

Cyreena Boston Ashby Awarepreneurs Interview

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SPEAKERS

Cyreena Boston Ashby, Paul Zelizer



Paul Zelizer 00:04

Hi, this is Paul Zelizer and welcome to another episode of The aware printers podcast. This podcast is all about the intersection of three things conscious business, social impact, and awareness practices. Each episode I do a deep dive interview with a thought leader in this intersection. Someone who has market tested experience that is already transforming many lives. Before I introduce today's guests in our topic, I've got one request. If you could go over to iTunes or whatever app you're listening to the show on and hit the subscribe button do rating really helps. Thanks for considering. Today I'm thrilled to introduce you to Serena Boston Ashby. And our topic is political entrepreneurship, and women in politics. Serena is a highly trained and evaluated C suite leader with 15 years experience in management, Community Affairs and government relations. In 2008, she ran for Oregon's House of Representatives when she was 20 Seven years old was the only woman and person of color in the race. She's one of the founders of the new political Consulting Group, shatter an all women political consulting company. Serena, welcome to the show.



01:12

Hi, thank you for having me.

P Paul Zelizer 01:14
So excited about what you're doing and what a fabulous time to be doing this. There's a few things going on with politics.

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 01:22
Yes, absolutely. Just say we're very good timing for us to be meeting with one another today. I'm very glad to be here.

P Paul Zelizer 01:30
So we're gonna get into this whole space in your work and how what even is political entrepreneurship that I didn't even know that was a thing and how that works and what you do, but before we do that were called the were printers. And one of the ways we like to get to know somebody Serena, is to ask you about a wellness or an awareness practice that you personally use to bring your best self bringing resilient self to this work day after day, week after week.

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 01:55
Sure. I'm glad to share. It's something I've developed in the past. Couple of years, or I've had to learn to disabuse myself of being gladdened by being too busy. And I had a few, a few seasons in my life where everything all at once was just so demanding. And so I instituted a practice from the training I received, which is you have to intellectually and physically stress yourself out every day. And so when we talk about stress, we don't talk about it in the good ways, right in the sense of just really pushing yourself to learn more and expand your capacity. But while I try every day to learn something new or make myself do something that's a bit more challenging, or to be physically active, every day, no matter what I make sure that I both mentally and spiritually recover myself. And that's either dedicated meditation or reading something or just having time For gratitude, and so I call it recovery. And that recovery might be five minutes, it might be a half an hour, it might sometimes only be 30 seconds just because of my life at that time. And so it's just called dedicated recovery. And that's something that I do to keep myself Well, every day.

P Paul Zelizer 03:19
What a beautiful practice. Thank you. So this whole idea of political entrepreneurship like didn't sound like you exactly started there you more started in more, some reading through your history, like Community Affairs and government relations and management.

Talk to us about like, your early professional work. And this whole idea of how to politics come on to three knows radar.

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 03:46

Sure. I'm glad to share them. So I am. My family moved to Oregon from back east when I was about nine years old and grew up with two parents that were very publicly involved in community affairs, racial justice work and also by association had relationships with elected officials. And so I grew up in a very active household. My father was a business leader. And you know, when I think of the work that you're sharing, and many of the people who have been on this, this podcast series series before me, there's so much synergy there. And so, in the 60s 70s, and 80s, my dad was a bit of an anomaly. He was a black man in corporate America working for national manufacturing companies and was, you know, usually the only black person in the entire company and certainly an executive leadership. And so, when the 80s came around, you know, my dad had had so many different great corporate stents, but was really yearning for something in his own name. And so he joined an effort that many card makers had entered into, which was an affirmative action program for women and minority dealers. Essentially increasing the amount of women specifically white women and people of color that own car dealerships across the country. And so Chrysler Dodge started their minority women dealer program and they invited my father into that program where you learn the makings of owning and running a car dealership. And so, for my dad, it was a great gateway into entrepreneurship that he took quite seriously. But of course, when you finish the program, you have to buy a dealership, and we were living in Syracuse, New York at the time, and they offered him a dealership for purchase in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which frankly, if you've been to either Syracuse or Milwaukee, you know, they're very cold places, very cold place,

