

Agency for Change Podcast: Danette O'Connell, Founder and Executive Director, The Nonprofit Cooperative

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Danette O'Connell: 0:01

When we lift each other up, we all rise higher.

Announcer: 0:07

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: 0:22

Hey everyone, welcome back to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. This is Lyn Wineman. I am the founder and chief strategist of KidGlov, so glad to have you joining us today, and today's episode is a special one for my nonprofit friends as well as anybody who's looking to start a movement, because I am talking today with Danette O'Connell. She is the founder and executive director of The Nonprofit Cooperative, which is a really cool organization that provides free resources for nonprofits, and she would have me underscore that that everything she does for nonprofits is absolutely free. Plus, she has, from scratch, started this movement that helps and serve nonprofits, and she's a great example for any of my impact leaders out there that are looking to do something similar. So enjoy this conversation, Danette. Welcome to the podcast.

Danette O'Connell: 1:33

Thank you for having me, so excited to be here.

Lyn Wineman: 1:36

I'm glad you're here too, because I think you have put together an amazing organization, and I'd love to have you start by telling us more about The Nonprofit Cooperative.

Danette O'Connell: 1:49

Wonderful. So The Nonprofit Cooperative is a membership organization where we provide nonprofit associates, which are members, free resources. Everything we do is free to nonprofits and we also have businesses that serve the nonprofit community as our members and they help support the organizations financially.

Lyn Wineman: 2:12

That's great, you know. I'm really proud to say, Danette, that you and I were able to connect several months ago and KidGlov is a business member of the nonprofit cooperative and I've seen you doing your work and sharing with nonprofits so many great tools. I'm curious your perspective why is it so important to give our nonprofits those free resources?

Danette O'Connell: 2:39

So it's very important that nonprofits get free resources, because whenever you join a council or a local community, they charge nonprofits to become members and then charge them for training and charge them for networking, and those come out of unrestricted funds and unrestricted funds are so hard for nonprofits to obtain, so then they're spending it on membership. So we wanted to create a platform where all their training, their collaboration, their networking everything is 100% free and provide them some valuable insight on how to run their organization.

Lyn Wineman: 3:23

You know, Danette, I think what you said there is so real and all of the nonprofits who are listening I'm sure really, really understand what you just said. That unrestricted gift, those unrestricted funds are so hard to generate and most of the nonprofits I know they really work so hard to lean into their mission. They want every dollar they can spend on that mission to go in that direction. So you coming together and providing those free resources really then frees up more funds to go to that mission and I love that. You know, Danette, I'm curious because this number always changes. It seems like every time I talk to you your membership base is really growing. How many nonprofits are you up to?

Danette O'Connell: 4:17

Right now we are up to 1,633.

Lyn Wineman: 4:21

That's amazing. That's a lot of nonprofit members to have in your organization, so think about the ripple effect as well of all of the people that they are serving. So we were talking a bit about free resources and I'm curious right now, what are some of the key resources or strategies that are making the biggest impact right now with nonprofits?

Danette O'Connell: 4:49

So our biggest impact program that we have is workshops, and workshops teach nonprofits from strategic planning all the way through hiring. So we go over strategic planning how to create a budget, how to present that budget to the board, how to build a board, how to get boards to fundraise, how to brand your organization, how to get your message out there and is that message really clear, because that's so super important and then we just teach them, like, how to hire people. Does everybody know they need DNO insurance? And so we just keep going through technology and fundraising and so we keep going through those. So they're a year long program and we have two tracks one for grassroots organizations and one for more advanced so that you know, everybody is on the same playing field.

Our other is our private social network. It is a I call it our own little Facebook and only our members can be part of it and be able to collaborate with each other. So we really promote collaboration. So, because nonprofits are better when they're able to collaborate with others, we can make a larger impact that way. That is our second largest and we have a lot of networking opportunities for them to meet each other and get to know each other and help solve problems. We have round, peer to peer roundtables, so we have them for just executive directors, we have them for leadership and we have them for board members, so we're hitting everybody in the nonprofit organization.

Lyn Wineman: 6:33

I love that. You know I get to talk to so many different people in the nonprofit world and one thing I have learned that I think you are helping to solve is nonprofit work can be both overwhelming but also very lonely, like there's very few places you can go to learn how to be a nonprofit executive director, or to learn how to be a nonprofit marketer or a development director, and so having these roundtables and peer-to-peer experiences and workshops where sometimes I think just knowing that you're not alone, because when you're in the middle of a challenge, it feels like I must be the only one in the world having this challenge. And then I got to imagine, Danette, you're bringing people together and it's like, oh wow, others have done this, others have solved this, others want to share their experiences with me, and I love that you make that available.

