The Long-Haul Fundraising Model with Aubrey Bergauer

Andrew Olsen:                  Hey everyone. Thanks for being with us today. This is Andrew Olsen, host to the Rainmaker Fundraising podcast. I'm really excited today to have Aubrey Bergauer, executive director of California Symphony Orchestra with us today. Aubrey, how are you today?

Aubrey Bergauer:             I am good. Thank you for having me.

Andrew Olsen:                  So excited about this. I think you've got some really interesting take on both engagement and fundraising in the sector and specifically in the arts. So, I'm really excited to have you share some of that with us. Before we get into anything too detailed, can you just take a few minutes and tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got where you are today?

Aubrey Bergauer:             My mission is to change the narrative for symphony orchestras, and that just probably sounds like this huge, big, audacious, crazy goal. But anybody who knows anything about somebody orchestras knows that there is such a reputation associated with them that the arts, and particularly symphony orchestras, can be stuffy, can be elitist, can be inaccessible. And so, this initiative for me is to just change all of that and break that down. And that includes everything from making the art far more accessible and talk tons about what that means and looks like. But, also, it has to do with the internal operations and company culture and all these things that I know you care a lot about as well, Andrew.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And so, to keep this a short introduction of myself, I will say that my experiences at organizations of all sizes at California Symphony is a midsize orchestra. It's a professional orchestra. But before coming here, I spent about a decade in Seattle at the leading institutions, Seattle Symphony and the development department, Seattle Opera and the marketing department, and then at the Bumbershoot Music and Arts Festival as the number two overseeing all the revenue. And then now in my first executive director role here at the California Symphony. And to wrap this up, I'll say I always tell everybody what you need to know about the California Symphony is that over the last five years that I've been here, we have nearly doubled our audience size and quadrupled our donor base. So, all these things that I care about and I'm so passionate about, they're working is the point I'm trying to make.

Andrew Olsen:                  So, that's a really huge statement to make. If we think about it in the context of not just with the fundraising industry and climate have looked like in the last five years, but just overall the general market trends to have any organization, any company that can say "we doubled our audience and we quadrupled our donor, our revenue stream" essentially. Unpack that a little bit for me.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Sure. So, everything we've talked about, you and I offline, is all about retention. And that for us has been a huge building block. This gets to some of the internal things I care about a lot. And we'll talk about that, I know, later but everything about having a path and a user journey from that first interaction with us as a first time attendee all the way through how do we build that relationship to inviting them to return to become a season ticket holder and eventually to become a donor. And the nationwide statistic for symphony orchestras is that 90% of first time attendees never come back for a second visit. 90% of first time attendees never come back for a second visit. And again, that gets into all these reasons why people probably know it can be really intimidating. It can be kind of boring. It can be off putting, and I'll be the first to admit that yeah, a lot of that is true about symphony orchestras.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And so, we'll talk all about retention in the Long Haul Model. I know we're going to get to that with. But the other thing I will say that has been a part of this success is we have done a lot of work with just going to our users, UX research, people who we want to be attending the symphony and asking them about their experience. And lo and behold, we learned all these things like, "Wow, your website reads like instant baseball you use so much technical language and jargon. I don't know what to wear when I go. I don't know when to clap and when to applaud." This was all work we did almost three years ago now.

Aubrey Bergauer:             But suffice it to say, by actually listening to users and what their experiences and acting on that feedback and making these changes. So, now we do all these things. Clap when you like what you hear, bring your drinks to your seats. We have a whole FAQ user guide online. We've removed all the technical jargon and vernacular. Anyways, I could go on and on, but all this is to say you act on the feedback you hear and then growth follows. That's what we've got. So, this is condensing a lot of work into a very short summary, but we always say now we talk about coming to the orchestra and we use words. We want it to be fun and entertaining, and a lot of orchestras don't use those words to describe themselves.

