

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh



**Episode #:** 21      **Title:** Should we be paid well for social good?

**Guest:** Doug Foresta      **Guest Title:** Producer

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(Intro music)

Debra: So good morning this is Debra Ruh and you are listening to Human Potential at Work and today I am excited to have Doug Foresta; My voice coach and producer join me again. I am really enjoying these really deep conversations that I am having with Doug and since Doug has really been involved in the social impact, the social good and inclusion of persons with disabilities. I think that's one reason why we can have these really deep conversations. So good morning Doug.

Doug: Good morning Debra, now we're going to be under pressure to have deep conversations. It reminds me of, do you remember what was that, Deep Thoughts with Jack Handy?

Debra: Yes, I do, I loved that show.

Doug: Oh my gosh, so great to be here. I know we're going to be talking about our topic today, we are going to talk about the question of, you know, I'm a social worker by profession. The question about is it the case that you should not be compensated well if you're doing good work, right? Is that kind of sort of the theme?

Debra: Yes, absolutely, I had written, after a recent experience, I had written a note that said I have got to talk about this and blog about this. Why do people assume when you're doing good work you should not be paid? I think that is a universal theme and I also think so much money is being spent on things that do not add value to the world. I shouldn't say it like that, let me say it a little different. So much money is being spent on things that sometimes just really un-empower people and make us sad. You know, I look at the money that's being spent on the presidential candidacy in the United States right now and I think, what could we do with some of the money that was spent just on people that didn't get, you know, the republican candidacy or the democrat candidacy? I can't say that word this morning. And I, this has happened to me a lot in my career and I know it's happened to you too Doug and of course then you take it and you multiply it out through the whole world. I think it's time for the world to look at the value of social good and social impact so I think it's a good conversation to have.

Doug: Well, I'll tell you that when I went back to school for my MSW. The first thing they said to me when I went to school. When I went to apply actually and I said I'd like to get an

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

application. The admissions counselor said, “well you know you’re not going to make any money in this field right?” I remember it was such a weird thing because what if I had been a, I don’t know, you go back to be a doctor? I’m back to school to be a lawyer, whatever it is and for the admissions counselor to say, “well you know you’re not going to make any money as a lawyer.”

Debra: Right, Right, you’re not going to make any money as an engineer or a doctor.

Doug: You know I think that there’s a couple things to this. One is obviously, is that true and then number two, I think another that comes to mind is, you know, how does that impact social good. I mean how, does that impact for example people with, persons with disabilities, or anybody who needs to, who relies on services right? If people aren’t paid well then how does that impact the lives of people who need those services and then how does it impact the lives of those people who provide those services?

Debra: I agree and you know, I have been a spiritual seeker all of my life. I was raised a Christian and I have heard many times that you know you don’t have to worry about how much money you make, God will provide. If you’re too worried about how much money you make maybe you’re not as good a person you need to be. It is interesting that so many of these things, money is the root of all evil which, by the way, there is a lot more to that statement than just that. I just have thought so much about it because I was in the banking industry for many years and I made really good money. I was able to really provide, you know, a lot for my family. I worked hard, but I got to a point where I thought I could really add value in the world if I’m not in this field. Not that you can’t add great value wherever you’re planted. I believe that, but I think you could add a lot of good value if I went in a different direction. So then as I moved into, I want to make an impact for people like my daughter with disabilities and sort of what your counselor said, “Ok, but you’re not going to make any money.” I just think that’s ridiculous and I think if we are going to evolve as a world, as a species, we’ve got to sort of turn that around. Recently I had somebody ask me to come and speak at a conference and it’s in another country. It’s in a wealthier country and the person that invited me is being paid and hopefully paid well for the valuable work they do and they wanted me to come in and do a workshop pre-conference and then several workshops during the conference and they wanted me to help guide them as they set up the conference. Bring in sponsors, do a lot of marketing and then they came to me and said what we will do is we will wave your registration fee and I said, well I’m coming from the United States this is very expensive and they started lecturing me about how important it is to help people with disabilities. Which amazed me because in the first place he’s getting paid to do this, but I’m not supposed to get paid to do this. That’s fine, I understand that sometimes conferences can’t pay their speakers, but it made me really start thinking about this topic and that how often this happens over and over and that, “oh you’re doing social good?” I’ll give you another example Doug. I was working one time with a local B L N, Business Leadership Network, in Virginia and once again it is part of the U S B L N if people haven’t heard of. It’s a wonderful organization that brings business to business together to talk about empowering ways to bring people with disabilities to the workforce. So this gentleman had contacted me and said I have this H R program and I think the corporations that are part of this B L N would get a lot of value out of this. I said ok well before I introduce you to the network, you are accessible right? Your program is accessible to individuals with disabilities and he said what, what is that? I

