

DEAR MINDFUL CHANGEMAKER,



HOSTED BY
MEICO MARQUETTE WHITLOCK



Dear Mindful Changemaker Podcast

Episode One – Sandy Miniutti Transcript

Podcast Intro

Meico: As a changemaker, you're dedicated to making a positive difference in the world. You love what you do, and you're good at it. But here's the thing. With all the things on your plate, you may struggle with finding the right balance between work and having a fulfilling personal life. And as the world becomes more complex, it may seem change, disruption, and uncertainty have become new norms in your life and work.

Meico: But it doesn't have to be this way. I'm Meico Marquette Whitlock, and I'm on a mission to help changemakers like you improve your well being while increasing your well doing and changing the world without burning out. In every episode, my intention is simple, to share practical wisdom about the inner and the outer work required to take care of yourself while building a better world, especially when it feels like work doesn't love you back.

Meico: So let's get started.

Part One

Meico: Joining me today is Sandy Miniutti. She is the Chief Program Officer at Family Promise, where she is working with an extraordinary team that is doing amazing work for folks and families that are experiencing homelessness. In order to support those folks in creating

sustainable independence and in that role, she oversees the regional directors and affiliate services and her role is to ensure the overall health and success of those affiliates and also the coordination of those affiliates.

Meico: So for many of you that are working with associations, large, national, or international organizations, you know, there's a lot of coordinating work that goes into that. And so Sandra is the person that you want to talk to and be in connection with for Family Promise, if you're doing that work. So Sandy has over 20 years of extensive experience working in a nonprofit space across the sector, including public relations, marketing, fundraising, strategic planning, public speaking, partnership building, financial management, research analysis, writing, you name it, she has probably done it.

Meico: So please join me and welcome Sandy to the podcast. Sandy, welcome.

Sandra: Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to connect with you.

Meico: Likewise, it's great to see you again. I'm excited for this conversation that we're going to have today. And I know that we had to, an opportunity to connect in another capacity. And I'm excited to talk about that maybe a little later on, but I want to kick folks off with a conversation about how you, think about who you are.

Meico: I've given people the brief bio sketch, like the professional thing you put on the website. but if you were to describe to us in your own words, like who is Sandy, what do you want the folks who are listening to know about you to take away from this conversation? What would you say?

Sandra: That's a heavy question. And, as you're reciting my bio, I was like, Sandy is an old lady now. That's a lot of years I've been doing this work, right? I like to think that I'm a nonprofit professional and that I'm someone that wants to leave the world better off than when I arrived. And that's really been the guiding force and a lot of my choices in my career and life.

Sandra: I also have a personal life and I have a husband and a dog and children and, I like to do lots of creative activities. I suppose I'm a multifaceted person.

Meico: Yes. So multi dimensional, multi faceted person, a creative that it sounds like through and through, like you're dedicated to the work of the nonprofit sector and the work that the sector is doing really to improve society and really filling those gaps, that are left by the other work that other sectors are doing.

Meico: So let's talk about how you started on this journey and dive a little bit deeper into what drives you to do the work that you do? And I really love this question about your first real job, however you define real. I feel like we all have a really interesting first job that even if it feels far removed from what we're doing now, there's some tenuous connection that I like to tease out.

Meico: So I'm curious, can you tell us if you can remember what your first real job was however you define real.

Sandra: So my first real true job, I was a lifeguard. And that was a great job. And also one that I took really seriously, right? Like you're in charge of making sure people don't drown. And so it's more than, you know, sitting out and tanning and all that. You had to pay attention. I was always counting the heads in the water.

Sandra: I did have to make a save or two in my career. But that would have been my first job and the money that I saved from that really helped me fund college and ultimately my first mortgage. And I worked a lot of hours as a lifeguard.

Meico: Awesome. I love that. So working as a lifeguard quite literally saving lives. And I think I can make a connection between that and the work that you're doing with saving lives and the work that you're doing right now.

Sandra: Yes.

Sandra: Yeah. Yeah.

Meico: Yeah.

Meico: But you're a lifeguard for families that are experiencing homelessness.

Sandra: Yes, exactly. That's a good way of putting it. Maybe I should make a t shirt for that. I like that.

Meico: Yes.

Sandra: That's very creative.

Meico: So let's dive a little bit deeper into that. So we said a mouthful when we talked about the work that you're doing at Family Promise. Can you tell us how you're currently making an impact in the role and specifically, what is Family Promise and what is your role there? there? Like, Did you start out in the current role that you're in?

Meico: Tell us a little about what you're doing in your journey there.

