

Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Yesh ([00:05](#)):

I'm Yesh Pavlik Slenk, and this is Degrees: real talk about planet-saving careers from Environmental Defense Fund. If you've listened to earlier episodes of Degrees, you know, that we interview guests about how they're using their time and their talent and their passion to serve our planet. And you're convinced you want to do that too-- but you're probably wondering, yeah. How do I get that job? What do employers want in 2021? What steps should I take now to move me to the top of recruiters lists? Well, good news listeners. Our guest today is going to answer your job hunting questions. Trish, Kenlon is founder of sustainable career pathways, which is the go-to hub for sustainability job seekers-- and career advancers too. So listener get ready to take some notes because this is your crash sustainability career counseling session. Trish, Kenlon welcome to Degrees.

Trish Kenlon ([01:03](#)):

Thanks so much for having me. It's great to be here.

Yesh ([01:05](#)):

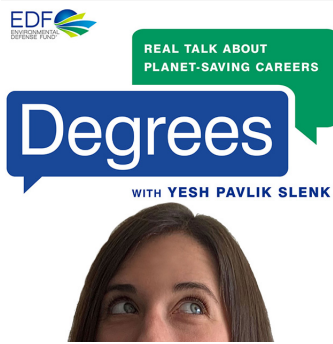
Well, Trish, you and I have been connected for the last, I don't know, five, six years through Climate Corps. And in that time, one thing that has never failed to impress me about you is your genuine enthusiasm to serve the sustainability community. Your sustainability rap sheet is pretty long and includes titles like practitioner, climate advocate, entrepreneur, writer, mentor, and now a sustainability career coach for our audience. What is Sustainable Career Pathways?

Trish Kenlon ([01:36](#)):

Well, thanks for that lovely intro Yesh. Um, Sustainable Career Pathways is a website and coaching service dedicated to helping people start or advance their careers in sustainability. And I created it because I wanted people to have a single place where they could go to not only learn about the different career possibilities in this space, but also to get the information they needed to actually find and get hired for those jobs. Um, so I've got a ton of information on there, like training and certifications to consider, networks, to join events, to go to whenever we're finally going to events again, uh, and job boards, dozens and dozens of job boards. And I think my favorite part is that I've got some really great interviews with people on there who work in sustainability and share their stories and tips.

Yesh ([02:23](#)):

And why is a resource like Sustainable Career Pathways so important right now?



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Trish Kenlon ([02:29](#)):

So we need all hands on deck to address the climate crisis. We need people in formal sustainability positions, people who may not officially work on the sustainability team, but our climate champions at work, policy advocates, volunteers, students, everyone. So it's incredibly important that we have everyone who wants to be a part of the team, able to connect with meaningful opportunities that use their skills and talents to do the work that needs to be done.

Yesh ([02:56](#)):

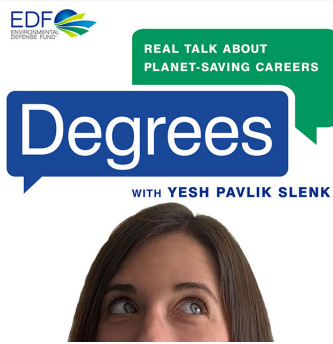
A hundred percent. I couldn't agree with you more and there are opportunities And they continue to emerge. In fact, I see this as a trend when I started on the Climate Corps team, back in 2015, the sustainability job market was super tiny compared to what it is just five years later. I can remember some of our alumni telling me that they got a job with a really generic title, but it was actually a sustainability job on the downlow because their company just wasn't ready to call it sustainability yet today, sustainability jobs are at the front and center of career pages and it seems like there's been a major sea change. Am I right in thinking that, is that me? What is the current state of careers in sustainability?

Trish Kenlon ([03:40](#)):

Yes, you're absolutely right. I think, I think there were a number of reasons for why we didn't see proper sustainability titles earlier on, I think a big part of that was that companies were still figuring out what sustainability meant for them. And, you know, that meant they were still figuring out what they needed from employees that were doing this kind of work. And so more generic titles or roles that were kind of split between sustainability work and more traditional functional work. They, they made sense at the time and the people that did have sustainability in their titles where you were often generalists, they did a bit of everything from strategy to running projects and reporting. But, but now as you noticed, I think we're seeing more formal sustainability education, more general agreement around what the standards and certifications are and more specialists. So you can specialize in reporting or energy analysis or plastics or water issues. And, you know, there are certainly still generalists out there, but you're starting to see more specialists for sure. And so as a result of that, you're also starting to see more specific titles and really detailed job descriptions that make it a lot easier to tell if a particular position is a good match for your skills or not.

