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Oral History Conversation with Sara Schairer (Compassion It)

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ORAL HISTORY CONVERSATIONS WITH CHANGEMAKERS

By Students in PHILOSOPHY 332: Business Ethics | Spring 2017

SARA SCHAIRER (COMPASSIONIT)

with Caitlin Catherwood, Kendall Higgins, and Lauren Sykes

Lauren:

So I guess to start. Where did you come up with the idea “Compassion It”? I know you saw the Ellen video, did it stem from that? Or did you have ideas of it before?

Sara:

It came from an episode of the Ellen DeGeneres show that I was watching in 2008. And at the time, I was going through a really hard time in my own life. I was facing an unwanted divorce and my daughter was only 18 months old at the time and I had quit my job to be home with her (my pharma sales job) to stay home with her in 2008. That was the economic fallout so there were no jobs and I couldn't find a job and I was just at home. I was a big mess at the time and I caught an Ellen episode and she was featuring Wayne Dyer who has passed away now, but he was an author and a speaker and he was talking about compassion. Wayne Dyer said that compassion is the most important lesson to teach your kids. That if we could teach our children to put themselves in another's shoes, we could solve every social problem on the planet. No more hunger, no more war, you name it. It's gone with compassion. And i had never really thought about compassion before in that way and I couldn't get it out of my mind. And that evening, the word compassionate turned into two words “compassion it”. It was like a vision. And i saw it just the way you see it printed now with white lettering on a black background just like it was a bumper sticker and i thought initially this should be a bumper sticker it could be like the next “Coexist” so that's really where it came from.

Kendall:

So I know that you said you saw “Compassion It” like pop up in your brain. Were there any instances in your childhood that you can like relate back to being taught compassion or was this your first introduction to compassion?

Sara:

I think my parents raised me to be kind to others so it was never compassion wasn't really a word I had used much or they hadn't used that specific word, but we grew up going to church and my parents volunteered so I certainly knew that giving to others was something that I should do, but it wasn't really something that I focused a lot of attention on.

Caitlin:

When you were creating compassion it was there like a memory that stands out to you the most from that time?

Sara:

Oh man. There are so many neat memories from those initial days, but I can remember how the ideas of the wristbands came about. I was with my good friend Sherri Wilkins who was helping

me in the very, she is a marketing genius, and she was helping me in the very beginning of “compassion it” and we were getting t-shirts and making some organic cotton t-shirts to use as we thought we thought at first it would be a sticker and then it evolved into we should be a t-shirt company and so we were working on that and I said to her “you know I really want this to be more like a movement. It’s the way we should be living. It’s not a brand. Like a brand doesn’t feel right for me for it to be a brand” and she had said, and i remember, we were at a coffee shop in North Park. I can’t remember what the name of the coffee shop is, but I remember her saying “well you probably should sell something cheaper than a \$30 organic cotton t-shirt if you want to start a movement so what about like a Livestrong type of band?” and I automatically was like no that’s a terrible idea and then later that evening was when I had the idea to have the two sided wristband. But those early days, I mean, I would work my job and then meet up with her or I had another team of people who were a social entrepreneurship fellowship that I was involved in. We would meet in the evenings and it was really I was very dedicated to getting this up and going so just having memories of the obsession and excitement of what is this and what could this be?

Lauren:

So you mentioned Livestrong, are there any movements when you were starting your own movement that really inspired you or were really strongly a part of before you started “Compassion It”?

Sara:

Oh gosh. I don’t think so. I don’t think there were anything that I really was moved to join before.

Lauren:

Well that’s cool then you created your own movement!

Sara:

I guess that’s the one then that really got me going.

Lauren:

Do you remember a first like “Compassion It” moment where you saw someone else engage in the compassion that you share as well?

Sara:

“Compassion It” or just like a moment of compassion?

Lauren:

Like when say you taught someone else about the “Compassion It” movement like the first maybe moment you’ve seen them being compassionate in the way that you taught them?

Sara:

Oh gosh I don’t know if I can remember a specific time, but any time I teach a class now on compassion and anytime that I’m with my student/participants and they share, they always have a time in the beginning of class where we talk about what happened this past week and they share their experiences from the week and about how “wow this person at work who usually frustrates me I was able to take a moment and take a breath and recognize this person is

probably suffering and I was able to change my interaction with that person” and those types of experiences really make me so happy to see. And the self-compassion piece has really resonated with people.