Sandra: Yeah, so I've been at Family Promise for five years now and it's a national federated nonprofit and we work with people that are at risk of experiencing homelessness or that are currently experiencing homelessness. You know, we're like a franchisee model so we have roughly 200 affiliates. In nearly every state in the country, and they're providing the direct services and our role at the National Office is to do whatever we can to support them to advocate for families experiencing homelessness, to make sure people know about the work that we're doing so more can join our community and help tackle this crisis.

Sandra: And I think it's really an exciting position and probably a bit of an extension of the work that I did at charity navigator there I was a voice for donors,

Sandra: but still trying to work very hard to help nonprofits be the best that they could be so that donors would want to invest in them. Maybe getting to do a little bit more of rolling up my sleeves and working with

Sandra: specific challenges that our affiliates face, whether it's operational or programmatic or fundraising or budgeting. It's a really dynamic entrepreneurial type of position and that's probably what draws me to it along with the mission. And I have great respect and empathy for our case managers out in the field that work day-to-day with families.

Sandra: That's not my expertise, but I feel like I get to contribute to the work that they do. In my role, as Chief Program Officer. So my team is really providing all that support training, to the affiliates. And we also in the last couple of years have had the exciting opportunity to do pass through funding to our affiliates.

Sandra: So

Sandra: one of the things I wanted to do in my career was be a grant maker.

Sandra: you know, Oprah gets to give away cars and all this money. What could be a better thing? Well, it's really hard. Like I have new respect for foundations and corporate funders, because it's hard to say, no, who gets the money and who doesn't is always a challenge.

Sandra: But, we've been able to do roughly 2 million in pass through funding the last

Sandra: three or four years to our affiliates. And that's helped us make real strategic growth in, particular areas of our programming. Our affiliates have really done a whole lot more in prevention and diversion services so helping a family avoid the trauma of experiencing homelessness, keeping them in their home, giving them some money maybe for back rent or for a new car, or for childcare and then our professional case managers work with them to make sure that they remain stably housed. That has profound impact on a

Sandra: child's life,

Sandra: versus if they do have to experience, homelessness and come into our shelter, you know, we do a great job helping them get rehoused and remain stable, but there's, you know, a lot of repercussions in a child's development when that happens. So I'm really proud of that work that we've been able to do on the front end.

Sandra: And having some great partners that are helping to fund that work.

Meico: And that's what I think is so interesting about where you sit in your organization and what your team does is that you all are situated where you're supporting the frontline folks that are doing the work. And so you get to see the full cycle of the benefit of your work. And I guess I want to dive deeper on

Meico: what I would describe as sort of the back end work, right? So lots of folks out there and that listen to this podcast, aren't necessarily doing front facing glamorous work. They aren't necessarily doing direct service work where they can see a direct impact for the work that they're doing. So can you talk about what excites you about the support role that you're

in for the folks that are actually doing the front facing work for those families that you're working with?

Sandra: That's a great question. And if you ask anybody on my team because I asked them every time we have a check in what excites you about your job today or this week or this month. We all say the same thing is when we get to work with the staff at the local level and help them solve a problem whatever that problem is you know if they're not going to be able

Sandra: to launch a new program because the grant didn't come through helping them find new sources of income. If they don't have benefits for their staff, how can we help them find affordable benefits so that we can ensure that our case managers and everybody are taking care of just like the families we take care of.

Sandra: So it's that. It's exciting to every day you have to think through a different challenge, but those are our mission moments. And then, of course, hearing from the affiliates about the families and their relationship with the families and those stories are meaningful to us. But in our direct work, it's helping the staff in the field do their jobs well.

Sandra: And then, you know, also one of the things that we advocate to our Boards and to our Executive Directors is that staff need breaks right they can't be

Sandra: working 24 seven. Yes. the shelter has to remain open 24 seven but we can find creative ways to make sure that everybody gets a break and a rest, and that they can come back and be more productive in the future.

Sandra: And that's something that we, I think we all learned during COVID. And we've been working hard on that and so we have affiliates now. This is something that never happened historically in our 30 plus years but we have affiliates now that will shut down for a week and they just figure it out.

Sandra: They'll have volunteers come and be on the phones or the shelter or Board Members but it's doable you know you have to

Sandra: make it a priority to take care of your staff.

Meico: Yes, I love that. And I want to come back to that. And I love that. The mindset, right? Like we can do this. So let's figure out how to do this as opposed to thinking about it. Oh, we don't have this or we can't do this. And so you don't even see it as a possibility. So I definitely want to come back to that, in a few moments, but, sticking with where you are in the role that you're doing and what you've been doing really across the sector for many years, is there a particular experience or project that

Meico: got you started on your journey. Like you, you talked about starting out as a lifeguard. We know that you went to business school and, you know, you played a pivotal role in the launching of a Glass Root, but I'm wondering, is there anything that stands out to you in terms of particular story or experience or project that you were like, okay, this is why I want to do the work that I want to do in the sector.