Yesh ([04:50](#)):

That's a lot of progress in just five years. What do you project for sustainability jobs looking five years ahead?



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Trish Kenlon ([04:58](#)):

So there's been a dramatic increase in interest in ESG data and performance from the investor community. And that's only going to grow. I think that anyone working in sustainability in the next five years is going to have to have a really clear understanding of the connection between their work and the company's ESG scores and reporting.

Yesh ([05:17](#)):

Let me interrupt here for just a second. Listeners, if you're new to the field, ESG stands for environmental, social, and corporate governance. There are pieces of data that investors and the public now look at to determine a company's performance and that's way different than it used to be when financials were the only thing that the average investor or the average person cared about.

Trish Kenlon ([05:40](#)):

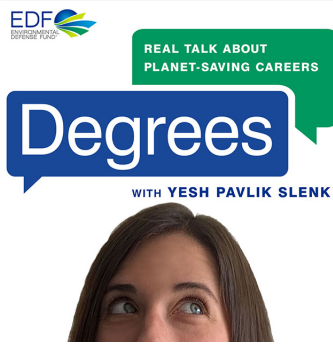
I also think that many of the events of 2020 have opened a lot of people's eyes about the importance of the "S" in ESG-- that social component. And a lot more companies are starting to develop strategies and metrics around things like social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and employee health and wellness. And I think a lot of sustainability teams will either be managing that work or partnering closely with the teams that do

Yesh ([06:08](#)):

I totally agree with you? ESG is like the hot topic right now. Um, which sectors within sustainability may be related to ESG. Maybe not are growing the fastest?

Trish Kenlon ([06:21](#)):

You know, as, as you've noticed, ESG has been the big success story this year. Even during the early days of lockdown, people were still posting positions or ESG analysts. Uh, when you've got someone like Larry Fink at BlackRock, making sustainability, an integral component of their investment strategy, people tend to respond to that and renewable energy and clean tech are also probably going to start growing like crazy next year. Um, I mean, they've been growing what you're going to see them explode next year. I think because if the Biden administration really is able to build back better, as they'd like to, there's going to be huge investments in renewables, grid, modernization, clean transit, um, energy efficiency, you name it



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Yesh ([07:03](#)):

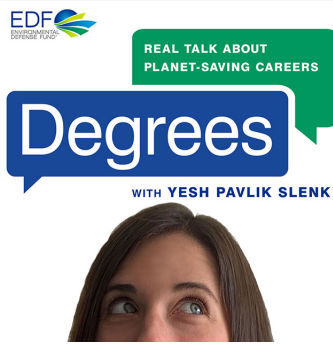
Well, I'm excited and I'm hopeful that all those things will be possible. So from my perspective, and it sounds like yours as well, the jobs are out there. The sector is growing companies and cities are looking for talent at rates that we really haven't seen before. So it is truly a golden time for people who care about climate change, to build their career while serving the planet. What should people do to get started?

Trish Kenlon ([07:29](#)):

So I'd say start by narrowing down your search to one or two target positions using your transferable skills and your interests as a guide, you really shouldn't be pursuing an energy policy role and a corporate reporting role at the same time. Those are totally different skillsets and totally different job searches. So, you know, start by doing an honest assessment of your education and work experience and try to identify what your core value and transferable skills are. Things like project management experience, marketing expertise, social media strategy, data analysis, industry knowledge-- you know, those are all usually very transferable. And then you need to decide if you'd be happiest in the private sector or maybe in government or at a nonprofit. And then think about, you know, what industry do you have experience in, or do you have any issues that you know a lot about, do you, have you worked with any frameworks, like the greenhouse gas protocol, you know, that those are all relevant and those should help inform your decision. Um, and if that doesn't work, you can listen to all of Yesh's podcast episodes and read the interviews on my website and try to get a feel for what fits. And then once you kind of have a clear understanding of what you want to do, try to talk to as many people as you can to learn about your target positions and find out if you have any gaps that you need to fill in order to be more competitive. So, so that's my, that's my 30-second version. I go into a lot more detail on some of the articles on my website.

