

# Joel Van Kuiken Episode Transcript

📅 Thu, 7/14 10:24AM ⏱ 52:24

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, data, juvenile justice system, conversation, community, called, grand rapids, listening, question, young men, bit, thinking, cameras, joel, cole, audience, nonprofit, happening, work, important

## SPEAKERS

Outro, Joel Van Kuiken, Intro, Tony Kopetchny

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Intro 00:01

Welcome to Engaging Ideas, the bi weekly podcast from Parsons TKO, bringing you conversations with mission driven leaders and luminaries to shift your perspective and challenge your assumptions on the art of the possible.



Tony Kopetchny 00:16

Hello, everybody. Welcome to another episode of engaging ideas to Parsons TKO podcast, where we like to talk to mission driven leaders and luminaries from all over the country to give you all kinds of great ideas and perspectives on ways that you could be thinking about how to maneuver your way through all the digital transformation and the every day of our lives here in the nonprofit sector. at Parsons Tiki, we are the nonprofit consulting firm working on digital transformation and with our methodology, Engagement Architecture, bringing together all the technology data and people processes within organizations to really help maneuver through this time of transformation. Today, I'm utterly delighted to be joined by my friend Joel Van Kotkin. He is the co founder of the Delta project, and also a principal at sea context. Welcome, Joel. Thanks, Tony.



Joel Van Kuiken 01:06

It's great to be here. I



Tony Kopetchny 01:08

really like it for this conversation. And Joel, to get us started, can you tell our audiences about the Delta project and how it got started? And what y'all are up to now? Yeah,



**J** Joel Van Kuiken 01:16

the Delta project is a nonprofit that is focused on helping kids in the juvenile justice system really changed their narratives. You know, it started really with a question that was asked of my business partner, Cole Williams, back in 2017. Cole teaches in the juvenile detention center here in Western Michigan, where I'm where I live. And as he was talking about all of the men of color in the community that he sees on a regular basis, doing incredible things. One of the students raised his hand and he said, Well, that's great that you see that Mr. Cole, but I don't see that in my community. And how am I supposed to become something I don't see. That was the big question. How do I become something I don't see cold didn't have an answer for that. It kind of pushed him back a little bit and made him reflect. He's usually not at a loss for words. But he sat with that for a while. And then a few weeks later, called me up. We met at a local coffee shop. And he told me about that interaction. And we built a Delta project from there. And that question continues to be our focal point. And the reason for doing the work that we do.



Tony Kopetchny 02:46

And the Delta project and the work you all are doing and where it got started. And with that question, I mean, it's a lot of video work. So I was on your site, and I've watched some of the video, can you tell us a little bit of you know, the genesis of that have video became the important piece? Was it? Is it video, literally, because it's answering that question, or is there a training behind it?

**J** Joel Van Kuiken 03:07

Yeah, yeah. So the video, what we call delta project conversations, it's really kind of the first iteration of the Delta project. I was in a position at the time, I was working at a local company, working doing scripting, producing video production work. And one of my partners in that work, runs a production company. I invited him into the conversation. And he brought a certain technology into the discussion. Because when Colin I met and had this, this discussion about what this could be called, was thinking, Well, you know, I want to create a tabletop book, I want to create something to kind of show these kids, successful black men in our community. And I was like, cool, you know, you can make a book, but this is a movement. This is much bigger. And I brought Eric Johnson in. He's really kind of our third co founder, and he's kind of our creative director. And that's when video came into the mix. So what we started doing, we went into the detention center on a Friday, we brought all of our equipment, and we started training the kids in the detention center. In audio engineering, we we train them in lighting, behind the scenes, footage, all the different positions that you need to know in a production. And then we asked one of the students or a student volunteered to be the interviewer. Then a week later, we came back in and we set up again, but this time we invited someone from the community that they wouldn't see He typically, and we sat them down across from the student, and they had a conversation. And we recorded that. And then we edited our content from there. Now, the reason this was unique is because we have this special box that gorilla and Eric Johnson developed, which is a box with two red cameras in it, but also mirrors. So when you're looking into one of the cameras, you're seeing a reflection of the person sitting across from you. So if you happen to watch those videos, this was back in 2019. Before zoom calls were kind of a thing. And the videos look similar to a zoom call, when two people are interacting with each other. But it was kind of before that all happened. And the beauty of that approach was that you could really see the change and the aha moments happening in real time, we didn't just

