

Agency for Change Podcast: Kristin Sukraw, Executive Producer, StoryFind Films

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Kristin Sukraw: 0:01

No matter how loud they are, you are the only person who can hear the voices in your head telling you that you're not good enough.

Announcer: 0:11

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: 0:35

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today is actually episode number 199, and I get to speak with my friend Kristin Sukraw, Executive Producer at StoryFind Films. This organization is dedicated to helping nonprofits discover and share their truth. Kristin is going to take us behind the scenes of StoryFind's unique approach to storytelling. She's going to share insights on how to build a compelling story while fostering a safe space for storytellers, and she's also going to discuss her new book, "Storyfind the handbook for finding and telling your nonprofits most impactful stories. I've read it and it's a good one to put on your list. Kristin, I can't wait to talk to you today. Welcome to the podcast.

Kristin Sukraw: 1:39

Thank you so much for having me, Lyn. I'm so excited to be here with you on this rainy day.

Lyn Wineman: 1:44

It is a rainy day and I always love talking with you. You and I have known each other for a long time and we've had the opportunity to work together. I think our businesses started at about the same time, but I'd love to have you start by telling us a story, and that would be the story of StoryFind Films.

Kristin Sukraw: 2:05

I would love to tell you the story of StoryFind Films. So we began probably in 2004. Storyfind was birthed in the backyard workshop of my husband's house, with him and a business partner. They were still in college and they got this cool project for the college of engineering and they thought they were on their way to producing recruitment videos for universities all over the country.

Kristin Sukraw: 2:37

That's how they got their start and they actually worked with a lot of schools. They were these young guys who could come in and connect with the students and they made a living off of it for several years. Fast forward to 2007,. Mike and I were married and we lived in that same house, with that business running behind our house.

Lyn Wineman: 2:57

I actually remember, I remember going to the backyard studio and it was awesome, right, but you park your car in the neighborhood and you'd use the walking path and go back to that studio, but it was an awesome place to start.

Kristin Sukraw: 3:11

Yes, for good or for bad. Sometimes on Saturdays we'd have employees there and our like our washing machine was down there, so I would go down and you know my sweats and some laundry and give our employees the wave, but it was great. It helped us really establish a strong foundation. I worked as a mental health therapist from 2007 to 2012 and slowly worked my way into the business. I like to say that I weaseled my way in. I was so fascinated with the storytelling that they were doing and we really started doing a lot of nonprofit work, so telling a lot of hard stories, stories that had a lot of trauma in them, PTSD, and so I would come in as an interviewer to help take care of those storytellers and I just loved it. It was like all of my heart came to life in those moments and finally left my practice in 2012. And we have been on a journey of nonprofit storytelling ever since.

Lyn Wineman: 4:15

That's amazing. I think the first time I worked with you and Mike and your team, we were doing some rebranding videos and commercials for an organization called Tabitha that's near and dear to my heart and the way you helped us tell those stories really set them on a very positive course. So I'll never forget that first experience, which led to many more later on. First experience which led to many more later on. So one of the things you've done in recent years is something I love and that's rebranding. You rebranded your company to StoryFind Films from Reliant Films. I'm curious why you made the change and what kind of impact it's had.

Kristin Sukraw: 5:10

So about a year ago, beginning of 2023 we began making the shift to StoryFind Films. It is, what What is going to become is a storytelling agency So so we are working on all of the pieces of an ecosystem around the art of storytelling, and so eventually we'll drop the films and it will just StoryF ind find.

Kristin Sukraw: 5:28

So we'll have a video production arm. We're working on an app that's a story vault, which is story organization for nonprofits where they can drop all of their stories and videos and photos, all of the above. We have teaching and training that we're working on right now and that's just another arm of all of it. It's pretty cool, it's really fun. So we just we've started doing storytelling and so many other aspects.

Kristin Sukraw: 6:06

So we have expanded beyond just film too.

Lyn Wineman: 6:09

I love that because we as an agency, Kristin, we as an agency often also work with nonprofits, kind of on the other side of their business, and we're always going where are your stories, when are the quotes? And there's, it's always, when you put together a website or a brochure, sometimes it's the very last thing to slide in when are the stories, where are the quotes? So I am so looking forward to partnering with you in this way. So people can't see me because this is a podcast, but I have my dog-eared copy of your book "Story Find the handbook for finding and telling your nonprofits most impactful stories. I'm really curious how does the book play into the rebranding and your overall mission and vision?