P Paul Zelizer 05:38
places,

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 05:39

or a small town called Gresham, Oregon. And at one point, my dad worked for a bay area manufacturing company, and my parents had lived on the West Coast before I was born and my dad wanted to get back here. So you've made a trip out here without me or my mother and I have three older brothers and spent a couple of weeks in Oregon. Making What was really fascinating for him and endearing for him is that in Oregon, which is still very true to this day, in order to be a successful business leader, you have to be socially impactful. You have to be connected to the community that was very different than any of

his corporate experiences prior to and that was very meaningful to him. And that's what made him choose to purchase a dealership here. So just came up with a family that was very much business oriented. My father was an, you know, a business leader. He was an entrepreneur, but felt very guided by community impact and philanthropy. And I don't think that I knew it at the time, but it had quite a profound impact upon me. I'll also share with you though, that you know, upstate New York is very different than than the Northwest and I didn't grow up in the most diverse part of New York, but certainly was much more diverse than New York. I mean, excuse me than Oregon, specifically Portland. And I was one of those kids who could not wait to get out. to Oregon and go back east for college. And so, I did go to a historically black college in Atlanta, Georgia for women called Spelman College, a very illustrious institution had a wonderful education. But it was in the 2004 election that I really realized where my politics and my political center laid, which is very left of progressive democratic politics. So I made a return home. I first started working with kids when I returned here and realize that there was so there were so many different public policies that created a lack of safety net for vulnerable children, especially black and children of color children below the income line. And when I changed my voter registration back to that of an Oregon voter, I reached out to the Democratic Party of Oregon. And to be very frank, I told them that I thought that they sucked and that they did not care about communities that I worked with. And about two or three weeks later, they offered me a job and I'm it's been Quite a run ever since then. So I worked for the Democratic National Committee in 2006, as a director at the state party here in Oregon, and had a chance to work on a lot of coordinated campaigns. And, you know, that's also what inspired me to run for office myself. I ran for state representative in 2008. And I was 27. At the time, the first African American woman to be elected to the Oregon senate retired after 25 years of service. And so my state rep ran for her senate seat and so I created an open house seat for the Oregon State of representatives. And there were 14 people interested in the seat because it was an open seat, a primary only race, and the rest of them either moved to other districts to run unopposed, or the rest perhaps came to their senses and realize this was going to be a tough Feat. So there were three of us left that ran and was just such a remarkable accent. experience for me in terms of understanding how to be an entrepreneur myself. And what I mean by that is, you know, when you do something courageous like that, you know, when you decide to run for office, which is very hard, and it's, you know, personally, you know, you are out there with your own values, your own life, you're working very hard every day to knock on doors, raise money, connect with voters, convince political action committees and unions and institutions to support you. It's very difficult, but you're also having to be an entrepreneur. And you know, thinking very deeply about what that means in terms of your own personal brand, how you communicate with others, and how you evolve your leadership technique. And I will tell you that may be different than other candidates. I looked at it very much in that way. Not to be self centered, but as a learning opportunity for me to expand my

leadership skills and to understand more about the field of politics but certainly executive leadership. And there is not much of a literal correlation between politics and executive leadership. And there should be because regardless of what your politics are, and your I would say your political alignments, or your party affiliation or what have you, if we look at American politics today, I think we recognize more than ever, that sound leadership is really critical. And so that opportunity, though I did not win my election, opened up many other doors for me whether I worked for elected officials or lobbied I've served on numerous boards of directors, and then I've been a nonprofit executive myself. And so you know, today, I have two day jobs. I'm a partner within a national consulting firm that's dedicated to public affairs. We do have a political line of service at times, and then we have a side firm a complementary firm, which is separate itself in a way which is called shatter, and that is the women firms. The women partners at my firm where I am employed hilltop public solutions have opened shatter as a dedicated firm working with women and diverse candidates and organizations across the country who are interested in transforming women and diverse politics. And so that's just a way to share about how I got to where I'm at. And you know, how I've been exposed to the idea of political entrepreneurship.

P

Paul Zelizer 11:30

And I want to unpack that all and talk about what it looks like. Now before we do that. Like in 2008, when you ran, you're the only woman you're the only person of color and between 2008 and when we're doing this episode of 2020 and August, we've seen some changes right? We've got AOC is you know now and national representative, we've got the squad, which she's sometimes part of, we just just was a yesterday or the day before that Kamala Harris was Joe Biden's pick for vice president on the Democratic ticket. We have seen some changes, but like what's been your experience on the ground in the past 12 years, from when you ran a 27 year old and the only woman and the only person of color to some of these changes that we're hearing nationally, and we're hearing that more women are running than ever before is? Have you seen that? And what kind of what has that opened up? And how is it different in 2020?

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12:31

Sure.

