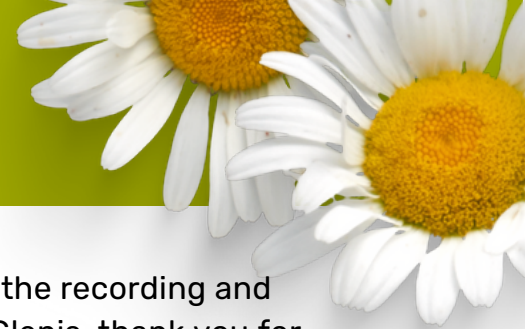


# CASE STUDY: PLENITUD PR TRANSCRIPT



**Nayla Bezares (NB):**

Ok, so I'm going to do a short intro now for the very reasons of the recording and then I'm going to tell you as I move through the questions. So Glenis, thank you for being with us today and it's a pleasure to be collaborating with you on this project. What I would like to discuss today are mainly aspects of how Plenitud has managed to be an organization in Puerto Rico that not only promotes the principles of sustainable agriculture and everything that is this more macro concept of integrating that also in the community that surrounds us, but also an organization with a viable business. They also have an aspect of the organization that is dedicated to the sales of agricultural products. So in today's conversation I'd like to explore that trajectory to share with students in this course how those two issues, business and mission, can coexist.

**Glenis Padilla (GP):**

Awesome, thanks for the opportunity, Nayla, and it's great that we can have this conversation.

**NB:**

Of course. Well, to start exploring that together, first question, tell us a little about the mission of Plenitud Puerto Rico.

**GP:**

Well yes, of course. We are located in a central-eastern region of Puerto Rico, a rural area with a social and economic disadvantage. Our mission is focused on three main pillars that are sustainability, community and service. So those are like the big three elements that best describe our vision and mission. We started in 2010 and the vision was always very close to what the principles of permaculture are, and it started very small. We were a group of... of friends, at that time I wasn't there, so we speak as part of this great family, but it was Owen Eagley and Paola Garrido, they were a couple, they had a group of friends who had an affinity with permaculture and had a very deep intention to bring change to our world and thought the best way to start was by following these pillars of permaculture which are to protect nature and our planet, love and respect each other and also protect each other, and share our resources and the surplus of all those resources.

So the project starts in another town first, but later on it moves to Las Marías, and it is in Las Marías that it develops more strongly. And in general, well that is what we are. We are community, sustainability and service. We are very focused on serving the needs of the communities we serve in. The central-eastern region [of Puerto Rico], this includes Las Marías, Maricado, Mayaguezs, Añaszco, Lares, San Sebastián.

These are different municipalities that lie in the mountainous area of Puerto Rico in the western side of the island. Our focus in this area responds to the challenges of food security - this is which is one of the great challenges that our island, Puerto Rico, speaking of the entire island, it is a great challenge that has been presented to us for many years. The agriculture industry continues to decline and we need more access to healthy food and fresh food in this region, and we know that in Puerto Rico more than 85% of the food that is consumed comes from abroad, it is imported. And much of it is also processed, canned, so well, there, there, was the mentality of, the vision of Owen and Paula and the other group of friends who were also there at the time when it started.

And further down the road we [Plenitud] also began to understand many other needs that existed in the communities of the western region of the island. For example, in particular, a high incidence of mortality from diabetes in the area of Las Marías and Maricado in particular. And this is also a reflection, it is a small representation of the larger sample, which is the entire population of Puerto Rico, in which we know this health crisis is also reflected at that level as well. So we were funded with an intention focused on permaculture and food cultivation, producing food in a sustainable way following those three pillars that I mentioned but then it evolved to include other things that we can talk about shortly.

**NB:**

Of course, please, I would love to discuss it, but I would also like to understand...because it sounds like the organization, this group of friends, but let's say the organization, was founded on a very clear desire to live the principles of permaculture. In other words, we could say that the mission was ahead and not the concept of a business leading the process of how to structure all of this. So I don't know if that has to do with these other things that you mention, but I'm curious to know how...

And I ask because I think that many people who have this worldview who want to make a change, that is, basically what you have just described, which is what Plenitud has in its scope, basically solving the problem of food insecurity and the quality of the diet in Puerto Rico, which is a super ambitious mission, right? And obviously, well, you're very wise to focus it on the immediate community. What better way than that.

