

## Agency for Change Podcast: Rebecca Deterding, President & CEO, YMCA of Greater Omaha

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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.

Lisa Bowen:

Hi everyone. This is Lisa Bowen, vice president and managing Director at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. There are not many organizations out there that can say their name is mentioned in a song, let alone one of the biggest anthems of all time. But the one we're talking with today can say that, it's the YMCA. They've been around even longer than that well-known song. The first American YMCA was founded in 1851 and the first Y in Omaha opened just 15 years later. Today we're talking with Rebecca Deterding, the president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Omaha. We're here about the Y's inspiring work to strengthen our communities through programs and services, and also how they partner with other organizations in the area to make the Greater Omaha an even better place to live. Rebecca, I'm eager to talk with you today and learn more about the great impact you're making on our youth and the communities you serve.

Rebecca Deterding:

Sure. So as you mentioned, the YMCA of Greater Omaha started 158 years ago, which is just incredible. We're actually older than the state of Nebraska, that's pretty cool. We actually span two states and four counties. We have 13 branch locations, five early learning centers and five afterschool sites. We're here to strengthen the community and we do it through our three pillars of youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. A lot of that is just determining what challenges our communities face, each community faces a unique challenge and figuring out how we can respond, how we can show up as a community organization, caring about people. We really value our values, our core values as an organization, and try and live those out in how we show up for the community, how we can serve. A lot of it is through the partnerships that you mentioned with other organizations and just determining what challenges we have and how we can address those challenges as best we can.

Lisa Bowen:

That's awesome. So do you tailor your services and programs to the communities that you're serving based on those needs?

Rebecca Deterding:

We do. We have core programs and services that span across the entire association and across the Y movement nationwide, but we do really tailor to each community based on what that community needs. So there may be some of our locations that serve a more active older adult population, so we may have more silver sneakers classes. We may do brain and body classes for Parkinson's disease. So we try and offer unique services to best serve that community.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. So you've been around, like you said, a really long time, not you personally, but the YMCAs. Can you tell us a little bit about what that impact looks like on the communities from then to now, what a difference you've made?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yeah, so I mean, we were founded by a Union Pacific employee in the Greater Omaha area to help, at that time, young Christian men have opportunities to learn, thrive, and grow while they weren't working on building the railroad. To me, it translates a lot to what we've done over the 158 years is we are still here to help our community members to learn, to thrive, and to grow. We're not exclusive at all to the young, to men or to Christians. I mean, that is the biggest change is we are really for all. And again, through our pillars, we want to offer programs and services to help people thrive, to help them find community, to help them find fellowship with other community members. We really do believe that we are better together and we're stronger together. I think the pandemic lifted that up more than anything is, there was a lot of isolation and a lot of loneliness, and we're still coming out of that. And then that has physical health impacts as well, so how we can make sure that we're caring about physical health and just the wellbeing of people altogether.

Lisa Bowen:

Great. So let's talk a little bit about those pillars you mentioned, youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. What does that look like on a daily basis? How do you live those or bring those to life?

Rebecca Deterding:

Sure. Youth development, we have so many programs that happen every day. Of course, our early learning centers caring for infants from six weeks old all the way up to school age. Our summer day camp programs are huge, outcome-based. We do a lot of curriculum to help kids thrive and grow. Our youth sports programs are more than just learning a sport. It really is about teamwork. It's about developing relationships with other youth, with coaches listening. It's not just about being the best basketball player on the court. So that really is how we develop youth in our care.

Healthy living, I mentioned some of the programs we do at all of our facilities, obviously we have amazing fitness amenities. We have group exercise classes that are very popular. One, because the instructors are amazing and our classes are great, but also because the other members that show up together, they create their own little community and they're very welcoming, and that accountability piece of, "Hey, I want to go take that class with my friend because if I don't show up next week, she's going to tell me about it." And then we offer Livestrong programs for cancer survivors. So really, again, that healthy physical, but also a place to go to find that mental health, that get away from social isolation for our active older adults.

And then social responsibility, some of our big components of that are making sure that our services are available to all. We award financial assistance for anyone who needs support to be able to be a part of our facilities or be a part of our programs. Over the last decade, we've awarded over \$13 million in financial assistance to individuals and families because we want it to be available for all. We want our community members to have a place to go, to have a place to belong. So that's probably the biggest part of our social responsibility, but then we're also really engaged in offering partnerships to do free flu shot clinics. We participate in just other community events that we feel are really important to be a part of.

