

## Agency for Change Podcast: Shari Veil, MBA, Ph.D., Professor and Dean, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Nebraska Lincoln

### **Shari Veil:**

Be the brand. You want to be known for representing yourself in a certain way, you have an expectation you have set for your organization for what you do, you have to embody that brand.

### **Announcer:**

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

### **Kelley Peterson:**

Few careers receive the same amount of criticism as journalism while playing such an important role in keeping us informed holding corporations and the government accountable and even providing entertainment. But it's a changing field, today's journalists need a wide range of skills to do their jobs, encompassing everything from digital tools to web literacy, photo and video editing, social media and more. Preparing these future journalists for such a multifaceted role is a challenge all its own.

### **Kelley Peterson:**

And we're going to hear from someone who is doing just that at the college level by helping to shape the next generation of news gatherers as an educator. Hi, everyone. This is Kelly Peterson, Vice President and Nonprofit Creative Director at KidGlov. Today on the Agency for Change podcast, we're speaking with Dr. Shari Veil. Dr. Veil is a professor and Dean of the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, which is preparing the communications leaders of tomorrow through hard work, collaborative problem solving and the ethical pursuit of truth to uphold democracy. Shari, I'm eager to talk with you today and learn more about the great impact you are making on the world.

### **Shari Veil:**

Thank you, Kelly.

### **Kelley Peterson:**

You bet. Shari, for those who aren't familiar with the journalism program at UNL, could you tell us a little about it and what makes it so special?

### **Shari Veil:**

I'd be happy to. I think the first thing to point out is that journalism is just one of our majors in the college. We have four - journalism, broadcasting, advertising and public relations, and sports, media, and communication. We also have two Master's degree programs - professional journalism and integrated media communication and we have two graduate certificates in financial communication and then another one in public relations and social media. I think what makes us so special is that every faculty member in our college came to education from the industry, even our tenured research professors had at least a decade of industry experience before coming into academia. And even now, almost 40% of our

classes are taught by faculty who are still working full-time in the profession and teaching on the side, working with our students.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Well, I'm so glad you said that it takes real world experience, especially because I'm out here doing it every day and so are all of the other colleagues that I have gone to the University of Nebraska with and more. So Shari, before we get too far into this interview, I must ask because I'm dying to know. In preparing for this episode, we asked you to tell us a unique thing about you and you said, "I spent the night on an aircraft carrier and I'm not in the Navy." How did that happen?

**Shari Veil:**

Sure. I had worked with the commander of the Naval Air Force Atlantic to evaluate their *sailor for a day* campaign. And what they did for the campaign is they would fly out journalists for a couple days on an aircraft carrier during their training runs. And then the journalists would be able to go around and interview sailors from their local communities and I went along for one of the trips in order to interview the journalists in that process. And then when they came back, I analyzed the media coverage of the campaign. So I had my Tailhook certificate showing that I caught a trap on a C-2 Greyhound and I was also catapulted off the next day. Very difficult to sleep on the top bunk in an aircraft carrier when there are planes smashing into the deck all night long but really incredible experience. And even just walking the deck because they shut everything down for everyone to walk the deck, to look for any kind of hair pin, screw, bolt, whatever it is, anything that could throw off the system, it was a really incredible experience.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Oh, my gosh.

**Shari Veil:**

I had thought just a moment about joining in the Navy.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Just a second, huh? Well, that is a great story and something that you can always say that not everyone has had that experience. So a good story to tell when you're at something and say, "I bet you don't know this about me," just like today. I'd love to hear more about your experience whether they happened on an aircraft carrier or not. So Shari, when you think about your previous roles which ones helped you prepare you the most to be a professor and a dean?

**Shari Veil:**

My last position, I was at the University of Kentucky, and I was chair of the department of communication and also associate dean for undergraduate affairs. So working with students, overseeing faculty, I think that position probably, prepared me most for the administrative part of being a dean. But really what prepared me for the other side of being a dean - fundraising, promoting what we do as a college, that came from my own professional experience before I turned to academia. I mean, I've worked for a hockey team, a hospital, a real estate firm and I can tell you that selling dasher boards and ice logos and promoting groundbreaking healthcare advances in the quarterly magazine and monthly wellness publication, they're not that much different than identifying sponsors for the Experience Lab,

writing the alumni newsletter. So a lot of the skills that I used today as dean are skills that I used when I first started out in the industry in communications.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Even more stories to tell us, selling sponsorships for icebox, wow. I had no idea that was in your background.