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 12:32

I for me, and I don't know if it's only just because I started my career Around this time, I

look at 2008 as being a game changer, in terms of diverse politics for women and anyone else. And so in 2008, you know, after the Bush administration, we had so many primary candidates on the Democratic side, and I know we look at what we just had now where we had several, you know, primary campaigns leading up to this election, right. But in 2008, we had very many as well. And so you know, as early as 2006, you had declared Democratic candidates, you had Edwards, Richardson, Hillary Clinton, you have this young person that nobody really knew a lot about, which was Barack Obama. You have many, many, you know, contenders that were interested in running, including Biden, of course. And so I look back at that time where we had a very deep bench of primary challengers that were interested in landing the Democratic ticket. At that time, it was also not only numerous, it was extremely diverse. And for the first time in American politics, we had a primary election that included a Hispanic so George Richardson, of course, from, you know, New Mexico, a woman, Hillary Clinton and African American, Barack Obama. And what that meant is that all the political institutions, the American public cells were engaged by people from diverse backgrounds and those topics became actual, literal political topics. And we never went back from that. And certainly electing a black president transformed many things in terms of who gets hired to work in a cabinet who gets hired to populate the staff of an administration. But certainly just the political field was enriched with a lot more diversity. This also inspired more diverse candidates to run for office, including women coming into the President's reelection, President Barack Obama, same thing, but then, you know, certainly, you know, thereafter, when Hillary Clinton was ran for president against Donald Trump, it also brought to the forefront that even though we had a black candidate prior to her run, that women in politics experienced very specific things when they are running for president. And so it certainly unpacked all of the misogyny the SEC ism. And many of the other issues that confront the American culture and social construct, and of course she lost. And now with, you know, this the tenure of President Trump, there has been so many things that have come to the forefront, including the Black Lives Matter movement, the me to movement, where you do see an even deeper amount of persons, especially women who are wanting to run for office. And, you know, I think in 2020, we're seeing a lot of, I think, more well rounded and complex conversations around America. There is I think, in astuteness, that, you know, national politics need more diversity, and that we do need a person in the White House in my opinion, who is anti white supremacy, anti white, anti racism, that is willing to look at the United States as being A place that has a strong economy, a place where people can have education, a place where there's opportunity for all. But it is important to the presidency that we do those things yet. And still, there's so many other things outside of the American electoral system that are important. And that is, you know, really community organizing and supporting other institutions outside of politics to be more diverse, too. And so, you know, we are in a very, I believe, historic and critical place in America where, you know, we have to look at American politics as being one way to solve

for our problem, but also community organizing and other other spaces need to be enriched to. I'm inspired. Actually, I know many people are feeling very discouraged right now. You know, the the murders of Ahmad arbery, Briana Taylor, George Floyd COVID-19 certainly have all of us very rattled and discouraged but I'm actually quite engaged and encouraged right now because I do see many people stepping up to the plate. courageously, you know, Senator Kamala Harris is an exciting force. And it's been interesting to look at the news coverage surrounding her as the vice president choice for for, for Joe Biden and his presidential bid. And how people have you either, like criticized her as a woman, as a black woman as a black person, or as a person of black and South Asian descent. But I'm, I'm really excited for her and I'm excited for this campaign season.

P

Paul Zelizer 17:30

So let's, we have some really skillful entrepreneurs. I'm so impressed by who's our listeners are, but I don't think many of them have much of a sense of the political landscape as a as a space, right? So we're gonna talk about like what you all do, but first, just kind of give us a layout, like how traditionally has political consulting worked, and then we're going to talk about how shadow is doing it differently, but like, I don't think our audience would have as much knowledge about this before. As many other spaces,

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 18:01

yeah, glad to explain. And it's such a good question because it's not anything that's widely discussed, which is a problem because it's not as much of a known industry, which I don't believe attracts a lot of talent and diversity because of that. So political consulting can be in a few spaces and places. So you may have political consulting firms. And those firms are made up of folks that are founders or Prince, our partners or principals, and they come from political backgrounds. So either they were grassroots organizers, or they were political organizers for campaigns when they started their careers and in their in college or in their 20s. So they worked for a candidate and they did that person's voter engagement campaign, so they did their door knocking strategy, their vote, you know, their Direct Mail, Contacts, contacts. They helped do their polling, they did things of that nature, and they just started off their career, working for a variety different candidates and working on campaigns. That's usually how a political professional builds their experience. And then they get a lot of wins under their belt, usually that are very prominent and they become very respected political technicians in their field and might be in a local context, right, specific to a city or statewide context or then ultimately, nationally, and you know, you meet people, you network, you joined together on efforts, and you win together or you lose together and that becomes your network of people that you've worked with over time. And often, that's how firms are founded. They're founded by