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

said well technology has to be accessible to people with disabilities or many people with disabilities can't use it. He said, "I've never heard of that, what I'll let you do is you can come in and I'll let you come in test it top make sure the program is accessible and you can do that for free and I know you appreciate me letting you do that since you work for people with disabilities." I was like really, really? So I want to make sure I understand what you're saying. You're saying that somebody that has a very large influential network, that you're going to allow me the gift of making your product accessible so that people can use it, is that what you're telling me? I guess the guy realized that was the wrong answer and he was like uh, uh. Including people with disabilities in your work force and making sure they can use your programs that is not a charity. one in seven people in the world have a disability, in the United States one in five. We cannot always think about this as yeah I'll be happy to let you do it for free because then people starve to death.

Doug: When you really think about it from another perspective as well, from doing therapy, the insurance industry over the last year. I have been doing therapy for the last ten years or so as a therapist. The insurance industry often times will deny people coverage or there are some insurances that I just haven't taken because it's like fifty-five dollars an hour and that to me is just not respectful of the hundred thousand dollars of student loans I had to take out and the thousands of hours of practice. It is as hard to become a therapist as it is to become a physician's assistant or any other kind of health care practitioner or mid-level health care practitioner. To me that's just not respectful and what the insurance companies have said is: "well, people need help are you not going to help them?" I think that is the, I have never cursed on this show and I really want to I'll say it in a nice way, that is the B.S. I think we need to overcome. That narrative is an oppressive narrative. The narrative that we should not be paid well for doing good work in the world is an oppressive narrative.

Debra: I agree and you look at the teachers what we're paying teachers or what we're paying firefighters or police officers or anybody doing social good. So what we're saying to the world is that those things don't matter. It doesn't matter if you're doing work that can really help empower the world instead we are making money bad. We're making it bad by what we're saying and I know a lot of the young generation is saying B.S. again because we are going to make a difference and we are going to make a lot of money because what I believe is the more money I have the more good I can do. You were telling me a story Doug before we started about working in a field where you were a doorman. Can you tell us that story? That's a powerful story.

Doug: I've told this story before and if people want to hear my story of my journey of being a doorman they can go to Empower Radio and I talk about it, but I worked for over five years as an overnight doorman bellman at the Millennium Broadway hotel in New York City and I made good money, I made up to six figures at that job lugging people's bags and greeting them and it was a good, I was helping people, but certainly the reason that I left was because I was not helping people to the full capacity of my own human potential, right. I decided that, I moved from New York to Massachusetts in 2002 and did not have any experiences in human services, I only had a bachelor's in psychology at that time. So was looking for a job and I came across

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

managing two group homes for individuals with disabilities. I was making a whopping eleven dollars an hour in that job.

Debra: Wow.

Doug: I took a huge pay-cut and at that time I knew I needed to get the experience and I was only able to do it for about six months because I just could not survive. I think that is the shame. You have said before we put our money where we see value. Money, at the end of the day, is an energy and we put our energy where we see value. So if we're not putting money into these, into having these services and if we're not putting money into social good then what do we actually value? It's interesting to see where people actually spend their money.