**Shari Veil:**

Yeah. The Bismark Bobcat's Junior A hockey team, I was the director of marketing and sales.

**Kelley Peterson:**

I loved that so much. Well, we talked a little bit before the show started about that your wardrobe has turned from blue to red and now, we know the reason why. But we do have a local hockey team that maybe you could wear some blue again. Who knew you had that up your sleeve? I talked at the top of the show but I'm wondering if you can give me your thoughts as well with the field of journalism changing so quickly, it feels like the College of Journalism and Mass Communications has especially, a tough job preparing students for a career that's shifting absolutely, all of the time. What is the college doing to accomplish this?

**Shari Veil:**

So I think the biggest change that we have implemented in the last couple years has really been the launch of the Experience Lab. And that is to prepare students to be able to grow and evolve along with the industry. So the experience is set up as a hands on experiential learning program. We have multiple programs from Nebraska News Service to our student who are in the agencies, where students are working with professionals and residents like yourself as well as the student leads and the faculty liaisons to develop content, build strategy, write stories, produce a live news show.

**Shari Veil:**

I mean, they are getting in and gaining that hands on experience and they can move around in different aspects of the Experience Lab so that they can figure out what is the best fit for them but also so that they get that experience of not just how to write a really good nut graph. But how do you work with a client? How do you work with a client who's upset? How do you get in and interview during a short time constraint? When you're trying to catch a Senator during the legislative session? I mean, there are so many different aspects of the hands-on experience that are just essential to preparing our students to be able to go directly into the industry.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Ooh, I want to talk more about this Experience Lab. It's one of my favorite things that I've had the opportunity to do as of late. And we have a meeting once a week and every one of those students gathers and I cannot tell you that there is a matched energy to what those students have at the start of that meeting and it's just a buzz like no other. But talk to me about the Experience Lab, you've described it as hands on experience. What does that mean and why is it better than a traditional classroom experience?

**Shari Veil:**

I wouldn't say it's better than, I would say it's complimentary because students still need the fundamentals and they need to understand the ethical and legal implications of their actions. But they also need to experience firsthand what the industry is like. They need to know those pressures of a deadline, how to work with that unhappy client. They need to get in, they need to experiment, they need to play, fall in love with media. That's what we want them to be able to do in the Experience Lab.

**Shari Veil:**

We also want them to be able to fail fabulously, here where they have the guidance of the professionals and residents and the faculty liaisons to support them. This is their opportunity to figure out if this is the right fit for them. I would much rather have a student come in their first, second semester working in the Experience Lab and find out this is not what they should be doing than to spend four years getting their degree and getting out there and finding this isn't the right career choice for them. At the same time if a student doesn't really know what they want to do, this is a place to come in and figure it out, find which is the right fit, move around. See what it's like to work in the industry, talk to those professionals and residents so that you can follow their career path or create your own.

**Kelley Peterson:**

I just love the name of it because it gives that feeling, yes, Experience Lab. Go in, get that experience, figure it out. And I love also what you said about having time to play and also giving it that, it's failing with a safety net and before they get out in the real world and it's just a neat opportunity. So for students who go through this program, what kind of careers do they end up in? And as you said before they probably, don't all end up as journalists, but some do. Are there other communication roles that you see them land in?

**Shari Veil:**

Yes. They go anywhere and everywhere. I mean, we definitely, have journalists, we have students right now who are doing their internship this summer at The Hill. We have one of our graduates from this last year was part of the Pulitzer Prize winning team for the New York Times and she just graduated here in 2020. We have students at the LA Times, we have them all over the country, they're working for CNN. They're also working for the Norfolk Daily News, the weekly paper out in Aurora, they're working for 10/11, they're at KidGlov, they're at Bailey Lauerman, they're at the Boys & Girls Club, they're at Bay High.

