



Workplace Democracy — Sharing Power and Decision Making at Work: Transcript

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Description

Democracy may be top of mind for many Americans this election season, but it's easy to forget that the ideal of democracy has always been about more than filling out one ballot every couple of years. Democratic and participatory principles and practices can strengthen our public spaces, community organizations, social media platforms, and even our workplaces.

Workers are closest to many of the problems and potential solutions most critical to an enterprise's performance, holding essential knowledge about safety, productivity, and culture. Employers who fail to sufficiently listen or value their workers' voices miss opportunities to innovate and improve productivity — and may suffer from workers' decreased job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. We know workers want a seat at the table on issues from pay and benefits to safety, culture, and accountability, not only because they say so in [surveys](#), but, increasingly, because they're organizing to win it. Companies that genuinely seek to leverage workers' insights often deploy tactics like surveys and town hall meetings that fall short of capturing representative input or turning feedback into action. But democratic mechanisms like shared ownership, board level co-determination, and labor-management partnerships can unlock benefits by enabling a truly collaborative, participatory work environment.

For more information about this event, including video, audio, transcript, and additional resources, visit:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/workplace-democracy-sharing-power-and-decision-making-at-work/>

Speakers

Julian McKinley

Co-executive director, DAWI

As co-executive director for partnerships and growth at the Democracy at Work Initiative (DAWI), Julian guides DAWI's organizational growth, strategic partnerships, and communications. Since joining DAWI in 2019, he has led the organization's communications and data programs while driving strategic priorities as a member of its senior leadership team. His diverse experience at DAWI includes guiding the organization's COVID-19-related strategic refinement, training cooperative developers in the US and East Africa, helping lead New York City's business conversions response during the COVID-19 pandemic, and leading regranteeing programs for the city's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative. Prior to joining DAWI, Julian led strategic storytelling campaigns focused on regenerative economics, impact investing, and family financial security. He began his career as a news editor and earned a Bachelor of Arts in communications from Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. He lives in Queens, New York, with his family.

Lenore Palladino

Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Leonore is an associate professor in the department of economics and the School of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst). She is a research associate at the UMass Amherst Political Economy Research Institute, as well as a fellow at the Roosevelt Institute. She holds a doctorate in economics from the New School University and a law degree from Fordham Law School. Her portfolio of work is available at lenorepalladino.com.

Palladino's research focuses on the political economy of corporations and finance. She has also written on financial transaction taxes, employee ownership, the macroeconomic effect of investing in the care economy, and the rise of financial technology.

She is the author of a forthcoming book on the political economy of corporations, "Good Company," from the University of Chicago Press. She has published in the Review of Social Economy, the Review of Black Political Economy, the Review of Radical Political Economy, Politics & Society, the International Review of Applied Economics, the Journal of Law and Political Economy, the Yale Journal of Regulation, and Fordham Journal of Corporate and Financial Law, as well as the Financial Times and other media publications. She frequently works with policymakers, media, and advocates on corporate and financial policy. She testified on the impacts of shareholder primacy stock buybacks before the US Congress Joint Economic Committee in 2022 and before the House Financial Services Committee in 2019.

Prior to joining UMass Amherst, Palladino was senior economist and policy counsel at the Roosevelt Institute and a lecturer in economics at Smith College. She was previously vice president for advocacy at Demos and a lecturer in economics at New York University. Earlier in her career, she was campaign director at MoveOn, a lead organizer with the labor union CSEA-AFSCME, and national director of United Students Against Sweatshops.

Larry Williams Jr.

Founder and President, UnionBase

Larry Williams Jr. is a seasoned labor leader and entrepreneur with over 15 years of experience. Currently, he serves as the CEO of UnionBase, a cutting-edge digital platform designed to empower union workers. UnionBase, the brainchild of Larry's entrepreneurial spirit, has garnered significant attention, being featured in renowned publications such as Forbes, Fast Company, and more.

Prior to his role at UnionBase, Larry served as executive director of both Black Men Vote and the Labor Network for Sustainability.

His career began in the heart of the labor movement at the Teamsters Union. Later, he made significant strides in the intersection of labor and climate justice as a pioneer at the Sierra Club, where he co-founded and served as president of the Progressive Workers' Union. The organization has since become a groundbreaking union representing nonprofit employees, primarily across the nonprofit sector.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (moderator)

Director, Aspen Business Roundtable on Organized Labor, [Economic Opportunities Program](#)

Liba is the director of the Aspen Business Roundtable on Organized Labor, a network of business leaders exploring constructive ways to respond to worker organizing for agency and dignity at work. Previously, Liba was the founding and lead social impact executive at MySpace, Tumblr, and 21st Century Fox, where she pioneered ways to harness companies' financial, human, cultural, and technological resources for social, civic, and environmental progress and built bridges between sectors to amplify impact. She has helped found the Civic Alliance, chaired the board of premier youth vote organization the Alliance for Youth Organizing, served as a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Sustainable Consumption, and advised nonprofits Pop Culture Collaborative, KW Foundation, Vote.org, Social Impact Fund, CARE, Civic Nation, Why Tuesday?, and Invisible Children. Born and bred in Brooklyn, and a proud product of New York City public schools, Liba graduated from Yale University with distinction in American studies and now resides in Los Angeles with her husband and two young daughters.

Transcript

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:00:06)

Good afternoon or morning. I'm Liba Wenig Rubenstein, director of the Aspen Business Roundtable and Organized Labor at The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program. And it's my absolute pleasure to welcome you to today's conversation, Workplace Democracy: Sharing Power and Decision-Making at Work. This conversation is part of our Opportunity in America series in which we examine the changing landscape that workers face, and how we can create an economy that works for everyone. Before we get started, just a quick review of our technology. For those of you who are joining via Zoom, all attendees are muted the whole time, and there's two functions, the Q&A button and the chat in Zoom. Please use the Q&A to submit and

upload questions, and then, you can use the chat to share perspectives, ideas, examples, resources, or just reactions related to today's topics. Please do stay for a moment after the webinar ends to respond to our quick feedback survey, which will open in your web browser as soon as you leave the webinar.

We do encourage you to post about this conversation on the social media platform of your choice. The hashtag is #talkopportunity. If you have any technical issues during this webinar, please message us in the chat or you can email us at eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. This event is being recorded, and will be shared via email, and posted on our website, and other platforms. Closed captions are available. Please click the CC button at the bottom of your screen to activate them. We will get started.

Democracy is a word that we have all heard so much in recent months. It may feel like it's been sapped of meaning, and depending on your perspective, the result of this month's election, either demonstrated that America's system of self-governance is in imminent peril, or that it's absolutely as strong as ever. But, either way, democracy has never been defined solely by the mobilization of voters to the polls every two or four years.

