

Agency for Change Podcast: Alexis Schwartz, Executive Director and Head of Purpose Partnerships, The Guardian US

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- LinkedIn – [linkedin.com/in/alexisaschwartz](https://www.linkedin.com/in/alexisaschwartz)
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Alexis Schwartz: Just put in the work because hard work does pay off.

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 of KidGlov. Welcome to the first episode of the Agency for Change podcast for 2024. Happy New Year. Today's guest, Alexis Schwartz, is Executive Director and Head of Purpose Partnerships of The Guardian US, and we're talking with her today to go beyond the headlines and explore some incredible initiatives driving positive change. We're excited to uncover the stories and insights that are shaping positive transformation. Alexis, I am eager to talk with you today. Welcome to the podcast.

Alexis Schwartz: Well, Lyn, thank you and thank you for having me.

Lyn Wineman: Absolutely. You know, you are our first podcast for 2024, so we're excited to kick this off with you. I'd love to start by just having you tell us about The Guardian US.

Alexis Schwartz: Oh, well, that's one of my favorite questions, and so thank you. I'm happy to share. For your listeners out there that don't know, The Guardian is part of the Guardian News and Media, an independent, global news organization, believe it or not, that reaches over 111 million unique browsers worldwide. Here in the US-

Lyn Wineman: That's a lot of browsers, yeah.

Alexis Schwartz: That's a lot of browsers, right? A really large global news organization, and here in the US we reach about over 40 million in the US. Again, pretty big audience.

Lyn Wineman: Big market, yeah.

Alexis Schwartz: The way I always like to describe The Guardian is I say that we deliver fearless investigative journalism. We give a voice to the voiceless, we hold power to account, and we do that without any political or corporate ambitions. We provide on the ground coverage here in the US, but also global issues, and they

include things, our favorite topics include the climate crisis, the fight for democracy, women's and racial equity issues, but we also cover really fun things like art, lifestyle, sports. We just launched a new health and wellness vertical called, Well Actually.

Lyn Wineman: Nice.

Alexis Schwartz: Yeah. So I mean, we really cover the gamut, but we also are doing the work that matters to drive change and to impact society. Our reporting gives voices to initiatives from, I mentioned sustainability, social and racial equity, and we've really done that. We've actually created impact and created change in communities. We're primarily reader-funded, and this is incredible news, we most recently surpassed a two million reader revenue goal during our annual year end campaign. So what does that say to you? That validates the want and need for independent, credible journalism that's accessible to everyone.

Lyn Wineman: That's amazing. Alexis, I knew I was going to love talking to you because most of your favorite topics are also our favorite topics on the Agency for Change - sustainability, causes that make a difference, the arts, women's issues, diversity, equity, and inclusion. So thank you so much for that. One of the things you said in the very beginning was you highlighted the fact that you are independent. Can you shed some light on the importance of independent journalism in the news and media landscape and what makes The Guardian US different?

Alexis Schwartz: So one of the things that really speaks to our independence is that we are unlike any other new source. We do not have a paywall, and because we believe that paywalls breed inequity. Why should only those people who can afford quality journalism have access to it? We are sustained by a corporate trust, but primarily, as I mentioned, we're voluntarily reader-funded, as well as some philanthropic grants and advertiser support. So all that being said, we have a reader first philosophy. We're all about, we're funded by our readers for our readers. The other thing that really differentiates us from any other news organization here is that we are the first major international media organization to become a certified B Corp. So we do a lot of-

Lyn Wineman: I love that.

Alexis Schwartz: I know, right? A lot of people don't know what B Corp is, but it's basically an ongoing commitment to become a more purposeful business. We are measured across five areas, including governance, workers, community, environment, and customers, and it's a very stringent process to become a B Corp. You have to be re-certified, and we were just re-certified. So you may say, why is that important? Well, it's important because we do a lot of reporting on businesses and we hold businesses to account. So we want to make sure that we're walking our walk internally as well, and that when we tell an organization or a business that they need to be more sustainable, when we report on racial or gender inequities in the workplace, that we are doing the work internally to make sure that we are walking that walk.

