

## Agency for Change Podcast: Kate Williams, CEO, 1% for the Planet

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**Kate Williams:** 0:01

Ask the next question.

**Announcer:** 0:06

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:** 0:34

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Oh, I am so excited about today's guest. She is leading an organization with a bold, bold mission to protect the future of our planet by transforming environmental giving into real, tangible action. Kate Williams is the CEO of 1% for the Planet, a driving force in helping businesses commit to giving back and ensuring that their efforts make a measurable difference. So 1% for the Planet has over \$670 million in certified environmental giving and that is just going to grow exponentially from here. They are creating transformational change, they're holding companies accountable and they are tackling greenwashing on a global scale. Kate, I am eager to talk with you today. Welcome to the podcast.

**Kate Williams:** 1:35

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here with you, Lyn.

**Lyn Wineman:** 1:38

I'm always happy to talk with you too, Kate, and people, of course, can't see you because this is a podcast, but you have such a great smile and you make me feel welcome on my own podcast, so thank you for that. I'd love to have you start by telling us more about 1% for the Planet.

**Kate Williams:** 2:00

Yes, we were founded in 2002 by Yvonne Chouinard, who is the founder of Patagonia, the company, and his friend Craig Matthews, and they were doing some giving through their companies, and essentially they created 1% for the Planet to build a movement. They realized, like an individual company, here and there doing something is good but not enough, and so building a movement to engage companies all over the world is the intent behind 1% for the Planet, and the way it works is that every company who's a member and we now have more than 5,000, is giving 1% of their revenues to environmental partners.

And we facilitate all that giving. We vet the environmental partners, we certify the giving annually and we build a really powerful company of businesses who are essentially saying with their dollars that we're going to do business differently.

**Lyn Wineman:** 2:54

That's amazing 5,000 members. Congratulations for hitting that pretty significant milestone. So obviously, organizations from across the country, across the globe, I'm assuming, see the importance of this work, but I'd like to hear from you like why is this work that 1% for the Planet does so important and why is it so important right now?

**Kate Williams:** 3:20

The work of 1% for the Planet is important in some different ways. One way that 1% for the Planet is important is that we've created a simple model that enables businesses all over the world, across all different industries, to incorporate impact into how they operate. And so, by being set up around 1% of revenues, not 1% of profits, we're saying like hey, move it into the center of your strategy. In the same way that you pay your staff, you pay your rent, you decide to invest in your underlying assets in order to have a good business, you build in giving back or investing in impact, and so 1% for the Planet creates the framework for companies to create this kind of strategic, integrated impact commitment that you do every single year. So that is an important way in which 1% for the Planet is different. It's not an add-on, it's not an initiative that you do and then finish. It's something that you commit to over time.

**Kate Williams:** 4:26

The other thing that makes 1% for the Planet different and powerful is that, by being a 1% model, we create this incredible way that companies of all sizes, from tiny startups to big multinational companies, are all kind of equally proportionally engaging together in driving collective impact. So last year, we certified over 100 million US dollars in giving and our lifetime tally is more than 600 million US dollars. And that number is made up of literally hundreds of thousands of donations of all sizes made in a distributed model of individual companies all over the world thinking through strategically where they want to give. But it all adds up together to this really powerful model. So that's a beautiful difference of 1% and meaningful way in which 1% creates a mechanism for collective action at scale.

**Lyn Wineman:** 5:26

I really love the idea of that that small businesses can be in the same group as a Patagonia or as many other large businesses and all coming together to make up that now \$600 million US dollar impact. That's really a lot of impact. Kate, I'm really curious as we talk about this. I'm curious about how you got involved with 1% for the Planet. I know you've dedicated your life to this work, but I'm imagining you as an eight-year-old on the playground. Someone says what do you wanna do when you grow up?

And you say I wanna get back to the planet. Did it happen like that, or what's your story? Not exactly At eight. I probably would have said I just want to run faster than my brothers because I have two older brothers.

**Kate Williams:** 6:19

I did early on so not eight but 18, have the opportunity to spend some time in big mountains in Wyoming and had a pretty transformational experience that you know really made me fall in love with wild places and also get really curious about leading other people or like being part of a group doing hard things together. And you know I couldn't articulate that super clearly at that time but I did have this kind of really clear feeling of like, oh, this is what I want to do. And so really my career has kind of been figuring out what this is, what combination of kind of that love for wild places and curiosity about doing hard things together in a group and having fun, hopefully, in the process. And so I started out as an outdoor educator and, you know, focused on connecting people to those kinds of experiences and really loved that and learned a lot about leadership and then kind of pivoted more towards leadership in the environmental nonprofit space.

