Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy podcast.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're your hosts, Fluxx's, co-founder Kerrin Mitchell, and Neon One's Tim Sarrantonio. We've spent our career learning how to leverage technology and data in the social sector to better connect and serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

Kerrin Mitchell:

In this podcast series, we profile leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry experts to explore the fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most formative topics and trends that shape the present and future of philanthropy.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Welcome to Untapped Philanthropy. These are very extraordinary times, folks. And today we're going to be diving into a topic that is deeply affected by the evolving political and regulatory landscape, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience. I'm thrilled to introduce our next guest, David Beckman. David is the president of the Pisces Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to advancing the collaborations capacity necessary for people, communities, and nature to thrive. Pisces is a resource for problem solvers seeking the tools to address global environmental challenges and to build a vibrant San Francisco. David, we're absolutely delighted to have you here. Welcome.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome!

David Beckman:

Great to be here. Thank you both. Looking forward to the conversation.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Awesome. So let's kick things off a bit. I want ask you, reflecting on your journey, was there a defining moment that you knew that environmental philanthropy would be your life's work?

David Beckman:

Well, honestly, no. I tell people that I think of myself as an accidental philanthropist because really what I set out to do was to be an environmental advocate, and I still think of myself as that, even though I clearly have a different job than I did when I started. I'm a lawyer by training. I worked at a law firm for a couple of years after law school. Really didn't love that and wanted to combine a passion for the environment with the legal skills that I had. So I went to an environmental organization called NRDC, some of your listeners may know it, the Natural Resources Defense Counsel. And I was happily there for more than 15 years doing environmental justice litigation, water litigation. I ran a water program across the country. And then had this opportunity through somebody I met at NRDC, a trustee named Bob Fisher to help start this foundation about 12 years ago. And so I jumped at that opportunity because I love social entrepreneurial work and I knew from being a grant seeker how critical grant makers are to what happens in the social sector. That was certainly true when I was doing the work and I think it's still true today. And so that's how I ended up being the president of a foundation.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And you did this through obviously NRDC. Oh, actually I love that you're a reformed lawyer. That's one of my favorite things when people are like, and then I decided to leave. It's like, oh yes. But it's such a skillset to bring to the next place you go and then you're at NRDC. And while you were there, we did a little bit of homework on you, as you might've imagined. You did a fair amount of work that basically moved forward. It's called Mosaic that you're doing at Pisces, but you did have this approach that you started back then, is that correct? And then you brought it into sort of the realm of where you are now. Can you share a little bit more about how that innovation occurred? What is it? What's the approach? How did you run into some of the problems you ran into and how you overcame them as a part of this? Because a unique approach that we really thought was compelling.

David Beckman:

Yeah, thanks. I mean, the truth is that I did some of what we're doing now, and I'll get into that when I was at NRDC, but I frankly learned a lot. I've learned a lot about the things I didn't do well and the ways and the approaches that I think were what I knew, but in the full reflection of time maybe could have been improved.

Kerrin Mitchell:

It's so wise. So wise we all learned from mistakes. I love it.

David Beckman:

I love, but it's wise. I think that I'm in such a fortunate position. Those of us in these sorts of jobs, these are like unicorn jobs. How do you get a job giving away money? I mean, not even your own money in my case. So I think it's incumbent upon people who have that sort of good fortune to think hard about how to do it well. That's at least a fair trade for the opportunity and in part because a lawyer. So I think being a lawyer has helped me and it helped me back. It's helped me because I think advocacy is a key and I consider myself an advocate in this job, even though I do it differently. Advocacy for social change that I think is important. Lawyers also can be super technical. So I cut my teeth guys on one section of the Clean Water Act.

I spent five years exploring maybe 350 words. One case is based on where a comma was placed and what that meant for the rest of the phrase. So that can be really helpful, but that's a tactic that's not going to generate the sort of influence and power that really is needed to make more than a marginal impact. And I think the challenges we have on water, which is what I worked on, or environmental justice or climate, you name it, are really no longer in my view, challenges of policy. They're not challenges. We don't know how to fix it. They're challenges of narrative, of influence, of power ultimately. And what I realized and what we do at the foundation now is that we're over balanced, over focused on the policy generation and under focused on getting people really excited and with us and generating the influence that you can generate. And that's what we're doing now.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Because especially with the environmental aspect, people can feel so helpless that they can't do anything. In your purview, how do you overcome that? I wouldn't even call it apathy. It's more of an existential despair sometimes that other cause areas don't necessarily agree.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I agree. It is very unique to climate. It does feel so large,

Tim Sarrantonio:

Big.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And it's funny then people only focus to your point on the policy side and how do we, but other ones might...