Lyn Wineman: Alexis, I can't believe that you mentioned the B Corp aspect and the B Corp recertification, because I have a meeting on my calendar this afternoon to start our recertification process, KidGlov as a B Corp. I've gone on record several times as saying it's a very rigorous process, but definitely very, very worthwhile as well, becoming a B Corp. Before we became a B Corp, I think we espoused a lot of the beliefs and practices, but just going through the process made us better, and I'm guessing you've found the same thing, because it really makes you formalize some of the processes and policies and practices to make sure your actions match your intentions, I believe.

Alexis Schwartz: Absolutely. As a journalist, again, we're reporting on these things, so we better have our T's crossed and I's dotted.

Lyn Wineman: Well, good for you, and congratulations on the recertification.

Alexis Schwartz: Thank you.

Lyn Wineman: So one thing too, as I was preparing for this interview, your title is Executive Director and Head of Purpose Partnerships. I talk to a lot of executive directors, but not very many head of purpose partnerships. Can you talk to us about what that role entails?

Alexis Schwartz: Sure. The Guardian was really founded and grounded in purpose. Again, we talked about some of the key things that we report on and some of the things that are important for our organization. A few years ago they put me in this role, and I'm really built to identify and build relationships and ultimately work with an incredible marketing team that I have to develop multidimensional programs with organizations, both not-for-profits and for-profit corporations, who are interested in leaning into messaging around sustainability, so talking about the planet, people, and community. Evangelizing topics like sustainability, DEI, and social equity and impact.

So for us, The Guardian, the ideal purpose partners are those who our values and beliefs align with those organizations and they're as passionate as we are and committed to their efforts to do good and improve our world. I know this may sound Pollyanna, but organizations who walk the walk like The Guardian does create really authentic partnerships that resonate with our compassionate reader base. So whether they're looking for funding for their not-for-profit work or just want to talk about their sustainability initiatives and their fair work practices, we are here to help amplify those initiatives.

Lyn Wineman: Yeah. Alexis, I think with our upcoming Gen Z and their documented demonstration and desire for making a change and social impact, I think it's not Pollyanna anymore. It's what the consumer and the workforce are demanding and will increasingly demand. But it is kind of funny because it's definitely not what I learned when I went to college, probably not what you learned when you went to college, the hard-nosed negotiating, bottom line-focused business

practices versus the triple bottom line where we're focusing on people, purpose, and planet. So I appreciate that you say that because sometimes I feel the same way. I feel like, are people going to think this is all too Pollyanna, too fluffy? But this is the way of the world. So I'd love to hear some examples, examples of purpose partnerships that you have in place.

Alexis Schwartz: All right, well, I'm going to share two. Let me share the first one that is a corporation that we all recognize, and this shows you that budgets can come big and small-

Lyn Wineman: I love it.

Alexis Schwartz: ...in the purpose work. So we recently worked with Proctor & Gamble.

Lyn Wineman: Oh, big, big, big, big, yeah.

Alexis Schwartz: Yeah, but when we say big, big, big, remember that when you're talking about corporate or purpose advertising or messaging, a lot of the time those aren't budgets that come from traditional media budgets. There's no dotted line to the ROI to sell product, this is more about talking about corporate initiatives that they're doing. So we were really excited, and this was a relationship that's been in the works for quite a while, and the goal was to amplify the sustainability work that they're doing, really important work about water scarcity, both globally and actually in this country. 4 billion people are experiencing water scarcity in the world.

Lyn Wineman: Wow.

Alexis Schwartz: Yeah, and in this country too, there are water shortages. So we collaborated with both the P&G Sustainability Corporate Team as well as the Cascade brand to debunk the myths behind pre-washing your dishes and the fact that if you use quality detergent, pre-washing is not even necessary, and running your dishwasher every night, if you quote, unquote "Do it every night," it saves more water than washing dishes by hand.

Lyn Wineman: I've seen those commercials, by the way. When I first saw them, I was like, are you serious? I could just run my dishwasher every night and that saves water? I love that, yeah.

Alexis Schwartz: So let me give you some facts and figures. This is kind of crazy. The amount of water we use per day, the average amount of water, 80 to 100 gallons per day. The amount you can save by not pre-washing your dishes and running your dishwasher every night could be 100 gallons a week.

Lyn Wineman: Wow. People can't see me, but my jaw just dropped.

