

Season 3.10 Sage Lanier

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SPEAKERS

Sage Lenier, Eric Benson, Narrator



Narrator 00:00

This podcast is a project of the climate designers network.



Eric Benson 00:03

Hey, it's Eric. Welcome to Episode 10 of season three of Climify. I'm excited for the guests we have for you today. As it just so happens Sage Lenier was just named a 2023 Time Magazine, next generation leader. She is the second of three episodes dedicated to Climate Education. She created as an undergrad, a course called solutions for sustainable and just future, which has enrolled 1800 students and counting at UC Berkeley.



Eric Benson 00:37

what stuck out to me in the conversation with sage were two things. First, how passionate and focused she is on climate education.



Eric Benson 00:46

She started a hugely popular course, as a student at a research one university. That's dedication and strength. And second, I was struck by her comments lamenting about having to be a climate activist, and how she felt already burned out by at such a young age.



Eric Benson 01:09

Sage is, right that she and her generation should not have to be the ones to save ourselves from ourselves. When it comes to the climate crisis. It's unfair, because that's the situation they are in. Unlike sage, there are many Gen Z fighting for their future where every fraction of a

degree matters.

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Sage Lenier 01:32

Hi, my name is Sage Lenier. I'm a Youth Climate Education activist and the founder of sustainable unjust future, a nonprofit fighting for just that. And you can find me on social media at Sage linear.



Eric Benson 01:49

welcomes sage, thanks for being on the program today. It's great to speak with you again. And this time recorded. So I'm glad that you have the time today to talk with us. Thanks, Eric. So I wanted to start off with just asking you how you got into climate action. What what was, was there a tipping point for you?



Eric Benson 02:14

Where did this interest in your work? Start?

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Sage Lenier 02:20

I was definitely coming more from the social justice side of things. I was a really passionate teenager, when it came to feminism, racial justice, etc. And I came to environmentalism with the realization that there's no human rights on a dead planet. So kind of just one movement to encapsulate them. All. Right, everything's connected. So I like to think about both at the same time, because I don't think you can, like divorce those two topics. I mean,

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Sage Lenier 02:51

you said it very eloquently, right? There's on a dead planet, you don't. I've just been doing so many interviews, and the amount of times I've been pitching myself in the past couple of weeks has been hilarious.



Eric Benson 03:03

I saw on your website, you're gonna be like in Forbes, there's there's a lot of things that you have coming up.

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Sage Lenier 03:08

Yeah, Teen Vogue, hopefully saying, Oh, my goodness, yeah.



Eric Benson 03:14

I have held a Teen Vogue in my hand, but I've never been involved with any things with them. So quite an honor for you really,



Sage Lenier 03:21

they're really radical. It's surprising that they're like very anti capitalists, like, I know,



Eric Benson 03:28

I actually I've been I've read articles in Teen Vogue online, where I was like, this is Teen Vogue.



Eric Benson 03:36

This seems like it's like a totally other different magazine. So the the way that I found you, though, was through the class that you created at Cal Berkeley. And then I think I found your website and then into your social media world. And



Eric Benson 03:56

I would like to know more about that class. You, you were the initiative you created at Cal Berkeley and how that all started.



Sage Lenier 04:04

Okay. So the reason I basically ended up being a Youth Climate Education activist specifically, is because I just feel like education is the biggest barrier to the movement getting any bigger. The environment, education, environmental education, as it stands is largely non existent. It's kind of crazy that we're churning out, you know, hundreds of 1000s of people with high school diplomas, college degrees, who still don't understand anything about the ecological systems that keep us alive, or the role that their career and life is about to play in that. No, we're still putting out people have a profit motive or who, you know, they're very passionate about design, fashion, whatever. But they aren't like equipped to do that from an ecological or even just social manner of like fair wages and whatnot. So that was what I was kind



Sage Lenier 05:00

have like, my, my,



Sage Lenier 05:03

I guess origin story was me being like, I'm so overwhelmed by all these problems. I feel like

maybe the biggest problem is that no one even knows them. Yeah, I can't solve them all myself, I need more people. Like I need a bigger movement so that we can get it moving. So yeah, so I started teaching my own class to my peers, Berkeley, because I really just hated the education I was getting there. I felt like, you know, you have these, these professors who are much older than us, and it matters, you know, because they don't feel the urgency that someone you know, who is going to live in that world would feel good. And they're just either, you know, giving these doomsday sermons and you had students literally leaving the classroom, in tears or having panic attacks or switching their majors because it was just too much of their mental health. Yeah. Or it was just so abstract and distant and far away sounding that it was like, No, you know, no real broad application. So we were just bored. And I was like, I don't know how you're making the world's most pressing crises sound boring. But it's, yeah. So for me, I've always, always, always been about the solutions. It's not a matter of,

