

Design for Social Change

A Call to Action

Transcript

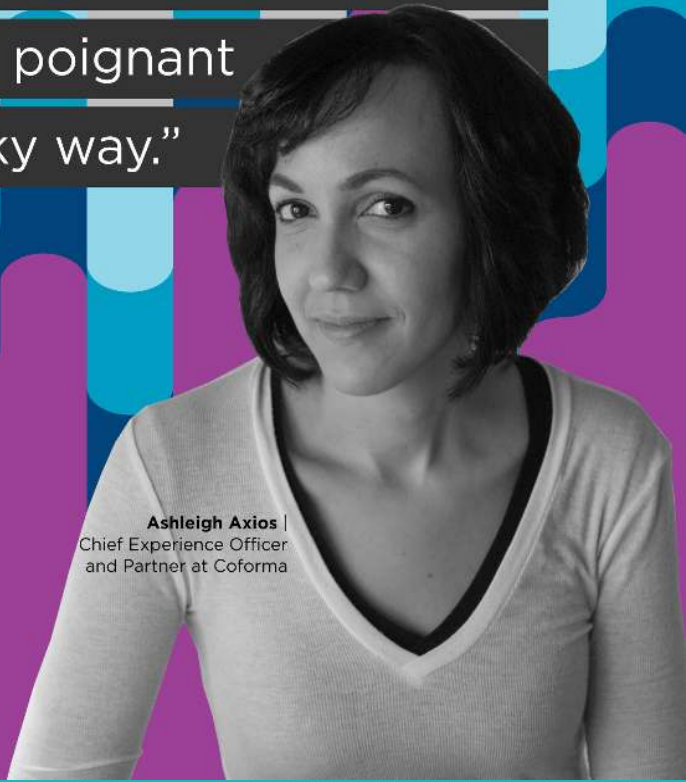
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What led me into a career of design for social change is seeing the need and reality in a very poignant and sticky way.”

Ashleigh Axios |
Chief Experience Officer
and Partner at Coforma



**The Heart of
Giving Podcast**
with Art Taylor



Heart of Giving Podcast Ashleigh Axios

You're listening to The Heart of Giving Podcast with Art Taylor, powered by BBB www.give.org. Here we explore the motivations that form the basis of giving and service, we inspire generosity and celebrate the transformative effects that giving and service have on the human spirit and on community. The conversations featured on the podcast also uncover giving strategies that educate and provide tools to help listeners make impactful gifts of both their time and money. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Welcome to The Heart of Giving Podcast powered by BBB give.org. www.give.org is the nation's standards-based charity evaluator, and your one-stop source for information on giving and reports on the most asked about charities, I'm Art Taylor, your host.

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And today we're going to talk about design and design for social change. And I'm really pleased to have with me, someone who knows a little bit about design and Social change, she is Ashleigh Axios, who is an international speaker and strategic creative. And Ashleigh is an advocate for design's ability to break barriers and create positive social and cultural change. Ashleigh is the chief experience officer at Coforma, formerly &Partners. She's part of a digital consultancy and a firm that crafts creative Solutions and build technologies that help people support communities. Ashleigh is also - and this is how we've connected - the board chair of the AIGA the American Institute For Graphic Arts. This is the professional association for design, which advances design as a professional craft, strategic advantage and vital cultural force.

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Ashleigh also was at one time - she worked in the Obama administration as - the director of design So, to speak where she was responsible for The White House website, whitehouse.gov. She was responsible for a lot of the digital communications that came out of the White House and was cited by Essence Magazine as one of the top 25 or so, influential women in The Administration at the time. So, we're really pleased to have Ashleigh with us. Ashleigh is Someone who I've come to admire in the short time that Ive known her, and I couldn't wait to have this chance to get her on The Heart of Giving Podcast to talk about design for good. So, Ashleigh is great to have you.

Ashleigh: Art. Thank you So, much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

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Art: Ashleigh, you and I have talked quite a bit about the power of design and images to shape our perceptions of people, institutions, and causes, but I don't think a lot of people actually think about that very much. How should we be thinking about the power of design and what might we do? What might people like you do to help us better understand the power of design to shape our Society and our culture?

Ashleigh: It's a great question. I think a lot of the best designs are Solutions that really feel natural to the environment. And So,, it makes sense then that many folks don't think about it on a regular basis. It's the kind of really good design which makes everyday experiences and life just more enjoyable. It makes that interface that you have to use consistently to cook Something or to schedule an appointment smooth so, that you don't have to think about it.

