#111 Finding Common Ground with Dream Corps CEO Nisha Anand

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SPEAKERS

Nisha Anand, Michelle Glogovac

M Michelle Glogovac 00:01

You're listening to the mice simplified life podcast and this is episode number 111.

M Michelle Glogovac 00:12

Welcome to the mice simplified life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present. Don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life and start taking action today. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac, and I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you while taking you on my own journey. This is my simplified life.

M Michelle Glogovac 00:46

Hi, friends. Welcome back to another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. We live in a world in which everyone has an opinion. And if you're on social media than you are seeing everyone vocalize those opinions. I know that personally, some of these views I have found disturbing. And I don't understand how we can all think so very differently on the same topics. My guest today has found a way to find common ground with those who think differently from her and many others. Dream core CEO Nisha nonde, is an activist leader. And my true definition of a world change maker. Nisha shares her story of how she grew up thinking that her way was the only way. But then an arrest in Burma changed all of that, and allowed her to recognize the importance of finding common ground with others. One of the things I love most about Nisha is her ability to bring common sense to the table. And to do so in a warm and welcoming way. She's also sharing what dream CT is and does and the future they are working towards for all of us. Hi, Nisha. Hello. I am stoked to talk to you. And I love that. It's becoming a regular thing since I just got to see recently, too. Yes, it has been wonderful. Can you take a moment to introduce yourself to everyone, please?

N Nisha Anand 02:12

Sure. I'm Nisha Nanda, and I'm the CEO of dream core.

M Michelle Glogovac 02:17

And what is Dream core? For those who don't know what that is, even though I talk about you?

N Nisha Anand 02:23

Well, we are a national social justice nonprofit founded by Van Jones. And we work on three big issues, criminal justice, reform, climate justice, and tech equity, some of the biggest problems facing America.

M Michelle Glogovac 02:37

And what exactly does that mean? Just, you know, I think we all know what criminal justice reform means. But, you know, can you go a little bit into what the other two components

N Nisha Anand 02:47

are? Absolutely. We really look towards the future at Dream core. And we try to think what solutions are going to propel us into the future. We're dreaming of one with freedom and dignity for all people. And so our motto here is closed prison doors and open doors of opportunity. So yeah, criminal justice reform is the closed prison doors part. It's pretty self explanatory. We are an over incarcerated nation. And most people come home and we need to make sure they're coming home better, and healed, and ready to help change the world and make the world a better place. So close prison doors is self explanatory. The open doors of opportunity is a little different, and what I think differentiates us from other nonprofits, our Green For All team and our dream core tech team, look at what are the jobs coming? What is the future we want to create? And how do we make sure that everybody has opportunity to get into that sector, and quite specifically, the people who've been left out and left behind? How do we ensure they not they don't just get like the great good paying jobs of the future, but they're creating in terms of dream coretec They're creating the future we're going to live into, they are coders and big tech companies. They're founders of new startups that are creating solutions to problems we have every day. And they're creating this world that guarantees what I said earlier that freedom and dignity for all people. I love that.

M Michelle Glogovac 04:13

I think there's so much more to dream corn, what you do, then what people might actually realize. And so I think it's important that, you know, they get that understanding and hear it directly from you. And you I think you're a big deal. And I think you're a big deal that needs to be talked about more. You're like a secret that needs to just be released.

N Nisha Anand 04:34

Well, you know, you've actually hit on a huge secret of the whole nonprofit sector. We are so under resourced and over capacity most of the time that we're really good at doing and very bad at telling. And

resourced and over capacity most of the time that we're really good at doing and very bad at telling. And so there are a lot of nonprofits, not just us and a lot of nonprofit leaders, not just me, who I think are doing amazing work and never cheerlead. They don't have cheerleaders. They don't have time to stop and say, oh my goodness, look at this Big win, because we just are too busy doing so you've tapped on, you know, the shadow side of nonprofit work for sure.

M Michelle Glogovac 05:06

Well, I'm your cheerleader now. So I'll be rooting for you and shouting from the mountaintops about all of your accomplishments from here on out.