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Sage Lenier 06:21

okay, let's spend an entire, you know, 16 week semester understanding how bad the problem is, and the nuances of the problem. I don't think we need to keep doing that. So we, in my program, introduced the program of the problem introduced the problem, just enough that you know, that there is one and like, now, we're just the first step. Were right, but we spend the majority of our time talking about the solutions. And we're just kind of phrasing it as like, Okay, this is how things are not working. Here's how things are going to be from now on. We're in on this. You're getting involved. You know, we are now co conspirators, we're building a better world. Let's get it going. And so not like, yes, we do do a good job. I would say, I will say, we do a really good job at communicating the problem. I think some people are like, what you want people to be delusional, like you want to not? Like the situation is really bad. How are you going to be positive about it? And I'm like, you were just need to focus on the next steps. Like, what's the point of dwelling and all the negativity of it? And yeah, yeah.



Eric Benson 07:31

So was this an official, like, on the books class? Or was this something that you're doing outside of that?

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Sage Lenier 07:37

Yep. On the books



Eric Benson 07:39

congratulations


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Sage Lenier 07:41

Well, it's actually the same students who

 Sage Lenier 07:46

this is what I've been told, I've actually never quite looked it up. So maybe this is not entirely true. But the same students who advocated for the for the establishment of the first Afro studies program in the United States,


 Sage Lenier 07:58

those black students also were advocating for the establishment of a democratic education program, because they're saying like, education shouldn't be restricted to old white people with PhDs. Yeah. So we have this really robust program for student led education, typically, student led classes, they're called decals, democratic education account. They're not very large. So the novel thing that that I did was, I have the largest ever he was big, by the way that sounded like online. Yeah, we've had he energy will go through the program. So far, my largest semester was 300. But that was just a bit unmanageable.



Eric Benson 08:37

Three hundred in one class is unmanageable.


 Sage Lenier 08:40

Yeah, and you can see the photos on our website. It's pretty cool. I'm still really proud of it. But yeah, so we scaled back after that, and we're kind of hovering between 150 and 200. a semester.



Eric Benson 08:52

Now, that's still a lot of students.

 Sage Lenier 08:54

Yeah, it's a lot. It's a lot. And we always have Mac's at waitlists, because people are just so passionate about it. Not this semester, this semester, there's a scheduling issue, but whatever.

 Sage Lenier 09:05

It is a two unit class, you can find it on the school registrar as solutions for a sustainable infrastructure. That was this I when I'm thinking about it, like, Hey, I'm not a student at Cal Berkeley.



Eric Benson 09:20



ERIC BENSON 09:20

Is this something that someone could take maybe in the future, that it's not necessarily in the way that it's designed meaning continuing education or something like that?

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Sage Lenier 09:32

I would love to we don't have quite the resources for that yet. But that is like, you know, that's the establish of the nonprofit. That's our goal. We want to make this we want to make solutions oriented environmental as accessible as possible. So we're really being flexible in the ways that we're expanding. Ideally, I would like to write a book, I would love to write a book that's just open access so you can get because I have the beautiful thing about the program at Berkeley, as it stands, as it

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Sage Lenier 10:00

It's really a crash course, everything I think you need to know about the planet. So we do food systems, and we do circular economy, we have this whole section on like, like this whole module really about how we can build a low carbon circular economy in which resources are cycling. And it's like zero waste by principle. And it's like more based on knowledge and services and experiences rather than selling tangible goods, because you can, I mean, 45% of global greenhouse gas emissions are related to the production of consumer goods. And people don't realize I could go into that, but just the whole, like, individual action is making a difference. And it's like, yes, it is, if you're in America, like you have outsize environmental impact. So we have a lot of power to create change in that system as well, which should be like, you know, encouraging and not, you shouldn't feel attacked by that you should feel excited because you do so much more power than a lot of the people in the world. Yeah. So we have all of these different topics, urban planning, and it's kind of just like a crash course vision for about our world. So I'd like to be able to turn that into a book. But one where so with the goals of a nonprofit, we're just trying to get environment education institutionalized, and available in different places. So one day, I would like das and E courses, I think that's maybe a little further down the line, maybe like a year, flee, if we're being ambitious. But I think it could also be cool too. Well, okay, no, we are also working to work with educators and establish either better or more environment education, whether that's like pushing them towards the solution side, that action side, creating actual campaigns in their schools, or alternatively, working with students to either set up educational programs at their schools, or to set up an advocacy program to advocate to their educators. So there's kind of like three major things we're doing on the education side,

