

## Agency for Change Podcast:

Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D., Vice President of Communication and Public Relations, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)

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**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 0:00

Keep on swimming. If you just keep focusing and keep swimming, you will get to where you need to go.

**Announcer:** 0:09

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:** 0:32

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, President and Chief Strategist of KidGlov. Welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today I want to start us out with a question, and that question is have you thanked your public health official today? Actually, I want to know have you even thought about public health today? If the answer to those questions is no, it's probably because a group of dedicated professionals have been working hard on your behalf to keep you safe. And today I get to speak to someone from this industry, Dr. Khalilah LeGrand, Vice President of Communication and Public Relations of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, otherwise known as ASTHO. Dr LeGrand, welcome to the podcast. I can't wait to talk to you today.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 1:34

Thank you. Thank you, so nice to chat with you, Lyn. It's been a while and looking forward to getting into some conversation today.

**Lyn Wineman:** 1:39

Me too. And you know, I just want to ask up front, because I really want to honor the fact that you have that PhD, because you are a very smart and learned individual, but would it be, okay, if I call you Khalilah?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 1:46

Khalilah is perfectly fine. Yes.

**Lyn Wineman: 1:50**

Fantastic. Well, hey, let's just get into it. I'd love, Khalilah, to have you start by telling us a bit about ASTHO's mission and the role it plays in public health across the United States.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 2:08**

Absolutely. It is so nice for me to be able to share with you a little bit about ASTHO and its role in public health. We are an 80-year-old organization.

**Lyn Wineman: 2:22**

Wow, 80 years Khalilah. I did not realize. Public health has even been a thing for 80 years.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 2:30**

Absolutely. It's been around for a long time. So, our nonprofit, ASTHO, has a mission to support, equip and advocate for state and territorial health officials in their work of advancing the public's health and well-being. So we work in a lot of different spaces and certainly are focused on undergirding various all of the state and territories in their public health efforts.

**Lyn Wineman: 2:57**

You know, one thing I love about your line of work is that when things are going well, nobody thinks about it, right, like if things are going well and people are safe and healthy and not getting sick, then they just don't even think about this field. You have to feel like one of the most underappreciated professions that there possibly could be. Does it ever feel like that?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 3:27**

Would not say that we feel underappreciated, but I do think to your point that, again, if things are going well, we're not noticed. One of the recent things that our CEO shared, and I think it's such a really great way to think about public health. He is from Louisiana and he talked about oyster season and we were talking about the role that public health plays in food safety.

And we're working on some things relative to a food safety podcast in our organization. But he talked about oyster season and said because of the great work that many, many public health officials do, it results in people being able to enjoy oysters however they like them. But you don't think about that. I think about here in Nebraska. You know the state fair. We have, you know plenty of local county fairs, but we have the big state fair and those things that relate to public safety, from the rides, from getting those things set up, making sure they're inspected, all of the food that happens. You know that people partake in at a state fair. Public health has a role to play in that and so again, if we're doing our job and we're supporting people being healthy and those public health practices, we're unseen, and so that's what we want.

**Lyn Wineman: 5:02**

Wow, what a range too, to go all the way from carnival rides to fair foods to oysters. And being a Newbraska girl, I love to escape to a coastal community and have the opportunity to taste a fresh oyster, and I rarely worry about it at all, so kudos to your field. So obviously we're referring to the association as ASTHO, but it is the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and, Khalilah, you as the Vice President of Communications and Public Relations, I imagine you have a feeling about why effective communication is so crucial in public health today.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 5:40**

Absolutely. I truly believe that it is so important because everything that we do is communication. There's a and I can't remember the person that said this, but there's an axiom that says man cannot not communicate. And that's true.

**Lyn Wineman: 5:57**

And especially true for women. Khalilah, women cannot not communicate either. True, right.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 6:07**

Very true. You know whether it's nonverbal, whether it's verbal. I often say that I went to school, my brain went to school for communications, but my face sometimes did not, and I have to remind myself that even when I think I'm not communicating, I am especially in front of people and in this virtual environment that we find ourselves in so many times now, you know, people can zoom in and look a little closer, and so you have to be very mindful, and so communication is just so critical in everything that we do navigating through challenging times, promoting positive initiatives and ongoing activities and so it's just really important for us to be able to understand the importance of communication.

**Lyn Wineman: 6:59**

Absolutely. So, Khalilah, you're obviously a very intelligent individual. You could have done a million things. What inspired you to pursue this work? I'm really curious how your journey into public health and communications began.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 7:16**

Oh, that's a very interesting question. So I actually got into communications because I was working on facing my own personal fear. And years ago, when I was very, very young, I was, as most people don't believe, painfully shy.