have to stick on one person, and switch and switch back and forth, we could see both people experiencing a moment of development, essentially, of a young man in the juvenile justice system, seeing what he might become, seeing what his future might be. And we did five episodes of those throughout 2019. We incorporated in September of 2019. We got our 501 C three and March of 2020. Then quarantine hit. So that's when we had to kind of revisit, you know, who are we what are we trying to do in this business? Because it's a startup? Yes, it's a nonprofit. But a nonprofit is a business designation. And we are bootstrapping a startup with the Delta project. And we had to think about what what are we focused on? Where are the gaps? Who are we serving here? And how do we best serve our customers, which are teenagers dealing with the juvenile justice system?



**Tony Kopetchny 07:11**

So I have a couple of questions I wrote down I mean, one, just go back to the video format, style, it's interesting to hear you talk about it. So I've watched your videos, and we're gonna link to them. So hopefully everyone here will watch them to him. And it's incredibly powerful. Yeah, you are right, the format seems almost perfect for watching an internet video interview to be able to see both people so clearly, the dialogues are so they flow so naturally, and so well. And you can really, I mean, it's, you could feel the mentorship happening through it. Noon, we talked a little bit of how he came up with the style for the camera. It doesn't so these marks scripted. I mean, this seems like it this was just us. And these people were in the kids were meeting the mentors for the first time. And these were the conversations that just flowed like, how did that all come together? I mean, it's, it's really powerful.



**Joel Van Kuiken 07:59**

Yeah, so yeah, it wasn't scripted. I mean, basically, we have a playbook for those conversation series when we do them. And there's, there are a series of questions that we make available to the kids conducting the interview. And, you know, the whole thing is about seeing what you might become and seeing each other. So we usually kick it off with, you know, can you see me, we are looking through these lenses in these mirrors at each other? Can we see each other? You know, it really often starts there, that being able to see, truly see the person that you're interacting with, and having an authentic interaction and conversation with that person, really the essence of human connection, and communication. And I think for us, you know, it's very, it was very experimental. But we were just, again, trying to capture those moments when people can see something and see what they might be in a situation that, you know, typically they would just not see those things, they just wouldn't have access. So it wouldn't even cross their mind what some of their opportunities might be in the future. So I mean, that's, that's kind of where that went in where it's going to continue to go. Because actually we are going to start producing the conversation series again. It's been a long haul, you know, not being able to go into the detention center because of COVID. And again, having to kind of really look at what is narrative story change for brown and black boys? How are they seen? You know, it's really important that we think that through, often society sees them as predators as criminals, as people that we need to segregate. And that nothing could be further from the truth. These are young men, many of them dealing with generational trauma, many of them dealing with mental health issues, who made a mistake, they end up and they end up in the juvenile justice system. And they're considered to be at risk. Well, they're not at risk, they're actually at potential. They

are the future leaders of our society, if we let them be that if we give them the opportunity to truly see what they can become. And that's why we believe so deeply in the work that we're doing. And the success that we're starting to have, is really encouraging to us. So



Tony Kopetchny 11:00

super powerful. And I really love that line to use there to add potential not at risk, I mean, more people, I hope will start taking that into the broader dialogue in our communities. So a lot of people who listen to the show work in the communication space in the nonprofit sector marketing, there is something you had said there. And I'm curious to how y'all think about it, like, who's the audience as you're thinking about how the boys you're working with, and the mentors are coming in how they're seen? But who are you packaging it for? Is it for other boys that could see this video, too, because of YouTube? Yeah. Can you tell us more about where you think it's coming for the audience you're trying to hit?