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Sage Lenier 12:05

in terms of like working to get it institutionalized, but then we also would like to create our own podcast, YouTube series, book, all those kinds of would just be, but all those kinds of things down the line. So yeah, we want to be educators. But we also want to, I guess, advocate for and push education. Got it? No, that makes no sense. Because I feel there's a huge overlap in what the climate designers group is doing in which this podcast is a part of, in that we're doing the same thing, specifically through or about design, and you brought up that important stat

about things that are manufactured, right? Yeah, well, a lot of people like me, design those things that then are manufactured. So it starts in that design, educational, foundational bang, and we want to make this foundational. And it sounds like you do too.



Eric Benson 13:03

Yes. Yeah. And I always wondered, as I'm, I'm an educator, right. I'm one of those older guys, you mentioned earlier. And I have always been confused about why the topic of climate change isn't a course that you have to take.



Sage Lenier 13:24

There's like a Gen Ed requirement, right? And like, there's so there's all these Gen Ed requirements. And I know the probably there's not enough time, right. But this is a huge issue. And when I saw your class, I'm like, That's the perfect type of class that every university should have, that I feel really passionate about that I was actually fighting the administration my senior year to try and get a, an environmental education institutionalized, and they were just like, No, not about actually reasons what the problem was. I actually got all the way up to the chancellor. And she



Sage Lenier 14:07

can I say this?



Eric Benson 14:09

You can say it.



Sage Lenier 14:10

This is the good thing. She basically was like,



Sage Lenier 14:15

Look, you've done a wonderful job and making our university look really good. And we're so grateful, but like, we don't have the resources to do this. I'm sorry.



Eric Benson 14:27

Wow.





Eric Benson 14:29

I bet they do. I bet they do have the resources to help a class get on. They do. So. How did you feel though, when they told you that



Sage Lenier 14:38

I was I mean, I was really angry. And that was kind of around the time when I formulated the idea of doing some sort of nonprofit. It definitely got like, postponed by COVID But it's so nice to be only doing it. But yeah, I definitely was like



Sage Lenier 14:56

the theme of all of my environmental work so far has been like



Sage Lenier 15:00

You know what, fuck it, I'll do it.



Eric Benson 15:04

That's a good attitude. To have to be honest with you. I've been working in a lot of different systems, right, like, academic system, corporate system. And so I been able to learn the systems and



Eric Benson 15:21

and maybe there's some intuition there, right, where users say, let's do this.



Eric Benson 15:28

Because it's so important, right? And I guess I'm a little bit more like that as I've gotten older, because I see like, oh, there's not a lot of time. Let's just get this out there.



Eric Benson 15:39

Well, I noticed from your social media accounts, and the things that you're posting there that you're doing a lot of talks you're using.



Eric Benson 15:47

That class is like a starting point to create sort of a bigger thing. And you've alluded to that a little bit So what are how you've continued this work after graduation into the work you're

here bit so what are now you've continued this work after graduation into the work you're doing now? Like, where have you been? What are you working on?

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Sage Lenier 16:02

Yeah, so I mean, the nonprofit kind of is my way of kind, I just kind of realized, I think, over time, I was like, why am I so fixated on this project started in college, like, I was like, this is just the only thing that's important to me, I just don't care anything else, obviously, like, as well, the actualization of those solutions. That's where you gotta make it happen. No, 100%. But I just think that like, as much as I do, do try to, to, you know, dig in with community fights and make things happen. In my community where I live, I think, I want to dedicate the majority of my time, at least for this stage of my career to education, because it's been amazing just seeing the results, people saying, you know, because of this program, because of this program, I have decided to switch careers switching major, started a new initiative do that me and my family are doing this in my hometown. And I'm like, Wow, just the impact. I can have. It's like, you know, times several 100 folds versus meetcha. Do that on my own. So yeah, I'm, I'm really passionate about this thing, specifically. So I haven't doing Yeah, you. You mentioned social media happened during kind of the social media circuit. I have been doing a bunch of press outreach, and podcasts and radio interviews and fun stuff. Yeah. I noticed.