But how do you even, how do you even start that process when you're a group of friends, right? How, then, does one carry out this desire to live a mission and achieve social change from the perspective of access to the necessary resources? How do you start to have the attention of the right people to achieve collaborations. I don't know if we could talk a little bit



about those early days, right? How was the evolution in terms of those elements that led to this not being just an idea and take root and then begin to take shape.

**GP:**

Of course. I want to emphasize that I was not there in that first attempt, but with the work that I do directly with Plenitud, well, yes, I have seen many documents that were created at that time and one of them that I can refer to, which touches my heart is a document in which a manifesto of what the vision was is made. And it's very interesting that the vision that Paula and Owen and that group of friends had from the beginning remains the same in essence and well, it very, very, very directly correlates to what's happening today. In other words, there was a lot of spontaneity in the beginning and I think it had a lot to do with the support of the parents of these young founders, they were together with a desire to dream, of very close mentors who met along the way while they were studying, they were studying at the university, they were very young, they were also able to travel and see the world and they had the opportunity to live in Guatemala and live in places where there was also a great need for food, a need for safe housing, safe water. So it was like a process, in that process of studying and deciding what they wanted for themselves, where they were going, and they found mentors along the way and they also had international experiences that helped them to better understand their calling of what they wanted for themselves, for their community and what things are viable, right.

So, with that help from their parents and with those mentors, with those friends, well, they began to sow, they began to sow fruits and design spaces, to think, right, they had this farm in Las Marías that in the past was a monoculture, it was a citrus and coffee farm and that space had been impacted by chemicals, there were dirt roads, without erosion control, runoff control, so little by little these souls continued to unite, these people with united intentions, with affinities, people with many affinities . They kept thinking about how this space could gradually become more a eco-friendly farm, more respectful of nature, how we can design terraces and have polyculture, a little more like thinking, following those same lines of permaculture. Initially, These two ideas of it being self-sustaining, that zero waste was produced, that everything be composted, that the houses be respectful of nature, all of that. From the beginning I can assure you that there was something like that essence, that element and this is still the case today.

And along the way, well, we also find ourselves with the dilemma that, okay, we also have to live in a capitalist country where we also have to survive and we have to produce also to self-sustain this project to be able to continue providing service, that is, to be able to serve ourselves and continue producing food that collects rainwater and food, but I think that this is how that part of the mission education was so close



and seeing the community needs, knowing those initial foundations and early documents, of the essence of the beginning of what the Plenitude PR project was, well yes I know that it was considered from the beginning that this was an educational project and that it was also self-sustaining. In other words, it did have to have a business aspect in order to work, but how it evolved, well it was, a non-linear path, it was not perfect and it continues to be a path, where we continue to adapt and see how, to continue reaching these communities which is the goal, right? Continue serving with love, continue serving to build community and highlight the sustainability of our country, and that service component.

**NB:**

And I think that perhaps this is a good point to touch base with those projects that you mentioned, which have emerged over time, because I suspect myself and please correct me, but then perhaps it is along this path that the opportunity arises to carry out one of the initiatives that I think stands out the most to you here in Puerto Rico, which is the educational aspect and how you have given yourselves to the task to share those experiences through content that was truly needed in Puerto Rico at that time, which are the books that can be used as a reference to then be able to implement these concepts of permaculture, that Plenitud has also managed to do very well through the last years.

**GP:**

Of course. Well look, I can tell you that El Josco Bravo is another project that was fully hand in hand with Plenitud from the beginning. El Josco Bravo is a project, I call it an emblematic project, one of the first initiatives established in Puerto Rico to mobilize sustainable agriculture, and agroecology, what we call agroecology, permaculture, sustainable agriculture, right? It has so many names, but it is all the same. Let's say, well, not everything is the same, but it's all heading in the same direction.

So, El Josco Bravo collaborated with us from the beginning, we were just starting out and then we began at the farm the [agroecology] course from El Josco Bravo. And that is where, what happens is that it was a great opportunity and it continues to be a great opportunity to have these young people wanting to sow, wanting to learn. This [collaboration] was key for the development of Plenitud and what continues to be the development of Plenitude. And just like El Josco Bravo, it is these people who have this call, who have this passion for tilling the land, for building the country, for providing food, and connect with our natural environment.

