

Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Steph Speirs: [00:00:00] While working at the White House, we would travel to Yemen and we'd be, you know, spending all of our time trying to get the dictator out of power. President Saleh, at the time, was in power and gunning down peaceful protestors. And yet when you looked out the window of the armored vehicles we were driving in, you would see people just lined up, waiting for fuel. They couldn't get enough fuel to power their everyday lives because terrorists were blowing up oil pipelines. And I thought, I don't feel like I'm doing anything to help those ordinary people get the thing that they're most concerned about, which is power.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:00:50] I'm Yesh Pavlik Slenk. And this is Degrees: Real talk about planet -saving careers from Environmental Defense Fund. My guest today is right in the middle of one of the most critical challenges of our time. The quest to move our energy economy away from fossil fuels and into systems that are clean, equitable, and renewable.

Steph Speirs is the CEO and co-founder of Solstice. It's a dynamic startup that is working to bring solar energy to the 80% of Americans who are unable to install solar panels on their roofs. Me included because I live in a condo.

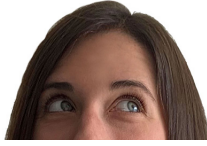
I can't wait to bring this conversation to you, but first I want to welcome you to the first episode of our new podcast.

Think of Degrees as part roadmap, part clubhouse, part therapy session for anyone who wants to have a career with purpose and impact. And every week I'm going to share interviews with people who are working on really big topics like climate change, economic injustice, renewable energy pollution, so much more.

And our guests come from all walks of life. They are entrepreneurs like Steph Speirs, our guest today. They are city leaders, investors, consultants, they're artists, they're storytellers, engineers, scientists. And they're going to tell you how they got where they are, share their behind -the- scenes struggles, their obstacles, their doubts, fears, and failures.

And also their successes. So I hope, listener, that you will see yourself in our guests. Actually, I am sure that you will see yourself in our guests. So welcome to the club. Please subscribe and share. And now, listeners, grab a cup of coffee and join us.

To Steph, what makes solar energy a non-starter for most people isn't where your house sits or whether your roof is shaded. It's that the solar industry is following an outdated



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

business model, which puts solar out of reach for most families, particularly those with low incomes.

Steph has had an incredible career path. It has led her across the globe into some very interesting places, including the White House.

Steph Speirs, welcome to Degrees.

Steph Speirs: [00:03:14] Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:03:17] So this is a relatively new idea, the idea of community solar. It's only been around for the last couple of years.

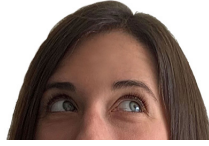
Can you take me back to the aha moment when you realized that this was an issue that really needed to be addressed?

Steph Speirs: [00:03:33] Yeah, I was working abroad on renewable energy. I had spent some time in India and Pakistan working on energy access and working primarily in off-grid communities. So we're talking, you know, solar micro grids and solar home systems and solar lanterns for people who have no access to the grid.

And I had a moment where I was walking on this poop -to -power farm in Pakistan, where I realized I didn't have to be halfway across the world to get people energy access. So that work is important. But back home in America, in my own backyard, there are so many people that don't have access to renewables and so I looked into that and I said, okay, let's see why. And then we found out that four out of five Americans cannot put solar on their own home. Maybe they're a renter or a condo owner, like you said you were. Or maybe there's a tree covering their roof or their roof is facing the wrong way or it's made out of the wrong materials or it's flat.

And then there are the people that can't afford rooftop solar. So either you have to have the \$10,000 to \$40,000 upfront to pay for it, or you need to access solar financing. But that means you need a high FICO credit score to access financing. You have to have a credit score of 680 or 700 and above. So when you think of all those enabling characteristics you need to have to allow you to do solar, you can see why so many people can't get it.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:05:06] I think you've talked about this a little bit, but what makes the work of democratizing energy so urgent right now?



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Steph Speirs: [00:05:15] I think COVID and the pandemic era has taught us, obviously, a lot of lessons. One of them is to take nothing for granted, but the other is that these are not new issues that we're dealing with.

Now they're just more exposed. And Warren Buffett has a quote that says something like, "Only when the tide goes out do you see who's swimming naked." And so COVID has exposed the cracks in our foundation that we've always had, but we're never fixed because we put on a veneer of stock market success over it, and we never addressed the root causes.

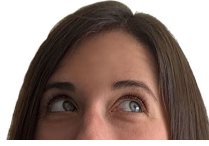
And so you see inequality. You see racism come to the fore right now. And also the conversation around climate change has drastically changed in the last few months. And thankfully people are more interested in solving these problems than ever before, but these are all problems that have been building up in the background for decades if not hundreds of years.