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Sage Lenier 17:32

Yeah. You know, getting the word out there is like, feels like 70% of the work right now. And just because that we're gonna actually, you know, make the connections with the educators and meet the young people and get the funding. Yeah. So yeah, right now we're kind of a

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Sage Lenier 17:52

big microphone stage. And hopefully in a couple months, we can kind of like, delve down into the deep work, but yeah, right now I'm kind of show ponying myself around on this, it must be tiring, but the world biting right. It's a tiring and exciting. Oh, it's so exciting. It's like every day open my inbox, and it's like Eric Benson wants to get you have podcasts have ever met Illinois.

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Sage Lenier 18:17

It's thrilling truly. So there's a climate scientist named Katharine Hayhoe. And she was famously like in her TED talk was saying how the first and best thing you can do is just talk about climate change to as many people as you possibly can, and that that's exactly what you're doing. So kudos to you. I would push back and I would say the first and best thing you can do is talk about climate action. hoax. Sure. Yeah. There you go. I you know, that I think that's an issue I do. I and that's what I'm really, that's what I'm trying to combat on social media. That's what I'm getting been getting excited. That's why I decided to take the content creation route, is because I think there is just too much caring and not doing. And that results in things like phenomenons like climate anxiety.

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Sage Lenier 18:35

 Sage Lenier 19:05

We are so sure people are you know, like literally feeling like this, you know, this, this

 Sage Lenier 19:13

crashing, crushing weight, but don't feel like they know how to get involved, and they feel hopeless. And now you have these polls that are coming out, they're saying the majority of people are just scrolling every time they see any content about the environment, because they're like, I can't handle that. That's too stressful. So, you know, in my work, I do really try to push people towards action and towards solutions. So what we're doing with the program at Berkeley, what we'll continue to do is, you know, it's like, oh, you're really interested in that you really love the regenerative agriculture unit. Okay, here's every single organization, local farm entity, initiative, anything, anything, anything, anything that I could think of that is in the bay area that you wish to, I'm going to this you can meet me there. We're very like we're

 Sage Lenier 20:00

We're really like, intense.



Eric Benson 20:03

We're very like, Come on, let's go. You're a part of this. We got work to do. Let's get it poppin. So yeah, like we're really trying to be about that action. Because I don't think that I think there is a lot of conferences. Yeah. There a lot of climate conferences and panels. Yeah. Amen suits. And there's not a whole lot of climate action. Yeah, I agree. I hear from other educators that, oh, we're, we're not experts in sustainability or climate, so we don't feel comfortable, including it or talking about it in the classroom. And urine. When you did this, you were not like even a PhD in any of that stuff. But you You figured it out. So I'm wondering why you didn't even have a bachelor's degree, but you're smart enough, figured it out? What kind of advice or what were some of your strategies in terms of creating that class that you can help? My listeners who are mainly educators?



Eric Benson 21:08

Move forward and try to do this? Because I think the interest is there. I know the interest is there. They just feel like

 Sage Lenier 21:17

I don't know. It's just another thing I need to learn and teach about. It's definitely not easy. I have to say, I don't think it like in terms of digital resources or anything, I don't think there are great. And there is great information out there about a regenerative food system or circular economy, even just credited okay to design. I think you kind of have to go to the books for that.

But those books are super, super popular. It's kind of odd. Yeah, I would say, Okay, if you're trying to figure out how you can teach or incorporate sustainability, but you feel like that's out of your league? One, it's not. And like, maybe

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Sage Lenier 22:02

I learned it from going to different corners of the university. Yeah. I would literally like I took classes in like, five different colleges. Yeah, yeah. But you went to those attributes, right? Yeah. Right. And it wasn't necessarily from a book. And like, I would take a whole problem focused class on food systems, and I would take their little about the solutions, and I would steal it. So it's really not easy to be able to say like, Here are those resources that are, you know, easy to learn.

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Sage Lenier 22:34

I guess the advice that I would give is, if you're struggling to figure out how to incorporate sustainability into your teaching, at least, incorporate it into your action. So whether you're capable of starting a student club or whatnot, find a way where you can feel like you're empowering your students to

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Sage Lenier 22:54

not feel helpless themselves. I mean, whether that's your school does not have, I mean, starting a compost and a garden on campus would have huge impacts. I mean, there's studies that are showing that gardening for children is can be really, really great for their mental health, physical health, the, you know, alleviating food insecurity or food issues, if your students are struggling with access to nutritious food, that sort of thing and having a compost, why not, and then teach them about how composting is a climate solution. And about, you know, farm to table distances, there are a lot of ways you can make this hands on in a way that helps students, you know, stand up taller, feel good about themselves, and also have real applicable skills to take with them into their lives, and a newfound passion. So I would say if you don't feel like you can teach it, action it. Yeah.



