

Bob Gilbert (00:00):

Welcome to tourism heads and their tails. In today's episode, we chat with Roni Weiss, Executive Director of Travel Unity, which is a 5 0 1 C 3 organization with a focus on increasing diversity in the world of travel through individual and community empowerment. So welcome, Roni. And let's kick off if you wouldn't mind sharing with our audience, your well travel journey in travel and tourism.

Roni Weiss (00:28):

Sure. Uh, thanks so much for having me. It's an honor, especially with all the different colleagues you've had, who I greatly respect on here. So thank you. So yeah, my, my journey is, was I guess it's still going, like a lot of journeys are that I thought I was gonna be a famous actor. So I grew up outside of Seattle and, uh, I graduated, uh, from the University of Washington when I was 18 and my, uh, with English and drama degrees. And I moved to Hollywood, uh, when I was 19 and I was a 19 year old who thought that things were just gonna go smoothly and I was gonna be famous and that's not how life works for most people. So it became very clear to me that this was not working out. So I thought, okay, what else do I care about? And I cared about making the world better, and I didn't really have anything much more specific than that.

Roni Weiss (01:24):

Other than trying to figure out potentially getting into a public policy. I applied to some, uh, law schools and that didn't seem like a good path. So I ended up working at a summer camp and after that summer camp, I really didn't know what I was gonna do next. So the camp counselors I worked with invited me, um, the, the, the J ones from England and Scotland said, Hey, come visit us. And I, I could cuz I didn't have any other plans and I just made some money. So I headed over and did my first backpacking trip and I got that bug of, of wanting to travel and then for a considerable amount of years, well, my new plan was I was gonna be a famous travel TV show, host <laugh>. So I would do videos and blogging and stuff. And at a certain point with going to over 70 countries, every country in Europe, every continent except Antarctica, I got lonelier and I kept introducing myself to people constantly.

Roni Weiss (02:24):

And I, I realized I needed to do something different. So my plan was I was gonna do one last Egypt to South Africa, overland trip, and then I'd figure out what was next. And I came across Africa Travel Association, uh, at what was then the Los Angeles Times travel and adventure show. And I said, Hey, will you sponsor my trip? And at that point I really had no concept of what a trade association was. And now looking back over a decade later, I'm like, that was silly that of course they wouldn't have done that knowing how these things function. But what they did do was they saw what I was doing on social media and said, this is really interesting. And they invited me to Senegal for their world Congress. And that really spun me around because what I realized was people didn't necessarily care about me.

Roni Weiss (03:11):

They cared about their own stories and they cared about how to tell those stories in different ways that that point through social media. So I started doing social media marketing consulting. I started an event which became the, the genesis for Travel Unity. And you know, it really was the working with young people that I did in different capacities for many years. And seeing that the travel industry was not having these discussions around diversity, equity and inclusion in the mid 2010s that made me really believe that there needed to be a year round push for, for doing these things. Getting people to see travel is something they can do no matter who they are because so many of us have benefited from it.

And so many others of us haven't had those chances and making sure that the travel industry at then was talking about it and now even more so, uh, our work is to make sure that they're doing something about it.

Bob Gilbert (04:11):

So I wanna quote a national geographic travel editor who said, and I quote, travel unity is a scrappy nonprofit that believes travel can only be more diverse when there is diversity in those that make up the industry, including those in the executive level. And it pushes a somewhat recalcitrant industry to walk the talk. Are you happy with that descriptor? A kind of bootstrapping scrappy, nonprofit?

Roni Weiss (04:45):

What's funny is when it came out and, and it was Nori who said this when we got yes. Uh, runner up in, in the Newsweek feature of travel awards. And I'm like, you know, at this point I feel like we, when, when it came out, I'm like, I feel like we're, we're getting beyond that. And what's funny is I have thought about it more recently and I'm like, yeah, I guess we are punching above our weight still because, and, and it really is the pandemic that did that. I, I mentioned how, how I, I was running an event, uh, the New York travel festival, the goal was to create a new model of event. And we did two in South Africa, one in San Diego. And it was clear that a and from seeing other initiatives that, that came up in the 2010s that expanding too quickly, globally doesn't necessarily work out.