Andrew Olsen:                  For sure not, yeah.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Yeah. So, then the last thing I'll say to wrap all this up is through our research and the projects I was just describing, we learned that the music is not the problem. And that's a really big differentiator for California Symphony and our approach from other orchestras. And that so many orchestras think, "Oh, there's something wrong with the music. We need to perform less Beethoven and instead do more Harry Potter in concert." And there's nothing wrong with that. Those concerts sell out. Believe me, they're amazing. You get to see the movie on the big screen with the orchestra perform it live. But what orchestras see are that those people then don't come back to anything else.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So, they're really scratching their heads. And so, what we've done is said, "No, no. All that showcases the breadth of what a symphony can perform." Yes, we can like totally rock Harry Potter in concert, but also perform a Beethoven symphony very well at a world class level. And all of that is good and all of that shows, again, the breadth of what we can do. It's everything else tangential to the experience that is really what's keeping people away, not the products. So anyways, I can go on. I know this is not an arts podcasts. So, I'll back up here.

Andrew Olsen:                  That's really interesting. The core thing that I think any of our listeners can take away, and you said it. When you listen to the input from your supporter group, from your attendees, and you apply the learnings and do what they've asked, the revenue follows, right? And I think that that's such a challenge for so many. How many organizations conduct a donor survey or an audience survey? They get the feedback and then they go, "Oh, it's not what we thought" and it goes and sits on a shelf for three years until somebody new comes in and says, "Hey, we need a survey." And then you start to cycle again and again, right?

Andrew Olsen:                  And I have a bunch of other questions I want to get to, but this is just leading me to this question. Talk about the discipline required to take those learnings to understand them organizationally and then operationalize it.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Discipline is the right word. It takes a ton of discipline, and it's really hard to hear feedback that hurts. That is stating the obvious but it's really hard. And our commitment when we were going through these focus groups in doing this UX research was we will listen and we will not jump to defense. And that was an exercise that was so difficult. And as we're hearing feedback from people that, there's so many moments where the tape is playing in my head, "Oh, we can't do this because of the CRM limitation. Or we can't do this because oh, who on staff is going to take that on?" And instead I just had to say, "Aubrey, shut that down. You are at a crossroads. You can either listen to what you're hearing and act on it and have the discipline to do that. Or you can be just what you described: another person who just takes the data and sets it on a shelf and puts my head in the sand."

Aubrey Bergauer:             And I thought this industry is at such a crux. Every nonprofit, I think, is fragile to a degree. And I think that the arts and Performing Arts Organization and symphony orchestras definitely are very fragile. And I thought putting my head in the sand just feels more unpalatable than doing the hard work to act on the feedback. And so, being disciplined has just become a real part of my DNA.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And then to the other part of your question of how do you then implement this into company culture? Well, for us it meant a few things. Some things are big, some things are small on a big scale. We eventually restructured the staff in order to better deal with some of this work and to implement the Long Haul Model and all this retention work that I know we'll talk about. On a smaller level, it's also about taking baby steps. I'm a really big fan of iterative design, and my staff knows and it's our culture that you test something and you try it on a small scale. And then when you see results on a small scale, then you feel a little empowered to either put more money behind it or roll it out on a bigger scale or whatever that looks like. And so, some things just start really small, test, measure, see what's working, and then you can say, "Okay, so now we're going to do this in a big way."

Aubrey Bergauer:             So, that learning culture, iterative design approach is really important. And then from there that scales up or down into big decisions versus a lot of little ones that really add up.

Andrew Olsen:                  Cool. Thank you. Excuse me. So, I am super excited about the fact that not just that we're having this conversation, but that you contributed what I think might be one of the most important chapters to my most recent book, The 101 Biggest Mistakes Nonprofits make and how to Avoid Them. And in it you talk about the Long Haul Model. Tell me how you got to a place where ... How did you come up with it? How did you even think that it might be applicable and what were the risks that you faced as you started to bring this to market?

Aubrey Bergauer:             These are great questions. The Long Haul Model, to summarize for everybody, is it's all about retention. That is the shortest, concisest summary of what this is. And I think all of us talk about we need to focus on retention. We know our biggest prospects for a donor is to renew a previous donor. We all know that, right? But then you look at an arts organization, and this is another case where maybe it's helpful if I say what normally happens and then what the model does to tackle the problems that come from that. And then I'll get into the challenges that you asked about.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So normally, typically a "symphony orchestra", any performing arts organizations, really, what happens is you go, you buy a ticket, you go to your first performance, and then it's this bombardment that happens from the organization. And I'm sure many of you listening have probably experienced this. The next thing you know you're getting tele funding call. "Hey, you want to donate?" You're getting the season brochure in the mail. "Hey, you wanna buy season tickets?" You're starting to see digital ads all over the Internet. "Come to the next concert." I don't know. The next annual fund appeal's in your mailbox. You name it. It's just totally this deluge of messages that then come from that organization. And as I mentioned, I now have almost 15 years experience in this field and I just witnessed this happening in all these organizations. And as my own seniority has increased and career developed, I have started as I could rolling out some of these retention tactics at all those previous jobs just in different areas and influence that I had. And then when I came to the California Symphony, I said, "Now I get to put it all together."