Yesh ([09:02](#)):

Soul-searching is the headline there, um, and, and really drilling down because you're right, there are so many positions out there now that, um, it'll feel overwhelming and feel like you're really treading water. And nothing's really sticking, uh, unless you have that very targeted search. There are now millions of up and coming. And of course, existing professionals who want to work on climate, but there definitely is not enough access to training programs to help train and support them as they take on this career path or, or shift within their existing career path. So we decided to create this podcast to fill what we see as a gigantic void, and bring people access to virtual mentors, like you, to help them stay inspired and to keep working toward a career with impact and purpose. What should people do if they can't afford to go to grad school or get a specialized degree, or maybe they don't get the internship experience to advance in this process?



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Trish Kenlon ([09:59](#)):

I always try to encourage people to try to start gaining experience in sustainability, wherever they are right now, if your company has a sustainability team reach out and see if there's anything you can do to help them. Sometimes they need help with data collection, or they just need vocal champions for initiatives from your corner of the company. You know, you never know, unless you ask and raise your hand. Um, and if they don't need help or if there is no sustainability team, so you, you can take on special projects or build the business case for a team. You know, almost every industry out there has an industry association with a sustainability working group. So find out who they are and learn as much as you can about best practices in your industry and try to bring that back to your company. Um, there's also a lot of nonprofits dedicated to helping specific industries. So see if you can connect with any that focus on your industry and learn that way. You can also ask around during your networking to see if there are any certifications that are relevant to the jobs you're pursuing. Um, there's also a lot of schools out there that are offering single courses or certificate programs that aren't as much of a time or financial commitment as grad school. So that's an option too. And of course there's always great things to learn and great networking to be had through volunteering, getting involved in advocacy for local government issues. Um, and, and even helping out for political campaigns. It's a little late for this year, but certainly in the future, it's something you can think about. Um, or you can even start your own side hustle. There's, there's lots of ways to get experience.

Yesh ([11:31](#)):

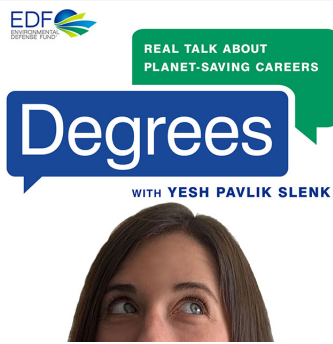
Yeah. And, and I think, you know, we have so many incredible networking tools out there like LinkedIn and like Twitter, it's fairly easy these days to stay up on the most recent trends and really engage with experts on an informational interview level to kind of help you put those pieces together and to learn the language of sustainability, um, in the specific niche that you're focused on.

Yesh ([11:59](#)):

Trish. One of the things that we try to stress in this podcast is that if you care about climate change or whatever your North star is, you can find ways at any company in any role to advance progress on the cause. Do you agree with that?

Trish Kenlon ([12:14](#)):

Absolutely. You know, look for the opportunities that add the most business value. Is it new revenue, like coming up with new ESG products for a financial company, or is it risk or cost reduction or is there a way to use sustainability to better connect with your stakeholders or add value to your brand? Um, just try to think strategically about your core business strategy and priorities and come up with pitches for



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

sustainability projects that align with those of, you know, even, even if leadership shoots you down, you now have experience with developing and pitching a sustainability initiative in the real world.

Yesh ([12:52](#)):

Uh, for the career-changers, listening in who are thinking about how they can pivot or enhance their current careers to focus on sustainability. What advice would you give to them?

Trish Kenlon ([13:03](#)):

Anytime you're making a big change in your career? You're asking someone to take a leap of faith. You're asking them to trust that the things that you've done in the past will lead to success in this new context. So the way that you help to make that leap easier for someone to take is number one, having a relationship with that person or someone who has recommended you to that person, so that they know enough about you to feel comfortable with you in general. And, and this is why networking is so important, especially for pivoters, uh, and two: really clearly demonstrating through your resume interviews and interactions that you understand what it takes to succeed in that role and how your previous experiences set you up for that success.

Yesh ([13:45](#)):

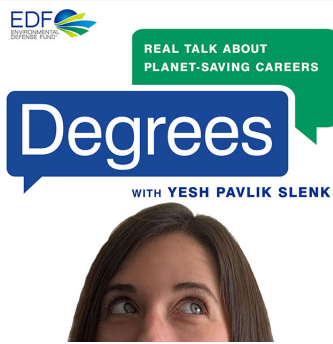
Are there certain skills that lend themselves well to having a career in sustainability?