Then, Plenitud began to collaborate very closely with El Josco Bravo and from there, from those first courses that were offered at the Plenitud farm, Rebekah Sánchez



arrived, who is our leading agronomist of the agriculture program today. Rebekah is young, full of energy, full of great intellectual capacity, very humble, very detached from the political part. I think that this has also helped as well--Although we do have that element of change, of providing solutions and of contributing to this shift, this change of opinion at a political-social level, but... [Rebekah] came [to Plenitud] very eager, very willing to learn and to reach out, as we say here-- to giving it all-- to produce food, to make food accessible to the community, to also be able to come together as a community, an intentional community.

So there, through the Josco Bravo classes, Rebekah arrives [to Plenitud] and Rebekah then gives love to that part of educational programs that were more structured to continue serving other university students who had an interest, who had a passion, and that's how our current educational model, it begins with that pillar that Rebekah started, which were workshops that lasted from six months to a year. These students came to the farm constantly, that is, there was a day to day of working, learning techniques, using tools, learn to choose, from the selection of seeds, passive and active control of water, planting rotation, all that technical part was covered in that course.

Then, [students] were chosen from those groups, we would observe the performance of those students and those who had that interest very well defined, that this calling was strong for them-- [those students] were chosen to then give them more specialized mentoring. And those students then entered another, in another phase, what we call intervals. Intervals, we call them tiers in English, they are tier 1, tier 2, tier 3. Well, from those beginnings with Rebekah, tier 1 was done, which is sowing the seed, [it was] like a very general course, but practical, right, on day to day basis. From there we go to a more individualized mentoring [Phase 2]. And later, if those students, those participants still had that interest for the project and wanted to continue, then they were [given the opportunity to be] in charge of helping as instructors in the next courses. So, they had to teach what they learned and thus retained more of what they learned. They were also very involved in production, in technique.

So, that is how the education model that we have [today] at Plenitud emerged, that is how everything arises--starting with that agriculture program--and continues to be very similar today. We have expanded the offerings, now we have an agribusiness incubator. That incubator provides dedicated attention to four different farmers, per year-- we have about four different new farmers or farmers who are starting their business, who already have a little experience but they are helped with materials, with mentoring and then, well, that's another new offer but the other courses continue to take place and annually, we reach around 25 new farmers who go through the



courses. And, again, if they show that performance and that genuine calling, then they are given the opportunity to receive individualized mentoring and once they go through that second stage, then we can consider them to be instructors during the following courses.

**NB:**

Fascinating, I didn't know, mind you, I didn't know about that very detailed aspect and I know we've discussed it at different levels of detail, but that three-tier model makes a lot of sense.

**GP:**

Uh-huh. Yes. Yes.

**NB:**

Ok, so if I understand correctly, right, and I'm talking about different places, fullness then begins with this social mission, well with its manifesto, with a very clear understanding of what is the position of these young people in the world and what is it, what is it that they want to achieve, they settle in a community and over time, obviously they have always been clear that their work exists in a capitalist context from an economic perspective, so they have this aspect of self-sustenance very clear and they incorporate the aspect of some kind of clear economic input. I guess that was done through CSA-type models or product sales at farmers' markets...?

**GP:**

Well, initially we weren't selling, I understand that at the very beginning we weren't selling, we were kind of starting out and asking for funds, we started writing proposals, we started writing proposals, but at that time there wasn't... We didn't quite know how to do this. We were like... Kind of like hitting blindly. Asking ourselves how to do this... We have a social call, a call to improve the community. Yes, that aspect was very clear. But then how can we find funds to help us get started, right?

And then, well, we started writing different proposals. We weren't selling yet. We sell now. Well, then we talked to USDA and we began to find friends who helped us, right, for a project at the beginning of obtaining vehicles. We didn't have vehicles, so they gave us confiscated vehicles. So go figure. So, there was another project—at that time moringa was something of interest to people, so we already worked with moringa, we wrote a project. So we started writing proposals more directed at that aspect of... of agriculture. USDA was key, NRCS was key, they are state agencies from Puerto Rico, from the United States that have an impact in Puerto Rico and that's where things started little by little.