Eric Benson 23:54

Or do a You did, right. So if you have the deep interest in it, you're gonna have to do a little bit more work, you're gonna have to go out and find out more information or bring those people into your classroom, right? Like, hey, I want you to this took this class and regenerative agriculture, hey, maybe that person will be willing to come and talk to my students. Right? Yeah. Or, or, gosh, that I don't want. I don't want to be like, Oh, just figure out what I did. I'd like to be able to share with them what I did. So that's what's coming. I know that's, that's your plan, right? Because, yeah, so I do have an interest forum, on our website, sustainable and just future.org. And if you're an educator, and you're like, please, I just want someone to hand me. I can hand it to you tomorrow, but I can't hand it to you sometime this year. I promise. I'm



Sage Lenier 24:44

definitely looking to be able to Yeah, have some guiding principles for educators who are looking to have a solutions oriented action focused and we are developing those right now and are they will be available this year? Well, I'm interested. I'm going to



Eric Benson 25:00

sign up.



Eric Benson 25:01

We'll pause here for a commercial and come back to hear more about sage and Hermitian.



Narrator 25:10

Graphic Design History is messy, it's incomplete. And it's full of overlooked, underrepresented and ignored people and topics. Incomplete Design History podcast explores those topics, and talks about those people to deepen and expand our knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the history of graphic design. Season one and two are already available, covering Women from graphic design history and bipoc designers and design culture.



Narrator 25:37

Be sure to subscribe to incomplete Design History wherever you listen to podcasts, and get caught up before season three drops in the fall of 2023. I NCOMPLET design history.



Eric Benson 25:54

When you were designing all of this,



Eric Benson 25:58

you mentioned you were going and taking all these classes and learning about it. And I'm curious about like, what are the you get to the students have requirements to do something from an action standpoint? Or how do you get them out? Out there? Whether it be you know, switching something where they live or doing something more active politically or whatever? How does? How does all of that come together in that class?



Sage Lenier 26:26

You know, I've never made it a requirement. Because a lot of students have things going on, you know, you always get a couple of students at the end of the semester were like, hi, you know, I really wanted to participate this semester, but my whole life fell apart, you know. Oh

know, I really wanted to participate this semester, but my whole life fell apart, you know, Oh, yeah. You know, yeah, it just kind of happens. I've never made it mandatory. But that's also the nice thing is I let people show us who they are. It's so funny, like how in the student discussions each week, they'll be like, you know, this class, this, that's actually really appealed to me, because as a business major, and someone will be like, you know, as a vegan.

S

Sage Lenier 27:01

And so it's so nice to see people like to let people show you who they are and what they're passionate about, you know, so yeah, all we do is just make it as action focused as possible. And we have that little directory that we go on our website of all the different student organizations they could get involved in, or things going on in the Bay Area, or in City of Berkeley.

S

Sage Lenier 27:23

So we know, we're just constantly plugging them, and they just kind of end up getting swept into what I think. And we do a survey at the end of the semester. Like we're asking them, you know, what kind of changes did you make? And so we break it down into so many different questions that we asked them about, like, did you change your, you know, diet as a result of this, like, whether it's more plant based, or organic, or local or something like that. And then we ask them, if they've reduced their waste, we asked them, if they got involved in an organization as a result. And so there's always like a not applicable, you know, if they're like, I'm already involved, then they can just hit non applicable. We've had amazing success rates. And a lot of students are saying that, yeah, not only did they make lifestyle changes, but also they decided to go further, take more coursework, get involved in organizations, etc. Well, I'm glad that that is your strategy, because I also found teaching, the more I make things mandatory, the less passionate people are about it. And it's smarter to have them follow their own voice, follow their own interests. And if they're vegan, right, they're going to do more things around that, versus you have to do this or you don't get a good grade. So I'm glad that that's your strategy. College. Happy to hear that actually. I think at one point, we might have had a waste audit, man, a mandatory waste audit. I don't think we do that anymore.

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Sage Lenier 28:49

But just like asking them to track their own waste for a day or something and see what their insights were, but nothing where it's like you're required to go to a protest right now. Yeah, actually, I did a waste audit in grad school. And I found myself cheating. Because



Eric Benson 29:08


I was getting so embarrassed. Like, here I am, like, I'm this advocate I care about and I tried to make the right choices. And I'm like, Oh, God, this is embarrassing that I have this much trash in a day. So I'm just not going to include that in the photograph. Or I'm gonna leave that on the table and claim that someone else threw it away and it wasn't mine.