That is, I think a lot of this kind of user experience and design is really integrated in a way that if we've done our jobs well, as designers, the broader public is not spending any time thinking about it. It's only when we've kind of messed something up that you're like, man, this could be better. This could be a much better experience, but what you're pointing to as well are these opportunities that designers have to actually demonstrate a better future, that it would take a collective to get to, or to get us in a mindset or a zone that is beyond that, of the status quo or where we are today. And I think designers are really well-equipped at doing this. I think photographers and certainly some other types of creatives are as well.

But I think of that blue marble photo of the earth, right, a single image that suddenly just completely shifts your view of the world, in that case, literally not figuratively, but your view of the world and your place in it. And helps you think about things in a more holistic manner. That is Some of the opportunity that design presents that we don't always take advantage of. And I think that certainly folks don't think about just because they really haven't engaged in discussions on the possible power of design. Art: So, Ashleigh, let me get into your background and history a little bit to try to flesh out how you arrived to this place now, where you see design as such a powerful tool for shifting society in a positive direction.

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Were you someone growing up who had this sense that I need to engage in Something artistic or Something design oriented, what led you to a career in this field?

Ashleigh: It's a great question. For me, I was exposed early on to difficult circumstances - to poverty and to homelessness. And so, that's, I think, one side of what led me into design and design for social change, was just seeing the need and the reality in a very kind of poignant sticky way. And the other side of it was certainly being a creative kid and liking to make things and define solutions that were more visual or tactile compared to maybe Some other peers So, together, and it took me quite a long time to really find the flow and figure out what fields combine these things.

But they really work incredibly well together and design for social change and looking at the reality of the situation as it is today, a big situation like homelessness in a city or something smaller like an interface and imagining a better future and reality, and kind of using the skills that I've acquired over time to put those together into really proposing solutions to those problems and painting a path that helps people get from that point A to point B. But early on, it was all about, I think, creative thinking and making and aligning myself.

Also, I think most creatives spend so much time in their youth just observing the world around them and kind of taking it all in. So you know, whether it was the hard stuff like being exposed, like I said to homelessness or poverty, or just some of the more beautiful things, a real skill that I built up early on is just being able to really see what was happening around me and being still, and just taking in the reality as it is. Because if you can't see the world as it is, you certainly can't do much to improve on it, right. You might be in a denial or just have a complete lack of awareness on it.

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Art: So, might I ask you to talk to us a bit about your experience with homelessness I know that for many people, how they grew up, what they saw, what they experienced, certainly leads them in a certain direction - certainly sets a path for them in some way. Maybe they don't even see it at the time. What was your experience with homelessness and how did that begin to shape you?

Ashleigh: Well, I think a lot of it is to the credit of my mother. She wasn't going to put up false walls and block us from the world around us and is a very religious woman. So, she took my brother and I to feed the homeless out in cold fall and winter days in the Washington DC area, even when we're pretty young.

So, just spending time at the back of a van open and a big pot of chili helping serve food to those who needed it just showed me one that there was need in the community, and that there are people in my neighborhood who were cold, who were hungry, who I wasn't going to be exposed to unless I went out of my way to be exposed to them. So, just having that awareness really early on, and then also just show me that there was something that I could do about it, right? That sense of agency and action. I had a role to play, a small one and it was a community thing. Certainly wasn't all on my shoulders, but there was a way for even me as a little kid to help. And so, that, that's just one example, but my mother was really lovely and exposing my brother and I to a number of examples.

Like that of just we're going
Somewhere, we have an extra spot in
our car, how can we - prior to, you know,
Lyft and Uber and all of that - use (but
we do have the privileges) the space
and the power to support and assist
others, either as individuals or groups
and close to home in our own
communities. So, that one was
beautiful. When I remember the first
time we went out to feed the homeless,
suddenly I was asking to do it because it
made me feel better. Once you're aware
as a kid, I was like, it's cold again, are we
going to go out and feed the homeless?
Cause you're aware of it and you just
want to help.

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And it, it really is such a satisfying thing to be able to do something about the circumstances around you, the things that are inequities, you know? I wouldn't have that word as a kid but are things that would otherwise kind of eat me up, that it exists in our society.