Joel Van Kuiken 11:42

Yeah, it's a good question. I mean, always understanding your audience is, you know, marketing 101, right. I mean, that's really a big part of understanding how to have an effective message. But I think there are multiple levels of audiences here. And to me, the most important audience are the young men who are dealing with these issues, who might be able to see, hey, here's an opportunity for me to see what my future might become. But really, the audience is, I hate to say it, but really general population, but people who want to see a narrative from these kids that we typically don't listen to. So people that are listening, people who want to see a different way of approaching the future, I guess. But people who are inclined to want to make a difference and to want to see systems change. And I'm trying to narrow this down. It's I'm always challenged when I talk about the audience for this, because I think everyone needs to hear it. But I think, you know, we need people who are inspired when they watch this, that want to take action, and try to make their community a better place by having more empathy for the people around them and understanding, you know, the struggles that many people who are at the bottom of the hierarchy of needs are dealing with. Right, so yeah, I didn't totally answer your question about the audience. I'm happy to take another shot. I



Tony Kopetchny 13:38

know that it makes a lot of sense. And yeah, I think he did answer it very well. And it's still human urine, still a startup stage? I think you had momentum from what you said, and then COVID happened, then there's the pause. And so I mean, you know, it's the agile methodology to deploy it into business in life. I mean, let's see where it goes. And you got to experiment as you put it out, and it sounds like you're doing all the the ethically correct things to really thinking about who you're talking with and how they're being portrayed and making sure that it's all positive light. So it sounds great. I mean, I'm sure you're gonna learn a lot and then you'll keep us posted and we'll see your to one quick follow up and then I think we're the conversation lead based on what you just talked about two, are the young men doing the production work while you're in there. So have you like are they getting trained in camera use and yes, then they're actually running the audio and, or the there's a boom mic set? Imagine

 Joel Van Kuiken 14:40

yeah, there's there's typically there's a boom mic. You know, I'm more in the executive producer type role. So I'm not deep into the directing and crewing but yes, these kids are running the production. Obviously there's a seasoned Video Pro Rational helping them. But it's like, here's the here's the camera, you can work with this camera that costs hundreds of 1000s of dollars or however much it costs, these red cameras and we trust you. You know, here's all the equipment. It's your opportunity to lead and produce this, you know, with with our help, and training. So we're really looking forward actually, within the next month from us recording this, we're hoping to be producing another episode. We've done five episodes, as I mentioned. And then we started to branch into other other programming, as



Tony Kopetchny 15:46

well. What's the other programming you're branching into?

 Joel Van Kuiken 15:51

So a couple of things on a production side, we have something that we call future skills, edit training. And we're teaching Adobe Premiere, Adobe Premiere Pro, and other parts of the Adobe Creative Suite to kids on probation out in the community. So we give them the opportunity to we have like six little mini vlogging cameras, they're called DJI, DJI, DJI video cameras are really tiny. And again, it's about storytelling. So we're giving our kids the opportunity to use these cameras to capture footage. And then we're teaching them the basics of video editing, in Adobe Premiere, which is kind of the standard professional editing program for video professionals. So the idea there, you have to really take to that, you know, they're learning a tangible skill that will allow them to potentially find employment. But it's not just about the nuts and bolts of editing. So understanding storytelling as well. And what it means to tell a good story and how to weave everything together. You know, many of our kids are interested in music, and hip hop and rap, this is a way to kind of influence the messages that they're sharing, and help them be a little bit more able to create their own beats and messages and produce, you know, they want to be producers also. So that's one of the programs. It's definitely an outgrowth of the production work that we do with Delta project conversations. Another program is called boys to mentors. And that is the program that my partner Cole Williams, runs here in our local detention center, and also in our county jail where there's a juvenile pod. And he's working with these kids, talking about a variety of topics relating to healthy manhood and understanding what it means to navigate in our communities, as young men, so that when they return, and enter back into society, they have maybe a bit more of a blueprint. And they have some connections, and they have some knowledge to help them say avoid recidivism, but really find their way and have some success. And then the other program we have is called Wi Fi. And it's young fathers initiative. So what Cole discovered in his work in the juvenile detention center, is that many of the young men that he was working with, we're already fathers are seem to be fathers. And no one was even asking that question of these kids. You know, they're in these residential treatment programs, they might be sent away for four to six months. Well, the fact is, they're separated from their children. They're missing the birth of their children. And they don't necessarily understand the importance of being present as a father, and the important role that fathers play, really in early childhood development. You know, from zero to five years old, there's so much going on. And the growth of the child and

having a nurturing father present to bond with that child is so incredibly important. And that's the type of interaction that's going to help a child develop and is going to pay off 1020 years down the road when when those kids grow up. Because I think what we're seeing a lot of these young men in juvenile detention have fathers who are in prison. So there's kind of this phenomenon of incarcerated fatherhood. And with, you know, 2 million people incarcerated in our country, more than half our parents of kids 18 years old or younger. So what does that mean? How do you address an issue like that? Well, one way is to help these young men see and model what fatherhood might be, and how they can play a role in their children's lives.