Sandra: I think what really influenced me, I went into getting my MBA not thinking that I'd stay in the for profit sector, but not really sure what that meant, and would I go into museum studies, I was bouncing around, and I met my professor, at Rutgers University in Newark, and she had this crazy idea of replicating a non profit that, Chihuly had started out in Tacoma, outside of Seattle, where he was working with kids at risk, kids in poverty and teaching

Sandra: them how to blow glass as a way of teaching team building and developing even their marketing and business skills, because they've got to sell their products, and self esteem.

Sandra: And I thought, wow, this is cool. It's combining my interest in creativity and I don't have a creative bone in my body, but like, how can I help youth do this? And so she was trying to launch this nonprofit and she was really my mentor and I as part of my MBA program pulled a team together we wrote the business plan for that.

Sandra: And I got to see it launch and become a real nonprofit and then I was invited to be part of the Board for I think it was on the Board for seven years. And that was a really interesting experience too because it gave me great empathy for Board Members and where they sit in the role versus when you're a staff member working with your Board members like I see both sides of relationship now so I would encourage anybody in the nonprofit sector to make sure they join a Board so they have that understanding.

Sandra: But I think that was a pivotal role for me and pivotal moment was being engaged in that program and having a professor that had worked in the field and, just seeing her dedication and her scrappiness and maverickness that nothing was going to hold her back like you

Sandra: see with many

Sandra: founders of nonprofits and even for profits.

Sandra: So that excited me. then I worked for a period of time at a museum and wore many hats as many people do in the nonprofit sector, before I landed at Charity Navigator. And I was there for close to 16 years and had a whole bunch of different roles there as well. And just was excited to learn about the breadth and the depth of the nonprofit sector.

Sandra: Most people don't realize how big it is, how diverse it is, the impact that it's having on all of our lives. And so I really enjoyed that piece of the role there. It was like getting

Sandra: another degree. I

Sandra: was paid to study nonprofits all day, right?

Meico: So I wanna ask you about that because there, now there are, I don't know if there were as many years ago when you first started, but now there are lots of programs where you can actually focus on nonprofit management or some aspect of, you know, nonprofit operations, et cetera.

Meico: But you have a traditional M B A. And so I want to ask you about that. And I want to ask you about this concept of the entrepreneurial mindset. And, what, if any advantage you think that gave you in the work you've done, like you mentioned Charity Navigator and we listed off all the things that you've done and the work that you're doing with Family Promise, even how you think about how you support the people and the example that you talked about earlier

Meico: regarding, okay, well, let's just figure out how to make rest happen. I feel like part of that might be connected to this entrepreneurial mindset and we have seen things that you have, but I'm curious if you could maybe share more about have you made a conscious connection between that and how you approach to work?

Sandra: I haven't, but I should have. And I was a kid with my friends; we were always inventing new businesses and doing those things. I think I've always had that through my life. And I think it's really important in nonprofit work to be a bit of a maverick, be scrappy and be entrepreneurial, not be so bureaucratic.

Sandra: And I think that's what made Charity Navigator successful in the early years, you know, we really came in and we didn't have foundation dollars. We didn't have government money. We had a private funder and we just went out and did it. You know, we were a disruptor right or wrong. We were a disruptor.

Sandra: And then at Family Promise, we're super entrepreneurial and it's one of the things that, was in the job description when I applied for the position, like every other sentence had entrepreneurial in it.

Sandra: and I think it goes with our culture because we see every family individually and we treat them holistically.

Sandra: So that's not a cookie cutter approach to how we work with families. Everybody comes in with different challenges that we work to help them solve and the way that works best for their family. So we're really intentional takes a lot of time to do that with each family. And then part of the beauty in our model is that if one affiliate in one part of the country stumbles across the best practice and try, they're always trying new things.

Sandra: My team, part of our job is to take that learning and pass it along to other affiliates that

Sandra: have. similar resources communities work that they do so that they can replicate it. We have affiliates with two hundred thousand dollar budgets and we have affiliates with 8 million dollar budgets so there's a wide range of approaches and how they do this work in each community.

Sandra: So I think that's super exciting and being dynamic and innovative are two of our core values at the National Office and that was really born out of. The work that the affiliates are doing locally.

Meico: So have you, with this approach to the work and this way of thinking, have you encountered resistance? And if so, how have you overcome it? And the reason I ask that, I think sometimes in the sector there, for a whole host of reasons, people have an aversion to, let's say,

private sector or enterprise approaches to, to work and some people might feel like it's incompatible.

Meico: It's inappropriate. and so I'm wondering, have you encountered resistance in that regard? And so how have you overcome that? What do you, what are the ways in which you're able to educate people about the value of some of the ways that type of thinking or framework might be valuable?