Rather, it is a system of behaviors, norms, and practices that tap the wisdom of people to participate in decision-making that affect them. What role, if any, should democratic principles play in the workplace, and how do they relate to economic opportunity? Businesses are famously not democracies, but their success does depend on, among other factors, the willing and committed participation of workers and input of workers. And we know from our EOP colleagues work on job quality, as well as the US Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Well-Being that for workers, voice, agency and participation, and decision-making are critical elements of a good job that supports worker mental health and well-being. At EOP and at the Roundtable, we believe that to expand economic opportunity in this country, and bridge some of our deepest economic and social divides, working people do need more power, power to negotiate the terms of their work, and to shape economic life and our democracy.

The conventional assumption of American business leaders, that sharing any power in decision-making is to be avoided, obscures opportunities for progress, leaves many workers stuck in the middle, and overlooks historical and comparative evidence that sustained economic growth happens when both workers and employers have a seat at the table. In fact, there is a long, if inconsistent tradition in American business of valuing

employee participation in decision-making. Even John D. Rockefeller, Jr. said in a 1919 address to the National Industrial Conference, " Surely, it is not consistent for us as Americans to demand democracy in government, and to practice autocracy in industry. When workers have a say in the conditions of their employment, they are better able to ensure their own safety and well-being, negotiate fair wages and benefits, and create a work environment that drives productivity and innovation. Participatory workplaces breed democratic values and combat polarization by bringing together workers across differences to make hard decisions and act together in solidarity."

And research shows that organized workforces can support good corporate governance, and positively impact productivity while also attracting and retaining talent. That's why we at the Roundtable organize business leaders privately, and develop resources to share publicly like the playbook called the Shared Power Advantage that we published earlier this year that details how leaders can build thriving companies where workers have a seat at the table through a lot of the mechanisms that we'll explore today. According to Gallup, the percentage of employees who strongly agree that their organization cares about their overall well-being hit a record low since Gallup has been asking this question of 21% this year, and generally worker self-reporting of their well-being is at an all-time low. Whether you look at the historic levels of union activity, or the recent election exit polls, it's clear that American workers today feel that their voices are not being sufficiently heard.

None of us on this panel are political scientists or pundits. We are not here to interpret the meaning of the election results, or speculate about what exactly the operating environment will be for either workers or employers. We can safely say that workplaces are entering a period of change and uncertainty. But, in some ways, that's not very new from the Great Recession and the fissuring of the workplace to Me Too, and Black Lives Matter, to COVID. The American workplace has experienced a series of disruptions in recent years, and many of these participatory and democratic practices have stood the test of time. If anything, now is the time when the private sector and all employers will be called upon to step up. It will be more important than ever for leaders in the workplace and those advising and coaching them to promote engaging, participatory, and supportive work environments.

Today we've assembled a stellar group of experts to help us understand how democratic mechanisms in the workplace can help address issues facing workers and employers alike, what success looks like, and the barriers and enablers workplaces

face. Without further ado, it's my pleasure to introduce our panel. We have Julian McKinley, co-executive director of the Democracy at Work Institute, also known as DAWI. We have Larry Williams, founder and president of UnionBase, and Lenore Palladino, an associate professor in the Department of Economics and School of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

To get started today, I'm going to ask each of you to please introduce yourselves, and if appropriate, your organization, and then, please share with us, to kick us off, what from your perspective, it means to have a democratic workplace. Is it about specific values, or behaviors, or systems, or outcomes? And why is it important in the big picture for both workers and employers. And we'll kick it off with you, Larry.

Larry Williams Jr. (00:07:34)

Thank you. Yes. As you mentioned, my name is Larry Williams, Jr. I'm the founder and president of unionbase.com. And I started my career off working at the Teamsters back in 2007, and my career led me to work at the Sierra Club, the largest environmental organization in the United States, as labor coordinator. And there I founded a union, a co-founded union called Progressive Workers Union, or PWU that represents workers across the nonprofit landscape. Later, I served on several executive positions at non-profit organizations, and one of which I had unionized staff. I see it on both sides of the coin in a deep way. Now, running UnionBase, I work to educate union leaders and employers about the labor movement, and try to fill in the gap there, because I think it's a movement that is not very well known in terms of how it works and functions. Our latest initiative, Union Employer, is about working with employers and unions to help workers find union positions and spread awareness about available union jobs. To answer your question, I believe that democracy in the workplace is about all of the above, those specific values, behaviors, systems, and outcomes. But, I do think in practice, in the workplace, it means including workers in areas of decision making that impact employment. Of course, that includes the permissible subjects of bargaining like wages, hours, and working conditions, but also things that employers don't necessarily have to bargain about, such as layoffs and internal policy as we've seen the news recently.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:09:12)

Thanks so much, Larry. Julian?

Julian McKinley (00:09:16)

Yeah, thanks so much, Liba. Just first, let me say, I really appreciate the opportunity to be here, and talk a little bit about workplace democracy. My name is Julian McKinley. As you said, I'm the co-executive director at Democracy at Work Institute, also known as DAWI. And as an organization, we work to expand access to worker ownership nationally for workers who we describe as being locked out of good jobs and opportunities to own businesses. Specifically, we work to benefit recent immigrants, workers of color, and low-wage workers. And notably, we were started by the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, which is the national grassroots membership organization for worker co-ops. And we have started to support growth of the field as a whole.

The way that we go about our work is through research, business innovation, education, policy support, and partnership development. And regarding what workplace democracy means for us, worker co-ops, they're guided by a set of seven principles of cooperation. But, to avoid reading down a list, and getting to the heart of what we do, democracy for us is about shifting power and opportunity to workers who really help create a company's value. It's about creating the terms for workers, to make family-sustaining wages, to work in safe environments, and for them to determine the future of their work experience.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:10:39)

Thanks, Julian. And Lenore, before I let you introduce yourself, I also want to ask, I know that you're not an historian by trade, but as our resident academic, I'd love it if in your introduction you could also take us through some of the history of thinking and practice of workplace democracy in this country.

Lenore Palladino (00:10:59)

Yeah, great. Well, thanks for having me, and thanks to everyone who's watching right now. It's a tough time for many of us in the United States, and so it's so important, I think, that we think about both political democracy and economic democracy. I'm an associate professor of economics and public policy at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Like my colleagues on the panel, I come out of both the labor movement and spent some time working as an attorney with worker cooperatives. But the way ... I'll just briefly answer your first question. The way I think about democracy, when I was a union organizer, of course, we were organizing around the terms and conditions of employment. But, what people who were leaders in the union, and leaders in workplaces, where they were organizing their coworkers to form new unions, what they mostly ... Their most important focus was on dignity and respect at work.