**Tony Kopetchny 20:39**

You have a lot going on with the Delta project and all these different pieces of the work you're doing. I'm curious, you know, you start it, it's, it's local to Grand Rapids, Michigan. You know, you're getting your feedback underneath you coming through the pandemic. You know, it sounds like as you continue to work, and you get more information and feedback from the work you're doing, is this a type of playbook that could go to other cities like resistance, and you all have thought about if there's other groups that are listening, and they're interested in there thinking, I want to start something like this in Fort Worth, Texas? How would I do that? Now, what are your What are your thoughts on that?



**Joel Van Kuiken 21:19**

Yeah, I mean, I think we've always thought about how to something like this, I guess, scale. We don't really use the word scale in this case, but it might be, you know, the proper term to use, we found that, you know, yes, we've been pretty hyperlocal with our focus here in Kent County. But Cole also serves in Ottawa County, my business partner. And we've, he also, by the way, serves on the governor's council for juvenile justice reform here in Michigan. So through those connections, he's been able to see potentially other cities in Michigan, where we might be able to duplicate our efforts and replicate this model. I think this is something that yes, it could be replicated anywhere in the country or even in the world. But I think everyone is going to have their own maybe their own different take on it. For us, we happen to be in the right place at the right time with the right question asked of us, that we were able to mobilize and pull a team together that could respond to that question. So maybe it starts there. Because I think everyone should, it should ask themselves that question. How do I become something I don't see? Well, how does a 16 or 17 year old kid in juvenile detention? Answer that question. It can be answered in a variety of ways. We can all answer it in a variety of ways. Our response was the Delta project conversations, and then our extended programming for kids leaving the detention center and on probation. So yes, we would love to grow it and expand it. But one thing I learned kind of early on in the pandemic, just do a little bit each day, you know, don't try to do it all at once. I mean, sometimes I would get a little frustrating feel like nothing is happening, we can't seem to get traction, but I just kept telling myself, just do a little bit each day. And it really adds up. And it does add up. And it leads to really solid outcomes, I mean outcomes that you know, that are foundational, not not, you know, volatile results that you can't rely on. So I encourage anyone listening to think about that question, and think about how they might interpret it. And then, you know, this model of video production doesn't have to be as elaborate as the way we're doing it. We can just as easily do something like this on a zoom call. But I think part of it is understanding the juvenile justice system and the justice system for that matter. And having the relationships and the connections and the ability to I don't want to

say go inside but reach these people that are in such need of support. You know, we've got so many people warehoused in this country. All of these people who are again at potential, you know, if we, if we just kind of shift our lens and see them that way, think about the benefit to the economy, to life to society. It's, in many ways, it's relatively untapped, because simply because of how we view it, if we shift our lens you know, the consequences, the good consequences could be brilliant for our communities.



Tony Kopetchny 25:21

I could imagine. And it makes sense to not talk about scaling. But like replicating maybe in a way, because I imagine it has to be very local to like, there's something about the people in the community talking to each other, seeing the people in the community welcoming people back into the community finding ways to reintegrate into the local community, which you really, once it goes national, it's, I feel like it would lose, it probably will lose all its teeth in a way that if you're doing it locally, everyone can kind of start to participate or get involved or see it happening next to them. And, yeah, it's part of the point you're making, really, on the podcast, tried to bring up the former places I worked with the Pew Charitable Trusts is doing a lot of work and Anti Recidivism too. And one of the things that always stuck out to me, and it's an observation I just keep holding is that there's a community of people that really are removed from us, even just visually from society where prisons are held, like they're just far out there, out there. It's, it's, it's hard to acknowledge and then doing something you don't see the people you can forget about him. I just remember thinking we wanted to do a project back then. And I was like, it probably be more striking to do it just audio, you know, let such disquiet, like hear that voice because you're not seeing him anyways. But to hear that there's something so intimate about the human voice in your ERA and realizing oh, my God, that's a person.



