



# Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

---

## EPISODE 79: OLYMPIA TRUMBOWER – THE NONPROFIT WORLD

---

### Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Nonprofit organizations they play a significant role in the lives of Americans. In fact, one in four U.S. citizens volunteered with a nonprofit in 2014, contributing almost 9 billion hours and donating over 350 billion dollars. Well, one of the best-known and most successful nonprofits is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Gates Foundation works to help all people in the United States and developing countries lead healthy, productive lives. Olympia Trumbower is Program Manager in the Global Policy and Advocacy Division at the Gates Foundation. She visited William & Mary recently for the Women's Leadership Summit and Stock Pitch Competition. During a break in the day's events, she sat down with us to discuss nonprofits, the Gates Foundation, and what it's like to have a career in the nonprofit space. Here's our conversation with Olympia Trumbower of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

### Ken White

Olympia, thank you for being here, and welcome back to your alma mater. I'm sure it's fun to be back.

### Olympia Trumbower

It's always a pleasure. I love William & Mary bleed green and gold, so it's nice to be back home.

### Ken White

And these you're going to be interacting with some incredible, incredible students throughout the day. It's going to be very exciting.

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely I was honored to be asked to come to the Women's Summit. In fact, they're quite impressive. I was joking around with someone. I don't know if I could get into William & Mary anymore, to be honest. They're all so impressive.

Ken White

Yeah, we hear that a lot. Well, it's great to have you with us. You know, we were talking right before we hit the record button. We haven't really done an episode on nonprofit and on the whole area of nonprofit. To start off, what is it you do? What's your job?

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely. So I just celebrated my fifth year at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, Washington. And for me, you know, I graduated from William & Mary undergrad in 2008, have always been in the nonprofit sector, and started a think tank in New York City called the Council on Foreign Relations, and I knew from then on I want to be immersed in development and health and how we really bring together policymakers and big thinkers. And so the foundation has provided that for me within the past five years. I've had quite an interesting track. I started in our global development division working on water sanitation and hygiene working, spending a lot of time in India in fact and then worked on the Ebola crisis when the epidemic was at its height around 2014-2015. And now, I have the pleasure of taking those experiences with our program teams, teams that work in certain topics, and I work in our Global Policy and Advocacy Division. So a lot of my job, I spend time every day working on strategy and thinking about how do we best use the investments, the money that we have, the resources. How do we work with the right partners? How can we think about evaluation, and how do we think how to use the resources we have in the best and most stewardly way?

Ken White

So it's global.

Olympia Trumbower

It's global.

Ken White

You are working with all kinds of cultures, different languages, different everything.

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely and even within Seattle, we have in total about 14 hundred people who work for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, mostly in Seattle but all throughout our global offices, and the culture itself of the workplace is fantastic. Very diverse, people from all

backgrounds, not just nonprofit. We have a lot of private-sector folks. People from the field. And for me interacting with everyone is just it's a learning experience every day.

Ken White

Sure.

Olympia Trumbower

And bringing that to the workplace those perspectives is, I think, just enriching the work that the foundation does.

Ken White

What is it about nonprofit that gets you so fired up?

Olympia Trumbower

I've always thought of myself as someone driven to mission organizations, mission-oriented ones. Organizations that really value, particularly with the foundation lives of every person we, have a fundamental belief that all lives have equal value and that everyone has the right to a healthy and productive life. So that really resonates with me. Growing up, I'm the second-generation Filipino American my mother and father immigrated to the United States from the Philippines before I was born. And I've always been interested in just the services that are provided to people from everywhere and giving everyone an equal opportunity.

Ken White

Well talking about a mission-driven organization, I mean the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. What an incredible brand, first of all. I'm sure when you say, what do you do? Where do you work? They just I'm sure you get a pretty interesting reaction from most people.