**Shari Veil:**

So every industry needs communicators and our students are filling those roles from corporate communication, nonprofit, sports, sports promotion is a whole other area that's exploding. We're actually, looking at developing some pieces here for e-sports as that has become a billion-dollar industry now. So one of the things that's great about a career in the communications field whichever direction you go whether it's promotion whether it's journalism, anything along that line is that you're needed everywhere. And really your ability to tell a good story is what is going to make you qualified for all of these different roles and that's what we do here.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Spoken so true and KidGlov thanks you because we definitely, have a need and every industry does need good communicators and good marketers to tell their stories for their brands. And just for them personally, in working with students, it's been so enriching too, to yes, tell their own brand stories and

promote themselves so they can get those careers that you spoke of if that's something that they want all the way from the New York Times to the Norfolk. And I can't remember, is it a Tribune? I don't remember what...

**Shari Veil:**

It's Norfolk Daily News.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Norfolk Daily News, yes. So all of those... You're welcome, Norfolk Daily News, for that plug! We'll make sure to let you know, we spoke about you today. And my next question is, do you ever hear from your students after they graduate and you've already answered to that is, absolutely. If you have someone already working on some really great projects like Pulitzer Prizes and things, are there any memories of former students that stand out to you that you could share?

**Shari Veil:**

Actually, when I first came on as dean, I did a listening tour. So meeting with alumni, I did it by decades as kind of reunions. I also did it by cities to bring folks together and so I heard lots of stories about old faculty of throughout the years. And one individual actually, kept coming back and that was Rick Alloway where he came up over and over again in those sessions where it was comments of, "I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I didn't know what my major was going to be. I was going down a dark path," or whatever it would be and it all ended with, "And then I met Rick Alloway," and just the stories that they told about him it really had an impact on me to the point that I worked with another one of his former students, Ford Clark.

**Shari Veil:**

And we nominated him for the Nebraska Broadcasters Hall of Fame which he will be inducted into this next fall. And actually, we're going to have a big party for him on June 11. There's going to be a big KRNU celebration at the Bourbon Theater, there'll be specialty drinks and we'll have appetizers and cocktails and really cool KRNU merchandise. But all of it is around celebrating the 50th anniversary of KRNU and also celebrating Rick's induction into the Hall of Fame. So I think those stories were just, I heard them over and over again. It was so meaningful that I thought it was essential that we make sure that Rick knows the impact that he's had on our students.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Absolutely. What a great event coming up to celebrate. I'll have to make sure to get that on my calendar as well. I personally ran into Rick just the other day, we were walking up to the Experience Lab together and I said, "What do you got going on today?" And he said, "You just never know what those students have going on and I can't wait to find out." So I loved that statement coming from him about how he supports 100% what the students are doing at all times and it's not his limelight, it's theirs. So that sounded like a perfect Rick statement to come from as we walked up the stairs together. So great. I'm sure you've heard people say that journalism is dead, where does that idea even come from and how do you typically, respond when someone says that?

**Shari Veil:**

I think a lot of it comes from where we're at right now with newspapers in the industry. I mean, we've gone from advertising being the primary way that newspapers, we're able to make money and to be able

to continue. And that's changed drastically as most things have gone online and now we're more focused on digital subscriptions than the actual print pieces. I mean, we're down to two privately owned daily papers in the entire state of Nebraska. The others are owned by big hedge funds, a lot of many papers, all owned by the same companies and they're cutting staff and honestly killing off papers. We have huge news deserts across rural states throughout the country and when most of your news is coming from the east coast or the west coast, there's a whole lot being missed in the middle. We also have essentially, opinion pushers calling themselves news analysts but being considered journalists when they're not journalists. Anyone with a Twitter handle can share information that does not make them a journalist.