Roni Weiss (05:33):

And once again, you know, a, a lot of other people would say duh to that, but it was a lesson that I had to learn in my own experience and seeing from others. So prior to the pandemic, I was very focused on, okay, we will be in New York City, New York state and stay in a lane to figure out this work before we then apply a model elsewhere. But the thing was when everybody lost all their visitors, there was an opportunity. And I'm pretty sure Greg Takahara said similar things. Mm-hmm <affirmative> of the, with the pandemic. We were then in a position where people were in their offices and, or rather not in their offices, they weren't their homes instead of their offices and would listen and were looking for ideas. So it, it, it quickly became this massive shift of going we actually have what started as a philosophy and then became more methodology and I, and approaches and roadmaps and things like that, that we had something to offer. And the discussions just entirely changed. And that's beginning the pandemic, not to mention with George Floyd and all the social protests, how there are plenty of colleagues I have, and, and people in the industry who, who that really completely changed how we're looking at this.

Bob Gilbert (06:58):

Yeah. That was a, that was a moment in time. And, you know, going back to what you were saying about the pandemic, it is interesting as we look at certain trends that there were certain things that were inevitable in terms of health measures and masks, social distancing, but there were other events taking place, the big resignation, you know, the big quit that people say, well, it, it was the pandemic that did that. And the reality was that the pandemic acted as an accelerant and it accelerated the trend if you will, for that, for, for the remote workers and how that became a challenge today because of the workplace environment, where there is a shortage of people within the service industry. But would you say then that the pandemic was an accelerant for you as well?

Roni Weiss (07:53):

Yes. And, you know, kind of a debut talk thing as well, where I think at the beginning of the pandemic, we had had solid relationships across the state of New York. And now, you know, this recording in toward fall of, of 22, we have solid relationships across the U.S. And in December, I'll be speaking in Spain at GST C. So the sort of New York to national to soon to be international seems to be a through line that, that we're going through.

Bob Gilbert (08:27):

So many travel and tourism organizations have embraced the principles of the, uh, of diversity equity and inclusion. You work with large organizations and small organizations, small operators. So how do you gauge the level of, of involvement and where does travel unity add value to that broad, I guess, broad range of different size businesses.

Roni Weiss (08:59):

So a couple years ago when the pandemic hit and people started listening, cuz prior to the pandemic, the people who were listening to us were, uh, quite honestly, the Greg Takaharas of the world. And

Bob Gilbert (09:12):

By the way, I meant, so we, we brought Greg's name up a couple of times and for those, um, oh, sorry. Yeah, no, no, no. It's okay for those on a different planet. They may not know Greg. And he is the, uh, CEO of tourism. Tourism Cares. Of course. So just wanna add that.

Roni Weiss (09:28):

So, so the people who were listening and, and prior to the pandemic, Greg and I didn't really know each other, either our, our friendship, I think both of us would say is, is really one of those things that to me was a positive over the past couple of years that being able to happen. Yeah. But it was the sustainability people who were listening to us and we'd be making this argument of, hey, you know, if you're relying on old white travelers, demographically, that's not gonna work out for you for forever. And that, that was a message that we thought was, was reasonable, but not everybody really puts time into strategy and forward thinking. It's a lot of, let's put out the fires that are happening right now. And I get it to an extent, but at a certain point in the kind of lowercase s so to speak sustainability, you can't sustain a business without some level of mid and long term planning.

Roni Weiss (10:21):

So once people started listening and going, oh, okay, how do we do this? We said, all right, let's jump to that challenge. So what we did was over the course of months, we put together DEI standards for travel and tourism. And the idea was these were a few things within it. One, we wanted them to be public facing and publicly available, like the UN sustainable development goals, like GS TC, global sustainability, tourism council, sustainability criteria. We wanted somebody, even if they never talked to us to be able to look at these and go, aha, I see what it means to do this work. And when we did that, there, there were a few things that we kept in mind the whole time. One was they needed to be globally applicable. And with the globally applicable, part of that meant that we weren't gonna talk about straight up measurements.

