

Xander Schultz

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SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Xander Schultz



Omkari Williams 00:21

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams, and I'm so pleased that you're here with me today. Hosting this podcast is a complete joy for me. I'm privileged to speak with people who are out in the world making a difference with their day jobs, their programs, their art, and their activism. If you would like to support me in doing this work, you can do so for as little as \$3 a month by becoming a member of my Patreon community. You can go to patreon.com/omkariwilliams and sign up. There's also a link on my website omkariwilliams.com.



Omkari Williams 01:03

My guest today is someone who is dedicating his entire life to social justice in multiple areas. Xander Schultz is a social impact entrepreneur, philanthropist and activist. As a tech entrepreneur in Silicon Valley Xander was on the founding teams of a consumer social productivity technology company, which was later acquired by Google.



Omkari Williams 01:12

Xander then committed his entrepreneurial and philanthropic efforts to social justice, co-

founding the refugee aid organization, When We Band Together with his wife Zoe. Xander focuses on building community around causes and creating innovative solutions to tackle systemic problems. He hosts the What We Don't Know podcast, discussing issues that define our time with leading changemakers. Xander also launched Defeat by Tweet, a donation based initiative that use Trump's tweets against him to raise money for the Justice Fund. That initiative, after the election, shifted to Win Both Seats, which follows the same model to win the Georgia Senate seats. And it is my great pleasure to welcome Xander to the podcast. Hi, Xander, how are you?



Xander Schultz 02:17

I'm doing good. Thanks for having me on.



Omkari Williams 02:18

Oh, it's my pleasure. I have to say I wasn't actually expecting to have this conversation in these circumstances. For the audience, it's the day after the Capitol came under siege by...



Xander Schultz 02:30

The dumb coup. It wasn't a highly orchestrated coup. It was a dumb coup.



Omkari Williams 02:41

No, it was really, really dumb. And yet, I found myself so horrified. I mean, just to see, the place we've come to was really, really heartbreaking. And it reaffirmed for me how much work we have to do and how grateful I am for the piece of news that was the good news before the bad news, which was the two Georgia Senate seats that went to the Democrats. Which means that Biden and his administration will have an opportunity to make some big changes. So I wasn't going to start here. But I actually do want to start here. Now, you created something that I thought was just really brilliant, which was Defeat By Tweet. And I'd like you to talk about that. And then also tell us how you flipped that to help the Georgia senate run offs, because that was so cool.



Xander Schultz 03:35

Sure. So we launched Defeat By Tweet in late June. And it was kind of at the intersection of a couple cultural Zeitgeist moments. One was this absolute fatigue from from the tyrant that Trump was being and and him using Twitter as his platform to spew hate, and feeling

kind of powerless in that, you know, we're looking at the tech companies to stop it. They weren't stopping it, etc. And so there's a lot of frustration. And if you looked at the comments in his tweets, there was a lot of people being triggered by all of them, understandably so. And then late June was also in the wake of the George Floyd killing, close to the peak of the the BLM protests.



Xander Schultz 04:16

And there's a lot of people that are trying to figure out what they could do to respond in a thoughtful way. I thought we were having really mature conversations around racial justice, and around responsibility and how to actually rectify these issues that we've been facing for so long. And so we want to create a platform that address both. We wanted to create a platform that both allowed folks to donate to political organizers and to hold Donald Trump accountable. And so, and so, that was a long winded way of saying we allowed people to donate a penny or two every time Trump tweeted to a syndicate, it was actually 37 different 501 c4, which means a political organization. It's not tax deductible, so it can be hard money to raise, Black led organizers. And so you know, there's a lot of these are groups you may be familiar with. There's Fair Fight, New Georgia Project, there's Black Voters Matter, the Black Male Voter Project, Color of Change pac. And then a lot of hyper local ones in the cities that turned out to be very, very important to organize in Philadelphia, you know, Minneapolis, you know, Madison, there were some incredible heroic work being done that we were just really lucky to support.



Omkari Williams 05:26

I just loved it, because I thought, what a clever idea, just you know, a penny every time he tweets, although honestly, that could have added up to a lot for, you know, it's on somedays.