Trish Kenlon ([13:52](#)):

So there are so many different career paths that there are no hard and fast rules. So if anyone's listening that doesn't naturally have some of these skills, um, don't be discouraged. Uh, but in general, I must say I have met a lot of people who are just naturally very entrepreneurial they're, they're good at connecting dots, finding new opportunities and, and they just always seem to be networking. There are also a lot of great communicators in this space. Um, storytelling and connecting with a lot of different stakeholder groups is very important. It's, it's a huge part of what we do. Um, other skills, you tend to see a lot of our project management, data analysis, policy analysis, problem solving, reporting. Um, and of course, anytime that you have experience with a particular tool or framework, you definitely want to make sure that you're emphasizing that experience.

Yesh ([14:46](#)):

I think this is such a valuable episode to be sharing with our listeners. But what COVID? Um, and what about a post COVID world that will, you know, be in for a while? How has that changed the sector? If at all



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Yesh ([15:01](#)):

Hiring definitely slowed down during the early days of lockdown. And there are definitely certain industries that aren't doing so great right now. Um, I don't recommend looking for a job in event management or working for a hotel, uh, but I'm still seeing a lot of new job postings every day. And plenty of my clients have been getting jobs. There is a lot of competition for those jobs, for sure. But again, that's why networking is really important as it can help you skip the line of it, so to speak. And, and COVID has actually been helpful in some ways in that there are more remote positions out there than ever before. I mean, this is unheard of many remote positions have been posted, and that opens up a lot of possibilities for people, especially people who can't relocate for whatever reason. Um, and it's also helped a lot with networking too. So most networking events and big conferences have moved online. Um, some do a better job than others. Um, and a lot of the big conferences have lowered their ticket prices or waived them entirely. So I've, I've attended more conferences to Sierra than probably the last three years combined since there's no travel involved.

Yesh ([16:07](#)):

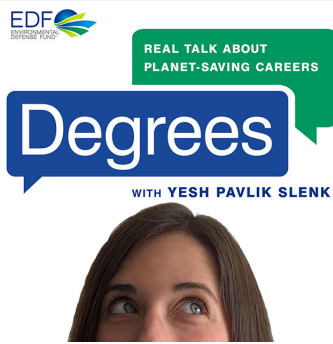
That is a huge win. And hopefully some of these things will, will linger on the, you know, into the, uh, immunized world that we're all looking forward to. Well, shifting gears, I'm going to play devil's advocate for a second, having a career in sustainability or a career that is mission-driven can sound so sunny. Um, and so idealistic, but it is definitely not all sunshine and roses. So be real here with our audience: what hurdles or obstacles can listeners expect when they choose this path.

Trish Kenlon ([16:46](#)):

So most people who work in sustainability have been hired to solve big problems. You know, things like getting an entire company to change the way they produce a product or developing best practices for an entire industry, or, you know, even one of my friends who creates reporting standards for the world. And so these are complex multifaceted multi-stakeholder problems that can take years to see meaningful progress on. Um, you will also hear no a lot, like a lot, a lot. Um, and at some point you will absolutely be discouraged by the amount of education. You still find yourself doing around the business case for sustainability. So you need serious amounts of patience. Um, definitely a lot of perseverance, um, and the ability to play the long game. But, you know, for, for most of us, or at least the folks that I talked to you, they there's no other fight that we'd rather be fighting. We hear the word, "no". And then we keep coming back every day until we find a way to get to the "yes", um, and those, those are the days you hold on to, those are the sunny days.

Yesh ([17:52](#)):

It is a delightfully stubborn bunch, but the, but we need, we need folks like that on this team.



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Trish Kenlon ([17:58](#)):

Um, we're stubborn in all the right ways.

Yesh ([18:00](#)):

Definitely, exactly. Uh, what are some of the things that trip your clients up in their search? Because people come to you for job help. Um, either when they're just starting out in their career, maybe they're advancing or transitioning. Um, maybe you can share some of the things that, uh, people really find as roadblocks or, um, as prohibitors in their search.

Trish Kenlon ([18:25](#)):

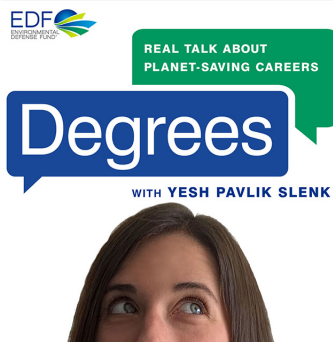
So a lot of people get overwhelmed by the sheer number of possibilities out there. You know, as you notice, there is a lot more out there that has titles like sustainability. And so they chase every job posting with the word sustainability in it, and they try to network with absolutely everyone. And it just, it just all gets a bit tangled. And, and that's why it's really important to start your search by focusing in on what areas of sustainability make the most sense for you. So you can kind of tune the rest of it out.