**Shari Veil:**

But I do think that there is hope. I mean, we've had a huge increase in nonprofit and focused journalism entities. We also have a lot of people who are investing in journalism, who are choosing to make that commitment whether it's investing in these nonprofit outfits or even... I mean, we have billionaires buying newspapers right now which sounds terrifying but I'm seeing those news staffs increase, I'm seeing them higher. I'm seeing changes happening within our own college. We just received an incredible \$4.65 million gift from an alumni in order to hire two new faculty focused on depth reporting, to be able to take that full semester even a full year, focusing on one story from multiple angles where they're doing the research, they're pursuing truth to uphold democracy. It's what we stand for here at the college, what journalism, true journalists stand for across the industry. So journalism is definitely, not dead. It is changing, it's evolving just like all the rest of our industries because the changes in technology, we have to grow and adapt along with the industry.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Yes, for sure. And that is so exciting to even think about, we wouldn't want it to stay the same. So we have to evolve and become something different than we once were. And yes, we may miss some of those pieces. We will have those memories but think about the possibilities of the future, it's just so exciting. And just to hear you talk about that depth of reporting and that there are funders out there as you mentioned, supporting that journalism is not dead and this is going to help change the world by getting truth in those things out where we can.

**Kelley Peterson:**

And it is going to still remain a very professional profession and I'm glad to see that my dog, that is a social media influencer is not a journalist nor do I think that he is. So it is okay to separate those things and use those channels for what they're meant for at the appropriate times. So at KidGlov, one of the discussions we've had around diversity and inclusion is that there is a need for greater representation in advertising. I'm wondering if journalism struggles with the same issues and if so, what's being done to improve it?

**Shari Veil:**

Absolutely. Well, one, as I mentioned earlier when you have major news organizations are both on the coast, a lot of people being missed in the middle of the country, educational background, socioeconomic status diversity in terms of racial background, ethnic background, all of that is key to having diverse voices in our media, diverse voices in the advertising side of things, as well as journalism. And what we've been focusing on here at the college is looking a little closer to home. I mean, we do have diversity in Nebraska. It's not always easy to find but it is here and we need to be focusing on how we can bring those voices to the table. So some of what we've been doing is working with Boys & Girls Clubs and

bringing them out. They're actually, one of the clients that you've been working with but bringing them here for some workshops that we do right here at the college.

**Shari Veil:**

We also have a grant from the Cooper Foundation that we receive where we're working with the new Bay High. So if you're not familiar with Bay High, it is one of the alternative high school programs here in Lincoln. It'll just be starting off here in the fall. And it's really an opportunity for students to take their generals or their required courses back at their home school. But then they get bused out to Bay High and they're focused on digital storytelling which is a perfect tie to what we do here. So we had the grant that we received allows us to send a faculty member out to Bay High to develop an afterschool program. And the students who are working in that afterschool program, creating media content, if they are doing it for the same number of hours that they would be doing it here on campus for the Experience Lab, we're working to get them college credit now while they're still in high school so that it's a smooth transition from Bay High to the College of Journalism and Mass Communications.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Wow. I love that innovation. That's all kinds of great new movement within journalism and just mass communications like you said, wow. I hadn't heard about Bay High and I'm excited to learn more about that particular program. In your opinion, what are the best and the worst trends happening in journalism today?

**Shari Veil:**

Ooh, I will start with the worst. The worst is the news analysts who are being seen as journalists. Worst is the echo chamber that we are able to create for ourselves with our social and traditional media even channels where we're just getting right back, what we put out into the world. We're not hearing different ideas, different perspectives. When we can easily block anyone who says something that might be against our current belief system, we're never going to get beyond our understanding of the world if we aren't open to diverse perspectives. So I think that is by far one of the worst trends in the last five to 10 years. What I see as the good things coming in one, as I mentioned, the focus on investing in journalism, we are over the idea of fake news and people being able to claim something as fake without having to do the research on it and people are investing in doing the research. We have entire classes that are essentially research courses in order to understand what is true and what is not.

**Shari Veil:**

And we've always had that issue, I mean, throughout society, I mean, rumor mills are not new, right? But we are building the systems now to do that analysis and to help people understand whether or not there's a verifiable source, what are those sources? And people are being more critical of the media that they're consuming. And that's what we want to get to. I see that as the big push moving forward is getting past this idea of, "Oh, well, it's just fake news and shrugging," and actually investing in what is the source? What should we be doing? And this generation coming up right now, they are incredible.

