



**Pivot into a Not-for-Profit Career**  
Season 3, Episode 5

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Speaker 1:

You know, most of the time in job searching, the way you're gonna get that job is not through writing a perfectly formatted and, and applicant tracking system optimized resume. It's gonna be talking to people who say, Ooh, I know somebody you should talk to.

Speaker 2:

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 3:

Hi, I'm Katie Zer, a career fundraiser dedicated to making not-for-profit sector. Better.

Speaker 4:

We are here with Emily Lamia, who is a career development coach. She got into coaching after beginning her career in electoral politics. She spent some time in the not-for-profit sector, and now she is an entrepreneur as a career coach. She founded Pivot Journeys in 2016 to provide professionals with strategies and support they need to find meaningful work and empower them to be inspired, engaged, and effective on the job. Emily is a Gallup certified strengths coach, a certified designing your life coach and certified administrator of the Enneagram assessment. She's completed more than a hundred hours of training and she regularly participates in ongoing education to become the best coach she can for her clients. So welcome Emily.

Speaker 1:

Thanks Katie. It's great to see you and be with you.

Speaker 4:

Well, we're thrilled to talk to you today, and I have to start off with the first lesson you ever taught me, and that was that I needed to be proactive about my job search and not just look for job descriptions and hope that they would capture what I want. So why don't you tell our listeners how you can proactively create the job you want?

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I mean, I could talk about this answer for like a half an hour, Katie. I feel like there are so many different pieces to this that are, you know, 30,000 foot level and details, but I think it boils down to a couple things in particular. The first is really knowing who you are and what you are looking for, right? Not taking your cues from what a job description says or what someone else says, oh, you should do this next in your career. But really thinking about like, what are my strengths? What are the things that allow me to be the best version of myself? What are people often coming to me for, you know, naturally because they know I'm skilled at you know, what are the bright spots that I have day to day? Like if I look back over the last couple years, like what are the things that stick out to me that I really enjoyed at work and felt proud of?

Speaker 1:

If you can kind of identify what those bright spots are and the strengths that are around them and what really motivates you that gives you a sense as to like, if you could create your ideal job, what would the components be? Like, what would you be doing all day? Who would you be working with? And part of this is also like, there are a lot of different tools out there to help you, you know, unpack those pieces, like strengths and motivations assessments. I've recently come around to this one article from 1999 which is insane to even say that something from 1999 feels relevant in today's job searching world <laugh>. But man, I love it and a lot of my clients have found it so helpful in sort of assessing. It talks about life interests and job sculpting and how to create a job for yourself that is really tailored and tied to the career and life interests that you have that are not necessarily things like hobbies.

Speaker 1:

They're things like creative production or managing people in relationships or in my sense counseling and mentoring. That's, that's my jam. So I think the first part is to design something and like be proactive about that search is to like really figure out what you would ideally do. And then the next part is to talk to people. You know, most of the time in job searching, the way you're gonna get that job is not through writing a perfectly formatted and, and applicant tracking system optimize resume. It's gonna be talking to people who say, Ooh, I know somebody you should talk to, or actually, we're gonna be hiring for this, or, you know, we could create a role for you that does x or whatever. So I think that's the other piece, getting out of the, the job search being this thing that you look at, you know, all these, these postings on a job board, which like 5 million other people are also looking at. And get out there and talk to people and put your story out there in front of folks and oftentimes design something specifically for what you're looking for that's possible because of your relationships.

Speaker 4:

This is reminding me of a recent hire at a small nonprofit that I know of, and they are gonna be an operations person, but again, it's a small nonprofit, and the person said, I also have skills and a real interest in developing my graphic design skills. And they kind of rewrote the job description within the interview process and, and made graphic design part of this operations person's ultimate position.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, that's awesome. I mean, that person obviously felt confident enough to say, yeah, I can do your job, but also I have these other skills that I'd love to use and I think could help the organization. And that's the like proactivity, right? The proactiveness of figuring out how to get into doing work that you really enjoy

Speaker 4:

Getting into work that we really enjoy. Brings me to my next question. Tell me why you named your business Pivot Journeys?