Roni Weiss (11:16):

It wasn't gonna be that you need X percent of X group to be in your visitors or in your workforce because that changes place to place in terms of the demographics and the statistics there. So we

wanted it to be more about process than about numbers and, and KPIs in that way, not to say that those aren't useful, but they're different from organization to organization kind of by definition. So we wanted them to be useful in that way and not too specific. The other was that they'd be useful for an organization of any size to, so to your point, that we could, could work with somebody who was a family owned bed and breakfast, or, or a global chain of, of tours or whatever it might be. And that it would just be a matter of scale, how it would be applied. And so that was a really important thing to us.

Roni Weiss (12:09):

And then the other was that we wanted to make sure that we had a certification program to validate that somebody was doing it. So the interesting thing about that is we have zero organizations that have that certification yet. And to other people like that might seem odd, but it's not to. We had a pilot program and the organizations who were part of it for various reasons, either are still trying to work toward it or realized that they could not prioritize this for various reasons. And we realized also that we needed to provide even more support. So in a lot of ways, what we did was craft what the end and I put that in very big, big quotation marks. But you know, if you have these, you have structures in place, you still have to review them. You still have to consider them things will change. So it's not really an end, but you can at least go, okay, this is a goal to reach toward. So from there, we went backwards and created a leadership level certification where you'd craft a plan because the whole point of the organizational certification is to demonstrate you're actually doing it well to actually do it. You need a plan to do it, and you need to be able to prioritize those things. So that's answering not just one of your questions, but other imagined questions that I have

Bob Gilbert (13:34):

<laugh> I have a lot of imaginary questions, but, but seriously, when you put into quotes end, there really isn't an end, right? I mean, because it's a continuum, it's a journey as the education and as society changes itself, but from the DEI standards, how did you create the standards? And you know, what filters did you have, who was on the team? How long did it take? Um, so talk to me a little bit about that journey within, so within

Roni Weiss (14:08):

The standards, it, it was a month long process and we had a variety of people who'd been involved with GS TC in different ways to be able to look at that. Certainly people who were familiar with the SDGs and we, it, it was a lot of, I wouldn't call it trial and error necessarily, but a lot of starting at the beginning every time we'd go back and go, okay, does the overall hierarchy still make sense? And Chilo my colleague. She came in four fifths of the way into the process and, you know, shook things up and made us have to consider questions that hadn't been brought up previously that made it stronger. So it was really Chi's involvement that made it, that the standards start with the concept of leadership commitment. Now that the, the DEI work starts by going, how are you in the leadership of an organization publicly and internally committing to DEI?

Roni Weiss (15:09):

So the process, once we started getting into a cycle, it became a lot easier, but we wanted to make sure it was people who were in the travel industry and who were maybe familiar with travel, but not part of the travel industry. People who were DEI experts, people who weren't, uh, and overall, we got a lot of subject matter experts into it. Uh, a lot of what, so the three pillars of the standards are pillar A is management and workforce pillar B is visitorship, pillar C is community impact. So for each of those, we,

we went to subject matter experts. So for local environment, one of the people I made sure to get involved in that is from the New York state department of environmental conservation, for the, the stuff that we were doing around hiring and employee stuff. We had multiple people who were HR consultants, who chimed in, we have a lot around communications.

Roni Weiss (16:04):

And that was, I think probably where, where things really started to break open for the logic of these and why we were ready for people to push back. And we were ready even potentially for other organizations to come up with. You know, I'll put it in quotes again, but competing standards. But the reality is these are the different ways that you deal with human beings as a visitor facing organization, the people who work there, the visitors and community in a local and kind of broader sense. So that kind of made it, that it made it worked. There was a logic. And then the other was this idea around life cycle. So when we talked about employment, we started with hiring and recruitment and then onboarding, and then employee support all the way through, offboarding. When we talked about making a marketing campaign, it was analyzing the things you've done before, and then every step of what it is to consider DEI as you are having a campaign. So that concept of life cycle, and having a lot of very generous people who, who put generous, smart, thoughtful people who put their time to it, uh, is what I think has made it, that these have been useful and haven't had more than kind of minor tweaks.