N Nisha Anand 05:15

And I will do the same for you, Michelle. Oh, thank you. You're doing great stuff as well.

M Michelle Glogovac 05:20

Oh, I appreciate that. Let's talk about how you got to where you are. Because I feel like your story makes you a natural born activist, leader change maker, like you came out of the womb to do this.

N Nisha Anand 05:35

I you know, I feel that way. And when you ask anyone in my family, about me now or about me, then they'll tell you. Yeah, Nisha has always been that way. But I think that's something as parents we, we have the luxury to do, we can find those markings of what the kids are going to become. And I'm already seeing it now with my teenagers. So yeah, there is part of me that feels like I was born to do this. I was, my parents are immigrants. I'm a first generation American. And when my dad came to this country, you know, he had an American dream, like most immigrants of that era, of the late 60s and early 70s, that came over, they have this idea that America meant a better future for themselves and their kids, and they were going to make it. And I felt like I was born not just for my father's American dream, but for all of the dreams he he would have in the future. And so yeah, I came with big shoes to fill for sure. But I also came, knowing how to build bridges. Being a first generation kid, you are the bridge between the old world and the new. I'm often the translator of customs and cultures to my whole extended family. And then here in America, I get to translate back what we do and why we do it. Today, you know, I woke up in and it marks the Diwali season for us. And it's a really exciting time. And I get to watch not just me try to explain it to my staff members, but I watch my kids get to explain it. And so it's, it's as bridge building back and forth, that is natural for first generation kids and became really natural for me. And I think that's a lot of the work that we do here at Dream core is trying to build those bridges.

M Michelle Glogovac 07:18

And, you know, you mentioned something that I've noticed in my son's class as well, is that we are seeing more and more encouragement from the teachers to share cultural traditions. You know, whereas I want to say like, in the past, it was okay. And then we reached a point where it was what do we say? What don't we say, right? We shouldn't educate, you know, everyone on differences and diversity, because we don't want to offend anyone. But it's it to me, it seems like at least from what you're saying, and from what my

son's experiencing in school, is that we are being more open to hearing about what others are celebrating and what that means to them. And I think that's a great move forward. You know, when it feels like we've taken a bunch of steps back, especially recently,

N **Nisha Anand** 08:06

I totally, I completely agree. And I think what we've learned or what I hope, what I hope it shows is that there is some beautiful parts of every single culture in their beautiful parts of every single human being. Of course, there there are. So some dark sides. It's not all sun, you know, there's no culture that's just perfect, right? There's no system, that's perfect. There's no person that's perfect. We know this inherently. So I hope that this ability to celebrate all different cultures is showing that like, let's show some of the beautiful parts of different cultures. That's what we're missing on our one on one interactions. That's one of the things I want to do here at Dream core is show that even if you disagree with me on 20 30% of things, even if I think some of your ideas are ugly, or not perfect or bad, there is going to be some beauty and some other things that you think and say and have been through that we can find common ground on. And we've lost that. And so I hope, if we can point to in schools in this is not universal. Absolutely. In terms of the climate we're in there are absolutely some cool some schools right now, especially around this critical race theory debate. And things like that, that are trying to shut down that sharing and understanding. But I hope the sign that there's more openness to it means that we can find our ways back to each other and be open to individuals, just one on ones who might one on one people who might think differently than us.

M **Michelle Glogovac** 09:36

And you brought up those beautiful segue into common ground and you've done a TED Talk that everybody needs to go watch because over 1.5 million people have viewed it. I've actually watched it a couple times myself and your story of how you reached common ground. I want to I want to talk about that. And I also want to discuss how do we find find common ground with people who have completely opposing views, which we're now seeing more and more of, especially on social media. And I think it's so easy to hide behind a computer and just type out whatever you want. And to me, it's been like, family and friends have come out of the woodwork where I'm like, what backwoods did you come out of? Because that is not okay to say it to think it. Who are you? Unfriend, unfollow, snooze? How do we reach that common ground? So can you tell us about how you reached your first common ground? Kind of that's that's what I'll say. And then how we all go forward, as you know, regular people?