Danette O'Connell: 7:32

And that is what our roundtables are all about, and that's why they're peer to peer is so that executive directors can openly talk and they share their experiences with each other and they're from some of them are from the East Coast. Some of them are from the West Coast, which is nice that they're able to share their experience, because sometimes their experience is different depending on their culture, and that they can talk openly in these round tables on how they solve that problem, regardless of what the problem is.

So we have different topics. Every time we have one and we do it for leadership also, so that the higher ups, you know, aren't there and they can talk openly. And then for board members. You know we're teaching them how to be a board member, what are your fiduciary responsibilities, how to read a 990. So it's important to have those you know and to be able to you know them, for them to ask questions without you know nonprofit leaders being there, so you know, it's always nice to have those, yeah.

Lyn Wineman: 8:33

You know, I've got to think I've got a long career now. Danette and I've served on a lot of boards, but I think the first couple I had no idea what I was doing, right, somebody said, oh, would you be on our board? And I said, oh, I love that nonprofit, yes, I'll come be on that board, without really understanding. So I love that you add the board training to both for the board members. But also, I think it's hard for a nonprofit to teach their board members this is what you're supposed to do, and this is what you're signing up for. So I love that.

Danette O'Connell: 9:10

Yeah, and sometimes the EDs don't know either. They invite people to be on their board, but they don't know really what their fiduciary responsibility of being to the board and you have to answer the IRS on that one. So you know we see that also.

Lyn Wineman: 9:29

Nice, I bet you do. So tell me, Danette, how did you get involved in this? You know you're the founder, how did you come up with the idea? How did it grow? I'm really curious what your journey has been.

Danette O'Connell: 9:41

So I've been serving nonprofits for over 20 years and one of the pain points that I kept seeing is that councils of the world keep charging nonprofits and then, which is so frustrating, not only are you paying for the membership, you're paying for the training and then for networking, but also so we've taken this concept of that and said we're going to do this for free. And you know we've taken it one step further is, if you're looking for an accountant and you go to their website, there's 20 different accountants. Well, how do you know which ones are good?

We don't have a lot of each category. Everybody's exclusive to their industry per zone, so that we are making sure that there's not 20 accountants, but we vet everybody for free. That's what we do for the nonprofits is that everyone goes through a vetting process. It's a three-step process and then they're able to serve the nonprofit community. So that's who does all of our training is our members, and so you're hearing from experts in the industry and all of our members have served, majority of their book of business is serving nonprofits.

So they understand the nonprofits and so, which is wonderful, like yourself, you serve the nonprofit community and you do that very well by the way. So we like to have members like yourself to come in there and educate our nonprofits to have the better resources so that the nonprofits aren't spending time and money doing it. We've already done this for you. Just choose one of our vetted members. We call them trusted members because we trust them. We put our reputation on these members.

Lyn Wineman: 11:37

You know, Danette, it is really sad for me to see a nonprofit who goes to a service provider of any kind, whether it's, you know, obviously, marketing and branding is my area of experience but whether it's legal, whether it's accounting, that doesn't understand right, and then they've spent their money, they've spent their time and you know, you kind of get into the process and you spend quite a bit of money and time before you realize, oh, this person doesn't, or this firm doesn't, understand nonprofits. So that's really a great resource. And I'm going to say too, having been a business member now for some time, when the business members get together monthly and we talk, the one thing that really strikes me is the other business members like KidGlov are they are very passionate about serving nonprofits, and none of these service providers get into the business of serving nonprofits because they think that's the fastest way to make profit. They do it because they too have a heart to serve and want to make an impact on the world too.

So I do have to say my experience is the business members are a pretty cool group of people, so I know one of the big things you have coming up, Danette, that I'm excited about is in a couple of weeks you have the Nonprofit Fundraising Summit. Can you tell us more about that?

Danette O'Connell: 13:07

Yes, so we have. The Nonprofit Fundraising Summit is March 18th, 19th and 20th, and the Nonprofit Fundraising Summit was created to help nonprofits think outside that box and come up with creative ways to fundraise.

As we know with our government right now that funding may become really scarce, and so what we want to do is make sure that all nonprofits are diversifying their fundraising. And so we are giving so many different ways of fundraising and we're hearing from experts of the industry. So we have Girl Scouts USA talking about how they do their fundraising. And so we have Meredith Mascara, who you know started out at a regional and then she's raised so much money they took her to the corporate. And we also have John Miller with Guide Dog and how he has been able to grow that nonprofit.

And we have all of our members who work in fundraising and branding, on creating ways to fundraise but making sure that your message is really clear whenever you do that fundraising, because if your message and your branding isn't clear, then you're going to struggle to raise funds. And people sometimes don't connect those dots. They think, well, if I have a good mission and I just go out there and keep asking for money, they're going to give it to me. If they don't understand your mission and what you're doing through your messaging, then you're not going to be able to fundraise. And these are the things that we really want to get through to nonprofits.