And I think shifting power in workplaces, and shifting power in society, are all about dignity and respect for all of us, not just for a few at the top, right. Just a couple anecdotes in terms of our history. I'm not a historian as you said, but I love talking about the history of workplace democracy, and economic democracy more broadly, because there is actually a really rich history in the United States that even many of us who work on progressive economic policy issues aren't aware of, right? And we should know this history to help us feel more empowered to take action today.

As large corporations became dominant for the first time in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was actually a tremendous movement for industrial democracy. And what we remember about this is that we got labor law, and we got the focus on unions in the United States, but that movement at the time was actually calling for broader participation in the businesses that they were helping strengthen directly.

Adolf Berle, for example, who is a leading lawyer and author who many people mistakenly think of as one of the founders of intellectual thought that support shareholder primacy, actually wrote an article called How Labor Could Control over 100 years ago in 1922. And in his most famous book, *The Modern Corporation*, he called for the social control of business, supporting workers' participation as well as business participation. The militancy of labor at the time led to works councils in different businesses like Filene's and General Electric here in Massachusetts. Fast-forward to the 1970s, and we've seen union leadership participating on boards of major auto companies of pension funds. And today, we see what we're going to, I think, talk about. For the most part today, we've seen the continued growth of worker cooperatives,

employee owned organizations, and companies, and profit sharing, alongside a growing and renewed labor movement. And I think that there's a really important moment that we have here to bring together all of these different ways that we can strengthen workplace democracy.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:14:13)

Thank you so much for that history. And it is ... I think it's very empowering to be reminded that the conventional wisdom that governs employment right now is just not definitive in any way. Let's turn to exploring why and how companies can effectively implement mechanisms for these participatory practices in governance and decision making. Julian, DAWI, as you said, comes out of the co-op movement, but you do work with firms that follow other models of worker ownership, like employee stock ownership plans. For those in the audience who are less familiar with employee ownership, can you please share a little bit more about the different forms, and in what ways they both democratize and strengthen workplaces, and who stands to benefit the most from worker ownership in these forms?

Julian McKinley (00:15:09)

Yeah, so ownership is a term that's used quite broadly these days. And in part because ownership exists along a spectrum, it looks like many different things, and it's something that many Americans are familiar with in some respects. The common denominator in terms of whatever form you're talking about, is financial benefit that's provided to a set of employees. Most commonly, a select set of employees are awarded company shares, or have an opportunity to purchase those shares at a discount. Our focus at DAWI is on firms that have what we call broad-based ownership. Ownership of businesses that is shared throughout the business, and that include elements of workplace participation. The most common form in which this shows up is in employee stock ownership plans, as you mentioned, but also, employee-owned trusts, and worker cooperatives. And so, each of these forms include financial benefit to workers, which is tied directly to business performance.

If a business does well, employees see the value of their shares rise. If a business struggles, the financial benefit that's provided to workers is then negatively impacted. In each of these business types, there are varying degrees of participation that makes

sense for them. ESOPs that are participatory, for example, may provide employees an opportunity to have a say in whether or not the business is sold, and to whom it's sold. They may also have a representative of their employee base on the board of directors, for example. They may also infrequently share information about the business, such as financial information to help people understand their place within the business, and how they contribute to its overall success.

Worker co-ops, which are on the far end of the spectrum, are businesses that are fully owned and controlled by their workers. They collectively decide what happens to business profits annually. They certainly elect the board of directors, and those directors are elected from the members within the business. They might collectively also determine changes in company strategy and things like that. There's certainly a wide range of opportunities and ways that it shows up in businesses that we would call democratic.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:17:22)

Thanks so much, Julian. Larry, I'll turn to you. You've been both a union organizer and a union employer. Can you talk about the role of worker participation in different phases of the unionization and labor management partnership process, and what case you can make to employers that unions can be valuable partners precisely because of their democratic nature?

Larry Williams Jr. (00:17:48)

Sure. Funny enough, I've actually served as a steward in various positions in a union from the president to the steward. And so, you have different levels of engagement that give you the full scope, and the early phases of a unionizing campaign can be very scary for workers who are organizing. They're not sure how the employer is going to react. Are they going to support their efforts? Are they going to get pushback? And then, there's the legal framework that both the employer and the union operate in that can be conducive to workers feeling a little bit more fearful about what will happen, because there's not many protections.

And so, once the declaration of a union actually happens, and it's out there, there is a choice by the employer. Do they want to step up and show support for the workers, or do they want to drag them through the long, often contentious process that could

damage the relationship between them and the management? It's key to remember for management, that the unions and employers, I should say, employer staff, are made up of humans. And the process, even though it can be a bit inhumane, if you choose to be humane in that process, you can allow that process to define how democracy will live within the organization. If you start with humanity, I believe the rest will figure itself out. Having been in very contentious union battles that took us to 3:00 in the morning walking away from the table, almost being a strike, to having great relationship with human resources leaders now that I'll DM them on LinkedIn and say, "I'm really glad about what we built and how long it's withstood the test of time." And I can see workers' lives benefiting from that. So I do believe if both sides enter the unionization of bargaining process from a place of humility and assuming the best instead of assuming the worst, then progress is possible. And then lastly, I say having been on both sides, I've seen management groups accept unionization and do a great job of supporting their workers and getting a positive outcome as a result.

And I have been on management teams that have been led by bad advice as well where you get the anti-union lawyer and you're spending \$1000 an hour for them just to tell you to basically stonewall your workers and you can kind of expect where that goes. On the other side, when I was an executive, I basically told a board of mine after the workers declared they wanted a union, I emailed each board member individually and I said, "According to my experiences in unions, what you should do is accept this unionization immediately." I got, I believe 10 out of 10 board members to accept without condition and myself as well and got back to them really quickly. That way there was no space for there to be a limbo where the workers are really scared about what's going to happen. And I let the board members know if there were any questions they had, they could come to me and we could also seek counsel as well. So there's a lot of things that you could do to make your workers excited about the process and happy about the process.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:20:45)

Thanks Larry. Lenore, you have argued in a lot of your work that board-level code determination, that is worker representation on boards, should be adopted more widely in the US. Can you tell us a little bit what this looks like in countries where it's already a well-established practice? And then are there any notable examples in this country and kind of what your work suggests an American version of the model might look like?

