



All the Best Podcast
Episode 27: “The Next Steps in Volunteerism”
Featuring President and CEO of Points of Light, Natalye Paquin

Natalye: May 29th, 1997 It's hard to believe that we are the old fogeys that we used to watch march by and even laughed at various reunions, and various schools, and various colleges over the years. Yet, we are them. And yet, it doesn't feel that way. I don't feel old, bent over, out of it, looking grumpily at life. Life is good, and Barbara and I are very happy. Blessed might be a better word. 1929, the stock market crashed that year, and yet, my classmates and I were privileged to enroll at GCDS in that fall. The Depression came and persisted, and yet, my classmates and I were lucky we lived in nice houses. We had loving parents who cared and who could pay the doctor when we were sick and could pay the school to give us a fine education that started us off in the right direction. In the process of giving us the right stuff, yes, we were privileged. Years later, when I went into politics, privilege was used against me. Some adversarial and elite editorialist used my background, my privileged background, to say, "How can this man, sheltered from the tough realities in this world, really understand the problems of America, really empathize with the poor, the homeless, the underprivileged?" But you know what the critics missed? They missed values, the values we were taught at home and right here at GCDS. Our parents taught us to care. And the faculty here seem to be intent on inculcating us into the fact that we had an obligation to care. Indeed, we had an obligation to help others. Our critics called it noblesse oblige. I was later to call it being one of a thousand Points of Light.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best," the official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

We're Mountaineers, volunteers.
We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles.
Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, "Write your mother, serve your country." And he said, "Tell the truth." And I've tried to do that in public life all through it.

And we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends, are the most important investment you will ever make.

George: We stand the night before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All the Best."

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Sam: Natalye Paquin is president and CEO of Points of Light, the nonprofit founded by my grandfather, George H.W. Bush, in 1990. Points of Light inspires, equips, and mobilizes people to take action that changes the world. Each day, Points of Light issues the Daily Point of Light Award, which my grandfather started in the White House, and he signed it until his passing. Natalye and my uncle, Neil Bush, now sign them daily, recognizing volunteers around the country. Natalye has had an extraordinary leadership career in nonprofits and she spent more than 15 years in the education sector in legal and executive roles in Philadelphia and Chicago. And in addition to this, she's been a lifelong volunteer. Natalye, welcome to "All the Best."

Natalye: Thanks, Sam. It's great being here.

Sam: Natalye, you were no stranger to volunteerism, service, and philanthropy before you took the reins of the Points of Light organization in 2017. Can you talk about your journey that has led to the day?

Natalye: I think, Sam, that you and I have something in common and it is family values. As a young girl, my family taught me a couple of things. One is that education and hard work were non-negotiable. And they also taught me to whom much is given, much is required. And so, I learned at a very young age that I had to give back. So the career path that I took, I believe, just led me to

Points of Light. I went to the same university that my parents went to, and then I went to law school at Chicago, was a civil rights lawyer for a number of years. I worked in education for about 15 years and found my way into the nonprofit sector really by volunteering. Each job that I was offered, was really because I was a volunteer for that organization. I had passion and I cared about the mission of that organization and at some point, they say, "Hey, you wanna come join us?" And when the position became available at Points of Light, someone reached out to me and asked me if I would take a look at it. And I did and I'm glad.

Sam: So, what did you know about the Points of Light and its reputation? What made you want to pursue the opportunity?

Natalye: I'd heard of Points of Light. I definitely knew that it was associated with President Bush, 41, and I knew that it was about volunteerism. I was living in New York at the time, so I knew about New York Cares and Chicago Cares as some of the affiliates. But I didn't have a full understanding of the breadth and the impact of the organization, Points of Light. We are a network of corporations, individuals, and nonprofits, in over 200 cities and 37 countries. And the mission is to inspire, equip, and mobilize people to take action. I think that interviewing for the job, meeting more people who are affiliated with the organization after I just learned so much, at a certain point, I was like, "Yeah, I really want this. I really want to be a part of this."

Sam: Oh, I know they're happy to have you. Natalie, what's the biggest thing you've learned since taking the job as President and CEO?

Natalye: One of the things that I know as a leader is you are only as good as the team you lead. Every leader is supported by a team and we, at Points of Light, have an exceptional team. And that includes our Board members who are volunteers, our partners who support us, and my colleagues. I consider all my colleagues as peers. And so, I think the most important thing is that you're only as good as your team. And then what I've also learned, and I think is very important as a leader is, in this world, where everything is on-demand, where people can present themselves in so many ways, transparency is key, and be your authentic self. I would say that those are the biggest lessons: a good team, being authentic, and being transparent.

Sam: You know, and we're talking right now in the spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shut down large swaths of American life and introduced us to the concept known as social distancing. How can you volunteer in a time of social distancing? And how has the Points of Light adjusted to this new reality?