Sandra: I think it's helpful in the way that you approach it and the language that you use not to come in and say we're going to use Harvard case you know best practices to change your nonprofit because you're not doing it right, you know, it's helping people think of it in their own terms in a different and coming at things in a different way.

Sandra: We're talking about mindset and I think what's pervasive in my experience oftentimes in the nonprofit sector is the scarcity mindset,

Sandra: but we can't do that because we don't have enough people we don't have enough

Sandra: money well. Let's think about how this is going to have an impact on our clients and our stakeholders, and let's go find the money.

Sandra: Let's get people excited about the change that we're making and then we'll have the resources to dream big. So

Sandra: that takes time. And especially for people who have been doing the work for many years. With very little funding it's hard to turn that around but once you can start getting that change to happen, like people light up.

Sandra: And that's really cool to see, but it takes time to change the

Sandra: mindset.

Meico: And it's, yeah, I think it's so powerful because I think, to your point, it does take time. It's it's not like an overnight flip of the switch, but it's something that, in terms of making that switch, like it, it doesn't cost anything to consider a different perspective or a different way of thinking about it, to move from a scarcity mindset to a okay,

Meico: how can we, right? One of the power questions is okay. Well, if this is where we want to go, as opposed to saying we don't have this and we don't and we need this. The question is, okay, well, how can we just have a question about how can we make this happen and work backwards from there? So I love that. so let me ask you this.

Meico: So we've talked a lot about the work that you're doing. I think your excitement and your passion for the work is palpable, but I would imagine that just like everyone listens to this podcast, you're having a human experience and a part of the human experience is their natural ups and downs or ebbs and flows or peaks and valleys along the journey.

Meico: And I'm wondering how you stay inspired, how you stay motivated when you have those valleys when you have those lows. Is there a practice or strategy that you're actively using right now? Or is there something that has worked for you over the course of your career? Can you talk to us about what does that look like?

Meico: You know, the stuff you're not posting on Instagram, like Yes,

Sandra: Yeah, for sure. I've always been, enamored by meditation and I've tried many times. That doesn't work for me. We just did our strength finders at work. My number one strength is activator. And the description starts off like, why aren't we done yet? Why haven't we started? Let's get going. Like I want to run fast.

Sandra: So What I've learned from me is exercise is important for me and I have to make it a practice every day, even if it's just a walk, it has to be part of my every day.

Sandra: And something that I've also picked up in the last few years post COVID is I'm taking group exercise classes,

Sandra: because the community is another piece that is huge for me and I don't know for other listeners of your podcast when you become a parent, your children's

Sandra: friends, parents become your friends, which is great, but that's a very homogeneous community. And so by joining different exercise programs and different parts of the community, I've created a much bigger community. And I like these group of women, like some of them have orange hairs and way more tattoos than I do.

Sandra: And they're 20 year olds and they're 70 year olds and they're 50 year olds like me, It's really cool to have that community piece, but also to have that exercise where I can blow off the steam and so for me I know that has to be a priority every day to move.

Meico: Absolutely. And I love what you shared and how you're sharing. Cause I think it gives us a couple different things. you've talked about at the outset, like you, you tried meditation, like you're enamored with the idea of it, but like you found that it hasn't worked for you. And the beauty in that, And the beauty in that though, is that we all have, there, there's more than one way to do this. And I love that you said for yourself, Yeah. You know, doing the strength finders and other ways to assess where you are, what might work for you. But it sounds like you, you recognize, okay, well, this thing doesn't work for me.

Meico: And let me assess what might work for me. And you found that movement is really important. And, it's interesting. So I'm a mindfulness teacher and I take a trauma informed approach to that. And one of the things we know about trauma and working through trauma, particularly with children is movement

Meico: is very helpful, right? So I find it very interesting that you were able to pinpoint that for yourself movement is something that is very powerful for you in terms of how you take care, how you take care of yourself. And the other aspect of that I really find fascinating too, is that not only was it the movement thing that you figured out, but you figured out that you need to be in community.

Sandra: Yeah,

Meico: That is so important to know about yourself and to actually be creative about how you combine those things by actually doing the movement in community. With other people.

Sandra: Yeah, it's been, it's become really important piece of my life and we have a new CEO, and she's based in another part of the country and so she flies in and it's all intensive when she comes and I'm like, I can't do dinner tonight because I have my exercise class and if I go to that, I know I won't be my full self tomorrow.

Sandra: You know, like it's good to learn that about yourself. I don't think I knew that about myself when I was in my 20s. It took time to like experiment and fail and to figure it out, but yeah,

Meico: Yes. that was interesting what you just said. In terms of your CEO flying in, you knowing what you need, and you feeling confident enough to be able to ask for what you need and to put in place that boundary. And I think that's a great segue into my next question, which is around how you balance the exciting work that you're doing, which can be all consuming, right?