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Well, you know, the original idea of a pivot journey when I started my business was actually combining travel with career development. And so the journey was like an actual, like get on a plane and go to Belize Costa Rica and do career development and coaching while on an awesome getaway and vacation with others. And for a variety of reasons, I don't need to bore you with the travel piece kind of fell by the wayside a few years in, and then I really just kept having folks that were coming to me for coaching. So, but the idea of a pivot was kind of what grounded it, which, you know, I feel like we all hear that friends dialogue for when the friends characters on that TV show are trying to get the couch upstairs and they're like, pivot, pivot, right?

Speaker 4:

Oh. So I'm like, oh, right, yeah. Right,

Speaker 1:

Right. So that's like the one time where people often are like, oh, I always think of that scene with the word pivot, but I think in the last four or five even like six or seven years pivot as a concept of like, pivoting your life or pivoting your career has become a really big yeah, it's been become a buzzword and just more people are familiar with it. So, and I think that, you know, we're in the type of world where we're all gonna have to pivot multiple times. And like, part of what I love working with my clients on is the recognition that like, you're never going to figure it out, like figuring it out, meaning like, coming up with your perfect job and your perfect life and like having it all set like that doesn't exist. Everything in life is a journey. You know, you have different plateaus and, and peaks and valleys and milestones, but there's always constant pivoting and it's often a journey, and we're all not done with that journey until we die. So so in some ways, like, you know, the, the name I think still really works.

Speaker 4:

Yeah, I agree. And it also reminds me that a change in your life doesn't have to be a dramatic, you, you didn't name it 180 degrees switch or something. It's a pivot. It's a, it's a change in direction and I wanna explore this idea of creating the job that you want and could that stay within the same organization? And if it, if it could, how have you helped clients make that happen?

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I think this is what is so interesting, especially right now as we're, you know, recording this in June, June, 2024. Because what we're seeing is after a couple years of many people, like so many folks being open to making radical changes, right now we're in a year where people are kind of staying put a little bit. And a lot of the folks that I'm getting that are coming to me for coaching are saying, you know, I would like to make a change, but I need to have some stability. I'd like to stay in my current organization, but I wanna make some shifts in my current organization. Can I do that? Which I think is great. You know, I think you and I have probably in the past talked about the idea of a single pivot versus a double pivot. The single pivot is when you keep one part of your work, so for example, like your job title, your your role in function, like if you're in fundraising, you stay in fundraising, but you shift the type of organization you're working for.

Speaker 1:

And that could be shifting from an environmental nonprofit to a healthcare related nonprofit. If there's a different issue you're curious about. The double pivot is when you change both the role and the function and the type of organization. So I work with a lot of folks that are interested in going from either like nonprofit, you know, various different types of roles into for-profit jobs of very different types of roles and vice versa, people who are so curious to kind of have more of a social impact in their career. And so they wanna go from a corporate, you know, marketing job into a nonprofit fundraising job. And those are very transferrable strengths and skills. But I think one of the first things to think about when you're thinking about the like, okay, how do I make a change but not do such a drastic change and be able to do it in my current organization, if enough works there is to say, you know, what is gonna engage me the most?

Speaker 1:

Am I gonna be more excited if I'm changing the subject matter and I feel the confident in my abilities in my role and function, but I want exposure to different types of organizations? Or is it man, I'm really bored and really kind of just unengaged in the content of my work day to day, like role and function wise, I'm tired of writing fundraising emails, I'm tired of doing donor meetings or whatever. And in that case, you might stay in the same type of organization, but try and shift your role, right? Move from a fundraising role to something that has maybe some transferable skills but is not that same, you know, day-to-day function in quite the same way. And then sometimes then you make it a double pivot, but it's one single pivot at a time. You change the role and then you change the org or the other way around you change the org and then the next move is also changing the, the function. Does that make sense?