Tim Sarrantonio:

I feel also, this is not the first time you've asked this type of question.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Other people might rotate too hard on the community side and forget the policy side. Obviously both have to be there, but what an interesting contrast for climate to be almost the inverse of that.

David Beckman:

Right. Well this is an incredibly important question and we could probably talk till we're taping this Friday. We could talk till Sunday about that question.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yes, yes.

David Beckman:

And I won't say that I have all the answers to it. I do think that from the seat that I have, I can say the following that it's no question a big issue. And I think as you move from the granular thing in your community to what are global issues, you get more and more of the sense which is not unrealistic, that an individual can't really affect the trajectory. So I do think that localizing things helped a lot when I did a lot of water quality work. I started working in Southern California and while the big issues that we were addressing were throughout all of southern California, which is as big as a couple of states on the east coast, no one person can handle that. The fact that the pollution ended up in the ocean and that so many people were there and loved to go to the beach, 60 million people in the summer in LA County as an example, made the issue proximate. And I think that helps. The second thing, and this is a lot of what we try to fund now, is you need infrastructure in social movements to actually get to provide the on-ramps for people so that they can learn what they can do and take action in ways that tend to mitigate that sense of I can't do anything about it. Without those on-ramps then we're all sort of bouncing off bubbles as we move around wanting to do something. But even having the time to figure out how to do it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And this is where Kerrin goes. Tim's going off script. So I had just watched a documentary, it was a half an hour thing, 1992 called Return of the Scorcher. I dunno if any of you are familiar with it.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I haven't heard of it.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's where they term critical mass for the biking movement came from.

And so in this 1992 documentary, it talks about the differences in US versus for instance, European and Chinese bike versus car culture. And it was such an amazing emergent strategy exploration of little steps. And it's infected me already where it's basically, why do we drive everywhere is really the central question of the documentary is why do we not build bike friendly societies in the United States? And my daughter, my 7-year-old, literally just she has a school assignment. So David, I'll lead into a question here, but I'll use today's youth as the weight because this weighs on me for my kids. So my daughter brings in this school thing and it says, describe your community in an urban environment. If you lived in an urban environment, what would it be like? My 7-year-old daughter talked about Uber, talked about cars, talked about taxis, didn't talk about public transportation, didn't talk about biking, and this isn't because she has bad teachers.

It's because we've designed a world that enshrines infrastructurally that thing. So how can we design movements? Then I'll pitch this back to you, David. So that's the bigger world. How do you see success in designing a movement that shows another world is possible here? Because ultimately, like you've said, we've known this in policy for a very long time. That's actually probably not the issue. We have a lot of smart people who know what to do. So talk about the actual change because this isn't bummer town. I want to go into people feeling like they can do something with this. So what are your thoughts on that?

David Beckman:

Well, first of all, right, it's not bummer town. I mean I think that Rebecca Solnit has a great piece about hope, and hope is an anecdote or it's a middle ground between despair and optimism. It's that space where you think there could be some productive action. And I think as somebody who gives money away, philanthropy is not going to lead a movement. That's not this posture we have at the foundation. But what we can do is that we can provide some of the infrastructure to your question, the social infrastructure, if you'll,

That can help flip the script you're talking about. So part of it is when you talk about public transportation versus Uber or you talk about what is prominent when you're moving around town, what do you see a lot of what you see is what's funded. I think the extent that environmental organizations and others have more money for narrative, for TikTok, for Instagram, for all of those things, that begins to level the playing field. And I also think that in my own experience doing this work that nothing succeeds like wins, small wins can build exponentially. When I got out of a big law firm and had a chance to stand up in front of a court on behalf of environmental issues, it's this proud moment. And when you have any success like emotion, a little emotion that I got to argue, it's addictive. And so the way we can structure movements and social campaigns to give people a sense of that power, the more better off we are. I mean, just me, I've been at this a long time in my personal life. I weighed in on a proclamation of the school district for LGBTQ. And I've been in front of the State supreme court,