Debra: Well I think it is too and I think it's also very interesting. This is a lesson I had to walk. I come from a middle class family, we grew up in Florida and there were times when we really struggled as kids. You know, we did not have we didn't have money that we needed for basic things, but you know we were fine, we made it through. I remember sometimes we would be driving by wealthier houses or we would see somebody in a really wealthy car and my Mom would make a comment about, they're a drug dealer or something ridiculous. I thought, wait a minute are we saying all rich wealthy people are bad? Because that is totally not true either and I remember when I started TecAccess and I really struggled. I went from making a lot of money to making no money, no money. Which is, by the way, sometimes the life of an entrepreneur as you're building your company. I didn't let it stop me, I still went out and really focused on doing the very best job I could. I never remember doing without. I always had plenty to eat, you know. Sometimes I think in my mind it's what they call, what, first world problems? It still felt like something was wrong and I really believe that right now the only way we can truly evolve is as a species and I talk about this a lot. It feels very powerful to me right now it feels like right now we can go one way or we can go the other way. You look at this, once again, presidential election that's going on in the United States and it's like there is one candidate that is making fun of people with disabilities. There is another candidate that's not really liked that much, but her whole life she's spent giving back and serving others and sometimes people look at that and I hear media not really valuing all the work that she has done to empower other and to fight for others and sort of discounting the work she has done. I think it is time for a change and I really think the young people are demanding that we change and evolve too, but I truly believe money is not a bad thing. Having money allows us to do great social good, great social good. If we could channel a lot of the money. That's one thing I loved that Warren Buffet was doing, you know, take most of his wealth and work with a whole bunch of other very wealthy people and say: give most of your wealth away to solving major social problems in the world. I'm a big fan of Warren Buffet because I think that's what we need to do. How much money do you need? I'm not saying give away all of your money, I'm not saying that at all. I am saying the more money I have, as somebody who really wants to make a difference in the world I have, the more good I think can do. The bigger my voice can be and not even my voice as my voice right now, but the bigger impact I can have the more money I have. It's not only about the money you can have great impact. We have seen a lot of leaders have great impact without money, but somehow we have got to shift this from its all about paying ridiculous amounts of money to celebrities and sports figures and then we ask our teachers and our social workers to live below poverty level.

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

Doug: You know, one thing I was thinking about as you were saying that is there is the other piece about money. The one thing is well, this is the craziness if we really explore the narratives we have around money and social good; Don't make a lot of money, right that is left best for charity, but also don't raise too much money for charity because if you do that you're a little suspect. You know, how much money did the Clinton foundation raise? That seems wrong, don't raise too much money. We want social problems to be handled with a bake sale at the local PTA or something. I think we just need to get over that, I think one of the things we're both saying is that the idea that you can't make money and do good is actually the opposite of what is true. You have to make money because in order to change something you have to have money I order to have impact. That's not the only form of impact we can have, you can do things that don't cost a lot of money, but at the end of the day money is the currency or energy of our society and if you don't have it you will stall out and you won't be able to have the impact you want to have.