**Kate Williams: 7:18**

I don't think I ever said and I could probably like check in with family and friends at the time like they were not no, Kate's not saying like she wants to be a CEO. That wasn't what I was saying. It really was more kind of bottom up curiosity and passion. You know curiosity on the sort of leadership of groups and passion for the outdoors and you know kind of flowed into a path around leading environmental nonprofits. I was executive director of another nonprofit that was actually part of the 1% network. I did that for 10 years and then kind of serendipity and planning which I think is sort of a combination that, for most of us, gets us where we end up.

I, you know, got to know some of the 1% for the Planet team, including the former CEO, and transitioned over to 1% for the Planet and became CEO in 2015.

**Lyn Wineman: 8:10**

Okay, so you've seen a lot, then, in almost 10 years at the helm of 1% for the Planet, I imagine. what are some of the biggest shifts that you've seen?

**Kate Williams: 8:21**

Well, I would say you know globally and just you know macro. Obviously, like the COVID years happened during that time, one big shift is going from being a pretty small 12 person nonprofit based in person in Vermont. As an in-person you know Vermont nonprofit with, you know a few people that were on a screen every now and then you pretty quickly becoming a hybrid remote organization that grew a lot during that time. So we now have about 50 people, mostly outside of Vermont. So we're very much remote organization with a headquarters office that a small subset of the team goes to. And you know that's been a great opportunity for us because we've been able to hire amazing people. But it's also meant that we have and are still learning how to be a remote organization effectively and build culture and all of those things. So I'd say that's one big change.

**Lyn Wineman: 9:24**

Yeah, yeah, and I appreciate you saying that, because I think the pandemic had that effect on a lot of small organizations where, hey, this is great, it opens doors across the country, across the world. But you really, once you start to say we're going to have full-time people that aren't in our physical space and we're committed to having a great culture and great working relationships, it really makes you

rethink how you do things. So I appreciate you saying that. Tell me, what else? What else have you seen in 10 years?

**Kate Williams:** 9:57

I think I've seen sort of shifts in like consumer and business behavior and, and you know, 1% for the Planet sits at a really interesting space. I mean I'm very grateful that I get to do this work because we're sitting at this interesting intersection between the business space, the nonprofit space and, you know, with business. We're really thinking a lot about consumers and kind of their interests. And you know, I think from the 2015 to 2024 period has been a time of, at one level, like growth in consumer interest in allocating their purchasing dollars towards businesses that are either like directly creating solutions or like have a purpose that they can sort of articulate concurrently. It's, you know, it's consumers have. I think consumers have always been somewhat skeptical but have become more skeptical of brands that have tried to capitalize on that interest by making insincere commitments.

**Lyn Wineman:** 10:54

It can really backfire. There's so many case studies, so much research that says people really do, I think, want to allocate their consumer dollars more responsibly, particularly even with the younger generations is what I'm seeing. But, boy, if you do it in an insincere or inauthentic way, it can really backfire on you very badly.

**Kate Williams:** 11:17

Absolutely. It's such an important point and a lot of that you know from the like going to remote to you know some of that like you know, risks of insincerity have created you know a lot of opportunity for 1%, because for us to be able to hire awesome people all over has helped us to grow stronger and to really be more, have a bigger footprint as a global company. Our hiring is still primarily US based, but still we're able to have a broader reach. But then also, like our model is all about credibility, like we are the third party certifying that a company is doing exactly what they say they're doing, and so you know that's been an opportunity for us because we represent a way where the opposite of greenwashing, so that's been powerful.

And then it's been an interesting time politically, which we don't directly operate in the political sphere, but certainly that's the water we all swim in. And so, like this year alone I think I was reading somewhere there's been something like 67 pretty significant elections globally. More than two thirds of the Earth's population has had, you know, access to, you know some sort of a vote, and you know. So I think that is a context of some uncertainty and, yeah, we're, we exist to sort of represent that the you know the environment, the planet, a thriving future needs to sort of outlast and you know sort of stand be the ground on which all of us walk, no matter where we cast our vote. But nonetheless, like the context, the more, the greater uncertainty the outcomes. Things like that do have a you know an impact on the business, the nonprofit, the consumer environment. So we're always kind of staying dynamic in that context. So, yeah, I would say those are some of the big, bigger kind of trends.