Olympia Trumbower

We do, you know. I think one of the questions I get most is what are they like. What are Bill and Melinda like? Absolutely I give tours at the visitor center at the Gates Foundation, and that's probably the most popular question. They're lovely people. They're very analytical. Bill is true to, I think, the persona that you see. I've. Actually, we have worked closely with them and our leadership team, and they hold us accountable. I think that's the big thing with the foundation. We are a family foundation. Bill, Melinda, and also Warren Buffett are our three trustees. You know they have trusted us as staff with their money, their resources to make these decisions on their behalf. But they're very involved, and I think that's one thing that people don't actually realize they're in the office quite often, Bill and Melinda. But they're also on the road. They do a lot of listening, a lot of learning, it

helps influence the decisions that we as staff make. And for me, it's been quite a journey to see how the foundation has evolved. We originally became the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000. So we just celebrated not too long ago, 15 years in 2015. And now we're thinking ahead to 2020. You know what do we want to look like. What's the legacy we want to leave further down the line, and where do we want to make the most impact? So having the two of them at the helm and our really powerful and very strong CEO Sue Desmond-Hellman, that's been a really fantastic opportunity for staff like myself.

Ken White

Yeah.

Olympia Trumbower

To just become more involved.

Ken White

Fifteen years in the foundation world is that young?

Olympia Trumbower

It's young, adolescent. Absolutely you know exponentially we've grown to where we are today, including the expansion of our global offices. And so for us, too, it's how do we make the most of the work in different regions and how do we leverage the talent that we have, particularly the regional talent, to reach those governments or other partners in areas where we don't necessarily have the best vantage point from Seattle. You know, of course, we believe very strongly in using the folks that are there on the ground and that that have those connections.

Ken White

Yeah, just a side question are you bilingual? Do you speak any? How do you communicate with all these people?

Olympia Trumbower

Sure. I wish I were. I actually I studied Spanish at William & Mary have not used it as much, unfortunately, but for us, a lot of it. Well, luckily, many of our conversations and communications are in English.

Ken White

Of course, sure.

Olympia Trumbower

Many of our people in the regional offices, of course, are fluent in English, but they are also fluent in their native tongue, so that helps us.

Ken White

Yeah.

Olympia Trumbower

When we travel, we frequently pair people from Seattle with the regional office team members, so when they meet with government partners, translation should not be a problem there and having someone interpret. But yes, it is a barrier, to be honest. In some cases, I know for us in Seattle, there's a lot of an effort right now to have more training provided where necessary and to make sure that staff not only with the language but the cultural barriers.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Olympia Trumbower

Yes. I used to travel quite frequently. So for me, it was very important to understand customs in the various countries I was traveling to especially working with government leaders. Any other political or high-ranking people to follow the customs of that culture.

Ken White

I don't know if I can't think of a guest on the podcast who is not immersed in globalization anymore. Doesn't matter what you do, does it?

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely.

Ken White

It's the world's flat, I mean.

Olympia Trumbower

Exactly and everything is so interconnected and for us as well. I mean one of my favorite parts about working at the foundation is the fact that I am surrounded by people with such different areas of expertise all over the world and people who can come together you know they might have a private sector hat on but they can sure contribute to the conversation with how we deliver a vaccine to the most remote area of the world from their own perspective. So that's it's really enriching to have that.

Ken White

How is the Gates Foundation organized? What's it look like?

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely. So we essentially are split up into several divisions, so the way we think about our work is whether it's global or U.S. So within our global work, we have a global development division within this division, there's a lot of a focus on poverty alleviation, and so some of the what we call program strategies, or teams include teams like water sanitation and hygiene, agriculture, nutrition, maternal newborn and child health. Another global division is global health. So we think of these teams as more around diseases, or we actually have a focus now on neglected tropical diseases or teams like malaria, HIV, and then the other global is global policy and advocacy. So that's division I'm in, which is a cross-cutting division that serves both health and development, and then the U.S. division is focused mostly on education. So we think a lot about early education K12 post-secondary, and because we're in Washington state and it's very special to Bill and Melinda, that's their home. We do have a Washington state strategy as well.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Olympia Trumbower of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization reach your goals with a leadership development program specifically designed for your organization and delivered by our world-class business school faculty. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education, visit our website at [wmleadership.com](http://wmleadership.com). Now back to our conversation with Olympia Trumbower of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Ken White

What about numbers? How many people, how much money, and so forth.

Olympia Trumbower

So there's about fourteen hundred employees at the moment. As of 2015, we invested four point two billion dollars with a B. So that's a lot of resources that we are able to have, and approximately of that four point two billion, about half of that was toward our global development program. So again, a lot of the teams working poverty alleviation, and about 30 percent of that was health, with the remaining in U.S.

Ken White

So what's a typical day like for you? Do you have one?

