

**Kerrin Mitchell**

Season six, welcome. It is today's episode of Untappd Philanthropy and we are absolutely thrilled to welcome back the incredible Trista Harris, one of my most favorite people in the industry. She's absolutely a visionary in philanthropy, but she also has a lot of transformative work that she's brought forward about futurism and how we as leaders can kind of imagine and build a brighter future. Her passion, her insights are inspiring for us, and especially in times like this where we're, you know, feeling a world divided.

The hope is to be able to build something with this conversation that helps you guys get excited about what's happening in the world, and what we can do to make something meaningful of it. So I'm excited. Trista, welcome back Thank you so much for joining us.

Trista Harris

Oh my goodness. Thank you so much for having me back again. It is so much fun to always spend time with you.

Kerrin Mitchell

We love it. Tim?

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, yeah, I mean, I think it's cool to have kind of like a futurist kind of built into how we can think about the year. You know, I think that's really great to have it as our our expert futurist, Trista.

Kerrin Mitchell

On and In January, to kick it off with a little bit of hope and excitement.

Tim Sarrantonio

Oh, ah it helped me. And boy, what ah what a hell of a year, you know, a lot of us had, um you know, but it's always like starting things off, right?

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh, yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

Maybe that's like what we have to figure out is to take that hope of optimism and go, okay, but how do we keep carrying that through?

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

...and I know you do that through the work of future good. So maybe for people who don't know your work and want a little bit more background before we get into it.

Kerrin Mitchell

Hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

Could you give us a little bit of an overview of some kind of future good, a little bit of you, and then we can get into the predictions.

Trista Harris

For sure. So I bet you haven't, many of your listeners haven't met a philanthropic futurist before. I have worked in nonprofits and foundations since I was 15 years old. I had my first job running a social justice community foundation, was super excited, a couple months into the job and our investment manager called and said, "Hey, don't panic.", which is like the best time to panic.

Trista Harris



Our endowment had lost almost 50% overnight. This was in 2008. And we had tried to be a good grant maker that made multi-year grants and suddenly we were over committed and I was positive that we were gonna shut down, which is like a phenomenal place to be as a brand new leader of an organization. I didn't have any good strategies besides crushing anxiety, which was not serving me really well. And I happened to run into a book about how to use futurism to get a business advantage during times of crisis. And I was like, hey, this is a time of crisis. So read it from front to back and realize those are the exact tools that our grantees needed in this moment. And so we taught them how to develop a picture of the future that they wanted to create after this financial crisis. And in the year and a half that followed,

Our grantees had 10 legislative wins, the most in our organization's history, wins on things like alternative teacher certification to diversify our state's teaching force, first in its country, Homeowners Bill of Rights to deal with the mortgage foreclosure crisis, and we got marriage equity in the state of Minnesota.

So it lit this spark in me that if you put the tools of futurism in the hands of people that do good for a living, they knock it out of the park every time. And I thought, well, let me find all of the nonprofit futurists and then realize that that did not exist.

So then I became trained as a futurist.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm.

Trista Harris

I went to Oxford and studied foresight. I did a lot of work with the Institute for the Future and Singularity University and really dug into what does it mean for the sector. Back in 2019, I started Future Good because I felt like the pace of change was getting much faster in the social sector. And I wanted to make sure that the tools that I had been using in the organizations that I was leading, I was able to use in the broader field and was probably a year into running the company when then the pandemic happened and everything fell apart in all of the ways.

At that point, I also was in Minnesota. So we had the murder of George Floyd and the racial reckoning that followed. And so really it was a time where folks were really trying to figure out what is coming next.

And so we've grown from then and ensure that we help foundations, nonprofits, other social purpose organizations, envision 30 to 50 years in the future. If you fully meet your mission, what does that look like?

And then how do we work backwards in the present and harness all this volatility that we are living with in this moment to get you to your ideal fast future a whole lot faster?

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm.

What I love about it is it takes something that feels like right now, you know again, there could be a thousand, it feels like an infinite number of realities. And it sort of distills it to say, you know there are four to five that are likely. And how do you kind of live into those? And it's not that you know when you're playing with these tools, it's not that you're trying to sit there and say, I know what's happening. But it's not just about knowing what's possible and probable, but then saying, and what can I do to really make something move in the direction that best supports, you know, the sector. So when you look at these sort of things and and and about, you know, we look at, for example, your predictions for, you know, what we're looking at in 2026, you know, tell us a little bit about your process, because I think that's the part that people say, well, I get that it might might not be infinite, but how do we get it to the four or five? And tell us a little bit about how you sort of look at those main structures, processes, and approaches, so that folks can sort of start thinking about how to use that.

Trista Harris

For sure. So futurists often will tell you it's very complicated to understand the future. Please pay me to figure it out for you. And the trick is that it is not. It is only paying attention to signals in the present that are giving you a picture of what the future is going to look like. And so my practice is spending a lot of time with amazing people that are making the world a better place and asking them, what are they noticing? What do they see coming next? And then I pay attention to trends that futurists in other sectors create. So technology futurists, education futurists, future of work folks. What I want to learn from them is what do you think is going to happen? And my job is to translate that to the social sector. And so when we develop



the trends that we think the sector is going to need to pay attention to over the course of the year, it comes from all of those different places. And then there is also a piece I'm very optimistic about the future. And so I will often say, I think we're five years from utopia, that all of this chaos and collapse that we have in this moment, is clearing the way for us to create the future that we're most excited about.