Xander Schultz 05:37

We allowed people to cap it there, there was that concern. So we're like, Look, if you want to cap it, that's fine. The average person was donating. Somewhere between four to five pennies a tweet, which worked out to somewhere between \$35 and \$40 a month,



Omkari Williams 05:51

Which is insane.



Xander Schultz 05:53

I believe the President was tweeting 1000 times a month, it was insane.



Omkari Williams 05:56

I mean, you know, he theoretically had still has a job to do, and that he could find the time to tweet that much. Thank God, you let people cap it. Because otherwise there would have been people who are like, Oh, God, I can't feed my children.



Xander Schultz 06:14

Yeah, that is, I think, according to him, that is his job, though. He's a marketer. He's a self self marketing, you know, pro, and that's what he's doing all day. I don't think he's very concerned with governing at all. So



Omkari Williams 06:25

Clearly, clearly not.



Xander Schultz 06:27

Right.



Omkari Williams 06:28

But then you shifted that and you shifted it to the Senate races in Georgia.



Xander Schultz 06:33

Yep.



Omkari Williams 06:33

So did you then just sort of narrow the focus to simply those two races? And that's where all the money went?



Xander Schultz 06:41

Yeah. So we narrowed the focus of who we gave to just 16 different Black and brown led organizers specifically working in Georgia. A lot of them were, you know, regional powers that then focus energy, and Georgia national powers like the Working Families Party, Domestic Workers Alliance has a C4 called Karen Actions, Ai-Jen Poo's organization. So some of them were national, that were just focused in Georgia, and then somewhere hyperlocal like New Georgia Project, Georgia Shift which organizes young people. And so yeah, we put together a good group of 16 folks and then got together a group of famous co-founders.



Xander Schultz 07:15

So we had Andrew Yang and Jaden Smith and police reform leader Phil Goff, business leader, Mike Novogratz, a really, really nice actor Sophia Bush, Kumail Nanjiani, really good group of folks who just wanted to figure out how to use their platform. And you know, given them a co-founder title, allowed them to tell their following more than once, you know, you don't want to feel transactional with your following. But if it's what you're doing, if you're a co-founder of an initiative, you are sharing what you're up to. And so it's definitely a tool in the tool belt, I'm going to keep in terms of like, before we launch these initiatives, gathering a group of co-founders that really want to lean in. It's been really inspiring to see people with both resources and fame, try to figure this out and lean in, in this moment.



Omkari Williams 07:56

Yeah, I mean, it was amazing. And as someone who lived in Georgia not that long ago, it was so gratifying to see that happening, and to see people actually really using their platforms in a very powerful way. And I I do think it's a very easy, replicable way of getting people involved and raising money from people who otherwise would probably feel like I have nothing to give. But if you're talking about a few cents a day, people are like, Oh, I can do that.



Xander Schultz 08:28

Or, you know, one of the issues isn't like is sometimes you know, they have something to give, but they'll default to candidate giving.



Omkari Williams 08:35

Yes



Xander Schultz 08:35

Or they'll default to, you know, a big group like the ACLU or the DNC. Not taking shots at them. But I think we've, we've seen, and it's nice to see these organizers get the credit, the best use of the money is in community organizing, that's the most bang for the buck. And so we were just trying to make it easy for people to make really high quality strategic investments in these groups. It's hard to vet local organizers, right? It's difficult. We have a partner called Movement Voter Project that did it for us, and does this work all the time. But we just wanted to open the door for the everyday person, the average person to be able to make an investment, like a strategic foundation would make an investment in that election.



Omkari Williams 09:09

I think that's really important. I mean, one of the things, I lived in Savannah, and there was a group of organizers there who, honestly, they're just brilliant. I mean, they are so clear about their goals and about what the community needs and about how to get there. I mean, I just bow down to these people. They are amazing. And a couple of them, I'm sure will be at some point, nationally known names because they are so so good. But that thing you just said about local work is so important because I think partly because we live in this society that so elevates big gestures and you know...