Art: So your mother was a champion for you to engage. What would you say about your mother that you might want to offer to mothers today as far as having the power and the ability to raise children to care about other people?

Ashleigh: I would say just exposure does so much. I think there must be, I'm not a parent myself, so, y'all can certainly tell me, but I think there must be tremendous pressure to have all of the answers and all of the solutions, but the first step is really just exposure and awareness.

And So, opening up those doors to that and giving a little bit of room, even just to awareness, you can do beautiful things and creating room for empathy and compassion and a kind of collective mindset in, in children.

And I - my mom would be the first to say that she certainly doesn't have all of the answers, but over time we came to figure out things that we could do to make a difference. And So, I would say just don't be afraid of feeling like you have to have all the answers and being afraid of the types of questions that kids are going to ask. Cause the fact that they're asking them and that they're inquisitive and that they're paying attention is in itself an amazing gift and really a necessary first step.

Art: Fantastic. You know, this is The Heart of Giving Podcasts. We, we named it that because we believe that there's a real power in giving of yourself. Actually, you get more Sometimes in return when you give than what you give away. And clearly that comes from the heart. That impetus to give comes from the heart and what you get in return feeds your heart. And I can see that it kind of had that effect on you. You know, here you are, Mother says, let's go out and feed the homeless in the middle of the cold and you're thinking, I don't want to go out in the cold, but you do it. And then suddenly you want to do what again.

Do you remember or can you possibly imagine what it was for you back then that changed you, that really touched your heart? - that made you say, I'm going to do this again. I want to do this again because it's the right thing.

Ashleigh: I mean, I think it's such a combination of factors. It's the fact that Somebody who, an individual in that group, was cold and didn't look happy at all, lit up when you hand, when I handed them the bowl of chili, right. That you could see that you're bringing Somebody joy. Maybe this is rationalization, you know, years later. But I also think it's just the chemical reaction to, of knowing that you've helped Somebody and that releases endorphins. It feels good for me to be able to support Somebody else in their time of need. And I think that's completely fine, right This, you know, this selfishness of giving to others, that you get Something back emotionally chemically, even by supporting others. When I'm in my worst places, I still kind of lean on that. I always feel better when I support and help others.

When I'm feeling incredibly down, when I'm feeling like I don't have power or control in a scenario. So, there's certainly something there that I come back to even today.

And then I think just kind of looking back at that period of time, there's also this feeling of being a part of something that's bigger than myself. I was a part of a small group who is doing this and suddenly we were, we were community and it's a different type of family to be able to give as a part of a collective, as opposed to doing it as an individual. And I think that is also drawn back in over time to, to giving and supporting in new ways and building kind of new communities through the practice.

Art: So yeah, and I, in what I know about you definitely would say that you're completely focused on using your skills in your profession to further this passion. You have to help others and receive this wonderful gift of warmth and return for what you've done. And I want to talk for a bit about AIGA and what you see in that organization and its, and its power through this incredible network of talented people to provide, you know, great social good and value to our society. Ashleigh: Well, AIGA is, as you mentioned, the professional association for design and the design community is So, much more robust than I think people even realize, I guess, to kind of back up a step. I would say anybody who is taking Something from an undesirable state today into a better state with intention is designing.

So, even if Somebody doesn't consider themselves a designer, if they are working on improving their employee culture and really intentionally looking at how it is today and building it up to Something that's better tomorrow, they're in the practice of designing that internal culture in that organization. And So, the design community is this robust community that tends to be trained around visual design and there's all of this personally tapped and then So, much untapped potential for the community to really embrace its unique power of observation and change management and creativity to ultimately change communities and lives of people across the U S and I think across the globe.

And to fully embrace others and help them understand the ways in which, whether they consider themselves a designer or not, they're practicing design by being critics of the reality and breaking the status quo and improving the society. The pieces that are right in front of them and around them every day. And So, that's part of the potential within AIGA. That gets me really excited.

It's about the strong community that we have that has already been practicing these skills of observation and shifting whether it's an interface, whether it's those single images and helping sell a book or a compelling message that they're practicing skills and are really adept at it and can expand it and grow it and teach it to others so, that we can make even more collective change together.

I think that Some of them show the most beautiful potential within the community as it exists today. And we're just getting started moving beyond designers, talking to folks that know they are designers.