**Lyn Wineman: 7:38**

That is hard to believe, Khalilah, knowing you now.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 7:41**

It is hard to believe. I was very quiet and reserved and I looked up to people who had very positive outgoing energy, and so I wanted to have some of that too, one of which was my mom. Another one was this woman who started this TV show, and I remember coming home in junior high and seeing this woman who reminded me of me and it was Oprah Winfrey and I remember vividly saying I want to be like them. I loved how they were just so engaging of people. You know, once you got to know me, I like to talk, but I just was a little quiet. And so through my high school and college years, I really forced myself to participate in, like the class council, participate in organizations and activities that required me to be more engaging with people, to speak publicly, and I really was trying to face my own fears, and then I ended up getting into communications after a few years of being out of my undergraduate degree, which I thought I was going to study, psychology. I still highly recommend psychology for anyone.

**Lyn Wineman: 8:59**

Psychology and communications go hand in hand.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 9:04**

Yes, absolutely. I rely on so many of the tools and education that I had relative to psychology and communications, and so I thought I was going to be this, you know, psychologist. And then I graduated with an undergraduate degree in psychology and fashion merchandising. Merchandising and marketing Best class I ever had was called the social psychology of clothing, where I got to work with a psychology professor and one of my fashion professors, and it's really fascinating stuff about how people project themselves with what they wear and artifacts and things of that nature. But I worked five years and a lot of my jobs had me in these communications roles and so then I found myself deciding to go back to school for my master's and kind of having a little more understanding of what it is that I wanted to study, and so I moved forward with actually formally studying communications and have been in that world ever since.

**Lyn Wineman: 10:08**

Yeah, so much psychology and communications. I even think when you're communicating about public health, if you're trying to get people to change their behavior, I think a lot of psychology is required, because generally, if you tell somebody what to do, they resist right, and so you have to figure out like how can I woo you into this, right?

Am I gonna? You know, I know we don't want to drive people with fear, but sometimes fear or pain is what will inspire change. Sometimes hopefulness or impact or outcomes will inspire change. Sometimes, I suppose just the message of don't mess up this water or the oysters will be bad is the way to go right.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 10:58**

Absolutely, and part of it. What you're describing is just compelling. You know compelling people to act, but also you have to be a compelling storyteller educator.

Part of the education is to compel people, to get them to understand. It's not just because we don't want you to throw, you know, this plastic in the water. It is because if you throw this plastic in the

water, the oysters may impact it, you know, may ingest it. That could then be negative, have a negative impact on your food source, and so getting people to kind of drill down and compel them to understand and to act is part of what that work is.

**Lyn Wineman:** 11:42

That's fantastic. So, Khalilah, you talked about this journey that you've been on. I'm really curious how does your past experience shape the work that you're doing with public health leaders today?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 11:59

So I think that my experience shapes the work that I do, because I do walk into everything that I do when I wake up in the morning, it is very important for me to impact people in a positive way, to assist them with navigating again, challenges to make sure that we're providing the proper supports. Certainly, there's been a lot on the forefront of major emerging issues that relate to public health, and so making sure that I'm abreast of the resources and tools out there so that we can provide that information to the states and territories that are in need, in turn, for them to be able to support the publics that they, you know, are trying to continue to keep healthy and to keep informed is really important. And when you think about that interconnectedness being able to inform folks at you know, in a timely manner with credible information, and to navigate through some of the challenges and kind of you know, work, through some of the muddiness that can surround any one issue. It's really important to make sure public health is seen and viewed in a way that again back to my original work, that compels people to be educated and to be motivated to act.

**Lyn Wineman:** 13:36

Absolutely so, Khalilah, one of the things I came across as I was preparing to talk to you is a note that said ASTHO uses modernized data practices to improve health outcomes and make health information more accessible. I'm really curious to hear more about that.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 13:57

Yes, ASTHO has been embarking on data modernization efforts as well as many entities, but our data modernization efforts really help to inform decision making based on data. Again, credible data, accurate data and looking at how we can look at particular trends and how that can then translate down to actions and decision-making at a state and local level.

And so, as we have continued to embark in our efforts related to data modernization, it's just really important for us to share these practices, to continue to have modernized data mechanisms so that that data can be accurate and timely. Certainly, from the COVID pandemic, I don't think many of us can remember a lot of life or can talk about life before. We talked about it before and after COVID, highlighted some of the areas where there was a lack of data modernization and there really needed to be some infrastructure that related to that, and so during the 22 legislative sessions, there were some laws that were enacted that helped to support some of the data modernization efforts, and so we are just working with various states and working within our own agency to undergird those efforts and to make sure that we can tell a compelling story with using data and accurate data.