Lenore Palladino (00:21:14)

Yeah, those are great questions. Thank you. So there are many companies that make sense to be employee-owned or to be worker cooperatives. Some of our largest companies though I think that's a ways down the road, let's say. And I think there's a lot of room to empower workers to participate in the actual decision-making within companies right now. So we should step back for a minute and think about what is a corporation? It's an entity that's supposed to be productive and innovative in producing its goods and services to meet the needs and wants of society, of consumers. We have this paradigm in the United States of shareholder primacy, which tells us that the only decision-makers within a company, within corporate governance should be shareholders when in fact, shareholders in modern day, especially when we hold shares through index funds, through asset managers, shareholders have the least to do in many cases with any given company.

And it's the workforce and the management of the company that really are the ones that make decisions that either cause the company to innovate and grow or to fail. And so I think worker participation on corporate boards is one structural way to make sure that the people who usually know the most about how companies are producing and how they could innovate are participating in the business process. It's important for me to say this is a complement to unionization and collective bargaining where workers are organizing around the terms and conditions of employment, that should stay as it is. And worker participation on boards is a way to increase worker voice in the overall course of the business. So very briefly, if people are familiar with this at all, they might be familiar with Germany where there is a strong system of what's called their co-determination where workers are organized such that they have mechanisms of representation on corporate boards and they have sectoral bargaining in many sectors within the German economy.

Co-determination has worked well in terms of improving productivity, improving many of the conditions in Germany, though certainly not perfect right? None of the innovations we talk about will be magic silver bullets. France also has an interesting model where they have for some large companies requirements both for employee ownership and worker participation on boards. There's other models around the world. My take just to stay somewhat brief is that the US should not import a model from Europe or other countries right? We have a very different system of labor law and corporate governance law. And so we need to stay grounded in what will actually

work in the United States. And I wrote an article called Economic Democracy at Work that looked at, okay, we have US labor law. We need to actually hold onto, I believe the prohibitions in US labor law on what are called company unions, unions that are dominated by management that don't actually serve worker interests.

But some of those prohibitions that developed that are important around prohibiting company unions have kept us from actually enabling workers to have a collective voice on corporate boards. So what I was thinking about in many other advocates and organizers and scholars before me have thought about is how can worker representation on boards be authentically representative? So it has an organizational structure such that you're not just having one person elected to a board and they're there by themselves not representing anybody. How do we do that within US labor law I think is one really good question and I propose some different mechanisms in the piece.

And then I also think that there's other ideas developing that are being talked about in forums like this about reforming the compensation committees specifically on boards so that there's consideration of overall workplace issues and participation at minimum in an advisory role by workers, even if not in a voting capacity. I also think that the models that have been developed at the scale of worker cooperatives and employee owned businesses can teach us a lot about what might work at the larger scale at some of our largest businesses. And we should continue to learn from those models and try different innovations at the large corporate level.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:25:58)

Thanks, Lenore. And I'll just say we have a member of our roundtable who has, I think the third year of an experiment with an employee representative on their board. It's a software company called Honeycomb. They already have profit sharing as is pretty standard in the tech industry. And to your point, I think that the most impactful part of that experiment has been the structures that they build up around the worker representative to help inform their participation and the transparency of communication between the board and workers and improving those lines of communication and bringing a worker perspective to what's relevant in both directions. And so-

Lenore Palladino (00:26:52)

Can I add one thing, Liba?

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:26:52)

Yeah, please.

Lenore Palladino (00:26:52)

That I thought of when you were speaking as well. We lived through the pandemic. We lived through the COVID-19 era and we saw in that time, I think a real missed opportunity for workers to participate in the discussions that their companies were having, particularly around workplace safety and health. So within US labor law, there is room for workers to form committees to discuss with management how to improve safety and health in the workplace.

And if we had had those types of standing relationships, we could have seen, especially in a lot of our businesses that had essential workers who were at work every day in the very early parts of the pandemic before we had the vaccine and everything, those experiences, those workplaces could have been much healthier places and more productive companies ultimately. So I think those types of models, sometimes it gets very abstract, workers on boards, what could it mean? I think the experience of the pandemic helps us concretize what some of the benefits could really be.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:27:56)

Absolutely. And I think there are some examples also of unionized firms that were able to weather COVID more successfully than some of their non-unionized competitors. I know the UPS, FedEx example was brought up a lot in that period, and I have to imagine that that's one of the reasons why it's kind of managing the health and safety and worker participation in that conversation. So thank you for that. For all of you, I'm curious, what have you learned about the factors that are most critical to employers implementing these strategies successfully when they do have them, and in particular, what kind of training and what kind of feedback mechanisms are necessary? And then perhaps most importantly, perhaps do workers and employers know if this is working?

Larry Williams Jr. (00:28:54)

I'll jump in. I think when it comes to the bargaining process, it is important for employers to have some training and guidance on how to communicate with the workers through that process. It can be very, I think, tense in the beginning because this is a new sort of process for both sides. And oftentimes, like I mentioned before, if a law firm is leading the engagement with the workers and is done purely through a legal lens, then the question becomes what do we have to do? What are we required to do that won't get us in legal trouble? Which it's a fair question, but the most important thing is that humility I was talking about and listening to the concerns of your employees. I'll just use one example. Something I heard the other day on CNBC, there was a person giving advice on what employers should do during this time with the labor of people, and they kept saying, "Just listen to your employees. Just listen to your employees."

But the thing I didn't hear was, "Be prepared to respond to what they say," because a lot of times employers will put out surveys, they ask these questions, and then they just don't do anything. So then that gives the workers the impression that you're not listening even if you are. Even if you get stuck in debate, maybe you should share, "Hey, this is why we're stuck here," all of that type of communication really helps people feel like the management is really engaged and they actually care what the workers think. And then I think the training could help with how to communicate and not sound aggressive or insensitive. Again, corporate speak can just be something that you've learned in law school or that you learned in business school, but it can come off very cold and not very human. And that actually the need to be careful in how you communicate in those times goes for both the employer and the workers.

And because I've been on the side of the workers and we're sounding like we're ready to go to war regardless when that's clearly not the case right? I've also been working with managers and executives to talk about how to be more comfortable in your discussions so that your engagement has come off the right way. Once a union and management have formed a contract, things change a lot and there's a lot more clarity. And then you can create something like a labor management committee. It's like one step before the board where we're talking about day-to-day issues. Is the time policy actually working? Do our credit cards have limits that are too low? I was basically the reason why we started Progressive Workers Union from a personal perspective, I was traveling a lot as an organizer. I would go to two or three cities in a month and I would

check into a hotel and the hotel would have a limit that you have to put at least I think like six or \$700 down on the card.