N **Nisha Anand** 10:42

Yeah. You know, I look back. And I think there's all sorts of things that, that I realized we're actually finding common ground. But I would like to say that was always my path. I was a radical activist who, as a young feminist, and I was really into animal rights. And in high school and college, I was pretty radical. I was certainly, I certainly had one set of views. And my views were the only views and were the right views. And if you didn't agree with me, while you had no part of what I was doing, that certainly was a part of who I was, I can look back now and say no, no, but there was always this common ground element to, but I was a radical activist, I spent a lot of time being arrested for different causes. And the first time though, I remember having a common ground moment, it's actually a pretty drastic story. But in 1998, I was arrested in Myanmar, the military dictatorship of Myanmar. And I went there with a group of 18 activists from around the world, all different ages, from all different countries. And we handed out these small pro democracy leaflets, they said, quite simply, we are your friends from around the world. And we support

your hopes for human rights and democracy. That's all it said, highly illegal in a military dictatorship, absolutely. Everything that is put out has to be approved by the government. And it commemorated the 10 year anniversary. Ada was August 8 of 1988, when over 10,000, students who were leading a pro democracy uprising were murdered. And I went back in 98, to commemorate that time, all 18 of us were arrested, we were sentenced to five years of hard labor, and spent only about eight days in jail before we were deported. Thing is right after our trial and our deportation. I mean, I chose this cause because it was important. And it was so obvious the the horrible atrocities that were going on in Myanmar at the time, and still today. They've had breakthroughs, where it looked like it was moving towards democracy in such big ways. And then we just saw a coup that that brought the military dictatorship back into complete power, just in the last year. It was a cause that was easy for me to get involved in. And I had that fearlessness of youth that was like, I can do this. It's important. I, you know, I look back now. And I would just die if my children were arrested in a military dictatorship. So now I understand what I put my father through. But on our way home, there was a US congressman from New Jersey, Representative Chris Smith, who was on the Human Rights Committee at that time. And he flew all the way to Myanmar, to try to get us out, because there were six of us from the US that were part of that group that were arrested. And he flew over. And Representative Chris Smith is still in Congress, and he is a Republican. And he flew over to try to get us out and secure our freedom. And I shared this long flight back with him. And I thought I remember the night before we were deported. I thought this is my opportunity. I'll be so close to power. I need to tell him all my thoughts, I need to convince him and my views that we don't agree on. And you know, should I really just I was also a debate nerd. I debated in high school in college. So I'd love to get into a political arguments. And I thought, well, he's a captive audience. I'll spend the next you know, 20 hours on a plane.

M Michelle Glogovac 14:14

Oh, yeah, no way,

N Nisha Anand 14:16

about, you know, all of my views. But something else happened that night. And I don't know what it was maybe being through the, you know, possible five years of hard labor I was I was facing. And I thought, no, let's talk about what we have in common. And so we spent the time on the flight talking a lot about human rights, which was an area that both of us were passionate about international human rights, that we completely agreed on so many things. And I thought, yeah, I can fight him on a lot of things. And maybe I'll throw in one or two punches. But right now he's my ally, and I can do a lot more good. By being connected and staying connected and just calling him out on things I didn't like and you know, I look back on that now and I think it was a A big turning point for me and one understanding power. And to understanding how using the things we have in common is a much more powerful position than always staying in opposition, and refusing, you know, to work with people who disagree.

M Michelle Glogovac 15:16

I love that that's, that's, quote worthy right there. And so how do we continue this? Because what we're seeing today is completely the opposite of finding common ground. And I think that's whether it's me as just a regular, you know, mom, who has my views and opinions to those who are actually in Congress in the Senate who are supposed to be representing us, and I'm not sure who they're representing besides themselves.