Speaker 4:

Yeah. And I'm thinking about how if you've done that first step of kind of creating the job you want and you're, you're already in a, in a position, you know, maybe you can use one of these single pivot moves to start building your skillset within your current organization.

Speaker 1:

A hundred percent. And I think this is where in some ways one of the most important factors to assess when you're thinking about, you know, joining a new organization is, is this a culture of growth? Do people get to take on stretch projects? And also what kind of relationship and feedback am I gonna get from my boss? Like, how often do we do performance reviews? Do we have career development conversations? Because if there's not an opening to be able to say, Hey, I'd like to try this, or I'm getting bored of this, can we try a little of that? Then it really is on you to have to push and say, Hey boss, I'd like to talk to you about my career growth and some changes I'd like to make in my role. Are you open to chatting about that? And if they're not willing to kind of have those conversations, then you get more stuck.

Speaker 4:

So having a supportive boss who's aware of your career development goals, they can be a great sponsor for you too, to help you find new things that you never thought that you never even knew existed. But I'm wondering about, you know, in the non, not-for-profit space specifically, what are some things that jobs seekers need to be looking for aside from that supervisor that would be supportive of their professional growth?

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I, it's such a good question and I think it changes over the years with the different trends and, you know, the economic factors that revolve all the time. You know, I think that there's, there's a lot going on in the nonprofit sector and you would know just as much, if not more than I would being directly in it, Katie, every day. You know, some of the things that I'm seeing are that layoffs are still happening and, you know, I think a lot of the organizations that rely a lot on those foundation dollars are particularly often the ones that I'm hearing are going through some layoffs. And so I think, you know, some of the things to consider for nonprofits are, you know, kind of evaluating it just as much in terms of the safety and security of it as you would look at a for-profit, which is like, you know, if you're looking at a for-profit and you're thinking, well, is their product gonna sell?

Speaker 1:

Are they posed for revenue growth? Like, are they growing? Right? the nonprofit doesn't necessarily have to be growing, but I think it's gotta have some stability in terms of its funding sources. And so when there's diversity of funding sources in a good portfolio, then you know, that means that, well, if for some reason something happens and the foundations are cutting back, like that's not gonna kill the organization's budget, they're gonna have other sources, right? So I think that one key piece is that nonprofit sector kind of that the, the different revenue sources that flow into that and thinking about for each organization you look at, even looking at the nine 90, which I think you've probably talked to listeners about, and just the treasure trove of information you can find by Googling and looking at that nine 90 to see, you know, where are their sources coming from, what are they spending money on? Like is the bulk of its salaries, do they also have other outlays of expenditures on consultants or like training and development and things like that. So that would be just one piece. And I'm, I would be curious as to your perspective as to if you've seen economic shifts impact the nonprofit sector as a whole and that that's something that you would advise people to be cautious of as well.

Speaker 4:

I think that the economic shifts impact nonprofits differently with more than a million nonprofits out there. The fiscal health that you're talking about within the nine 90 is really what you can count on. You can count on seeing several years of revenue and expense. You can see if they're good stewards of the money and the, the overall budget of the organization will be there in that nine 90 as will what they're paying their top executives and whether or not they're paying their board members. And that's something we've flagged on this podcast before, is that if you see not-for-profits paying board members, you should really be questioning what's the purpose of the mission and, and how they're achieving it, because that's a, a very uncommon practice. So you should definitely dig into that.

Speaker 4:

As for overall economic stability, I think that the, the key is really to see, like you were saying, is there diversity in revenue because one missed grant, one mega donor that's upset with the organization can really tank the budget. It may not make the whole nonprofit go down, it may not make it sink entirely, but it will. We've, we've been around for 40% we layoffs or something like that. So looking at the, the organization overall I think is a great, great piece of advice. And I'd love to hear about your clients that are moving from the private sector to the not-for-profit sector and some of the myths you might have to bust or common misconceptions that you have to clear up.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, you know, I think there's, it's, I think I've said to a number of people, one of my like secret wishes is to put, you know, two or three of my for-profit clients in a room with two or three of my nonprofit clients and have them each talk to each other about the idea of going into the other sector. Because I think what would happen is that the nonprofit folks would realize that they are potentially gonna make more money, but not necessarily all the time. And that there is still the same level as dis of dysfunction in for-profit companies. I think there's this sort of sense that in nonprofits, like you're paid crappy, but you have great mission alignment, but it's also totally dysfunctional and like doesn't work properly and it's really, could be the exact same in for-profits from what I've seen.