Kendall:

So how do people find out about your classes via “Compassion It”? Is it word of mouth or?

Sara:

Ya no. Well marketing is an area where we need some help, but we try to promote things via social media and through our email list. So if you’ve signed up on our email if you go to the website and sign up for our newsletter list then we let people know when I’m teaching classes.

Kendall:

So how many teachers and like the U.S. are certified in compassion? Because I saw you were certified via Stanford in compassion so like how many like what is the process to get that certification and how many people actually have it because I’m assuming it’s pretty rare

Sara:

Ya so Stanford has a sector for compassion and altruism research and education and developed an eight week course called “Compassion Cultivation”. So I’m certified to teach that course and I was in the first group of people who get trained to teach the course. So I think there were about 50 in my class and there are people internationally some people internationally in that class as well and they only had the opportunity to teach one more cohort beyond my group, but now I think they’re looking at another you know trying to get more people trained to teach it. But we the process for my class it was three different quarters where we learned about the science of compassion, philosophical perspectives of compassion, and then we learned how to facilitate various groups. So we learned about that a little bit so it was a good year long process at Stanford and then they had to supervise us teaching a class. So it took about a year and a half to go through the program to get certified. They shortened that to a 6 month long program so I think if people and now there is an entity called the Compassion Institute and they’re the ones doing the teacher training. I believe so I don’t think Stanford is holding the teacher training anymore.

Kendall:

So most of these people who are getting certified, what’s their end goal? I mean you came upon this social entrepreneurship venture what do they usually go to the compassion education realm for?

Sara:

Well most people who get certified to teach these courses are psychologists or therapists in some way. So it’s something that they offer their patients or their communities. There weren’t very many of us who were not therapists to get certified to teach so I think I was really lucky to get in the program.

Kendall:

It’s crazy to see someone who is not necessarily I mean you were in pharma sales and then you went into like kind of a medical, counselor-ish type of realm and then you started a social entrepreneurship out of it. So that’s pretty cool.

Sara:

Ya, it's neat to see how it's all worked...

Caitlin:

In the 8 week course, what do they just do lectures, do they go out into the field?

Sara:

So the 8 week course is the course I teach and it's an 8 week course that is 2 hours each week and it's the same participants the whole 8 weeks and it's a step by step process for cultivating compassion towards ourselves and ultimately towards all so we start with mindfulness. A week on mindfulness and then we learn how to practice compassion for a loved one and the idea behind that is to understand what compassion feels like. And it's much easier to know what compassion feels like when it's someone you love so it's like oh that's what compassion is! And then we spend two weeks directing that feeling towards ourselves and learning how to treat ourselves the way we treat our friends, which is not something we learn. It's really difficult but so helpful when we can learn that. And then we start sending that compassion out. So we work on compassion for people that are challenging in our lives or people that are others that normally fall outside of that circle of compassion.

Lauren:

But since in your Stanford classes you said there were mostly therapists or psychologists. What characteristics do you think you had that made you a social entrepreneur that has made you different kind of than anyone else going through that class?

Sara:

I think the reason why I was able to get in and I don't know I can't confirm this, but I think that they saw I was really passionate about compassion because I had already come up with "Compassion It" and I had a mission that I wanted to get this phrase out to as many people as I could and I really saw the power of compassion. And that is the mission of the folks that created this class. They want the message of compassion to go to as many people as possible. So it's actually the man who authored the course is the Dalai Lama's senior translator his name is Thupten Jinpa. So it is based on Tibetan Buddhism. It's completely secular so it doesn't feel religious at all or like Buddhism, but it is based off of his techniques and his, the Dalai Lama gave the largest grant he's ever given a non-Tibetan organization to Stanford to start this center. So it's really, if you know anything about the Dalai Lama, he wants this message to get to as many people as possible. So I think that what they saw was that I had this fire in my belly like "hey we need to get this message out there. We need to get to schools. We need to get to businesses. We need to be everywhere. Whereas most folks who are teaching this stuff, they just want to help their patients or they just want to help their communities. They may not have the larger vision. Some of us do, but they're not as concerned about making that their goal. So I do think that they wanted to give me a shot and I think that it's good to bring in a little different thinking. They didn't want everyone to be the same in that program.

