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Nate Benson: I'm Nate Benson, and this is Latitude. Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker is the president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo.

Clotilde: We connect people, ideas, and resources to improve lives in Western New York.

Nate Benson: Her story in America starts in 1968.

Clotilde: I actually came to Buffalo in 1968 with my family, as Cuban exiles. We were resettled here through the Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement program. For the first two years of our stay here, we were completely provided for by the public safety net and by charitable dollars from people like yourselves who didn't know me.

Nate Benson: This week on the podcast, presented by the University at Buffalo Center for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness, my cohost, Professor Darren Treadway, and I talk with Clotilde about immigrating to the United States from Cuba and how she spent her life and career improving the lives of students in the greater Buffalo area. The UB School of Management Center for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness, also known as CLOE, is a group of researchers, scholars and experts who work to create more effective leaders and organizations. CLOE offers programs, training, speakers and conferences to help people lead at all levels of their organizations and in the world. Darren, how are you today?

Darren Treadway: I am wonderful, enjoying this 80-degree weather swing.

Nate Benson: How's the semester going at UB so far?

Darren Treadway: Fantastic.

Nate Benson: Just trying to get back in the swing of things, huh?

Darren Treadway: Right back in the swing of things.

Nate Benson: What's the expectation this semester for you?

Darren Treadway: Just same as always, try and teach a couple of classes and publish a couple of papers and all that good stuff.

Nate Benson: Well, I know you're super excited about our guest today, Clotilde.

Darren Treadway: Absolutely.

Nate Benson: Thank you for joining us on the podcast this morning. For those who don't know you, give us the quick pitch of who you are and what you do.

Clotilde: So I am Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, and I'm the president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, and we connect people, ideas and resources to improve lives in Western New York.

Nate Benson: For 100 years old, you look great. No, I'm just kidding. The Community Foundation just turned 100, not you, obviously.

Clotilde: Yes.

Nate Benson: But that's a great accomplishment, and so 100 years the Community Foundation's been pouring resources into this community, right?

Clotilde: Yes, sir, absolutely. It's a very significant milestone, and we feel very privileged to be at this point in time with the foundation to celebrate for a century of service.

Nate Benson: Now how long have you been with the Community Foundation?

Clotilde: I've been with the Community Foundation now 14 years.

Nate Benson: Now in your time there, what has that transformation of Buffalo looked like from your point of view, from the Community Foundation point of view?

Clotilde: It's an incredible time to be doing the work of the Community Foundation in Buffalo, because this community, over the last, I would say, 20-plus years has had a real awakening. The awakening has been around an embrace of our very unique assets. Whether you look at the transformation of the Buffalo River or the restoration of architectural treasures, such as the H. H. Richardson complex or the Darwin Martin House, or you're looking at the elevation of an arts and cultural sector that is really second to none, whether you're looking at performing arts or visual arts, this community has said, wait a minute, we've got what it takes to be the best in class. We are simply going to leverage our very unique authenticity of place to make that happen.

Nate Benson: How does the everyday Buffalo resident see the benefit of what the Community Foundation has been doing for the last century?

Clotilde: Literally, in thousands of ways. Last year, so in 2018, we put out \$22 million in charitable grants on behalf of our clients. That represents thousands of grants that are touching tens of thousands of people throughout the very inspiring non-profits in this region, addressing any and all issues across the age continuum, so in really myriad ways.

Nate Benson: It's kind of that behind the curtain, so to speak. It's impacting. You don't necessarily know how, until you really think about it, right?

Clotilde: Yes, exactly.

Darren Treadway: What is it about the people of Buffalo that inspires you so much to be such a passionate advocate for our future?

Clotilde: Well, the people here are the real deal. The more you travel, the more you appreciate and the more you exhale when you land at the Buffalo Niagara Airport, because the people here are just authentic, and they're incredibly generous. So the growth of the foundation over these 100 years is representative of that generosity. Many of our clients are individuals that you haven't heard of, because, by choice, they do their work anonymously. But I can tell you one example, a teacher who taught her entire life and lived very prudently and left millions of dollars in her will to support education in this community. That's the stuff we get to work with, and that's pretty powerful.

Clotilde: The generosity of this community is something that's very personal to me. I actually came to Buffalo in 1968 with my family. As Cuban exiles, we were resettled here through the Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement program. For the first two years of our stay here, we were completely provided for by the public safety net and by charitable dollars from people like yourselves who didn't know me or my family. So I came to philanthropy as a beneficiary, and for that I hold a great debt of gratitude. So I feel very honored to be able to pay forward through my work at the Community Foundation.