**Lyn Wineman:** 13:13

Those are big shifts, big shifts, and I think, too, we're hearing and seeing more people, by all kinds of elections, feel uncertainty. This year there's a lot of people feeling uncertainty. So you know the fact that there's an organization like yours that at least puts some verification into the process I think probably really helps people and gives them a sense of comfort. So I'm curious we talked about maybe what shifts you've seen in nearly a decade. What's on the horizon for 1% for the Planet? Are there any initiatives or goals that you're particularly excited about, Kate?

**Kate Williams:** 13:54

Yes, there are. So for us, the way we track our impact is that giving dollar. So I mentioned the more than it's actually 670 million US dollars that we've certified lifetime to date. Our goal is to grow that and get to, to do two things to get to a billion in lifetime dollars and then to build the organization and sort of global community that can get to the next billion and the next billion faster. So that's our, you know, that's our kind of numerical goal and metric and supporting that is you know, all of the stories of partnerships and that are sort of happening through that impact that really kind of brings to life the way in which we are driving change. We are driving change and we do that through four impact areas, which is important to share. So you know, to really understand billion dollars and beyond is the way that is kind of comes to life on planet earth is through these four impact areas that we've identified that essentially are an expanded definition of environmental impact. So our four impact areas are just economies, resilient communities, rights to nature and conservation and restoration.

**Lyn Wineman:** 15:10

Oh, I love those. That's a great way to break it down and also, as an advertising person, I have to say, very nicely written, memorable. They work together and they're all active, so I do really appreciate that. Kudos to your marketing team. So, Kate, I'm curious. I mean, other than participating in 1% for the Planet, because that's got to be, I would think, at the top of your list Do you have any advice or insights for businesses or even individuals that want to ensure that their actions make a meaningful difference?

**Kate Williams:** 15:48

I think I would point back to what we were talking about earlier in terms of the importance of like sincerity or authenticity. And so, you know, I do think there's like great data on purpose-driven companies tend to outperform the market. consumers want that. Like it's good for business, like it's good for business, but it's good for business only to the extent that it's the right. It's the right path for that specific, particular, unique one of a kind company.

And so I think my advice is, you know, don't try to become the company that you may maybe be your inspiration. Look at them, understand them, but don't think, oh, their formula is my formula. Try to figure out like, okay, they were courageous and figured out what their kind of ethos was and built a purpose around that and activities around that and all the things you know. Take the time to figure out. You know, if you're two people, 200 people, 2000 people, whatever size you are, to figure out what, what is it that we uniquely get to do so, if you're a lawn care company or, you know, industrial cleaning company, both of which are, you know, categories and specific companies that we have in 1% for the Planet and are not what people would sort of normally think of when they're like oh, purpose-driven company, industrial cleaning.

**Lyn Wineman: 17:10**

No, it is not usually the first thing that comes to mind.

**Kate Williams: 17:14**

But it's right there for those companies if they take the time to think, well, okay, we're like touching a lot of spaces, we can sort of think about how we make that a positive and impactful process and since you know, blah, blah, blah, you can like they, they have the opportunity to do that really sort of specific, unique story that no one else could tell.

So I do think that's, you know, an important step and I think it may sound daunting, but I think actually that's also the fun of it, cause then when you find what clicks for you, in the same way that, as you know, individuals, when we find the hobbies or activities or ideas or music that we like it, it feels good, it feels energizing. We return to it, we keep doing it. I think that's, you know, it's the same for businesses. Find those things that really kind of light you up, and then you will do them better, more consistently, with, like more energy, and they will resonate because it will be so clear that they're true.

**Lyn Wineman: 18:16**

I love that. I think too, if you work your purpose like, if the purpose becomes the fiber of who you are and it's just naturally part of your strategic planning and your goal setting, you as an organization can be much more focused in how you apply that and your team can get behind it, versus just kind of saying yes or no to different opportunities and so forth. I also think something you said reminds me. I think we're seeing a lot of organizations who maybe espoused a purpose during the pandemic or during a time when social justice was in awareness, and now they're backtracking, and that also is a kind of a very difficult thing to be all in on something and then to pull it back can be very difficult, as well,

**Kate Williams: 19:04**

I agree, I know I've been watching that as well and I guess one thought I have about that too is like you want to, you want to make it authentic so it sticks, but at the same time, to give yourself the grace and space to evolve and like, be dynamic cause, in the same way that, like you know, I was all in on running and then my body changed and so now I really, you know I enjoy going to the gym and biking in, and so now I'm like super passionate about those, and so I still have a purpose as an active, strong human, but I've figured out ways to define it differently as I have grown and changed. So if that, to the extent that that metaphor works I think that is to companies as well the context that we're in changes, we have different staff members, the market changes metaphor works. I think that is to companies as well. The context that we're in changes. We have different staff members, the market changes, so we evolve some of our like products or services. So then you know, we pull through that purpose in a different way. So creating space to evolve and be dynamic without it being an abandonment of principles such that it makes it look like you were never really that committed in the first place.