Federal district courts, Federal appellate courts, et cetera, et cetera. This is a school district. And when they said yes, we're with you, me and the 10 people who talk, it's a feeling of almost like joy. And I think that the extent that we can tap into that and provide the cash to tap into that to allow people to have those experiences, we can really make progress.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I've been obsessed with fractals in particular, and especially because in nature you look at a fern and it's going to expand out. And that's kind of been very comforting to me, kind of almost the biomimicry. I actually even wrote on LinkedIn today about biomimicry because I just came out of the Community

Centric Fundraising Conference that they just hosted and they talked a lot about this on the grantee side, how can we build our own power and our own infrastructures? But fractals are so fascinating because of the scale. So kind of a question that I can also...

Kerrin Mitchell:

It's scale an awareness. That's the thing. It's all of a sudden you're like, oh, snap. This has tentacles everywhere. And I think people don't realize that they can only see as a hub and spoke what they're attached to. And I have a tech, I want you to keep chatting. I know you have a thought on this, but I do want to, I'm putting a pin in it. I get to talk about it next. I want to talk about where tech can help on that. I am very curious what David thinks about some of the opportunities.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, I was just going to lead into, and we can maybe shift to the tech. How do you focus with all of that? If in a world where mycelium connect everything, how does that not actually drive you to scope creep in a way for your own work, right? You can see the connections everywhere. How do you kind of zero in on that where it's like this is my part of the ecosystem?

David Beckman:

Yeah. Well first of all, it's great to meet somebody who's into fractals, into mycelium. You and I are like brothers from different mothers or something. Love it. I have a bunch of books. I have a book on lichen. I love actually going out on the...

Tim Sarrantonio:

I have an entire shelf of B books and things right here. So...

David Beckman:

I love going out into Tomales Bay and just, there's a portion of it where you can just kind of paddle by these beautiful cliffs with lichen growing up side. So I think I've forgotten your question.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It was how do you focus?

Kerrin Mitchell:

I was actually going to say I love that this is a question that you're asking Tim. It's my favorite part of this whole thing too. It's coming from you. Let's talk about focus, in the best way, but it does tie in. It's focus and I think there's a second part of the question, which is around the idea that you have talked about getting in front of audiences from the PTA to the State Senate to DC and the question of how do you focus? Are there effective ways that people can look to say, how do I start to shift and make that awareness? And maybe it is to bring the fractal back in. How do you make awareness to the larger parts of the fractal that you might not see if you are in that hub and spoke or that thing that feels like it's only one or two steps of visual, how do you expand that?

David Beckman:

Yeah, right. It's a good question. It's a super hard thing to do right now particularly, but I think in my professional role, which is really where I spend most of my time on this kind of work, a lot of it is making

the conscious decision not to do everything. And I think that whether you do environmental work for a living or whether you just care about it, that nobody can do everything. And so a good piece of device from my perspective is to pick something or two things and to focus on those even though with a lot of intention, what people might call with some mindfulness and with some non attachment to the other things. Because that's what I've seen in the work is that it's usually, it doesn't take even a lot of people to move something forward, but it does take some people being really focused on it.

I'd rather work on a project and environmental work with a couple of people who are very focused than a dozen who are sort of like that's the third thing on their list. So I think that's one thing to do if that's in your community, if that's through one of the larger environmental groups that provide a million emails that can tell you what's going on there. Our half technology has provided ways of communicating that it's much easier than it used to be in terms of one click and you can send a message to your congress person, for example. And in our foundation, what we've decided to do also is, and what I'm doing, part of why I'm talking to you, is just to make the same sorts of points and to focus on what we think we can add. Which is not to say that we're going to add everything or that others aren't adding things that are super important, but what I think we can add right now is a focus on what does it take to boost influence and to help make the case frankly for the fact that we've been too fixated over time on policy and technological solutions, and we just need to rebalance it.

It's not that policy and technology don't matter, they matter hugely, but the balance is out of whack and you can't get to technological solutions, and you certainly can't get to policy solutions without influence. So that's where it all starts.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Where do you see some of the biggest challenges rising out of that in terms of, again, I think you look at obviously the current environment we're in, political whiplash, all the things that are going on here. Where do you start to, where do you typically with the work you're doing specifically run into the biggest challenges and how do you typically try to go about those? Since some of those things are obviously out of your control when you talk about everything, you've got Federal cuts, you've got AI, you've got a million things, there's a climate, there's even denials, a rampant. How do you sort of go in and tackle those things?