And so, when we say it is urgent that we work on both climate change and inequality at the same time right now, it's because it's gotten so bad. This is the bad place right now, but it could also get worse. And the only thing determining whether things get better right now or whether it's a continuation of getting worse is our actions.

We can do it, right? We've done hard things in the past as a society. And so we can do it! I think we need different leadership in a lot of ways, but we can do it.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:06:58] Steph, just so that our audience can level set and understand a little bit more about you, your company, Solstice, doesn't actually build solar gardens. So tell us what you do.

Steph Speirs: [00:07:09] Sure. So Solstice's mission is to make solar so easy and so affordable that everyone can sign up for it. And solar developers are like the commercial real estate developers that build and finance and construct the project. Either they do it themselves or they outsource it. And we partner with those solar developers to take care of their entire customer experience from the end to end. Everyone who's signing up for these solar farms, they're interacting with us. So we're educating them about what community solar is because most people have never heard of it. And then we're signing them up for local solar gardens in their community.



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

And then for the life of the 20-year project, we're handling all the interactions between the customer and the solar farms. So by owning the whole customer experience, we work to make it more inclusive of all kinds of Americans, including underserved communities.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:08:04] Of all of the things that you could get really excited about, why did you choose community solar as your thing to really drive and to really help take it to the next level?

Steph Speirs: [00:08:18] I actually never wanted to be an entrepreneur. My dad was a failed entrepreneur and I'd only seen the bad parts of it. You know, what happens when your business fails and suddenly you're in economic devastation.

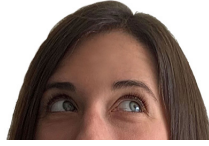
And then I realized at some point growing up that starting a company or starting an organization isn't about starting your own thing and doing your own thing. It's really about seeing that there's a gap in the world and maybe you have something to offer that can fill that gap that can help solve these really crazy intractable problems that we're faced with right now.

And so, what makes community solar so compelling? Not just for me, but you know, it's one of the fastest growing parts of solar, which itself is one of the fastest growing parts of the U.S. economy. Community solar has the opportunity to put solar in the hands of people who have never gotten it before.

So we're talking low -income Americans, [and] black indigenous people of color who also are disproportionately low income. When you think about that community, they are disproportionately affected by climate change. They're disproportionately living by oil refineries and coal plants. They're disproportionately suffering from air pollution, and now we've learned COVID morbidity.

And yet given all of the suffering they go through that I just listed, they're paying a disproportionate amount of their income on energy. And still they're disproportionately locked out of the clean energy revolution. So all of these incredible benefits that we're starting to see from green energy and sustainability, those benefits are not accruing to the people that need savings the most.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:10:00] Thank you so much. I love that. And I love the priority that you've made to giving people access to this, and educating them, and making the opportunity to interact with and benefit from solar, really personal for people who never



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

could have imagined it for themselves. I imagine that you're also educating developers and you're also educating a financing body to participate in what Solstice provides for people.

There's probably a great deal of code switching that happens when you're talking to these different stakeholders. Can you talk a little bit about how you change the story or connect with these different stakeholders to bring them all together?

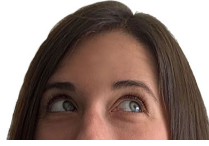
Steph Speirs: [00:10:45] So on the one side, you have a growing vibrant environmental justice community, and they are buoyed by amazing luminaries like Greta Thunberg and the Sunrise Movement.

And they're demanding that the energy and environmental systems change to include marginalized communities. And that's really exciting. And on the other hand, you have these developers and financiers who are going out and building the projects that are helping us decarbonize our society at huge scales.

But they're more market-driven people. You know, they do seek returns for their investments. And those two sides, I've learned in the last few years, never talk to each other. I think that it is our moral responsibility to give voice to people who are oppressed and nobody wants a hand out. They want a ladder.

And so our job, if we are privileged, is to give ladders to as many people as possible. And so if you have these two worlds that never talk to each other, then how will they ever reconcile their different opinions? Well, I realized that we have to get outside of our silos. Myself as a community activist at heart, if I don't learn how to speak more in market terms, if I don't know how to engage with any capitalists, then we'll probably not implement as many solutions as if we can get more people to join the social justice coalition. We need to reach across and we need to engage in the hard work -- that makes you sometimes want to pull your hair out -- of getting other people who don't share your views to believe that social justice is really important and is worth investing in.