There are a number of futurists that are forecasters. So what they do is they look at what's happening currently and sort of estimate where it'll be 10, 20, 50 years from the future. You hear that all the time when it's demographics or climate change or that sort of thing.

I think for folks that work in the social sector, that doesn't land as well because we do not want that future. It's miserable. Like our job is to make the future better. And so a lot of our work...

Kerrin Mitchell

Fill in the gaps so that there are, you know, there is a quality and there are structures. Yeah, exactly.

Trista Harris

Yes, it is not going in the direction that we want. And so our responsibility is instead, what does it look like if we're fully successful 30 to 50 years in the future? And then let's work backwards and figure out all these future trends and future forces that are pushing towards us. How do we use those to get to a future that we're excited about instead of a future we're scared about?

Tim Sarrantonio

Do you find that, because that's a fascinating insight, even at the foundational level, because it almost sounds like depending philosophically where you are in the world, it's obviously going to, we're humans.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And so even a futurist has biases and things of that nature.

Trista Harris

Yep.

Tim Sarrantonio

Do you find that, like, not to put it in, in because you are very much a half glass full person.

Trista Harris

I am. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

But do you feel lonely? Like, or are we, are there more?

Trista Harris

Yeah. I like it.

Tim Sarrantonio

Like, like count us in, but, and we'll get into it, but, and and kind of my first, oh, um absolute hype crew.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah Tim and I will totally be your hype girl or hype girl and hype high boy.

Trista Harris



Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

But, but like, where do you see since you started, maybe we can get into, to, to things that are holding people back because, you know, I do want to get into even what we talked about last year, um obviously, and kind of connecting it into, okay, but what happened and stuff like that.

Tim Sarrantonio

No homework, anyone, you don't have to go back.

Trista Harris

Yes, yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

But before we get into that, where has that philanthropic futurism environment grown since you started?

Trista Harris

Yeah. I think it has grown by leaps and bounds. So when I first started Future Good, I spent the first year going to philanthropy and nonprofit conferences and speaking and making the case for future thinking. And what people would consistently say is "Trista, I am so glad you are doing this. I am very busy with the present. If you would like to think about the future, cool. But like I have important things to do." And I had a trend that I shared probably for about five or six years before 2020. And it said global pandemics are much more likely. And I had pictures of people in the airport wearing masks. And there's a million reasons why global pandemics were much more likely and why we got COVID and why we will have other future pandemics as we go. But in that moment, what happened is those audience members reached back and they're like, hey, you, if you said that this thing might happen and then it happened. what ah What are we supposed to do now? And how do I also know what's coming next?

Tim Sarrantonio

Mm-hmm.

Trista Harris

And so that skill set. And that set of tools allows you to not constantly be reacting to what feels like constant wild cards, but instead have a plan for what that looks like moving forward. And our responsibility in the social sector is to manage the volatility that the rest of the society faces. And so if we don't know what's coming, how are we going to protect everybody else as they're intersecting with those future forces too?

Kerrin Mitchell

Got it. That makes sense. And I think, you know, one of the questions people I'm sure are asking is like, well, what are your predictions this year?

Trista Harris

Yep.

Kerrin Mitchell

So I'm curious, do you mind diving into a couple of those? I know we've got a bunch of questions because obviously Tim and I went through, you know, a lot of the information you've released and the thought leadership you do around this. But I know some folks may not be as familiar. You know, at the time of this recording, it's December. We're going to be releasing this in January. We are in the middle of a lot of government, you know, ah chaos. We're in the middle of a lot of places where people are feeling overwhelmed, overburdened. You know, there's places where people are in a freeze kind of mode. And I think, you know, that's one of the questions that Tim and I had, which is really around how do we start getting people, one of the trends you talk about is the idea of breaking free and taking action. So maybe we start with that so that when the rest of the trends come in, they feel like they're in a position where they can't act. But what's your take on that?

Trista Harris

Yes. Yes. So um we did some scenario planning about a possible Harris or Trump presidency six to eight months before the election. We had 800 nonprofit leaders that were doing scenario planning and thinking about what is: What's likely?



What are wild cards? What's sort of possible in that future? And anytime we do scenario planning, what we ask is for challenges, opportunities, and actions that you would take in these different scenarios.

It's very easy to talk about the challenges. But even in the worst possible situation, there are things that you can harness that get you to a much better future. And so we want to make sure that folks in the social sector are really digging in. So we had a lot of information about what was possible and probable with the Trump presidency. We had already lived through the first version of it, which was a lot less coordinated. And so our assessment was all of the chaos that we had before is just going to be a whole lot faster. And it is going to be much more targeted, particularly at the social sector, because social sectors are where the resistance lives to those sort of folks that are leading governments. And so in that process, it was really like, okay, so it's going to happen, it's going to be fast, and it's going to impact every single part of the social sector, both broadly and then really into the narrowest space.

So whenever I talk to a new nonprofit organization that's a potential client, they will say, hey, here is this policy change that just happened. It came completely out of the blue and has destroyed everything that is important to the way that we need to operate to move things forward. And I'm like, cool, I've had three of these calls today about completely different things that are happening. And yes, that is terrible. And that is what is happening across the board. It's not a unique experience.