Joel Van Kuiken 26:50

Yeah, I agree. I agree. You know, speaking of proximity, you know, this, our juvenile detention center here in Grand Rapids, the Kent County Juvenile Detention Center, it's right in a neighborhood, you know, it's a place that you wouldn't need to go there unless your GPS was telling you to go there. But it's right kind of in our midst. Yet, no one really knows it's there. You wouldn't go there unless you had a reason to. But once you see it, you're like, Okay, this is right, in our city, right in our neighborhoods. And, you know, there's a whole world inside of this place that we don't fully understand.



Tony Kopetchny 27:35

That's, yeah, it's powerful. It's one thing we talked about earlier in our first conversation together was data ethics and equity. Got into that a little bit in that minority, black, brown. And when they're put his data points, they are meant to be bad danger singles, which was awful, they hit me really hard. Now, what have you seen people organizations trying to do to correct for this factor? We talked about I know, you've got some stuff, I think coming up later this year, in Grand Rapids, where you're going to try to help people see the to the danger, the see the danger and what they're doing with some of these data points. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about that.



J

Joel Van Kuiken 28:20

Okay, yeah. So you know, I'm pretty I'm, I've got a background in public relations and communications. You know, just give a little backstory here. You know, I was teaching at a local university, and I wrapped that up, because as an adjunct, it was just, it's just challenging, you know, to manage teaching along with the other pursuits. I was I was involved in so I told myself when I was done teaching, at the end of last year, I would get more active in our local public group Relations Society of America here in West Michigan. So I joined the programming committee, I joined the DEI committee. And so when we started talking about an event that we wanted to hold our annual event around Dei. I had previously made a connection with someone named Renee Cummings, and she's a data ethicist focused. She's a criminologist data ethicist. She's really focused on racial bias in artificial intelligence, and algorithms and machine learning and data. And one thing she said to me that really stuck was that, you know, blackness is a data point for risk. And that idea is so insidious to me that we need to pay real attention to how we're using data. And if the data that we're using is being used to suppress brown and black people. And if it's being used to influence how people see bipoc communities, and essentially maintain a status quo that we think is okay, because we don't know anything else, we have a real problem. Data shouldn't be data data is collected from the past. But somehow data needs to bring us to the future. And I'm really concerned about artificial intelligence, these algorithms, all this stuff going on in the background, not being led by an ethical human, but being directed by someone who may have priorities based on scarcity, profit, some of the things that kind of maintain how things are, when we know that how things are really isn't working for the majority of people. So yeah, Renee Cummings, we're planning to have her come to town here at Grand Rapids, and in the second week in November, it's a work in progress. I'm kind of working on putting this all together. She'll be here for a whole week, and she'll be really discussing this topic in our community, a community that is dealing with real issues with, with I guess, how data is being used in our police force and in different areas. I mean, we recently had a police shooting here in April, young man was shot by grantors Police Department. And it's caused a real upheaval here in our community, as these types of things have caused upheaval and questions throughout our country. So I think it's really important that we don't just react, you know, we think about how do we get upstream of problems like this? How do we solve in a bigger way, in a way that avoids the problem ever occurring in the first place? You know, one of my, I'll get on my soapbox here, this whole quantitative idea, you know, we're a society that's built on quantitative analysis and quantifying things. You know, what happens if you are measured by how many lights? How many impressions you get? How many traffic stops you make, for instance, what if you are positioned? Think of a speed trap. And if you are encouraged to have more, write more traffic tickets? Well, you're going to set up a speed trap, you're going to catch people speeding? Well, if you if you go upstream of that, and you think, well, maybe we don't want people speeding. To begin with. Let's not make a speed trap, let's just have more of a presence so that people slow down. And let's find ways to calm traffic, so that people don't start speeding in the first place. So we're not trying to quantify the data, or we're trying to ameliorate a problem that we're going to react to, and find a way for it never to occur in the first place. Problem is you can't measure that. So you can't really reward the success of avoiding a problem. Because the problem never occurred. There's nothing to measure. So I think there's a bit of a paradox there as well. It's why I'm just when I think about empirical research, and data, man, qualitative data is so incredibly important. And we shouldn't just get hung up on the quantitative data. We need both. They need to work together. And the data needs to be handled ethically, humanly, and it's really in service of our community. Not necessarily in service of a bottom line.