So that's all a way of saying that a lot of what we do is try to engage developers and financiers and say there's actually business value in becoming more inclusive. For instance, if you allow more people into your, your solar projects, more people who are excluded like low-income populations, then it's easier to fill up your projects. And the easier it is to generate demand for your projects, the easier it is to get financing for your projects to get built more quickly.



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:13:09] So I'd love for you to talk about your energy score as a tool and how you're helping to empower users to understand how they can participate and how they can benefit from community solar.

Steph Speirs: [00:13:24] Yeah. I mentioned a little-known fact about solar is that you have to have a high FICO score to get access to residential rooftop financing, or in often cases, community solar. And FICO was invented in the 1950s.

It was based on your mortgage and credit card history, but it's not really based on your utility repayment, history or other kinds of bills, like your cell phone or your rental history. And so if you have a half-million-dollar mortgage, you are more likely to have a higher FICO score than someone who pays their utility bills or their cell phone bills or their rental bills on time every month.

So in other words, if you're not affluent, if you're not a homeowner, then FICO is discriminatory against you. And so Solstice got tired of trying to sign people up for solar and then finding out they just missed that FICO cutoff. And there's no way they could get access to solar that was cheaper than their utility bill.

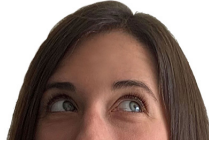
We said, why are we using FICO to qualify customers? So we created our own score, called the Energy Score. And it's based on your utility repayment history as well as a bunch of other demographic data. And it turns out our Energy Score is more accurate at predicting who will pay their utility bills than FICO.

But it's also shown that our score is more inclusive of low- to moderate-income Americans. So you can have a score that is more accurate and more inclusive. You can have a score that's better for business and more inclusive. And that's the world that we're imagining that we don't have to have these, you know, age-old discussions of capitalism versus activism.

There's definitely tension between those two worlds, but we can find innovative paths where we can move both forward.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:15:20] Fully agree. Switching gears a little bit, you know, you're the co-founder and CEO of a startup with a unique business model. So to me that says that you're at the center of real change and real challenges. So can you take me to a moment when you've come up against a big problem and how you've overcome it?

Steph Speirs: [00:15:44] Yeah, it's sometimes hard to figure out what to pick of all the problems. In terms of the most recent example, when COVID hit, uh, what a time to be a



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

small business owner, what a time to be responsible for people's livelihoods and, and the responsibility of that.

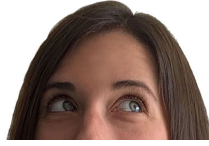
It is very hard. It's, it's a big weight to deal with. It's a sacred responsibility to have influence over other people's families and livelihoods and it should be taken seriously. So in that situation where everything is unprecedented, where no one has been in the situation before, the only thing we can do is try to learn the fastest. And this was the time where we saw our revenue drop 80% practically overnight, because a lot of how we engage with communities who are our customers was in person. And if you can't do in-person anymore, and your revenues fall off a cliff, what do you do? And so we asked our team to try to just learn as quickly as possible. We pivoted the organization, changed strategies, restructured the company. And it's really more to the credit of the incredible Solstice team, but we just closed the best quarter we've ever had in the history of Solstice. And it goes to show that if the emphasis is not on "don't fail," but the emphasis is on "learn as fast as you can," then, I think, seemingly impossible things are possible. You know, Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it is done."

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:17:39] I love that. And COVID seemed so immediate. So to say, learn faster, feels like it has this immediate pressure. And I think that's a really good takeaway for the fight against climate change.

Even though climate change feels more and more immediate by the second, it's still sort of this big problem that exists out there outside of my house, outside of my bubble. And I love the message of "earn faster." Just as an aside, I listened to a talk from Dr. Robert Bullard a couple of weeks ago, and he had a great line that was something like, "Your enemy will never tell you when you've won. So when you're fighting big problems and you're really fighting against something that you can't quite get your arms around, you have to decide when those victory points are. Because no one's ever going to tell you, especially in this kind of work."

Steph Speirs: [00:18:28] Yeah. I love that. And what a incredible role model for the environmental justice community.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:18:34] And you know, what his advice was to the Climate Corps Network, he said, when asked, "If you could give your younger self some advice?" He said, "Have more fun! It's a long fight. And you just need to make sure that you have a lot of fun."



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Steph Speirs: [00:18:49] Sounds like a community organizer.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:18:52] Exactly. Exactly. Well, getting back to you as a leader of the team at Solstice, as far as CEOs go, you're young, you're female, you're not white. How have all those qualities presented advantages to you, but also obstacles?