Kristin Sukraw: 6:56

Yeah, so the book has really been the jumping off point for credibility for us on a national level. So we have had this process that we've used internally for years when we work with organizations to find and tell their best stories, and it's absolutely something that organizations can take and use themselves.

Kristin Sukraw: 7:20

So we finally were like let's package it and put it out there so that organizations can be doing what we think and believe is the most important thing for their organization, which is telling their stories, and they can do it themselves, and oftentimes they can even do it better than we can, because they're the ones that are closest to the people that they serve and their employees, whoever that might be, whoever story that they're telling. So the book has really been the jumping off point of allowing us platforms that we didn't have before, allowing us audiences to speak to that we didn't have before, and it's just been a really cool ride. It only launched in November, but I'm actually heading off for three weeks on Monday because I'm so tired from the launch. It's lasted months.

Lyn Wineman: 8:08

Yes, I know, I know you've done speaking. I got a great little box in the mail. You've done podcasts. You have been very, very, very busy, but that's really exciting. I want to ask you a follow-up question, and that is there's often this balance in this new day of marketing and content marketing between do you feel like you're giving your secrets away in the book? Like, does anybody ever ask you? Like, why are you just telling everybody your process?

Kristin Sukraw: 8:38

Yes, I do feel like I'm giving all of my secrets away, but I do want people to have them. The reality is storytelling does take time and some organizations are really lucky and they have people who are dedicated to that effort. We're working with World Vision right now and we're doing training only with them. They have content creators all over the world who can do the great work and so if we can just help train and put these tools in their hands, they're going to be able to keep doing that great work. And then for other organizations they don't have those people who are dedicated to their storytelling efforts. So even if they read through the book and they're able to apply some of it themselves, likely they're going to reach out for help. I think for us it's just a balance of we want to help in any way we can and if we can give organizations, especially nonprofits, tools to do it themselves, great. And if they need help, we're here to help along the way.

Lyn Wineman: 9:34

You know, I think that it's a great marketing strategy, but it's also very true to what I know you and Mike to be is extremely generous people and you giving away this knowledge to organizations that need it, I think, is a very generous and smart thing to do. So I told you before we jumped on it is a little bit intimidating interviewing somebody with as much experience as you and in the book I've dog-eared a page on tips for creating this safe space for people to tell their stories, and on this page it's 144 for anyone who has the book. You say if there's one interview skill to master, it's the discipline of allowing moments of silence at the right times. I am so bad at that, Kristin. I've already stepped on your words a couple of times in this interview. But talk to me about that tip. And then I'd also just feel like can you give us some high level advice on finding and telling nonprofit stories?

Kristin Sukraw: 10:40

Sure, yeah. So that tip I call embracing the pause, and this is really especially important when you're telling an emotional story, so you can think of it along the lines of don't rescue someone and that's a motto that we have at StoryFind Films too. If someone is struggling with a deep emotion, don't rescue them from it, because you're going to pull them right back out of it. They're not going to get a chance to say what they really needed to say at the end of the day and you're going to lose some really great content for your stories. Embracing the pause just means, if you can tell, if someone falls silent and you can see that they're really thinking deeply about something, or if they're getting emotional and they're taking a moment to cry, just sit with them in it, let them experience it. Don't pull them back up out of it, because when they start speaking again this is true in a therapy session too when they start speaking again, they are going to be saying some of the most profound things in their interview. They're going to talk about what they just experienced, why that was hard for them, what the emotion was, that was there, what it meant to them, and some of that meaning making stuff is really what you pull your interviews together with.

Kristin Sukraw: 11:58

So I always say don't rescue, just let people be. People have a tendency to feel shame when you pull them out of that emotion too, like I'm making you so uncomfortable, it becomes about you as the interviewer. I'm so sorry. I'm going to stop feeling and I'm going to make sure you're okay when really it's their story and it's our job to be with them in that story. So yeah, embrace the pause, let people be. I usually give people 20 seconds of emotion and it feels way longer. Honestly, like sometimes I'm like, oh, can I please say something? But if 20 seconds goes by and they haven't, then I'll say what are you feeling

right now? You know what's going on, what are you thinking about, but I won't I still won't rescue them out of it. It will just be another question to engage the emotion.