Art: Absolutely. I think a lot about Some of the conversations we had about race and the significant role that images play in either connecting people to a mindset or destructing, I guess, a particular mindset. And I wonder how you would react to this question: What can we do with images to change hate or to eliminate hate?

Ashleigh: It's a great question. I think So, much. There's So, many things. There's just mere exposure to different types of images, different types of point of view and vantage points can be incredibly powerful. There's So, much, especially in society that we've normalized without realizing it - normalizing what is effectively white as the typical or the standard. We've normalized abled body-ness. We've normalized certain body types, certain privilege and power dynamics and points of view.

So in simple images, videos, still, we have the opportunity to suddenly juxtapose those to really new points of view, vantage points, and to give people the opportunity to see a different perspective and to really experience it in deeper ways.

I know there's been some really fun experimental stuff out there, even, you know, VR that would help men gain the experience of what it's like to walk down the street as a woman. You know, you got this VR headset.

They have simulations for daytime, with harassment simulations for nights. So you can really get the experience of where some of that fear comes from. Those are like deep visceral things that I could try to explain to somebody so, many different times and ways, and it's not going to click, right. But if I can show you, if I can put you in that perspective for a short period of time, suddenly then it starts to click, or you start to kind of question the difference between your standard point of view and the point of view of another.

Design is one really powerful way to do that. And I can give you 10 more examples in that space specific to, you know, racial justice, if, if you're interested. But I, I love talking about that.

Art: Yeah, it's, it's So, important because even today, you know, as an African-American man, my wife and I like to watch old movies and you know what we come across, right. We tend to see in movies, even the ones that were really done well, most of the characters are white and they are part of communities that are all white and there are no black people in those films. And it gets to a point in today's world where you say to yourself, I can't watch this anymore. I can't watch it anymore because it doesn't even know that I exist.

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It doesn't respect that people like me exist. So,, we can see how these films, as you say, normalized life decades ago, and even less than Some decades ago.

Now that's changing and we can see through those images that we have today, how that's affecting how people relate to each other. So,, it's quite powerful, indeed.

But I think there is this ability to look at systemic racism, to help pull out the, you know, even looking at the design of language, the euphemisms that are being used today as racist terms that are being used to mask them and that people aren't really aware of on a conscious level, in most cases.

Just the whole notion of images, but design, as you mentioned, is also systems and structures. And I would imagine that those of us who are caught up in systems and structures that are holding us back are looking to designers who can begin to change those as well. Ashleigh: It's another really great point, I think, you know, and it takes a collective. So,, I want to also be careful that we're not coming across as selling designers, as the inherit fix - they're people who you can just pull in and we'll work in a vacuum to fix things.

And there's this responsibility and I think opportunity of folks that have the power of perception to work really collaboratively with social scientists, with business folks, with economists, with folks at every level of our institutions in Society to kind of bring up these issues to help elevate what's problematic about the status quo and teach kind of co-design collaborative design processes to be able to work together and finding Solutions to those problems. But some of the biggest problems and Solutions come down to some really wonky solutions.

They're not always the glamorous types of solutions, but it's new flow charts and organizational and changing of hiring practices and really outlining what terms are acceptable in different spaces

and what terms are not and why and demonstrating those histories so that we don't fall into the traps of the status quo.

I think whether all designers would own this or not, it's one of the most problematic things. It is just how things are today.

We constantly want to be improving, making things better, more sustainable, more equitable. And the worst thing is to just kind of sit on things as they are today and accept what's been given to us because So, much of that is steeped in problematic history.

Or we just have to acknowledge the people that it supports and those who, for whatever reasons it has historically not supported or even recognized or, and in some cases has even, I guess, benefited from as kind of stolen opportunity... taken from communities.

Art: You know, you're making great sense. And I was going to ask you to talk a bit about your experience working in the White House for a President that most of us would have never imagined, could ever have gotten to the White House, you know.

Ashleigh: But now there are two that'd be talking about, but for very different reasons.

Art: Yes. Well, I mean, I think that for many of us growing up, we could never have imagined an African-American serving in the White House because it had been normalized to be a place that only a white male could ever serve. And here you are Someone who actually had the experience working in that White House. What were your responsibilities there and how were you able to help the administration prosper?

Ashleigh: Well, before I answer that I'll just say really quickly that it was a real trip to even have that opportunity to work in the White House.