N Nisha Anand 15:46

Yeah. Yeah, I do feel on my darker days. I'm an optimist. I don't think I'm a naive optimist, where I just think everything's gonna be wonderful. But I am a determined optimist. I've seen enough hard work, pay off, that things can change, with enough determination and hard work and enough love. And we can certainly come back to love. So I say I'm an optimist, because I also want to know, I, you I, you know, I have some down days, they're probably not many, if you ask my kids or my husband, I'm, they find me annoyingly Sunny. But there are some dark days. And on those I do think about how what's happened to the field of public service, I grew up thinking that if you were an elected official in the US, even if you wanted, even if you had a different way of solving a problem, you woke up every day wanting to be in service and be a servant leader, and figure out how to bring all of humanity forward. I thought that now I you know, I could have been naive back then. But at least I mean, you don't get a ton of money. Well, as your salary, I should say, there are a lot of ways that politicians can make money, but they don't have crazy salaries, you had to do it because you loved the people. You can't lead a country you don't love, you can't lead a people you don't love. And so that used to be the basis of public service. And so on my darkest days, I just think the entire and I'll call it an industry now, it's, you know, the entire sector, but the whole industry of politics is is does feel like I can't find those good people anymore. But on the good days, I know they're there. And I've actually had the privilege of working some with some from every side of the aisle. And it was a hard learning. When I interviewed for the job. I have a dream core. So I started here about eight years ago. And I was interviewing for a fundraising job because that was my background. And I had my final interview was, was an interview with Van Jones, this was eight or nine years ago. And he told me what he was up to, and kind of the big things we would do together back then there was a staff of five. So it was really like you're joining this team, you know, and they're just a few of you. Here's what we're going to do. And he talks to me about bipartisan criminal justice reform. And I remember laughing and telling him that's an oxymoron. There's no such thing as bipartisan criminal justice reform. To me, that was the most divided issue that I had been a part of I had been on the streets, protesting all sorts of violations in the criminal justice, criminal justice system, from the death penalty to political prisoners to police brutality. I was outside of the Republican National Convention in 2000, organizing 1000s of people to protest this and there was not a single Republican on the street with me. So I kind of laughed, and I thought there's no way this is a polarized issue. And he said, Let me walk you through it. And Van is a visionary. He's always he has been over and over again ahead of his time. He has an idea before anyone else, people think he's completely ridiculous. And then, you know, a few months later, here it comes. So he told me that he was on a TV show with Newt Gingrich called crossfire where they sit Republicans and Democrats and they debate issues. And what he had learned during that interaction was that both man and I and everyone I had worked with Thus far we come at the criminal justice system, from an angle of injustice, that this is a racist system from the beginning that has unfairly treated black and brown people that disproportionately locks up folks for, for crimes, black folks for crimes that white folks commit and do not get time for. We've seen this system. We think it's unfair, it's unjust, it's torturous, it's brutal. We don't like it. That's why I've always wanted to change it. And he said, but look, what I've learned is that Republicans want to change it to

N Nisha Anand 19:43

the fiscal conservatives look at it and see a system with a lot of taxpayer dollars in they have to raise taxes to keep up this level of incarceration. So fiscal conservatives hate it. The religious conservatives hate it because they care about second chances, and they care about redemption. They're usually anti death penalty. And they know that the current system doesn't allow for that, that redemption, the second chances. And he said in the Libertarians also think that there's too much policing, especially around drugs and criminalization, and they just don't like the overreach of government and what prisons represent. So you have three parts of the Republican Party that want to reform the system for completely different