Meico: If you allow it to be right and we know that with all the affiliates right that you have. that can be all consuming, we know with dealing with folks that are experiencing homelessness or fill in the blank, whatever the issue is, right? you could be in your feelings all day long.

Sandra: Yeah,

Meico: and be overwhelmed by that.

Meico: So how do you balance that? with making time to go do the group exercise work, making time for your husband and your dog and your kids. How do you make all that work for you?

Sandra: I think I've learned that over time. well, I was at Charity Navigator. We moved to remote work as an option. It wasn't a full time thing, but it was most of my time. and I was doing a lot of the PR marketing and I'll tell you, reporters love to call at five o'clock on a Friday and they want to get their story file.

Sandra: And I knew that if I didn't tell them, give them the quote, they would find somebody else to give it to them. So I would find myself many times at eight, nine o'clock on a Friday night. One of my kids would come over and be like, are we going to have dinner? And I would just get lost in it. So I've learned over the years that, I will be more productive for me and my team if I take those breaks.

Sandra: So

Sandra: I've learned to close the laptop. Now, will I check it on the weekend? Will I check email on vacation? Yes. There's never pressure or expectation to do that. I feel better if I do that. But I don't do it in lieu of, you know, a walk with the family or something. I'll do it when I know I have some downtime and everybody is preoccupied with other things.

Sandra: So I think it just took me time and perspective to learn how to create those boundaries.

Meico: Yes. And do you have any advice for folks that are listening and wondering how they can do that? Cause I was Communications Director, so I completely get

Sandra: You know,

Meico: The 5pm call on Friday afternoon for the quote or for, Oh, can you clarify this stat that you have on your. Your website. So how do you just using that as a framework and as an avatar, if you will, like what advice would you share to your previous self about how to manage that situation?

Meico: You got to get the work done. You don't want to miss the opportunity, but at the same time, you want to value your family and yourself because, you know, that's what you need in order to be at your best.

Sandra: Yeah, I think I would have told my former self, take that call give that quote, but then shut the laptop and don't keep going on the next project because that's what would keep pulling me and okay I had this report to do or somebody needed something with, you know, I get an email, you know, prioritize those

Sandra: calls with reporters because they have to come first. but recognize the other stuff can wait till Monday or even Sunday night when everybody is in bed and getting their sleep for school the next day, you know, that it didn't need to take place when it should be family time.

Meico: Yes. And so what I'm hearing and part of what you're sharing is two things that I'm sort of threading. If I'm willing, you can let me know if I'm correct on this. The first is, it sounds like you're very clear on your priorities, And what you need and what's important to you outside of your work.

Meico: And the second part of it, it sounds like, there's a recognition that while the work isn't a nine to five type work perfectly, like it doesn't fit into that nine to five type box, that you give yourself the grace to, to move things around. So that you can make space for the work, but then you can also make space for those important personal priorities as well.

Sandra: Yep. Yeah, a hundred percent.

Sponsor Break

Meico: All right, it's time for a break. We'll be right back after a brief message from our sponsors.

Meico: Changemakers like you are driven to do more and more, often with fewer and fewer resources. But there comes a breaking point where your passion dwindles under the weight of pressure, the mission suffers, and you feel like you love the work more than it loves you back. That's why I wrote the book *How to Thrive When Work Doesn't Love You Back*.

Meico: A practical guide for taking care of yourself while changing the world with a forward by Beth Kanter, author of the "Happy Healthy Nonprofit." This book is a succinct, practical, and action based guide for changemakers seeking to make an impact without burnout. Learn more and order your copy at mindfulchangemaker.org/books. That's mindfulchangemaker.org/books. The reality is, if you really want to make a difference, you must start by taking time for yourself right now because you can't change the world if you're not around long enough to make that happen. This isn't about working harder and smarter, it's about making a commitment to work differently so you can take care of yourself while making an impact for the long haul.

Meico: In "*How to Thrive and Work Doesn't Love You Back*", I share practical strategies grounded in the well being while well doing change framework. And I wrote this book after experiencing more than my fair share of burnout and overwhelm in the name of saving the world during my previous career in government and non profit work.

Meico: I share what I've learned to be the most impactful strategies for my personal practice and my experience helping changemakers around the world just like you create lasting balance in their lives. These are the same strategies I teach teams and organizations through my live trainings, self paced courses, coaching programs, and tools like the Intention Planner.

Meico: Each chapter has a summary of key ideas and a checklist of practices you can start implementing right away. I know you need practical strategies and resources to help you create sustained balance in your life and work so you can lower your stress level. And focus on getting the important things done right now.