Xander Schultz 09:52

Totally



Omkari Williams 09:52

enormous platforms. We can forget how important it is to work at the local level, but that's where it starts and that work not only is where it starts, it really needs to continue consistently. I mean, yeah, the GA run offs are over. But there's so much work to do on the ground in every community. So I really, really appreciate that.



Xander Schultz 10:05

Totally. That I mean, that's the big challenge now is we had about 54,000 donors between Defeat By Tweet and Win Both Seats, which was the initiative, we started just specifically

for Georgia. And you know, that we're thinking about that a lot this week, how to how to speak with them about continuing this work. We don't want to have transactional relationships with community organizers and marginalized communities where, you know, they're not organizing their community to defeat Trump. They're organizing their communities, so they know how to navigate our political world and to defend themselves in a, you know, system that is built to oppress and marginalize them.



Xander Schultz 10:47

And so, yes, the outcomes are great, right? I love that we won both those Senate seats. I love that, you know, Trump's out of office, and you know, we're on our way to a progressive decade, hopefully. But the way community organizers work, it's from a place of service, they're not trying to sell anyone on anything. They're like a concierge service. They're just helping you solve your own problems, what's your problem, the rent's too high, you're going to be evicted? You don't have health care? Let me let me tell you how to get there. And a lot of politics, especially the politics that matters to poor communities, like justice is local.



Omkari Williams 11:20

Yeah, absolutely.



Xander Schultz 11:20

A solution to a more justice system is often having a more progressive D.A., or more progressive judges or more progressive sheriffs, more progressive City Council members. Those are all elected officials, a lot of people don't know the District Attorney is elected, the lead prosecutor is elected. And they can decriminalize things like low level offenses, they can get rid of cash bail, if they choose to. And those things have a fundamental, wild impact on these communities. And so, yeah, I think a lot about, these days, about how to take this energy that was so inspiring to you know, get over this hump and keep our democracy intact. And how to keep it to your point, because there's so much more work to be done in terms of building an equitable and just society.



Omkari Williams 12:01

Yeah, I really couldn't agree more, especially when you consider that most Americans don't even understand how our government functions, they don't understand the basic structures. And if you don't understand those basic structures, it's really hard to advocate.

And so having people at the local level, who do understand that and are willing to go out there and do the work and are willing to say, "Here, let me educate you on this, let me teach you how this works" so that you can then advocate for yourself is super important. And I'm, I'm really, really glad that you're putting that kind of energy towards this.



Omkari Williams 12:39

One thing that you do that is sort of outside of that local realm that I am particularly interested in, because I am the daughter of a relief worker, is you started an organization with your wife, Zoe, called When We Band Together. And I would love for you to talk about that. Because something I think it's gotten lost in all of the chaos of the last few years. Is the situation with refugees around the world and how critical that is. So if you could talk about that,



Xander Schultz 13:14

Yeah, definitely the refugee crisis is in danger of falling into, like the category of just unnecessary suffering that we tolerate. Right? Like we're really good in general. I don't know about really good, but we're good at responding to crisis. You know, there's a hurricane, we, you know, try to try to get everything stood up etc... You know, we put in a lot of money into the Red Cross, but the refugee crisis had a moment in 2016, in the wake of a lot of exodus from Syria. And since then it's fallen by the wayside as topics do. It's okay, not everything can hold our attention forever. But we never resolved anything.



Xander Schultz 13:49

I think, if the only thing we're understanding now, is that the refugee crisis, there's 70 million people displaced in the world right now, 25 million refugees. It'd be like the 12th biggest country in the world, if it was a country, the amount of people that are displaced, these require systemic solutions. And so it was actually my experience with the refugee crisis was one of the reasons I leaned back into politics, because immigration policy and multi country coordination is what's required to really solve that problem. But speaking about our organization, specifically, my wife and I spent a month in Lesbos in 2015 Lesbos. It's a large Greek island, right off the coast of Turkey, and it's where most of that footage that people saw of those rubber dinghies, you know, arriving on shore was taking place.