David Beckman:

What we do, we make grants. And so I can tell you a little bit about how we're trying to help grantee partners with those kinds of challenges. And I wrote about this in a piece in the SSIR, the Stanford Social Innovation Review. And part of what I've seen and begun to try to address is that philanthropy in general tends to fund in ways which make the job that you're asking about harder than it needs to be. That's in part because philanthropy in general concentrates money in a relatively small set of organizations. Just to give your listeners a quick factoid, so there are 10 or 20,000 environmental nonprofits in the country, and there's a large association of environmental grantmakers called the Environmental Grantmakers Association, EGA. And the members of that organization give about 50% of the several billion that they collectively contribute annually to just about 200 organizations to 200 out of say 20,000. So that is not a recipe for a fractal at any scale to be strong and vibrant.

It's siloed, it's not broad. The scale isn't there. The capacity to connect different, like mycelium, isn't there when you've put that much money in. So I'm making an argument for different funding paradigm, which really builds a broad field. Looks, if you will, to build all those organisms and distributes the money in a broader way in order to get that kind of scale, because that's going to be a critical ingredient of influence. That will mean that organizations like to take this theory and take it into where you live.

That will mean that the nonprofit in your community might have a little bit more money to do the things that would connect somebody who's looking to do something to make a change to the way to do it. It just makes, what we can do is shift the probabilities. We're not going to direct a movement, but we can shift the probabilities if we fund in different ways. So I think that's the thing that I can do and other people who run foundations can do. Right now,

Tim Sarrantonio:

How has the current situation at the Federal level affected that strategy and viewpoint in terms of any, I tactically, yeah, we know things have to shift, but I'm more interested in the roots. And so what has changed and what has stayed strong throughout the last few months?

David Beckman:

Well, I think things are evolving, and I think that the idea of building a field is very consistent with trying to address the moment. I mean, the moment is that a lot of nonprofits, not just in the environmental or climate space, but broadly are losing funding, particularly those who've had federal grants or that funding is caught up in some sort of, they can't get to it or they're worried about losing it. We're seeing that happening. And so the answer to that is to move money broadly, to move more money, number one. Of course. But to think about how that money doesn't get grooved in the same ways with the same patterns that tend to concentrate it. The concentration has a lot of levels to it. It also includes more money going to larger organizations, less to say frontline BIPOC led organizations. So that is part of the answer. And I think that right now it's a combination of more money and as I said, moving the money in ways that offer more to more organizations so that we can maintain the legacy of these nonprofits that we've inherited that are so powerful. We don't want to lose that. We talk about infrastructure, that's the core. We need to build on that, but we certainly can't lose it if we're going to get stronger.

Kerrin Mitchell:

What would be some of your advice then to folks that are perhaps in a similar field to you or part of the, sorry, EGA, EGA. Did I get that right?

David Beckman:

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell:

What is some of the advice that you would say, Hey, let's meet this moment. Here's my three things I ask of you.

David Beckman:

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, I think what I've offered a couple of ideas. So one of them is to think about who you're funding, add money. We at the foundation are adding money this year and distributed broadly. Meet new organizations, ask existing partners that you trust, who do you trust? Who can I reach out to and support? How do you build strength in this moment? How do we build alliance and fellowship in this moment? That is easy to do if you're communicating with your partners. The second is to ask yourself as a foundation, is there ways that you can share power? One of the things that we've invested in at the Pisces Foundation is something called participatory grant making. So what that is is in contrast to somebody like me or people I hire, making all the grant decisions, you give money to the people doing the work, and you support them in distributing money to the field in which they're in.