But my card's limit was like five or \$600. Oftentimes I would arrive and my card would get rejected. It's not only embarrassing, but you're stuck and I have to call my manager in the middle of the night. It was a lot of stuff like that. And I had tried to go through my operations director, and there was no response, found out there was a hundred other organizers going through the same situation. So imagine a hundred people in a hundred cities getting stuck in hotels, and that had been happening for 25 years. So we brought that issue to the Labor Management Committee, and the issue was fixed overnight. Our limits were increased because we realized when we put our heads together, you're only risking one or \$2,000 that let's say that the person overspends or something like that. And when that happens, then you can reduce it, but you have to have a way to actually have the communication, regular meetings between union leaders, mid-level managers, and in some cases senior management, allow you to fix problems before they become major problems.

Julian McKinley (00:32:33)

Yeah. So just to jump in on that, I think that that's such a great example of what's possible when employees across a business are really able to contribute to decision-making, shed light on what their work experience is and create efficiencies where otherwise it would go overlooked. I think the way that I like to think about it from an employee ownership standpoint is if I am a worker who's making \$17 an hour and I'm living paycheck to paycheck, lots of times my focus, what's important to me isn't necessarily going to be aligned with the business just inherently. I'm really thinking about how I clock in and clock out and do my work and collect my paycheck and do my work to the extent that my supervisor is not breathing down my neck. And I might, particularly around the holiday season, look forward to the potential of overtime pay because that week groceries are going to be less or easier to afford, and I might be able to afford some extra gifts during Christmas time.

Whereas for the business efficiency and productivity is really number one. And so in the absence of efficiency and productivity, I may think about needing to increase managerial oversight. My costs are going to go up and I'm thinking workers aren't really doing their job and that's not the case. But if I am able to support the worker who's making \$17 an hour to understand from a day-to-day how their individual tasks

contribute to the company's success overall and just as an added benefit show how that increased productivity will benefit them financially, that worker really becomes fully invested and begins to, I think, make some of the observations that Larry identified and say, these are some of the critical challenges that I'm seeing on the job every single day. My manager probably doesn't see it, but this is something that will really improve our entire performance. So I think that's a great example.

Bigger picture, when we're thinking about employee ownership and what it looks like to create a democratic workplace, we think about it as building the foundation of a house. And so there are four corner posts that are needed. When you build a house, you need a strong foundation right? Those corner posts for us are sharing money, sharing information, sharing power, and developing people. Each of these elements requires commitment to positioning workers to contribute to decision-making, but also to think about how we help them build the skills so that they understand what's going on within the business. So that's where you see that overlap in terms of sharing the information in an effective way, sharing power, that's an opportunity to have my voice contribute to outcomes. And then developing the skills within people. From the business' standpoint, you have got to think about, and this goes to I guess your question, Liba, about how do you measure it and how do you approach it, number one is that it takes time right? You're not going to, I think, change the culture overnight.

Lots of workers have no idea how to read financial statements, so you've got to help them build those skills, understand how to read it, create language where folks really can sort of connect with it. And there are, I think, a couple of examples of how to do this well. I think open book management is a really common practice to begin to share financial information with workers to train them and bring them along the pathway from... to help them connect the dots between their individual tasks and the business outcomes. Doing things like creating critical numbers for departments. These are basically KPIs, but very, very specific within each person's role so that they understand, "Okay, that's the mark that I've got to hit together, and we're going to be able to see the benchmarks that we all want to achieve."

Lenore Palladino (00:36:19)

I'll just add a couple things because I think those are really... both of your points range from, I think specifics to they're very broad, so that's really helpful. I think that the problem, the kind of mindset we have to break is that worker participation and worker

voice will cost the company something or in many cases that unionization or increased compensation will cost the company something. And I think it's the opposite. We've seen all kinds of examples, really rigorous research, that when employees have more participation, when they have more financial stake in a company, they're better set up to be part of the innovation process that that company is undertaking. We will see less turnover, which is one of the biggest costs that businesses face. We will see less strife, and I think in our time we will see less consumer backlash.

So I like to think about the example of Starbucks where if Starbucks, this coffee chain that put itself out there, in many ways culturally as a hip millennial place, come get your frappuccino, when workers started organizing, Starbucks management had choices to make. They could have really taken a very different direction along the lines of what Larry was saying. How do we actually be the high road employer that we say we are right? But instead, they took a totally opposite attack and their negative attacks on workers' freedom of association was noticed by consumers and was noticed by shareholders, and that had really negative implications for the company. So I think that really making sure that we break this mindset that these things are costs and actually see them as benefits for companies will really help us to strengthen the case.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:38:19)

And I think it's a great example of a company that was also famous for having an empty chair in its board meetings to represent the importance of the worker's voice. But to your point, Larry, I think when you say that you're listening and then when workers voice something that they need and you don't act, that actually breaks trust as opposed to builds trust.

And so I think there is a theme to pull out here, and one of the reasons that we talk about these mechanisms as opposed to purely listening mechanisms, is that there has to be a combination in our understanding and a combination of real systems for listening and systems of accountability that reinforce what the company or workplace does with that information. And that's where these kinds of structures of shared ownership or shared governance or worker representation go beyond the CEO benevolent dictator model of management.

Because a lot of these factors that you're talking about boil down to really good tried and true management practices. And as some of our members will say, is it possible to do everything that we do for our employees without union representation? Sure, we

could absolutely choose to do them. Would we? That's a tougher question, and maybe sometimes we would and maybe sometimes we wouldn't, and these are the systems that kind of keep the lines of communication and accountability open so that ultimately you reap the benefits in the long term, the shared benefits.

And I think you also all ultimately address one of the questions that I was going to ask, which is the democracy is famously not designed to make decisions super quickly or efficiently, certainly in the political realm. And so in the workplace, this is kind of the opposite of the early Facebook motto of move fast and break things, which of course the company did jettison a decade ago, but still sort of emblematic of a certain type of workplace philosophy.

But I think you all address the fallacies of traditional ideas about how worker participation is a cost or slows things down. And where if you do it well with all of these supporting management mechanisms, it's really something that unlocks innovation. We did have an audience question for you, Larry, in particular about if you can share some more examples of companies or experiences you've had where consistent communication between union leaders and mid-level managers, where that works or a little bit more about how that works well.

Larry Williams Jr. (00:41:41)

Yeah, sure. Great question. I would say that probably the greatest success that we had at that experience I had at Sierra Club, and I really should try to get a talk going between the previous management there and the union leadership from the era, because I think it was really special. We had a wage scale like most organizations do, that was pretty broad. It went pretty low from \$36,000 up to 100 and maybe 50 or 60. And the 36,000 was brand new folks out of college.