**Shari Veil:**

I mean, I've heard the comment of my generation, GenX, we are rebel without a cause. These are rebels with causes, they're invested, they care about what's happening in society and they're willing to do that research to make sure they are making decisions that are best for them and for society. So even looking from the advertising marketing side of things, understanding social advocacy is going to be key for

organizations because people will vote with their dollars as to whether or not you are aligning with their expectations of you as a member of the society.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Wow. So much, my brain is full of things to think about in response to that, what you just said as we spoke about before, it's neat to hear that those investments are going to be happening within journalism and encouraging all at the same time of this is going to change. And I also, hadn't heard about this echo chamber and you're so right because sometimes we don't even know we're doing it to ourselves. Because of course, all those algorithms are doing whatever we may have selected by wanting to purchase a certain pair of earrings that all of a sudden is serving up you all different kinds of things that those are also aligned with. So you don't even know sometimes and you do have to get deeper and go and search out those different things that aren't in your regular lineup. So with those best and worst, how do you see these things changing in the next five to 10 years?

**Shari Veil:**

I think we will see continued focus on nonprofit journalism. I think we will continue to see some of the smaller communities losing their newspapers, become more of regional news. The only way that we're going to really curb that trend is if we focus on rebuilding our rural communities and there is potential in that especially, as we've understood that you can live anywhere and work anywhere else. We learned that through COVID you can work from home and do a really good job, you do not have to specifically be there. And I think that one, it'll increase the diversity of our programs, of our industries throughout the world. But it also provides that opportunity of getting young people back into more rural communities. I think that's going to be what we really need in order to continue to keep news in the rural community. To keep those community newspapers alive, we need to have young people choosing to make that investment back in their own home community or moving to a smaller community.

**Shari Veil:**

So I think there is definite potential for that as long as we don't get so tight in whether or not we allow people to live and work in different places. I think there is potential there, I think there's opportunities as I mentioned from a social advocacy standpoint. Corporations are going to step up and be much more involved in politics moving forward. It sounds very scary to some, but really if they want to keep their employees, you look at what's been happening with Disney and the bills in Florida right now, you have to be engaged and know what's happening in politics and be able to step up in order to support your employees. And I think that's going to be a continuing trend over the next five to 10 years, so my particular area of research is crisis communication and issues management. So as far as career opportunities for those coming out of public relations, I expect there will be plenty of jobs in the area of issues management, crisis communications, social advocacy, corporate advocacy. Companies are going to need it.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Yes we are. The world's going to need it. And that isn't necessarily a "sky is falling" at all. It's evolving as we talked about earlier, everything is evolving and we need to figure out how to do that in the most peaceful and positive way we can with everything going on in the world, for sure. When you spoke about rural communities especially, in Nebraska, it reminded me of a previous podcast guest that the Agency for Change has had on, Jeff Yost from the Nebraska Community Foundation. And their work in re-engaging some of those rural communities and it'll be great to see the organizations like that one and



the University of Nebraska and students themselves going back into their hometowns and really making things happen. And you can see the possibilities especially, they've recently done Transfer of Wealth Study, that's very interesting to look at as well in seeing how we can keep this and enrich those communities into the future and doing that. So it's neat when two podcasts, guests, itineraries collide so... And I wouldn't call it a collision, I would call that more of a synergy, right?

Listen to Jeff Yost's podcast episode here: <https://kidglov.com/podcast/jeff-yost/>

**Shari Veil:**

Well, if you think of what we could do, I mean, we have the rural health opportunities program, right? Where essentially, if nurses go out into more rural communities, they're able to get their student loans paid off. What if we did that for journalists? I mean, think of what that would do when we are... This isn't just people who write great little articles about their hometown. This is protecting our democracy, this is making sure that there are journalists at those city council meetings, that they are at those school board meetings, that they are sharing the information of what's happening in the community, that they're watching for the good and the bad that is out there and they're publishing stories about it. It's not just a newsletter for the community, it's not just a wonderful brochure about all the great things happening. There's truth that needs to be told even in those rural communities and we need journalists there to tell those truths.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Yes we do. And in addition to those journalists being there, we also need innovative and creative minds which also reminds me of another podcast guest that we had with the Nebraska Arts Council and their initiative of creative districts that are also all over the state. And so when you think about journalism and mass communications and even the marketing communications side, a lot of that is visually creative or performing creative, all of those things. And I think that the Creative District Program is going to highlight some of those as well.