And this is something like in a project called Mosaic, which is in the environmental space where leaders in the movement, highly diverse group, environmental justice, big brains, get money and they distribute it for social infrastructure in the field. It's a very powerful way to meet the moment, very powerful way to put people who know what they're doing in closer proximity to funding decisions. And only one in 10 foundations according to a study a couple of years ago actually share that sort of decision making power. I think it would be good for philanthropy also to do that. It's not just good for the organizations. So that's a second thing. And then the third is think about frontline organizations. There's some amazing studies, so shocking perhaps, that show that just somewhere between a couple percent and 20% of dollars go to frontline BIPOC led organizations. And my view is that those organizations are a critical part of movement building. Those organizations have expertise that somebody in DC doesn't. And so if your funding isn't strongly addressing that disparity, then there's an opportunity to fix that and to find really extraordinary organizations that deserve greater on the merits deserve greater funding. So those are three ideas.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, that was great because I wanted to actually even draw out an example, and now you don't have to pick favorites because we talked about the mosaic side and participatory grantmaking in particular I think is a really powerful concept. Maybe a follow-up question to that is, what's a lesson like a failure that you've learned from this process that you think can help others as they wade into that type of approach?

David Beckman:

Yeah. Well, it's a great question because participatory grantmaking is hard to do well. And that's in part because nonprofit organizations, well, let me say it this way. I think foundations unintentionally for the most part, put nonprofits in competition for money. That's how I felt when I was running a program at NRDC.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Absolutely. I totally think so too. It's really a hard one.

David Beckman:

So part of what I'm arguing for would the benefit of mitigating, it's not going to eliminate it. I don't want to be a Pollyanna, but it would mitigate the way in which foundations can unintentionally distort the relationships among the people they're funding in ways that tend to counter that scale, that collegiality, that we're all in it together. Because if, look, if you've got to raise your budget, how do you differentiate? There's a natural tendency for me to say, Hey, I'm going to be better than this guy over here, and therefore I should get the money. So one of the critical things with participatory grant making is recognizing that just because you set up a fund, you invite people into it, you give them facilitation and whatever, that those dynamics don't go away instantaneously. So in Mosaic, one of the turning points in that effort was when this inaugural leadership group that was making decisions had a retreat.

The retreat worked through a bunch of problems, and the treaties found themselves after dinner at one of those late night cookie shops in Brooklyn, 11 o'clock at night. People who didn't fully trust each other days ago or weeks ago, actually being human beings with each other. And when that trust builds up, it was so much easier to make decisions that were really good for everybody without that sense that the participants in the grant making process were like delegates that were just there to get their piece as

opposed to make good decisions together. So there's a lot more to it, but the relationship aspect and really attending to it is something that's I think a bottom line need.

Tim Sarrantonio:

One of the things to maybe follow up on that, I do love my late night Brooklyn cookie places, by the way.

David Beckman:

Insomnia. I dunno if you can say a brand, but it was Insomnia.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You can say a brand. Absolutely. It reminds me of the phrase that's kind of been my grounding mantra so far this year is move at the speed of trust. But I want to transition this. We'd love to talk about our technology on the Untapped Philanthropy podcast. This is a connection here, and there's always a bit of a friction too, potentially and especially more recently between tech and the environment. And so from your perspective, because I'm not going to put you on the spot about AI, let's actually say that's the one time I'm going to say the words AI in this episode. Kerrin, I'm holding you to that, but I want to talk about the broader role of technology in environmental organizations and how we can approach it in an integrated way. I actually think your perspective on this will help inform us to the broader question.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Or in a fractal way, tapping into the community and the awareness of that larger web too.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So it could be strategic, but then also maybe a practical example. A way that you folks are even using this to bring people to together would be great to hear.

David Beckman:

Yeah. Well look, I mean, I would say there's a couple things. So the first is a lot of the social movement infrastructure that I'm arguing is a really underfunded piece of the puzzle is tech. So these are not, this is, I don't know, with our analogies, this is like to add another one. It's a little bit like a weave, right? It's like a fabric that's woven and tech's a key part of it. So when you think about, well, what do movements need? Well, they need data and analytics. They need top rate communications. They need things that have a lot of technological backbone to them. I mean, that's not the full extent of it, but that's a lot of it. I think the question is sort of what are you leading with and what is your vision of how change occurs? I think what I would say is that for the most part, we've invested in the environmental movement and environmental climate in most of the solutions we need.

Now, some might argue that there's more that needs to be done, and I'd probably agree, but fundamentally in the water sector, what I used to work in, we kind of know how to fix things. It's political will and its cost. That's the issue. How do you address that? You address that with influence and power like we did in the modern environmental movement in the 1970s. There are other areas where we've also, at our foundation in trying to address climate change have funded a group of pollutants that are called super climate pollutants. So this is the other things, not CO_2 - methane, black carbon, which is essentially vehicle exhausts and some chemicals called HFCs. Pound for pound, this class of pollutants is hundreds of times as much as hundreds of times more potent than CO_2. And in that context, tech

matters a ton. So air conditioning, believe it or not, the chemicals that help refrigerants when they leak are climate change catalysts.