Meico: So, this book isn't about theoretical concepts. It's about what to do and how to do it. Learn more and order your copy at mindfulchangemaker.org/books. That's mindfulchangemaker.org/books.

Meico: All right, let's get back to our conversation.

Part Two

Meico: So you talked earlier about affiliates and these are frontline staff, right? These are folks that are running the shelters. These are folks that are running the direct line social services and people come in and do an intake, etc.

Sandra: Yeah.

Meico: And you talked about being intentional about making time for people to rest. So they're not. Yes, the service needs to be available 24/7, but you as the individual don't need to be here 24/7 doing the work 24/7. So can you, I guess, give us a bit more detail about that? is there more you can share about that?

Meico: Those conversations, the process, especially for someone that might be at a similar situation, and maybe they want to have this conversation with their team or with their boss about how they can do this.

Sandra: Sometimes I think we all know it's easier coming from somebody else than the executive director trying to tell the board or the board chair. So I think that's one of the value adds that we bring as a national team. We can come in and say exactly what the executive director has been saying for years, but sometimes when it comes from an external party, it rings truer,

Sandra: and we can come with examples from other affiliates, how they've made those changes and they haven't missed a beat.

Sandra: They're still providing great services to a lot of families each year. And guess what their retention rate of their staff has gone up, so they become even more effective over time right and I think we've been able to share some of the stats with board members very intentionally in trainings that you know when you lose your executive director

Sandra: it's not just a month or two it's many months before you get the next person with the right skills that

Sandra: can fill that position that can be trained up to do it well and guess who's left holding the ball in the meantime the

Sandra: board,

Sandra: do you want to be in that position.

Sandra:

Sandra: and there's nothing wrong with your staff taking a break and, in fact, if anybody needs it's the frontline folks that need it the most because,

Sandra: like you've experienced working with kids in trauma, like you're taking on that trauma every day. So you definitely need to take time to meditate, work out whatever it is for you and step away for a period of time, not just a day or a few hours, but step away for a week. And we've seen it, but be effective with an affiliation short, close their doors for a week.

Sandra: The whole staff steps away. So nobody's getting side emails about projects, right?

Sandra: The whole team is on pause at the same time. And we can find creative ways with community partners and volunteers to ensure that there's still coverage and that our families are still taken care of, but yet still give staff a break.

Sandra: And I think it's also, it goes with professionalizing their roles and making sure that they're

Sandra: earning a good wage, right?

Sandra: And making sure they have benefits, making sure that they're thanked when they do a good job,

Sandra: all those things. That's a whole package. And sometimes, I don't know why this is, but board members come to their nonprofit roles and like they forget, like they do all this in their professional for profit roles with their staff, but somehow they think in the nonprofit world, we should be making like below minimum wage, right?

Sandra: These are some of the toughest jobs in the world.

Sandra:

Sandra: You know, it's important to have all those conversations with boards and with team members, you know, sometimes team members. Like I said, sometimes I don't want to like not check email at night but it's a practice that we have to teach our staff to do as well because case managers need a break, and they can't be on call 24 /7.

Meico: Yes.

Sandra: fact,

Meico: so there's so much gold in this. And for folks that are listening, I'm just going to tease out some of the steps that you articulated that I think can be replicated. Like the first which is you talked about the messenger, right? you know, sometimes you need a different messenger. And so for folks that are listening to this podcast, maybe that means you send this podcast to whoever needs to hear it, right?

Meico: Maybe you need to reach out to Sandy, right? and get her support and examples, right? the other thing I heard you share was that you're not just making a request to do something differently, but you're actually tying it to tangible benefits. For everybody involved and you have data, right?

Meico: You're able to point to data, right? And so for folks that are looking at, as an example, I can see someone sharing this podcast, reaching out to Sandy, actually getting their data, talking to some of their affiliates and actually having a real life person, real life data, real life stories to talk about this, and then I can't help it.

Meico: But the mindset piece is just so so strong here, which is let's just figure out how to do it right. This is important. We're clear about our priorities. We're clear that we care about our people. And here's how we show that we care, right? Here's how we build sustainability into our model. And make it better for everyone, right?

Meico: Because the clients are better served, the folks that are doing the work are better served, you as an organization are better served, the board members are better served, because they're not having to jump in, and fill the gap with those emergencies. So there's just so much gold there. anything else you want to add that I feel like I left out that you want to just add or accentuate?

Sandra: I mean the only thing related to that is I think it was so interesting during COVID I belong to a group on Facebook of small nonprofits I forget something like that was the title of the group, and the executive directors on there were so lonely, like they

Sandra: didn't have a peer group, other than this little Facebook group and they're saying I'm running in this challenge and everybody's like I am too and

Sandra: I think one of the beauties in our model is a federated group is that our affiliates have one another.