Aubrey Bergauer:             And so, I created this model. I call it the Long Haul Model because it's not about the short term sales. So, everything I just described, the deluge of solicitations is really about the short term sale. How do we get you to become a season ticket buyer now? How do we get ... who cares if you renew next season or not. We'll deal with that problem later. How can we get you to donate now because we need the money in our annual funding now? And those are real problems and real feelings that we have and real challenges we have at nonprofits. And so, what we have said in creating the Long Haul Model is there is going to be one next step only no matter who you are. If you are a first time attendee, as I said earlier, 90% don't come back. That means 10% do.

Aubrey Bergauer:             At the California Symphony we've gotten that to 30% retention, and it's because we're not soliciting them for all those other things. We're saying the only thing we invite you to do is to come back again to another performance. Once you come to a couple of performances, then we start rolling out the offer for season tickets and sure enough we've seen our subscriber base grow. Then there's another big sort of benchmark in the performing arts industry. First year subscribers, season ticket holders, their renewal rate nationwide is about 50%. So, that's another red flag of only 50% of new season ticket holders are renewing and we said, "Well, guess what? They don't get a donation ask either. The only thing we need them to do is to renew that season ticket package." And then all the data shows once you're a renewing subscribers, second year or higher, than your proclivity to donate goes way up.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And so, that's what we've done. And so, we do not solicit for a donation until somebody is a second year subscriber or longer. And so, usually this is when jaws drop and they're like, "Whoa, aren't you leaving money on the table? What the heck?" And you already heard me say through all this discipline, we've doubled the audience, quadrupled the donor base. So, by having this restraint in this really diligent focus, we have just grown at every level and opened up that pipeline. So, that's the Long Haul Model. That's the summary of it. And I write all about it in the chapter in your book, as you said.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And the second part of your question was what's challenging in that? Well, there a lot of challenges? I'm not going to lie. I think there are two big ones that come to mind. People think the challenge is going to be that in the short term you are cutting off revenue because some people do donate the second they get that tele funding call and some people do buy season tickets in the cases that our organization when they get the brochure in the mail. And I have worked with enough arts organizations on this approach now that I say, "Run the numbers. How much money do you actually get from brand new donors who give at these low level annual fund amounts" because these are not big donors that come in this way. They come in usually at very small amounts. Run the numbers. How much money do you actually get in a given year from brand new ticket buyers who then convert it to a donor that same year? It is never more than 2% of the entire operating budget.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And so, when you look at it that way it's like, "Oh, it's just not that big of a revenue stream." And it's all in our heads that we're somehow cutting off this big source of revenue. We're not. By having the restraint in the short term, we're opening up the pipeline in the longterm. So, that's a challenge. Number one is just feeling like you might be cutting off a revenue stream in the short term. And I always counter with you, also, have an expense savings by doing it this way. You're not ... All of your mailing lists aren't 30,000 people because you're hitting every single person in your dang database who ever breathed. Instead you're being really focused on who is actually qualified prospect for this mailing, and that saves you money.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And you have higher response rates. So, your ROI becomes a lot higher. So, there's that. And then through all this that I'm saying, I think I touched on the second challenge, which is just to have the discipline internally. And I've been there where it's the end of the fiscal year and you're running that fiscal year end campaign because it's your last chance to balance the budget for the year. And I've been there where I'm pulling the mailing list and I think, "Oh, I just add these other people my mailing list will grow. And I think that means my prospects are higher." You and I know the reality is just that adding unqualified leads doesn't make you more money. It adds more unqualified leads. So anyway, again, like I said, I've been there where you just feel it entirely, this anxiety of "got to make the revenue goal" and it's this intense pressure that we, all face at all nonprofits regardless of our corner of the sector. And short term pressure is so real.