Bob Gilbert (17:18):

Right. You know, I, I think it's interesting when I look at DEI as a collective, that there are three legs to the stool, right? Diversity, equity, and inclusion, and some businesses that I observe from the outside, the perception is they're doing, you know, well with maybe one, two, but not necessarily all three of the topics of the subjects. Is that something that you observe as well? And a follow up question is, are there any industries within travel and tourism, not naming companies, but are doing better than others are better organized to understand DEI.

Roni Weiss (18:02):

So I think the first thing is that it's a, um, how I even call it a, a, a line of work, a philosophy, a study, whatever you want to call DEI, an approach where words are meaningful and also can bog you down a bunch, right? So we use DEI, well, others use de AI, others use idea, and those are just flipping letters around, right. Um, then there's Jedi where you start including justice. There's D E I B, where you have belonging. So I, I think my answer to your question on the word part of the balance, diversity can only be maintained when you have inclusion. And my definition of, of inclusion and equity are, are sometimes different than how other people frame it. So diversity means just having difference. And in this context, different people, presumably of different identities and backgrounds, and then you get into this kind of, uh, skirt around where, uh, thought diversity inherently, everybody's different.

Roni Weiss (19:16):

So you can get around what it really intends to be by just kind of accepting that, that, that doesn't bring in different groups and identities and communities, but you can't have diversity, be meaningful without people feeling like they can speak up. And, you know, we, we do services consulting work. And in that we do surveys around DEI. And one of the most impactful if I want to be neutral and sad things that's happened with with clients is one of the questions we ask. And this is for, you know, whether the staff is considered diverse once again, in quotes or not. Do you feel like you can convey a contrary point of view in the workplace mm-hmm <affirmative> and you'll have leaders who will assume that, of course people

can, they have an open door policy and we wanna blah, blah, blah. And you'll see that the, the numbers, you know, on a scale of five are across the map and that not everybody feels comfortable sharing.

Roni Weiss (20:17):

And it, so diversity without actually people feeling like they can contribute is not very meaningful in all honesty and then equity by my definition. And once again, I think this is different than sometimes other people's is it needs processes. And I think one thing that's sometimes missed in this DEI work is people bring in consultants to get people, to understand their identities and their privilege and understand the ideas of injustice and all that's very important. But if you get a bunch of people within an organization to understand stuff, and then some, or all of those people leave, where's the institutional memory. So you can't really do DEI without processes in place for your other question, we've done a few small surveys through partners, cuz we work with associations and, and others around industry sentiments and, and success around DEI. And the last one we did, which was, I think a couple years ago at this point, but it wasn't very different sector to sector.

Roni Weiss (21:21):

Interestingly enough, I think you could make arguments of why one sector or another in the industry inherently might be doing DEI better or not. But you know, I, I love working with DMO and I think one thing I will say as a bright spot is most DMO that are being thoughtful about this are getting past the idea of representation in collateral. They really get very firmly and maybe I'm in a bubble, but I, I, there are people I know less than others who I think convey this. And I see it that having people who look only one way in the marketing collateral is something that we're getting away from, I think pretty firmly and is becoming a, an easier thing in some manners of, of speaking, but something that people are accepting needs to be done. And that to me is a big positive.

Bob Gilbert (22:16):

Yeah. And I agree. I, I think that long gone are the days when somebody notices that this image is not actually diverse and it, it does not represent the visitors that come to my destination or hotel, whatever. And it it's become part of what we do to ensure that we do have diversity in images. And it it's second nature that took a while, but it, it reflects the, the population and it reflects the, the targeted audiences that we have that have been around for a hundred years. <laugh> in terms of who we, you know, not everybody responds to the same message. So in terms of your marketing strategies and your go to marketing strategies, clearly the line of least resistance is to get on board, to have a partnership with an association, whether it's tourism cares, NTA, to be able to gain your visibility and the ability to, to spread the goals within those particular organizations is what I've said is that, is that a reality, is that part of your go-to market strategies to fo to form partnerships with the leading influential travel and tourism associations?