Yesh ([18:55](#)):

I think that's a really wise again, that's just a really wise insight and it's hard. It's harder than it sounds to find one thing and to really focus on it, especially when we have the passion that we do in this group. Well, Trish knowing you like I do, I know that one of your superpowers is connecting people and connecting people with each other. Do you have a system of organization that helps you keep your network healthy and productive? And I'm asking because networking is not everyone's jam and it can be easy to put your network aside when you have a great job and you're happy, but I hear this all the time when people need that network again, it can go cold. So your strategies on keeping a healthy and productive network.

Trish Kenlon ([19:42](#)):

I rely pretty heavily on LinkedIn. Um, I check it regularly, um, sometimes multiple times a day, and I make sure that I'm actively reading and liking and definitely commenting on people's posts. I don't, I don't think a lot of people understand how important it is to actually use value-added positive comments in their responses. Um, just liking is not enough to keep a relationship going. Uh, I also try to post a lot of content that is relevant to my network. So, so people can reach out to me and connect with me that way as well. Um, and as, as you've noticed, my brain is, it's just kind of always in networking mode, I'm always meeting people and, and coming across resources that immediately make me think of someone in my, in my network who could benefit from an introduction or share. And then I just reach out. It's, it's a lot about just kind of getting into the habit of, you know, always thinking about, okay, I



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

just took in something new. What, what can I do with this? And who can I help with it? It doesn't really matter much how you keep yourself organized. It just matters that you're regularly checking in on people, continuing to build those relationships and value where you can.

Yesh ([20:49](#)):

Those type a listeners that really want a system. Do you have any recommendations, even a simple one on getting started?

Trish Kenlon ([20:57](#)):

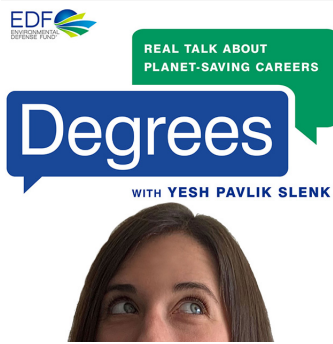
Yeah. If you're just getting started and you know, this isn't a muscle for you yet, then I'd recommend using a spreadsheet and just start out by identifying all the people that are either in your network or that you want to be in your network, prioritizing them, and then actually schedule your networking. So write down when you plan to reach out to that person, um, you know, everything from, when are you going to write that cold introduction, email, or even better, a warm introduction email, if you can. Um, you know, and when to follow up on a conversation or when to check up on a project, someone's working on. Try to use One Note or some other product to keep track of the notes that you're taking when you're actually talking to people so that, you know, okay, maybe it's been six months since you and I have chatted, but I can go in and I can check my notes and remember, Oh, you know her, daughter's probably about this age now, or she was working on this project. I can ask her how that's going or really anything you can do to help yourself remember to be thoughtful and mindful of what's going on in their lives and how you could possibly help.

Yesh ([22:00](#)):

And from my experience, getting a lot of requests for informational interviews, I really appreciate it when people follow up, not only on directly after the conversation may be about something we talked about, but in three months, six months, cause you know, I'm rooting for you. I think anyone who's agreed to take time out of their day to have these calls with folks is rooting for the person on the other end. And we really like to get updates. And that's another great way to maintain the relationship.

Trish Kenlon ([22:26](#)):

Absolutely. There's there's no better day than when you get an email from someone that says I got a job because of, you know, a conversation we had or something you shared with me, or, you know, I aced the project. Thanks for the tip.



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Yesh ([22:39](#)):

A hundred percent. That's, that's what keeps us waking up for work every day. Well, as we bring this conversation to a close Trish, I want to ask you a question that I'm asking all of our guests, if you could have your own personal Trish, Kenlon Board of Directors, the folks that you lean on when you're making, uh, any life decision related to work or family or travel, or, um, creative pursuits, which couple of people come to mind and you can know them, or maybe they're complete strangers, but which couple of people come to mind?

Yesh ([23:13](#)):

Let me think. Definitely Chris Castro, who is the director of sustainability and resilience for the city of Orlando, I think you had him on an earlier episode. So you just, you know, what an incredible community builder and visionary Chris is. And I don't think I've ever met anyone who has such an impressive grasp on the many different areas of sustainability as Chris does. Um, you know, plus he's, he's just incredibly nice guy. Um, definitely Joel Makower from, from GreenBiz, he, he may seem like an obvious choice, but he's been thinking about and writing about sustainability since way before it was cool. Uh, and my, my media empire isn't quite as large as his yet, so I think he could probably teach me a thing or two.

