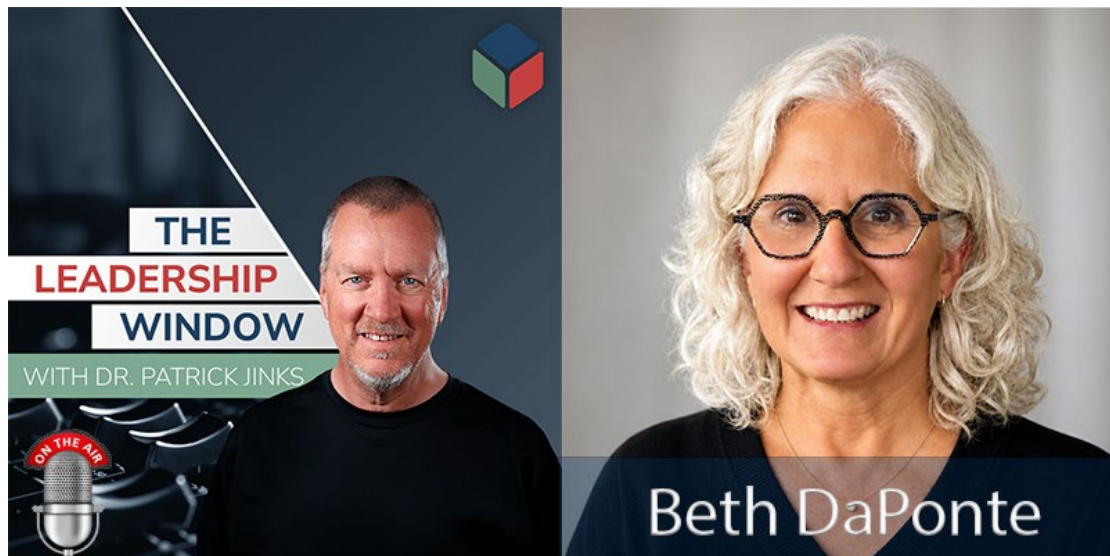




EPISODE SUMMARY

Dr. Patrick Jinks sits down with evaluation expert Dr. Beth DePonte to demystify program evaluation as the nonprofit sector's research and development engine. Together they distinguish outputs from outcomes, clarify how theories of change and logic models make impact measurable, and show why mixed methods reveal both what happened and why. They explore funder expectations, practical capacity realities, and the risks of acting on incomplete data, including a candid debate about using AI for qualitative analysis. Leaders walk away with a clear framework for moving from assumptions to credible, learning-oriented, data-informed decisions that drive community-level change.

IN THIS EPISODE

- Evaluation as R&D: how disciplined testing, iteration, and learning accelerate mission impact—and why framing matters as much as funding.
- Beyond outcome measurement: evaluating relevance, efficiency, and whether your approach is the best use of limited resources.
- Mixed-methods power: pairing quantitative “what” with qualitative “why,” including bright-spot analyses that challenge demographic assumptions.
- From outputs to outcomes: using theories of change and logic models to track meaningful results (e.g., work hours, access to services), not just counts.
- Practical capacity and funder dynamics: when to outsource evaluation, how to engage funders as partners, and the growing appetite for measurable community change.
- Attribution vs. proof: building logic-based arguments grounded in literature and stakeholder insights rather than seeking courtroom-level certainty.

- AI in evaluation: promises and pitfalls of using advanced AI for qualitative coding, the necessity of human expertise, and avoiding flawed, unvetted conclusions.

KEY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

- Where is our mission or program framing too broad to measure, and how can a clearer theory of change sharpen the outcomes we track?
- What assumptions are we making based on incomplete data, and how will we incorporate qualitative stories to understand the “why” behind our numbers?
- How will we resource evaluative capacity—internally or externally—so that learning loops inform strategy, operations, and funder engagement?

NOTABLE MOMENTS

00:00 — Introduction to Dr. Beth DePonte and the role of social science consulting

02:15 — Evaluation as the nonprofit sector’s R&D: testing, iteration, and learning

04:02 — Demography in practice: mortality, social forces, and population-level stories

08:23 — Economic shifts and their impact: the garment industry and Puerto Rican women’s labor participation

11:53 — “Why, What If, How”: linking innovation questions to program evaluation

16:11 — Bright spots: a school defies demographic assumptions on kindergarten readiness

20:30 — Outputs vs. outcomes in practice: Second Chances Garage case mechanics and design

24:50 — Measuring outcomes: increased work hours, community participation, education, and medical access

28:44 — Literature reviews, mixed methods, and building credible logic-based arguments

32:15 — Capacity constraints, outsourcing evaluation, and funders’ growing support

41:20 — Framing versus funding: sharpening logic models to enable measurability

48:10 — Attribution challenges: logic model over proof model in complex initiatives

00:00 — Evaluation is storytelling, not a court case; setting up a learning mindset

00:30 — AI for qualitative analysis: potential, pitfalls, and the importance of expertise

06:33 — Leadership example: Joyce Rothermel's quiet preparation and servant leadership

GUEST

Dr. Beth DePonte, Founder and Leader, Social Science Consultants — evaluation, demographic research, and community assessment services for nonprofits, NGOs, governments, and international organizations.

RESOURCES MENTIONED

- Evaluation Essentials (2nd Ed.) by Dr. Beth DePonte
- A More Beautiful Question by Warren Berger
- Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath
- Social Science Consultants: <https://socialscienceconsultants.com>
- Second Chances Garage (Frederick County, Maryland)
- Impact Operating System (referenced in conversation with Doug Paul)
- Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) and Traction
- Center for Credentialing and Education
- International Coach Federation
- Microsoft Copilot
- NVivo
- Claude by Anthropic
- ChatGPT
- Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

FINAL LISTENER TAKEAWAY

Clarify your theory of change, pair credible data with insightful stories, and treat evaluation as your learning engine so you can make smarter decisions, engage funders confidently, and deliver measurable community impact.