Speaker 1:

And then I'd like to tell the for-profit people who think that they're going to have, you know, more work life balance, maybe take a pay cut but feel so much more aligned in their day-to-day life and mission that like, actually that really may not be the case. You may not actually have to take that much of a pay cut depending on how senior you are or what type of role you're looking for. There may be just as much intensity in terms of the pace and the demands and the toxicity of culture at times. And that yes, you hopefully will feel better about what your work is in terms of the mission and impact that you're having in the world. But that doesn't mean that you also don't have frustrations about not being close to it, particularly if you're in an organization that's still somewhat removed from like a direct service nonprofit, you may still not feel that tangible impact as much as you might have imagined you would. So I think that's why the, the biggest thing that I'm always talking to my clients about is make sure that you are really talking to people and looking under the hood and these assumptions that you have about what it's gonna be like on the other side of the fence, like, hmm, those might really not be true. Let's go check those out. And so much, much of it depends on the specific organization.

Speaker 4:

I really appreciate that you bring both perspectives here that, you know, the grass is always greener when we are looking at options. And I think you bring some, some realism here for us. And we've had a chance to talk about how to evaluate an organization on their nine 90 and their fiscal health, and also the idea of finding a supervisor that's going to support you in your professional growth. Are there any other questions that you encourage job seekers to ask during the interview process?

Speaker 1:

I think this, this topic and like even just figuring out the specific questions that an, that a person should ask in an interview process is worth like an entire podcast on its own. One of the things I'm always telling people is that in the same way that when you are interviewing for a job and you're getting a ton of behavioral questions, which start with the tell me about a time you blank blank, blank, right? Those are the exact same type of questions that are fantastic for us as job seekers to ask employers because just saying, tell me a little bit about the culture or what do you like about working here? Or you know, what programs are available for people to grow in their, their roles, right? That employer can answer with top level, like, oh, we really prioritize growth and we really wanna give you opportunities to build your skills and stay here for a while.

Speaker 1:

But they could just be saying that, right? So I would encourage more specific questions like, tell me about a couple people in your department or your team who started in a, you know, a lower level position and are now in a more senior level role. And if they can't come up with that, then you're like, Ooh, okay.

People here are either not sticking around, they can't stick around, or they don't stick around because there's no growth or something else makes them leave. And or this boss is not actually able to really provide those opportunities or the organization isn't able to, right? It might be a combination of things. So I love the like, tell, tell me about a time you blah, blah blah, right? I love questions that are, you know, specific to how bosses and managers get feedback or give feedback rather right.

Speaker 1:

For a, for an, an employee to potentially say tell me about how as my manager you would be giving me feedback how frequently and what that usually looks like. How would I know that I'm doing great work and how would I know that my work isn't hitting the mark if I was to take this POS position? Right? so I think really just getting more specific with questions when you're in that interview process is so important. And you know, you do your research with the nine 90 and the press releases and the website and the LinkedIn profiles and all of that. You prep your answers, but I think there are also other kinds of questions you can ask in an interview process to see where that organization is going. You know, everything from tell me what success looks like for this department over the next 12 months.

Speaker 1:

What does my role look like in helping work towards that, that vision and goal? What are the biggest things that are keeping you up at night? Right? Like, I love that question in particular because, you know, every job you go into is gonna have some crap and some challenges, right? It's just a question of do the challenges that you would be coming into energize you or do they feel like draining kinds or does it actually just seem like a kind of total disaster? So I think that like high level strategy questions, figuring out what the organization is doing and where you play into that. And then also some really nitty gritty specific details of like, tell me how you like to give feedback and how someone knows if they're doing a great job or if they're, you know, not hitting the mark on their deliverables. So

Speaker 4:

Those are great tips and I'm gonna have to remember some of those for myself. And I'm thinking about something you've told me probably 10 years ago about every job is exists to solve a problem.