Lyn Wineman: 12:50

See there, I didn't even embrace that pause so, but that's such great advice, it does give me a little anxiety, I have to be honest with you, to think about a 20 second pause, but in your medium that is so powerful, so powerful.

Kristin Sukraw: 13:07

I think podcasts are different too. You know, your listeners probably don't want us to sit here quietly for 20 minutes.

Lyn Wineman: 13:17

I'm also not Barbara Walters. I usually don't make people cry only every once in a while, but I usually do not do not make people cry.

Kristin Sukraw: 13:27

Maybe I will today.

Lyn Wineman: 13:29

Al right, al right, so tell me this why is video so powerful for nonprofits in their storytelling process?

Kristin Sukraw: 13:39

I'm probably biased, obviously, because that's what we do, but I don't think that there's anything quite like a video that can connect you to the heart and soul of people's stories, Unless that person is there in person, one of your donors, video is the next best thing. It is just the raw humanity that can emerge from the telling of a story and an audience being able to visually see it and experience it with them. I'd like to say that storytelling is so cool because it's really collaborative as someone is telling their story. So I'll give an example.

Kristin Sukraw: 14:21

We worked with this woman named Rita. She was at the time we interviewed her. She was a elementary school teacher, but she had this long journey of coming to that point in her life and so when she was in high school, she went into her high school guidance counselor's office and, even though she was in the top 10% of her class, that guidance counselor told her that she was not college material, and she should get a job at the sewing factory after high school. And so she graduated and that's what she did. She went and got a job at the sewing factory and it wasn't until the school it was Confordia College, Alabama stepped in and someone at her church found her and was like, would you consider classes years later? And she was like, I guess, Anyway, that's like the essence of her story, and she became this amazing educator.

Kristin Sukraw: 15:14

But storytelling is this collaboration. So as you hear Rita walking into her high school guidance counselor's office, your mind pairs the imagery with that and we also start overlaying our own meaning onto the stories, which is really cool. So I'm sure all of us can relate to being told we're not good enough. Instantly we're bonded to Rita as an audience. We can relate. We're not good enough. Our minds are pairing imagery with the story that's being told. And it's this beautiful thing of joining together of worlds and that's why story is so powerful. And then you take it a step further and it's video so you can see Rita telling her story. You see the emotion on her face and you want to give, you want to support her and other students who are just like her coming along. Yeah, it's just sometimes I'm like, is this really what I do for a living?

Lyn Wineman: 16:12

Your work is so beautiful and we'll make sure we link to your website in the show notes too, so people can see samples of your work as well and how you do it. I'm curious because I know you've been doing a lot of speaking engagements all over the country. What are you hearing from nonprofit leaders about the challenges they might be having right now?

Kristin Sukraw: 16:38

I think the biggest challenge is always money. So, it's always. How can we do this? We know we have to tell our stories, that's foundational but how can we do this in a way that is cost effective, doesn't take up a ton of time and, at the end of the day, actually gets results? That is probably the biggest thing that we're hearing right now is just we know this is important, but how do we do it in a way that makes sense.

Lyn Wineman: 17:07

Every nonprofit I know is they think about their investment in any kind of marketing or storytelling or branding, they're weighing the fact that I'm taking money from serving our mission to put it into these mediums and I have to believe that we are going to get a return on investment that is going to bring in more money and help us, or more support, or more volunteers, or connect us with the people we serve. It's going to do something that's going to make it worth pulling the money out of the mission temporarily and making this investment. So it is a really, really big deal. So you're obviously exceptional at video production and you've kind of mentioned this. You're doing more than video alone. Are there other things that you're offering your nonprofit clients that really help them be successful?

Kristin Sukraw: 18:13

Yes, I think our training is probably the most helpful, so if organizations want to do storytelling in a way that drives results, and I think that's key. We also study and teach the psychology behind moving an audience to act at the end of the day. So our trainings, I think, are again, I'm biased I think they're pretty invaluable. That if you already know storytelling is something you should be doing, like, let's do it in the right way

Lyn Wineman: 19:06

You know what I love about that is sometimes we think that, hey, I'm a good writer, I'm a creative thinker, I connect well with people, I can do this and maybe you can. But having that structure, having that methodology, really helps ensure that you are moving people and you are instilling behavior change. Whether that behavior change is opening your wallet and making a donation, whether it is signing up to volunteer, whether it is a behavior change related to some type of maybe public health issue or social issue, all of those things are impacted. But it's more than pretty words and pretty images. It's really making them work together.