Lisa Bowen:

Great. I love the youth sports component that you offer. We're a sports family, so I'm super familiar with that. But as sports for youth get so competitive and you hear stories about kids getting burned out and losing the love for the game, I really love that the YMCA offers opportunities for youth at all levels and really brings it back to what's important, which like you said, it's that teamwork and comradery and being involved in something. So I do love that about the Y.

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes, and families are so busy and we know, some families, they want that competitive sports, they want to have practices every night. There's a lot of families that want their kids to be in sports that can't commit that amount of time, and they do just want a great opportunity to be on a team, to learn the sport, but then learn all of the other underlying development skills that come with being on a team and being a part of that program.

Lisa Bowen:

Absolutely. So you've had a big year. Last year, I think you opened more than one location, but I believe your recent one was in Gretna. How is that going and what can you tell us about that project?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes, so exciting. So the Gretna Crossing YMCA opened in September of 2023. It's our 13th location, and it was really special because it was a partnership with the city of Gretna and the school district of Gretna and part of a bigger project that's amazing called the Gretna Crossing Park. We were actually part of conversations clear back in 2012 about opening a YMCA in the Gretna community, and conversations continued, it just didn't come to fruition. And then the city of Gretna made it happen through a sales tax bond that went through and the school needed a swimming pool for their high school swim teams that are combined and didn't have a place to practice. Kids would have to get up at four in the morning to go practice at a different pool.

So to bring these resources together, the expertise of the Y in running a facility, bringing our programs to life, the city amenities and the park is amazing and then the school being able to utilize that pool for a swim team, it's just an amazing collaboration project and I think the community just has really responded well to it.

Lisa Bowen:

Yeah, that's truly a community project, so many hands in that making that happen.

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes.

Lisa Bowen:

So speaking of community, let's talk a little bit about the other community partnerships that are important to you at the YMCA and how are those partnerships vital to your overall mission?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yeah, I mean, we know we can't do it alone. Bottom line, we need to pull together, whether that's public, private, nonprofit, civic organizations to best serve our communities. We found a lot of success partnering with, Omaha Public Schools is a great example, two of our branches that opened in 2022 we're in partnerships with Omaha Public Schools, really creating some of those wraparound services that our communities need attached to high schools. We've partnered with Creighton University to help operate their childcare center, also with some CHI hospital locations to run their childcare centers.

So again, it's taking the strengths of each organization and coming together and saying, how can we do this better? How can we continue to serve? How can we expand our services so we make sure everybody has a place, people can return to work because they have a spot in childcare centers, which is really hard right now. So we just feel like we need to be at the table and we want other organizations to be at the table with us so we can solve the challenges that we know we have today and then emerging challenges that we anticipate in the future as well.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. We talk a lot about culture with a lot of our podcast guests, and it's really important to us at KidGlov as well. I just wonder if you could tell us a little bit about the culture at the YMCA and what makes it special.

Rebecca Deterding:

Yeah, we've worked a lot, particularly over the last couple of years on developing what we call a healthy culture. And that's not just physical health, it really is ensuring that we have low politics, high amount of clarity, better communication, a lot of trust, vulnerability, accountability. Our senior leadership team is kind of a practice what we preach, so we really took it on ourselves to make sure that we were developing that amongst ourselves. And then our organization is truly, I feel like around our core values, which is carrying honesty, respect, and responsibility. We see those lived out every day across our entire association. And I also think what's really special, as we mentioned, each center is unique, each community is unique, our members and the people that we serve help shape our culture as well. So you go into each location and they have a different feel and a different culture that's strong, but it is shaped by the people that we serve because we serve them so much and they're part of our family, and they're part of our Y community.

Lisa Bowen:

I love that. And my experience with the Y is that it's also a little social hub for people where they meet, and I've seen people having coffee there and just a place to get together and gather, and I really love that as well.

Rebecca Deterding:

It is. I mean, I think that's the biggest thing that we want to make sure people understand is yes, we have a pool, we have fitness centers, we have activity centers and things for kids to do, but it is really just a place to go to find community too, to find friends, to make friends, to engage with others. You

could remote work at many of our Y locations, we have great WiFi. It's just, be around other people and find that community is really important.