people who have worked together, and they offer something to the political fold. And usually, you know, political consulting firms will offer guidance and strategy on for candidates running for office for institutions that are looking to put ballot measures on a ballot, to change laws or to create different types. Some laws, let's say bond measures for public funding for, you know entities levees, things of that kind political consultants usually work in strategy. Or they might do the nuts and bolts such as planning. They also can offer a variety of other services, creating direct mail, which advertises for a candidate or a campaign. They can offer phone services for voter contact polling, there's lines of service that a firm will offer. There's also something called public affairs, which is usually not associated and there's often a firewall between those that line of work, where you work, we'll work with corporations, nonprofits, public institutions, such as higher ed school districts, you name it, to help with anything that they need to engage with the public. That could be earned media, public relations, crisis, communications, strategic planning, perhaps executive coaching with their leaders. Just ways in which to interact. It may not be direct lobbying, but to interact with elected officials. It could be the federal delegation. So sometimes you could have a national client that is looking to get some federal legislation changed or processed. But they need a few members of Congress that are their key focus. And they will look for a firm in a state that has a relationship with those, either that US senator or that Congress person. And they will retain that firm to speak with that person staff to do either direct lobbying or grassroots lobbying towards their effort. And so political consultants live in that world. And if they're in a firm, their firm is geared in that way. And much like other, you know, entrepreneurs, it does involve a rigorous amount of business development. And like with all entrepreneurs, there is that trade off or I would say that practice To where you're managing the business side of things. So understanding, you know, how to have revenue and expenses, how to manage your time and do business development. But then when you're assigned to projects and you've landed a client, and it's a big client, and you've put your employees on the project, and you're running the project yourself, how do you do your work, manage the business and do business development at the same time. And in politics, whether it's an even year during the election season or an odd year, it's going to be busy all the way around. And it is sometimes a bit of not necessarily feast and famine or famine, but you are often always on you're trying to kind of stay ahead in order of you know, in order to just, you know, see where business is coming into play. And you know, like in any industry, you have competitors and so, you know, differentiating yourself is always going to be very important. And so some in the political landscape might be more right leaning. So they are led by those who are registered Republicans who have strong relationships with members of Congress or a state, a legislative body that are Republicans, they work more on perhaps typical conservative issues. And then you have some that are very moderate. And then you have some that are very democratic. And I would say, though, that in the world of politics, especially related to public affairs, there tends to be a balance, although

some are much more known to be partisan, and very specific on their issues, which can be a differentiator. And so, you know, today, you know, there are many sole proprietors that run their own businesses, so they're for hire, they might work with a candidate, they might work with an institution, but then there are firms such as mine, which are medium sized, that are all across the country that you know, we may work on things locally. But then also may roll up to a national effort depending on what's going on. Thanks for that explanation

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Paul Zelizer 24:05

screen, I really appreciate it. So like, just to get a sense of the lay of the land if there was like a convention, or you went to a, you know, regional meeting where there were a lot of people in the political consulting space and you go back 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, you walked in the room and just looked around, what would you notice in that room?

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 24:26

Oh, I'm laughing. It's such a great question. I'll go back to 2006. So in 2006, when I had my first quote, unquote, big girl job in politics, it coincided with the DNC, the Democratic National committees winter meeting, and that's when all the presidential the known presidential primary candidates came to speak. So you know, it was Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, Richardson, Joe Biden, Barack Obama campaign. I'm sure there were others and everybody was so excited. Looking forward. To the to the 2007 primary, the oae general election is going to be a big deal yet and still, pretty much everyone that was in the room that was a general consultant nationally, or even locally in their town were white men. When I ran for office in 2008, when a candidate is looking to build out their campaign, they usually will need two things. They will need a general consultant who will help them develop their strategy, and all the different facets of their campaign, how to design your mail, how to design you know, your website, the institutions in which you will need to meet, and then a fundraising plan. Then you'll hire a campaign manager who mostly just implements that schedules, you help you, you know, design and build your events, all of those things. When I ran for office in Oregon at the time, which was still About the case, I'd say we had about five or six known democratic general consultants, all of them white, one woman who I admire greatly, but was more merging her career into a different direction. And none of them except for one of them would work with me. Not only would they not work with me, they made it very difficult for me. And you know, being 27 being a woman being black, I was already very vulnerable, even though I had a lot of political experience and strong relationships, and who your consultant is also does set a tone in the opposition, and also will attract certain people to you. And so, you know, at the time, there was no diversity. Over time, though, we have seen a change and so if you, you know, 10

years ago in 2010, you probably still would have seen general consultants still being white men, but Oh, Over time, we have seen a great difference. Some of it is that some of these older white men have retired frankly. And then also there have been other women like me who went in the direction of professional politics, and just kind of kicked the door wide open and built up their own perspective and their own line of work. Certainly, again, candidates like Hillary Clinton AOC you know, all the different different diverse candidates that you know have been elected. lately. They also helped with inspiring that and making space for for that conversation and professionals. But you know, I would say today, you will see more black indigenous people of color as political professionals as consultants. You will see more firms either owned or managed by these professionals, but it is still a struggle, and it is still not the norm whatsoever.

