

Agency for Change Podcast: Anne Constantino, President & CEO, Constantino Consulting Agency

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Anne Constantino:

I really believe that part of my purpose is to help create the future.

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.

Lyn Wineman:

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, President and Chief Strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. When I started KidGlov 13 years ago, I knew I wanted to work with groups who are making a difference. The phrase, helping people who are changing the world, became a mantra here, and I am incredibly proud of the work we've been doing to support countless nonprofits extend the reach of their mission. Today's podcast guest, Anne Constantino, shares this passion for supporting nonprofits. In fact, she has started Constantino Consulting Agency, which is a group specifically catered to the needs of nonprofits like fundraising, development, culture building, leadership development, and so much more. Anne, I am eager to talk with you today and learn more about what you're doing. Welcome to the podcast.

Anne Constantino:

Lyn, thanks so much for inviting me to be a part of this. I'm really excited to have a conversation over some coffee this morning.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. I can just feel the energy in this conversation too, and I'd just love to have you start by taking a minute to tell us more about this new consulting agency and the work that you do.

Anne Constantino:

I have been in my over 25 years of experience leading in nonprofit. I have found that many a times I had wished that I could pick up the phone and talk to somebody that had the lived experience, had sat in that seat, really had kind of that executive coach friend that could guide a little bit and answer any questions, but sometimes as a leader, you don't have a lot of folks, it becomes a little lonely. And so I decided, after I stepped out of my CEO role, that I wanted to help other nonprofit leaders and help other nonprofits truly maximize the potential in the amazing work that they're doing in our communities. So that is how it started, was just as a need that I felt as a CEO that I really wanted to step into.

Lyn Wineman:

Anne, I love where you're coming from there because we often say that nonprofit leaders wear so many hats, you wear so many hats, there's so many things to do. There's not a really good guidebook out there, so having someone like you that can help answer those questions, I think is such a fabulous resource. I'd love to just touch a minute on what do you find are the differences between nonprofits and for-profits? What are some of those key things you might not get from reading a Stephen Covey or some of the other for-profit business gurus?

Anne Constantino:

That's a great question. I think that as we step into nonprofit work, many times they are really working hard for every resource that they have. And because of that, many times nonprofit leaders are truly wearing many hats within the organization. They may be the chief HR person, they may be the chief development officer, they may be writing curriculum. It just is so extensive of the work that they do, and I truly believe that nonprofit leaders have the ability to work magic. The resources that they have and what they're able to do with them is truly incredible, but it also is probably necessary for them to have resources outside of their organization that they can really tap into to help guide and advise and help them in these spaces that really are probably not in their wheelhouse.

It's not what their expertise is. Their expertise is going to be rooted in the mission of the organization. Truly, that's where their heart lies, and they wanted to do something really impactful and important for that population. And so that's where their passion is. It may not be risk management or it may not be in that HR, how do you hire and retain and build culture? So I think that that's the biggest difference that I see in nonprofit versus the for-profit leader.

Lyn Wineman:

And I think it's interesting, Anne, because I think sometimes people forget, nonprofits still have to make payroll, they have to balance their budget, they have to pay their bills, they have to often provide benefits and follow all of the employment laws, they have to hire, which is becoming harder and harder. So many of the things that a for-profit business does, then on top of that the mission. And the way the money comes in is very different than a for-profit as well, often a little bit more mysterious ways when it comes in. And then I think about too, I mean, just to put it mildly, the last few years have put a lot of pressure on nonprofits with the pandemic, with inflation, and probably the need for their services has also increased. I'm curious, what is your suggested strategy for supporting nonprofit leadership during uncertain times?

Anne Constantino:

Well, we all have been walking through uncertain times, and I think that we all have learned a lot, maybe made some aha moments in our lives, and other times said, "oh no," in the last few years as well. I think the key to success during these uncertain times is truly being rooted firmly in your why and rooted firmly in your mission. So for example, when I was leading CRCC, and we had been around for 30 years, and we had always provided services for the children that have special needs within the four walls of the buildings.

And when we started to kind of hear, hey, there is this thing out there that is impacting health and we need to be aware of it, we need to know a little bit more about what it is and what the impact could be. Working with kids with special needs, our kids really were medically compromised to begin with, and so it was something we had to take very seriously. So we started to do a little research and realized we need to have a contingency plan in case. So in January of that year, we started talking about what would we do if we had to close the doors of our agency?