What happens as a result of that though, is that the panic because of your part that's broken, means that you can't move to action because you're like, there must be other things. Let me figure out the other things. And everybody's sort of scrambling. um What we saw in the sector after the election was a freeze state, that sort of fight, flight, or freeze piece. We were in the freeze state, and I think particularly the philanthropic sector.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Trista Harris

So in the pandemic, what happened is there was chaos and foundations within four weeks to eight weeks, had a plan. They communicated with grantees, he said, here's what we're going to do. We are here to help you. We're going to make this work. It was like action, action, action. That did not happen this time around. There were some very lovely exceptions to that rule, but in general, folks were frozen. The reason they were frozen, like foundations are never the target of scrutiny or attack the entire time that I've been in the career, in my career. That's a very rare thing. Um, I had a mentor that said the quickest way to shut down a foundation is to have two people outside with signs that say, I don't like what you're doing. And then just fall apart.

Kerrin Mitchell

No. Sorry. Totally.

Trista Harris

Um.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Trista Harris

You know, giving away money is a lovely thing. And so there usually are not a lot of complaints about what that looks like. But at this moment, philanthropy is directly under attack.

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm.

Trista Harris

And so...

Kerrin Mitchell

Great.

**Trista Harris**

There's a nervousness about, well, how do we move forward, especially when it comes to equity work that foundations got really good at after 2020. And so this thing that your skill set is now your Achilles heel and everybody was sort of frozen. Um, I...

Kerrin Mitchell

Actually, what's interesting today is there was, ah and I just read this literally this morning, is that there's like a new caucus that's actually, as of today, trying to build a philanthropy, a funder, sort of friends on the hill, if you will, um idea of both parties coalescing around this idea that nonprofits need impact. So it's interesting. That's that that's the first time I've seen that kind of other public side meet the private concern about this. So anyway, just to nail that one in, it was today.

Trista Harris

I'm so...

Tim Sarrantonio

I do want to chime in in terms of what I witnessed over the past year is because, you know, kind of...

Trista Harris

Please go ahead.

Tim Sarrantonio

Trista, when we connected, and it was one of the first few times because my focus has always been on the smaller organizations, community, grassroots, 97% of nonprofits make under \$5 million dollars a year, right?

Kerrin Mitchell

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Trista Harris

Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

And so not the funder side, but who's actually begging for the scraps in certain cases versus seeing the impact.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And I even say that begging for scraps because there's also perceptions and realities, right? that a lot of these organizations had and they in particular felt very alone. Um, but there was a lot, there were a few, like you cited instances where in particular, the fundraising effectiveness project, which I chair, I was thrilled and I would, I actually think you helped a bit here Trista because it helped go, okay, let's organize what we need to do.

Trista Harris

Beautiful. Beautiful.

Tim Sarrantonio

And we worked with Shannon McCracken at the nonprofit Alliance, to form a government relations committee that used the data that was coming in and even helped influence that bill that came out in April. It was a bad bill in a lot of different ways, but especially from a social sector standpoint. But what was fascinating, though, was to see the National Council of Nonprofits was part of that coalition, AFP.

Trista Harris

Yeah. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio



And I think that on the individual giving side, they've had a very long standing need to do legislative work. Right? Like literally I go in and there's a lobby day for the National Council of Nonprofits that happens before the conference. I think, Kerrin, you even like came in one time and saw that, right? So I think it's interesting to hear like, oh, they're kind of also thinking about we might need to do this too. And I think, again, there's even broader, the biggest thing that frustrates me is that it still seems like we're talking about two different things, two different groups of people that are literally the same group of people.

Trista Harris

Yeah. Yeah. And we're on the same team. I think that is the piece that is always so, so frustrating.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yes.

Trista Harris

I was talking to a lobbyist that was like, where is your sector? Like I'm at the Capitol every day. Your entire field is totally under attack and there is nobody there defending the work that you were doing with some very beautiful exceptions.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Trista Harris

We've been seeing this happen in the field, but it's because the social sector has been taught, "Oh, that's that's political."

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. Yeah.

Trista Harris

"You can't lobby. You have to stay out of there." And um, to our detriment. So lobbying is where the transformation happens that influences both our sector and the issues that we care about. And if we are not at those tables, what is that saying? If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. We have totally been on the menu. And so how do we ensure that we're a part of those conversations? What we saw happen this September is a thawing that happened across the sector. So everybody was in a freeze state and you can only freeze for so long. Like we are, we are in this work because we want to see change in the world and you just can't sit still.

And suddenly it was like, okay, we got to figure it out. We're not going to know exactly what's coming next, but we know that we have to be ready. We know that we need to start partnering in different ways. And so we've seen a lot of action that's happening in the sector that I think will only exponentially increase as we go, as people get much more comfortable with both volatility and uncertainty.

So I think in the social sector, we've gotten really comfortable with linear change so that we know exactly what next year is going to look like. We're going to create a three-year plan and we know exactly what the next three to five years are going to look like. I'm a futurist. I don't know what five years from now is going to look like. And so it is silly that we have really structured all of our work in our organizations. It only works if there's certainty because we've got nothing but uncertainty coming towards us. And that uncertainty is only getting it faster and more intense because we're living in a time of exponential change.

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, and I think that leads into another prediction that I want us to unpack, and it's overall kind of governance and boards, and it's like how people relate to each other.

Trista Harris

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

So, but you know, if you can even, because a lot of this is just like how we decide how to organize resources.

Trista Harris



Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

So if you could design the perfect board...

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

...Because God knows we need to re-envision that. Um...

Trista Harris

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

What's it going to look like and and what's what would have its stop you know what's going to stop that from possibly happening that we can anticipate?