**Lyn Wineman: 15:38**

Khalilah, I imagine, as I hear you describing this, and I think about getting data from 50 different states across all kinds of things, all different safety determinants, I've got to imagine that could really be a messy tangle of information if you didn't have some structure to that process.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 16:07**

Absolutely. You know structure, and there's a keen focus on privacy that is in place as well, because you do have to be mindful that, while data is important to utilize for the purposes of decision making in a number of health factors and social determinants, it is also very important to keep people's privacy at the forefront, and so part of that data modernization is also making sure that laws are being abided by and practices are being employed to ensure that, to ensure you know that identifiable information is, you know, removed, that you're using platforms that have high security and you're again modernizing those practices to make sure that, as things you know are more digitally accessible, that the privacy is intact.

**Lyn Wineman: 17:07**

That is a really good point. So, Khalilah, the organization's been around for 80 years. You're modernizing, you're doing new things. I'm curious what are the exciting new things that might be coming up in the future for ASTHO?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 17:23**

Sure, I think there are some exciting things that are coming down the pipeline always. We are working on a number of projects, one of which I kind of mentioned storytelling and telling a compelling story, one of which that I'm very heavily involved in is a storytelling effort with our states and our territories, making sure and this is kind of coming on the heels of COVID but telling compelling stories about what people, you know, how people were impacted from their health departments, what infrastructure went into place to make sure that people could be safely taken care of and so that information would get out to them in, again, a timely and efficient manner. And so I'm really looking forward to being able to use some innovative practices to tell a compelling story, to articulate kind of, as you know, a retrospective, looking back to see, kind of from what's we've come. That's very exciting to me, and so I'm just looking ahead at how we can use so many innovations. You know social media and there's so many different platforms that are going to be instrumental in how we tell the story. I think it will be compelling to look at how AI will impact public health.

**Lyn Wineman: 18:52**

Absolutely.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.: 18:53**

That is going to be something that is here to stay, how we can utilize it to our ability, to the best of our ability, and use it in a way that provides fidelity and helps to ensure that public health practices are

instituted and that we're helping, you know, every single person that we possibly can, and so I'm just looking forward to what's on the horizon in the realm of public health.

**Lyn Wineman:** 19:25

I love that. You and I both, as communications professionals, know that you can give somebody something that's very straightforward a list of bullet points, or you can give them a story, and what they will remember is the story. Stories can be so impactful right, but yet there's some art to telling the story in a way that people can remember.

But also in a way that fits all these mediums like when you're thinking social media you've got to go very short. But then you can go to a website or YouTube and you can go longer, because there's a lot of research that says, hey, once you've piqued someone's interest and they're into the topic, they will watch something longer. But then some people like to read or some people like to watch videos quietly, with captions, and then there's the language barriers and working on the languages or the accessibility. So all of the new technology makes it great to get those stories out, but also add some complexity in the storytelling as well, which makes your role even that much more important. And then you add AI on top of that and that kind of just boggles my mind a little bit, because while it will make some tasks in public health communications so much more efficient, there's also the risk of where does that information go, and we all still know that some of what comes out of artificial intelligence is just completely randomly made up. And how does the public understand the difference between the two? Yeah, so much packed in there.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 21:18

So much, so much. And yeah, when you talk about modalities, it made me think about you know, just so many things that we do in ASTHO. We have, you know, telling the story or telling compelling stories and sharing information. Out, we have a short form morning newscast that's our public health morning edition and it's five minutes. People start their day with it and it gives them kind of you know, the latest and greatest on hot topics related to public health. But we also have some long form podcasts that do blogs. We're using all of those modalities and still trying to learn, you know, emerging modalities so that we can be on the forefront of sharing information within this public health space and the ways in which people want to get that information.

**Lyn Wineman:** 22:03

All right, Khalilah, you are going to laugh at this because we are on a podcast. Your organization's doing a lot of podcasts. I'm listening to podcasts and doing podcasts and interviews on other podcasts all the time. The first time somebody mentioned the concept of a podcast to me, I was like that's crazy. Who would want to do that? Right? And now there's so many podcasts and there's, you know, and people can listen to them however they want. You know, I'm even surprised this podcast we've had over 220 episodes. Just the other week, somebody went back to the very beginning, in 2020. And I can see it in our data. Somebody's starting to listen to the episodes from 2020. And they're still like getting listenership because they're all very evergreen. But it's just interesting. So you wonder, two years from now, five years from now, like, what will be the next thing that somebody says we should do this and I'm like you're crazy, who would want to do that? And then everybody. The answer is everybody wants to do that many times a day.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 23:15

Yeah, that is so true, and you know I find it fascinating. I was very much like you when people started talking about podcasts and it's like you're listening to people talk about different topics. Well, that's a talk show, but why would I want to listen to regular people talk about these topics?