Kristin Sukraw: 20:00

Yes, and I'm just going to jump in really quick with this. One of the other things we hear from nonprofits all the time is that when they set off to do a story or set out on a storytelling journey, they will start to hear from different department heads like, oh, could you just put this in? And well, why aren't you talking about my initiative? And how come we don't do just this? Or how come you know just it? And the video or the story that they're telling at the end of the day just ends up being this, what I call just a pot of stew. Like you throw in this, you throw in that and you hope that like at the end of the day it tastes good. Yeah, but it's 50-50. Like, maybe it will and maybe it won't.

Kristin Sukraw: 20:43

And so it also our process. The StoryFind process also really gives nonprofits a way to anchor their messaging so that when those conversations come up, they can they have a way to say what you're doing is awesome. But for this initiative, these are the things that we're focusing on and this is why. That's actually one of the things that we've heard most back from our nonprofit clients is it's given me a tool to talk to my coworkers about what we're doing and to not allow that chaos.

Lyn Wineman: 21:22

The chaos. I love that. We call it Frankensteining a project too. Like, and sometimes giving people the words, the words to protect the project. Because nonprofits do have a lot of influencers. You know they have their board members and they have different program heads that are all very passionate about their know they have their board members and they have different program heads that are all very passionate about their programs. And they have donors and funders and all the audiences and you can't be all things to all people. That is always, always, always true and especially if you're going to tell a story, you can't put everything in it. You have to make it a story. Yeah, lovely. So you shared a story earlier about Rita, I believe, in Concordia, Alabama. You've told so many stories Like I even wonder, since 2012, when you came in full time or 2004, since Mike started the business, like, is there any one story in addition to the one you've already shared that really stands out at the top of your mind for being particularly impactful?

Kristin Sukraw: 22:33

Yes, and I feel guilty for having favorites, but I do. Yes, there was a project we did a few years ago for an organization called Jesus Film Project and they are a branch of Campus Crusade for Christ, so it was a big organization. They do major fundraising events, I think, twice a year. They call them briefings, and they bring in their major donors from across the country to these briefings and it's two days of storytelling

and just learning about the organization. It's where they make their big asks. Essentially, it's not a gala, but it's an all day event for two days.

Kristin Sukraw: 23:09

One year they wanted to do a donor story and this is different. Of course, usually we're used to telling the beneficiary stories or we come and work with those and really tug on the heartstrings. But they wanted to have like an everyday couple that other donors could see themselves reflected in, and that process of finding a donor story was absolutely one of my favorites. Which is cool because I don't know I'm in love with all of the outcomes and all of those stories that we tell, but this one was just special.

Kristin Sukraw: 23:47

We worked with a couple named Warren and Brenda and they this is the reason that I love their story so much, and this is the key ingredient to successful stories too. They were willing to be vulnerable in every area of their life. Wow. So they were occupational therapists, turned what they called failed missionaries to Poland. They returned to the United States and their son was diagnosed with a fatal progressive illness where they watched him pass away over 13 years like truly like horrible.

Kristin Sukraw: 24:22

And along the way, they turned major donors to the Jesus Film Project when Brenda's family's business, her father's business started doing well and she earned stock options with them, and it was just the most beautiful story of what a life really well-lived looked like. Their relationship together was just so strong and they went into the hardest places of their story, and that's what allowed the audience to fall in love with them, to see again, like we talked about earlier, the storytelling being a collaboration. Any one of us could find ourselves in the full story and so when that's shared from stage and this is why I'm probably most proud of it too no one in the audience had an excuse not to give, and it was just a cool twist on storytelling.

Kristin Sukraw: 25:18

I didn't cry, but you got me teared up.

Lyn Wineman: 25:20

I was going to say nobody's ever made me cry before, but you're getting close there, you're getting close. That would be a first. So, all right, all of this great stuff, the training, the videos, the book, the stories, the advice, what is upcoming, either initiatives or projects that you might be excited about?

Kristin Sukraw: 25:50

First, a three-week vacation. I've been waiting for a while and then we just have a year of building in front of us. Jared, he is our senior director of education. He and I have a bunch of initiatives that we're excited about, opportunities that we're building, courses that we're building we're actually, we have a publishing deal for a workbook. It will be more helpful than the actual book, because it will take you just

start to finish through the whole process with really like practical resources. We're excited about that. And on the film production side, we just continue to grow our nonprofit client base.