Alexis Schwartz: It was a really great project because it was a video, it was a person on the street video where we actually just asked people, "How much water do you think you use? Do you pre-wash your dishes?" I mean, I think one of my favorite women who was interviewed said, "Oh yes, with hot water and lots of soap. I get them really clean and then I put them in the dishwasher." So it was a really important conversation and the water stewardship work that Proctor & Gamble is doing is really incredible and they're really creating a positive impact. It's important for us to talk about those things because I think a lot of people don't think about Proctor & Gamble beyond selling the incredible products and innovative products that they create, but they're actually doing the work too.

Lyn Wineman: That's pretty cool. Now, you said you had a second example.

Alexis Schwartz: I do.

Lyn Wineman: Okay.

Alexis Schwartz: So this one is more of a not-for-profit. So I really wanted to give you an example of both a corporate partnership that we did as well as a not-for-profit. This is Bloomberg Philanthropies and their Partnership for Healthy Cities. I'm really proud of this. This is a two-year program that we've had with them. This latest one really focused on NCDs, or non-communicable diseases. What we've discovered during the pandemic is that public health is incredibly important, especially in urban environments, and this one really focused on immersive, interactive experience that are highlighting three cities and their innovative tactics to reduce NCDs and injuries.

Eight out of 10 deaths worldwide are associated with NCDs. So we featured urban centers in corners of the globe that talked about everything from traffic fatalities to nutritious meal policies to decrease obesity, as well as cutting down on smoking and selling tobacco products. I think what was so amazing about this program that our marketing department worked in collaborations with Vital Strategies and Bloomberg Philanthropies Partnership for Healthy Cities is that it included just about everything you can imagine in this feature, original illustrations, photography, interactive maps, even audio from the mayors in these three global cities.

Lyn Wineman: Wow, I can't wait. I'm going to go look that up, that sounds amazing. It sounds amazing. You've given us great examples. You've already touched on this, but I want to ask this next question because I do want to bring it into focus. In your opinion, what really sets The Guardian US apart from other news organizations and news websites in the country?

Alexis Schwartz: I think the paywall is huge, right? We're not owned by anyone, we're not beholden to anyone. All of the revenue that we receive through reader donations, advertising, and philanthropic funding, that's all reinvested in the journalism to produce quality, in-depth reporting. So we can truly say that we

are independent, we're open to all, we're funded by many, and we're beholden to no one, and I think that's really what sets us apart from anyone else.

Lyn Wineman: I love hearing you say those things. It sounds like you've said those words before as well, which I do appreciate. So tell me this then, are there some common misperceptions about The Guardian US or maybe even about the media industry as a whole that you would like to address?

Alexis Schwartz: I mean, absolutely. I think first and foremost, all news is fake news. There's this feeling out there that every news organization has their own bent, their own opinion, and that no one is really an honest reporter or an honest source of information anymore. I would say-

Lyn Wineman: So I should fess up, I should fess up that right before we started, I told you about my healthy skepticism of the news industry. So I will admit to that.

Alexis Schwartz: Yeah, and you know what? Healthy skepticism is okay. I mean, the public should hold journalists accountable for their work. But there are trusted, quality journalists out there, and I would tell you that in the US, over 150 of them work for the Guardian.

Lyn Wineman: Wow, that's quite a force.

Alexis Schwartz: We hired 50 new editorial heads this year. So I mean, if that doesn't validate and point to the fact that our journalism is resonating with people, I don't know what will. I mean, we are growing, our audience is growing, and we are doubling down on being that voice for the voiceless and investigative reporting this year, especially in such a huge year.

I think another misconception is, oh, it's just another news outlet, can't be differentiated from the others. Well, I think you've seen, especially with the paywall, we can in fact be differentiated from the others. I love walking into my meetings and they'll say, "Hmm, you're a British newspaper." Well, that's how we started 200 years ago, but we've certainly evolved since then. But I think my favorite, Lyn, and this only really happens in the US, by the way, "Isn't the Guardian and insurance company?"

Lyn Wineman: Yes, I do have to admit I have a Guardian card in my wallet, so yes.

Alexis Schwartz: I do too.

Lyn Wineman: Yeah, that's amazing. Alexis, I'm always curious about individual paths. I am curious what part of your background or your past experiences shaped your interest and appreciation for media and led you to this role?

Alexis Schwartz: Well, so aside from five years with a Silicon Valley startup, I've really always worked in media, and specifically news, and for almost 30 years. I'm the

granddaughter of immigrants who always had newspapers and magazines, local newspapers, US newspapers and magazines, and even global sources in their home. My parents, both my parents were voracious readers and news consumers and still are. So it's likely why I majored in journalism, I was attracted to the industry from the time I went to college, and I have a huge respect for news organizations and reputable reporters, even though I went onto the business side of the work.