And there have been great technological solutions that change the composition of those refrigerants so that they don't do that or they do it less. So that's a good example of plugging in a technological solution to solve a really big problem. So I think it's a both and. I would just say that overall, the problem that we face today is not that we don't know how to fix the problems technologically, it's that we don't have the will, we don't have the influence. And in the environmental movement, I think we're relying a lot on influence. It was generated a long time and is reflected in statutes which are providing diminishing returns.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So I had the pleasure of attending the AWS Imagine event a few months ago, and Jane Goodall spoke. And so David, what you've been talking about helps connect to what she also of course had a lot of experience in when it comes to the environment. And they asked her about the role of technology. And I think it comes down to is it extractive or not in many ways. What is the intent of this and the usage of it. And especially to hear that guidance from organizations like yours and leadership like yours is inspiring. So in the environmental space, what does courageous leadership look like? Let's kind of bring that at a very high level. In your opinion, what does it look like to be courageous right now?

David Beckman:

Well, first of all, I think the organizations doing the work are the ones who are courageous. Philanthropy has a role to play, and I can tell you a little bit about what I think makes sense for philanthropy, but I think it's important to recognize that the organizations in communities who are up against efforts to undo policies that are so broadly beneficial to public health and to people generally, deserve our thanks and our gratitude now more than ever. From the perspective of philanthropy, I think that we need to recognize that the more money that we move all equal, the better off we are. So philanthropy that is stepping up by raising their grant making. I'm proud our foundation is doing that, I think is an important first step. What folks want from foundations is cash, and there's no reason not to just be direct about that. And what foundations exist to do is to provide money to charitable causes.

So that's our product. We need more product right now. My point also in some of the writing I've been doing is that how the money is directed matters. Who's making the decisions matter? Can we use this moment to provide money in flexible ways? Can we build fields? Can we build scale? Can we build the alliances that we need to face off against the big issues that we're facing? Atomistic one organization versus the world is not going to work. It never worked, and it certainly won't work now. So thinking hard as philanthropy people about how do you provide that money? Are there ways you can shift how you provide that money to do a better job, I think is also key. And then I think philanthropy has to stand up for the right to freedom to give. And I think this is a cross ideology. Whether you run a foundation that you might, one my characterize as focusing on conservative causes or liberal causes or wherever you are, there's a benefit to being able to give to the charitable causes that you'd like to without any government at any time telling you what to do. That's not good for the social sector in the country. And so philanthropy needs to be part of saying, Hey, wait a minute, we're not going to stand for being told that we can give to X and not to Y. And so I think that's a third area that's really key.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It flows like water. This is the thing is that we try to treat the gift, the giving, the actual act as a thing that's controllable. And it's ultimately, my background in all of this, Kerrin is on more of the formal grant making side. I'm in the messy world of individual giving,

And the philanthropic psychology that I've studied ultimately teaches people, it's about identity. And there's something, the natural world is where we all come from. And so that is part of our kind of core identity of all of us as humans. And so to try to control that is just baffling sometimes. But we like our systems, right David? We like to put things in boxes and sometimes that helps, but especially, I was almost going to be a lawyer, but I decided against it. So is there anything that we haven't asked? Because folks, you may notice Kerrin isn't speaking as much anymore. She has a bunch of teenagers and people in her house. We're not sure on the audio side. So I'm going to close things out for us, David. Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you wanted to make sure we talked about, that we discussed before we head into our final segment here?