And the reality is that a lot of organizations are pulled by the inertia of the industry within which they operate. So if all the other nonprofits are paying \$36,000, you just do the same. You think it's fine. And then the workers get into this argument about, "Well, we don't make enough." And then it's this circular argument where, who's right? Who's wrong? But the solution we found I think was really elegant.

We used the MIT family sustaining wage calculator, and we humbly brought it to them and said, "Listen, we think that folks are getting paid too low, but let's not try to make the standard your standard, our standard. Let's agree on this normative standard." If

you're not familiar with the MIT family sustaining wage calculator, it determines how much you would need to live in any given city around the world based on having one family member, two family members, two adults and one child and so on and so on.

I believe there's 12 permutations. And we tried to pick what we thought was a generous example. So an adult with three children saying, "Hey, everybody should be able to have at least one child, but if you have three should be able to take care of them." Well, Sierra Club went even further than that and said, "Listen, we're going to average together the 12 permutations because no matter what type of family you have, you should be able to care for your kids and yourselves, and we're going to apply that across our national staff."

Which is if you know Sierra Club, it's a massive organization with lots of local chapters, has two headquarters, one in California, one in D.C. So that meant that our wage scale went from \$36,000 floor to \$55,000. All these people instantly got raises. And then a lot of people who were not in the union at the chapter, this took a lot of negotiation, but they ended up getting unionization for the first time and that meant them having benefits and things that they never had before.

So it's a very complicated organization, and it's a niche example, but I think that applies to any organization that listens to their workers. And one more really quick example. We always talk about, "Hey, can workers do this without a union?" Think about all the changes that have happened in the United States in the last, I'd say 10 years since the labor movement has really made a resurgence.

\$15 an hour is now the minimum wage in many states. That didn't just start by chance, that was because SEIU started a campaign called Fight for 15, and now this is the standard. So my challenge to these employers is if you can do it without a union, please absolutely do it, but if you can't, then you should consider just supporting your workers when they want to unionize and then working with them.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:44:50)

Well, and fun fact, the campaign started as Fight for 15 and a union and the union piece was dropped, but that is the spirit and as well as the organizing muscle behind it. So [inaudible 00:45:10]-

Lenore Palladino (00:45:10)

Can I give one other example, Liba?

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:45:11)

Yeah, please.

Lenore Palladino (00:45:11)

Real quick. Because I think so much of our economy, a lot of our mental models of our economy are based on the 20th century, manufacturing industrial economy, but we live in an economy that's mostly services, and healthcare is really one of our biggest and most central economic generators and employers.

And when I was organizing one of the best outcomes of successful union formation in private sector healthcare organizations were improved quality of care for people, in this case, who had different long-term healthcare challenges and were receiving care in what are called adult daycare day centers.

And there were all kinds of issues that mid-level management simply ignored most of the time because they didn't really have the right structures to hear from their workers. They would write it off as complaining or they were just trying to keep the bottom line, keep squeezing things as much as possible in many cases, even though this was state money, this was public money supporting these private healthcare companies.

And the union structure really enabled workers to come together and say, "We have a clear answer to how to solve some of the problems that are affecting both us as workers, but also affecting the quality of care for the people who we are taking care of for eight, 12 hours a day. And I think that that's a really important example.

As our economy continues to grow in healthcare and in education and other service sectors of the economy, we need to keep in mind that often these are human services where the output, as economists would put it, is also a human being. And so that union relationship with middle management a lot of the time can actually benefit everyone.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:47:10)

And I'll just say another theme in terms of enablers that I'm hearing and that I've heard before is this engagement with middle management because not to demonize them, but actually to say they can often get squeezed in between, especially in an environment where maybe there is a union that they are not allowed to be part of. And I think engaging them and helping empower them in their role in this relationship is so important, and that's where training comes in and that's where communication comes in and committees.

Because they may feel like their measures of success coming from above are really different from what the workforce is asking for. And so they play a really important role in harmonizing and they need to be supported in a number of ways in order to realize these benefits that we're talking about. So a couple of closing-ish questions before we get to really open it up to the audience. It has been said that the workplace is one of the few remaining spaces where Americans interact and build relationships across differences.

As Americans have become more polarized politically and fractured culturally, how can these participatory processes help workplaces navigate complexity and conflict? And I may combine this with this larger question of how democratic mechanisms in the workplace may have a bearing on our broader kind of social fabric and at this time of low social trust. And I think those two are really related. So it's a bit of a leading question, but I'd love to hear in your experience kind of how these dynamics interplay.

Julian McKinley (00:49:13)

Yeah. So this question is coming up a lot lately, no surprise. But I think when we look at worker co-ops. We published about a year ago the first study on individual workers within worker cooperatives to understand their individual experiences in comparison to their experience at a non-worker owned company. And one of the things that we saw was that workers within worker cooperatives often they tend to vote at much higher rates, particularly during the midterm elections, more than 20% the rate of the general population.

And what it tells us is that workers who are building the muscles of democracy every single day, they really begin to understand the value of their voice. And democracy is

no longer something that just pops up every four years and is focused on this quote-unquote "right or wrong outcome." I think typically most of us, when we think about democracy, that four year election we do think about it in terms of what our outcome going to be, but I think you said this in your intro, Liba, but that democracy is really a process.

It's about being able to develop, to trust and to practice in these structures of engagement that allow us to listen to other people and to understand what's important to them, to have our voice heard, to collectively make a decision together and understand that the outcome is determined collectively and it's for the greater good. So one of the biggest things that I am beginning to think about is, how do we really emphasize democracy being a process, again, as opposed to this a game that just has a win or lose at the end of it?

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:51:02)

Thank you.

Lenore Palladino (00:51:02)

Yeah, and I'll add onto that. That's very much along the lines of what I was thinking and no surprise two weeks out from a presidential election where we're thinking about this. But I think because we have in the United States two dominant parties, we forget that actually there can be pluralistic outcomes. Democracy is messy. And I think the more that you practice that in your daily life, and where do we spend most of our time in our lives? At our workplace. So the more that we're having these experiences of the messy process of democracy I think the more we will participate in political democracy from the federal level all the way down.

And there's a lot of rigorous scholarly evidence that has shown that people who are members of unions vote more frequently as Julian said in midterms, but across all kinds of different metrics. I think there's a lot of evidence from around the world that institutions, participatory institutions, when people belong to them, whether it be a more participatory political party or a union or other social organizations, the more that they feel a sense of trust that the society, even if it's broken in many ways or not working for them perfectly, that people are going towards the same goals. And I think we have such a dramatic situation right now in the United States of fracturing, of polarization.