Xander Schultz 14:35

We spent a month volunteering there, but you know, I'm not a medic or anything or have

a lot to offer other than I was mainly a cab driver for everyone arriving on the shores to get to the camps, old ladies and people couldn't make the walk. Security, at the camp, etc. And you know, it was impactful and it kind of opened my eyes to the shortfalls of even progressive ideology in America. Right? We are finally, starting to have a mature conversation around reparations and racial justice here. We, you know, as recent as 20 years ago, illegally toppled entire country's government killed a million people. And when we talk about the refugee crisis, we act like we have no responsibility for it.



Xander Schultz 15:17

The vacuum and Saddam Hussein's absence created ISIS, which created a crisis in Syria. Out of like the top six or seven countries in the world that are producing the most refugees, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria are all in that. And we had a big role to play in all of that. And we can completely, have shirked that responsibility to the, you know, absolute disasters we created over there. And so we decided to stand something up. A lot of nation states were going the other way, they were getting more intentionally cruel immigration policies. And so help wasn't necessarily on its way, it seemed like actually help was going to be pulled back. And so we started a small organization called When We Band Together that rents out warehouses near the refugee camps, and then turns them into community centers.



Omkari Williams 16:02

Yeah, talk more about that, especially the Moria refugee camp, because that's a particular...well, I'll let you tell the story of Moria.



Xander Schultz 16:11

Yeah, yeah. So Moria refugee camp actually burnt down a few months ago, it was known as the worst refugee camp on Earth by the BBC, I'm not sure if that's true. You know, maybe maybe there's, there's there's other ones, but they call it the worst refugee camp on Earth. What's happening in Greece is not dissimilar to what we know is happening here at our border, which is, the conditions are made intentionally cruel to try to dissuade people from coming. And politicians who push those policies or winning elections,



Omkari Williams 16:39

Right.



Xander Schultz 16:40

And so you have a situation where people are living in open sewage, there's no warmth, they don't have enough shelter, people were building houses out of boxes, they're finding at the shipyard. There's certainly no place for joy, in the things that want to make you keep going. There were children as young as seven trying to commit suicide at this refugee camp. And food is nice, and warmth is nice, and we need those things, and the government should be applying those things. But if a lot of these people are stuck in purgatory, the average refugee experience lasts 14 years. You're stuck in purgatory for a while, and it's hard to keep going. A lot of people at Moria had been there for two or three years. And so we really wanted to create spaces that allowed for dignity, some personal growth, some joy, a sense of community, a sense of support and regularity. I know that doesn't sound so profound, but it's profound when you're stuck in a situation like that. For sure.



Omkari Williams 17:38

Yeah, I, I think those things are really profound. I think that most of us take those things so for granted that we don't recognize how deeply painful it is to live without them. I mean, also, I know, I mean, Moria, I'm going to just say, maybe the BBC was being hyperbolic when they called it the worst refugee camp on Earth. But it kind of doesn't matter if you're in the top five, that is not company you want to be in, you know. And it was horribly overcrowded, there's suspicion that it burnt down, because refugees themselves set fire to the camp. I, you know, I don't know whether that's been proven or not. But what is for sure, is that the people there who had already left horrible circumstances because no one leaves their home and their family and their friends, because life is so good. And they just want to put themselves in a dinghy and sail across the sea.



Xander Schultz 18:42

Totally.



Omkari Williams 18:43

That you then get there, and life is so horrible, that you would consider killing yourself is shameful. And all of us who just sort of look the other way need to recognize that to look, the other way is privilege. And these people don't have that privilege and to provide something that creates some joy or some respite from that circumstance, I think is incredibly important. I mean, that's the human spirit we're talking about maintaining so...



Xander Schultz 19:12

Right.



Omkari Williams 19:13

you know, is it food or shelter? No, but it's something else that is equally important to our being able to survive as healthy humans. So I think that means a great deal.



Xander Schultz 19:25

Thank you.



Omkari Williams 19:26

Thank you. One of the things that really struck me when I was researching Moria was okay, as you mentioned, the bulk of the people in that camp were from Iraq or Afghanistan and Syria. And we, the United States has kind of abandoned as he said, this situation that we created, and now the people who were in that camp, don't even have that crappy camp to live in. So I'm wondering, what's the circumstance with those people today?