**Tony Kopetchny 34:17**

Yeah, amen to that. I always qualitative and we talk about this a lot in our work with this company. I've talked about it in my career previous to this too, because people come in and I would put systems into organizations because technology is important. And then we would talked about data and analysis and you're just trying to boil it down to a number and I'm like, that's not the truth. There's, there's something to it where I have to monitor this but what I care about too, is the qualitative side and in my gret in my graduate school experience, the qualitative side curves to me is harder than the quantitative side like the numbers are the numbers you can start playing with them and grad school we had a book, How to Lie with Statistics. You know, it's out there were qualitative, you know, when you think of ethnography or some of the anthropology, I mean, you have to get into culture, what does it mean? Or what's the Hawthorne effect you're having? Just by sitting in? Did you change the way that person is behaving just because of your presence? Now? How does that affect your data? It takes so much more effort to, to pull good qualitative work in that I, maybe people wanted to fall to the others, as you're talking and made me think too. Big Data? I don't, I guess it's not a fancy word anymore. It was I don't know, times blur. But you know, five years ago, 10 years ago, big data, big data, big data. People were hoovering this up and the companies have all done it. But where was the data? Where did it start? Have they ever looked at it? Why did they have these data points? Why did they collect them? And and I think there probably is rightfully in the population. Now fear and nervousness of what the hell do you have on me? Or and then why would I give you more? Right? So it's Yeah, I don't know if I'm just grandstanding myself on this. But I've there's a thread in some of the other podcast episodes and some events we've done, where we are really trying to get into the ethics of data as a company to just to make sure the message is getting out there. You don't have to collect everything, just to collect it. Right really got to have a reason. And if it matters, be transparent, and let people know what you plan to do with it and how you'll handle it. safely, we'll handle that I think, the nonprofit space. I don't know a lot of nonprofits that can sit here and tell us what their data security strategy is, once they've collected all this information, then I'm not trying to call anyone out in the sector more just like we got to get better at it, because it's still important work to do. But you've got to really think about all those angles, the security, the why and the reason. So I love what you're doing. I'm going to be following it. And it looked up Renee, after the last time we talked and open maybe have a chance to meet her at some point too, because it sounds like she's doing some fantastic work. And I think these are hard, big discussions that, that shake the status quo, I think there's people got, you got to put some work back into it. If you want to get this right, and you want to get it ethical, you want to get used for getting upstream and doing what it should do. Thank you for what you're doing there. And hopefully, we can export it out to other places, too.



**Joel Van Kuiken 37:24**

Yeah, one thing that just listening to you to talk there, and I was just thinking, you know, we we often say, you know, what is the data? Or what are the data, maybe we should be saying? Who is the data? And, you know, data represents a person quite often. And what if that data could talk back to us? You know, and that's what we're trying to get it to do, I guess, but maybe we need to start thinking about it as people and where this data is coming from if it's coming from a human source? Who are those people that are speaking the data? And what more is there to their story that we're missing? Just a thought



Tony Kopetchny 38:14

I liked it. I mean, put the human back in it, right? It is a game changer, when you think about it that way. These aren't just random maths points that I'm putting together. This is this is a person's life that I'm turning into ones and zeros on the screen to try to automate my way through and make it faster and not have to have an actual human relationship conversation with this person. Yeah. Yeah, there's something coming through COVID A little bit of pause, we all had to take a little bit of patience with each other again, and start talking to human beings again, getting to know each other. And yeah, and I don't know, waffles. Open that either,



Joel Van Kuiken 38:51

you know, it's challenging is COVID was is, it's been a huge kind of relationship opportunity for me, for me to really make strong connections with people all over the world, many that I may never meet, physically face to face, but that I've become incredibly tight with and close to my network is just growing exponentially. I look for these opportunities, you know, just finding people, like minded people, finding a tribe of people that are all kind of working for the good, you know, trying to make our communities better and try to solve for some of the issues and existential issues that we're all facing. Yeah, it's