Lyn Wineman:

I'm going to, just real quick, I think that's amazing because I still think in January and February and maybe even early March, a lot of us were a bit in denial about what was happening. We were seeing it in Europe, but it was kind of like, oh, it's not going to come here and it's not going to affect my life, and then all of a sudden, boom, it did.

Anne Constantino:

Right.

Lyn Wineman:

So good for you for having that foresight.

Anne Constantino:

Well, I was blessed with an incredible board, and one of my board members was in the health field, and so she came and she said, I really think this is something that you need to be diving into a little bit more. And so I did. I started diving in, and that's really why at that point we started, I brought my leadership team together and said, okay, we need to start being innovative in our thinking. We know that these kids that we serve are going to continue to need the services. For me, as a leader, I knew that my responsibility to the employees to keep people employed, keep people getting the income that was going to help them to support themselves and their families, that was important to me. So we had to start thinking differently. And sometimes you have folks that are all gung-ho, yes, let's innovate, let's think about things a little bit differently.

You're always going to have some folks that are going to say, well, I don't know, that's not who we are or what we do, and I'm not sure we want to go there. And so we really spent some time in January innovating and thinking about, okay, we're going to hypothetically say we're going to have to close the doors of the centers. What are we going to do? And so at that point, we started putting a plan together, okay, we needed to get our childcare licensing and our respite licensing from the state. We needed to get that expanded to be able to do things outside of our own four walls. So we started to put together kind of a project plan in case that would happen. And I'm grateful for my team and their willingness to really step into that space of the unknown, but to still embrace it. And I think that's where I say you have to be rooted in that mission.

My team, our entire agency, we were rooted in the mission of caring for kids that had special needs and complex needs, and everybody was rooted there and no one wanted to see kids not getting the services that they truly needed. And so that's really the core of how we were able to dig in deep. And so when the schools shut down in March, we had already kind of come up with a contingency plan of what we would do. We'd already worked with the state to be able to expand our licensing, and we ultimately sent our staff into the homes of the families that wanted that care. So from 30 year in the walls of the centers to CRCC is now out throughout the entire community. And we sent our nurses, we sent our teachers, we sent our paras into the homes of those families that wanted it.

And so we were able to keep our staff employed, we were able to continue to provide the services for the kids, and we were incredibly fortunate that we had a community foundation that saw the work that we were doing and that we had people out in the communities. We also had these two centers that were sitting empty and as a business, you need to make sure that you're looking at those things, you still have the overhead, you're still paying for.

Lyn Wineman:

You're still paying rent. Yes.

Anne Constantino:

You're still paying for the lights to be on. And so we were able to, through an incredibly generous donation from a foundation, local foundation, we were actually able to open up our one center and we were providing childcare for first responders, kids, for free. So we not only were then able to continue to keep more people in working and in their career field, we were also able to meet an incredible need that our community saw at the beginning of the pandemic. And that was first responders had no choice, they were going. And so childcare centers had shut down. They were in a bind. And so we were able to step into that space as well to really help provide a service to our community at large in a way that I would never have imagined.

It was never on the radar until we really stepped through and started hearing, gosh, what are these families doing that needed that care? So we were providing care to our families and our kiddos that we served in the center. We also had opened up then to provide care for more families in our community. In a time of true crisis in our community, we were able to step into that. And I'm really proud of our team for, again, being willing to go there with me. I am usually about six steps ahead, and sometimes I know that can be a lot and I can be a lot. So I was grateful for a team that was willing to say, okay, we'll follow, we'll come.

Lyn Wineman:

And that's amazing. What a story of, just like you said, mission, focus, innovation, rallying the team, and then to have the connection with the foundation. I mean, I know those kinds of things don't happen if the foundations aren't aware of your work and connected to you. And then even taking it a step further and providing an additional service to people in need, that is a great story. Now, I also can see where that experience plus 25 additional years of experience have really helped put you in the position you are now. I mean, it feels like you found a need and you filled it. I mean, can you tell us a little bit more about how you came to this line of work?

Anne Constantino:

So when it comes to nonprofit work, I think it's really important for folks to know, this is something that was deeply rooted in me from the beginning of what I can remember. I remember very young, my father was a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. And during the holiday season, he would always deliver meals dressed up in a Santa Claus suit.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, I love that.