Volunteers also started, nobody was paid for the work they did, that is they donated, people donated their own things, they camped, there were no houses on the farm. In the photos that I have seen there was like... like a stove where they cooked for everyone. They were small, right? Maybe there were five to ten people who were, who came and went, right? That they had their other projects, but they were also very close there.

At the same time, Paula and Owen are growing professionally. For example, I know that they took some courses and were certified in permaculture, permaculture design, writing proposals--Paula began to learn about how to work on proposals, how to meet donors, so while they were tilling the land and getting busy as we say and getting what they could, well they were also preparing professionally to be able to start, have the resources necessary and it is later on where, well, we are able to establish a crop rotation, a clientele that is more recent, maybe two or three years ago is that it is that we started more formally, having 25 clients, it has grown, now we have about 180 families annually and they continue to be about 25 to 30 constant clients throughout the week, but at that time, well, we didn't have it, it wasn't like that, it was like producing for us, for the children we are serving, or now more recently we also have another program that serves the vulnerable elderly, so... We were kind of figuring it out, trying to see how it worked. And it was like that with little injections from different proposals we were then able to start.

And Owen, another thing that I wanted to say, is that he also prepared himself a lot. He has a very particular passion for Super Adobe, which is a type of bioconstruction, and he gets certified through Cal-Earth in California in this type of type of sustainable housing construction that is resilient to hurricanes, to earthquakes--which are a recent threat in Puerto Rico-- well hurricanes are not recent threats, they have affected us all my life but earthquakes more recently. Puerto Rico has been suffering more from these threats so he prepared himself [in bioconstruction] and when he obtains his certifications, [Plenitud] continues to promote bioconstruction within the farm with this same vision of super-adobe and bio-construction, and then, that's when they begin to create more workshops to create homes together. And that's where the bioconstruction program came from, which is like these groups of people who are more passionate about the subject, who are in the same line of thought that we have to find safe housing for Puerto Rico and more, right, more housing that is appropriate for our climate, for our challenges.

And then, that's where it comes from, OK, well, we're going to create this program to continue promoting public policy that legitimizes, that legitimizes the process of building this type of house, we haven't achieved it yet, but we're on that path. And



then creating a community around that topic. Building homes together and leaving that legacy for future generations. So at the farm we already have about four prototypes. that we have managed to do in the last, perhaps, five years.

Those first five years, I think, were more about trying to find the fund and donations and voluntary work, and then the last four or five years have been like wow, we begin to find, let's say, angels, sponsors, people who believe in the vision, many people who have joined and want to be involved. So then this growth of resources [happened] in every sense, the human resource that is one of the most important resource, the one that we give a lot, a lot, a lot, of emphasis the care of our people, of each one-- individually, recognizing that each of us is in a healing process, that we each have our challenges, our baggage, the baggage that we have been carrying for God knows how many lives. And we pay a lot, a lot of attention to caring for people and I think that this has also been key for the ongoing growth of those resources . And now, as is the last two years, we are starting to structure the team, designing more specific roles of who is the director of what-- because everyone is doing everything and it's like how can we organize ourselves? So I can assure you that we are still, look, in diapers.

**NB:**

And this trajectory if you add it up is approximately a 10-year trajectory.

**GP:**

Well, since 2010, yes, practically like 13 years there, right? We are talking about 10 to 13 years. And more structured, more solid in terms of resources, perhaps the last five years have been crucial. But yes, Paula and Owen have been... since 2010... with a very clear vision of what they wanted and this vision has been manifesting itself in a very beautiful way, very loving, very sensitive with regards to the ecology, sensitivity to what nature on our planet is calling us to do and also very sensitive to the diversity that we have in Puerto Rico, to the diversity from skin color to political and social visions within the same movement of what agroecology is. So I think that's where we are.