Steph Speirs: [00:19:13] Those characteristics have presented both opportunities and obstacles.

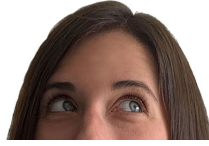
And I think I've focused more on the opportunities because the obstacles seem in a lot of ways outside of my control. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius talked about how it's not a question of whether you will encounter obstacles in your life, it is a question of your attitude once you do.

And so yeah, if the whole energy industry has 10% women globally, and the renewable energy industry has 25% women, and I believe if you look at executives in the energy industry, women account for less than 6% of executive seats, when you look at all those numbers, yeah, there are going to be systemic systems of bias against people of color and women or anyone who is differently abled. But at the same time, investors will sometimes see my co-founder and I, who are two women of color. And they'll get really excited because they'll say, oh, here are two women. They're not white. And I happen to identify as queer as well. So they get very excited because, you know, that's the triple threat and they can check all these diversity boxes.

But what I try to remind them about is that, you know, there are people who experience marginalization every day. And Black and Brown Americans are not represented enough in the energy industry. And so rather than seeing me as an Asian American woman, as their check-the-box of diversity, they should really go beyond tokenism. And they should have portfolios of many more Black, Brown, people of color indigenous folks (BIPOC), rather than stop at just the one.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:21:14] Yes. Can we all stop and clap for you right now? I hope that people hear that and they take that to heart.

It sounds like you've built an incredible team at Solstice. You have people who are living and breathing the startup life, who are living and breathing this purpose-driven career and mission. How do you bring those people together in terms of building a team?



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Steph Speirs: [00:21:44] My biggest lesson as a leader is the more I give up control and give it to others, the more impact we have, because this becomes more scalable. And there's an overemphasis in startups on the founder. Really the most important people are the first ten employees, or all the managers, because they're the ones who have the most interaction with customers or your entire team.

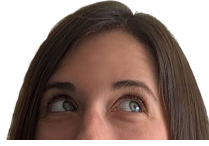
Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:22:14] I think a lot of our listeners are in jobs, in organizations, are choosing a company to work for where they might be alone in their mission-driven values, but they still want to use their talents, use their career to make an impact. And I think one of the strategies to do that can really be to find your tribe within an organization that can help propel and really connect you to that mission every day and keep it at the top of your list. And I'm wondering if you can speak to that at all in your work experience, finding that group and keeping each other motivated?

Steph Speirs: [00:22:52] Yeah, absolutely. It is so important to have community in whatever you do. Community provides a sense of sanctuary, you know, where you can be yourself freely without any worry about retaliation or mockery. And it is in that safe environment where you can build power. And so it is so important if you're feeling alone in a place, in an institution that doesn't share your values, know that there are other people around you who probably feel the same way. And I learned this from community organizing on the first Obama campaign in 2007 back before, you know, people were really considering Barack Obama a serious candidate. And I would go out to the most conservative areas in the country and I'd be so worried that I would be the only one with my progressive values out there. And the most beautiful lesson to learn straight out of college was that it doesn't matter where you are in this country. It doesn't matter if it feels like you're in, quote unquote, "enemy territory." That you will find that people are united by very similar things, right? They just want to take care of their families. They want to be good to the people they love and have those people care about them and respect them in return. They want to provide for their loved ones. They want to have dignity in their jobs and they want to be free from persecution. Like these are pretty basic things that unfortunately not everyone has in this country.

And so if you can unite on those elements, you can unite with anyone, really. So yes, finding your tribe is so important; they're out there. But I think the real hard work is in getting outside of our tribes. So you have to kind of go back and forth. You stay, you build power and then you leave and you go and organize and then you build power and then you organize. And that's the oscillation that we have to do as change agents.

Degrees

WITH YESH PAVLIK SLENK



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:24:58] I married someone who doesn't always share my political views. And we do that every day. We negotiate through that every day and it's not always comfortable, but to your point, we share the same values and we want to get to the same destination. But we don't always agree on the path to get there.

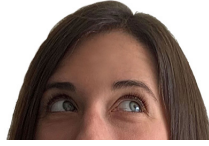
I heard you call yourself a “delusional optimist”, which sounds right on brand for you and probably gives you the momentum that you need every day as the CEO of a startup to move forward. When you call yourself a delusional optimist, is that something that you have always felt, or have you grown into that state of being?