Tony Kopetchny 39:39

always been where my heart is. It's why we focused on the nonprofit and the mission driven sector here. And with the audience working out there that's listening to this. We know you're all working hard, and this is what it's all about making sure we all see each other because the news can get dreary, that feels like there's not a lot of progress, but like you said, Joel, it's that little bit every day and we'll keep building together and we'll all get there. So keep the game moving. So I am a huge fan of what you and CO have created and are doing with the Delta projects. I don't think I have a huge audience listening to us yet I'd love. I'd love to say I do. But I don't know if that's true. If you're listening, thank you so much. Keep listening. But you know, I know there are influencers who are in our network that could be listening, they at least maybe see some of this on LinkedIn. And when we promote it, I just like to ask you, I mean, what you would like to ask of our audience to help with the Delta project, the work you're all doing, you know, how do we how do we support you and keep this going and help get get a rebuild and moving forward coming through? COVID? It kind of asks, Do you have us?



Joel Van Kuiken 40:41

Yeah, that's a good question. And I think, you know, our initial asks are, we need funding, I'm just gonna say it straight up. No, this is this has got to be sustainable. It's this has been a bootstrap effort. We're starting to see the screws turning a bit, and we're seeing funding coming in. But often the funding is program related. And there isn't enough really infrastructure foundational support, to kind of put, put food on our tables, you know, Cole and I both work, other jobs to support our work on the Delta project. So straight up, you know that that's a big part of it. For us to kind of keep this going. You know, the other thing is to go to our website. And sign up for our newsletter, and watch our video, share our videos, and pay attention to the content that we're producing on a regular basis, share it, begin a discussion with like minded

people that, you know, that might be interested in this. And let's start to see returning citizens, families, and young men and young women dealing with the juvenile justice system in the proper light, I want you to think about what are my biases? What are the heuristics I'm using, that might be miscasting my view of an individual who may have done something relatively innocuous that got them into the juvenile justice system. Now, that's not always the case, as we know, but again, if it's generational trauma, mental health, lack of certain guidance, you know, things can go awry. You shouldn't be penalized for the rest of your life. For a mistake you might have made as a youth that you don't have the network or the resources to navigate through. Once you're on probation, the rules can be can be a real challenge for people and can be very hard to get off, or you end up re supervising and you're you're back in. So understanding and having empathy for that community, is what I would like you to do. And I would like you to understand the narratives and the storytelling, and where these people are coming from, and how you might support them in your daily life. That's my ask. And to follow us, again, sign up for our newsletter, find us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, listen to the videos that we're going to be producing and putting out soon. You know, I'm guessing that when this podcast goes live, we're going to have our new website up and running. Yeah, so I mean, we're, we're about a week out on launching it during our taping right now, so I'll be a little bit vague about the dates. But you know, it's right now our website is circa 2019. Very soon it's going to be circuit 2022. And be more representative of of what we're up to. Yeah, there's lots of stuff great stuff happening. So just stay tuned with us because, you know, I'm all about really using a design thinking lens and looking for ways to promote systems change.



Tony Kopetchny 44:45

I'm eagerly going to be following you and I hope a lot in the audience well, we're gonna have links to everything in the show notes too, to make it easy for people to click on from whatever device you connected with the internet these days and get in there. i It's Interesting. The first ask, yeah, money matters. It was pre COVID. It was always this odd, uncomfortable conversation in the nonprofit sector. And I saw a lot of that fall away during the during COVID. In the lockdowns and yeah, we need money. This is a it's a nonprofit business designation, but it's still a business it has to run. There has to be money coming in. And I've had another conversation. And I'm probably going to try to keep working into this angle too, which is, I think there's a realization on funders that whatever the its program plus maybe 10%, air, quote, overhead, and how do you run an organization without air quote, overhead, you have to have people there that can work their full time, right? Press the buttons, put the messages out, get your email up, promote the work, pull the work together, put all your equipment together, get to the detention center, the organize these interviews, get the people to like that's a lot of work that absolutely it is to say it has to be specific to just a sliver of program work. And then you're bending over backwards to try to write a grant report to show how everything's fit slammed into this one thing. Yeah, yeah, I think as much as we talked a little bit here today about data and some of the other work that has to change. I do think there's something in the funding world that it's, it's got to start opening up a little bit to a realization that operations matter, too. And you know, it's all Ford Foundation is starting to put money towards that, which I think is really important to three year op, totally operational focused, and get your get the work done, but the operation side of the house in order, so you can actually have that as the base to move forward. So I'm glad you brought that up and hope. Yeah, I think there's probably some people in the foundation space that are listening. So just let us know, to help. How do we help change that to?