Lyn Wineman: 26:47

That's what keeps this business fun. All of the new ways that nonprofits are helping people.

Kristin Sukraw: 26:51

Yes, there's no shortage of it. That's what's cool.

Lyn Wineman: 26:56

So, Kristin, for our listeners who would like to learn more, where can they find more information about StoryFind? Keep tabs on the book. Maybe keep tabs on the new workbook coming out.

Kristin Sukraw: 27:09

Okay, so you can find us on the web, of course, StoryFind.com, Instagram. You can follow me @KristinSukraw and I also have @StoryFindBook, where all of the workbook updates will be posted along the way, and LinkedIn is the the same @KristinSukraw so I hope to see some of you there.

Lyn Wineman: 27:31

We will put all of those links in the show notes on the KidGlove website as well for anybody who didn't catch those. All right, I'm going to ask you my favorite question. This is episode number 199. We've asked it on every episode. I am inspired by motivational quotes, Kristin, and you have written a whole book and I know there's lots of inspiring things in here. Could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom for our listeners?

Kristin Sukraw: 28:01

Yes, I have been thinking about this and which direction to take with it, but I think I'm going to go the more vulnerable route because I feel like it is more important than a catchy business quote. But I would say, no matter how loud they are, you are the only person who can hear the voices in your head telling you that you're not good enough. So do the things that you want to do anyway, and deal with the voices along the way. That is a lesson I wish I would have learned 20 years ago.

Lyn Wineman: 28:37

Wow, mic drop, mic drop, like I'm crouching in my chair because that is so impactful, Kristin and such a great quote, such great vulnerability, something that really resonates with me as well. I think, as I talk with people that work at KidGlove and sometimes speak with audiences of younger women in business. It's like learn to deal with that anxiety and that self-doubt and the voices and your life will be so much happier so thank you for that. That's amazing and from a real place. I think it's a lifelong journey.

Kristin Sukraw: 29:21

Well, and the next thing you do, the voices are still going to be there for that, and so you have to kind of work through it each time you do something new. And yeah, it's always crazy to me that other people don't see me the same way that I see myself, and so learning to see that and learning to accept that maybe it's just in my head, has been a good thing.

Lyn Wineman: 29:44

Oh yeah, okay, I'm curious, and this may be going too deep. Do you give the voices names? I've named my. I've named my voices. They're in there. I've given them names so I can say hey, Rita, thanks for sharing, thanks for sharing, Rita. I'll go sit back there for a while.

Kristin Sukraw: 30:04

That's actually really great. So, yes, I have too. Um, most of mine, I feel like, are my little girl voices that I hear from younger. So I actually talked to myself with the name that my mom always called me, which was my, my first and middle name. So Kristin Nicole.

Kristin Sukraw: 30:22

So I'll be like okay, Kristin Nicole, I see that you're here with me, but it's time to go sit down. That movie Heavy Weights I don't know if you remember it, but Ben Stiller talked to oh my gosh, he talked to his little boy. It was Tony in the movie, so he'd be like, okay, little Tony, and so I have adapted that. It was humorous in the movie, but I take it seriously.

Lyn Wineman: 30:45

Al right, I might have to put that on my schedule for the weekend. Kristin, thank you. Thank you for sharing from a place of vulnerability. Al right, I just have one more question for this great conversation. I'm kind of sad that it's coming to an end, but as we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Kristin Sukraw: 31:09

Oh gosh, that is a great question. I think the most important thing is that I know it seems daunting to learn and figure out how to tell your own stories, but you really can do it yourself and you really can do it yourself successfully. And that confidence is the one thing that I want people to walk away with is that's why I wrote the book. There is, there's a step-by-step process now out there in the world that if you start it from the beginning, you follow the steps along the way, you will achieve storytelling success. And that is my hope for the nonprofits who can't afford a partner, for the nonprofits who feel like they don't have time. Learn the process, follow the process and you can do it. I know you can do it.

Lyn Wineman: 32:02

That's amazing. Thank you for that. So, Kristin, I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations like StoryFind, and I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule before your vacation to talk with us today.

Kristin Sukraw: 32:23

Thank you so much for having me. This was the easiest interview ever, so I think you've got your interview skills down.

Lyn Wineman: 32:29

Thank you. That means a lot coming from you. Thanks, Kristin. I appreciate you being here.

Announcer: 32:38

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast 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.