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I spent a lot of time after meeting the former creative director at the White House when they said that they needed an Art Director, just thinking who could I get to fill this position for them, who has enough years of experience and is qualified to serve this, you know, amazing administration. And certainly, didn't think that I was the person.

I wanted Somebody who had a whole lot more experience at the time than I did, but I joined as an Art director and then became the creative director over time. I worked in the Obama White House for a little over four years from the beginning of 2012. So,, the very end of the first term through much of the second term. I left a little bit early to get a little bit more involved in the election season than I could as a staffer in the White House at the time.

But my role there was really to represent the brand of the White House and to make sure that it was visually sound and that included the brand of the White House as a historic institution, executive office of the President effectively a museum, the home of the first family, as well as the brand of Barack Obama, the man who is elected into office on a campaign of hope and change So, that it was the Obama White House - a very distinct White House from those prior or those since.

That was a big part of the role. That is kind of what covered a lot of my duties: from working on the budget covers and backdrops for events and new programming and launching different digital campaigns; working on the state of the union slides to ensuring that White House.

gov and our other platforms like We the People, the petitions platform, are fully accessible, but also represented our values and our brand through and through. It was also kind of a place I worked out of the office of digital strategy. So, much of our purpose was connecting the administration with the American people, given the influence of technology on how people engaged with one another at that time, how they saw it and really took in information. So some of the things we're seeing today started emerging then, you know, smaller bite-sized content, increasingly using images, infographics, and videos over time to distill to the most poignant bits of information So, that people could get news and information on the go.

And also kind of finding ways to activate in collaborate with the American people on the issues that matter to both them and the administration, So, that we could be working more as a collective democracy and, and not have such a strong divide. So, I was really fortunate to be able to work with Some amazing offices on great initiatives and my exposure to the impacts of climate change and different economic theories and, you know, even the Iran nuclear deal. Like I was just So, fortunate to be able to learn from some really fantastic people and work on some really powerful and kind of influential pieces of content and policy that I'd never could have imagined myself touching prior to working there.

Art: Were there specific, I would say, projects that you participated on that bring fine memories or particular challenges to you that you'd like to share here. Ashleigh: Sure. So, I mean so many of them, but they're all just so varied. I one that we didn't get motion one, but it's still heavy on my heart so many years later was our work to try to close so many of the gun loopholes that enable folks who really shouldn't have access to really heavy ammunitions and weapons in the United States that easily gain those weapons after the Sandy Hook elementary school massacre. That one is still heavy on my heart because there's just so much more work to be done there to, frankly, protect our children and ensure the safety of our own people. That one, of course, there's so many reasons that that keeps coming up.

Another kind of big one for me is, actually, more of a side project for us because it wasn't something that we were leading on, but we knew that the Supreme Court was going to make their decision in 2015 around the same-sex marriage decision. And we didn't know which way it would go because it's the Supreme Court's choice. But we decided as an administration that we were going to recognize all of the work that had been happening on a state-by-state level and support the LGBTQ community, no matter what way that decision went, lighting up the White House in rainbow colors and changing our iconography across our social platforms and putting out explainer, animated gifts and all sorts of things to support the community.

And that ended up becoming (obviously it passed and was a celebration) a really beautiful way for us to live and show our values and also really participate in advocacy in a legal way that showed community and support. So that one's another one that I look at pretty fondly and think about pretty regularly.

Art: Awesome. Ashleigh, I think you would consider yourself to be an activist. At least that's how I would describe you - as someone who takes action, who really wants to see change in the world and does something about it. And we can certainly say that activists have been in the spotlight. And you know, I'm a nonprofit person myself. I've spent much of my career in the nonprofit space.

And I'm interested in how you might see your work helping nonprofits contextualize their relationship with activists and how they might think of themselves. I know you mentioned the word reformers, but what's your thought around how activists can connect more or how nonprofits can connect more with activists? Ashleigh: That's a great question.

I think there are a few essential roles and they can build and play off of and collaborate with one another, utilizing their different skills to add kind of power to movements And I see activists as folks who are largely working outside of the established institutions, they are calling out differences and issues that they see calling for direct change to happen.

Usually not, although, you know, somebody can be an activist in one place and, and kind of serve in a different role on a different issue or in a different space altogether. Activists are usually not the folks who are directly making the change. They can be teaching. And again, largely around calling out the issues. I think of reformers as the folks who are embedded a bit more into the institutions, they have a role of actively shifting or talking about the power of design, actually taking things from that point a to point B or Sometimes Z as it were like step changing the processes, the policies internal to the institution.