Anne Constantino:

And so I remember very early on, I probably was five years old maybe, that my mom put me in this elf costume that she had made. And my dad and I were out delivering Meals on Wheels during the holiday season. He did it year round, but I would always join him as the Santa's little helper.

And so I always had a really deep connection to service and having a heart for others. And I think that, really that did guide me in my career choices, guided me into that nonprofit world and that nonprofit space because everything that happens is coming from a place of service. And so that really was engrained in me very early on. That then continues as I have served in the capacity of leading these

organizations, it now is transitioning to service to other nonprofits, and I just feel like that is and has always been kind of my core mission. The work that I do in Constantino Consulting Agency is work that translates beyond nonprofits, sort of like capacity building, how to maximize the potential of a business, how to think about revenue in a way that you open up more revenue opportunities for an organization, culture, and thinking about how to build teams.

All of those things translate. And yet for me, I continue to be drawn to, I want to do that work for those nonprofits that are doing just such incredible work in our community. And if I can provide some expertise and some support and guidance in some of these areas, I know it's going to help them become even stronger. And being a stronger nonprofit means they're going to be able to impact more people, impact more communities, really impact their mission work that they're doing. And so the nonprofit just has followed me throughout. I think it's just something that I was exposed to early on, and it took hold very deeply for me.

Lyn Wineman:

And you're doing something that's very exponential. As a human service professional, you help people. As a nonprofit executive director, you help more people in a different way. And now in your role with Constantino Consulting Agency, you're helping more nonprofits. I mean, think of where you've come in this journey and now how many people you are impacting in a positive way. I love how your trajectory has gone and how you're using your skill and your talents. One thing too, you are a very good storyteller, that's why I was so excited to talk to you today, and you and I both love storytelling. I'm curious, how do you embrace storytelling in your work?

Anne Constantino:

I think I love working with folks on how to tell your story, whether it be how to tell your story to reach more potential clients for your organization, whether it be telling your story for more funding opportunities, but ultimately it all is around how does your work that you're doing truly touch the hearts of others. And when you can really think about words as a vehicle to the heart, suddenly you are going to open up an entire horizon of opportunities for the organization, for others, and for the impact of the work that you're doing. So storytelling is absolutely essential. I love being able to kind of think about the creative element of that. I think one of the best stories that I can tell that has impacted in this space, it was 3:30 in the morning and I had just woken up because I was really thinking about the work that we were doing and knowing that there were families and children that were in our community that didn't know who we were.

And so at 3:30 in the morning, I'm woken and I have that on my mind and on my heart, and I started to think about some of the kids that we were serving and started to think about how would they describe what we are doing for them and for their families and that is helping them grow. And so I was kind of laying there and thinking about it, and I just kept hearing two words come to my mind and that was, watch this. So I was hearing my one school age student say, oh, you don't think I can do this? Well, watch this. And then I started thinking about another one and I started thinking, oh, what would he say to his peers at school that were telling him he couldn't play in the playground the way that they were? I just kept hearing him say, watch me. And so when I started to dive into that a little bit more, I started to think about that is the story to tell for that agency, the story to tell.

We're proving what's possible every single day, just watch us, watch this, watch the work that we're doing. And then that became our story. It was our story to tell, and it touched people on a really deep level because we've all heard kids say, watch me, watch me, or hey, watch this, right?

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Anne Constantino:

The kids we were serving were no different. They were no different. And so it was our way to use these words to explain and express, we're serving kids, kids that have all the hopes and dreams of every kiddo, so just watch us, watch this. We're going to prove what's possible. And that is the storytelling. That is how you tell that story. You tell the story of the child, you tell the story of the work, you tell the story of the client that you've helped. That's going to be what connects to the heart, and what connects to the heart is what becomes the microphone. And so I think that's such an important piece of nonprofits is telling the story effectively. And I love working with nonprofits and thinking about how to best and most effectively tell the story.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. Since this is a podcast, people can't see us having coffee here and you just absolutely lighting up as you tell that story, but I bet they could hear it in your voice. And that's been my experience too, Anne, when you see a nonprofit leader or a nonprofit board member or even nonprofit employees, when they understand the story and can tell the story and then people can receive the story. I mean, what I love is you have this beautiful story, but then you summed it up in a few words that I can remember. Watch this, watch us, let us prove it to you. So I love everything about that. And I think too, what you've just done too is demonstrated your passion for the work. And I've always found there's a lot of passion in nonprofit organizations that you don't find anywhere else, and it's contagious. And I'm curious, have you found any additional inspiration in your work with nonprofits?