Trista Harris

Yeah. Yeah, I think there's a couple things. One, boards need to govern. Like that is the responsibility of a board. And at this moment, governance is a brave act. It is not cushy board seats where you sort of sit around and middle in the day-to-day stuff and just make everything harder for everybody.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah, no, absolutely.

Trista Harris

Um, it's like, what is the big picture of the future that we're working to create? So I think boards need to do two things. One, have a clear, shared picture of the future, very long-term future. If we are fully successful 30 to 50 years from now, what's the external impact of that? And if you turn the lens around at that moment, what would your organization have to look like for that to be true? And your board, staff, community members, people impacted by your programming, everybody needs to be aligned about that picture of the future. So the board really holds that responsibility to make sure that future state's really clear. I talk to lots of organizations. I like, yeah, we have a mission statement. We know what it is. We know what it looks like. And you poke for two seconds and it's suddenly you have a slightly different picture of the future and then all your efforts are diffused. The other thing that I think is super important is both the cover that board members can give to the staff and to the mission. And there's a lot of talk about let's do risk assessments and make sure that, you know, all these challenges that are coming our way, what is that going to mean to our financial state or to our ability to exist as an organization? There's also mission risk. What is going to happen if we don't meet our mission in this moment? And being brave might influence the money coming in. It might even influence your ability to exist as an organization if the White House decides that they don't like the future that you're working to create. I think mission risk is the biggest risk that nonprofits and foundations are facing in this moment, and so they really need to step up in new ways.

Kerrin Mitchell

And I think, you know, when we talk about this, I actually felt that as a board member, um the desire, the need, the want to push and apply all the skill sets I have. And it's interesting because on the board right now that I sit on, it's a 55-year-old organization, absolutely wonderful. And there's a kind of the older group of folks that are like just there and they attend every month and they're very kind and they give money. And then there's the younger ones where we're like, look, we don't have the money, but we've got time. We've got, I mean, I'm helping them with everything from AI to, you know, hands-on work around, you know, getting into the community. So it's a very interesting change of the guards that's occurring, not age, just so much as like tenure on board. Um, so I actually really do feel that way.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell



And I also feel committed. Like if I'm not giving my time as much as my money, I actually feel like the time is the thing. If I'm not giving that, I'm not doing my job as a board member. And I'm actually enjoying this ability to immerse in.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

So yeah. Anyway, just my little anecdotal story of that.

Trista Harris

I love...

Kerrin Mitchell

And it is interesting.

Tim Sarrantonio

I think I think that's...

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh, no, no. I was going to say it is interesting. And in that, what's funny is that the next trend that you talk about that I kind of was hoping to go into, but Tim, did you want to, before I go to the next trend, did you want to plop anything in there?

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, yeah, it's also because I've just recently joined a board, and I've had a very similar feeling initially, because...

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And Trista, that is kind of a sub-question to this before we go into our next trend, which is the influence of, like...

Trista Harris

Yes. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

History and generations here too, because um I love the board, but I think also one of the things it's it's an older community foundation, actually.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

So I get to sit on the grant making side again, a bit. But it's very rooted in what's local. It's all micro grants, basically. So \$5,000 here and there. It's very cool. But um It was interesting because there's folks who've like, they've been there for a very long time. They have a very specific historical perspective on that. What role does history play when you are taking into account any of these things?

Trista Harris

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

Because that even on a fractal level down into the little community foundation in this place in upstate New York, connecting all the way to these international questions, um, there's going to be power dynamics and historical dynamics.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

**Tim Sarrantonio**

How does that play into your work before we move into the disruptive elements that might come with technology?

Trista Harris

It's interesting. We just started a project with a community foundation that's celebrating their 50th anniversary, and they had a very young donor base. It's a social justice community foundation, and so many of those donors are still around. And what we're doing is a project where their different grant-making areas, the grantees in those areas and other community members that care about those issues are doing a picture of the future that they're creating 50 years in the future.

There's a bigger group that's doing a picture of what the future of this foundation looks like. And then they're going back and asking those initial donors, what did you think it was going to look like 50 years from now? What's different when you started it? What did you think it was going to look like 50 years from now? And how are we different and how are we the same? And what are those threads that sort of move through?

And so when you're a part of a board where you had folks that have been around for a very long time, they have amazing context about what have we tried and what are the relationships and what were the hopes when this thing started and what's the core values that are like moving us forward.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Trista Harris

You don't, future stuff is not like we used to do things this way and now here's the new thing. It's what do you bring forward from the future and what do you, from the past and what do you let go of? And I think that those long-term folks around the table have those threads of what is necessary to bring to the future so that we can get to one that we're excited about.

Kerrin Mitchell

I think that's exactly right. And I think it's a delicate balance for people like me that join a board where the only other board we had was a snowboard. You know, it's different. It's like this is this new group of folks. Right. And in that, I actually do recognize that, you know, the 20 year history that many of them bring is so powerful because it grounds the values on it.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

And then it becomes something when you pair it with, say, AI, which obviously is the next trend we're talking about. Um, the idea about how to blend those and arrive at a place that does support it is really powerful. And, you know, I looked at it because I've been kind of driving a lot of the AI and tech for it for the foundation, or sorry, for the nonprofit that I'm a part of. And, you know, I look at it and it's, there's things that they understand about it.

Trista Harris

Beautiful.

Kerrin Mitchell

There's things they don't, there's things that they don't really get that they need to start preparing for and haven't started, but they, you know, they're pretty excited about ChatGPT, but there are things that they also understand like you said, need to let go of or look at a problem instead of trying to solve the problem, just skip the problem altogether because it can be solved with technology.