Andrew Olsen:                  So, I'm curious to know because, I think, everybody who's listening is going to think the same thing. How the heck did she convince her board to do to try this, right? Talk to us about that.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Okay. So, there's a couple things. I was brought in to turn around and brought into a crisis situation, and I always say the silver lining of a crisis is that there is more of an appetite for change. And so, that allows you to leverage that because, in this case, the board knew so much so that the old way was not working that they were desperate for something different. And I was able to say, as I was interviewing for the job, "Look, if you guys want me, I'm going to do some things differently and I have some ideas. Are you ready for it?" And so, I made them give me the verbal blank check to say, "Yup, do whatever you want, Aubrey" and I said, "Okay, you've got it." So, that's one answer as an organization in crisis may have more of an appetite for change.

Aubrey Bergauer:             The other answer for the boards that aren't in crisis and the boards that are much more set in their ways, which is a real hefty percentage of our boards, I imagine, is I always use the data and it serves me so well in my career, too, whenever I'm pitching an idea to take my subjective opinion out of it and start looking at the data. So, that's when it comes in handy to run those numbers. How much money actually is attached to these desperate solicitations to people who shouldn't be solicited yet? At an arts organization, that's our single ticket buyers. At another nonprofit, I'm sure there's some segment of people that would qualify as probably soliciting too soon.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So, what is the revenue attached to that? Running those numbers and saying, "Oh, right, it's not that much money," being able to present that, and then being able to say, "But these are the steps we're going to take with this group to get them to be more qualified leads, and then we're going to solicit them. What do you think about that? Does that sound strategic to you?" And then suddenly the board says, "Yes, I get it. I get that there's a plan and that there's a longterm plan." And that has really helped me a lot as I work with other boards that weren't in the same position of this crisis feeling is to be able to say, "This isn't about leaving money on the table. No, no. This is about way more over the longterm."

Andrew Olsen:                  That's good stuff. So, on that topic, how long did you have to wait? How long were the fingers crossed while you waited to see, "Okay, is this model actually going to work out for us?

Aubrey Bergauer:             Right. So for us, we started making money in year one. Again, the organization was such a crisis that I think just instilling a lot of these good, solid practices really started generating money right away and the expense savings that went along with it. Those two things for us in year one, in the shop I balanced the budget and the organization had been about a decade of deficit budgets before that. So, year one we started seeing results.

Aubrey Bergauer:             I don't know if that's the case everywhere. I think at a really healthy, robust nonprofit, there might have to be a year one pause. But by year two we had already almost doubled the donor base. And I forget the size of the audience that grew, but by year two I remember being able to build in risk capital to our budget. Risk capital is a word we never ever use when talking about building our budgets, right?

Andrew Olsen:                  No one knows what that is.

Aubrey Bergauer:             That's right. Nobody knows. So, yeah, by year two we were building in experiments that we wanted to take on because suddenly we had a little bit extra in the coffers to allow for that. What a mind blowing game changer is that? So, it happens pretty quickly is the answer to your question.

Andrew Olsen:                  Well, and when you think about the typical time that a nonprofit has to wait for a new donor they acquired to pay back and to start to generate net, it's at 18 to 24 months right now anyway. So, assuming that you might need a two year time horizon for a turnaround like this, it's not any different than what you're risking when you invest in new donor acquisition. So, it makes a lot of sense.

Aubrey Bergauer:             That's really interesting to hear you say that, yeah.

Andrew Olsen:                  I'm curious as I'm hearing you talk about this and recognizing that you're an executive director, I wonder how you will respond to a hypothesis. I suspect that you are better at your job because you came from a ... You had development experience before you came into the executive leadership role. React to that for me. What do you think about that?

Aubrey Bergauer:             Absolutely. Every executive director, we know it's part of our jobs to be involved in the fundraising. And I think it's so interesting that so often it happens that executive directors are hired without a lot of fundraising experience. And this happens in the arts, too. They want somebody who has operations experience or this corporate COO to CEO transition. And I always think that's so ... I just scratch my head over it. It's so confusing. Why is this happening? And yet it's in every CEO job prescription for a nonprofit. But you're responsible for a lot of fundraising, and of course we are. We're a public space. We're meeting with these big donors. So yes, absolutely my previous fundraising experience matters and I brought that to this job and it has made me better at this job. Absolutely.