Nate Benson: So it's safe to say ... Early on in your life, were you kind of driven to want to be a part of something, from a career standpoint, that gave back to the community?

Clotilde: Absolutely. I wouldn't say from a career standpoint. I actually came to this career through my voluntary work. It was really through volunteer work. I joined an organization called the Junior League. It's a women's leadership development organization, and it teaches leadership through service. That led to all sorts of opportunities that led me to this position at the Community Foundation. I'm actually a teacher by profession. I have my master's in education from UB.

Darren Treadway: Alumni, there we go.

Clotilde: Yes, I'm a UB alum, proud alum.

Nate Benson: Looking back at the 100-year history of the Community Foundation ... And we get this question a lot with 43North, like, who's your favorite company? We always use the line, they're all our children. We love them equally but differently. But is there a greatest achievement or a list of big top-three achievements that the Community Foundation really likes to put their hat on and say we did this?

Clotilde: Well, the we for us is really our collective relationships with all of our clients. We have 400 active clients, and we carry on the legacies of an additional 500 clients at the Community Foundation. Those numbers continue to grow over time, so I would say that is our greatest achievement, that clients continue to recognize the unique value proposition of the Community Foundation and helping them carry out their charitable goals. That growth speaks for itself. So I would say, first and foremost, it's the generosity of people in Western New York and how that is reflected in the growth of the Community Foundation platform.

Clotilde: There's a subset of our clients that establish endowments in their name to address the changing needs of this community forever. Our board is very strategic as to how it directs those very precious assets. The board actually goes into deep consultation with the community. This past round of revisiting our community goals engaged over 900 residents living in low-income neighborhoods, because we wanted to hear from people with lived experience and understand what's important to them. The four goals that emerged from that were improving educational achievement and workforce readiness. As you know, the leading indicator of economic health for a region is the level of education of its residents. So to the degree that we can continue to make progress there, our resurgence will be powered forward.

Clotilde: The second goal is to increase racial ethnic equity. We need to mobilize and maximize our human capital. We've got 140,000 jobs that are coming open in the next eight years, and we are not going to have 140,000 people move into Buffalo to fill those jobs. We need to grow our own, so workforce and education go hand in hand. We need to ensure that everyone is part of our economy, and that needs to be focused through a racial equity lens in our community. We have tremendous opportunity for growth in that area. Then preserving and protecting our unique natural assets, water at the top of that, and access to those natural assets, and then strengthening the region as a center for architecture, arts and culture.

Clotilde: So that's the framework against which we deploy these changing needs assets from that subset of clients who want us to be very strategic in deploying the spending from their endowments over time. For every dollar we've put out from those endowments, those changing needs endowments, we've been able to bring 13 more dollars to the table, which is tremendous leverage, because of the work we're doing collectively here in Buffalo. That is really a testament to the strength of our public-private partnerships in this community that are being viewed nationally and internationally as a best-in-class model for innovating in the social change space.

Darren Treadway: I think when you talk about that, you're really talking about partner matching. I hate to say it. Oh, it's almost like a matchmaker service, right? You're trying to find the right fit, the right company, the right leader. That goes beyond just simple networking, beyond checking someone on LinkedIn. That goes to building credibility for yourself, credibility and trust for yourself and for your organization. Can you talk, perhaps, a little bit about that process, about how

you go about doing that and perhaps two organizations or more that you're able to link that perhaps didn't initially see the benefit of being each other's friends, so to speak?

Clotilde: Yeah. So we do a lot of work with strange bedfellows.

Darren Treadway: [crosstalk 00:11:07]

Clotilde: It's really wonderful, because, first of all, the challenges facing our community, Darren, far and away exceed the reach of any one organization or institution or government agency. If we're serious about bending the trends in this community, we have to work in cross-sector partnerships, public, private, non-profit, with coalitions of the willing. So we issue invitations around shared goals and shared challenges, so around ... Let's talk about ... I think a fine example of this that was announced in December of 2011 is the Say Yes Buffalo partnership. As a funder, we, every year, received, literally, hundreds of requests to address the challenges of under education across the age continuum. Those are important. Non-profits are doing really important work, and they're on the frontlines of addressing the symptoms of systems that could be improved. So we do that, and we continue to do that.

Clotilde: But we also have chosen to go upstream and address the systems that actually are upstream and need to be thought through and strengthened. We can only do that with the stakeholders from that system, in partnership with those that benefit from or should benefit from those systems, so education is at the top of that line. When you look at Say Yes, you see a partnership that includes the Buffalo Public Schools. It includes philanthropy. Central to that partnership are the parents, who are the customers, if you will, of that system; the unions, higher education, the business community, and the non-profit sector.