And then as I started to understand it more, to see it more, especially in the role of which I'm in now, and ASTHO has done just an excellent job at, and the team of their public health review renditions of various podcasts. I'm like, wow, this is really pretty, pretty interesting and this is neat, and so it is fascinating and I'm curious to see, like, what will this evolve to in the next two to three years, because I certainly remember you know the podcast. You heard one or two of them at first and then the next thing you know pretty much all you need is a microphone and some audio equipment and everybody can do their own podcast, and there's some that really have some, you know, unique slants. I'm starting to get recommendations on personal finance podcasts to listen to and things of that nature, and so you know the True Crime podcast, oh, my gosh

**Lyn Wineman:** 24:30

All right, I have to tell you, too, when I'm not listening to this podcast, I listen to sleep podcast, like podcasts that are very specifically for you to go to sleep. Right, that's maybe too much personal information there, but I mean, but it just goes to show you there's literally-

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 24:47

It's fascinating the genres.

**Lyn Wineman:** 24:49

Right Podcasts for everything. So, Khalilah, for our listeners who have been tuning into this, maybe I know we have some listeners that are preventionists and public health professionals, but for those that aren't really in the field, I want to ask if you have any advice for just regular people to make an impact in advocating for public health.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 25:37

Yes, I would say that your local public health departments are wonderful resources. And so engage with them as much as you can of yourself. I would say make sure that you're doing your own research and looking into credible sources. And just remembering that every single day, like personal health is public health. You taking care of yourself, you making sure that you are as healthy as you possibly can be whether that's from making sure that you're exercising and eating healthy, but also to make sure that you're caring for your mental health.

There are just so many avenues that public health is involved in at this point, and so I just encourage people to engage with their local public health departments, because they have such valuable resources that can truly enhance someone's quality of life.

**Lyn Wineman:** 26:14



That's fantastic. So, Khalilah, for anybody who'd like to learn more about ASTHO, maybe find that five-minute daily report that you've got. What is the best way for them to find out more information?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 26:29

Yes, I would say if they go to our website, that would be a best way to engage with the organization and that website is ASTHO.org and from there they can sign up to hear from our podcast. You can go onto the website. They can sign up to get the podcast daily. They can go on the app store whether you're an Apple user or an Android user, sign up and they can look for Public Health Review Morning Edition and sign up for those podcasts.

**Lyn Wineman:** 27:11

That's fantastic, Khalilah. For anybody who maybe didn't get those down, we'll make sure to have those links in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well for anybody who's looking for them. All right, Khalilah, are you ready to go on the hot seat, because I'm going to ask you my favorite question next.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 27:29

Yes, I think I am.

**Lyn Wineman:** 27:32

All right, I have asked this question in every episode. It's my favorite question because I feel so lucky that I get to speak to inspirational people like you, and people who listen know that I am inspired by motivational quotes and what I want is an original Dr Khalilah LeGrand quote to share with our listeners.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 27:57

All right. Well, my original quote, and again, maybe I got it from somebody, I don't know, but I say this often. I've said it when I was a professor. I say it every day in my own or very much in my own personal life, on a regular basis, and say it to people all the time. But it's keep swimming, keep on swimming. And it's funny because I really do think that it's kind of a little bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy, because I am one person who cannot swim. But I am committed to learning how to swim. But you know, figuratively, I do say to myself to keep swimming, because I think if you just keep focusing and keep swimming, you will get to where you need to go. And that has been a mantra that I've said to myself quite often, on a regular basis. And again, one day I am going to truly learn how to swim.

**Lyn Wineman:** 28:47

I do believe that. I believe that. Anybody who went from a quiet childhood to the outgoing personality that you are today can definitely learn to swim. And, Khalilah, just to top off this conversation, what I want to say is, while you're swimming, be thankful that your public health officials made sure that water is clean for you, right?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 29:11

Absolutely, yes, yes, absolutely.

**Lyn Wineman:** 29:16

Khalilah, I have loved this conversation and, as we wrap up this time together today, my last question is what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 29:32

I think the most important thing to remember is that there are people that are truly committed to making sure everyday citizens have the support that they need and that they are undergirded with the education and the resources that they need to make their communities safe. And if you just engage with your public health officials and make sure that you are educating yourself, you will find some of the most hardworking and committed individuals ever in one career field.

**Lyn Wineman:** 30:09

That's fantastic. I think the motto of the story is hug your public health official today.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 30:18

Yes, public health thank you day is coming up very soon, so I encourage you to thank your local public health officials on that day.

**Lyn Wineman:** 30:26

That's fantastic. I didn't even know there was that day. Well, Khalilah, I'm going to wrap up here by thanking you, because I truly believe the world needs more people like you and more organizations like ASTHO that are keeping us healthy. Thank you so much for taking time to talk with us today.

**Khalilah LeGrand, Ed.D.:** 30:46

Absolutely. Thank you so much, Lyn. It's been my pleasure.

**Announcer:** 30:50

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