Xander Schultz 19:58

Yes, they created new camp, maybe a mile and a half away from the old one not too far. Similar circumstances, overcrowded summer tents in the wintertime. Muddy, it's right by the shore, it gets flooded all the time. Misery is the policy and it's intentional. And, you know, it's hard. It's hard to see that changing anytime soon without a sweeping government changes. It's also you're working with local culture that I'm empathetic towards in in that their primary industry that they relied on was tourism. And in the face of a refugee crisis, the tourism dried up. And so you have, you know, soaring unemployment, Greece was already in the midst of a terrible economic crisis before this. And you add in a high profile refugee crisis, even if you go to the island, I've been the, you know, Lesbos, now, probably 10 times with my wife. And you can have an incredible tourist experience there that like, there is, you know, places where this refugee camp is and where those services are, and where boats are coming in, and not as frequently as they once were. But it's, it's totally possible to have a wonderful tourism experience in Lesbos as well.



Xander Schultz 21:10

And these people are seeing this high profile, high profile, you know, news story that for them, you know, in the United States it's gone away, in Europe it's still a big story, the refugee crisis. And still uses a really, it's still weaponized, you know, for politics. And so I understand. Look, if people are desperate, they'll do a lot of things. And turning to hate or just trying to figure out a way to, you know, stop this thing that's threatening their family or their family's family. I had a friend, I do have a friend named Kimmie Weeks. He's a Liberian peace leader. And he said, You can't, he's like, people do anything if your kids are 12 hours away from being hungry?



Omkari Williams 21:49

Yeah.



Xander Schultz 21:49

And if you have too many people in your country that are in a state like that, a lot of things can happen. Liberia obviously had a terrible Civil War. But I think about that a lot. Because one thing humans are good at, for better or worse is projecting scarcity. So even if we're not 12 hours away, we can project to being 12 hours away from it. That's what we see a lot in Trump country, right is projected scarcity, even if people are doing not great. We have a lot of people still struggling in this country, but they're not maybe suffering in the way we think of like a Liberian, you know?



Omkari Williams 22:15

Right. But I think that's a really good point. No, I think that's an excellent point. Because if we understood that so much of what we are afraid of, is likely not going to come to pass, we would probably have more empathy for people who are actually struggling, because we wouldn't be so afraid that it was actually going to be us. With no evidence to support that fear. So I think that's a really important point. So something that I struggle with, with philanthropy, because as I said, it's the family business, in a way, is the downside to philanthropy, that there are often downstream effects that are unintended consequences of an organization doing something that on the surface seems really good. Like, you know, like, let's say, you give a pair of shoes for every pair of shoes that's bought. And that seems like a really good thing



Xander Schultz 23:14

There's a local market that's totally disrupted.



Omkari Williams 23:16

Totally, totally destroyed, there's a skill set that just dies in the community. Or if you take girls out of the community to educate them, and then they don't go back to the community, you've taken the best and the brightest away from the community. So I'm curious as to how you navigate that?



Xander Schultz 23:36

Yeah, it's a great question, I spent a decent amount of time thinking about what is the most like ethical, high integrity, ways of going about this type of work. And I think, you know, the solution as a kind of a rule of thumb is giving away power, which is cool, because it kind of eliminates the headache of trying to develop the best theory of change. And so this is why we're doing everything from funding community organizers, it's like, you know, instead of instead of candidates, it's like, I think I know which candidate should be like "it". But it's your town, I'm just gonna, I'm gonna make sure you have the same type of power I do as a citizen, to be able to determine who, you know, is representing you.



Xander Schultz 24:16

With the refugee crisis stuff, you know, we're just creating community centers, just four walls. We're just saying, Hey, here's a safe space, you guys teach the classes. So a lot, most of our courses and classes are taught by refugees from the community, they bring other folks in, we pay for, you know, security, a director to make sure the place stands up and then but really, it's just kind of a safe space for them to at a time when, you know, they can't own property, no one has the spaces etc. It's just leaning in, and we, you know, all of our expenses go to fund the local economy. We're paying the landlord's paying the lights were, you know, buying materials locally. And so I think I think you're right in terms of like we need to be cautious and how we step and and exporting our ideas. Like that exporting the idea that, you know, all education is good education and not thinking about the ripple effect of like impacting communities.