Lauren:

How have you used the Stanford center to expand "Compassion It"? Like have you used the resources there to really broaden your reach?

Sara:

It's really just the connections that I made there that have been able to help me a lot. So I think having an affiliation with Stanford gives "Compassion It" some street cred and the people that go through the teacher training. All of them care about compassion so they all are wanting to inspire compassion to others. So I think it's just more about the networking. The center itself hasn't really done a whole lot with us, but the people have.

Kendall:

So when we were researching you on your website, we noticed that your program targets a lot of elementary and middle school students. Could you walk us through some of the adventures or experiences you've had in learning how to teach compassion to children? And the challenge of teaching it and some of the important lessons you've learned.

Sara:

Ya I think what I've learned is that is not my personal ideal audience. I feel good about teaching college students even high school students and above because I love the hard questions you guys ask and the discussions that we have. That just seems to be more in my wheelhouse than with little kids. Even though I have a ten year old and I adore her, I feel like I can interact with her well. Kids are a completely different animal so that's why I hope to someday have a team that can focus on these younger kids who are better with them. So I don't know if I know the tricks of the trade for having them all be quiet. Like I've learned the whole criss-cross applesauce and clap if you hear me. Or whatever they I can't even think about it now, but if you hear me once clap once or you know those things, those little tricks. I don't really know that stuff well. What I do try to do is make my interactions in schools fun for the kids. So the last time I did assemblies, I had music in the beginning and I had the teachers come up and do a little dance and clapping with me because the kids think that's fun and anything I can do to get them to do to get them to interact is the way that I try to work with the kids. I can't say that I've quite figured it out. I haven't quite cracked the nut on the best way to bring this to schools.

I think that "Compassion It" is appealing to kids in schools because it's simple. And the wristband is a tool that kids get. And it's an easy way for teachers to point out "hey that's an act of compassion flip your wristband". So it's an easy way to reward them and that's really nice. I think when you go into schools, it's just gotta be easy. So that's something else I've learned. Teachers are overwhelmed, the principals are overwhelmed. They have so much to do and it's sad, but this is not a priority for them as much as we want it to be. They have academic standards that they are trying to meet. So figuring out a way to bring compassion in and making it easy is what we're all about. So I hope is that schools and really schools around the world have ordered our wristbands and we have lesson plans online than they can use themselves. I don't, what I want to be creating is something that I don't have to be in the schools to do. They can do it themselves, they can bring the wristbands in to reinforce it and to make it, to really celebrate those acts of compassion. So that's sort of what I'm hoping. And another thing I've noticed, this is important too. Last year, I had this epiphany that I can go into a school and have a great time with the kids and they're excited and they get the wristbands and it's great, but if the staff isn't into it and the staff doesn't embody this in the classroom it goes nowhere. So, now when schools reach out and are interested in having me come in, I say "what'd I love to do is do a training with your staff first and then we can follow up with something for the kids" and that gives me the opportunity to bring self-compassion to the teachers, which they need. They also are really hard on themselves. I want to see teachers embodying self-compassion in the classroom um so I teach them self-compassion skills and then help them figure out, help them, um make sure compassion

is a priority in their classrooms. So that's, that is something that I have figured out that I feel really good about it's that it's gotta start with the staff.

Kendall:

So after you've come in and taught these classes, whether it's high school, college, have you heard feedback from teachers or I guess students, not necessarily, younger-students, are giving you direct feedback of the differences it's made in...?

Sara:

Yeah, yeah a lot of teachers or counselors have, have written to me and just said that "this has helped change their atmosphere around their campuses" so, yeah its cool.

Kendall:

Especially with like young kids I think, you know, they're into like, "this is mine," but being able to teach them compassion from a young age is so vital.

Sara:

It is and if, if, if you can learn these skills when you're young to recognize that, "hey everybody deserves compassion even the people who maybe are frustrating to you or might annoy you or are different than you, that's still a person who deserves your attention and your, um, respect. Uh if, if we can all learn that from a young age then that's someone who is going to be a better employee and a better teammate when they get out into the workforce. They're going to be happier. You know there's a lot of research out there that shows compassion makes us happy. When we have, because it builds these connections with others and so when you're happier you are more productive at work and you're better to work with. I mean there's so many benefits from this skill, but it's not something many people focus on.