Andrew Olsen:                  Talk to us about as an executive director, what role, what space do you occupy when it comes to the overall philanthropy efforts of your organization?

Aubrey Bergauer:             For me, we are a smaller staff. I don't know what the typical size is of the audience listening to this, but we have four full-time staff members and then of course this giant orchestra and contractors as well. But full-time just four of us, and some of those people are on the marketing side and the ticket sales and all of that. So for me, I'm very involved. I personally do all the major gifts, and that goes right back to your previous question of setting up the executive director for success. We know that the executive director probably should always be involved in major gifts, and at least a lot of those major donors expect that. And so for me, I just said, "All right, we're dividing up all the labor between four people. That's going to be on my plate." And so, including all the move management plans and cultivation plans and all of that, I do all of that.

Aubrey Bergauer:             When I'm not as zoomed in and hands on, of course I'm involved with the strategy. So, strategy for lower level donors because that's the pipeline that feeds into my major giving. And I'm always involved in to the level of what story are we telling you in our next appeal letter? What education program are we highlighting? And what's the stat that we can pair with a story" because all the research shows a stat plus a story about an individual effected by your program and services. That equals fundraising success. So, I'm always looking at that, trying to be involved in a strategic level about that.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And always sensitive as well to the language we're using. I know that there is a lot in the book about donor centric language versus organization centric, and that's a big pet peeve as well when it's "give to us and support us" and all this. I just go nuts in a bad way over all that, and I just want language that talks about you, the donor, and the impact of you're making. So anyways, I try to be ... my staff is very good about this, too. I have an excellent staff, but I try to be just one more person to just proofing all those kinds of materials and making sure that that voice we're using across everything we do, whether that's website or a direct mail appeal or a brochure or the program book or whatever, trying to make sure that that voice remains cohesive in that way. So, I don't know. That means I'm involved in a lot of levels.

Andrew Olsen:                  It sounds like you're very involved, yeah, which I think maybe it's fairly similar in smaller organizations. It's very different from many organizations where, you're right, there are a lot of executive directors that come in and say, "Wait, I thought I had a person for that," right? But I do think that organizations are more effective when when the folks in the C suite are actively involved in the fundraising activities. It just makes a lot more sense, yeah.

Andrew Olsen:                  So, you've been in your role for five years now. Talk to us about what's been the most fulfilling experience for you in that five years?

Aubrey Bergauer:             That's a great question. I think seeing just the trend defining growth, and you heard me say 90% of first timers don't come back. Most of symphony orchestras ... It'll be no surprise to anybody listening to this, I'm sure. Most symphony orchestras are not growing their audience. Most symphony orchestras are not seeing mega increases in the number of donors supporting them, and on one hand that makes sense. We are up against a lot of other good nonprofits and there's just a shift generally in philanthropic giving. And you know more about this than I do, Andrew, I'm sure, about just the trends of the arts just don't have as much intrinsic value as clean water, for example. So, there's a lot of ways where it's really hard to be managing an arts organization and really hard to be raising money for that work.

Aubrey Bergauer:             But to see that we have defied the trends of the industry and have used the other programs we offer. We have amazing education programs that are working towards social change and combating poverty and then suddenly we're talking about a social justice message that is competitive, if you will, with other nonphysical philanthropic asks. But anyways, I digress. I say all this to say that the success we've seen has been so fulfilling. And for somebody who really cares about this part of the nonprofit sector, but the way that I think orchestras can be serving others and can be having an impact in a way that it's just not assumed to normally be having, that is what's fulfilling I think.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And then to see that, yes, all the numbers are behind that and the revenue has followed, as we said, and we're still going five years later. It wasn't like, "Okay, you instilled some best practices and got them out of the ditch." Anybody could have done that because the option was either close the doors or improve. But no, five years later we're still growing and it's still working. So, I think all that together is just super cool.

Andrew Olsen:                  I think that's proof that it's a legitimate intentionally and valued strategy. So, that makes good sense. So, I want to ask you another couple more leadership-esque questions. First one is when you shared your career trajectory, and I have not asked you this directly, but I suspect you're a fairly young executive. And I think we have a lot of people who are young in their careers that listen to the podcast. Did you wake up one day and say, "I want to be an executive director at a symphony organization." How intentional was that career path for you? When did you know I wanted to lead organizations? Talk to us about that.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So, age is a number. I say that all the time. I think what is more interesting is definitely the career path part of that question. And for me, I was in high school when I decided this was the job I want, which nobody ever says that. Nobody wakes up and says, "I want to lead a symphony orchestra." So, my story is when I was 16 years old, I played an instrument growing up. I grew up in Houston, I played in the Houston Youth Symphony. And when I won the audition, I was in eight grade. By the time I was a sophomore, I had been a member of the orchestra for a few years.