 Sage Lenier 29:30


You know, we'll see I think that's funny. I think it's funny how Zero Waste got co opted and of course under capitalism everything's gonna be

 Sage Lenier 29:39

but zero waste got co opted to be about like zero plastic instead of minimalism, because that's the primary that is the primary principle of zero waste is to produce and consume less less. Yeah, so I think yeah, that because that's also I think, where people feel so discouraged but also just mad about trying, like trying to be held

 Sage Lenier 30:00

accountable for their waste or whatever they're like, What can I do about the fact that all my groceries come wrapped in plastic? And I'm like nothing. You're so light up. What we can do is not shop at h&m because we don't need to do that. So I think like, yeah, the principles got messed up. It's more zero. I'm sorry, I could go on about this forever. I just gave the keynote speech for zero waste you with us then? And yeah, I had a whole so much to say about this, like, they're a waste at its fundamental is supposed to be about conserving resources. And so that means no fast fashion. That means low repairable electronics, that means long lasting. I mean, it means no cars, I was gonna say long lasting cars, but no cars, public transit.

 Sage Lenier 30:42

Yeah, it's about conserving resources. It's supposed to be a design principle is not supposed to be about fitting interaction to ensure I know, I don't know what happened. I just got sidetracked. And that's



Eric Benson 30:55

why there is something you said earlier, which struck a note with me, which was teachers that come in and talk, doom and gloom, and then the student, but the idea is like, Oh, the students will respond and do something great with this terrible news. But in, in reality, that's not what happens. They just they can't handle it's overwhelmed. They're overwhelmed. And that was my mistake. When I first started teaching, I was very passionate about it. I brought these topics into the design classroom. And I thought people would be as passionate about it as I was, and guess what they weren't. And mainly, I think it was because I was being so negative. And it took me a while to kind of figure that out. And like you just present solutions. Like, here's a way we can do this. Let's experiment with doing it.



Eric Benson 31:46

And I'm wondering,



Eric Benson 31:48

do you have any other advice is already some other good advice that you can give in terms of how to really inspire?



Sage Lenier 31:56

Well, it's a great question. I think it really is the energy that you bring, honestly, I'm a passionate person. And also, it's infectious, I think, because I'll also be in there talking about my own involvement, the ways that I'm, oh, I'm working on this, oh, one of my best friends is doing that, you know, oh, like this was, you know, let me tell you this little life story from when I was 16. And why this is so important to me. And I come and I bring my deep enthusiasm. And I think it just, I think it just naturally is infectious because I'm walking around. I'm heated up. I'm excited. I'm like, using my hands. Um,



Sage Lenier 32:36

and I think, you know, when someone it's peer pressure, really, if someone thinks something is cool, and you think it's cool. And so if I think I'm up there like gushing about compost, I'm like, you guys.



Sage Lenier 32:48

It's a double a climate solution, because not only does it avoid the methane emissions from landfill it also and like they're just like, What is going on she's so what they're not going to forget that they're not going to forget that like she owns outbursts of energy. And because Brinkley does a three Vin system, there's landfill recycling, and compost everywhere you go. And the municipal compost gets taken to a facility in Richmond,



Sage Lenier 33:18

which is a climate campaign, you could start in your own community to get some funding for our facility. And like, you know, the compost collectors and the green bins. And yeah, because that is a way that you can actualize regenerative agriculture and climate solutions on a community level because we're not just waiting around for sweeping national legislation anymore. We're getting it done on the committee level anyways.



Sage Lenier 33:42

Dude, I'm excited know what I mean? They are going to they're going to hear their instructors sage has their same age up there, like the hub. And then they are never going to forget that they're never going to be able to short improperly anymore. They're gonna walk past the

compass, and they're gonna go down. But I think it's really about bringing your own passion, your own energy. And, yeah, it literally becomes peer pressure today, what I think is called become school because they think I'm cool.