So there's a lot of things that help them to understand what's what and how to navigate that has been a very big, ah you know, sort of part of what I've brought to the table. And while I think this is something that obviously, you know, you probably have a lot of theories about how you are seeing AI play out?



What are people getting right? What are people getting wrong? Do you know? Is there any advice you have for obviously a year ahead of this where AI is at the very, not just basis of it, but the sort of agentic structures about you know not just doing tasks, but having entire you know roles being taken over by this? Where are you at um on on sort of that prediction?

Trista Harris

Yeah. AI is changing everything in the sector, in the world. And when I talk to people in the social sector, I get a lot of like, "But that doesn't influence us", or "I am worried about the environmental impacts, or I'm worried about the racism of AI. And so we have a policy to not use it and not to engage." I think that is absolutely the wrong direction to go. AI is trained by how we use it. And if you don't use it, it's going to be trained by all the people that you don't want training it. And so I want everybody to every single person in the social sector to be influencing what the future of those AI tools look like.

Kerrin Mitchell

Amen, sister.

Trista Harris

Um, the other thing is that there's a broader future that we need to determine about what we want our lives as humans to look like as a result of AI. And there's a lot of fear and we've all seen the sci-fi movies about the million ways that this can go bad. And the version of the future that we're already starting to see is, "We're going to lay off all of the people. We're going to use AI to poorly replace those roles. And five guys are going to become trillionaires from selling these tools." And that is the worst possible future with AI.

Um, the future that I want to see is that people work a 10 to 20 hour work week. They're paid full-time wages for that. When they are not working, they are raising their children and taking care of their elders and engaging in their democracy and creating art and getting to know people in their community and finding new solutions to problems.

And then when they come to work, you know how you see somebody that comes back from a sabbatical and they're like all rested and it's irritating and they have all these brilliant ideas. Um, that's how I want everybody in the social sector to always be working, to be well rested and well connected. And in their work, what they are bringing forward is the people part, which is relationships and connections. It's an understanding of how different pieces work together and how we want them to work together, what we want that ideal future to look like, like what's the purpose of this work.

Um, and then the last piece is new solutions. AI can't create anything new. It can only tell us what we already know. The entire purpose of the social sector is new solutions. And so we need people to be developing those new solutions. You need to partner with that with an AI super team. So each employee has a set of AI tools that makes them 10 times more effective. And what those tools do is take all of the repetitive work off of their plate. Those tools become a brainstorming partner as they're trying to make meaning out of things that are happening in the world.

It's making them smarter about the work that they do. And the people's expertise is then utilizing the AI expertise. And in that future, what we get is a really happy humanity And we get solutions to the problems that we're working on, that we can actually harness the horsepower of AI to be able to move us forward to a future that we can be really, really excited about. And I think if we can model that in the social sector, then then that's what happens in the government sector, in the business sector. For companies that have already laid off a ton of staff and are like, cool, AI can now be the journalists. I have read those articles. They're terrible. People are super disappointed in the quality of work that comes out when you wholesale get rid of big chunks of your workforce. What you need is really smart people that are influencing how those tools are being used moving forward.

Um, I'll go back to the AI concerns because those are real concerns that people have about the environmental impact, about the racism of AI tools. All of that is 100% true. So, I think sometimes though the data, especially about the environmental impact, isn't correct anymore. So you'll often hear data that's like every chat GPT prompt takes one glass of water. If you get every time you say, please, it causes this and environmental catastrophe, stop being polite to the robots, all of that sort of stuff.

One, for the water piece. It is often the same glass of water that is going in and out of a system to cool it. And so it is not that there are new glasses of water that are being used every single time. The energy usage of AI is gigantic and continuing to grow and getting more energy efficient every single day. So it's in those companies...

**Kerrin Mitchell**

And offsetting other things that we're pulling resources in other ways. So there is an element of that too, of the opportunity cost, but yeah.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah, it's not being apologists of like, like that's but this is one thing where we're like, so I live with an engineer and primarily her last job was focused on data centers. And fire protection systems within that. So I had an interesting perspective hearing about what was actually getting built and all these types of things. And the biggest conversations are always talking about batteries, right? It's just constant discussion of batteries and power and all this type of stuff. Because capitalists don't like bad profit margins and dumping a bunch of money into something that is constantly inefficient. I wasn't helping them either. So, so yeah, it's a bigger problem, but it's also like a larger issue, non AI, which is growth for growth's sake, right?

Trista Harris

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

Just keep... grow, grow, grow.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

And that's where I think we're starting to have a much larger societal conversation because the same data centers are doing TikTok and, you know, hosting podcasts and all of these other things.

Trista Harris

Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

It's just overall energy, um and the promise of AI is where that energy can be rerouted to. So I think that's an important nuance here.

Trista Harris

Mm-hmm.

Tim Sarrantonio

And I'm really happy that you're bringing up things that are changing rapidly on that side too.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

So, so yeah.

Trista Harris

And I appreciate the profit margin piece because there are constant changes happening to those AI algorithms to make them more energy efficient. That is a constant process that's happening because it is in whoever owns the AI's best interest for that to be as cheap as possible. The other part that is a huge problem is I talked about the sort of circular water going in and out of the system. And I was talking to a group of environmental justice organizers in the South about this. And like, I know that you have concerns and like, here are some of the data pieces. And one of them is like, actually in my community, Grok is like directly polluting the drinking water.



