Andrew Olsen: Hey, welcome to the Rainmaker Fundraising Podcast, sponsored exclusively by Newport ONE. This is Andrew Olsen and I'm here with my co-host, Roy Jones. Roy, welcome.

Roy Jones: Hey, good to be with you.

Andrew Olsen: Glad you're here, man. We're in for a treat today. So we're here today with Betsy Taylor, the president of Accordant Philanthropy, and I'm so eager to talk to Betsy and jump into this conversation because we're going to talk today about the role of leadership in philanthropy and the impact that it makes. And there's nobody better to have that conversation with than Betsy. Betsy, welcome.

Betsy Taylor: Thank you. Great to be here.

Andrew Olsen: Hey, so grateful for you to share your wisdom and your time with us. Before we get into any deep questions, could you take a minute to tell us a little bit about yourself and a little bit about Accordant?

Betsy Taylor: Sure, absolutely. So I've been working in healthcare philanthropy for about 25 years now. I'm passionate about moving this field forward, not just for healthcare, but for philanthropy in general. I believe we've got a noble mission to fulfill and I think that means we've got to always bring our best to everything we're doing. Accordant works exclusively with healthcare organizations in the United States and Europe in raising money for hospitals, academic medicine programs, schools of medicine and similar.

Andrew Olsen: Awesome. Thank you. So let's jump right into it. The first question I want to get your perspective on is, when we talk about leadership in philanthropy particularly, I suspect a lot of people that listen think immediately of a chief development officer, development director. But I think you mean something differently when you talk about leadership in philanthropy. Would you agree?

Betsy Taylor: Sure, I do. I think I see it as being expansive and beyond just the chief philanthropy officer.

Andrew Olsen: Tell us more about that.

Betsy Taylor: Sure. So, I guess where I started was, so many programs that I talked to said they didn't get access to the information they needed, the resources they needed, the allies they needed. And so I felt like part of what we needed to be doing as leaders in philanthropy was managing up and engaging the leaders who were the chief executive officers of our organizations and the governing board members of our organizations. In healthcare, also our clinicians. I also see though, within the ranks of our philanthropy organization, we have a lot of directors of development and major gift officers and others who have influence and you know have the capacity to lead. So I've tried to take a more holistic approach to leadership in terms of how we are positioning ourselves, how we're deploying the influence we have, how we're engaging stakeholders around us.

Roy Jones: It really is about building culture, isn't it Betsy?

Betsy Taylor: It is indeed. And for so many people, if your chief executive officer does not believe in what you do, good luck to you. It is very hard to push that rock uphill. And so I felt like sometimes we needed to look outside our own offices and look at the people who were down the hallway in the C-suite.

Andrew Olsen: Hmm. So that's a really important point right there, and it actually leads right into my next question. You know, one of the things that Roy and I have seen, we've spent a lot more time on the social service side, and international relief and development, some other places, not as much in healthcare. But I suspect it might be true for all. We've been in organizations where the prevailing logic is, "Well, we hired a development person and it's their job to do development," right? And, "I don't do that because I'm doing the real work." How does an organization overcome that cultural challenge?

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. What I find myself saying to a lot of chief executive officers is, any donor who is going to give you a significant gift wants to see the whites of your eyeballs. They want to have a relationship with you. They want to hear your vision. They want to know that you are trustworthy. They want to know that you are authentic. They want to know that you're going to execute. And so the engagement of leadership, just to affirm that we are the right place for them to deploy the good they have in mind, to me is essential. So certainly we have opportunities there to engage our leadership and the work we're doing. And that extends to our governing board and our foundation board members as well.

Roy Jones: You know, she mentioned something that, since I'm the color commentator, I got to jump on this. She talks about seeing the whites of their eyes. These larger donors, the whites that they send us, we call it whitemail in our industry. We send them a pre-printed reply envelope, but because they want the chief executive officer to respond, they go to the trouble to go to the post office, get stamps, find their own stationary and mail their own donation in in their own envelope because of what you just said, Betsy. They want the chief executive. They want the leadership in the C-suite to pay attention to that gift.

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. And I get that. They're not just investing in our mission, they're investing in the vision of that person. And they need to know that that person has the right vision and the right ambition. And so we should be working to foster those relationships. With that, just to throw in, CEOs will often say, "I'm terrified to go out there on my own." What I've said to them over and over again is you never have to have the words, "Will you consider a gift in the range of X," come out of your mouth.

Roy Jones: That's perfect.

Betsy Taylor: Instead, talk about what you believe in. Talk about what you care about. Talk about how this organization is going to fulfill its mission. Because going back to what Andrew said a minute ago, great philanthropy is an everyone endeavor. It is not down to a few people who happen to be sitting in the fund development office. It is about every person that that donor interacts with on our frontline to our C-suite who is talking about who we are, demonstrating cultural beliefs that we hold, and giving people confidence to participate with us or not.