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

So are there any questions that you could ask the hiring manager or the, the screening team if you haven't quite understood through the job description, what is the problem they're trying to solve for through this job? Yeah,

Speaker 1:

That's a great, great question. So I have this one client right now who's interviewing for a chief of staff position at a company that also serve like that serves nonprofits specifically. And it's a new role. We sort of know that because they're, they're, you know, hiring for this chief of staff position and it's the first time they've ever hired this. They're like, okay, this person is supposed to come in and like fix stuff and like deal with problems. And so this client of mine, like really was very specific and thoughtful in saying, you know, my guess is that you're hiring this role because there's, you know, some miscommunication.

There are some things that are falling through the cracks. There are some challenges that you need an extra set of hands to solve. Tell me about what the top two or three of those are.

Speaker 1:

And, you know, six months in what pain point do you hope that this chief of staff is gonna have solved by that point? And so, you know, I think in that whole interview process, a lot of it has been asking really specific questions and reading between the lines a little bit. 'cause No one wants to actually say, well, our CEO can't make difficult decisions and so we need someone who's gonna pressure them more, right? Or we can't say, you know, this development director is not hitting the numbers and we're gonna need to have a plan for how to either get that person out or remedy the, the goal or whatever. So yeah, I think that there's always I think it's great and really impressive to the employer when the potential, when the candidate shows up and pushes and says, it sounds like you've got some challenges. How would I help fix those? And coming prepared proactively to share the relevant examples of how you've solved, you know, challenges like that in the past. That's what usually really blows people out of the water, I think, in terms of getting that position.

Speaker 4:

I agree. And I think they can also see how you as the candidate would work as the staff member. Yeah. And they would, they see how you approach problems and how you approach difficult conversations. So that's a great tip. The last few times I changed positions and it took six months on average from first interview to start date and those were all positive steps, you know, but it still took a long time. So what do you tell your clients who are in really long slog processes or are getting some rejections or, you know, the, when you want a new job, you know, you don't start applying the first day you want a new job, you should have to start applying six months before you want a new job at least.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Yeah. I think this is such a painful piece and it, it sucks, but it is what it is. And you know, the market or the economy really factors in a lot in terms of like, you know how long it's actually gonna take. And also because people are doing bigger career pivots, right? They're trying to do oftentimes a double pivot with their role in the industry. And so those take even longer. I think the recent stats that I read from 2023 was that yeah, if the average person for a job change, it was taking between five and six months. And that was if you were looking for the same type of job and the same type of organization, right? And so if you're trying to do a single pivot or a double pivot, it's just gonna take you longer. You know, I think that we are as a society, like kind of tired right now too, right?

Speaker 1:

We're going into an election season, which, you know, no matter what your belief is on either side or even if you're neutral, it's exhausting either way. We've got geopolitical tension that is exhausting and so demoralizing and upsetting and and the economy. Like just the fact that we're going out and being like, how much am I spending for a latte these days? Right? So I think a lot of people are also just feeling tired and stretched and that means that they put off something until it becomes really painful and then they have to deal with it, right? And so when you're not loving your job, it's like, ugh, I'm just too tired to deal with it. And that inertia to kind of make a change. And then it only often changes when you're just really upset and really frustrated and it's time to move on.

Speaker 1:



So we always tell people, you know, if you're still enjoying your work, that's when the time is to keep networking and to look at what you see as your next step. You don't need to take it now if you're not ready for it. And I don't even know that you have to be necessarily interviewing for things, but I think always having a sense as to what's my timeline horizon? When am I gonna start to get a little itchy? What does that mean in terms of when I should start to get my materials ready and when I should start to do some networking? 'cause It may take a lot longer than it unfortunately has in the past for folks.