Lauren:

I love the way that you said how teachers can incorporate it in the classroom because I think a lot of times they're more interested in, getting the math done for the day or meeting their requirements. Whereas that's something visually like kids will see and be like, "wow that's a great thing to be compassionate" and you flip that's just like so amazing. And it becomes more a genuine too.

Kendall:

And that becomes a movement like, "oh he's done his one compassionate thing today, like I haven't done mine like ahh I need to find something good to do. It's like pressure, good pressure.

Sara:

Right! When you're seeking out ways to be compassionate it really cool. That's a good thing to have in your mind right, we're training the brain to look at the world in this way and to seek out ways to be compassionate. It's really about changing what's up here so it's just an easy tool to do that. It's a mindset intervention which is kind of a buzzword in education these days, but I think this is a really a relatively simple mindset intervention.

Kendall:

And then we also noticed that compassionate is present in like 49 countries which is pretty cool.

Sara:

Yeah, more than 50 now.

Kendall:

50 now? Wow. So what has made compassionate go international? Like is it you personally reaching out to these people?

Sara:

No, well we got really lucky uh soon after we launched someone, you know, we had wristbands in pairs so that you wear, the tag reads “Wear one, share one” and someone sent their extra wristband to a YouTuber who has hundreds of thousands of followers around the world, she’s a teen, or she was a teen, I don’t know if she’s still is a teen.

Kendall:

What YouTuber, sorry just curious!

Sara:

Her name is Cary Hope Fester and she’s out of England. The video is on our website too but she did a little bit about her wristband on her YouTube channel and literally overnight we became global . Cause teens from around the world started ordering our wristbands. Um, and then we’ve also have a really neat partnership with the with Kristin Neff and Chris Germer who created a course called “Mindful Self Compassion” and it’s another eight week course and they do teacher trainings around the world. And they have in their teacher manual for the teachers to order the self-compassion wristbands for their students. So, we get orders for the self-compassion wristbands around the world often. So that has helped us grow too and then just social media. Literally, it’s amazing to see how social media has allowed us to reach people that I would never have imagined.

Kendall:

Have you had any international experience, like do you ever teach courses international?

Sara:

Yeah, I was able to go to Botswana a couple years ago when I was a new teacher, I co-facilitated a couple two day courses in Botswana and they, someone reached out from there uh, was one Magdolina (UNCLEAR) who was starting a compassion movement there. And she was just really inspired to do something because it was a country that was really really suffering they were highly affected by the HIV epidemic. And uh people are just so used to suffering that they don’t really feel as much anymore so their healthcare providers particularly nurses and social workers needed to learn about self-compassion. And that helps them then have the resources to continue to be compassionate to their patients. Um and then the country just needed some nurturing of the people’s hearts so that was a pretty cool experience.

Caitlin:

Have you followed up with her, at all and seen where that has gone?

Sara:

Which one? Magdolina in Botswana? Oh yeah we’re in touch all the time she has, she just moved, um, to Indonesia, her husband works for UNICEF so she isn’t there anymore. But, you

know, she was able to do a lot with them, Botswana, and they were selling our, they have uh Botswana blue and black compassionate wristband that they were selling there in a local grocery chain and other stores so I don't know if they're still selling them or not but yeah.

Lauren:

Obviously compassion can be taught to people of any age or any level or background. Is there a certain like age group you try to target or do you just try to talk to as many people as possible?

Sara:

This is funny cause when I was thinking about, "when they ask me about challenges, what will I say?" This is a big challenge for us because we do want to reach everyone and it's hard, it's hard to be successful if you don't have a specific target audience. Um so I don't know if I'm, I really see the benefit of teaching this to younger kids so that they grow up with the skills of self-compassion and compassion for others. That's how we can change the world. I also think that people that are your age and in high school that are getting ready to enter the workforce and if you guys can come in with this compassionate, compassionate lenses I think that can do a lot of good in our world. And then there are people in power today that I think can learn this now, so I don't, I don't really know. I do see the benefit of reaching each group. I don't think it's too late, I don't think it's, um, I mean it's tough to teach an old dog new tricks as they say but I'm not giving up on folks who maybe are politicians or our leaders. I think that we can still influence them if they, it's a simple exercise of recognizing, ah this person is just like me, they want to be happy and free from suffering. You can see that others are that way and you can start making decisions based on that, um, that can change the world.