Xander Schultz 25:03

Like one thing we are completely impoverished by here is is a lack of community. I think one of the reasons, you know, we talked about, you know that that projected scarcity, the reason that projected scarcity is so intense here in the United States, you can have

someone like Trump ride a wave based on that, is because you're on your own here. In this rush of this individualism, achievement, meritocracy, all these ideas. That we, you know, moved away from each other, don't have those support networks. When we're in Greece, like Greece is incredibly poor, but they have 150 people within a half mile of them that they can go sleep on their couch that love them, you know, not for a week, you know, not for a month. Like if they're in trouble, they're, they're okay, right, and that that's a security blanket that only if you're a multi, multi, multi millionaire, you can experience here. That level of security, right, that can replicate that and even not even not then right, because you don't get the emotional effects etc. And so anyways, that was a digression about like how exporting a good idea kind of doesn't take everything into account at times. And so just try to empower people that are local, and that understand the situation or, you know, that are the ones being impacted as much as possible has become a theory.



Omkari Williams 26:13

I think that's a really great way of approaching it. And something I've been thinking about a lot in this year of pandemic is how critically important it is that we really work micro locally. You know, it's like start close in and see who you can touch directly, and then just let that keep expanding out. Because to get through this year, people I do think have started to reconnect to those people who are directly around them more. And I think that that's been really important. But it's not something that our culture is actively encouraging. And I think it would be really, really helpful. I mean, there's so many people who are just starved for community right now. You know, they're they've been home alone for 10 months, and they're just wiggling. And can you blame anybody? And just having that connection. I spent time in Greece when I was a teenager, and, you know, everybody in a community knew everybody, and most of them were related through marriage or blood to the people around them. And it was, it was so nurturing in a way that in growing up in Manhattan, you don't have that experience.



Xander Schultz 27:32

Right, right, so different now.



Omkari Williams 27:34

But it was really, really important, so I appreciate that you say that. Because I think that that's actually something we have the power to do we have the power to build community, right where we are. It's a choice. It's like, okay, instead of spending time doing X, Y, or Z, I'm going to actually spend some time getting to know the people around me

and finding out what they need and helping the organizers or whatever that might be. So I think that that's a really important thing to do.



Xander Schultz 28:02

It takes proactive energy here, though. We don't have it by default. Like Italians aren't thinking about how to create community. They just, like Liberians aren't thinking about this, right? And so it's a right, we're just we're architected in a way that makes it really, really hard. We're like, whether you're suburban sprawl or hustle and bustle city or whatnot, you know, you probably move, Americans 10X more than other countries. I don't know that for sure. But I assume so



Omkari Williams 28:26

Exponentially more. I mean, there's just no question. I remember an experience I had in Savannah. It was when Stacey Abrams was running for governor and I went out with a friend and we were knocking doors in a part of Savannah that I was unfamiliar with, since I'm from Manhattan. And there was no one in the suburban neighborhood, like out in their yard, everyone was in their home. So there were no people interacting with other people. It was, to me the oddest thing, especially as a New Yorker where it's like you step out your door, and there are a billion people in your face. I mean, it was like a ghost town. And I thought, Oh, this is so weird. But it was just how it was in all the neighborhoods we we went to and you know, there were varying degrees of affluence in these neighborhoods. But that was consistent across the board. And it made me kind of sad. And I think it's something that we should really be thinking more about as a result of the pandemic and which has put into high relief, the impact of that kind of isolation. So I just think it's really important, and I'm glad you, you reference that. Thank you.



Omkari Williams 29:44

Our time is coming to an end. And one of the things that I'm curious about just for you is what led you to support Black and brown people without taking their autonomy from them. I mean, you're white man with a great deal of privilege and often in your position, people just do what you say we shouldn't d. They want to be in charge of how things go. So there must be an experience or some experiences that led you to where you are. And I'm curious about that.