Clotilde: So you really have a 360 look at the system of education, and all of those individually were doing their best. But when you then bring everybody around the table ... And we meet. The Say Yes operating committee meets every three weeks now. It started out for the first three years every two weeks. When you sit next to people around the table, representing the mayor and the county executive and university presidents and parent leaders and the BPS board and the union leaders, when you sit around that table, focused on solutions to achieve a shared goal, that's powerful stuff. You can't make that stuff up. There's no shortcut for relationships, and the currency of social change is relationships, trusting relationships. That's what gets built over time. There isn't a shortcut for that.

Darren Treadway: If you can get them sitting together, all of a sudden those two people with opposing ideas realize that, really, their goals are identical. It's just how you get there that's the challenge.

Clotilde: Well, it's the theory of emergence that occurs, that two plus two is going to equal to a whole lot more than four when you have that type of constellation and operating rhythm. The proof is in the pudding. We have collectively ... And Dr. Cash has been a phenomenal asset to this effort. We have collectively redirected the meta trends around public education for the Buffalo Public Schools. We have increased the graduation rates since 2013 by 16 percentage points and increased the post-secondary matriculation rate by 10 percentage points. In so doing, we are closing and narrowing that achievement gap in our largest school district in the region. This is real, real stuff, and we have over \$50 million that have put on the table by the private sector to ensure college tuition for our graduates of Buffalo public and charter schools. So those are definite, tangible indicators of systems change.

Darren Treadway: That's fantastic.

Nate Benson: There's an emerging startup ecosystems in Buffalo. You're getting quite a lot of startups relocating to Buffalo, growing their businesses here. How has or how can the Community Foundation engage with this growing community so that they now become more ingrained with the community on an everyday basis?

Clotilde: Well, first of all, congratulations to 43North for the phenomenal success that you continue to experience and welcome to all who come to Western New York through the 43North door. So I view 43North and the whole startup universe as innovation. This community was built on innovation, from the grain elevators to the pacemaker to the air conditioner.

Darren Treadway: The coffee break, the most important one.

Clotilde: The coffee break, yes, absolutely. So 43North builds on and leverages that tradition, and we're all about, at the Community Foundation, social innovation. Say Yes is an example that I've just shared with you. The Racial Equity Roundtable is another example that is being watched very closely nationally for how to close those opportunity gaps in our community. We actually have two very specific programs or initiatives, organizations, that have been built through the leadership of the Community Foundation. One is the Western New York Impact Investment Fund, so that is an organization that is deploying impact capital, so it's putting more capital at work to support the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Impact investments are investments that seek both financial and social return, so we launched that fund in September of 2017. They've invested in three or four deals already. I think two of them are startups, so we've actually invested in growing capital within our local capital ecosystem that has this both financial return without compromise and social return without compromise. So this is very much a growing field internationally, and Buffalo didn't have an entity. So the Western New York Impact Investment Fund is an LLC that was established through the leadership of the Community Foundation. So that's capital, financial capital.

Clotilde: In terms of human capital, we have a very robust non-profit sector that needs strong leadership. charitySTRONG is an organization that we launched three years ago, and charitySTRONG is an online matching program that helps individuals that are new to this community or individuals who have been here their entire life and want to get more engaged in civic leadership find opportunities to serve on non-profit boards. It also builds that bridge for the organizations that are looking for leadership to folks that are interested in serving. So charitySTRONG is a very important new tool for the non-profit sector and for individuals who want to get more involved in finding solutions through missions that are tied to specific non-profits. It's important to know that 25% of the talent pool that is on charitySTRONG, that has already raised their hand and said we want to serve, are people of color. So it's another way that we can build a more inclusive community, which is the ticket to our future here in Western New York, building a more inclusive economy for the future of our region.

Darren Treadway: You mentioned leadership and non-profits, so if I could I want to ask a couple of questions first about you and then about other people who might want to get involved. When I hear your story, education, trying to pay it forward for the grace you were given when you came here, I really sense a degree of servitude, the idea we talk about as servant leadership, individuals who look to serve first, and then leadership emerges. I guess, first question I would ask is do you see yourself as that type of leader? If so, where do you think that passion and desire to serve came from?

Clotilde: Well, servant leadership is certainly an aspiration of mine. Leaders are always in process, I would say. We always have opportunity to improve and learn, and I would certainly describe myself as a lifelong learner. I guess, if I were to describe my leadership style, I would say collaborative. I subscribe to using all the brains I have and all the ones I can borrow. It really works. I've just experienced success over and over again. I don't get in a room with myself, limited to my own experience. I like getting in a room with as diverse a group of people as possible and agreeing on a shared goal that we want to accomplish together, and then co-creating solutions. The answers and the solutions don't lie within any one of us. I firmly believe they lie between and amongst us. So, to me, that collective co-creation of solutions really accelerates progress. That's my approach to leadership. It's served me really well. Most importantly, it's just a great gift to work with people who are passionate about a particular issue, like education or racial equity or the environment in this community. That's a real gift.