Natalye: First of all, the health and safety of volunteers and people is always our first concern. In April, we celebrated Global Volunteer Month. And it was really about recognizing the power of people and all of the volunteerism that they do year-round. With COVID-19, we had to pivot a bit. And we felt like it was still very important to lift up volunteerism but because of the CDC guidelines and social distancing, it was also important to provide people with opportunities to give back from the comfort of their home or wherever they were. And so, we worked with our network and put together some toolkits. We have a website that really matches people with their interest and also provide ideas about how you can volunteer from your home. And that could include making face masks. You know, you've seen sewing circles, you've seen people writing letters to senior citizens, also writing letters of thank you to our first responders, putting together care packages for first responders or care packages for some of the students that are not in school. So, there are lots of different ways for people to continue to get engaged. And one of the things that we learned and saw, and it was just reinforced through COVID-19, is that people want to help. People really want to help.

Sam: During an extraordinary time like this, what causes have the most need?

Natalye: One of the big lessons that we've learned from COVID-19 is that the vulnerable are now more visible. When we have natural disasters, hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, floods, the vulnerable in those communities are visible and usually, we have time to prepare to support them. But COVID-19 hit us from nowhere, and it is relentless and has no boundaries. A couple of areas that we found where people really need support is in food and security. You'll notice many, many lines of people in their cars to try to get food. We've noticed healthcare and access to healthcare. The impact of COVID-19 is greater in some communities because of lack of healthcare. And then technology, I think, is also a big area coming to light. When you think about all of the students that are out of school and all of the students learning via distance learning, well, there's a certain percentage of students...and I know this because I've worked for 15 years in education. I worked in the Chicago Public Schools. I worked for the Philadelphia Public Schools, which is the third and fifth, at the time, largest school districts in the country. There are many students who do not have access to technology or if they do have a laptop that was provided for the student by their school, they may not have the internet connection. They may not have the bandwidth or if there is a family with two or three students, and this is a family of any class, there may be problems with, well, which student gets to work on the computer at what time. So I would say those were three really big areas: technology, healthcare, and food and security, that we see because of COVID but there are many, many vulnerable communities that are now more visible to

all of us. And my hope would be that through the next crisis, whatever that crisis is, that we will have less people that are hungry, and less people who had neglected healthcare, and less people who don't have access to technology. So, it's not just about resiliency, it is about how do you get in front of these issues before the next big crisis.

Sam: Natalye, going forward, what are the long-lasting implications of this pandemic? Has it altered life as we know it or volunteerism in any permanent way?

Natalye: I am sure that around the world, we will create a new normal. You know, your grandfather, I'm so inspired by his work. I'm so inspired by his words. I'm so inspired by the ideal that he shared with us and honestly, Sam, I feel very, very privileged and honored to lead the organization that was his idea and that has grown to be in so many cities and so many countries around this world. And what inspires me the most when I go back to some of his quotes, where he says, "The solution to any problem usually rests with an individual that says, 'I can help.' " And it's all about the light that is within each one of us. And it's all about people, the power, the best in people and when we come together, we can really solve problems and so, I do think that COVID-19 has highlighted that.

Sam: As a follow-up, you took over in 2017. My grandfather passed away in November of 2018. I wonder if you have any takeaways from being around him that you could share with us?

Natalye: Yeah, yeah. First of all, I met him at least five times. So, I've been to the home in Kennebunkport, in his office in Houston, you know, because Jean Becker, who was his longtime Chief of Staff, is also on our Board. I've been out to lunch with him and I will recall one story. We were in his office and this is kind of surreal for me. You know, Jean said, "Okay, you're gonna have to brief the President. Tell him how Points of Light is so he knows what's going on." So, I had my book, and I'm nervous, and I'm thinking, "I cannot believe that I am here, sitting in this office, and I'm about to brief the President on Points of Light." So, I pulled out my book and he looks at me, he says, "What's with the book?" I was like, put the book down, get yourself together, and let's just have a conversation. And so that, even in his late age, he wanted to make me feel comfortable. And he wanted me to know that it was okay, I didn't have to be so formal. Let's just have a conversation about Points of Light. And so, I collected myself, I put the book down, and I shared with him my thoughts about Points of Light. And so that, I think, is my fondest story.

Sam: Well, my grandfather was always very proud of the mission of the Points of Light and proud of your leadership in the time he got to know you. There's no question here. I just wanted to make sure that was on the record. But, Natalye, thank you so much for joining us on "All the Best" and sharing all these wonderful stories. I feel hopeful about volunteers in America, especially during this time when people are looking for hope. And I think the Points of Light, with your leadership, is gonna be a big part of helping us to feel hopeful.

Natalye: Thank you so much and all the best to you.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All the Best."

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America, the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