Roni Weiss (23:36):

So I think it's interesting because those relationships really started a couple years ago and yes, that was my intent and thought mm-hmm <affirmative>. Um, but Catherine Prather, who you interviewed also, who mentioned the work that we've been doing with, uh, their DEI advisory board and Carol Asante from CDA and Greg Takahara, who we've mentioned a few times, they were all part of what we had, an association DEI working group. And my thought at the beginning was, okay, we're gonna, we're gonna meet each other. We're gonna talk about this a bit. And then very quickly, this is gonna become, how do we do stuff for the members? And that was not the case. And it's to the credit of Katherine and

Carol Anne and, and Greg and the others who, who are from those different associations. We were working with that. They wanted to make sure that the associations had their houses in order and that, that they in their staff and the board, and just structurally had this firmly in mind before they went to their members and treated as more of kind of resources and education thing.

Roni Weiss ([24:46](#)):

So it didn't work out that way, but I would say it worked out even better in that we are through these different relationships and, and bodies that have been created. And the association, uh, the travel industry association, DEI pledge, which is really a roadmap for how to incorporate DEI into an association. And we have an array of associations that have, have signed that most recently, ABA, the American bus association just signed that pledge. And that was through the relationship with CDA, et cetera. But yeah, no, the, the associations have been putting work in internally and it's only through getting the chance to go to site in DC and, uh, Louisiana travel summit and Lake Charles that I've gotten a chance to meet some more of the members and being on those boards, but I've gotten, you know, friendly with the Catherines and Carols of the world. And I'm looking forward to kind of the next phase of this being, uh, meeting some of those members more.

Bob Gilbert ([25:45](#)):

So are you finding within the associations that you partner with their needs are the same or are some more advanced in their progress within DEI or, or are they all more or less at the same place?

Roni Weiss ([26:02](#)):

I think the one that has proven itself in this group to be a little ahead of the others is the Society of American Travel Writers, S A T W. And I say that because of knowing where some of these associations are at in the process. And one of the, the later let's say things in the association, DEI pledge is a code of conduct. And that actually was a really interesting discussion when we had this group, because to me it was a line in the sand of you can't have an association and claim, you care about DEI and not hold your members to account. And I've heard many, a tale of Facebook group, hostings where it just blows up and becomes political. And we all know the climate we're in of how a lot of things can become political and people, you know, get into it, but you can't be going, oh, well we want all new members.

Roni Weiss ([27:02](#)):

It's, it's the same thing as that idea with the staff survey that we do, you can't be attracting new people until you're taking care of the people you already have. If you, as any sort of an entity go, we need more racial and ethnic diversity, whether it's visitors or workforce, if you can't maintain your current partnerships, then how do you think you're gonna make good relationships with new people? And if you're an association that wants to diversify your members, if your current members don't feel like they're being taken care of and protected from problematic other members, then that's an issue. So yeah, in that specific regard, S A T W had a code of conduct that they had done, that they had enforced, or, you know, gone through that process. Whereas we've had conversations with different associations where they're not even sure if they have a code of conduct to let alone, if there's a process to enforce it. And I, you know, you need to have that to be able to make people feel safe.

Bob Gilbert ([28:05](#)):

So you mentioned the Travel Unity pledge and that you have, you know, the latest signature on that pledge was, uh, the American Bus Association. What was the thought behind the creation and development of the Travel Unity pledge?

Roni Weiss (28:24):

So to clarify, and this is where, you know, this whole punching above our weight and stuff, I lose track of sometimes the things we have. So we actually have an individual pledge, which is a philosophical thing to about speaking up, understanding that people are different, et cetera. Um, so there's an individual pledge, and then there's an association pledge with the association pledge. We'd been convening these meetings with different associations to try to figure out how these associations can move things forward. And it became clear that for the associations we had in this group, not to mention as a general thought leadership exercise, that kind of similar to those standards that we have and curated that there needed to be a how to process. And that really is a lot of the work I'd say, maybe over the last year or so, which is how do we give people more, how tos, so we're working on a process or working on, on a tool, including DEI and RFPs. So if you're trying to get an event planned somewhere and you're looking for, for hosts and, and things like that, how would you in the bid process include DEI? So that's a lot of the work we're doing now, and that's where the association one came from, really the associations we're working for going, okay, how can we do this in a way that we can go back to the board and say, this is our process.