34:11

Do you think it has something to do too with like, you're close to their age, and there's more of like, she gets us versus people like me who are older and like, this guy who listens to music from the 90s will try with, you know, okay, I would say it's a little bit that but what I've been thinking about a lot lately, is that kind of like, age is like a choice. Honestly, once you get past a certain point, like, I will meet some 30 year olds I know are like crotchety and that's true. The curmudgeons already, yeah, some 30 year olds are like really boring. Like, not wandering, not enjoyable to be around people. But I've met several people in their mid 40s Lately, who are just full of life. That's me. That's me. Right like stole Borgia

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Sage Lenier 35:00

So, so like, yeah, so I didn't get to choice I think you can be. And I think Gen Z in particular, I think we're starting to really look for older role models. I think a lot of us are trying to get rid of that idea that like, the only thing that's cool is youth because it sucks because as you get older,

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Sage Lenier 35:20

you start, you know what I mean? Like it's a process of self destruction. Yeah. So, yeah, Hollywood beauty standards aside, I think a lot of us are looking for like guidance and role models and whatnot. We're in their 80s. And I like see all the white haired women on Tik Tok, like, showing their little outfits and I'm like, Yes, this is where I want to be. I think it's a choice. I think you can be a really sick 45 year old teacher and I plan on being one. So I hope you do. I don't I don't think that there's something inherent to us. And I kind of want to get rid of that narrative. Because one, I think Youth Climate activism was a little bit of a meat grinder. Like, they're like, oh, like, You're so young. And you're doing this. And it's like, yeah, I was too young to be doing that, actually, as a matter of fact. Yeah.

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Sage Lenier 36:07

I burned out. I shouldn't have been doing that I was a child.

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Sage Lenier 36:11

Yeah, and too, it's like old work. You know, it isn't Kids Next Door. We're not like aging out at the age of 20. You know,



Eric Benson 36:20

no, one, we won't be young forever. But I will say continue to know what happens happens quicker than you think I can already feel it in my right shoulder today. So



Eric Benson 36:30

but I wonder too, like, there's this idea that you brought up about? If you can't teach it, you should live it or do it. And I'm wondering too, like, if you're teaching if you're in front of the class, but you're also setting that like, good role model example like showing, this is what I'm doing at my whole. Right. And being honest about it, like your pitfalls, but your successes. I feel like that's what you're also referring to, but but maybe I missed your missed your idea there.



Sage Lenier 37:02

Yeah, like showing them. What you're doing in your life can be impactful. But also, if you yourself having the time to go down to city council, and, you know, may comment on the bill that's up about more bus funding, then you get to talk to your students and be like, how cool and I making change here, right? Yes, I think I think that that is exactly like people feel



Sage Lenier 37:32

there is this defeatist sentiment that we need, like Joe Biden to sign sweeping climate legislation into law, and that's the only thing that we can do. And I see it, I see it online all the time. I see it in every comment section, people were like, Oh, my God, don't talk to me about my fast fashion purchasing, go after government go after the corporation responsible. And I'm like, Okay, well, you're financially incentivizing them anyways.



Sage Lenier 38:00

But also, like, I think it's, yeah, it's this really defeatist narrative. And I just don't think they will realize that



Sage Lenier 38:08

a lot of this change is going to have to happen on the local level, because that's how climate resilient to work. The problem is that we've been trying to do this, like, huge masses of land all doing the exact same thing. And it's not tailored, it's not reached, or it's not in Sasha has no root in indigenous knowledge, like, you know, yeah. So whether it's redesigning our food systems, or public transit, or wherever, there's so many things that can really only be actualized on the local level, and maybe the funding can come from federal or state or whatever. But we need we need Yeah, like if people feel more empowered to make change in their, I mean, you change your city, and I change mine, and they change theirs. We can patch work together real systemic change. Yeah. Yeah, I agree. Your your comment about individual actions matter. I'm 100%. On board with that. I do hear the same things you do about well,

there's these 100, these 100 corporations, and really, they're really the problem and what we really do, yeah, but the 100 corporations referred to not statistic, the statistic being 100. Corporations are responsible for 71% of that's

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Sage Lenier 39:16

carbon. I don't know if it's carbon emissions overall, or carbon emissions from fossil fuels, because they're, like 20% of carbon emissions don't even have to do with fossil fuels, like animal agriculture and stuff and deforestation.

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Sage Lenier 39:27

Though the 100 corporations it's referring to are oil and gas. And I find that very boring. I find that to be an extraordinarily boring statistic because, yeah, of course, obviously, why do they pull so much oil and gas because they are financially incentivized to do so? And who's financially incentivizing that Apple h&m, Toyota,

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Sage Lenier 39:53

like it is, it is this consumer system? It truly truly is. It is TJ Maxx, I promise

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Sage Lenier 40:00

Yeah, TJ Maxx is a is a carbon.