Darren Treadway: Do you think that's an advantage, I guess, in working in the non-profit community? Many of the people who are attached to these causes ... We talk about, in the business world, we want to get our employees engaged, so they give us more. They're more loyal. They're more passionate. Do you think that's an advantage? Because your collaborators, your workforce in some of these organizations, they're often there for a purpose. Do you think that helps or hinders progress in those areas?

Clotilde: Well, two assumptions I operate on: One is that everyone comes to work every day to succeed, and, secondly, that everyone is in search of their purpose. I've had the privilege of working in the public sector, in the private sector and in the non-profit sector. I'm a grow where you're planted type of person, and in each of those opportunities ... I mean, when I was in high school and college, I worked retail on Tuesday and Thursday nights, not exactly sexy. But I learned customer service, because talk about customer engagement. When the one person finally walked into my department, I was like I wanted to know all about their life. [crosstalk 00:22:12]

Nate Benson: How can I help you?

Clotilde: Right? So I learned customer service. I learned about constituencies while I worked in government. Of course, in non-profit, it's about a mission driven line of business and work. I think every job opportunity is really an opportunity to learn and grow. By making the most of every opportunity, you build a skill set that is portable for the next opportunity. I think hard work is not to be underestimated. I remember once I read on the wall of a restaurant a quote that said, "Success is the place in the road where preparation meets opportunity," so prepare, prepare, prepare, prepare, and you'll be ready when the opportunity presents.

Darren Treadway: I'm going to ask you to put on your educator hat, put on your master's degree and help me a little bit, because every day, well, every other day, I go teach MBAs, I go teach undergrads. This particular generation, I'm sure you're aware, has been criticized, perhaps wrongly so, for being a little more entitled than the last. Well, the research also suggests that they're actually more concerned with their community, their environment, than previous generations, and they want to be engaged. So I'm going to ask you to help me be a better educator. What should I tell those folks who ... There are MBAs who I'm telling you should change the world, and they would love to, but they're being told, hey, I should go down this path where I'm going to be an accountant at XYZ firm. What can I do to help them move forward with their passions rather than follow the traditional path that may lead them to not being quite as happy?

Clotilde: I think the lines between the sectors are being blurred. I find that to be very positive. So some people know exactly what they want to do and what their calling in life is. I want to be a doctor, and, boom, that's what I want to be. I want to be a lawyer, I want to be an accountant. I have a pronounced skill set or an ability for a certain affinity, for a certain line of work. That was not my story. I kind of meandered and said yes to opportunities as they presented, as I've shared with you.

Clotilde: But, I guess, commit to learning, and commit to self-awareness. Invest time in reflection and learning about yourself. What are your strengths? How do you partner with folks who have complementary strengths? So I would say I am a big proponent of continuous learning. There's phenomenal leadership, literature, as I'm sure you know, Darren. Not all of it agrees, and that's the best part of it. I

read, on a regular basis, around leadership. I read a lot of biographies and understand how other leaders succeeded in life. I ask a lot of questions of my colleagues and my partners in the work. I mean, we at the Community Foundation work, literally, with hundreds of partners and clients. It is in that collective activity that we really get to progress. In my experience, with this newest generation of professionals, is fresh eyes, tremendous energy and commitment for the greater good. Boy, if that isn't optimal, I don't know what is.

Darren Treadway: Exactly, especially for a community like ours.

Clotilde: Yes, for every community, frankly, but we want them to stay here.

Darren Treadway: 140,000 jobs, so we need them.

Clotilde: Yes, absolutely. Creativity is wonderful. It's a premium.

Nate Benson: You're certainly seeing that a lot with the startup founders we see come through not only 43North, but other organizations like Launch New York as well. Given your experience with leadership and, like you said earlier, getting groups of people who might not always agree into rooms to collaborate, obviously, it takes a high level of leadership. What would your advice be to those startup leaders, those founders who are just getting off the ground? They don't know what they don't know, and they have to come across difficult decisions, or they have to make the tough decisions or bring competing ideas to the table that, again, might not necessarily agree. What's your advice to those young leaders for startup companies?