And it could be a closed system, but they've decided it's like 3% cheaper for it not to be. And I'm like, oh, okay, well, what we also need is policy work to ensure that people are not evil for evil sake. And we have elected officials that do not understand how AI works. They don't understand how their email works. And so we're asking, yes, we're, we're like asking them to create the guide rails for things that they totally don't understand.

Tim Sarrantonio

It's a series of tubes.

Trista Harris

And then they ask the folks that own those systems what are the best things that we should put in place? And they're like, "Hey, nothing would be great." And they're like, "Cool, guy". Um, so we need to have one elected official that understands the most important technologies that are influencing the entire future of society.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Trista Harris

They need to be.

Kerrin Mitchell

Especially right now in its formative infancy of like, who's it going to be when it grows up?

Trista Harris

Yes. Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Like not having the guardrails or an adult at the table, sorry, to and help with this stuff.

Trista Harris

Yes. Yeah. And we should be pouring a ton of money, and some foundations are, into the ethics of AI. And how do we structure this so that we ensure that you know AI doesn't kill us in the future?

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Trista Harris

Like, these are important...

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah, I can't wait to speak more with folks over the coming, you know, after that 500 million was kind of put in, like, let's see how it goes. But I'm very cognizant of those efforts and whatever we can do to support them, I think is so key.

Trista Harris

And for each of us individually, how are we getting smarter about how we're using AI, what it is being used for, how it works? That learning part is a responsibility of each of us moving forward too.

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, and I think it kind of ultimately comes down to identity. A lot of this is just who do we want to be? And that can happen on an individual level.

Trista Harris

Yeah. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio



That can happen on a societal level. And I think that's ultimately what I love about futurism that you've helped clarify for me, you know, as an amateur futurist, I would say. And so that kind of helps transition because I had the past year, we're not going to make a big deal about this, but I did leave my technology job. And now I started an educational gaming company. And um one, just even doing scenario planning, like I have a little game that's kind of conversational. But afterwards, a lot of people were like, but what's the component? Like, where's the technology side? Like, where's AI that can use it? And where I've led is I don't want to use it to produce the art for anything that I do.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

I want to work with local artists. But if I need to load it into something to analyze what people did, that's been fun.

Trista Harris

Here.

Tim Sarrantonio

That's been very interesting. And that is something that would be very labor intensive because I know, because I actually look back at old things that I would work on that I'm like, I could produce this and I know how long it took me to do. And that's where the joy could come from the technology.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

So I want to talk about joy. I want to talk about play.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

I want to talk about creativity.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

Where do you see that in a future society?

Trista Harris

Yeah. I think in this moment, like joy is the revolution. Joy is the thing that is moving us forward into the future that we can be excited about. There is a lot of heaviness and there's a lot of worry. And I think it's important that we really lean into how to cultivate joy in our lives, how to cultivate joy and connection in our communities. that this idea of like, what is AI taking away from us and what's the human part and what's left? There's a loss of professional identity that is happening very, very quickly as people are losing parts of their work that they were really great at.

Right when ChatGPT came out, I wrote a blog post that was like, *Is ChatGPT going to take my foundation or nonprofit job? Probably it's going to be fine though.* And it was sort of like, how do we use these tools and that sort of thing? And a futurist magazine reached out to me and said, hey, we saw that article, could you write the same article about will it take your futurist job? And I was like, no, cause that's my job. I don't like that. What do you mean? Stop. No, it could never take my job. And it was this sort of like, oh, I have to take my own medicine. Okay, let me see. "It can't, it obviously can't do what I do". Let me try.

Tim Sarrantonio

I'm irreplaceable.



Trista Harris

Yes. And it was like five minutes and I was like, oh, so you're, but yeah, yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Marvel superhero for that to occur. No way.

Trista Harris

And...

Kerrin Mitchell

Great.

Trista Harris

Five minutes and I was like, oh, so you're much better at my job. Okay, well, this sounds good to me now. Um, and so in that loss of professional identity, we need to upgrade what it means to be a human being. And that is hard. Like that it is hard work to reimagine not just yourself, but all of us as people. What does it mean to be a better person? And we're at a time where people have really figured out how to be terrible people consistently. Like we're just getting worse and worse. And we need to, what just anytime you go to an airport, I'm like, we have gotten really good.

Kerrin Mitchell

They're doubling down sometimes.

Trista Harris

Yes, yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Oh, I know. Oh, girl.

Trista Harris

Yeah, well...

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

I don't... it isn't necessarily that we're worse people. I think it's just that it's easier to see. Look, I'm reading about...

Kerrin Mitchell

Well, it's just more apparent. I think people kept their mouths shut for a while and now it's just like, they're like, "Here I am".

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, look, I'm reading about the Batavia Mutiny of like a 1600 ship where like this dude did awful things to hundreds of people on this island, right?

Trista Harris

Yes. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

Like, like humanity has had a lot of very dark, pretty significantly dark periods.

Trista Harris

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right. That's a good point. It's just, it's now it has a microphone while it's doing it.

**Tim Sarrantonio**

Well, yeah, and and and and also there's like nuclear weaponization on things that didn't exist past that, like the scale and impact.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And I think that's the biggest thing is it's not that like humanity is humanity. And within that, at least the philosopher in me thinks it is that it encapsulates all the good and the bad, the entire spectrum of that.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah. Long flawed, long human. Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

What technology has changed is the possibility of hurt or benefit at scale quickly.