Steph Speirs: [00:25:43] I probably have always had a lot of serotonin in my brain and so I feel lucky in that sense, but I think that, you know, I grew up in sometimes a dysfunctional family situation where I was raised by a single mom and we didn't have that much money. And she got yelled at every day in her call-center job because she had an immigrant accent, and people told her every single day to go back to her own country. And she was not a college graduate. So she never got to follow her educational dreams. And I truly, truly believe that if I have achieved anything in life it's because she let me, she sacrificed so much that I could achieve. And so when you live with that constant reminder of how unequal our society is, despite talent being universal, but opportunity is not, then it becomes easy to see that, you know, the things that seemingly divide us, aren't actually real things. Sometimes they're just stories we tell ourselves.

And so I also believe that in terms of delusional optimism, that you have to have a, I forgot what literary scholar said this, but you have to have cynicism of the intellect and optimism of the will. You know, it's another way of saying yes, optimism and idealism are incredibly important. Hope dies last. But at the same time, you have to be incredibly rational about how the world works, because that will help you figure out the solutions to change what is broken in the world. You have to understand how power works. You have to understand what motivates people to, you know, spend money on consumables instead of spending money on marginalized communities. And that realism is what unlocks the actual change.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:27:53] Steph, you haven't always been part of the private sector. You had a stint developing Middle East policy as the youngest director at the White House National Security Council for President Obama. How did you end up there?

Steph Speirs: [00:28:09] Part of it is that I watched West Wing during formative years in college. And I thought that's what government was like. And I'm very glad that I wasn't watching Breaking Bad at the time! And I, you know, I joined the Obama campaign right out



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

of college and I started out , for the first year, just knocking on doors. And then we happened to win, against all odds. And suddenly there was an opportunity to move to D.C. and work for the administration.

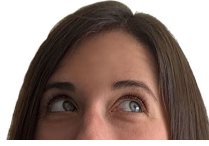
When I started working at the White House, though, I was just an assistant whose responsibility was to get coffee and escort foreign nationals around so they didn't steal things. And then talk about another stroke of luck, I was working in the Middle East office at the same time that the Arab spring erupted. And before the Arab Spring started I had spent a year asking people for more work.

You know, after I got the coffee, I had more time to spend on work. And so I was asking people if I could do research for them. And so after a year of doing that and slowly building up more trust, the Arab Spring happens. There's more work to do and not enough time to do it in and suddenly my boss asks me, "Hey, can you start taking over parts of the Yemen portfolio?"

And then to my surprise, he asked me to take over the policy director position. And I think if there is a common thread throughout all my jobs, it's that I have always felt supremely unqualified for any job I've had. And it's less about imposter syndrome and more about just on paper I was supremely unqualified for the jobs that I have had. And that was an important lesson to not get so overwhelmed by the fact that I didn't have the credentials to do the work, but to just focus, again, on learning as fast as I could. And so that job in the White House is half briefing the president and the national security advisors if they work on anything that is in your portfolio. And the other half of the job is managing the policy process and getting disparate actors, such as DOD, CIA, Treasury, USAID, State Department, to all agree on policy.

And so that was really intimidating to do as a 25 year-old, to get generals in a room and try to get them to agree with each other. But I learned so much from that process and all of those skills from previous jobs, whether I was a waitress at Bubba Gump Shrimp Company in high school, or being a door knocker on the Obama campaign and talking to strangers, anyone who will talk to me, to getting people who don't agree with each other at all, to agree on policy, all of those skills have come into play in the CEO role.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:30:55] What did you learn at the Bubba Gump shrimp company that helped you with that role?



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Steph Speirs: [00:31:00] Similar to knocking on doors for 12 hours a day, I think working in food service is an amazing way to build a conversational skills, but also people you're interacting with are going to come from different places. And to meet them halfway and to show interest in their lives and hear their stories, that has been such a key crucial part of my job today, just being able to ask anyone, what is it that motivates you? Why do you live? What is your purpose? And honestly, most waitresses don't take that conversational tack. But I found that, actually, the more I engaged with the customers, the more they were invested in their experience and also the more they tip.

And so, you know, it was just a real lesson that starting with connecting with people on a real human level is where all interactions should start. Interacting with people right now is my job 24/7, just trying to connect on a human level and starting from there and having the trust that that will come to grow into something bigger is a good lesson.

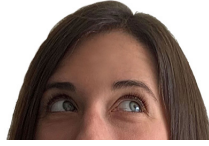
Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:32:17] And when it was time for you to make a jump and make a career shift, when did you realize that you needed to make the leap from the community organizing world?