Olympia Trumbower

Not so much, to be honest, and I say that because we are very responsive as an organization to what's happening around us in the world. We, of course, have a strategy that each of the teams work on, and we think a lot about how we have influence in certain areas in the right ways with advocacy and policy work and how we think about our actions. But the day differs because we like to think, you know, really work with our regional colleagues in the various time zones. What's relevant? What's happening? The division I work in is policy advocacy also communications, so we're responsive to whatever is happening in the news cycle. We also think a lot about as the governments evolve as their elections happen globally. How do we work with the new partners or new people in office? How do we think about future partnerships future ways of collaborating so there's consistency in the strategies that we have and particularly the way that we want to measure a lot of the work we do? Data and measurement is very big for us as well as evaluation. We want to learn about what's working what's not working, and so for me, I spend a lot of time in meetings. We're pretty meeting and email-heavy organization like many, but it is, for us, the most efficient way to communicate, particularly globally. But meetings are a precious time because it's really where we come together, and it's a thinking session which we try as much as we can in our meetings to solve problems and not just discuss them but think about what how we can move forward. So for me, luckily, it's a pretty standard workday. I don't find myself working on weekends. That's something I deliberately chose to do with my work-life balance. But there is some travel involved, and the nice thing is with the travel, you get to visit colleagues across the world or work with partners.

Ken White

Sure.

Olympia Trumbower

So developing those relationships is a big part of my job.

Ken White

Can you give us an example of where the data in a project might come in? What kind of numbers would you be looking at, for example?

Olympia Trumbower

Sure. So as a family foundation, we primarily give grants. We also issue contracts, but through our grant work, part of the grant agreement that we have with these grantees are really how do we measure and evaluate whatever the project outcomes or the deliverables are. And so it's an agreed thing that we have with the organization of position that we

have at the foundation or it's program officer and several levels of a program officer and that person actually owns a portfolio of investments of grants and they have responsibility to continually communicate with their partners and grantees and go through cycles of evaluation and by having the partners present data or other ways of showing how the progress is going on these different projects were then able to see okay where do we need to course correct or what's really working where can we actually provide more funding or scale back if necessary. So for us, it's a continual conversation. There's a lot of feedback loops that we try and create into the process, and then we also encourage our grantees to be very transparent. If there's something that we're doing that isn't working right.

Ken White

You need to know.

Olympia Trumbower

Exactly we need to know, and we need to be able to adjust to that, particularly as teams might change or we might have staff turnover. So for us making sure that the grantee relationship is very strong is a priority at the moment.

Ken White

So of the over four billion dollars that is granted to help others, how much of that is from the general public and how much of that is from Buffett and Gates?

Olympia Trumbower

Wonderful question. Great question. None of that is from the general public. So this is all coming from the trustees the, Bill, Melinda, and Warren. That's exactly right. It's quite amazing though many people don't know that the general public they do try and donate.

Ken White

I'm sure.

Olympia Trumbower

To the foundation exactly, we have a visitor center, and we have many people who just want to give money. Rather what we encourage is that they donate to the partners. So for us, it's very important to educate people on who are some of the grantees that either we're working with or others that we think are very trusted, reputable organizations where we encourage people. What are you passionate about? What would you like to learn more about? And we encourage you to actually give to those organizations since we ourselves are working with others. You know, these partners to do this great work, we're actually not



the ones out into the field, you know, digging the well. It's rather we work with other people to do that.

Ken White

Sure, interesting. Nonprofit it's interesting in the education space. We know that many undergraduates across the country are interested in nonprofit. But when we start to talk about putting an academic program together, the first thing you hear is well. I don't know because the jobs don't pay much. Absolutely accepted. That's not the case, is it?

Olympia Trumbower

No, not at all. I think it particularly for a family foundation, you know, it's a big initiative right now and one I'm very proud of that we are working very hard on one diversity, equity, and inclusion and also with just compensation making sure women and men everyone is treated equally that everyone is compensated according to their skills and talents. Our H.R. has done a wonderful job or human resources of making sure that there's comparable wages across the market, not just in nonprofit. And we acknowledge that we are trying to attract talent and bringing people who are from other fields that make a heck of a lot more money. And I will say, as an employee, I am continually just astounded and feel so grateful for the benefits we have. We have incredibly generous benefits. In fact, I believe it was last, or two years ago, we had a new chief human resources officer Steven Rice come on board, and one of the first things he did that was incredible. They started a one-year parental leave policy full pay.