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Paul Zelizer 27:56

Oh, nasty, more about chatter and why you started it and how you do things differently. Before we do that soon, I just want to give a shout out to our sponsors. But we're printers a little different than a lot of other podcasts. We don't have like a website service or a meal delivery plan or something like that. We are a community supported podcast. It's called the aware printers community. And we have over 300 members and what we do in our printers is we somebody has a business in the space, you need a website, we've got, I don't know five different six different people who build sites that understand these kind of businesses and your Facebook ad strategist. We have a LinkedIn pod, we have two of them actually 12 to 15 people and we're kind of helping each other get our profiles so that they're really resonant and strong and learn how to use LinkedIn. We have an Instagram pod really get into we have a podcast success team, right? The real granular nuts and bolts of how do you grow a business like this using the tools that are available to us which ones are right for you and then generous people who will help you apply them in your situation for your impact goals and your revenue goals. So if you could use a little more support, go check out the aware printers, community and aware printers.com forward slash community. And thank you aware printers for sponsoring this podcast. So it's time for some change in the space that's ready for some disruption and particularly with where we are in the political moment of the us right now, as we talked about the we've just seen the largest wave of protests and they're still happening at the world has ever seen. George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter of protesting scaling up and we're in a very poignant election year here in the US. And there's more women and more people of color running than any other time in US history. And you all decided some colleagues of yours. And you decided it was time for a political consulting group that fit that and knew that world and could speak to that and embodies the diversity that you're wanting to help tell us about shatter how it's different and what you do.



Cyreena Boston Ashby 30:07

It is really exciting. So thank you for asking. So at hilltop public solutions, we have partners both in our Washington DC office and then we are within different states across the country and I'm a partner in our Oregon office. We have nine women partners across the country, and a few of us identify as black indigenous or women of color I myself in black, and we had have been having a conversation about a way for us to bring our talent and our efforts together. So many of us have, all of us have started our careers, you know, young, you know, working for a variety different campaigns. You know, some of us got our first start doing political organizing on our campuses and then started working with candidates, but have built up really solid and prominent track records. So whether it's running congressional campaigns, presidential campaigns, being the executive director of state political parties, caucus managers, you know, running our own political outfits and firms before we came to hilltop, just very experienced nationally or specifically in a local context. Some of us in the past year were in very prominent leadership positions on some of the primary campaigns, either related to Senator Harris. So I have a couple members of chatter, who have worked on Kamala Harris's presidential bid, for example. So when we looked at all of that talent, and that leadership, and I think, like into this audience entrepreneurship, we thought what an incredible opportunity for us to come together because it is still true in 2020. That both in terms of politics and public affairs, there's such an important perspective. that's missing. And that is how do we use either public policy and Public Affairs or electoral politics, to remove barriers for women, black, indigenous and people of color, and to make America a much more stronger Union for everyone. And so we thought of shatter. And you know, it's a great opportunity for all of us to leverage our talent, but to either work and support women candidates, either culturally specific nonprofits in you know, and to work on really transformative paradigm shifting opportunities. And so the way that we've modeled ourselves is that there are nine of us, we're in different states, but we can, you know, come together to put in a bid or a project in one of our states or working with a national nonprofit that might be geared towards women. And it really can either be all hands on deck, or we can look at an opportunity and could be Oh Sabrina has experience working in LGBTQ equity. You know, here's let's say, an LGBTQ nonprofit that has an RFP for, you know, communications solutions or digital strategies. Well, you know, one of our partners is very good and has a strong digital marketing background. And I have a lot of work doing LGBTQ organizing and law making, and things of that nature, we might come together, even though she's in another state, and I'm in Oregon, and we'll join up and we'll work on a project such as that. And so, you know, we've been working on this for quite some time. There is unfortunate coincidental timing with what is happening in the social construct. So the murder of Brianna Taylor, a mod Aubrey, you know, George Floyd, specifically, all of the health inequities that have been exposed because of COVID-19 did coincide with us launching the firm, but it did definitely reinforce the fact that there is now is the time more than ever, for such a firm to

exist. The other thing I would note is that You know, when you when you're invited by a corporation or an institution or a political group, as a firm to bid, they may say, Hey, you know, we just need somebody to, we need a firm that can just do our strategic plan, or we need somebody who can only do our communications. You come in and you'll, you know, present a deck about your firm your experiences, and you'll give them a very general approach to how you think the work should be done. What you don't often see today, across the board, even in 2020, is anything dedicated to very specific constituencies. So what shatter can offer is the ability to connect with very specific demographics in a way that's different than other firms that can't do that. And that's either because we have people who are of that background within our firm or who have experience working with those Oregon with those communities. So we have a partner who has a firmer I own that we will utilize that has done other language news media. So Spanish speaking media. So that's radio, newspaper print, you know, the ability for language translation and other other languages besides Spanish, just thinking about ways to market and target specific communities by working and partnering with community organizations on the ground. That is something that we would always bring to the table. That's a very different and a much deeper strategy than what other firms are able to offer. It's not that they don't want to it just may that be that they're not very good or adept at doing that, because it don't have anyone on staff who can do so. So that is a difference that that shattered does offer both to you know, any prospective outfit or entity that wants to hire us, but certainly in terms of how you think about the work should be the way the work should be done. A few years ago, people would have thought, oh, that doesn't matter. We don't need to do that. But when we look at the social construct today and we look at the change demographic in terms of not only who is eligible to vote, who wants to vote who is voting, which is also who's in our country today, you have to have that approach. Now it only makes sense. And so we're excited because we know that shatter can be a leader in that way.