Sandra: So our executive directors traditionally get together once a month for a meeting. And we do that by region so there's about 40 of them on a call, and during COVID they were meeting weekly and sometimes it was just to support one another and saying wow this is really hard.

Sandra: Other calls they were sharing forms and where did you buy gloves and, you know, how did you find a place for families to stay, you know, like all that was happening but. Back to how I personally think community is so important in my life. I think that's really important for other nonprofits to find your community.

Sandra: So if you're

Sandra: not part of a federated group, what is the community you can join? Is it NTEN? Is it a group of nonprofits in your, you know, your location, your region? Is it a statewide group? Even for me professionally when I started Family Promise, there was no peer group of federated nonprofits with, people in my role.

Sandra: And so over time I've been able to pull people together and now we meet every other month and we're like, you have that problem, I have that challenge too and

Sandra: I don't have an answer and maybe I do, you know, and just to have one another, I think is another work life balance just to know somebody else's going through it too.

Sandra: So I think that's another piece to for self care is to find your community as a nonprofit case manager, executive director, fundraiser whatever your role is.

Meico: Yes.

Sandra: That's been critical for me.

Meico: And that's so powerful. There is research that talks about the power of community. I mean, as part of the human experience, we know that we thrive when we have community, right? When we have those strong connections. And the other point that you make in terms of knowing that you're not alone is also research that talks about the psychological and emotional benefit of simply, even if you don't change anything else, simply knowing that you're not the only person

Meico: experiencing what you're experiencing to have your experience validated and know that you're not imagining things like other people are experiencing this, too. So it's so important. so you mentioned NTEN. I want to pivot and talk about that in our work together. So NTEN the nonprofit technology network.

Meico: So for folks not familiar, it's an association that supports nonprofits in the US and around the world, really bringing together folks to leverage tech, and data, to take their work and their mission to the next level. And I've been teaching courses and affiliate with NTEN in many different capacities over the years.

Meico: And I think you took one of the courses that I taught on mindful leadership. You brought me in to do a talk at one of your conferences. So I'm wondering if you could talk about those experiences and what the impact has been for you and the team. that's been able to experience that.

Sandra: I think it's really helped me like think through some of these things with work life balance, and it helped the team one of the things that we did after working with you is, we set forth like an actual document for the way that we're going to engage in with one another. What hours, am I going to be accessible during the work day?

Sandra: How do I want to be contacted? Can you contact me on my text on a Saturday or do I not want to be bothered?

Sandra: And if you can contact me on a Saturday, for what reasons?

Sandra: How are we going to talk in teams? And when are we going to use email for conversation? Are we going to be on camera on Zoom? If so, for what meanings?

Sandra: And we came together collectively and decided that as a team. And then you know, every quarter or so we review that document and make sure that it's still working for us. I think that was really helpful because, especially during COVID, everybody was inundated with all this stuff and it was such a crisis and so many families needed our support and our affiliates were in crisis and then we were asking everybody to stop being in person in relation to do it on computers and tech.

Sandra: So creating those parameters, really helped ease some of that anxiety that we were all feeling.

Meico: Awesome. Well, I'm happy to hear that, and I think you're talking about what I call the rules of engagement, which, yeah, so if folks go to the website, they can find in the resources section. I think there are templates for that. But reducing that uncertainty and that guesswork in terms of how people are connecting expectations and reducing that collective stress and anxiety.

Meico: Is there anything else you want to share in terms of benefit impact of either the talk. I think we, you had me come to one of the virtual conferences that you all did during the pandemic. And I think you or someone

Sandra: I was like the most attended we had the most attendees in that talk that you gave and I think it just goes to show the hunger that everybody has for trying to understand this like when I graduated college, I didn't even have email until I got my first job and even then

Sandra: it wasn't like, you know, I'd come into work on a Monday morning my boss be like you didn't answer that email from over the weekend like.

Sandra: I didn't have access to it. there was no remote stuff, you know, so very rapidly in the last few years, all that changed.

Sandra: And so I think so many affiliates attending that talk that you gave really shows that we're all struggling with this and trying to figure out what are those rules of engagement.

Sandra: I mean, even my team, I said over and over, if I say something on Teams, that's like me talking to you at the water cooler. And if you don't see it, that's fine. And if it's pressing, I'll follow up with a call. But they couldn't internalize that. So they were always in a panic when I was talking to them on Teams that they felt like, oh, my boss is asking me something.

Sandra: I got to get back to them. But then when we put it in writing and it says in black and white, like Teams is just for conversation. It's not you know, the biggest priority of your day like that changed how we interacted and how people felt.

Sandra: Um, So those techniques can really be profound.