Listen to the Nebraska Arts Council podcast here: <https://kidglov.com/podcast/suzanne-wise/>

**Kelley Peterson:**

And that's just going to enrich every one of those communities also. So it's such exciting stuff we could talk for days and hours. And another, I've been known to say recently of, I just want to hug the state of Nebraska. And I get excited about talking with changemakers like you, Shari, for this reason alone. And it does make me want to just hug our state and the people all within it because we do some really neat, innovative, creative, thought provoking and truth-seeking ventures and that is cool. So Shari, I'm inspired by motivational quotes, could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom for our listeners?

**Shari Veil:**

So I did think about this one and I would say I've become known for two particular lines. One is, it's amazing what you can accomplish when you don't have time to procrastinate. And it goes back to, you want something done, give it to a busy person because they're going to get it done, they're not going to put it off because they've got other things to do and I think sometimes we sell ourselves short on what all we can accomplish. So that was one that my graduate students often heard me say when they're worried about all their busy workload like, "It's amazing what you can accomplish when you don't have time to procrastinate." And the other one which my staff has heard, faculty have heard, students have heard and that is, be the brand you want to be known for representing yourself in a certain way. You

have an expectation that you have set for your organization for what you do, you have to embody that brand.

**Shari Veil:**

And you were joking earlier about my red suit, it's all part of it. Be the brand, I feel as dean of the college, I represent journalism, I represent advertising and public relations, broadcasting, sports, media and communication, all of our majors. I represent our students, I represent the University, I represent the state and I accept that. I take that on as being part of my own personal brand which means I'm always thinking about, "Am I representing the state, the university, my students, my faculty, all of that in the best way I possibly can." So anytime something feels hard, or I've got a busy day or something's coming on, looking ahead down the calendar, it's take a deep breath, be the brand, let's go.

**Kelley Peterson:**

You can do it.

**Shari Veil:**

Absolutely.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Well, I think you were doing an amazing and fantastic job both of those. I think the first line that you mentioned about procrastination, you may be just singing my personal anthem. And then your second line, I think you may just be singing KidGlov's anthem. So we are all about helping organizations, individuals reach that personal being their brand and it's a great way to be. So for our listeners who would like to learn more about your work and how can they find out more about the College of Journalism and Mass Communications?

**Shari Veil:**

Easy to find. Quick Google search, you'll end up on our page. If you want to talk to me directly, email me directly [veil@unl.edu](mailto:veil@unl.edu). Happy to chat, love to have folks out to show them what we're building here whether it's the Experience Lab or our new studio that's being put in this summer. I'd love to show off what we're building here at Nebraska.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Can't wait to see that new studio, I'm looking forward to it. Shari, as we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work you're doing?

**Shari Veil:**

Journalism is not dead. We have so much happening right now, not just in journalism but across broadcasting, a huge increase in jobs coming up in media production editing, 33% increase in the next 10 years, that's huge opportunities. As far as working in advertising, public relations, I think folks know well that there are job opportunities there. Sports industry is taking off especially, on the sports promotion side of things, eSports launching in that direction. There are jobs, there are opportunities, and you can come in and create your own career out of the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. We have incredibly industry focused faculty who are here to support and encourage you along the way. We have amazing partners in the community, our professionals and residents and our industry partners are

there to support and encourage you along the way. Just know that you have a home here in Nebraska and we'll take good care of you.

**Kelley Peterson:**

Shari, I fully believe that the world needs more changemakers like you. Thank you for taking the time to share with us today.

**Shari Veil:**

Thank you. This was fun.

**Announcer:**

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit [KidGlov.com](http://KidGlov.com) at [K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com](http://K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com) to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.