**J** Joel Van Kuiken 46:51

Yeah, I see a shift, you know, just in my short time doing this work, that this discussion is happening, that you just mentioned, people are thinking about what yeah, how do you make? How do you make an important organization sustainable? So yeah, those are discussions that need to be had. And we've been lucky, you know, we got a, it's called the nonprofit Technical Assistance Fund grant. It was simply a \$10,000 grant for us to pay a consultant to help us with our budget, with our strategy with a mission and a vision that really kicked us off nicely. And it's led to some other opportunities. And it's allowed us to really begin to articulate who we are, why we're doing it, how we're doing it, and what we want to accomplish. So again, doing a little bit each day, those building blocks



Tony Kopetchny 47:48

100%. And I'm glad you mentioned Soltan, not just because it's what I do, but there are a lot of us out here that are ready and willing and want to help enable organizations of folks like yourself that are going to be on the ground doing the work, thinking about how it happens, thinking about the impact, and then pull us in, we're gonna help you think about those other elements, get them done, set them up faster and get you moving. It's almost like Rockstar to the roadie, right? Let us carry you let us carry your equipment. I love that metaphor. You get on stage and go jam change the world. With that in mind. A thank you so much for your time today. This is thank you great episode really enjoyed this conversation. I'm glad we got to meet. You know, we were one of those LinkedIn meetings said Yeah, and here we are talking in person, which is wonderful. But for everyone who's been listening for a while, you know, we have started a Spotify channel. And we are sharing all the songs that our guests have mentioned. And so Joel, I have to ask you, what is your go to song when you need a boost? And why?

**J** Joel Van Kuiken 48:47

Okay, this is tough, because I've got two bands that speak to me, and have spoken to me for 30 and 40 years. And I go to one of these bands when I need to reflect and chill. And I go to the other band when I need a pick me up and real energy. The first man is the mighty diamonds. There, Jamaican harmony trio, the song called I need a roof. And it's a very simple, beautiful, lyrical song. No, I need a roof over my head with bread on my table and love in my heart. It's basically the chorus. And I've been listening to that band for 40 years. And it's pointed to me because the lead singer was shot at the end of April and he died. And then one of the other members of the band died a couple of days later. And it's a huge hit to you know fans of reggae music that really know reggae music and know about harmony trio so I was hoping to bring them to Grand Rapids in the next year or two Have it obviously, that's not going to happen now. And that's a song that is always with me, no matter where I go. And then my other my other band I really like, are the Bad Brains. They're hardcore punk band started in the 70s. You know, guys that started their band called mind power, it was called. And it became bad brains like bad brakes, you know. And they were kind of into jazz fusion, they got into the herd, the Sex Pistols, they got into punk rock, and then these young, talented black men saw Bob Marley and the Wailers. And then they formed this kind of hardcore genre fused with reggae music

that spoke to me. And, you know, I love their reggae tracks, but I love their their hardcore punk as well. You know, the meek is a song I really liked from theirs. So though I gave you two songs, you can choose one or the other. But Oh,



**Tony Kopetchny 51:09**

really? Yeah, yeah, we'll put them both on. they'll both be there. As a Washingtonian form of Washingtonian, The Bad Brains is really speaking to me. So Oh, nice. Everyone knows they came out of DC. So a lot of pride there. Thanks. Well, thank you for sharing that. And thank you for sharing your time and your energy with us today and all the great conversation. It was my pleasure. It was wonderful to talk with you. Thank you so much, Joe. Thank you. All right, everyone, and hopefully you'll click on the links we're going to put in the show notes here and give us a listen. And if you got feedback for me, let things you'd like to hear more about in the show. If you want to connect with Joel somehow let me know. Love to hear from you. Just leave a comment or shoot us an email at [create change at Parsons. tko.com](mailto:createchange@Parsons.tko.com). Thanks, everybody. Bye, Joe.



**Outro 52:01**

Thank you for listening. Join us again for more engaging ideas with your host Parsons TKO CEO Tony Kopetchny. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a comment and share with your friends. Send us your feedback at [create change at Parsons tko.com](mailto:createchange@Parsons.tko.com).