Trista Harris

But, yes. Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio

And I think that's what we're, we're getting at.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Tim Sarrantonio

I'm just, I am quibbling a bit here, but I think it's an important distinction.

Trista Harris

It's full.

Kerrin Mitchell

No, no, no. It's fine. That's what podcasts are for...

Trista Harris

This is. I will, this is.

Kerrin Mitchell

Quibbling. We're quibbling.

Tim Sarrantonio

Oh, if we just agreed with each other all the time, that would be worrying, but keep, keep going.

Kerrin Mitchell

We're...

Trista Harris

I would.

**Tim Sarrantonio**

Trista, I want, I want your reflections on that before we get into the, so some final stuff here.

Trista Harris

Tim, you're right. This is the safest time in humanity to be a human. And it probably is the kindest time as well, but it is exponential. So we see the exponential bad. We see the exponential good.

Kerrin Mitchell

You...

Trista Harris

I want to see more exponential good. And I think what that means is that as human beings, one, we need to dig into relationships and connection. We had an assignment that I gave my staff last year for them to 10x their capacity using AI tools and was a lot of worry of like, okay, so "We all going to get laid off?" I was like, "Nope, there is plenty of work for you to do. Do not worry." Like, let's let's figure this out. And as I worked through that loss of identity and all of those pieces, it was figuring out what is the unique secret sauce that I have that I'm bringing to this effort? And how do I pour so much into that secret sauce that brings me joy and creates transformation? And I had to do that for myself. It was like, I put time in my calendar to be bored. I put time in my calendar to experience its awe. Like I will look over the course of the month and say, what are the things that I can do where I will have a feeling of awe this month that's planned? And then am I looking out for it? I do these things called awe walks where I walk until I feel a feeling of awe. And if I'm getting tired. I will stare at a plant and I'm like, that is pretty cool. Okay. Yep. This is great. But doing that purposefully is what really charges up your own battery so that you are able to create that transformation.

I think we have to do it on purpose. This can't be an accidental thing. This is what is necessary for us to upgrade. I think we can have a like a matrix future where we are the battery for the AI tools and humanity is ruined, or we can have a Star Wars future where we have to become Jedi and sort of upgrade what it means to be a human being in the service of broader humanity. And I think we can model that in the social sector.

Kerrin Mitchell

I think you're right and in that modeling is something I oftentimes getting started is the hardest, getting that mindset going. And then, cause once you get going, you're like, "I see it. Okay. What can I do next?" But how do you suggest people kind of come in or, you know, what have you seen, even if it's just from future good, I know you guys have some offers that you do, but how do people get started on this? So they get that motion and almost start flexing their muscles in a you know, just a couple sit-ups before they do the a thousand, like what can we do to start getting in shape with that mentality? What do you suggest?

Trista Harris

For sure. So the easiest thing you can do is set aside 5% of your time for the future. So a couple hours a week. I like Friday afternoons when it's a little bit quieter. Set Google alerts for the future of whatever the thing is that you care about and just pay attention to what's being talked about and the future of your city, the future of early childhood education, the future of transportation, the future of technology, whatever your thing is, just pay attention to what is happening. That's going to transform the way that you're noticing patterns about change. So as you're reading for a little bit, you're like, "Oh, a lot of folks are talking about this thing. Maybe we should have a strategy around that. Maybe we should have a scenario about what that might mean for my organization or the cause that I care about". Spend time with people that are building the future, like figure out who in your social network and who in your professional network are thinking about what's next and spend time with those people. Because when our future visions start to bounce against each other, that's where really beautiful things happen. At Future Good, we create a lot of spaces where that happens. Purposefully, we have Future Good Studio, which is an asynchronous learning program that teaches people how to use futurism in their work. And there's a bunch of connection opportunities for other folks in that network where you can share trends that you're paying attention to. And then we have the future proof program, which is about an organization using futurism as the basis for its strategic plan moving forward. And in that program where instead of normally future good comes in and we help your organization and think about those future trends and what's coming next, we help you develop a plan.

This is about building your internal capacity to be able to do that. It's also how we serve much smaller organizations than we're normally able to serve. And then that capacity lives within the organization instead of an outside consultant coming in. And I think future-proofing our organizations and strategy not being something that we do occasionally, but something that



we do every single day is the only way that we're going to be able to harness that volatility to get us to a future that we can be super excited about.

Kerrin Mitchell

Perfect. All right.

Tim Sarrantonio

I mean, what a rush.

Kerrin Mitchell

So real quick, Tim, we have eaten up all of Trista's time. It's already 45 minutes in and we could talk forever.

Tim Sarrantonio

I know. We could.

Kerrin Mitchell

However, is there anything else though, Tim, that you want to play in?

Tim Sarrantonio

Well, and she's going to be talking a little bit later on, right?

Kerrin Mitchell

I know.

Tim Sarrantonio

Like...

Kerrin Mitchell

I get more of her. Yeah, for anyone who is a part of the Fluxx Community, we actually will have her join us at the end of January for more on exactly what we just talked about, as well as some of the future proofing ideas. So please join us for that. But is there anything else, Trista, that you wish we had asked you or Tim that you feel like you want to sort of lay out? Because I probably should release poor Trista back to her day because she has been so gracious with her time.

Trista Harris

Goodness, it's always so fun to be with you guys. I think, um, I just want your audience to leave optimistic about the future. I know there is a lot to worry about in this moment. And anytime I give a talk, I start with all of the terrible things that are happening in the world for a minute, because otherwise the first question is like, have you heard of climate change?