Clotilde: So I believe in shared leadership. The most important skill, from my experience, within that model of shared leadership, is facilitation, being able to facilitate diverse opinions and being able to facilitate a consensus process to be able to elicit the best solutions that benefit from the most diverse set of opinions and perspectives as possible. I think that applies to any setting, be it a for-profit, a non-profit or a public agency. I think the power of the collective is the way of the 21st century. We emerged from the 20th century with a siloed approach to solutions, and we were siloed by sector, the business sector in that corner, government in that corner, non-profit in that corner, different languages, different cultures. I think the work of the 21st century is bringing the unique assets of those three sectors together to leverage progress by working together across the sectors. That's the magic, and that's the juice of the 21st century.

Nate Benson: As we wrap things up, when you look at the future of Buffalo, what do you see? How do young leaders, how do startups, how do entrepreneurs, how do they fit into that table for the next decade, 20 years of Buffalo?

Clotilde: That's a great question that every leader in this community needs to reflect on, on a daily basis. What I see is a vibrant and inclusive greater Buffalo region with

opportunity for all, because if we all subscribe to that goal and ask the question you've just asked me of ourselves, we're going to accelerate our progress in getting to that goal. From a private sector standpoint, the more vibrant and inclusive and expanded our local economy becomes, because we have more people that have on ramps to our economy, then the more cars car sales people are going to sell, the more meals restaurants are going to sell, the more product retailers are going to sell, the more taxes are going to power our public sector, and the more contributions are going to be available to address any challenges through the non-profit sector. It is a win-win-win, and we all have a role to play.

Darren Treadway: Before we came in ... I want to make sure we touch on this. You told us about a great, exciting thing that's happening around the centennial anniversary, so I want to make sure that ... I got excited about it, so [crosstalk 00:29:19]

Clotilde: Thank you, absolutely. So, yes, we are really excited about celebrating our first hundred years and opening up the door to the second century of service for the Community Foundation by giving out a million dollars to the change makers in this community. There are going to be 12 winners, and the nominations open on February 11th and close on March 22nd, so listen carefully.

Clotilde: The top four winners are the Champion Award, which will honor a change maker who has made a meaningful change for a particular group of people; the Cause Award, which will honor an individual who has dedicated their life to addressing a pressing issue in the community. The Community Award is going to honor an individual who saw the hidden potential in a place in our community. Then the Up and Comer Award is an emerging leader that's currently mobilizing around people, place or cause.

Clotilde: So those top four winners are going to each make a \$100,000 grant to the non-profit of their choice in Western New York, and they will also have a \$100,000 endowment established in their name at the Community Foundation, which they will direct to do good during and after their lifetime, per their direction. Then the eight finalists are each going to make a \$25,000 grant to the non-profit of their choice. So we are thrilled to launch this award competition on February 11th, and we have a very diverse, in every sense of the word, panel of 40 distinguished community leaders from all ages and stages, geography, sexual orientations, race, ethnicity, gender, et cetera, to actually select the 12 winners that will deploy this million dollars of charitable capital. We're very excited, and we hope everyone who's listening to this will think about nominating someone who gets up every day and thinks about the future of this community and how they can make it better.

Darren Treadway: That's fantastic. I think I'm safe in speaking for the school of management, and I'll speak for myself as a Buffalo resident, we're incredibly grateful for the work you do at the foundation and grateful you could be here to share with us.

Clotilde: Thank you. It's my pleasure and privilege. Thank you.

Nate Benson: I can speak for 43North. We love a good competition, so [crosstalk 00:31:44]

Clotilde: Hey, yes. You are masters of a good competition.

Nate Benson: So, Clotilde, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. If people want to learn more about the Community Foundation or get involved, how can they do so?

Clotilde: Yes, [www.CFGB.org](http://www.CFGB.org), and we welcome your partnership.

Nate Benson: Thanks again for coming on. We'll check in with you down the road.

Clotilde: Thank you, my pleasure.

Darren Treadway: Thank you.

Nate Benson: Do you want to be a better leader? Visit [MGT.Buffalo.edu/CLOE](http://MGT.Buffalo.edu/CLOE), that's C-L-O-E, to learn more about our upcoming programs. I want to thank Clotilde for joining us on the podcast this week, and also my cohost, Profess Darren Treadway, from the UB's CLOE program. You can download Latitude wherever you get your podcasts, and please head on over to Apple Podcasts and leave a five-star review. Also check out the 43North jobs board, [43North.org/jobs](http://43North.org/jobs), where we have over 25 jobs available in the startup ecosystem as of today. So if you're looking to jumpstart your career or jumpstart a change in your career, head on over to [43North.org/jobs](http://43North.org/jobs), and start your new startup job. For 43North, I'm Nate Benson. We'll see you at the next one.