Eric Benson 40:04

What do they call it is a is a climate criminal? He doesn't word Yeah. Climate criminal? Yeah, no, I think I think that's totally right. I agree with you. And I struggled for a long time going through apathy, and what is it? Anxiety? And really coming to this point of like, well, what what is there left for me to do except actually just do something and celebrate that I'm doing something. And that I learned later on was this concept called Hope punk. Or the every fight is worth the fight. Right? Even how minor how small it is. And so that's what keeps me going. That's why I'm doing the show. That's why you're here, because you're here to help inspire others to do what you're doing. Because you're right, that patchwork can help change the system. And yeah, so I have one last question for you. It's my favorite one. And that is, you're an educator already, you already are doing this. But if you were to step into a design classroom, like one where I'm in, or any design classroom from architecture on,

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Sage Lenier 41:17

what would you? What would you assign the students to do? What would you want them to tackle as your project or class? What a wonderful question. Well, I think the obvious answer, and if you don't know the term about to say, then go ahead and learn it is really, really

incredible is to operate from cradle to cradle design standpoint. And so if you haven't read, Cradle to Cradle by, I always say that asking Dr. McDonough and Braungart Yeah, That book changed my life. That was the book that got me into this whole thing. Yeah, read that book. But I think I wouldn't be challenging them to.

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Sage Lenier 42:00

I think, still, what I'm seeing with design is too much organic cotton, and recycled polyester, recycled plastic bottles, whatever. And I want to see more creative landfill recovery. So whether that's recycled clothing, or furniture, whatever it is electronics, I don't think we need more organic cotton. I don't think that's good for though. And I think it's bad for the planet. And I don't think that recycled plastic bottles are really doing much acceptance, and except making people feel good about recycling of plastic bottles, or anything. Yeah.

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Sage Lenier 42:37

So yeah, so I think I would just be in there trying to challenge folks to think about design systems that are more about landfill resource recovery, but also divesting from the concept of goods in the first place. So how do we, you know, what are those design models like carshare like, I really like the gig carshare model in the Bay Area, where it's this fleet of cars, and you can unlock it at any time. It's not like Zipcar where you have to like reserve it for a whole day like that.

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Sage Lenier 43:11

But I really like this model, because it's turning the concept of a car from good into a service. And so that's that's the design thinking that I'm trying to see push the envelope rather than more recycled.



Eric Benson 43:24

Yeah. Is it kind of like rent the rent the Rent the Runway? Is that is that a similar thing for you?

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Sage Lenier 43:30

I think so.



Eric Benson 43:31

Yeah. Yeah. You could just rent clothes as opposed to buy them.

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Sage Lenier 43:35

Yeah, honestly, I know very little about sustainable fashion for young woman just because I only thrift. So yeah. Well, that's another perfect thing. Right. Like, how do you design project to make thrifting the noisier Yeah, yeah, like Depop. Love the fun.



Eric Benson 43:52

Yeah, well, what's what's next for you? Do you have anything else big coming up? I heard some interviews, happenin work, where can we find you? Going forward?



Sage Lenier 44:01

I am building the nonprofit that is my nonprofit and trying to build a relationship with people on social media. I think getting the doing social media content creation is gonna is like half of the work at this point. Because I just want to make these ideas as successful as possible. And I'd like to help everyday people feel like they are co conspirators in the environmental movement and push more people into it. So yeah, I'm on social media. I'm on Instagram and Tiktok at Sage linear. My last name is spelled le ni er, and I'm also enjoying it. I haven't used it yet. But I will one day as well. I think you have like a lot of followers, which is good and some looks like some pretty important followers too. So hopefully they can help amplify what you're doing.



Sage Lenier 44:55

Thank you. Thank you.



Eric Benson 44:58

You've done really well since you started in January.



Sage Lenier 45:00

that's, that's really hard to do. Yeah, I mean, some of it was coming from. I mean, I was doing content creation in late 2019 2020, early 2020 and then stopped. So I had a little bit of a base. But yeah, I just really hit the ground running in January with the content creation again.



Eric Benson 45:16

Well, I'm actually really inspired by what you're doing. I'm, I'm on the same page as you and trying to do that for my end. So I think there's a lot I can learn from the work you've been doing, and specifically that class, I want to bring some of that into into my classroom. Well, thank you so much sage. It's been quite fun to talk with you and I wish you the best in your work because it's super important.



Sage Lenier 45:41



Sage Lenier 45:41

Thank you, Eric. You as well.



Eric Benson 45:43

This podcast is CO produced by Bianca Sandiko and me a big special thanks to Ellen Keith Shaw and Christie Piolet for their gorgeous work on our new branding tool Batul Rashik and Mark O'Brien for their continued design help. Brandee Nichols and Michelle Nguyen for their strategic guidance and always supporting me on this podcast.



Eric Benson 46:06

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