Anne Constantino:

Every nonprofit that I have had the privilege of working with has inspired me even further. The work that is being done quietly in our communities, sometimes silently...

Lyn Wineman:

Yes.

Anne Constantino:

In our communities, is work that needs to be shouted from the rooftops because it is a space that is not easy to step into. It's a space that is not easy to be able to create a business model around. And yet, people do it every day. People are inspired by something inside, whether it be an experience that they've had personally or they've been touched by an issue that dives really deep into their soul. People are investing their blood, sweat, and tears into creating something that's going to expand the reach for that particular impact need. And that is inspiring. I look at some of these nonprofit leaders that have, they're founders of these nonprofits, and I look at them and I know how much work and how much just of your entire being goes into that creation of a nonprofit, let alone then just leading that nonprofit to growth.

And that is inspiring. I look at that and I think, gosh, what I do every day, easy-peasy compared to what I know they're doing every single day. And so I think that has inspired me to maybe come alongside them and just be that support and be that person that they can reach out to when they feel like I'm going to fall. They know that they've got a hand right next to them with me, nope, we're going to do this

together. We're going to walk through this, and yes, that might look like a really big barrier that you're about ready to come to, but we're going to be together figuring out how to navigate that barrier so that you are going to get to the other side of that. That's inspiring. That's what inspires me every single day.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. Anne, one thing you've kind of touched on here too is the whole idea of entrepreneurship happens in nonprofits as well. And you have to, as a nonprofit leader, have a very kind of innovative visionary mindset. So I'm curious, do you have any advice for entrepreneurs in general, and maybe even more specifically, since you and I are both female founders, any advice for female entrepreneurs?

Anne Constantino:

I think for me, the best piece of advice that I could say is know who you are, stay true to yourself. There are going to be things and opportunities that come at you all of the time that either are going to align and help excel or they're going to come and you're going to say, oh, that's maybe a little scratchy, I know, gosh, it could make this happen over here, but it might feel a little scratchy, it may not be true to who I am. And you have to be willing to be strong enough to say, not now, that isn't the right thing for me right now. And that's okay.

I truly believe that the doors will open that are supposed to open. If you come to a door and it's not open and you are trying to figure out, okay, there's got to be a way I can open this door, there's going to be a key somewhere that's hidden, or there's going to be a tool that I can use to open this door. When you are doing that, that is not your door. That isn't your door. And it's okay, even as much as you want to get to what's on the other side of that door, that's not your door. And as scary as that can be because that door in your mind might lead to work-

Lyn Wineman:

It is scary to walk away from the door.

Anne Constantino:

Yes.

Lyn Wineman:

I know that feeling. Yes.

Anne Constantino:

But your door is waiting for you. Your door is open somewhere. So it's a matter of saying, okay, it's time to walk away from this door because there's another door that's opening. And truly, that is what happened for me. I wrote a short story about my kind of journey and leaving this executive leadership role and going and taking the leap. And I wrote a short story about that. And it truly is, you're climbing that mountain and you are at the top and you see this amazing vista. All of this beautiful mountains and trees and forests that are out there, you can see that from the mountain that you're on, but you don't know how to get there, or you're not quite sure where that path leads to go to that next thing. And so you stay there for a little bit and you dig in and you enjoy everything that you've got right there on that top of that mountain. But at some point there becomes a kind of a spark that starts to then turn into a flame, and then that flame starts to get a little bit bigger.

And you start realizing that that flame is really saying, it's yearning for that other mountain, it's yearning for that forest, it's yearning for that thing that you're wanting, that you've seen out there but you've never been. And at some point you have to say, it's time for me to step off of this mountain and start my path on the next to get to the next. And I found that the moment that I took that step and that I took that leap, I didn't know when I took that step off where it was going to lead, what was going to be below me. I had no idea. But I had this flame that was just burning to take the step. And so I took the step and I found that the path to the next mountain was truly maybe two feet down, and I landed firmly on my feet on that path, and I could then see that is leading to that next mountain. And I get to experience all of the beautiful trees and the forest and all of that on the path to that next mountain.