David Beckman:

Well, this has been a great conversation. I mean, the only thing I would maybe add to it is just to bring us back to what philanthropy can do right now. You talked about Jane Goodall just a minute ago, and there's a concept, an evolution called evolutionary mismatch. And it's the idea that traits that might have been useful at one point carry forward, but become less useful or maybe not useful at all. And so let's not waste a crisis to think about, and let's use it to think about what as philanthropic actors, what aspects of the way we operate are like an evolutionary mismatch. What isn't serving the organizations who are losing money, who are, in many cases under attack in various ways, in unprecedented ways. What can we do, even if it's on the margin to make the social sector more robust, more capable, more ability to do what it's got to do on behalf of everybody in the country? I think that's part of what we need to do. That's part of what it means to be equal to the privilege that we've got in being able to provide money and to have jobs. We have to do this kind of work. And so I would just say there's a different answer maybe for different organizations, but asking the question is really key.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think that's a really great way to also kind of bookend a fantastic conversation, as you said, David. This has been such a pleasure between me and Kerrin. I'm going to round things out with the segment for this season, which is two truths and a lie. So tell us two truths and a lie, and we'll try to figure out which is which.

David Beckman:

Okay. Alright. So...

Tim Sarrantonio:

Because shared a fair amount about yourself, so I have a little bit of context clues, but I have a feeling you're pretty crafty with your words too. I got to watch the lawyer stuff here.

David Beckman:

I'll see if I can stump you here. So, okay, one, I'm a private pilot, love to fly airplanes.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Okay.

David Beckman:

Two, I went to law school with a Supreme Court Justice currently sitting and a former president of the United States in my class. And three, I've argued a case in the Supreme Court.

Tim Sarrantonio:

See, I know that I could look up number one because Nathan Fielder just wrapped his show, The Rehearsal about flying commercially. So I'm wondering if you watch that and you're drawing inspiration from that. You are straight faced. Our producer is in the chat. I will say, folks, and he is going to say number two. So I'm going to pair up with Shawn and say it's the second one. That is the lie.

David Beckman:

You guys were wrong. I went to law school with Neil Gorsuch and I went to law school with Barack Obama. They were in my class. My mother says, what happened to me?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Shawn, I shouldn't have listened to you because my gut actually said number one, because I was like, he's in an environmental organ. I don't think this guy's flying planes all over the place too.

David Beckman:

I never argued in the Supreme Court. So that's the one thing that I wish I had done. And my dad's a pilot, private pilot, and I grew up flying with him and loved to fly, although I haven't done it in a while. But yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You never argued in front of the Supreme Court.

David Beckman:

Never argued in front of the Supreme Court. Neil Gorsuch was in my first year section, and Obama was not, but Obama was a star even then. He had it. He stood out probably throughout his whole life.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Do you have any light tea that you can spill about either of them that is okay for a public context?

David Beckman:

I'll tell you if you want. I'll tell you a very quick funny story about Obama.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I'll happily end. Let's end on a fun Barack Obama story because you probably all want to hear that again. So...

David Beckman:

I'm not a friend of Barack Obama, but at one point you're in a class together, you kind of know who each other are. And when he was elected president, right after he was elected president, I went to an event with him, and this is perhaps at the height of Obamamania. People would get close to him and faint.

And so imagine a room in an event with Secret Service everywhere, just the energy's off the charts. And I'm in a line to talk to him, and I'm like, what am I going to say to him? Everyone's like, flustered. And I thought, I'm just going to play it completely straight. He's a law school classmate and that's it. So I went up to him, or I got up to the place where I could speak to him and I said, so what you been up to? He had been elected president six months earlier. So Obama, he throws his head back and he's got that laugh and he's got perfect comedic time, and he says, oh, this and that. And so that's my Obama story.

Tim Sarrantonio:

But he recognized you. He remembered who you were?

David Beckman:

Yeah or either he did, I think, or he's a politician and didn't pretend that he didn't. Right.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I mean, Dunbar's Number puts about the number of people that one person can hold in their head at one time, about 150.

David Beckman:

Yeah. So didn't.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Maybe you're an archetype of law school people that he just kind of can then call upon.

David Beckman:

That's right.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You know what, David, I think it was because it was, I think it was because of it was you were that memorable and we're so happy to have had you on.

David Beckman:

Yeah, it was a pleasure. It was a pleasure, and thanks for giving me the opportunity to chat a bit. And that was good. Thanks.

Tim Sarrantonio:

If people want to learn more information, where can they find out more about you and the work that you're doing?

David Beckman:

Well, maybe we'll put it in ...

Tim Sarrantonio:

Oh, of course. It'll be in the show notes.

David Beckman:

Yeah, in the show notes. But LinkedIn's a great place. I'd like to post there and we'll drop our Pisces Foundation website in as well.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Awesome. Well, I'm going to go connect with you right after this.

David Beckman:

All right.