Lyn Wineman: 14:51

Danette, you are singing my song right there. I mean, we are so passionate about that and I'm really excited to be able to be part of your speaker lineup. And my topic is brand raising, which, for us, is leveraging your brand to raise more funds, and I think right now, that's as important as it ever has been, and one of the great statistics that's available is that having a strong and consistent brand can help you increase your fundraising by as much as 23%, and you know who wouldn't like that right now. Or, on the flip side, you know, not having a strong and consistent message A. could help you be could end up with you being lost. It could end up with your message not resonating. But, even further, it could even end up with people wondering is your message fraudulent? Is it even? Because there are now fraudulent messages out there too, and inconsistencies make people wonder is this really working the way I want. So thank you for saying that I'm so excited about the conference. I'm assuming that, like everything else you do for nonprofits, is the conference free to nonprofits?

Danette O'Connell: 16:11

It is free for nonprofits. It's free to anyone. All businesses, future business members can come, nonprofits. So whoever would like to attend, you're more than welcome to attend, and that is also free. And we'll also have another one in the fall. We have them in the spring and we have them in the fall. And we'll have a technology and operations one in May or June we haven't come up with a date yet, but that will be how to analyze and look at all of your technology, because now these days, you know, we use 10 different platforms.

So, how are they overlapping and how do you analyze them and how do you get them to work with efficiency?

Lyn Wineman: 17:00

Wow, what a big topic. So everyone keep a lookout for that technology and operations conference to be announced. We even Danette, I have to say, at KidGlov, we even went through over the last couple of years a process where we said the same thing. We've got so many different technology resources we're using and they're not talking to each other, so therefore we're not as efficient or comprehensive as we could be, and so I know firsthand what it can do for you to really get that technology working for you. It's almost freeing in a way, but it's kind of overwhelming if that's not your background, right.

Danette O'Connell: 17:42

Exactly.

Lyn Wineman: 17:43

So, Danette, somebody who's considering attending the nonprofit fundraising summit coming up March 18th, 19th and 20th how do we get them signed up?

Danette O'Connell: 17:56

So if you go to our homepage, which is www.thenonprofitcooperative.org there's a right on our homepage. There's a link. You'll see it. There's a big advertisement on there for it. Just click on the link register. Every person who attends the nonprofit fundraising summit will get a 30 day free subscription free subscription to donor search so you can search all the donors you want for 30 days and we'll be raffling off some really great things. Grant Station will be raffling off their subscription. We have gift cards, we have books, we have services. We have all kinds of fun things to raffle off every day. At the end of the day we will be during the closing remarks we will be raffling off all of our free stuff.

Lyn Wineman: 18:50

Awesome. I'm really excited. We're putting in some of KidGlov's new books that aren't even released to the public yet into that raffle as well. Danette, so excited about that. We'll also get that link in the show notes on the KidGlov website. So if you didn't get that written down, just pop into the show notes and you'll be able to click into that link. So, Danette, looking beyond this event and looking beyond what's coming up in the spring with the tech and operations in the fall, what else is going on with The Nonprofit Cooperative that you're excited about?

Danette O'Connell: 19:29

Really, the summits are really exciting for us. We will be having some board trainings coming up soon, which is always exciting, but the thing that excites me the most is the social entrepreneurship program.

So the social entrepreneurship program. We, yeah, tell me more so. The Social Entrepreneurship Program we're putting it together right now and that teaches nonprofits how to run their nonprofit like

a business. So nonprofit is a tax status and all nonprofits are businesses. That's why you have to register them with your state and then you go to the IRS to get the nonprofit status right. But at the very beginning and the core, all nonprofits are businesses and if they're not run like a business, they will struggle to grow, and so we want all nonprofits to grow right. So we are going to teach them how to do this and how to think like an entrepreneur and how to just simple tasks like put \$50 a month into your savings account for a rainy day.

So have a rainy day fund and you know, or if you're larger, how to invest it. So these things are really, really important. And some people say, well, we're living paycheck to paycheck, and I understand that, and the first couple years that is the way that it usually ends up, but after that it's really important to take the \$50. Start small \$25 a month, right, Put something away every single month, and that is going to really serve you. Just don't touch that money. Leave it there for a crisis.

Lyn Wineman: 21:09

Because someday you are going to have that crisis, whether it is you know a physical thing in your building, it is something that happens with an employee. Yeah.

Danette O'Connell: 21:24

Exactly. You will use it one day and so but and then the best thing to do is write down a criteria of when you would ever use that money. So and if it doesn't reach these criterias, then you don't touch that money. So create a list and we and we teach EDs, executive directors of nonprofits, on how to create a strategic plan and the importance of one. And I always say would you travel in your car across the whole United States without a map? That's running a nonprofit without a strategic plan.