Xander Schultz 30:17

Yeah, I mean, like all things with privilege, I get to bump into really smart, you know, people and I've learned from incredible people. And so, privilege helps in so many ways, but that's one of them for me is I've been fortunate enough. I work at a family office that invests in racial justice, in a pretty significant way. And I got to learn from both the you know, the guy leading the foundation and the principal Mike Novogratz, and Billy Watterson over there, about their theories of change and how things are working. I got to meet incredible, incredible leaders like Desmond Meade down in Florida, like Rashad Robinson over at Color of Change, like Patrice Cullors, and Alicia Garza, the co-founders of BLM. And so I didn't start out that way. I met a bunch of people, met a bunch of smart people learn from him. You know, I wish I could say I like stayed quiet in the beginning and listened. Because that's what people say, but I probably didn't throw out some ideas. And I go, listen, this is how you can do it. You know, this is actually what's helpful. And so I don't know, I don't prescribe any level of like genius to myself, it's just being around really smart people and having the lack of access to them. And then also the, the lack of being able to bump my head maybe a few times and do the wrong things and still be giving grace and being able to still be active.



Omkari Williams 31:32

Yeah, well, you know, God knows we all screw up. And that should never be the thing that stops us, you know, that should just be the thing. It's like, Okay, let me ever not do that again.



Xander Schultz 31:43

Yeah, yeah. But I mean, it may, you know, and it's also just an idea that makes sense at its core, too, right? It's like, once you start, I think you really have to start eradicating the idea of a meritocracy. And once once you stop believing in meritocracy, then this idea of like, well, I'm, I'm at this position, therefore, maybe I'm smarter well that really kind of dissipates. And you're like, Okay, well, you know, if I don't think I'm smarter than obviously, the person closer to the problem is more well positioned to figure out how to solve it, or how to organize you know, all the other people over there. There is a theory where that like, that's the only solution. I don't believe that either. I think I do have things that you know, to add. And I think combining their theories of change with some of my know how when it came to like marketing, and when it came to like, yeah, I had a couple tech startups before this, and hey, you know, what's a product launch that might make sense that gets people excited? Like that, that was valuable. And so I don't think it's also like, hey, just sit in the back and donate. And that's it. I think it's a combo. I think I don't bother myself too much with like, what's the best theory of change? And just try to add the other

things like, how do we get more support there? You know.



Omkari Williams 32:48

Yeah, that's a really good point. And finding that balance between listening and contributing is really, it's always fluid. But it's the thing that I think makes the most difference and allows us to be most valuable ultimately, so



Xander Schultz 33:03

Yeah, yeah, I just socialize everything by nature. Like I also will like call Rashad Robinson up right away and be like, is this a good idea that's helpful? I want to do this. Is this good, not good? What do you think, you know? And so it's great I've got access to Rashad but like, you know, just find some friends that are pretty smart in a space. People want allies, people want help. This is hard shit.



Omkari Williams 33:24

Yeah, it really, really is. And there are always people who knows so much that there's someone in every community, who is Stacey Abrams, or who is Rashad Robinson. You know, there's someone there that you can go to and say, Is this a good idea? Or am I absolutely going to get my ass kicked for this?




Xander Schultz 33:46


Right, just just to ask, but I don't I also don't want to make it you know, I think a lot of people have been bitten recently by be trying to be a participant in saying the wrong thing. Right, trying to step into and saying the wrong thing. And and then being like, maybe I don't know enough, and I'm just gonna keep saving the trees because the trees it's not a it's not that volatile of a topic. No one's gonna yell at me. Everyone likes recycling, you know? And so just don't be afraid to just it's okay to fuck up. It's okay. You don't want to do too often. Ask before. Ask before you do things, find mentors, but don't let it dissuade you from being a part of a very important fight. We need everyone we can.





Omkari Williams 34:27


I completely agree. And I would like to also just say on the other side of that, for the people who are further along on a path, having some grace for people who fuck up is really, really important.

 Xander Schultz 34:43
Totally.