Bob Gilbert (29:55):

So when I look at the different associations that you have a relationship with, some of them are, or most of them are general in terms of their membership. Others in a very specific would put themselves in, you know, a DEI bracket, you know, like the, um, IGLTA, which is, you know, L G B Q plus, you know, that organization I think, has been around for about 10 years. And I know that there was an iteration of that at least 10 years before, before that, within that particular community, do you look at what they're doing and get the information, or, you know, look at them as a resource to be able to look at your own organization's goals and objectives.

Roni Weiss (30:45):

So I consider us to be part of the middle of a sandwich. We are under sustainability where we're really the people, part of it. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, but we are DEI generalists. And we want to respect the fact we've been around since 2016. And IGLTAs been around longer than that. And

Bob Gilbert (31:03):

A few years, not many actually. I mean, I think it was 2012 when the foundation was formed. But, uh,

Roni Weiss (31:10):

Well, the, the point being though that, that there are people who, whether organizationally or individually, there are people who have their own lived experiences and also who have done this work prior to us existed and smart people who've started doing it since we came into existence. There, there, there is enough work to be done all around. And where we are is in that middle where we're DEI generalists mm-hmm <affirmative>. So when you're talking about an IGLTA or a Black Travel Alliance, mm-hmm <affirmative>, or, or any other group that's focused on a specific identity community group of communities, we want to make sure that we're able to bring them in Open Doors Organization is our partner are around the accessibility disability space. So we don't want to gobble everything up. We want

to be the ones who kind of are our helping set the stage for organizations that are starting this work, want that level of, of support along the way. But when there are specific questions around groups, if it's an LGBTQ plus, uh, issue going to, IGLTA going to Billy Colver in Hospitable Me there, there are other entities that, that we would rather go, okay, you want a specific thing work with those content, uh, experts on it.

Bob Gilbert (32:33):

So how large is your organization? I'll go back to the National Geographic quote in terms of scrappy, which would suggest, you know, you don't have a staff of 30 people. So what, what is the, the makeup of the organization of Travel Unity?

Roni Weiss (32:53):

So the answer to that is the staff is a handful of people who get paid regularly. We certainly have a, a lot of volunteers we have as a, a 5 0 1 C 3 a board of directors, and we have a pretty robust board of advisors. And now that we have the Alliance, that really is a mechanism to bring together a lot of different folks to create this bigger impact. So, yeah, uh, part of my, uh, goal and responsibility is to get us to the point where we can have that higher level of staffing and ability to do things that are not necessarily on the backs of, and the kindness of, of volunteers, but we've been so focused on, on doing the work that you mentioned, marketing. We, we have to do a better job of, of explaining what we've done and touting those successes. So that's that phase and stage that we're in now of growth,

Bob Gilbert (33:53):

Right? You spoke before on about, you know, the educational process. What tools do you have that you provide other segments within, within our industry? Where can they go to gather information that will help them at least for the first step?

Roni Weiss (34:14):

So I'd say looking at the standards, those are publicly available, right on the website, Travel United org slash standards. Any Alliance member has access to a free basic DEI review, where we give them some questions and then have a call with them to walk through where they're at with DEI now. So it's low stress, low cost for smaller organizations for 2023, it's gonna be \$300 a year and smaller for us. Our definition is still under \$5 million of revenue. So there's some leeway there. And our baseline for bigger organizations is \$900, uh, a year starting in 20 or for 2023, really for the Alliance, the idea is how do we raise up the good work that folks are doing and support them on the back end for things they might need some advice on. So a lot of small things we do for members are they ask about some sort of DEI statement or something, and we give them a few notes on that.

