



CHRISTINA BAAL-OWENS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF PUBLIC WISE

"THE IMPACT OF DOING WORK THAT YOU TRULY BELIEVE IN IS IT WILL NEVER FEEL LIKE WORK. YOU WILL LOVE YOUR JOB AND YOU'LL BE BETTER AT IT."

Christina went to college for theater, which is where she learned about storytelling. When she got her Masters, she moved into the advocacy space and now works in social change to try to create more interest around voting.

WHAT IS YOUR UNIQUE GENIUS?

"Creating social change organizations from the ground up by telling stories that can change the world."

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THIS CAREER?

"I grew up with immigrant parents. I saw that they had certain advantages that other immigrant families didn't have. But I also saw that there were things that we, as an immigrant family, didn't have that other people had. I wanted to make things more equal for everyone.

I got involved in clubs and activities in high school and in junior high, and felt like we were making change. That led me into theater, which seems kind of like a weird connect, but I felt like it was a lot about telling stories about people you might not hear from or know about. I felt like it was a creative vehicle to do that. That did lead me to seeing the world through other people's eyes."

"I set an intention that I want to create social change and I want there to be more equality."

IN WHAT WAYS IS YOUR CAREER A PERFECT FIT FOR YOU?

"All the skills I've spent my career building come together in one place. I'm putting on events, I'm telling stories, I'm teaching folks. I'm creating social change. I'm creating structures that allow people to live lives where they are paid fairly, where their work is appreciated."

WHAT DOES A DAY IN THE LIFE LOOK LIKE?

"Part of what I like about working in politics and advocacy is there isn't a typical day. A day can involve meetings and events where advocates brainstorming ideas together. I'm always reading briefings on issues because we work on many different pieces of policy or legislation. Often I will go into DC and meet up with other folks. Building relationships is a big part of this work, so I make sure I get face time with people and check in."

WHAT SKILLS DOES IT TAKE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR JOB?

"One skill that I never thought I'd be using is budgeting. A lot of policy change comes down to who's going to pay for it. The ability to communicate and be comfortable in front of an audience is important in the world of advocacy. You also need the ability to tell stories, which is where my theatre background comes in. You need to tell the story of people different than you—the people you want to create change for. It helps people understand why policy is important and how it affects people directly."

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER?

"I wish I knew that being young and learning is just figuring out what you love and what you're good at. When I was young, I wanted to be a theater director. Honestly, I am now—I put together a lot of events and have to think about where people are standing and who's speaking."

"Keep doing what you're doing and find what makes you feel both happy and accomplished."

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF ON YOUR JOURNEY?

"I started an organization in Costa Rica called Vivo Sueno, which taught low income workers how to start their own businesses or taught them entrepreneurial skills to help them achieve financial freedom. The impact has been financial stability and being able to work in businesses that they love for generations of families."

WHAT IS THE COOLEST PART OF YOUR JOB? WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF YOUR JOB?

"The coolest part of my job is seeing people's lives change from what I do. Seeing campaign wins, seeing someone that you've really fought for and believed in.

One of the most challenging parts is being the only woman or person of color in the room. People have an image of what an expert looks like, and it's often not me. [I have] to throw some elbows around and show who I am, what I know and why my work is important."

WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR FIELD/JOB?

"I think people used to think to be in politics, you had to be a lawyer. Now there's a lot of different ways to get there. I don't have a law degree, I have a theater degree and a social work degree. The best elected officials are people who come from diverse backgrounds because we need every voice."

WHAT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE?

"When I was in social work school, I had internships as part of my degree. One of them was working in a low income school in East New York. I remember being in a class and discussing Martin Luther King Jr. Day. A lot of the kids thought that MLK Jr. had done work to integrate schools, which is not the case.

I remember one kid saying, if it weren't for MLK Jr., they wouldn't be able to go to school with a different race. I looked around and every kid in the room was black. I realized the people whose schools have less educational opportunities tend to be communities of color. It was an eye opening moment of how much work there is to do."