Aubrey Bergauer:             The organization went through an executive director change, and I remember sitting at the back of the orchestra and they introduced this new person and said a sentence about what that job was and who that was. And for me that was the light bulb moment that there is a job managing this entire operation. And I could be connected to the arts and very involved in the arts and I could be a leader in the arts. And I could be doing all of that without having a career playing my instrument, but have a career doing all these other things and managing, really, The business side of it all.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So, for me that was the a-ha moment and I've been very deliberate since then. And I went to college, I got a degree in music performance, but also a degree in business. This is what I wanted to do, and now I have over 15 years working for nonprofits and arts organizations, which equals very good experience. So, even though I might be "young," we all know that there are a lot of other people in the field who don't have 15 years experience. They've come in later in life or through other angles, and that's all okay, too. But for me it's been very deliberate, very focused.

Aubrey Bergauer:             I know that's not everybody's story, of course. I just think maybe what's important for younger executives or people aspiring to be executives is to have that focus. I've been so intentional at every job I've taken of how does this help get me to the goal? A job in fundraising and then a job at another arts organization and marketing, in my case, and using all of that to build up a so much of the foundations of what we've spoken about today. So, hopefully that helps just the intentionality of it all.

Andrew Olsen:                  Yeah, I think if there's, and we don't know each other well yet, one word that I think really fits as I think about who you are that I've experienced, intentionality really is it.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Love it.

Andrew Olsen:                  Yeah. Talk to us a little bit about as an executive, as a leader, often it's lonely, right? Often you've got to make decisions that nobody else is willing to make or ready to make. How do you recharge when you go through tough situations? And talk to us a little bit about who else inside or outside the industry do you look to not necessarily as a mentor, but what do you read, who do you follow? Those kinds of things. How do you gain perspective outside yourself?

Aubrey Bergauer:             Yeah, these are great questions. I look outside the industry, outside the arts industry, outside the nonprofit industry so much and I'm very nerdy in that way. I read business books like crazy. I am just such a voracious reader and I love that kind of stuff. And so, we go on vacation and my husband's like, "You're seriously reading another business book" and I'm like, "I like it, okay? Just go play your Switch or whatever." But for me, that fills me up and I know that maybe it's not the answer for everybody. But it's important that I'm not reading arts books. I will say that. It's always about what's happening at innovative Silicon Valley companies and how is there a way where I can apply that mindset and that mentality to what I'm doing. And I think that mental exercise is what fills me up and recharges me because it really lifts me out of the day-to-day and instead I'm solving this really different problem of, again, going back to company culture or innovation in away I haven't thought of before.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So to get specific in terms of role models, again, I look a lot outside the industry. I think of people like Patty McCord. She was the first performer. I think probably first and former chief talent officer at Netflix. I love her book Powerful. She talks about so many things that you write about in your chapters in the book, Andrew, in terms of just making sure you get hiring right and don't waste your time or money on hiring a mediocre person when you can hire an excellent person who's going to be a rock star and what it takes to invest and attract that talent. And then what to do when that talent is no longer serving your organizations. Things do ebb and flow and you have different chapters, and I love just the way she writes about all of that and how it really shaped Netflix becoming the company that it is today.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Inside the industry, Deborah Borda she cracked the glass ceiling for arts administrators. This is a very traditional industry, I'm sure everybody can imagine. And the symphony orchestra world can be a real boy's club at all levels of seniority and definitely in the executive director, CEO spot. And she, Debra Borda CEO of the New York Philharmonic now , before that the L.A. Philharmonic. And she is just a role model because she, like I said, is the one who broke the glass ceiling. So, that's been really important to me.

Andrew Olsen:                  That's awesome.

Aubrey Bergauer:             So yeah, mostly outside the industry but got to have some people in the field as well.