Ken White

Wow.

Olympia Trumbower

Men and women.

Ken White

Wow.

Olympia Trumbower

We've had men and women both take that time off one full year because we truly believe that maternal and child health, particularly that mother bond with the child, is so important, and we need to walk the talk, and so for us, that's been quite a win.

Ken White

Yeah. Well, if you're going to attract talent, obviously, you have to pay for it.

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely.

Ken White

I don't really know where that whole myth or is it a myth. I don't know where it came from. Go nonprofit. You're not gonna get. You're not going to really make a great living. But there is certainly, and your foundation is one that that's just simply not the case.

Olympia Trumbower

Absolutely. And I think too, you know, just in the sheer opportunity and exposure to the travel alone. I mean, not many organizations or companies can give you that opportunity to go out and see these things and to be able to interact with people. I think that's a lot of where that currency is in terms of just the exposure that you get.

Ken White

So for those listening, whether they're working in nonprofit or whether they're in another field but who, who say, I like what you're doing. How do I get started? What do they do? What kind of advice do you have?

Olympia Trumbower

Yeah, so I'll say the first thing is this, you know, many people equate a nonprofit like ours, particularly one in health and development, to just people who work in health and development or education for that matter. We, in fact, have a very large team of finance people and lawyers and people that work in grants management. So again, I think I encourage people who work in the more operational fields to think about the foundation. If you're someone who's driven by a mission organization, we're a place that we love people to come in with those skills. And if you're interested in more of the program work as I have done myself. For us, it's really just trying to see where can you contribute. And by that, I mean, are there particular issue areas where you're an expert? If so, fantastic, we're interested in that. Or do you are you more of a generalist, and I would count myself as that just someone who has these skills? I'm a program manager, project manager. But I have an idea of everything that's happening in terms of these issues enough to be conversant in them and to interact with people. So if you have, you know, that desire to just expose yourself to this world, we love those people with that passion. And I think everything from looking at the website it's always up to date. The job site, we have a lot of networking events throughout the region. We have a wonderful Alumni Program now where we actually encourage Gates Foundation alumni who have since left the foundation to recruit on our behalf as well. Give us some new talent and people that you trust and then we are trying to work now with many universities. In fact, we have an internship program, graduate internship program with several universities across the country, and it's bringing in great talent as well.

Ken White

Yeah. What about education? Is there anything specific that someone should pursue?

Olympia Trumbower

That's a great question, so, by and large, the folks that recently are who are recent graduates with their bachelors they, you know, we certainly hire folks like that. We usually start around the administrative positions. Many of the roles that require more expertise generally come with a master's degree. Whether it's an MBA or otherwise particularly if you are more of an issue expert, you'll see a lot of Ph.D.s among our staff. And so it really depends on the issue area and also what level of position you're looking at. But I would say, you know, for us having both the degree in terms of that certification but also the track record of experience whether it's employed or volunteer, that's something we certainly look at. And of course, you know we have a series of interviews or we try and ask different questions to understand how your working style is. And if it's going to be a good fit for you.

Ken White

What's ahead for you in the next six months or year?

Olympia Trumbower

Oh, my goodness. Good question. So you know my team right now we're going through some change in a good way. I think you know now that our policy advocacy division is thinking also about communications. For me, a lot of the thinking is how can I personally challenge myself and take some risks in my role. I'm mid-career; I'm almost ten years out of undergrad. I just received my Masters this year earlier this year. So for me, it's thinking, okay, I love what I do. I really value this organization, but I know that I can do more. And I know that I want to do more. So what does that next step look like and it's a wonderful place to grow. I'd like to continue growing within the organization. There's so many issues to work on. So for me, it's well, I've worked on toilets, I've worked on Ebola and communication, so now what.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Olympia Trumbower, program manager at the Gates Foundation, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you and your organization meet and exceed your goals with business and leadership development programs that specifically fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your

organization, visit our website at [wmleadership.com](http://wmleadership.com). Finally, if you have a suggestion or comment pertaining to our podcast we'd love to hear from you. Please connect with us via email. Our address is [podcast@wm.edu](mailto:podcast@wm.edu). Well, thanks to our guest this week, Olympia Trumbower, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.