reasons than I do. But they still want to see reform, surely, we can get something done. And I thought about the 20 years now that I've been in the movements for change, and we've gotten very little done, one or two cases overturned a few people out who should be like, there has not been any massive reform in my time there. It's just been more locked them up. I grew up in the era of three strikes, you're out mandatory minimums, I was a high school senior when the 94 crime bill came out, I grew up in a lock up era, I wanted to see change. So I jumped on the ship and said, Alright, let's try it. And with that coalition of Republicans who had different reasons for being there, and as we passed something called the first step Act, which was really hard to pass, but it was the largest criminal justice reform bill in generations, the only one I had seen in my time. And it was a first step, it was a federal criminal justice bill, that allowed for some changes that released folks from prison in the entire time that we fought on the bill, we had opposition from the left and the right, the left saying it didn't go far enough, the right saying it's going to just release criminals on the street. We started this process during the Obama administration. Of course, when I started on staff, and we had the moment when van came to us and said, Look, we can keep pushing during the Trump administration, and get this bill passed. Or we can stop and wait for a more favorable government. I can tell you this, every single person inside the people we say we care about, they do not want us to stop. So I'm going to continue in this team is going to continue. And we're gonna pass this under this administration if we can. And we found a way to do it. And like I said, a lot of folks thought it was compromised, a lot of folks thought it wasn't good. They said, how can you find common ground with folks, to this day, Michelle 18,000, people have come home because of that bill. 18,000. Amazing. So I just look back. And I think for all of the folks who say you can't find common ground, or it's the weak position, or it's compromise, there. 18,000 people reunited with their family, outside of these dungeons, back home, we need more of that. And so I think strategically, it makes sense. find common ground wherever you can, these are durable solutions that have big impact. They scale it away, our small movement solutions haven't been able to, I think you do that for a strategic reason. I also think you do it for a moral reason. I want to build a future that's inclusive. I was excluded. As a young kid, most of us were we understand what that means when you're nodding, included. And that's why I'm a strong progressive. I want to include more people, and therefore I want my solutions to include more people. And that means reaching across the aisle.

M Michelle Glogovac 23:20

And how do you work with someone who doesn't have that mindset? Because I think there's, to me, there's almost like a calmness about you of, you know, this is what I want. And I'm willing to do this. And yet, I've seen opposing sides who are so adamant and angry. And, you know, they feel like their ways the right way. And it's the only way, how do you approach these kinds of individuals who aren't open to finding a common ground to listening to just being open

N Nisha Anand 23:54

overall? Well, I think I understand it, because I was that way. Um, and I also just think that way of being is important to having the fears of fire that wants to point out injustice every time you see it. That's critical. Those are the folks who have led the way on so many movements in history, to expose an injustice is an important role you play in changing the world. So I don't want to say that's not a good way to do it. I think it's an important way. And those folks might not be at the common ground table that I built, but their voices are definitely a part of what we're doing. Absolutely. That's, that's where I come from too. And on the other side, the folks who who hate and there's absolute hate on the other side, too, that would look at me and tell me to go back to India or something even worse. Those folks also have their place. I think it really fires us up to look at and see this is the stuff we still have to change It has its place, this is how society works. They also aren't sitting at the table. If we focus too much on the folks that won't ever come

to the table, and don't mean to, we're missing the majority, the giant, the millions and millions of people who do want to move this country forward and don't care about either pole and aren't stuck in their way. I think because the loudest elements are the loudest elements, they get a lot of attention. But I think there's so many awesome people who are willing to look for something different. And and don't have a place to do that. And so that's what I want to build come from really, my strong, very strong progressive values, but be able to build something where everyone has a seat. So I don't need to focus on converting people, I need to focus on what my role is in changing the world. And I feel pretty comfortable in this role now that that I'm the sound table. That's great to hear.

M Michelle Glogovac 26:01

I love your message overall, too, because it encompasses not just what you do, but it can be used across really anything, anything that involves people and opposing viewpoints. And it doesn't have to be political. You know, it can be a PTA meeting for you know, all I intended, you know, examples. It's really a lesson that I think that you could be teaching more than just the audience that we have. Now, it goes so much deeper, whether we talk about corporations, or we talk about the PTA, or anything in between, that you can find these common ground areas, and that everyone has value, no matter what their viewpoint is.

N Nisha Anand 26:47

Absolutely. And I don't think you know this about me, but I did spend three years as the PTA president. I've done my time there as well. So I wholeheartedly agree, I think it's really important.

M Michelle Glogovac 26:59

I'm going for room mom and den leader, so I'm going to sit on my hands for PTA. Oh, I love it. What are your next big plans? What's what's coming up for you?