Kendall:

Um, so kind of like are going to shift gears. Um, in our class we discussed a lot about how people are shaped by their values and their experiences. Um, can you think of some specific experiences in compassion it like the program um that made you rethink or change some of your values? That's kind of a deep question. (laughs)

Sara:

Yeah, well I think, I think I've always had the same values which are compassion, and family, and friends um. And I value courage a lot but obviously compassion is just a huge focus in my life now and it wasn't as much before.

Kendall:

So, has compassion changed the way you see your other values? Like, the way you interact with people obviously has probably changed. Is there a moment where you realized "wow, compassion has taken over the way I do things" like a specific moment?

Sara:

Ah, I can't think of a specific moment. I can say that I took, I know you guys have to take the strengthsfinder, don't you too? Or maybe you not. Anyway, but I took this assessment called the strengthsfinder assessment right when I started compassion it, so 5 years ago and then I recently retook it and the strengths have shifted a little bit. And what I noticed was that now because mindfulness practice is part of my life now and it's what I teach, it really awareness and mindfulness is how you get to compassion because if you aren't aware that there is suffering you can't be compassionate, right? So, that has changed. Um I guess I see the value now in having

time alone and in silence and before that I always thought I needed to be around people and that friends and interacting and I love connecting with others. And I still do love all of that, but I place much more value on seeking out time for myself and having time to practice mindfulness and have silence instead of filling it with people like I used to.

Kendall:

Makes sense. (laughs) And then in our class to we also have learned the difference between entrepreneurs and salaried managers are obviously very different um what sets entrepreneurs apart is their courage or ability to act on uncertainty. What are some of the biggest uncertainties that you faced going into compassion it and how are you able to deal with them?

Sara:

Gosh, there is still the uncertainty of whether or not this will survive. And that's a scary thought right? There's something to be said about having a salary and good benefits and a 401 K plan and all of this. And just not knowing and I am spending all of my time and energy on this thing and it may fail and what does that mean for my career or for my future, so there's uncertainty around that absolutely, um and I don't remember the second part of the question.

Kendall:

Um, how do you deal with that like on a daily basis and not let it overwhelm you. And I like a lot of people a lot of entrepreneurs give up when they don't see the action or the result right away. And obviously you've been in this for 5 years and now it's your full time job. How do you deal with the uncertainty that can probably get overwhelming at times?

Sara:

Yeah, I think that's where my mindfulness practice can help cause I can notice that maybe I am making up stories or I'm worried about something that hasn't happened yet so I try to come back to the present moment and say what I know right now is that we're still going and we're growing and doing well so um that helps. And then I also have been able to say let's say worst case scenario this doesn't work out the people that I have met, the skills that I've acquired, the networks that I've created through this are gonna benefit me way more than if I had just stuck with my boring sales job from before. And I'll have a much more rewarding career moving forward no matter what. But I certainly no part of me wants to even think about compassion it failing. Um but I do I just feel like things will work out either way. I'll be ok. You know I thought about something when you asked about, I just thought of the values that have changed I can say that I had this idea of what my life should be for most of my life which was married with children and I'd probably stay home or have a job where I was mostly with the kids. And I would be totally content and happy and that would be focus and wasn't so much on the career side. Um, and now I am realizing that in order for me to be fulfilled I need to be serving others many other not just my family. Um, so that shifted for me in a big way and not feeling like I'm a failure as a mother because I well, I'm only with my daughter half of the time. Um and so making sure that I don't feel guilt for that um. And be feeling like I'm an example for her of someone who can work a job that she loves and is helping others and is exciting everyday um and you don't have to just get married and have kids. That's not the route that you have to take when you're a woman. So, I guess I don't know if those are values or just a different way of looking at life, but I yeah that has all changed for me. And the definition of success like I think before I had the definition that many people had that making a lot of money means you're successful. And having a nice house and all of that which I'm using air quotes which you can't

see on audio but that success. But now I don't see any of that as successful I think that it's comfortable it's nice to have to have enough funds to be comfortable. But if I see someone with a lot of money and they are not giving back to others or spending time I don't know I almost see that as unsuccessful in someone to say that you have all of this are you even recognizing that there are others who have nothing.