Debra: I agree and I think also, once again going back to my experience, I learned so much walking the experience of building TecAccess and all the mistakes I made and all the amazing miracles I had along the way. I remember I successfully raised money over the period of TecAccess, but as a company we were always struggling with cash-flow issues, common to entrepreneurs. I had an investor, a female investor, say to me one time: "Debra you have actually raised a lot of money for your company over the years and you're now looking to raise more money, tell me why this time it's going to be different?" I really thought about it and it really stung when she said that, but I thought about it and I remember lying in bed and really thinking about that because at the time when I was raising money what was going to happen because the financial crisis had really hurt my company the work we were doing with the corporations had really dried up. The big corporations had all gotten in trouble during that scary financial time that we walked as a world. But, I remember what I really needed to do was I needed to lay off quite a few members of my team and for obvious reasons I did not want to do that. I did not want to do it. So I thought, if I can go get more money I won't have to lay it off and I won't have to look this really scary reality in the face because I didn't want to do that. When she said that and I really thought about it and pondered it and I thought she is right. I have got to do the right thing by everybody. The very best thing that I can do and I had to make some really hard decisions. But it wasn't at the time and it's also not only about money as we are saying. There must be some kind of balance. It can't be let's not pay people who are doing good social work ever, you know. Anyone doing charity let's just keep them poor. But at the same time, I guess a better way of saying it is, how do we balance this? In my career now I'm doing well now, I'm not complaining or whining about money now, I just keep seeing that happening all over the world and really believing that we need to start looking at money in a different way. I'm very hopeful Doug because I remember when I started TecAccess back in 2001. At the time there wasn't social enterprise or social entrepreneur we didn't really, we weren't using those terms and I didn't realize that when I was building TecAccess that I was doing social good or you know. I knew it at one level. Like now we have B corporations, the beneficial corporations, which a good friend of mine Michael Parron is very involved in that effort and had a B corp. I love what the B corp. stands for and I love efforts like Ben and Jerry's and some of these really important entrepreneurs that have made a difference with their work. You know, can you really change the

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

world with ice cream? Maybe you can and now they're making vegan ice cream for people like me that can't eat dairy, even better.

Doug: As you're saying that I'm thinking too, like, what if we're asking the wrong questions. We are asking the question about should you make a decent living, right if you're doing social good? I think the answer is clearly of course you should make a good living, but the other thing is and this is where human potential, I mean this is where I think the dialogue can go off to even a more radical place. Which is, the assumption is, the way we set things up right now is that for example, if you have a disability you go on disability, right and you become a net loss to society. That's the perception.

Debra: Right, Right.

Doug: You become a net loss to society. What if we really could bring out the human potential in all people regardless of whether you have a disability or not?. We wouldn't have to really wrestle. It wouldn't have to become this lose win and that's where it is right now. Who gets this limited pot of money? Do you get this money? Do you get it? To be honest with you, Debra, I'll say this right here. I think, I honestly think, that there many of non-profits across the United States that have gotten so caught up in, I understand why because its survival, but they're so caught up in fighting for that limited amount of dollars that they've actually forgotten why they even started the non-profit in the first place.

Debra: I agree, I agree and I see a lot people doing that and I love the saying "follow your passion and the money will come", and I will tell you, I have found that happen in my life. But I still think, you know, that we have got to change these conversations. I will tell you, Doug, that on one of our future programs, Michael Parron, my friend, is going to join us and talk about B corporations and some amazing things that have happened with these beneficial corporations. It is interesting watching his progress because he created this really amazing company and gives a lot of the profits back to charities in the Richmond Virginia area and he has been very big on creating legislation. Working with legislators to create legislation just so that we could have something called a beneficial corporation so that's very exciting. So changing the way we think about social good and money and the way we encourage people to get involved in things that speak to their heart and make a difference in the world. I think it's a really powerful thing to do and something we have to keep stopping and saying, "Well wait a minute, did you just say that because I am doing good work that I shouldn't get compensated for that?" and is that the right energy?

Doug: Here's another crazy thing, shouldn't we all be actually doing good work?

Debra: Yes!

Doug: Should we really, should anybody be doing work that is not good work?

Debra: Yes, yes, yes I think it's very important the work that we're doing and a lot of other people are doing and I'm just am very hopeful for our future. Doug thank you for joining me again I think your voice is so powerful and I think you allow my voice to be more powerful and

# HUMAN POTENTIAL AT WORK

Host - Debra Ruh

we come together to do a really amazing good work and hopefully others will benefit from the work we are doing and that others are doing as well. You know I always end the program with the only disability is not being able to see human potential and I really agree with what you said Doug, shouldn't we all be doing good work that really empowers the world and empowers people around us. So thank you so much Doug, I really appreciate you being on the program again today.

Doug: Thank Debra it's always a pleasure, I look forward to the next one.

Debra: Thank you.

(Outro music)