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Paul Zelizer 36:17

So I think what I hear you say, sir, now, is it fair to say, you don't just know these ways of being in the public eye, you know, whether it's direct mail, or digital, or you're working on a fundraising campaign, which many consulting political consulting firm, you know, the constituencies in a way that many don't? Is that fair to say?

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Cyreena Boston Ashby 36:40

That's absolutely right. Thank you for saying that so succinctly. Totally the case. Yes.

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Paul Zelizer 36:45

One of the things I love about our listeners and our constituency or a subgroup of our listeners are the young and I think we have these fabulous young, you know, like, I'd say from like, early 20s to early 30s. If a whole wave of them, and they Smart and diverse and they're like, oh, gosh, it's palpable how much they want to make a difference, right? And some of them have their space and they blend it in. Some are iterating. Right? pitch those young people, right, the next gen like, why political entrepreneurship as opposed to a more traditional social entrepreneur expression of their talents and their skill set.

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 37:26

Practically speaking, despite any similar cynicism that you see in the American discourse, American politics are not going away, not going away. And it's a field that's always going to be available to anybody that's willing to work in it, frankly. And if you are interested in making change, and you do have a point of view that you want to see, either enriched in the political fold, or because you see a person that you want to work for who's running for office, this is a great way to bring your entrepreneur edge. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you just have to work on the issue side of things. Political professionalism, and entrepreneurship involves technology. It involves marketing. And it involves, you know, design work and human organizing, business management, financial analysis, lots of different things. It isn't just, you know, soapbox issues, and you know what you see on the news. And frankly, it's a very, very profitable industry. Not everybody makes a lot of money in it. But it is not unusual for people to have very healthy and wealthy lifestyles, and professional politics and entrepreneurship. And I, you know, I don't think that there's anything wrong with that per se, but I don't necessarily know that many understand that, as with any industry, there's so many different ways in which you can work within it. And also, as I say, Just a minute or two ago, it's not going to go anywhere. And I hear, you know, I meet with, you know, people who have parents, and people who are parents whose kids are in college or like my kids interested in politics, but like there's no money in that they need to go out and get a real job. And I, you know, often counsel then, you know, in terms of a different point of view that it's an industry that's not going away. And if you have an entrepreneur spirit about yourself, you can actually climb the ranks very early and make a name for yourself in a way within other industries. matriculation takes much longer. You also don't have to have a formal degree. I know many political consultants that did not go to college, and therefore they don't have advanced degrees. Some do you have jadis. So there are a lot of lawyers that come into politics and things like that. But I know some of the greatest and the most successful that completed high school only some actually didn't complete high school. And so it really is a while. Open feel that if you have the interest, you have the grit. And I think you have the heart you could do well. And I look at our younger folks, you know, I know there's often this split and this conversation about, you know, millennials and boomers and you know, all of these things, but, you know, they

are living in a world that is very different. And politics is one place, that's going to be an important platform for solutions around the things that are confronting our future generations climate change, natural resource management, racism, white supremacy, healthcare and access to health care, mitigating and preventing chronic and infectious diseases. All of that is going to come into the political arena. And so I'm encouraged and I'm hopeful that younger generations that are coming into their careers, and coming into, you know, their first, like employment opportunities will look at political entrepreneurship as a way that they can make a difference for for themselves, and their All children to come.



Paul Zelizer 41:01

Thanks for that nice pitch. Yeah. So, younger entrepreneurs go follow Serena on LinkedIn or other social places we connected on LinkedIn, go go see what she's up to, because I agree with you. It's not going anywhere. Anywhere is not going and so we're in this incredible moment. sirna 2020 is like a watershed moment in American politics, many people talking at least nationally, you know, but even in our states and locally, some of the more important elections in our lifetime, right? certainly feels that way to me. What are you at chatter and at hilltop, like what are you working on now? And is it just another election to you all are there differences in 2020 both in the what feels like being voted on and how you're approaching it in 2020?