Kendall:

So, what's your definition of success? Is it giving back?

Sara:

Um, I think success is living a fulfilling life for you. Um in a way that can contribute to the world I do think that. I think that needs to be part of it I don't think everyone needs to work for a non profit to do that though. I think that we need people that are bankers and doing all the things that people that make a lot of money do and there's nothing wrong with that and some people love being lawyers or they love founding facebook, right? There's nothing wrong with, heck i wish that I made a lot of money I think the more money you have the more you can do for others but i think if you're not seeking out ways to help others who can use your help then I don't think you're a successful person.

Lauren:

How did you first hear about um social entrepreneurship and did you ever think that when you were in pharma and going through college that you would ever pursue that path or where did that really come from?

Sara:

I don't think it was a thing when I was in college. So I graduated in 99 which is a long time ago. Um, and social entrepreneurs weren't really a thing. I am trying to think when did Toms get going, I'd have to look cause I think that might have been the first like, oh that's cool, somebody who's giving back to others. Um and then, I was talking to one of my college roommates about Compassion It. And she's the one that said, "oh you need to connect with my friend Tony, he's an entrepreneur who's is doing, has this really neat company that he's starting. And anyway, his company was doing this social entrepreneurship fellowship. And this was 5 years ago, and that was right when I got started with Compassion It and I got into the program. And that's really when I started learning more about it. Um, but I don't remember thinking about it. I certainly didn't go to school thinking I would be an entrepreneur. It just sort of happened. Yeah.

Kendall:

Then, do you have any advice for people who want to be an entrepreneur? Specifically, um in the social side of it.

Sara:

Well, I can say looking back the reasons why Compassion It has been successful and has reached so many people is I have A.) shared it with others, and then also been open to feedback and help. So I have never tried to do this on my own, I attribute much of the great...the great stuff that's happened for Compassion It is because of other people. Honestly, the wristbands wouldn't exist if Sharie my friend hadn't said, "oh, we should wear wristband, right". I would have never of thought of that, because I thought that wristbands were stupid. Um, and then, one of my teammates in that fellowship, who is still a board member, 5 years later, Heather

Arnold, she's the one that said, "you know, we should never just sell the wristbands individually, we should always pair them up. So that you wear one and share one". Well because we have paired them up, someone sent their extra wristband to Carrie Hope Fletcher in England and she did a thing on her YouTube channel, right. So those two ideas alone...I mean... and there are many others that I can share, so I think...um...taking...listening to others and what they have to say...I don't...and a lot of people have ideas for me that I don't use, but I'm always open to hear ideas from others and to give people, other people ownership for sharing Compassion It in their communities. So...um...yeah, I think it's sort of noticing if there is any ego at play and checking that at the door and saying, alright the mission of this organization is to get this message to as many people as we can, to inspire compassionate attitudes and actions. So...would...always keeping that in mind as I'm making decisions, and saying yes to some things and no to others. And knowing is it because of my ego that I'm saying no, or is it because it really wouldn't be a wise decision.

Kendall:

Do you have a...your proudest Compassion It moment?

Sara: Um...

Kendall:

I'm sure you have a lot.

Sara:

There are a couple. One just...just happened, I have a new partnership with the University of North Carolina and Duke, both athletic departments. And if you know anything about those schools they're huge rivals-in sports especially. And so...and the campuses are only 10 miles apart. I went to school at the University of North Carolina. And you just go to school, and you learn to hate Duke. I mean it's just part of the (laughter-Kendall cues in on the word "culture") culture. You hate each other, um so it's really neat that they have decided to embrace this idea of coming together under compassion. And they have a sportsmanship week coming up in April. Um it's through the conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, so Duke and Carolina together are going to be promoting Compassion It. And we created this special wristband that's Carolina blue on one side and Duke blue on the other. So, if you're a Carolina fan, like me, you put it on with the Duke blue side out and then when you Compassion It you get to flip it to the Carolina blue side which of course, like that's the biggest incentive ever to do a Compassion It act (Sara flipping her special wristband in the background) because I don't want to wear this Duke blue wristband on my wrist. Um, so we have these wristbands, we have these for the student athletes for both schools, and we're gonna be launching that during ACC's sportsmanship week. So I know, one day the women's tennis players from both schools are going to go to a local school and talk about sportsmanship and compassion. They've already...they already did that a couple weeks ago, um to bring...you know having both, Duke and Carolina in the same..when I saw pictures of it a few weeks ago having the student athletes with each other with a whiteboard that said, "Compassion It" on it I cried. (We all said a soft "aw") I...cause it's really...like if we can bring Duke and Carolina together (laughter) we can create peace anywhere guys, like Israel and Palestine we are coming after you-right. I mean that..so that's sort of the...and to just, also as I have mentioned we are just trying to get this message out. And often times people that are yogis or who are already into this stuff are the ones that are attracted to Compassion It but this everybody loves, well not everybody, but most people love sports so this