Lisa Bowen:

I love that. So on a personal note, Rebecca, can you tell us a little bit about your career path and what brought you to the Y here in the Greater Omaha area?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes. I feel like my career path towards leading the YMCA is fairly untraditional. I spent the first 10 years of my career in private sector software industry, really in the finance side, and then moved into more business development marketing. And there was a point in my career where I did really feel like I want to help shape the community that I'm raising my family in and that I care a lot about. I did not have any experience with the YMCA prior to when I started as their CFO nine years ago. So we didn't have a Y where I grew up, just didn't have that interaction. I was really passionate about the health and wellness component of it. I think because I didn't know everything that the Y did.

And over the last nine years, it's just been so incredible to learn and to be a part of an organization that does so much and we really do. It can be kind of our positive and can be a negative because we do so much, because we know there's so much to do to help shape our communities. But serving as the finance leader in the organization, when the opportunity to lead the organization in the president and CEO role came up, I was very excited about it because I really care about our staff. I care about our culture, I care about our community, and I wanted to have the opportunity to help lead the organization in a different way as well. So very untraditional for a typical, I think, Y CEO across our movement.

Lisa Bowen:

Yeah. What a unique background, software finance and fitness. Very well-rounded.

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes.

Lisa Bowen:

Now how long have you been at the YMCA overall, and then how long in your current role?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yeah, I've been with the Y for nine years, and I've been in my current role about two and a half. I served as interim CEO for a while during the search process and then stepped into the CEO position in March of '22.

Lisa Bowen:

Awesome. Just a fun question to throw in here, what's your guilty pleasure? What do you really enjoy doing?

Rebecca Deterding:

My guilty pleasure is murder mysteries, whether that's fiction, reading murder mysteries or true-crime documentaries. I love the whole murder mystery thing. So if I'm cleaning around my house, I typically

have my earbuds in listening to an audiobook or a podcast that they're trying to solve some sort of murder mystery.

Lisa Bowen:

I love that. My husband watches those 24/7, so yeah, I see a lot of that as well. So we love quotes here at KidGlov and words of wisdom, inspiring mantras, anything like that. Do you have anything that personally inspires you that you'd like to share with us today?

Rebecca Deterding:

I think this kind of goes back to the Y doing so many things, I find myself saying a lot to myself and to others that, "If everything's a priority, then nothing's a priority." I think that's the biggest thing. I mean, we do really need to make sure that we're identifying what our north stars are, what our priorities are, how we're putting the effort in, in the right area, because just we can't do it all. And it also, I remind that for our leaders as well, because I think it's kind of notorious in the nonprofit world, it's pretty easy for leaders to get burnout because we give so much of ourselves, we care so much, and it's really important that we make sure that our leaders are taken care of, they feel like they don't have to do it all, and they do have to prioritize and decide what maybe can't be top priority this week or this month or this year.

Lisa Bowen:

How do you manage that personally with, and I know from past experience you've got, what, 13 locations, they all have different needs and wants and ideas they want to bring to life, how do you manage that?

Rebecca Deterding:

Well, I couldn't do it without an amazing team. First and foremost, just our leadership team, our executive directors, our staff at our branches, our volunteer boards, they're all paramount in the work that we do, and there's no way that any leader can do it without the support of their team. From a personal side, I have amazing family support, an amazing husband who helps support home life and supports me in my career. And I think it's also really important to be authentic and vulnerable to say, I don't do it all. I don't. There's many times that I missed the mark on something or I have to ask for help. And that's something I've learned a lot through my leadership is don't be afraid to ask for help because everybody needs it.

Lisa Bowen:

So true. So true. So you've shared a lot of great information today, and for our listeners that want to learn more, either to help support your mission or join their local Y, how can they find out more about you?

Rebecca Deterding:

Yes. Our website is [metroymca.org](http://metroymca.org). You can also find us on Facebook and LinkedIn, YMCA of Greater Omaha or visit any of our branch locations. Again, we're spread out across the metro serving almost every community, so we would love, love to interact with you.

Lisa Bowen:

Great. So as we wrap up our time here, is there anything else I didn't ask you that you want us to know about the YMCA?

Rebecca Deterding:

Oh, gosh. Just the fact that we are just focused on strengthening community. We are a cause-driven organization. We care. We're so much more than a gym and swim. So if people have a choice of, if they are looking for a fitness center, we would just love for you to consider the YMCA, not just for the fitness component, but because you really are making a difference in the community when you're a member of the YMCA.

Lisa Bowen:

I love that. Well, thank you so much for joining me today and taking the time. I know you've got a crazy busy schedule and we really appreciated getting to know you and learning more about the YMCA. And thank you for all the great work you're doing to help our communities thrive.

Rebecca Deterding:

Thank you so much.

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.