Roy Jones: Hey, that's the meme of the day, right there. So I'll give you attribution, that's going on Facebook when we get done here.

Betsy Taylor: All right, I'll take it!

Roy Jones: Philanthropy is an everyone responsibility.

Andrew Olsen: Absolutely. I think AFP ought to have a tattoo booth with that at their conferences. So I'm curious, and maybe this is a misplaced assumption, Betsy, but when I think about a homeless shelter or a Boys and Girls Club or something like that who pretty much are 100% reliant on philanthropy, it feels like they might be quicker to act because there's a greater need. Do you see in healthcare that because there is a different and significant revenue source in patients and insurers, is it harder to get C-suite executives to adopt a philanthropic mindset? Or is that something that you kind of see as a challenge across the board?

Betsy Taylor: I definitely see this as a challenge. And it's crazy to me that every CEO knows that they have a not-for-profit status as a charitable organization, but they sometimes act like they're a business. And they will say, "We have a revenue source, we have money coming in." And there's almost a point at which they don't embrace that they're a mission and don't feel they're entitled to ask people to participate in their noble work. So some of them are, frankly, to a point that they're having to get past that. The median operating margin in hospitals today is 2%.

Roy Jones: Did you say 2%?

Betsy Taylor: 2%.

Roy Jones: Ouch.

Betsy Taylor: Ouch! So if you truly have a compelling and audacious vision, good luck funding that with the 2% that you're getting. You're using that to replace things, to clean things up, to keep your plant in order. You're not pursuing your vision of potential and enabling competitive advantage on a 2% operating margin. So I think whether you're in hospitals or universities or social service organizations, you need to realize that philanthropy can be a critical revenue source to power your best plans.

Roy Jones: Absolutely. So tell me this, how do we go from understanding that cognitively to acting on it? What are some of the best ways that you've found to engage C-suite leaders in philanthropy?

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. I think the first one is very simplistic. Speak their language. I've talked to so many CEOs who think that... They'll say, "My philanthropy executive tells me there's an art and science to fundraising." And I say, "Yes there are both. But you know what? Fundraising is built on best practices and metrics and benchmarks and known deliberate proactive processes. Don't act like this is just fairy dust that we go out there and sprinkle." I think we also need to quit talking about cost per dollar raise. Our executives talk about return on investment, and so we need to utilize the same terminology that they use to be taken seriously. I just think we've got to make sure that philanthropy is not seen as a decorative social endeavor, but it's seen as a management process that is thoughtfully and proactively and respectfully deployed to invite people to be part of our work.

Andrew Olsen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's deep. I like that. And I think, Roy, there's another meme somewhere in there about fundraising fairy dust.

Roy Jones: Absolutely. Well, speaking of fairy dust, I do. Have a vested interest here now of course, I support a hospital ship that floats on the water, but one of the things that we do is recruit physicians, doctors, nurses, medical professionals to come work on our ship. We really have not done a great job at getting them to also become donors. It's interesting, with your background in fundraising, talk to me about physicians and medical professionals and how involved, philanthropically, they can be.

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. So I'm going to give you a totally counterintuitive answer. People will often say, "We're not sure if we should engage that physician in our work because he or she does not give." And what I tell leaders all the time is, "Don't focus on whether they are giving now, engage them in our work. Because if we can expose them to the joy of altruism and giving, they will come around. When they can see the impact and the ability that giving has to affect change, they will catch on fire for it themselves." But I think so often with our physicians, especially in hospitals, we presume that they would be compelled to give and we don't ever say to them, "What do you believe in? What do you care about? What do you value? What do you want to make in the universe?" And so I think we need to do the same thing we do with any other major gift donor. Find out what they care about, give them opportunities to ignite their passion, and engage them.

Roy Jones: Good. Very good. It's about them, not us, right?

Betsy Taylor: It is. It's always about the donor. When we start talking about us, us, us, we know we're in trouble because it is never about us. I say to leaders all the time, "People don't give to us, they give through us. They give to affect change. They give to touch people's lives. They don't give to an institution."

Andrew Olsen: Hmm.

Roy Jones: That's powerful.

Andrew Olsen: So I want to talk a little bit about board relationships. We see oftentimes that boards might appear reluctant to engage deeply in philanthropy, but then at the same time there's a misconception, an unrealistic expectation about how fast philanthropy can result in dollars, especially significant dollars. So what is it that you think organizations are doing wrong or could do better in the way that they bring their board along in that conversation, and also in how we set expectations for what that growth potential from a timing perspective also looks like?

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. Oh, I could go on for hours about this.

Andrew Olsen: I know, that's why I asked!