And so that was really my story. I knew that it was time to take that step. Didn't really know what was next. I honestly didn't know, but I knew what I loved about the work that I was doing, I knew what I loved about what I had been able to develop my skillset around and who I was. I knew all of that. So when I took that step, I figured something would be there. I didn't know how far down. I didn't know how long I would fall. It was truly two feet down. And so now I am on this beautiful path with experiencing everything around me on this journey to that next mountain. And I know that when I get to that next mountain, it's going to be the same thing. I'm going to have the same experience. And so while it is scary to take a leap, it is scary to step off, if you don't step off, you know you'll never get to that vista of beauty. So that's my story.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow. Talk about the power of storytelling right there. Every young entrepreneur needs to hear that story. That's amazing. So Anne, what's next? What's next for you and Constantino Consulting Agency?

Anne Constantino:

I have, again, had just the privilege of working with some incredible nonprofits since I started this work. Actually, at the beginning of January is when I really started working with nonprofits.

Lyn Wineman:

Because you really, you've just gotten started. You've just gotten started, but already doing so much good work.

Anne Constantino:

We have. And so as I'm working with them, I'm recognizing and realizing that there's other needs within nonprofits that I hadn't really thought about expanding into. As I'm working with these nonprofits, I have the opportunity to, one, bring on some amazing people onto my team to help support in some of these other areas, but also really thinking about what's next for us and being able to create an agency that is really going to be boutique, but also full service. It's really based on what it is that the client is needing, what it is that they want to accomplish, and how they're needing to get some support to get to that next step. And so I'm adding some folks to my team that are filling in those gaps.

I also absolutely love connecting clients with other agencies that are doing great work in the spaces that they need. So while, yes, I have had experience in doing some of these things, that's not my wheelhouse, but I know who is. I know those places that they should go, who truly believe in the mission of nonprofits, who truly believe in the work of nonprofits, and want to help support the nonprofits to grow even further. So I love connecting people too. So I feel like that's always going to be part of what we do. I will never claim to have everything that needs to happen in my agency, but I will definitely be the one to connect.

Lyn Wineman:

Of course you are, I can only see that as the path for you. And you have said so many inspiring things that this next question's probably going to be a piece of cake for you, but I get to talk with so many great leaders on this podcast and find them to be so inspiring. So I'm going to ask you for a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners.

Anne Constantino:

I think that, for me, it is always going to be rooted in that service to others. And because of that, one of my favorite quotes speaks to planting the seed of the tree of which you will never enjoy the shade of. I really believe that part of my purpose is to help create the future. I won't see it, and that's okay. That is what motivates me the most, is just to know that long beyond my time on this earth, there's going to be something that I was able to do while I was here that is making a difference in the lives of people in the future.

Lyn Wineman:

That's amazing, because you will touch people's lives in ways that you will have no idea or connection to and that's a pretty neat thing to think about. Anne, I know we have a lot of nonprofits that listen to Agency for Change. If somebody wants to get in touch with you or learn more about the work of the agency, what's the best way for them to find you?

Anne Constantino:

So at this point, the best way to find me is going to be to go to our website, constantinoconsulting.com, and you'll be able to not only have a way to connect with me, but also see the work that we are doing currently. That's going to be a great way. Connect with me on LinkedIn, I love to connect with folks on LinkedIn and be able to kind of network that way as well. So those are the two best ways to probably get in touch.

Lyn Wineman:

Fantastic. We will have both of those links in the show notes on the website as well. So, all right, Anne, last question. I hate for this great conversation to end, but as we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like people to remember about the work that you're doing?

Anne Constantino:

I will always come back to we all want to be part of something that's greater than ourselves, and the work that's being done in nonprofits epitomizes that. People are giving of themselves to be able to be part of something greater than who they are. I hope that the people that are listening understand that they are incredible humans that are doing incredible work, that have a heart for others in a way that we need more of in this world, and I applaud them and they inspire me daily. So keep on going, keep fighting that good fight. There are folks like us that are here to help support you in that journey, but you inspire us in what we do every day.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, that's beautiful. Anne, I fully believe the world needs more people like you. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

Anne Constantino:

Well, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to really tell my story. We don't have the opportunity to kind of share in this longer form very often, and so I always appreciate when I have the opportunity to do that. So thank you so much for doing the work that you're doing and helping support the nonprofits that we have come to know and love in our communities.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. My pleasure. Thank you, Anne.

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 at 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.