is one way for us to reach people who maybe wouldn't have exposure to this otherwise and the idea that this is something that we could duplicate at other places around the country or with other...heck even professional rivalries. I just see a lot of potential for what this could do. So that was one really big moment for Compassion It and for me...um cause you know if you think about there's really one...there's a brand that those student athletes wear and it's Nike, right, it's not like everybody can get their products on these student athletes, but because we are a non-profit we were able to do it. That was pretty special..ah and then we were able to be...ah we were invited to participate in the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday celebration a couple years ago at Irvine. So I didn't get to meet him, unfortunately, but I was there and all the VIPs had Compassion It wristbands and bags and water bottles. And I was sitting in the second row during a talk he gave and Michael Frat, he was like right in front of me, who I love. And everybody sitting around me had Compassion It wristbands on, and the Dalai Lama was right there up on stage with Gloria Stephen and you know some other well-known folks. And just to see Compassion It in that environment was pretty surreal to me, so it was something...then Gloria Stephen...you guys probably don't even know who that is, but she's a...um, artist or she's a singer. You don't know her, but anyways (loud laughter) it's okay that you don't, people that are my age know her. Um she tweeted out about...cause I met her after and I talked to her about Compassion It and she tweeted out a picture. It was pretty cool...so...yeah it's been neat to see.

Kendall:

Do you have any vision of...I mean, I know you talked about sports, but do you have any other vision of where you want Compassion It to go...like...kind of within reaching distance, like your next steps?

Sara:

Right now, I can see...I see us focusing on Corporate America. I think that...um...A.) for funding purposes it will help us, if we can start bringing these practices to people who can pay to have us there, and people are starting to recognize the benefit of having compassionate leaders, especially, when they are dealing with millennials, who are not going to put up with people who do not have empathy. Um...so not only from a funding perspective, but also what I think about how much power is in the hands of Corporate America and if we can start changing the mindsets of folks who have power...um...we can do a lot of good. So, my vision for Compassion It is that at some point we have a team that focuses on corporations, and a team for elementary schools, and a team for high schools, and a team for healthcare providers, and a team for college students. So, I wanna see these various aspects of Compassion It...um...taking it to various audiences around the country and the world. So we are focused...I have a teammate in Chicago who is from the west side of Chicago and he's working on making Compassion It his full-time job so that he can teach these practices...we sent him through the Stanford program. So, he's certified to teach it and there's a lot of violence happening...um...in the west and south sides of Chicago and we think this is something that can really benefit that city, as well so that's exciting too to think we could get something working in Chicago and show how Compassion really has made an impact there. And then again, just replicate that in other places.

Lauren:

That's really cool.

Sara:

Yep.

Lauren:

I was going to say, I saw a “Donate to Chicago Branch” which is really cool to see that someone...I mean...that a similar mindset as you is doing the same thing. How do you balance that...like does...I mean, what ideas has he brought to the team...like how does that work with the east-west coast?

Sara:

Yeah, so he's been on...(the guy's name?)Barrelle...has been on the Compassion It team since we started. He was in the social entrepreneurship fellowship (Lauren says: cool) 5 years ago, so he's been a part of Compassion It from nearly the very beginning and he's a board member now. And he is just so passionate, he's learned a lot about it, and recognizes the need for it in his town. Um...so he...he has a lot of passion, he has built an incredible team there of people who are helping him spread this message and who see the value in it. So he's got a more specific focus and trying to...you know...what's going on there is really like a warzone there, honestly, the violence is unreal. Many many people get shot and killed...um...every year and it's getting worse and worse. And he can see how this can help, so he's certainly has a different...a different kind of fire in his belly because it's in his backyard. And wants to see this change...change things. So, he's awesome...I feel...I'm really really lucky to have him on the team.