I think that these types of practices in many ways because trust in government is so low, it's even more important for businesses to lead and for leaders of businesses to say, "I'm not going to follow the old playbook of hiring the union busting consultant or of ignoring what workers are saying about conditions in the workplace. I'm actually going to take a different approach because we actually need to reset our social norms around discussion, around participation around democratic deliberation." Though there's a lot of challenges, I think all of the examples that we're talking about today do give us a roadmap of how to start to rebuild some of that trust.

Larry Williams Jr. (00:53:24)

Really good answer. I think I see it both from the employer perspective in the union perspective or the worker perspective. I think from an employer perspective, I like to know exactly how much I'm spending on labor year over year. And if you have a unionized workforce that's pretty clear. I know that I'm not going to have a lot of turnover because folks are pretty much better taken care of because they have input.

And I know if there's conflicts that are member to member, worker to worker, then the union is likely going to have a hand in being a conflict resolution system or I'll have a system between myself and the union to solve problems, whereas if there isn't it's sort of a free for all and it's all on the employer to solve it. I think from the union side, I mean this is really the reason why I fell in love with the labor movement 15 years ago, was the first time I ever saw people coming together over something that wasn't surface level, where the same gender, where the same age or whatever, was working at a union and being in a union.

There's an interview I did, it's on my channel actually on YouTube where they went before the election and they were asking everyone who they were voting for, and let me tell you, it was a very, very diverse local union. You had people from all ages and races in that room. And they were voting for different people, but guess what? There were sitting in the same room together. And since coven, that's the one thing you never see is everybody coming together and just being a family. So that's how I see it.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:54:52)

Thank you. A little bit along these lines, but maybe less rosy. And I'll start direct this to you, Lenore, and then anyone else is welcome to chime in. So much of your work,

including your forthcoming book, which you should mention, is focused on public policy and how policy can shape corporate governance to make companies more accountable to and their decision-making more inclusive of workers and other stakeholders.

So there are some questions in the audience, and something I think we just have to address, which is we are unlikely to see federal policy move in this direction in the next four years. Although there is bipartisan support for employee ownership so maybe you can speak to that a bit. But Americans did vote for worker friendly policies at the state and local levels at the same time in this election. And so I'm curious what you see as bright spots for advancing workplace democracy through public policy, and what policy models are out there that could be adopted at the state and local level to help bring these mechanisms to scale.

Lenore Palladino (00:56:06)

Yeah, it's a great question, and I think that the answer really is state and local in this period of time. And just to step back, it's important to remember that one of the ways in which the U.S. is different than a lot of other countries is we have this very decentralized government in which lots and lots of power is centered in states and even municipalities. And so that includes our corporate government structure.

People might not be aware of this, but we don't have federal corporate law. We have state corporate law. Most corporations, most large corporations in the United States are incorporated in the state of Delaware that has, I think less than a million residents because that's a state that over time for historical reasons has become the most business-friendly state to incorporate. So I think that on the one hand - so I have a book called *Good Company: Economic Policy After Shareholder Primacy*, that looks at the history of shareholder primacy, but then mainly focuses on what kinds of policy measures, supporting worker participation on board, supporting employee ownership, changing board fiduciary duty to be towards the entire company rather than just to shareholders. Many of those policies would necessarily, in some cases, need to be federal. And I think the truth is that a lot of these policies are longer term in any case. We weren't going to see them be signed by a president in the next administration in any case, because we have a very divided Congress no matter who's in the White House, but we do have measures like the Accountable Capitalism Act that Senator Elizabeth Warren put out a number of years ago. We've had other measures like the Reward

Work Act put out by Senator Tammy Baldwin and others that were about worker participation on boards.

But I think we really need to, at this moment, lift up these measures at the state and local level. So my colleagues can talk even more about this, but there's been a lot of efforts around the country in different states to support employee ownership. So we have government employee ownership centers that have come to be in the last five, six, seven years in a number of different states. We have efforts around sectoral bargaining that are, for example, in California around fast food workers. I think these kinds of efforts are going to become more and more important around public policy in the next couple of years.

And then I'll just return to a point that I said a little bit ago, which is that there's also just an opportunity for the private sector to lead without policy mandating what they do. So again, I think the theme of this conversation is that there are lots of opportunities right now that actually don't take policy change that can engage workers more directly in participatory structures inside their companies, whether they're small or the very largest. And experimenting with those as much as possible, I think is actually what will tell us what are the best policies that we should continue to push for whenever we have the political will to do so.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (00:59:34)

Thanks, Lenore. Julian, do you want to add a little bit about the policy landscape on worker ownership?

Julian McKinley (00:59:40)

Sure. And Lenore, just an excellent response. I think there's so much that you shared that I was thinking about. As you mentioned, Liba, employee ownership does benefit from bipartisan support. The Main Street Employee Ownership Act was passed in 2018 and that was signed into law by President Trump. So big picture is, I think that for employee ownership, I think there's still opportunity to move work ahead, particularly as folks focus on how do we support workers in rural communities to really own their own businesses and have a say in their workplace? The silver tsunami, I think, provides a really strong backdrop for that. And we're in the midst of seeing businesses evaporate from our communities, particularly at the rural level. And so I expect that to still be a focus, or at

least an area where we can move things forward in a good way over the next four years.

Aside from that, there has been a lot of momentum that has been built at the federal level. The Worker Ownership Readiness and Knowledge Act was passed, had not been appropriated, although. So we're pushing for that. Not sure that's going to happen in the next month and a week or so, but hopes are high. But much of our attention is, as Lenora said, I think turning towards the state and municipal level, and there's just tremendous opportunity there to build support for employee ownership. There are opportunities, I think, to leverage workforce development dollars and resources to train workers in thinking as owners and to build their voice and to build relationships with unions. There's also a growing relationship between worker cooperatives and unions that I think is really important here from a policy perspective, as we're able to identify what are some of the improvements that can be made at the sectoral level, and we can combine our voices and create a united front to get the policy that can be supportive of workers on a greater level.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:01:40)

Thank you so much. Larry, do you want to speak a little bit to some of those recent policies, the bill that just passed in Massachusetts affording collective bargaining rights to rideshare drivers or California fast food? Local examples of innovation in labor and union law.

Larry Williams Jr. (01:02:03)

Yeah, I think that's really, really massive, especially the bill for the Massachusetts workers. I think when you think about rideshare drivers in particular, there is no way for them to express their voice. They rarely even see each other on the road. So you're really alone. I think many of the folks who are doing these jobs operate in a silo. They think of it as a part-time opportunity, so they really have low expectations about what they deserve in that situation. But from the organizing that I've been a part of, I think that these drivers, a lot of them, if they could do it full-time, they would, and if they could give benefits, they would. What we've seen is a shift in places like California where you saw Lyft Uber drivers organizing and unions like the Machinists and the Teamsters really investing their

time and resources into these campaigns because the regulatory environment is not friendly.