So, a lot of folks who are nonprofit folks, I think are in the reformer space, they're in it to shift things over time, but because they're embedded, they have that kind of inside view and are traditionally working with in the norms of an institution as it exists, and then shifting those norms as they can over time.

And I think another kind of role is the revolutionary kind of agent of change who is maybe a bit more radical who wants to sweep away bad institutions, looking for more immediate action, then maybe a reformer would be able to do from their position of power and, and kind of privileged within an institution or, or set of institutions. So, that is like oversimplifying a few of the key roles that I see. But I think in 2020, especially in kind of, as we move into 2021, our activists have been getting so, much tension.

They're calling out inequities and are calling for change. There's a lot more power in the revolutionary space pushing for immediate change for the abolishment of institutions. Those are all incredibly powerful and necessary parts of our dialogue.

But I think the reformer is one that can often feel stuck when those other two are in positions of when they have the microphone. So, to speak, shouting saying, do this, do it faster.

And Sometimes the reformers, like how do I prioritize and change things internally with all of this noise What can I do in the space that I exist with the power that I have.

And I think a really critical part of moving forward and seeing progress and moving from status quo is for the reformers to invite the activists and the revolutionaries in for dialogue and conversation, where possible to really spend some time taking that feedback in and prioritizing the tasks that they can do internally to shift and to transform and being increasingly transparent about how those decisions are being made. And if it has to be a gradual transformation, which is often the case, what do the series of movements look like so that there can be trust.

Built in accountability builds between those kinds of activists who are external, and those folks who are making shifts internally, but it's a hard dynamic at this time, because especially in the United States, where so much had been suppressed for so long. We just didn't talk about the issues that existed. We didn't acknowledge, we never dealt with them. We didn't have our truth and reconciliation. It's going to be especially hard because there's so much anger and hurt

And I think where bonding can really happen to is in acknowledging that and acknowledging the ways in which that's impacted everybody involved. Because it cuts deep when you're talking about things as bad as anti-black racism, when you're talking about the horrid history of and segregation and stealing of property and resources from one community to another, whether it's native community or the black American experience deep in this country. It's going to take some time and you can't rush to the building without taking a little bit of time to acknowledge and to hear the pain and the hurt, and to use that as a building block to move forward. So, that's a kind of a long answer for you.

Art: It's brilliant. It's a conceptualization of what we're dealing with right now. I mean, we see every day in the news people standing on soapboxes, you know, wanting change and through social media, organizing people to take action, whether that'd be marching the streets or signing petitions, or just posting social media something that they're against or something that they're in favor of. And that's a great part of our American democracy. And Sometimes I think organizations do get crowded out of that. And we have people who work inside of organizations - have been doing work for years, who sometimes feel that their work goes unnoticed. But it's critical because we all know from experience that revolutionaries can cause things to change.

They can cause us to look at things differently. They can cause institutions to fall, but it's not always clear what we do once these institutions have fallen.

And in order to get things done, we need to be organized. We need to have some structure put to what we want to see change. We have to have some clarity around what we're trying to do. And in many times, those are best happening through institutions. And at this very moment, we probably are at a point where institutions have been beaten up so, badly that the public doesn't trust them as much as they used to. And there's a declining trust in institutions. And some of that is beginning to spill over on non-profit organizations.

I kind of worry a little bit that there's this declining number of people who've donated to charity over the years. For instance, even though the amount of money has been the same, because wealthier people are giving to organizations.

I've pointed this out many times on this podcast, people are going to get bored of me saying it, but there's something going on in our culture where people don't want to support organizations as much as they used to. They don't trust institutions as much as they used to. And I think there's a cost as associated with that, that we may not yet understand. And so, clearly organizations have got to do better.

Maybe some of that is to connect better with these revolutionaries or activists so that they can be moved forward in a positive way. So, that society can move forward and accomplish some of the things that actually revolutionaries and activists want to see happen. Ashleigh: Absolutely. I think it just takes incredibly creative means to break through in this time. There's so much that's demanding attention and especially with the deep history of inequity and like I was mentioning some of the hurt and the frustration, the anger that comes with that can be really hard for folks to focus on building and knowing how or where to invest and build. And I think for many organizations, you want somebody to be able to just judge you based on what you've done before. And So, it's like at our track record, look at our track record.