**Lyn Wineman: 20:23**

I love that you said that. Thank you for that. Kate. So for our listeners who want to learn more about 1% for the Planet maybe they're a nonprofit that wants to connect, maybe they're a business that wants to connect where's the best place for them to go find more information?

**Kate Williams:** 20:41

Absolutely. We have a great website, [onepercentfortheplanet.org](http://onepercentfortheplanet.org) all spelled out in letters and there's information about all aspects of our program and opportunities to fill out a form and get more information to join for members. So definitely invite that. We also are pretty active on Instagram and LinkedIn, so encourage people to follow us on those social channels.

**Lyn Wineman:** 21:06

That's great. We'll make sure to get links to all of those for everybody in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well, so those are easy. All right, Kate, next I'm going to put you on the hot seat. I'm going to ask you my favorite question. We've done over 200 episodes and ask this question on every one. I am really inspired by motivational quotes and I am hoping you can give us a Kate Williams original quote to inspire our listeners.

**Kate Williams:** 21:36

Yes, so my quote is ask the next question.

**Lyn Wineman:** 21:39

Ooh nice, Tell me more, Tell me what that means to you.

**Kate Williams:** 21:45

Yes, I will. So I went on a backpacking trip in Patagonia Lifetime dream. It was awesome. I was with my two kids. It was amazing. It was about five days, so not super long, but like we, you know, we covered some ground and it was with. I was with my kids, but also with some other people who I had not known before. And at the end of the trip as is often the case on these kinds of, you know, backpacking or outdoor trips like after five short days you know it's not that long a period of time we were so connected, we had had really deep conversations, we'd gotten to know each other, we'd really opened up. And I was thinking you know the number of times I spend five days in the quote front country with people and really barely get scratched the surface. So I was actually talking to my daughter afterwards and it's like why is that and what can we do differently? And I realized, like when you're out there backpacking or doing whatever, you take the time to ask the next question because you're walking along the trail and someone says something that piques your curiosity.

And I think sometimes when we're in, you know, more like work settings or professional settings or just kind of front country settings, we might be curious but we might feel like society doesn't, you know, doesn't want us to ask the next question, but actually ask the next question. Worst case, someone's like oh yeah, you know, I don't want to answer that, and it doesn't mean you have to be aggressive or anything like that, but just be curious. So when someone says something that interests you say, oh, could you tell me a little bit more about that? Or oh, whatever your next question is. So that's really

stayed with me, and when I do that I find that I connect more deeply with those around me. It's really rewarding and positive.

**Lyn Wineman:** 23:26

I love that. That's great advice, I'm going to say, Kate, I also wrote down doing hard things together. I love the desire to do hard things together and it just when you said it. It takes me back to times in my life where you've been on a team and you've had an obstacle to overcome, whether it's a work project. Oftentimes these obstacles come in when you're traveling in groups right, or things like that. But it really does make a difference when you're working together with people and I guess when you're doing hard things together, it gives you the opportunity to ask the next question, as well so thank you for that.

So, Kate, I've loved this conversation. 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?

**Kate Williams:** 24:30

I would like our listeners to remember that 1% for the Planet, as both a specific model and as kind of a philosophy or a theory of change, is all about taking a step and believing that that starts you on the journey, which may sound like trite and overstated, but I can't. I can't get away from how important that is, because I think oftentimes people might get paralyzed of, like, what's the right thing to do? Enough I've had those questions, so I get it. I say that with no critique whatsoever, but more as an invitation to realize that when you sort of take that step and join a community of other people who are taking a step, suddenly your step is multiplied, in our case, by 5,000. And then you put the next year and you build relationships and you learn and you do more and it's kind of this incredible expansive opportunity that begins with a very small initial step.

**Lyn Wineman:** 25:18

That's amazing, Kate, you know, I'm going to say it reminds me of another favorite quote from Arthur Ashe, which I believe is start where you are, use what you have, do what you can, right. I mean, I think we can wait until the perfect time, but often the perfect time never, never comes. So thank you so much for that. Kate, I have really loved this conversation and I'm going to say I fully believe the world needs more people like you and more organizations like 1% for the Planet and this incredible network of 5,000 companies that you have pulled together. That's only going to get bigger and more impactful from here. Thank you so much for taking time with me today.

**Announcer:** 26:09

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