Cyreena Boston Ashby 41:53

working on so many things, you know, I have a we have a diverse portfolio. We have some corporations. We have some public education Institute's some advocacy, nonprofits, affordable housing, we have all kinds of clients across the board, what we're seeing our clients need now more than ever, is a way to connect with your constituencies either because COVID-19 has disrupted so much, or they are entering into strategies that can only be informed by what people think of them, and how to connect with them better. There's still the good old fashioned lobbying where, you know, we need to connect with elected officials on some influential legislation or some policy changes. That's always going to be the case. We don't do often direct lobbying, but we may help coordinate that for clients. But mostly what we're seeing is that people need support for communications and digital strategies. If you had said to me a few years ago that the most traditional public affairs or political firms would have to give savea digital marketing, I would say, I can't think of how that would be the case. It just seems so unusual, really drugs, right. Like what like, you know, I'm thinking, you know, of the more traditional firms that came before ours, where, you know, everything is, you know, business luncheons and political luncheons, you know, and networking and things in that way. But now it's you know,

people need social media marketing campaigns. They need language translation. They need multi prong communication strategies that definitely involves social media, but just other ways in which to connect with people and get their information out there. They can't host their events. So they may have like annual flagship events, they can't host those anymore. So how are they raising their funds? If it's, you know, a fundraising event that can't happen or how are they showcasing and sharing to the broader public who they are. And so a lot of what we're seeing right now is the the need to support our clients and doing that. So it is very Much communications focused, I'd say going into the election season leading up to November, voter strategies are at the top of the list. Also communications, how people can either vote by mail or get to their polls safely. registering voters right now is going to be very key and critical getting out the vote is going to be key and critical, communicating in real time any public safety protocols that might influence that. So it's just all very intense right now. Everything is moving at a very fast speed no matter what project we're working on. And a lot of that is guided by going towards the election season, but I would say just getting near the end of the calendar year, that is very much like increasing the pace of things. But COVID-19 has certainly influenced every facet of America and every facet of the world in terms of politics. It is politicized. And, um, you know, whether it's just looking at, you know, who gets access to health care. So we're seeing black people and people have Spanish speaking backgrounds, the ones that have died the most of COVID-19, but they are the ones that have been tested the least, and diagnosed the least. So that certainly is become quite a political conversation, because that is a matter of fact. But then also the public, you know, the public health conversation around, you know, local governments deciding against masks, or those deciding for masks, and how are we working with public health agencies or governors, or any other entity that's involved with that we're seeing a lot of busy work and a lot of really important intensive work around that too. And so all in all, if you read about anything in the newspaper right now, there's a chance to add shatter, we're having some conversation about it or we're working on it in that way.

P

Paul Zelizer 46:01

So, you've been in the space for a long time Serena, like looking ahead. What's your sense of what's coming in the world of political entrepreneurship and women in politics?

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 46:12

Mm hmm. I expect more women will run for office. I expect more women will run political firms, and be in different types of political management leadership to help women run for office. And when I expect that we'll have more women elected officials, both in state politics and national politics. I expect that we'll have more women in administrative posts.

I also expect more discord and uncomfortable conversations in the American forum. As we see a lot more diversity and inclusivity. It's going to challenge constructs that left a lot of people out and we will see a continued struggle with that. It's not going to be nice and neat. It's not going to be easy, but it is going to happen. So I do see a very intense tense but transformative several years ahead for us in this country. I feel honored and excited that I get to be a part of that. At this point, I've been in my field for almost 15 years, which is incredible. And I look at the time ahead. I think that technology is going to be a big influencer, and all of that, digital strategies. And you know, how we utilize technology to support political and governmental decision making, I look at that as only advancing rapidly. So that's another prediction of mine. But I would say that I know many of us are exhausted and weary right now. I'll even speak for myself. It's been a hard few months in America. You know, I live in Portland, Oregon, where we've had massive protests. A little known fact though. We tend to protest in Oregon all year round in different places in this day. Definitely in Portland, so we're not protesting here is not unusual. But we have had a lot of insensitive protesting lately. And you know, I like many people I'm quite tired. I would also just encourage people to know that we we, in my opinion, nationally have a lot more intensive time. And the best way to remain engaged is to take care of yourselves, but to remain engaged to what's important to you, because we'll be unpacking and deciding a lot of critical things that are going to change. Not just the face of this country, but how we discuss things. And so I don't see a big break in sight. I just see a lot more interesting work and productive work to be done.

P

Paul Zelizer 48:43

One of the images of 2020 that's perhaps been most helpful to me, and maybe you've already heard it surina but the image of a choir or chorus, and the idea being that when you one of the things that makes choir music actual absolutely gorgeous or choral music, so beautiful. That we can time the breaths. So you sing with other people in your section. And, you know, you get to take a real breath and acquire can sustain notes way longer than an individual. And the idea of like, it's your job and acquire, when it's your time to breathe to really take a full breath, not rush it, because you taking that full breath and pausing when it's your neighbor's turn to take a full breath, they get to really pause and I just and how we need to learn how to do that. For those of us who are thinking about social impact and activism and entrepreneurship, we don't always take a full breath. I love that.