And that is really important, but it also takes kind of verbalizing and saying repeatedly, especially because so much is in question what you believe, why you believe it, who you're standing with, you know, it's going to feel redundant and it can feel a lot like virtue signaling too. Like you're just putting stuff out there cause you want folks to like you, or you want to be perceived as on the right side. But as long as it aligns with the work that you're doing, it can go a long way in building trust and that relationship back up so that folks will feel comfortable and like they're part of the community to give and to stay involved. It's not just, you know, giving financially of course it's giving of time and energy and promoting an organization by word of mouth.

The trust that it takes to get any of that type of engagement, I think comes from the same place of being in communication and meeting people where they are, which of course just takes such active listening, even when it's hard, but also you know, we need breaks. Vacations are some of the most important things. And the years that we've had recently, just to make sure that we get the breaks in between because we're listening to so much stuff that has been buried for so long but it's also important to be there as a community and to go there because we're not going to have the trust and get the engagement that we want by just asking people to look at our track record. So, it's a new balance. I think.

Art: Yeah. I had Elvia Castro, one of my colleagues on a previous episode, and she talked about the dilemma that charities are experiencing these days in their fundraising. The population is certainly changing. We're a more diverse population than we used to be. Yet nonprofits continue to go after a more historic, I guess, legacy donors. And they know that they have to find ways to reach donors of different backgrounds, but they don't have, it seems, the resources to spend cultivating people from different backgrounds. And it's an enormous challenge for the sector. So, it's no wonder that the number of donors is going down when charities aren't really investing a whole lot in identifying them and cultivating them.

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So, it's an enormous challenge from that standpoint. And then when you add in, you know, what you're talking about, which is, you know, we have to now listen to them, we have to feel their pain

We have to empathize with them. There's a lot to that. We have to hear things that we may not want to hear from people in order to make them feel a part of what it is that we're trying to do, even when we're trying to help people from their community sometimes. So, I agree.

I'm on a board Ashleigh, of another organization called Convergence and the whole mission of Convergence is to try to bring people literally to a table on a particular issue who have very different points of view. Some even polarized points of view. And I was asked to join a board last year. And I agreed

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because I felt that here we are at a moment in time where I don't know if our Country's ever been more polarized, (maybe during the civil war we were pretty polarized) but we're certainly extremely polarized right now

And it doesn't seem to me that we're going to be able to bridge these gulfs unless we can get people talking to each other about the issues.

And convergence has a really interesting approach to doing that (which I'll have to get David Eisner, the CEO on one day to talk about) but it's this kind of, what I'll call, a designed approach to get people to talk to each other - that we have to have as a society we're going to hold together in the future. Ashleigh: Absolutely.

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Art: Well, then I wanted to just shift just a little bit and give you a chance to talk to us about some of the more interesting projects you may be working on right now.

Ashleigh: Oh, sure. So, one I'm incredibly excited about is a project with HHS, Health and Human Services supporting Limex, which is an initiative by HHS with support of the Stephen and Alexandra Cohen Foundation to eradicate Lyme disease in the future.

This health plus program is really on understanding the implications of Lyme disease and the ways that it shows up for people who have Lyme disease, for the caregivers, for the clinicians that treat them as well as for the policy makers and those who are trying to chart ways forward for this community and improve the care and access to care over time, as well as even just the understanding about the disease and how it comes forward.

So, we're doing research and deep into Lyme disease to get a sense of where the opportunity areas as well as the problem areas are.

And we're putting together a human centered design report that synthesizes all of those findings and then really excited for later on in 2021, just during Lyme disease awareness month to have what we call a healthathon, which is a chance for everybody to actively engage on how piloting some solutions to those issue areas, whether they're with design and marketing communication materials or changes to data collection or clinician kind of treatment packages, all sorts of solutions are kind of welcome in that space, but it's a chance for real investment in solutions to high impact.

health area that affects so many people across the United States and suspected many, many more as diagnosis has been really hard for Lyme disease in particular, but we do so many different

types of projects. We've been happy to work on health plus with HHS in the past for sickle cell disease. So, this is our second cycle working in collaboration with them on an area of health that will affect many people across the country.