Like you seem too hopeful.

Kerrin Mitchell

You know what's happening.

Trista Harris

Turned on the news. It actually is really bad. I am totally aware of what is happening in the world. um And still, I am optimistic. And I'm optimistic because I spend time with people that work in the social sector that every single day are building the most beautiful future that I want to be a part of. And so I know it is easy to be discouraged.

Kerrin Mitchell

Thank you.

Trista Harris

I gave a talk in Brazil once and they were getting their sort of Trump-like president and I had a translator. And so the person asked the question and then my answer was, "The present is a dumpster fire. There is only hope in the future". And the translator was like, "I'm sorry, what?" And I was like, "Do you not call them dumpsters?" And he's like, "We do. Is that what you're trying to say?" And I was like, "Does it not feel like a dumpster fire?" We are living in a rough time. And I feel that



every single day. And yet I think that we can build something that is better than our greatest dreams if we have a picture of the future and we work together to create it

Kerrin Mitchell

Awesome.

Tim Sarrantonio

I don't have anything to add or ask because we'd be here for another three hours. So, you know, I think that ultimately, though, we have to keep revisiting it, right? I think that's why this topic and Trista, you are so beloved by our audiences because it is that hope for the future.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah, absolutely.

Trista Harris

Yeah.

Tim Sarrantonio

And we need it now ah ah critically, right? um So, no, I have nothing else to add.

Kerrin Mitchell

Well, why don't we wrap up? We have a new game this year, Trista. It's *Completes the Sentence* because every year we have to have a new every season.

Tim Sarrantonio

We have a new game every year. It's like, we got to figure out the game.

Trista Harris

I love it.

Kerrin Mitchell

And Tim didn't even know what it was because I just was like, I'm going to make a game. So this is where I get to surprise everyone with my game.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah, I was like, oh, we have a new game. Okay.

Kerrin Mitchell

It's this one's complete the sentence. So kind of like a sentence like, the weirdest thing I've ever done is blank. I'm just going to have you finish it on the spot. It's kind of a quick fire. I didn't give you these prior, but we're going to three of them.

Okay, ready? Let's do it.

Trista Harris

Got it.

Kerrin Mitchell

Younger me would have been shocked to learn that I am now blank.

Trista Harris



Ah, that I moved to the beach. I thought I was going to be frozen forever and I moved to something warmer.

Kerrin Mitchell

Right.

Trista Harris

I think past me would not be surprised at all that I...

Kerrin Mitchell

The Minnesotan you, just deep Minnesota roots would have just been like, let's stay, let's stay breezy and cold.

Trista Harris

Yeah, yeah. The futurism part wouldn't have been a surprise at all, but not being cold in the winter would have been shocking.

Kerrin Mitchell

All right. The first celebrity.

Tim Sarrantonio

I want to do this one. The first celebrity I was irrationally obsessed with was...

Trista Harris

Um, it was Prince as a...

Kerrin Mitchell

Yes. Yes, Minnesota. Look at you, girl. You just get it.

Trista Harris

...as a Minnesotan.

Kerrin Mitchell

But...

Trista Harris

It is a requirement and I...

Kerrin Mitchell

Yeah.

Trista Harris

I was probably five or six years old and I literally physically ran into him. He was walking on the corner, going into a restaurant that was connected to our apartment building. And I knocked off his hat. The security guard picked me up and dropped me on the ground. And my mom said, she's a kid. She doesn't, she doesn't know who it is. And Prince was like, just let her get up. And so when we left, um, I, I, my mom said, "Do you know who that was?" And I said, "No". And she goes, "That was Prince". And I said, "Prince on my wall?" And she goes, "Yes". And I go, "But he's a grownup and he's tiny like me." And she's like, "He is, he is a, he is a tiny grownup".

Kerrin Mitchell

Smaller man. I was going to ask you if he was, I was like, wait, is he as small as I think he is?

Trista Harris

He was as small as I was as a small child.

Kerrin Mitchell



Oh my gosh. I saw him at Madison Square Garden a year before he passed and he did a full box jump from the bottom on from the, basically from the floor up to the top of his um piano.

Trista Harris

Yeah. Of course he...

Kerrin Mitchell

Like he was like, so it was like a ninja move. I was like, whoa, like,

Trista Harris

Magic, magic, magic man.

Kerrin Mitchell

I was like 50 years old.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

Homeboy just wanted to write up.

Trista Harris

Yes.

Kerrin Mitchell

All right. Last one. If a genie were to give you an extremely... Oh, sorry. The sentence is from your perspective. If a genie gave me an extremely specific wish I'd ask for.

Trista Harris

Oh, everybody has empathy.

Kerrin Mitchell

...and love that.

Trista Harris

I think a lot of things would be good.

Kerrin Mitchell

Trista, you're the best.

Trista Harris

Oh my goodness.

Kerrin Mitchell

That was wonderful.

Tim Sarrantonio

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell

Thank you so much. And anyone who wants to learn more about our dear friend Trista, feel free to visit wearefuturegood.org.

Tim Sarrantonio

Thank you.

**Kerrin Mitchell**

Trista, anything else you want to leave them with? Any other sites, references, thoughts, quotes, dreams?

Trista Harris

I love all the amazing work that each and every one of you are doing. Thanks for all you're doing to create a more beautiful future for us to all live in.

Kerrin Mitchell

Thanks, Trista.