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 49:39

I love that so much because what you're speaking to is how much science and technique goes into acquire being able to do that. And the only way that they could ever

successfully do that is if they have that shared connection. And that shared practice, but also

P Paul Zelizer 49:59

Yeah, Being part of something larger than one person larger. Yeah,

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 50:04

and feeling very comfortable that when one person's voice needs to be elevated, that person's voice matters the most in that moment. And that that person speaking forward, and being supported by other people being quiet and catching their breath, is the only way that the choir is going to be successful. So when we look at movements, like Black Lives Matter, and we talk about, you know, the me to movement, or we talk about, you know, undocumented, you know, residents living in this country, and we talk about, you know, who was important and who should have a voice, it is going to be extremely important that we stress, specificity, and an unashamed way, this is my opinion in this country in order to understand who we are. And the only way that we can do that, such as with this choir example is to make space for those voices in a very explicit way. And everyone, there has to be a cycle and a timing to things But there has to be your priority still. And so I'm, I love what you just shared, I'm going to use that if you if I hope you don't mind.

P Paul Zelizer 51:07

Mine, it's been passed around forever, I've

C Cyreena Boston Ashby 51:11

yet to hear it. So I'm glad that I've learned a bit now. So thank you for teaching me something new because I think it's very real. And sharing and making space is a wonderful way for the broader context to be enriched. It's something we don't really feel comfortable with in America yet, but in my opinion, is the only way that we're going to be able to move towards any change on the biggest issues that are confronting us right now or that will come and many more will come. It's not unusual. We've seen history and hard times in our history before and so we know that there will often be hard times but I think that that that choir metaphor that example is so incredible. So thank you for that.

P

Paul Zelizer 51:52

You're welcome. Deep out of my, the people whose shoulders I stand on, I'm really grateful to them. So So, boy, this is such a big topic in so many ways. We just touched on things. If there was something you were hoping we would get to and this topic of political entrepreneurship and women in politics that we haven't touched on, or surina, something you want to leave our audience with, before we tell them all the places they can get ahold of you and all that good stuff. What would that be?

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 52:25

I think Normally, this would be like an opportunity for a plug, right?

P

Paul Zelizer 52:28

Sure. I plug away.

C

Cyreena Boston Ashby 52:31

I'll do two things, please. You know, learn about shatter you can follow us on LinkedIn at shatter LLC. And you can also find us on Twitter and Facebook. And so it would be great for you know, any of your listeners to connect with us. You can visit our website and learn more about our lines of service and ways in which we can collaborate with you. We don't only do politics at all, we can support businesses, nonprofits, education institutes. I have a wide roster of clients that I support. I also, you know, me and my partners and my colleagues do business management solutions, you name it. So it is true. We are strong in the political space, but we have a lot of different types of entrepreneur and executive services in which we can offer. I do want to end it a bit on a more personal note. Now I was speaking with my partner, my my personal partner in my life, the other day about why it's very easy to be discouraged today, with all that we see happening in the world. We just had this unfortunate eruption and in what happened in Lebanon. You know, we see climate change happening often with natural disasters, we have COVID-19, which is just relentless right now. You know, disrupting so much in the world. We see, you know, black people dying at the hands of police and other people. We see many people dying right now, because of gun violence or other sorts of things. It's a very easy time to be discouraged. But it is not the first in our time right now in our history where we have seen so many horrible things all at once. And so if I could say to anybody is find ways to continue to be encouraged. And for some people, that is politics and some people that is just taking care of themselves and their families, some people, it's learning something new. But whatever it is, that could be for you, to find a way to not be discouraged. I just,

you know, encouraged that of all of your listeners and you know of you as well Paul and say thank you for making space for those of us like me to share their stories and really looking forward to listening to all those that have have shared their stories here with you and that will come so thank you.



Paul Zelizer 54:57

Thank you so much for being on the show soon. Such an honor to have you here.



Cyreena Boston Ashby 55:01

Thank you again.



Paul Zelizer 55:03

So we'll put a link to shatter website chatter on LinkedIn and other socials, hilltop websites and go check out what hilltops doing as well. And for now, I just want to say thank you so much for listening. A reminder that we do we went to two episodes a week because there were so many amazing stories like Serena's I would just, I'm getting hundreds now a week. So we went from one episode to two. And every Tuesday and Thursday a new episode drops if you have an idea of a topic or a guest that you think would be really interesting to sit down and unpack and learn from please go to the web printers website, go to our contact page, tell us your idea. We love listener supported listener suggested guests. So please, for now, I just want to say thank you so much for listening. Please take good care and these very poignant times and we really appreciate all the positive The impact that you're having