Yesh ([24:01](#)):

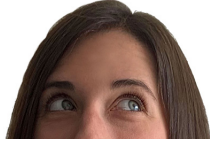
The, the key word there is yet someday I told you I'm entrepreneurial, right?

Yesh ([24:09](#)):

That's right.

Trish Kenlon ([24:10](#)):

Yeah. And I think last, but certainly not least, um, Amina Razvi, who's the Executive Director of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition. Um, I had the opportunity to meet her when she was working at Gap and I was at Ann Taylor many, many years ago. And even back then, she was looking for ways that retailers could work together and solve some of the bigger systemic problems we're facing as an industry. And I just, I really admire her for that. She's she's just got great systems thinking. Um, so, so that's my dream team. No, no one's ever actually asked me that before. So thank you. Um, what about you, Yesh? Do you have a personal board, real or imaginary?



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Yesh ([24:49](#)):

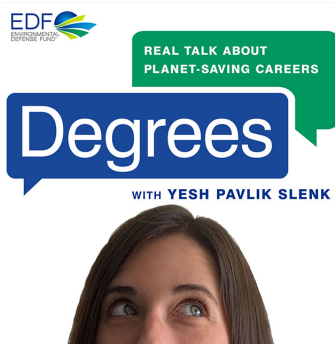
Yes. Lots of people are on my personal Board of Directors. Um, thanks for asking, uh, you think I could rattle mine off because I ask people this question all the time, but, um, well this isn't an exhaustive list, but a couple of members of mine are: my husband, David, he is not in the nonprofit or environmental space, but because he isn't, he always brings a real fresh perspective to my work. Um, he loves and supports me, but also challenges me to think differently and question my assumptions and be really clear in my logic. So I really appreciate that. Um, Trish truly and genuinely, you are on my personal Board of Directors as a member of the seriously as a member of the community I serve. And you are someone who is similarly passionate about moving the needle on climate by empowering people. I find myself learning from you every time we work together. And I really think about you and reach out to you frequently, as you know, when, uh, when we're tackling similar challenges. So I appreciate that. Um, someone, I don't know, but I would love to have lunch with sometime is Radha Agrawal. She's the founder of Daybreakers, and she's a truly inspiring thought leader in the field of community building and community management. So I always look to her example when I want to innovate. And then of course my folks, I talk about them on this podcast a lot. Uh, Bob and Sonja: they're my, you know, two of my biggest cheerleaders. And when people ask me how I ended up in the environmental space, I tell them that I had no choice. I was brainwashed from birth. My parents are nicknamed affectionately by my siblings and I as "Mother Earth" and "Father Time", because they are infinitely wise. They're great people infinitely wise folks. And while they're not environmental practitioners, they have made environmental stewardship core to everything they do as professionals. Um, definitely as parents and members of their community. So that's, that's on my, on my short list. Well, Trish, this has been such a fun conversation as always. So I want to thank you so much for taking time to speak with me today.

Trish Kenlon ([27:00](#)):

Thanks so much for having me. This is fun.

Yesh ([27:02](#)):

And that's our show for today. Thank you listeners for tuning into Degrees. We've linked Trish Kenlon, Sustainable Career Pathways website in the show notes. You can also follow her on Twitter [@sustainableCP](#), or on LinkedIn for regular job posts and articles. If you know others who are starting or continuing a job hunt, definitely share this episode with them and ask them to subscribe, and feel free to point them to our website [degreespodcast.org](#). We've just posted our favorite sustainability job boards. It's a goldmine. While you're there, we'd love to hear about your sustainability job hunting experience and get your tips as well. You can email us on our website or send me a message on Twitter. My handle is [@yeshsays](#). Degrees is presented by Environmental Defense Fund. Our Producers are Rick Velleu and Amy Morse. Our Executive Producer is Cristina Mestre. Our production company is Podcast Allies with Elaine Appleton Grant and Lindsey O'Connor. Our editor is Karen Lowe. Engineering by



Episode 7: Trish Kenlon How to land a sustainability J-O-B

Matthew Simonson, and theme music by Lake Street Dive. Tune into our next conversation with Michelle Romero, National Director for Green for All, a Dreamcorps program, and an environmental leader who is helping folks from all political ideologies find common ground so everyone can participate in the fight against climate change. She's very cool. I'm your host, Yesh Pavlik Slenk. Stay fired up, y'all.