Steph Speirs: [00:32:28] If I understand the spirit of your question, I think you're asking at what point did it make sense to leave what I used to think was my dream job at the White House and go and be an unpaid entrepreneur for a few years?

And the thing that prompted that was really looking around, while working at the White House and we would travel to Yemen and we'd be spending all of our time trying to get the dictator out of power. President Saleh, at the time, was in power and gunning down peaceful protesters. And so we spent all of our time trying to get him out of power.

And yet when you looked out the window of the armored vehicles we were driving in, you would see people just lined up waiting for fuel. They couldn't get enough fuel to power their everyday lives because terrorists were blowing up oil pipelines. And so I thought about our dependence on oil. I thought about our dependence on the geopolitics of oil in this Middle Eastern region.

And I thought, I don't feel like I'm doing anything to help those ordinary people get the thing that they're most concerned about, which is power. And also, I know nothing about power and the electricity sector, so I'm going to go and learn more about it. And then I realized when I was in India with my friend, we saw villagers put up solar in their off-grid community.



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

We were like, that's so cool! There are these illiterate women and they've been trained on how to bring solar to their own village. What a great model. Why don't we have that back in the U.S.? If this village in the middle of nowhere can do it, why can't we scale up renewables back home? And so that's what led to this journey of going back to our backyards and trying to be useful where we grew up,

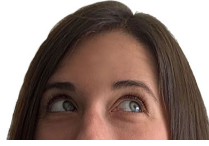
Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:34:24] I ask all of our, our guests this: If you, Steph, had your own personal board of directors, which couple of people would be on it and why?

Steph Speirs: [00:34:37] There are a couple of people who advise Solstice now and who have been dreams to collaborate with. One is David Simas. He is the CEO of the Obama Foundation and he's someone that I just happened to meet while working in the Obama administration more than a decade ago. And I admire him so much, because he's not the type of person who will ever raise his voice. He listens way more than he speaks. And to find a leader of such an important, large organization who does that, who's more content to have other people be empowered than to get credit for anything himself was such a divergence from anything I saw in Washington or what Washington is known for. And so having that as a leader role model early on was really, really influential and what I aspire to be.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:35:37] Well, last question. I think a lot of our listeners are still figuring out how to combine their passion to make an impact with careers and a job and an organization. So it sounds like you were probably in that place at some point, trying to figure out how to connect a paycheck with your passion. And I'm curious what advice you'd give to your younger self who is still trying to figure it out.

Steph Speirs: [00:36:04] I've only worked in social impact jobs. I can definitely say that you won't earn as much as a lot of lucrative jobs at, say, a bank or anything. But you will earn enough to live a safe and fulfilling life. You're gonna have to drive a Honda instead of a BMW or a Hummer. You have to vacation at Florida instead of Barbados or Paris, but what are such losses when set against the opportunity to do work you believe in? Work you're suited for? Work that you love every single day of your life. Assuming you have your Maslow's hierarchy of needs met, then there's so much that can come from working in a job that doesn't just feel like a job, that feels like you're trying to make the world reflect what you think it should be rather than what it is.

And there's value in that. And you can't put a price on it, but it's definitely worth sometimes taking that risk. I have learned in my own career taking that risk is always worthwhile.



Episode 1: Steph Speirs Transforming energy, unlocking change... and Bubba Gump Shrimp

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:37:20] Thank you, Steph. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and thank you for joining us on Degrees.

Steph Speirs: [00:37:25] Thanks so much for having me.

Yesh Pavlik Slenk: [00:37:27] That's our show for today. Thank you, listeners, for tuning into Degrees. For more about how Steph Speirs is working to bring solar energy to everyone, see our show notes. If our message resonates with you, and we really hope it does, please share this podcast with a friend and ask them to subscribe. That's the best way to support our show.

Please write a review and give us a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. Also follow me on Twitter at Yesh Says. We're online at degreespodcast.org. That's degreespodcast.org. We'd love to hear your thoughts and questions about the show.

Degrees is presented by Environmental Defense Fund. Our producers are Rick Velleu and Amy Morse. Our executive producer is Christina Mestre. Our production company is Podcast Allies with Elaine Appleton Grant and Lindsey O'Connor. Engineering by Matthew Simonson and theme music by Lake Street Dive. Tune in to our next conversation with Chris Castro. He's a young city leader, leading a revolution to make Orlando the greenest most sustainable city in America.

I'm your host, Yesh Pavlik Slenk. Stay fired up, y'all.