N Nisha Anand 27:11

Well, right now, my team is all headed to not all of them, but a few of them are headed to Glasgow for cop 26 A big climate summit that's happening right now. And to me, that's really important. I think it's the next era. You know, when we started the criminal justice reform fight, everyone said it was not possible. There was no bipartisan agreement that could happen and certainly not under the Trump administration. And we proved them wrong. And I'm hearing the exact same things around climate, anything you pass won't go far enough, you're never going to get Republicans on board. And I don't think that's true. And that's what the big thing our team has set out to prove is that there is common ground around climate, there's common sense Common Ground legislation, that does have a lot of bipartisan agreement. And if we focus too much on the areas we disagree, we're going to miss the stuff we can get done. And I I haven't figured out the right way to message how important the climate is. But what I know in my heart is that if we can stop the warming by even a tiny, tiny little, you know, 100th of a percentage, you stopped some suffering of millions of people, we've seen the climate incidents hurt so many people, every degree is millions of intense hundreds of a degree is millions and millions of more suffering. So for me, any common sense and common ground legislation we can get past that can help stop some of the suffering or prevent some of the suffering is really important. It's something I have to get onboard into. So I think we're looking at big climate breakthroughs. For us, and I think it's possible I'm seeing a lot of good signs. So I'd say that's one of the big things we're up to.

M Michelle Glogovac 28:57

I love that and you know, my husband, I were talking about this recently too, about climate change and how really you don't have to be an environmentalist, you don't have to be you know, go green all the way green to believe this, you can literally see that there is climate damage, there is things going on in our world that are hurting our world. Yeah. And you know, you have to acknowledge it doesn't you know, no matter what it is, it is happening and we're seeing it so I think it's wonderful because I think small change can equal big change and that's what you're doing. Yeah. Oh, I love you Nisha, you're you're a change maker. You truly truly are and I just say so appreciate your you just you have this it keep going back to calm. It's like you just put you put me at ease. And yet you're tackling such huge issues in such a common sense way. Truly, that's what it comes down to.

N Nisha Anand 30:03

I think, Well, I appreciate the kind words. And I think so I think that right now we've lost a lot of common sense things are so extreme and so bad. And anyone who experienced the worst of the pandemic, I, you know, I cannot imagine what a lot of people are going through right now I try to, and it's such extreme times, we really do need to find our way back to less extreme ways of being, that there is a way it's a day by day way, you know, to get back to where we need to be, and to hopefully build a better future. And it's hard. I think, for the folks who have spirit experience, the intensity of it. And just my son's high school, they're dealing with like daily pranks, kids coming to school, drunk school property being destroyed. There's an extremism that's everywhere, on the airports, people fighting each other on airplanes, we have this increase in violence, we have folks saying I don't, I can't go back to work, it's just not worth it. Like, it is an extreme time, I think we need a calmness to know that. And we actually need a light, we do need some guiding light, some North Star that we can find a way back to each other, we can find a way to solve tough problems. I think we just had a year where our leaders weren't doing a good job of it, or few years of it. We're gonna have to find light elsewhere. And I really see some of our leaders at Dream corps being that that light are trying to be like, Hey, we can do hard things, we can do them together. And I wish like back to the beginning of the conversation, that nonprofits were better at telling the stories because they are all over nonprofits everywhere have these stories where you can see the heroes stepping up, you can see just local everyday people taking care of each other. You know, whether it's just carpooling, other kids to school, helping other kids with homework, right, that's out there. And we're not telling those stories, or when it's passing big legislation. There were some amazing wins. This week, we look at Virginia as this big election debacle. But there were a lot of positive things that happen. We are so bad at telling those stories, but I hope we get better at them. And that can help inspire some people.

M Michelle Glogovac 32:20

I hope so too. And I so appreciate you and the dream core team and everything you guys are doing. Can you share where everyone can find you, please?

N Nisha Anand 32:29

Yes, our website is the dream core and core is spelled like Marine Corps and Peace Corps. So ce o RPS, the dream corps.org

M Michelle Glogovac 32:38

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Nisha, thank you. Friends, I truly feel a sense of calm when talking to Nisha, I feel like there's really hope for our world and especially our country, when I hear her viewpoints. We need to find common ground with one another, to respect each other, and to learn from one another. Nisha also brought up the incredible reminder that we need to look at nonprofits and the work they are doing. Let's recognize them more. Let's learn from their messages. let's promote them and let's help fund them. Our futures all depend on finding this common ground and making the world a better place for each and every one of us. Together we really can make a difference. Until next week, share your voice. Take time to listen and discover the common ground