Betsy Taylor: So I think we set ourselves up for failure when the first question we ask is, "How will we get our board to raise money?" There was a statistic that I read that said 85% of people do not think they have the capability to raise money. It's outside their comfort zone, it's not what they want to do. They're afraid of being set up for failure. So I think the first thing we need to do is recognize that we're trying to engage them in a continuum of activity, that it's everything from identifying people who care about us and have affinity, to telling stories and engaging and advocating for our organizations, asking good questions around what they want to do. Yes, there's a moment in which we ask, but then there's a whole lot after that around stewardship and sharing impact.

And so I think with board members, part of what we need to do is not see them as a cookie cutter of a bunch of people who believe and care about the same thing, but instead say, "How do you want to be engaged? How could you be effective? What tools and resources do you need?" Because I find there are a lot of folks who would be reticent to sit down and ask for money, but they would open a hundred doors for you. And opening a hundred doors is critical to our mission because if we can't open a door, we will never have a real conversation with someone. So I think it's first just tailoring to how they want to be engaged and fulfill their own purpose.

And then I think you're right as well. They need to understand that it's not likely that they're going to walk in and say, "Will you consider giving a gift to my organization today?" And someone says yes. They need to get to know us. They need to see how we behave. They need to see if we fulfill our promises, they need to see if we're the type of organization they really want to be engaged with. And so getting to really know someone takes time. And I think we should give the donors that we talk to the grace to recognize that the timeline should be there, because they're the ones who need to satisfy their needs for information and their needs for feeling comfortable with us. And so if we can just respect the donor's timeline, I think that it puts it in a different perspective.

Andrew Olsen: So I want to go back to something you said. I think those are great points. You talked about getting to know each board member individually, understanding their personal goals and their desires and how they see themselves fitting in. And I have two questions about that. First of all, I've been in plenty of board rooms where there was never a development officer present in those conversations, and even some where some of my clients even will say, "Oh yeah, our CEO doesn't allow us to talk to the board." Right? So question number one is, how do we go about changing that culture? And question number two is, with respect to facilitating that conversation, that too feels like a much longer process than I think most development shops are comfortable with, because so many of us are in the mode of like, "Well, how do I ask right now for a gift right now?" Talk us through some perspective on that.

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. So I think it all goes back to even that executive leadership engagement. What I've found over and over again was people said exactly what you just said. "I'm not allowed access to the governing board. I'm not allowed to have relationships or to ask them to be part of our work." And that to me said the executive leader did not understand what our role was, but they also maybe thought our role was a little bit embarrassing. They thought we were arm-twisting. They didn't realize this was a joyful altruistic endeavor. They saw us as taking people somewhere they didn't want to go. And so to gain access to those board members in that board room, I think you first have to change the mind of the executive. So engaging them then gives you access to the others.

And then, you know, the timeline, again, is always fluid. We need to talk about what the timeline of donors is going to be even relative to... There's so many times that executive leadership is thinking about their budget year, or their capital budget, or when they're going to stick a shovel in the ground. And we need to realize that our timeline is not always their timeline. And if we truly wish to engage with people as partners and stand shoulder to shoulder together, we're going to look at how we can craft a shared vision on a shared timeline.

Roy Jones: It's about them, not us.

Betsy Taylor: It is!

Roy Jones: I think I heard somebody say that a few minutes ago.

Andrew Olsen: But I'm curious to get your perspective on how you think we, as a sector, are doing at building up the next generation of leaders, and what we might need to do differently or better to position our organizations for success over the next couple of decades.

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. I think what breaks my heart the most when we look at leadership in our sector is how often we see someone who is, for example, an excellent major gift officer suddenly thrust into a leadership role as a chief philanthropy officer with no preparation to be at that table. They were great at going and talking to people about being engaged, but they don't know how to build a strategy, or to influence leadership, or to talk about the financial statement. And so I think sometimes we have failed our leaders by pushing them into positions without giving them the support and training that they need to go and be successful. And I think that's in part why we see so much turnover in our industry, that we do put people in positions that they're not yet ready for. And our colleagues deserve more care and keeping than that.

Andrew Olsen: Right on, yeah. Excuse me, sorry.

Roy Jones: Yeah, it's interesting. I had a meeting with a board member, and we've kind of gone through a transition in this respect too, but he was concerned that prior to me sitting down with them, that no one from the executive team had asked him for a gift in the past few years. And he said, "If you don't ask, I'm not going to give. And I'm on the board." And I just thought that was very, very, very revealing about their heart. Yeah, they support us. Yeah, they go to meetings, in our case four times a year. One of those meetings, they fly halfway across the world to Africa for one of those meetings. But he wasn't going to write a check unless he was asked. And so often we think that people don't want to be asked. The people that have great capacity, they do want to be asked. They do want to have input into the process, and this whole piece about board governance and involving them in the culture of philanthropy.