Kendall:

It's hard to even infiltrate neighborhoods like that, if you're not from those neighborhoods.

Sara:

Right!

Kendall:

Like you can't do it.

Sara:

Yeah...right.

Kendall:

Like they don't trust you so that's really cool that he's bringing this message of like Compassion, which I'm sure a lot of people in these...in the harder neighborhoods is hard to even give compassion when a lot probably haven't received it.

Sara:

Right.

Kendall:

So...

Sara:

And having that...teaching the community and the folks who are...um...there are so many nonprofits that are doing good work there who need to learn self-compassion too so he can benefit those different groups who are trying to help the community. Um...but yeah...I mean, it's awful to hear people speaking about like having more of a crack-down of the police...like have

the police force doing more. And...and...arresting more or you know...what were they calling it? Like frisk and...or...arrest...or whatever.

Kendall:
Stop and frisk.

Sara:
Stop and frisk, yeah. Whatever that is...you know stuff like that, that's not gonna make a community safer, it's going to make people upset and angry. And...um...compassion, if you show people that you care that is what is going to decrease violence. Compassion is the antidote to violence and what we learned...what I learned from my teachers is that any type of unskilled behavior...and this could be just acting out by yelling at someone or shooting someone comes from an unmet need. And that's...that's Marshall Rosenberg's work, he started something called Nonviolent Communication, it's a book I recommend. But that's what he says, and it's true...right...if people are peaceful and happy they're not killing other people, they're not violent. You don't have very many happy terrorists running around...right...so that's what we need, we don't need to be alienating people and making them feel like they're bad or whatever. We need to show them, yeah, but your behavior is not allowed, we don't want you to do that, but we know that you as a person deserve respect and compassion. And especially...imagine growing up in those neighborhoods, the fear that you must feel starting from a very young age. How can you get out of that cycle if you don't have people showing you that you deserve love and compassion...right.

Kendall:
I'm going to check the time and see.

Kendall:
We can probably wrap-up-ish. But if there is anything you want future social entrepreneurs...or to know...or hear about Compassion or your experiences as a social entrepreneur? Anything you want them to know?

Sara:
Yeah!

Kendall:
Hopefully, this is going in the library (laughter).

Sara:
I mean...I think if you...I think another thing that I have learned over this experience in the past 5 years. I back-up...okay...this is something that I learned. My father was killed in 2004 in an accident when he was jogging and he was hit from behind by a truck and was suddenly killed. And that was devastating for me, it also taught me that any moment could be my last. And when you have that in mind, you have to recognize...like if you have something you want to do that you think could help others, you have to do it. You have to at least try. You have to be smart about it, don't...maybe don't quit a full-time job and go 100% if you haven't tested it out. And you got to test things first and be smart, but you have to go for it. Because we really aren't on here...on this planet for very long. And people talk about it all the time, what regrets will you have on your deathbed. Boy, if I had stayed in pharmaceutical sales I...I would have looked back

and said, “yeah, I had a lot of money, and I had a really nice house, and I wore fancy clothes, but man I wasn’t happy”. So you...I think...I think if you feel you’re called to do something, if you have an idea...if you..I mean...you feel it’s something you just feel inside, you have to go for it, you have to. And you know if it doesn’t work out the experience of going for it is going to set you up for something great. So I think it’s just having the courage and surrounding yourself with other people who have that same view of the world. Um...that has been a challenge for me because the friends that I hang out with now look differently than the ones that I use to have. And not that I don’t love my friends from before still too, I do, but our values aren’t really aligned as much anymore. Um...and I can’t go to fancy restaurants, we can’t hang out so...(loud laughter) you know I can’t afford to hang out with them. Um...but yeah I do think that it’s good to surround yourself too with people...other people who care about the world because they are going to inspire you to keep going and you can learn from each other. And it’s cool to be with...I mean I really feel like I am around people who are doing good for others, that’s who I am around all the time and how awesome is that?! It’s really...it’s cool, I feel really lucky.

— End of Transcription —