Event Recap — Public Service Through Podcasting

Panelists:
- Krista Tippett, Founder and Host of On Being
- Lily Percy, Executive Producer of On Being

Do you see a way for podcasting, with its wealth of options, to help solve the polarization of America?

Krista
- Technology is what you make of it. Unfortunately, it’s easy to be angry and with technology finding your people to be angry with is easy, too.
- But what we’ve experienced in our listening community together is a digital space to work through what it means for us to be here; people who otherwise couldn’t share physical space. More of us need to step into that space and create digital space where people can be in dialogue without being together.

Lily
- In the past, I had limited options of who to hear and what to hear. But now I have the option of seeking out people who think differently than me but who speak in a way that I understand and that’s not something I could’ve found pre-podcasts.
- Personally, I like to listen to podcasts whose lives and experiences are completely different from mine and who I want to learn from.

Can you talk a little on how your interview strategy has changed over time?

Krista
I started my career as a print reporter, and I took some of that with me when we began doing the podcast. So, if you listen to our first shows, about 10 years ago, I sound so rigid and formulaic.

I’ve always done a lot of research so that I can create a hospitable place so that they walk in and they know I get them. If they get you, they relax. Even if I’m in a studio and someone is hundreds of miles away, the hospitable space is important.

I know where we start and I think I know where we’ll end, so my preparation is a road map. But the point of preparation is that if someone goes off on a path, I can put my notes down and follow them down that path.

Lily

By doing all the preparation you can, it allows you to be present. You can also pick up on themes that the interviewed have brought up. You can connect things back to things they’ve said.

Interviewees always say that they’ve never had an interview where the person knew so much about their work as Krista; tries to know as much as she can from as many sources. Doing preparation takes out the worry of asking something dumb because she knows the work they’ve done.

How do you find people to interview?

Krista

Every field and community have their heroes and voices who are so formative, but they are just below the radar from everyone knowing them. We try to find those people and we try to introduce voices that are just below the radar.

What is the next big question for society that we haven’t asked yet?

Krista

We need to shape technology for human purposes. We’re so excited about technology becoming conscious—but we already are, so can we investigate ourselves and how to better ourselves?

We are the first generation of our species to think about ourselves as a species. Technology is pushing the idea of humanity and I think we should be pushing ourselves to investigate our humanity.
What makes a good question?

Lily
- StoryCorps has a list of 10 great questions and they’re all memory-based. If you center your questions with memories, it makes for a much better conversation. You want to be eliciting memories in your questions because something shifts with those questions.
- Something Krista brought into the podcast is the first question she asks everyone, “Describe the spiritual background of your upbringing”. It’s a memory-based question and everyone can answer it, no matter their current identification.

Krista
- What asking those memory-based questions does is that it actually gets you to activate your body and mind. It gets you out of your mind and activates your body. And when we include memories, we have a chance to say something that is more true.

Lily
- Memory questions place you in your body, which other questions don’t do. It feels different.

Do you see your work in On Being as public service? How and why?

Krista
- Yes, we do absolutely consider it public service. As our website says, the On Being Project is a media and public life initiative. We’re pursuing deep thinking and social courage, moral imagination and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together.
- And what we’ve found is podcasts are a great way to build community, both digital community but also a great way to build physical in-person community.

Lily
- Through The On Being Project, we also have the Civil Conversations Project where we are trying to create a space outside of just audio for public service and that’s a big reason Krista created her own independent company.

Krista
• All of our disciplines are having to reinvent themselves to be better and better reflections of humanity. Journalism has to be connected to the effects it has, in the building up and tearing down of things.
• We’re clued into that. We’re not in “breaking news” for a reason, so we’re in a place where we’re setting a challenge for ourselves to be better and provide a better service by identifying and centering our grounding virtues.

Resources to look up: [StoryCorps list of questions](#), [On Being](#), [Civil Conversations Project](#)