Art: It's really important to make people aware of what's going on with these particular challenges you know, we've been so focused on the coronavirus and COVID-19, we can't forget about the other health issues that people are dealing with right now. And It's good to see that at least our government is putting some resources into continuing to make people aware of some of the challenges there too. I know Lyme disease is a particularly tough illness. How many people Ashleigh do you know are affected by this disease?

Ashleigh: I try not to say the number because there's really actually a large debate on who is considered to have Lyme disease. There's like a fixed definition of what Lyme disease is and what qualifies as Lyme disease.

That's really locked in as diagnosis in the broader Lyme communities, kind of advocating for opening that up a little bit and recognizing a few other types and symptoms. And some folks that have had a harder time getting a formal diagnosis. The understanding is that it's probably in the hundreds of thousands of people in total actual numbers. So look forward to actually getting this certainly will not be our role. Thank goodness, but over time, getting much more clear on diagnosis for Lyme disease, that those numbers can be a little bit more clear and, and something that everybody feels really confident in. Art: Well, that's a particular challenge in and of itself. Just getting a clear definition of what, what it entails and what it is.

Ashleigh: Yeah

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A lot of people think about that kind of, there's like a signature circle and rash kind of with a blister in the middle that is like a visual signifier of Lyme disease, but not everybody gets that.

And Lyme disease is kind of a disguises itself, so to speak, as a number of other illnesses. So, it can be incredibly hard to diagnose. Art: Ashleigh, what do you see for AI GA this year coming up What are Some of the things that public expect from AIGA? Ashleigh: Well, we've been building community, really connecting our chapters. We have 75 chapters across the country, DEI task force, that's diversity, equity and inclusion, design educators community.

And this year we're doing a lot more to connect those communities to one another and work in collaboration on initiatives. We're excited about having further support for educators in the design field who are outside of traditional Art institutions. So, whether they're at HBCU or community colleges or other training programs to really bring them into the fold so that we're working more as a collective with one another. We're also spending a good portion of our time this year, providing deeper access to training and materials for folks who are like I was mentioning earlier, just outside of design, who, who could benefit from information around what design is, who can use context on how to bring designers into their institutions, organizations, to be collaborators in the change that they're creating.

That's not an area we'd spent as much time on in the past that we're really pushing into for the 2021 year and beyond and thankful that we have Benny AF Johnson as our Executive Director who is doing fantastic work to really connect the dots here. Art: I love Benny he's so bright and so skilled in running organizations and inspiring people and teams. I expect a lot to be coming out of AIGA. I would just tell the public to stay tuned and look out for what's coming out of that organization this year and in the years ahead. Well, Ashleigh, I want to thank you for giving me this time today to speak with you about this ubiquitous field of design and how it can be used to create social good and shape our society.

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And also, to congratulate you for the many years you've been in the field making sure that the change that needs to occur takes hold through our images and through the designs that we create.

And I just continue to wish you a great success in everything you do. I am just privileged to have the opportunity to work with you on the board of AIGA. And I know that in the years ahead, we'll have some great successes.

So, I want to thank everyone for listening to this episode of The Heart of Giving Podcast. I hope you'll subscribe to us by going to any of the major podcast platforms. And I hope you'll listen to our next episode.

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About the Host



Herman "Art" Taylor is President and Chief Executive officer of the BBB Wise Giving Alliance - give.org. Appointed to his position in July 2001, the Wise Giving Alliance Board of Directors selected Mr. Taylor President & CEO for his record of accomplishments in the non-profit arena and his business, professional, and volunteer background. As the head of the

Alliance, he oversees all aspects of the organization's work.

Mr. Taylor is a respected and sought-after voice in the non-profit sector on charity accountability, transparency, governance, impact, and strategy. DCA Live cited him in 2018 for demonstrating exceptional performance in advancing his organization's mission. For his efforts, he has been named 4 times to the Non-Profit Times list of the Power and Influence top 50 in the non-profit sector and is currently a member of its Hall of Fame.

He has spent his career serving the non-profit sector. Currently, he is a member of the boards of Convergence, American Non-Profits, the International Committee on Fundraising Organizations, the Fundraising Standard, National Assembly Business Services, CFRE International, and the American Institute of Graphic Arts. He lectures on Ethics in the non-profit management program at the Columbia University School of Professional Studies. He is a graduate of Franklin and Marshall College and is currently Vice Chair of its board of trustees. He acquired J.D. from Temple University James E. Beasley School of Law.

H. Art Taylor, President & CEO

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