And typically these folks are thought of as independent contractors. And what you have is people who are working five or six different jobs per month, they're doing Lyft, Grubhub, DoorDash, Instacart, as many of these things they can cobble together to try and make a living, and they're still not making it. So I think what I like about these bills is there's an opportunity to build some collective power for these workers. And then in terms of the companies that are operating these platforms, obviously want them to survive and thrive because they've been so useful for us, especially during the pandemic.

But if they're going to survive over the long term, we can't just have Americans working six or seven jobs at one time and call that a living. To me, that's not really employment. And I think recognizing the changing nature of work is the best thing that comes out of this. Because if we still use this employment standard from 1925 or 1915 that didn't really address people having multiple opportunities then and now they're not putting out applications and therefore they fall through the cracks. So to me, it's a future of work conversation, and I'm glad that we're trying to address it state by state, and hopefully I think we can do it nationally at some point.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:04:05)

Thanks, Larry. We have a lot of questions that are asking for advice about how these mechanisms play out in particular types of workplaces, whether it has to do with generational divides in the workplace or the differences between workplaces where folks tend to have very long tenures versus workplaces where there's a lot of turnover, nonprofits versus public sector versus publicly traded companies versus startups.

I'm certainly curious if you want to speak to any of those in particular, but rather than trying to use the few minutes we have left to go through each case, I'm curious if you have some takeaways for folks about, because we're, in most cases, in this voluntary implementation zone, to your point, Lenore, about the opportunity for workplaces to lead and be ahead of policy, what are the considerations that employers should keep in mind about which forms might be right for them and maybe what resources are out there to help them navigate that decision tree when it comes to wanting to support this principle of workplace democracy and trying to understand which forms might be right and wrong for their own workplaces? Julian, do you want to start?

Julian McKinley (01:05:43)

Sure. One of the things that is becoming increasingly apparent to us, as you said, Liba, we work with a variety of firms, from worker co-ops to ESOPs with democratic workplace practices. One of, I think the core learnings that we have is before you can even go to thinking about what structures and decisions are really a fit for our business, you've really got to make sure that your workers' basic needs are met. Do they have the wages that they deserve and they're contributing in terms of creating company value? Do they have access to the benefits that they really need to support their families? Without that, workers are not interested in whether or not I can have a seat on the board. So that I think is step number one.

Beyond that, I think there are a number of resources out there that can help a business think about... And when I say business, I'm thinking about for-profit and non-profit, because DAWI, we have membership as a non-profit, and so our workers, they can become a member, they sit on committees and create policy.

And so in terms of resources that are available to get someone started, once you have those basic needs met, we actually have put out a guide for democratic management. When I say guide, I use that word loosely. It's a book. It's like 120 pages that gives you a little bit of concrete steps to take to begin to share information, to begin to figure out what are the types of decisions that we can have either our workers contribute to, our management level, contribute to? How do we support our workers to develop the skills to contribute to decision making? So that's, I think, a good resource for a number of businesses to take a look at. Our website is institute.coop, so if folks want to go and visit and check that out.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:07:36)

Thank you so much. And does that include anything about open book management, which you mentioned earlier? Because there was an audience question about-

Julian McKinley (01:07:43)

It does, yes. It includes a little bit of open book management. If you're looking at that for that specifically, I'd recommend the Great Game of Business, which is just an excellent resource for for-profit firms.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:07:54)

Thanks. Any other thoughts about navigating-

Lenore Palladino (01:07:58)

Yeah.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:07:58)

Yeah.

Lenore Palladino (01:07:59)

I would add, I think there's a tremendous amount of resources out there, and so I definitely can't name them all. But I think that no one should feel like they're charting this course themselves. So DAWI is an incredible organization, the National Center for Employee Ownership. There's a lot of different entities involved in certainly supporting worker organizing in the labor movement, starting with the AFL-CIO has a whole section on how to organize your workplace, the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee. So mostly I think it might take a little bit of research and time looking around, but I think I'll maybe speak for my co-panelists. I think all of us can be resources for people, certainly Aspen and EOP and The Roundtable are resources. So I think no one should feel like they're charting the course on this themselves.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:08:53)

Thanks for the plug for all of us, Lenore. And I just want to name also for the audience, I didn't say we were starting to go to the audience Q&A, but certainly if you have another question... I've been incorporating them. So if you have a burning question that you haven't submitted yet, please, now is the time before we close. And there was another question about ways that workers who hold shares in public companies can exert influence. And it brings me back to a point that I meant to make earlier, which is also that Lenore, you talk about boards, and I think it is worth just naming that when we have this idea that there's no room for democratic systems in the workplace, boards are a great counterfactual to that.

We actually do have ostensibly democratic systems that govern every workplace and every organization, or most of them. And so it's not that those systems are unfamiliar. And boards obviously have a very particular role, but they do operate democratically and ostensibly are supposed to represent certain interests and help make decisions and create some accountability for between management and other interests. So it's not alien to even the way that most organizations operate. It's just a question of who's at the table, right? So yeah, this question of the role of shareholders and all of us and workers who have a stake.

Lenore Palladino (01:10:40)

Yeah, I think connect with your pension fund, connect with the shareholder organization that might be connected to your employer or your faith-based institution or your community. I think that we have, at this moment, a tremendous amount of really important shareholder activism going on to try to actually shift how corporations work as well. And I think that there's a lot of those organizations, as I mentioned at the beginning, that do actually require worker participation on some certain pension boards. And there's a lot of other organizations where if people are interested, they can get more involved, for sure.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein (01:11:25)

Thank you so much. And we're at time. Oh, no. I think maybe we have one minute if anyone else wants to... My clock is different from this clock. If anyone else wanted to weigh in on that question before I close.

Thank you. So thank you so much to all of you, Lenore, Larry, and Julian, for being here today and sharing your perspective and expertise. And thank you to the audience for really excellent questions and engagement. The Economic Opportunities Program has a full slate of events like this that are planned for 2025. So if you're not already on the mailing list, please do sign up now to get information straight to your inbox. And also stick around for a second to fill out that post-event survey.

No event would be complete without a shout-out to my colleagues across the Economic Opportunities Program for helping pull together today's event. They include Tony Mastria, Nora Heffernan, Frances Almodovar, Matt Helmer, and Maureen Conway, our fearless leader who was not able to join us today, but is very supportive of this line of

conversation, and to our partners at Architects for making sure everything runs smoothly and addressing some of the sound issues early on. So thank you all, and have a great day.