Roni Weiss (35:14):

The other thing in terms of tools is our leadership level certification. So if people are listening to it, uh, soon our November cohort is coming up. And in that you learn about DEI with other leaders in a live ver in two live virtual sessions. And then you create a comprehensive DEI plan. Within that plan. You have lots of questions that are there to help you and your organization think about things and go, okay, how are we gonna actually do this work? We do some free webinars. The amount of them depends. We have our regional summits. Our next one is our Northeast summit in the finger lakes. It's exciting because while I, I mentioned before, we have all those New York state relationships, we're bringing in people from Maine and Rhode Island, Massachusetts gonna come speak, uh, to that as well. And our next

Southeast summit will be in March in Lake Charles Louisiana. There are a lot of events where they will do a session or a couple sessions around DEI, but these summits are all about DEI. So if you really want to take a deeper dive, that's a really great place to be around people who are thinking about this very deeply and to, to learn from and share with others. So

Bob Gilbert (36:35):

What, where would you like to see Travel Unity be in three years from now,

Roni Weiss (36:42):

From the beginning, there were two sides of the same coin. And even internally, we, we sometimes have this debate as to should one side be bigger. Should there be only one side, but inherently with DEI, you've got people and you've got organizations. And if you say, Hey, you should join the travel industry, or you should go out into the world and, and see it because it's there for you. I find there to be a big disservice to then not working with those visitor facing organizations, to make sure that those people really can feel welcome as employees and or as visitors. On the other side, you go, Hey, you should try to attract all these new people and to not have there be that work on pipeline. To me seems to be a disservice too. So really while the skillset might be different, the approach has been consistent from the beginning. And it's more tying things together. More so Trip Advisor is a major sponsor of our virtual high school programming for this fall. So that's really the next step. So prior to three years from now, but the work that'll get us to where I project us to be is having there be more through lines of getting people to be inspired, to see that travel as an activity and as a possible career path are for them and finding those threads that tie on both ends.

Bob Gilbert (38:20):

Got it. You know, I think, um, many years ago I was on a course within actually it was a travel. It was by, it was credential was created by the Travel Institute. And it was a certified travel professional, which is a travel agent designation. And I had to write a thesis and it was about international travel. And the hypotheses was that more open borders, more people became familiar and understood each other's cultures that that would promote world peace. Right. I know very lovely, but that's, you know, you have to, your thesis has to be, I think, uh, aspirational as well as a degree of authenticity about it, but I did enjoy writing that, but I think it's to the greater good. And I still believe, by the way, in that, in that philosophy, it's just governments who get in the way of the people <laugh> trying to, to travel. As you strive for your goals. As you know, I mentioned there it's governments that get in the way many times, what are the barriers for you for travel unity to achieve the success that you are looking for? Roni?

Roni Weiss (39:34):

So I think people miss <laugh> because they're not necessarily listening, they miss some of the need or broader issues. So one of our youth participants was interested in sports management. Well, he came to the us when he was 12 and he's the only English speaker in his family and they're in Queens. And even if he had gotten a full ride scholarship, right. Even if you paid for every second and outs of his experience in college, he wouldn't have taken it because he needed to support his family. So we are not there yet structurally relationship wise to be able to, to do that. But when you're talking about marginalized communities and getting them to be involved in things, there's a delusion entitlement. I don't know what word to use, but of, oh, okay. We organizationally now are finally ready to listen to you and bring you into the fold.

Roni Weiss (40:34):

So the fact that you tried to talk to us a few years ago, when we ignored you, or, you know, we put this thing out and it was offensive. Let's forget all that. Cuz we want a fresh start. It doesn't work that way. <laugh> and that's the barrier. The, the reality is if people listen to each other and we're empathetic and a consistent basis, let alone a hundred percent, we probably wouldn't need to exist as an organization because this would just be natural and happening. But where we find ourselves many times is being that bridge because that trust has been lost or never deliberately gained and having somebody who can speak both languages so to speak of what this group is trying to tell their story. And then some of the things that might make it organizationally, that, that slow things down, cuz not everything can happen instantly. That's where we need to be that cultural translator in all of this because it's more than just having open doors and saying, reach out. If you want us to put something out there, that's not real partnership. That's laziness and making other people do the work and it takes more than that.

Bob Gilbert (41:51):

Indeed it does. And I think every journey begins with that single step. So I'd encourage folks to take that step and check out your website, Travel Unity's website. Do you want to shout it out again there? Roni,

Roni Weiss (42:07):

Just travelunity.org. There

Bob Gilbert (42:09):

We go. Listen. Um, I've enjoyed our journey this morning and I wanna thank you very much and wish you continued success with Travel Unity. So thank you again, Roni.

Roni Weiss (42:19):

Thank you so much for having me.