Speaker 4:

Great point. And I know that you're a Gallup strengths coach and a design Your Life coach and an Enneagram assessment administrator. Those are great resources. What are some of your favorite resources for people who are looking to, to enter the not-for-profit sector and that are trying to decide where to put their skills for a mission driven organization?

Speaker 1:

One of the great things about living in today's world is that there are just so many resources. The number of people who have podcasts who write books and self-publish, you know, websites, and now we've got this chat GPT tool that gives us access to so much. Honestly, you know, when I'm working with folks and they are trying to explore a new type of organization or mission area one of the best things that I would say that they can spend their time doing to just see if they're actually into it, and it's really motivating and inspiring to them, is to just get into the meat of the actual stuff that they'd be, you know, engaged in if they were to make that pivot and change. So, you know, if it's education, for example, there are so many different podcasts, books, websites, newsletters, resources on education. If you're interested in hr, there are, I mean, I read an HR Brew email every day that comes into my inbox, right? And it's got such great content and information and stats. And so I think the key is searching out for the types of role and function resources that exist, right? I mean, you know, the Association for Talent Development Professionals or if you're in fundraising, the oh

Speaker 4:

A FP Association of Fundraising Professionals. Yeah. Yep. I think this is a really great tip. Yeah, just immerse yourself in, in where you wanna be because you may find out that what was inspiring to you that you read an article about once, once you really get in the, in the mess of it really is not that interesting.

Speaker 1:

It's super boring too. Exactly. but I think the other thing that it does is it gives you something to talk about. One of the best ways to shift from being just an average job seeker is to not come across as like, hi, I am interested in working in fundraising and I'm looking for a job. Would you be willing to chat with me about, you know, what you do day to day? And I'd love to pick your brain about your career path. It's not that that's bad or wrong, it's just it doesn't show me, oh wow, this person really has an interest. Right? But if you were showing up and saying, I'm really interested in fundraising, I've been, you know, attending a few you know, fundraising professional types of events, I read, you know, x, y, Z newsletter. I've seen some of the trends happening and I'm curious as to what this is going to, you know, how this is gonna impact, you know, big nonprofits versus small nonprofits.

Speaker 1:

And I, I was hoping you might chat with me about, you know, how you made the decision to go to the Red Cross or the Girl Scouts as opposed to a smaller organization and how you're seeing some of these trends play out differently. Then I'd be like, wow, this person is like really thoughtful and trying to be really calculated and specific and strategic and where they decide to go next. And it tells me they're engaged in the work, which just is so much more appealing, I think for people who are then gonna need to find engaged, smart energized people to hire.

Speaker 4:

That's a great tip. That's wonderful. So, well, Emily, thank you for your time today and your perspective and all the great work you're doing for so many individuals out there.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, it was great to chat Katie. I could talk about this stuff all day. So hope to talk to you again soon about things and also hope that in the next six months or so we've got you know, even more exciting things happening in the nonprofit space and the job openings are up and people are doing great work.

Speaker 3:

I was so glad that Emily could join us today. Her idea of designing the job you want and then going to find it is something that I hope you'll put in your playbook. The idea that you can create relationships to help you find your next job has been a theme throughout so many of our other conversations on the podcast. But here's just another reason why it's important to network and get clear on what you're looking for. Emily shared behavioral questions that you can ask your potential future employer that will help you understand if it's gonna be the right fit for you. She gave some excellent advice about starting to soak up all the information you can about the subject matter that you're looking to transition into. She also shared some insight that it's taking longer and longer for her current non-profit clients to hire and to be hired.

Speaker 3:

So please don't be discouraged if you're not for-profit jobs are just taking more than six months. In our next episode, I'm thrilled to have a conversation with a person who's actually done a career pivot. It's Christus Siller and she's the Chief Technology Officer over at Charity Water. She's gonna talk to us about how she moved from the tech sector into the not-for-profit sector. Tell us more about the impact of data and technology on storytelling and not-for-profit operations. She'll also talked to us a little bit about what she's looking for when she's hiring in the not-for-profit sector. Thanks again for listening.