So it says this is where I am, this is where I want to go and this is how I'm going to get there. It's your roadmap and so it doesn't have to be elaborate. I always say, like mine, six pages, like it doesn't have to be huge, but it's my roadmap. And did I reach my goals for the year? You know, some people say a three-year strategic plan? Absolutely not. They're fairy tales. One year, do year to year, but look at it throughout the year and am I on track? Do a timeline and show that timeline to your board members every single month. So it's things like this that there's small, simple tasks that you can do to. You know, get your, get your nonprofits to success.

Lyn Wineman: 22:42

What a great idea. That sounds like an amazing program. As a matter of fact, Danette. I'm going to talk to a couple people I have in mind that need to go through that program. So thanks for that. So, Danette, what advice would you give? I know we have got a lot of nonprofit listeners that listen to the Agency for Change podcast. What advice would you give to a nonprofit that's looking to strengthen their organization and take it to the next level?

Danette O'Connell: 23:11

If you want to strengthen your organization and get it to the next level. A. join The Nonprofit Cooperative.

Lyn Wineman: 23:17

I love it, do that.

Danette O'Connell: 23:19

Right and you know people are a little nervous about joining the nonprofit Like there's a catch. There is no catch. We will never charge you for anything. This is our way of giving back, so it's not scary and we're not going to do anything bad, like we've been around for years.

So it is safe to join, so please do so. But the biggest advice is really creating. The number one is creating that strategic plan. And you know, walk through that strategic plan. Not only is it good to have, but it really gets the person who is creating it through the workflow and getting everything that's in your head that you want to do on paper and then people can help you with it. And it takes you through the thought process oh, what about this? And what about that, it really takes you through how am I going to start, how am I going to do this, how am I going to grow and do branding? And do you know outreach and who am I going to serve and how many people do? I think that is like it takes you through that whole thought process when you go there.

We have a template where there's different questions that it'll ask you and you just write them down. That's all it is. Here's the question, write it down. Here's the next question, write it down and then, next thing, you know you have a strategic, but it really has you walking through. It's the foundation of every nonprofit and you have to have a strong foundation. If you don't have that strong foundation you're going to struggle to grow. It's just that's fact, right. Like no business is started without a strategic or a business plan, nonprofits have strategic plans.

Lyn Wineman: 25:00

That's such sage advice, Danette, I think from my experience working with nonprofits and even as a business owner. There's so many ideas and things you could say yes to, and you just get yourself completely overwhelmed from your own, your time standpoint, your staff focus, your financial resources. And having that strategic plan really can serve as that guiding light. So you know when to say yes because it aligns with where you're going, and when to say no because that might be an interesting or fun or different opportunity. But if it doesn't align and it's going to spread you too thin, you probably should be saying no. And the strategic plan is going to give you that yardstick. So you know yes, yes or no. So that's such great advice.

To add to that great advice, I'm going to ask you my favorite question next and, Danette, I think this is episode 235 for the Agency for Change. We've asked this question 235 times, but I am inspired by motivational quotes and I get to talk to such interesting people like you. I'm looking for a Danette O'Connell original quote to inspire our listeners.

Danette O'Connell: 26:22

So my quote is when we lift each other up, we all rise higher.

Lyn Wineman: 26:28

Oh, I love that, Danette. When we lift each other up, we all rise higher. You know what? It reminds me of my favorite quote, which is you can always tell the strongest person in the room because they're lifting others up, not pulling them down, others up, not pulling them down. And I think you are definitely a lifter of people, a lifter of purposes and a lifter of nonprofits, for sure. So, Danette, as we wrap up this lovely conversation today, the last question I'm going to ask you is what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Danette O'Connell: 27:09

Everything we do is free to nonprofits.

Lyn Wineman: 27:13

What a great message and there's no catch. I'm just going to say, having been involved with you now for many months, I see it and I feel it, and I feel the quality this organization brings to the world of nonprofits, so that's pretty great. Danette, I'm just going to say I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more, more organizations like The Nonprofit Cooperative. Thank you for the work that you're doing and the impact you're making, and it's been a joy to talk with you today.

Danette O'Connell: 27:47

Well, thank you so much for having me. I've really enjoyed my time here with you.

Lyn Wineman: 27:51

Absolutely, and everyone go sign up for that Nonprofit Fundraising Summit. We're going to have that link in the show notes so you can all make that happen.

Danette O'Connell: 28:05

Okay, well, thank you very much for having me it's been a pleasure and thank you for being such a supportive company of our organization. I really appreciate it.

Announcer:

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