And it truly is, I call it a ministry. We honor people by how much we ask for, what we ask for. And, specifically, if we can find their passion first so that we can make the ask about something they have a heart for. And I just think you're just right on the mark here, especially with these board governance comments. It's something the whole industry needs.

Betsy Taylor: Thank you. It's pretty amazing work. I think it's worth the effort. And I think we have a lot of work to do as a sector in talking to leaders, whether they're executives, or board members in hospitals, clinicians, we've got a lot of work to do. And I think that in some part with that as well, we need to give ourselves a promotion. We need to realize that we're people who have important solutions, who can add significant value. Our profession is noble. I never want to hear someone say to me, "I don't know how you raise money." How often do we hear that? And I think-

Andrew Olsen: All the time.

Betsy Taylor: All the time! And we need to let people know that what we do is magic and amazing. And we work with people who want to really affect change. And boy, I can't think of a better job than that. So let's embrace that and let other people see the opportunity to be part of those conversations.

Andrew Olsen: Yeah, I'm with you. I'd much rather have somebody say, "How do you sell beer and cars all day?" Right?

Betsy Taylor: Yeah.

Andrew Olsen: In my mind, that's a lot easier of a question than, "How do you raise money for this great cause?" We have to be proud of it, right? But you're right. So often, it feels like when I meet someone who works in the field, even when they're talking to somebody like me, they're almost apologetic when they describe their role, or they've got to hush tones like they're a drug dealer or something.

Betsy Taylor: Yes, yes.

Roy Jones: Oh, I'm always amazed at the unique job descriptions we come up with in the development and philanthropic world to try and hide from people that we're in the money business. But they know why we're there.

Betsy Taylor: Absolutely. You know, though-

Roy Jones: The titles we give ourself.

Betsy Taylor: I do wish we would change some of our titles though. I wish we would quit calling ourselves major gift officers, instead talking about being philanthropic gift advisors. I think that we do have titles that sound-

Roy Jones: I like that.

Betsy Taylor: ... [crosstalk 00:22:25] worry in nature, and we have an opportunity to elevate our own profession by changing some of the semantics. With that, the other thing I say to boards all the time that I've vehemently agree on, I say to them, "Put up the tin cup. This is not about fundraising. This is not transactional. This is not about somebody giving a gift and us thanking them and them all moving on. This is about philanthropy." And philanthropy is not about gift size, it is about values and intention and shared purpose, and people want to be part of philanthropy. People want to be part of efforts that are bigger than themselves and that is beautiful work.

Andrew Olsen: You know, Roy was actually telling a story about this recently, this was a couple of weeks ago now, about a donor he had been cultivating who said, "You know what?" I'm going to butcher this Roy, but basically said, "I don't know if I want to give to you right now, because if I give, then I'm afraid I'm not going to hear from you again."

Betsy Taylor: Oh, wow.

Andrew Olsen: And I think that speaks so much volumes to what people's experience are with fundraisers in our sector.

Betsy Taylor: Yes.

Roy Jones: And there's a lot of bad actors out there that are... It depends how you look at it. I mean, I've taken it as a challenge to show donors specifically what a real fundraising and development officer should feel and do and act. And so many have just been beat up just by people twisting their arms, treating them like an ATM machine. And to find somebody that really sits down with them and finds out what their passion is, finds out where their heart is, finds out what they want to do. And then, as you said, becoming their advisor on how you can do that on the inside of our organization. Man, that's fun.

Betsy Taylor: It is.

Andrew Olsen: And I love that title. I think it brings parody to the conversation between someone who's having a conversation with their financial advisor on how to spend their money elsewhere, right? To also, how do they spend it philanthropically? I think that's a much smarter place for us to be.

Betsy Taylor: Thank you. Well, you can help me try and get people to change their titles. One of my missions.

Andrew Olsen: We've got to catalog all the titles first.

Betsy Taylor: Yes we do! That's a whole other problem. That's a whole other podcast.

Andrew Olsen: Well Betsy, we're just about out of time. I'm so grateful that you were here. Love the conversation that we just had. If somebody wants to get in touch with you, wants to learn more about Accordant Philanthropy or talk to you about your thoughts, how do they reach you?

Betsy Taylor: Betsy@accordantphilanthropy.com, and I always love the conversation. I'd be delighted for anybody to reach out, and I'd also love to share any information that I can about just the joy of giving and the power of gratitude and purpose. I'd love to be part of the conversation.

Andrew Olsen: Awesome. Well maybe we'll have to have you back for a conversation about gratitude.

Betsy Taylor: That'd be great. Let's do it.

Andrew Olsen: Awesome. Thank you again.

Roy Jones: Thank you, Betsy.

Betsy Taylor: Thank you, great to be with you.