to any one of your listeners who are thinking about making this plunge, or if you're in the plunge and swimming through the trenches, know that there are many of us out there pulling for you every single day. So we, we are many and many hands make lighter work. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Katie Pooser([36:14](#)):

Thank you for joining us on asking for, find us wherever you get your podcasts. And please tell a friend, take care.