Though this may sound really outdated, I'm going to show my age, I believe journalism is the fourth branch of government and integral to the survival of our democracy, so I'm passionate about working and representing those like The Guardian who are doing the work. I might not be writing the content that's on our site, but I am really proud of what we're doing, especially in today's media landscape of fake news and user-generated content that really doesn't accurately reflect the great work of journalists and disseminates so much misinformation. So The Guardian's position as this credible, independent news source is more important than ever, and then I feel that my job evangelizing that is more important than ever.

Lyn Wineman: Yeah, I feel your passion and your understanding for the reporting, and I am sure that really adds to what you do on a day-to-day in a very high-level basis. So Alexis, I'm going to ask you next my very favorite question. We've done nearly 200 podcasts, and I've asked it on every single one that I have moderated. That is, could you provide us an original Alexis Schwartz motivational quote to inspire our listeners?

Alexis Schwartz: It's funny because I have so many motivational quotes, but none of them are attributed to me. So this is a really tough one, but I think if I had to say anything, and it's kind of been my motto since I started working, was just put in the work. Just put in the work because hard work does pay off.

Lyn Wineman: I love it, "Just put in the work," that is fantastic. You know, that's exactly why I love asking this question. I have had the opportunity to talk to so many smart and interesting and passionate people like you, and we all have our favorite quotes from other people, but it's amazing what a base of inspirational quotes we've built from people who have been on this podcast as well, so thank you for that. So Alexis, for our listeners who now you've piqued their interest, they'd like to learn more about The Guardian US, they'd like to support you, how can they find out more?

Alexis Schwartz: Oh gosh, I have a list of ways they could find out more. Visit The Guardian, download the app, sign up for the free newsletters. Listen to a podcast. I bet you didn't know that we coined the term podcast in 2004.

Lyn Wineman: Wow, I didn't know that.

Alexis Schwartz: Isn't that fun? Yes.

Lyn Wineman: That's amazing.

Alexis Schwartz: In an article, one of our reporters called it podcasting.

Lyn Wineman: Wow.

Alexis Schwartz: Engage with our enhanced soccer coverage. We have always been a football-focused sports coverage and we doubled down on that this year, as well as our newest vertical, Well Actually, and our newest Reclaim Your Brain Newsletter, how to disconnect from your phone. Follow one of our live blogs. That's the other thing that we do really well. Whether we're following an election or the Women's World Cup, we are live blogging from the event. Share content that resonates with you on your social media channels. We're always discoverable via Apple News and Google and LinkedIn and X, I guess. Donate. Donate, donate, donate to support credible independent journalism. Lastly, contact me. I'm always available to have a chat or send information. You can find my contact information on the web or via LinkedIn.

Lyn Wineman: That's fantastic. In preparation for this conversation, Alexis, I have spent some time reading The Guardian, The Guardian US specifically, and found it to be really a great source, and I was inspired to make a donation. So anybody who values independent journalism, check this out, and I would encourage you to make a donation as well. So Alexis, what a fun conversation. As we bring this to a close, I'd love to have you tell us what is the most important thing about your work that you would like our listeners to take away?

Alexis Schwartz: Okay, so I'm going to get on my soapbox for a minute. We've already kind of touched on this, but I'll reiterate that in today's divisive media landscape, The Guardian is truly a unique news platform, independent and free from influence. No other brand can really make that claim and create this environment for both our readers and our advertising partners. Because we've earned our readers trust, there's a rub-off for advertising partners too. They trust the journalism and they trust the brands that we choose to partner with, and we are very selective. So it's brand transference at work or halo effect. Consumers judge a brand by the company it keeps. There I go, I'm using a quote. But if I could leave you with one thing in this very important election year, don't avoid the news. Embrace the news, be brand brave about the messages you're disseminating and the environments that you choose to engage with. Embrace the irreparable ones who are doing the work.

Lyn Wineman: Amazing. That sounds so refreshing. Alexis, I'm going to say I fully believe the world needs more people like you, we need more media outlets like The Guardian US, and I appreciate you taking the time to share today.

Alexis Schwartz: Well, I appreciate you having me here and letting me evangelize all that I love about The Guardian.

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 dot 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.