Andrew Olsen:                  And that's a legit one to look up to for sure. So, two last questions for you. First, let's say that there's another young aspiring executive sitting, listening to this podcast saying, "What Aubrey has talked about today, I think I got to bring that into my organization." What are your top two or three recommendations for how someone can bring this level of change? Where do you start?

Aubrey Bergauer:             Yeah, I have this conversation all the time as people reach out and have asked this question, how do I do it? And I think the answer I think it's two fold. The first part of the answer is use that data. I said already being data driven has really helped me so much in my career because then it's not subjective opinion. The same way I would use to pitch an idea to a board now is the same way I would pitch ideas to my bosses when I was more junior at an organization. And it works because again, you're not debating what somebody's opinion is. You're saying, "No, this is what the data shows." And so, become that person who is so data driven because most people aren't.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And I think there's such a need for more of that in all of the nonprofit sector. And so, this now moves into my second part of my advice, which is become that person. Be the expert. And yeah, it takes more time to train yourself on whether it's Google analytics or whether it's becoming this expert user of your CRM so that you can pull all of these kinds of crazy, complicated reports that other people can't or export it to Excel and manipulate the numbers. Whatever that looks like, you be that person is what I always say because nobody else is.

Aubrey Bergauer:             And now that I've managed enough people for long enough, I can say definitively that ... my staff knows this very well. I'm not looking for more ideas that I should implement. I don't want somebody to come to me with their great idea. "You know what we should do" or "you know what you should do." I am not interested in that. What I am interested in is when somebody comes to me and says, "I've got this idea. Here is the plan I've made. These are the steps I'm thinking through on how to implement it. These are the reports I found already that supports this idea that maybe there's something here. If there a budget attached to that, I just need a few hundred dollars to spend." Whatever it looks. When they come to me with a plan, then I want to say, "Fly. Please, how can I support you" because then it's an employee saying, "I have an idea and I've taken all the initiative. Can I do it?"

Aubrey Bergauer:             And I know not every boss is like me and saying yes, but I think a lot are because that's a way better scenario than "Aubrey, you know what we should do" as if I need to implement somebody else's idea because I have all the extra time in the day. It's a real big shift. So, I say we be data-driven and then be that person, be the expert, take upon yourself, take the initiative. And I know that takes more time that you probably don't have. I always give that piece of advice or that caveat. I know it's hard. We're so busy and we're probably overworked and underpaid and all that, but to figure it out definitely has been a move that has helped me. I'll say it that way.

Andrew Olsen:                  Awesome. All right, so last question. I don't fly Southwest a lot, but rumor has it that you're featured in their most recent inflight magazine. Tell us A, how it happened and give us a little bit of insight on the magazine article.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Oh, you're so awesome to bring this up. So, the April issue of Southwest Airlines Inflight magazine, it was this whole entire feature on me and my work at the California Symphony. And it has been the most amazing piece of press. Their circulation is 6.5 million people. That's how many people fly Southwest in a given month. And of course, not every single one of those people read the magazine in the seat back pocket, but a lot of them do. And so, how it came about is they found my blog and started seeing some of the things that we've talked about today like, "Wow, you're actually doing things seemingly really different. You've got these results to show for it. We want to talk about that." And that's how it came about.

Aubrey Bergauer:             It wasn't our own PR person was pitching the story or anything like that. It was really organic inbound, which is so nice when it happens that way. So, I would say it was the culmination of a lot of years of really hard work and then they found me, found California Symphony and decided to write about it and the results have been so amazing. With a circulation like that, it's just people across the country are reaching out now and saying this is awesome. Inside the arts and outside the arts saying, "This is the change that I want to see in arts and culture in America." And so, talk about rewarding and fulfilling. It's been insane in the best way.

Andrew Olsen:                  That's really awesome. Congratulations on that.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Thank you.

Andrew Olsen:                  Hey, Aubrey, if anybody wants to get in touch with you, what's the best way for people to contact you?

Aubrey Bergauer:             Oh, gosh. I am on social media, Aubrey Bergauer Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn. You can find me in californiasymphony.org if you can't find me that way because my name is complicated to spell. So, there you go.

Andrew Olsen:                  Awesome. Well, thank you again for being here today. Thanks for sharing your insight and wisdom with us. I really appreciate it.

Aubrey Bergauer:             Such a pleasure. Thank you.

Andrew Olsen:                  Awesome.