Meico: Awesome. Well, I'm excited to hear that and that it sounds like it's also not a one and done so I want people to understand this that it's an ongoing process it's an ongoing conversation, it evolves. Yes. And I like to think of it like a workflows and seasons and so we got to think about just like with the real seasons in the real world like okay, if it's winter time you're going to need a heavier jacket or coat. if it's warmer outside maybe you break out the shorts, right? Different seasons call for different ways of showing up and love that you all are revisiting this

Meico: on an, on an ongoing basis. So I want to wrap us up here and close us out and talk about what's next for you and Family Promise. But is there anything else you want to say about the work we've done together about any of the other topics that we've covered today before we close up?

Sandra: just that, my work with you has really had an impact on my work and my team's work and I believe the affiliates work, and I'm grateful for that I'm grateful for NTEN that I got to stumble upon you and get to know more about you and have that opportunity to work together. I've long been a fan of NTEN and I think I would encourage nonprofits to look into the organization and what they can learn from NTEN there's so many great classes and the conference, and so many great people.

Sandra: I've had. really great networking opportunities and, people have been able to answer questions for me about tech projects and where to source tech staff. So it's a super great resource if folks don't know about it.

Meico: Absolutely. And it's, it's been one of the most valuable communities and conferences that I've been a part of. So I can definitely echo that. And I think that no matter the size of budget that you're

working with, there's a way for you to be connected with the organization, like the forums and getting access that don't even require a membership.

Meico: And the current membership model is sliding scale. And so for any

Sandra: Super reasonable. Yeah.

Meico: reasonable. and the conference is definitely worth the investment as well. And very reasonable compared to some of the other opportunities out there.

Sandra:

Meico: But with that being said, you know, can you give us a little bit of a preview of what might be next for Sandy?

Meico: What might be next for Family Promise?

Sandra: Yeah. So I'm really excited. Like I said, we have a new CEO. Her name is Cheryl Schuch and she came from like our flagship affiliate out in Grand Rapids when she started there. I think she started in, I'm gonna get this wrong, 2014 maybe it was before that. But she was the only full time staffer and they had a budget like two hundred thousand.

Sandra: Now they have 50 staff, they have a huge budget, they have all kinds of for profit businesses that are providing money back to the nonprofit. They have really trauma informed best practices.

Sandra: They've all kinds of different programming for families in their community so I'm super excited to work with her.

Sandra: I'm super excited by the management style that she comes with and the way

Sandra: that she tracks goals and progress and her commitment to ensuring that we have a great culture at our organization. I think we'll see more entrepreneurship for the national office in the coming years and the way that we offer resources to affiliates and the types of resources that we offer to them will change.

Sandra: So I'm super energized by what's to come in the next couple of years for my career and hopefully I'll get to stay at Family Promise and experience it all.

Meico: Awesome. Well, I'm excited for you. I'm excited for all the work that you're doing and I'm excited about the mindset that you're bringing to the work, like your energy, your excitement, your passion for the work is palpable. And, there's this can-do mindset, right? Okay, well, we can do this. Yes, we're not oblivious to the fact that what we're dealing with is a very challenging set of problems.

Meico: And, you know, we really, we're dealing with folks that are the most vulnerable point, perhaps in their life journey. But yeah, totally. We can still take care of ourselves, and we can still set ourselves up to do great work for the people that we are serving. So I absolutely love that. And I think that there's so much that, folks

Meico: outside of your organization and your network can benefit from. So where can folks who are listening to this conversation? They're inspired. They're excited. They want to learn more about how you're doing the work. Maybe learn some best practices. Maybe have you be that. That voice, right? That alternative voice to say, hey, here's why you should do this.

Meico: Where can people go to learn more to stay connected?

Sandra: Probably the easiest place to find me is on LinkedIn and just Sandra Miniutti. You can also find me on Twitter at Sandra Miniutti and then Family Promise. Our website is familypromise.org. and you can find my contact information there as well if you want to reach out to me directly.

Meico: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for being on the podcast. And I want to clarify something for folks that are listening. I think on social media, you go by Sandra, right? But it's okay for people to call you Sandy.

Sandra: Absolutely.

Meico: I wanted to make sure. So people are looking, they're looking for Sandy and they're wondering like, where is she?

Meico: You just

Sandra: There she goes. Yeah.

Meico: And you, yeah, exactly. So you'll be able to find her as well. So thank you all so much for tuning in, for the podcast and for what was, I think. A very enriching episode

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Meico: That's mindfulchangemaker.org/retreat.

Outro

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Meico: It's 100 percent free when you join at mindfulchangemaker.org/join. Again, that's mindfulchangemaker.org/join. Until next time, I'm Meico Marquette Whitlock. Take it one intentional moment at a time.