 Omkari Williams 34:44
You know? So it goes both ways. Don't be afraid to fuck up. And don't belittle people who do. You know, we're all struggling to figure out how to navigate this. So, you know, let's just be kind to each other in the process. It's so important.


 Xander Schultz 34:57
I think you know, if any movement going to eventually get where it wants to go, it needs to be inclusive and bring folks in because we by default need the majority of people to support whatever it is if they're going to be adopting a democracy, etc. And so I think it's almost like when you have a band you really like, but it's not that big yet and then starts to be popular. And like, it's rooted in such a weird place, I think it's rooted in the same desire of like, Oh, this is my thing. And this is my identity. And if you know the things I know, I'm losing that, like if you, you know basic Karen, are using the language I use. And so I'm gonna go create new language, I'm gonna go say something, say something else, I'm gonna make it seem like you still need to come to me for information. And maybe they do. But I don't think it's all the time rooted in the best place. It's like this desire to like, get on top of people.


 Omkari Williams 35:45
Yeah.


 Xander Schultz 35:45
For these things. You're right, we need we need more grace all the way around. That doesn't mean people aren't accountable. You can have accountability and grace, those things can coexist.

 Omkari Williams 35:54
Yes, absolutely. And the idea of these cliques is what gets us into the position that we're in,


because really, knowledge should be this thing that is generously shared and spread. And if we're just like, I'm gonna hold on to this, because it gives me a little more power, we are totally missing the boat.

 Xander Schultz 36:15
Totally.

 Omkari Williams 36:16
Yeah. Well, I'd like to end this by asking you what I ask my guests, which is, I would like you to give us three simple things that people can do to move forward any of the things, all of the things, we've talked about today,

 Xander Schultz 36:32
Oh, amazing. I would say like a good place to start, whoever is listening to us, imagine the best version of the world that you think is possible. Whatever you think is possible, forget me, forget, like, you know, the hippie vision or whatever my social justice. Whatever you think, is possible that we can get to, and just make it your mission to start moving, helping us move towards that world. And so as a baseline, you know, before you do anything, you know, I'd love your help in the stuff I'm doing. But just try that as a practice, and, you know, see what kind of world you're envisioning. If it's the best one you can possibly envision that you think we can get to hopefully, it's exciting to you. And just try to start making that more part of you know, who you are, if you're not already hyper activated, just just helping us get there. Because we need all the help we can.

 Xander Schultz 37:22
More specifically, you know, in our conversation, if you are excited about helping displaced people, it's an underfunded space. So if you go to WWBT.org, we would love your help creating these community centers that are that are often the only sources of joy for, places of joy for a lot of these folks.

 Xander Schultz 37:41
And if you are moved to create a more just equitable America, we have an organization called One For Democracy where we ask people to dedicate 1% of their net worth to democratic infrastructure, which is a code word for community organizers. And maybe a

couple of other things like getting rid of gerrymandering and rank choice voting and all that stuff. We'd love you to take the pledge and be a part of that. And then we're currently figuring out what to do. We're gonna rebrand Defeat By Tweet because it looks like Trump's getting his ass kicked off Twitter. And so we're gonna figure out what that rebrand is, when I know it'll come back at you. And maybe you can share with everyone.



Omkari Williams 38:17

I would be delighted to do that. Xander, this has been such a pleasure. I can't even tell you, I'm so glad that we got to speak. And I am going to be putting the links to the organizations that you're affiliated with in the episode notes so that people have an opportunity to go check them out. And I just want to say thank you so much. This was really great.



Xander Schultz 38:39

Yes, lovely speaking with you. Thank you for your time. Thank you for providing a platform for me.



Omkari Williams 38:43

Absolutely. Thank you. While we're still in the midst of the pandemic. We're also at the beginning of a new American administration, one that has vowed to address concerns such as the refugee crisis, DACA, the climate crisis, and other social justice issues as a priority. We can all make an impact. So follow the advice that Zander just gave us. Find the cause that calls to you and then really dive in. Thank you all so much for listening. I'll be back with another episode of Stepping Into Truth very soon. Until then, remember that change starts with story. So keep sharing yours.