**NB:**

And I would like to recap, but before I do that, I wanted to reflect on something that you mentioned, so I would like to explore it with you, but you mentioned that this CSA or the community sales started quite recently, you mentioned it was something like 5 years ago and that coincides a bit with the times of Hurricane Maria and so I wanted to see if we could talk a little about how [Plenitud's] mission being so cemented and having dedicated its efforts first to living [the mission], to structuring your organization around that mission, and not around the business aspect-- How did this





have an impact, whatever it was, in terms of both you as an organization being resilient, as well your ability to empowering your community in this process of, well, the impact of the hurricane although we could be talking about any other type of event that could have a similar transformative, cataclysmic impact on the day-to-day life of a community or in our case as a country. So I would like [to ask] if you have any thoughts on how that organizational clarity-- that continues to evolve and that perhaps structurally continues to change--but at that time, in that context, what was the value, right? And what came of it, if anything.

**GP:**

Of course, of course, many growth experiences came out of Hurricane Maria I think -- for all Puerto Ricans! But for Plenitud specifically, it was a catharsis, it was living in such a rural place, being in communities where... well, it's hard to get there, especially after a hurricane, because the area is highly forested and the roads are ... there are a lot of curves, many small spaces to get to the mountain where we are located. So that geographic element was a big challenge.

In addition to the fact that the community...We have a community with many sick people, so if we return to the issue of diabetes, Las Marías and Maricao are the fourth or fifth municipality in Puerto Rico with the highest incidence of diabetes mortality. So the need for insulin was very high in that area. There was no electricity, there was no drinking water. There are many communities as well that were connecting their water intakes to streams or aquifers that were contaminated. So there were countless social problems going on at the time. Then Plenitud immediately took decisive action, we are going to put our hands to work, we are going to seek help, we are going to address immediate needs, so we provided a lot of immediate response, that is, we served as first responders, this was a large part of what we did at the moment, they [Plenitud] joined the municipality [in their efforts]they tried to maintain the mission and vision, it has always been very important to stay focused on that vision and not compromise it by any... any political influence.

But yes, there was a lot of collaboration with other first responders. And it is [at this time] where a calling arose, where the "Amo Mis Abus" program was created. We realized that there were many, many elderly people, many older adults who were abandoned, vulnerable, with problems, that is, since before the hurricane. This was already happening, what happens is that the hurricane uncovered countless social problems. So, one of them that we immediately addressed was this need to take care of the elderly and then we started cooking, cooking together to provide food during the hurricane and as a result of all that experience of cooking every day, bring a plate of food to these communities that were not receiving immediate supplies because the



geographical conditions did not allow it. then all the government aid payments were delayed, and usually [NBS1] government response takes time.

Even when the distance is short and the path is clear it takes time, so that experience gave us, gave us the strength to create the “Amo Mis Abus” program and also the pandemic, the pandemic also exposed a lot of this part of the abandonment, right, to the elderly. Another social problem we have is that we have lost many professionals. There are many young professionals or adults who decide to move to urban centers or move from Puerto Rico to other places in the United States or other countries. And well, their older relatives stay here. And so these relatives, many of them are sick or do not have the mental capacity, right? Or they have their needs and well, being alone in a rural community is hard. So that's where the drive for this program came from.

But we also realized that there was no water even when we live in a region where it rains a lot, in Las Marías it rains a lot. And we asked ourselves- how it is possible? That there is no water, people do not have water to flush the toilet, to wash the dishes, to be able to bathe, drinking water. So we started training people on how to collect rainwater, we looked for funds to install cisterns in the places with highest need. From there also the “Safe Water” program is developed, which is the one that seeks to train, using the same tier system Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, those three learning intervals, we reach people who are interested in learning about how to install these rainwater collection systems. and then we give them individualized mentoring with the intention of helping those interested in starting their own businesses. That's the idea. Community development through a perspective, of service, giving an essential service, such as access to water, and at the same time, allowing these people to also benefit financially from a business like this.

So water was another great element that Maria taught us and continues to be a great challenge. more recently we had Fiona and we also had this reminder again that we have to continue working on this issue of safe water. And well, right, in terms of agricultural sales and the challenge of access to food during this time, we had to ask ourselves, what are those crops that we had to give more priority to in times of hurricanes? We had to rethink everything and adapt what we were doing. And it was... One of our values is spontaneity in service, which is like... The world, life brings you some very big surprises or some cataclysm, in our case this great hurricane arrives. And it's like, how can we be spontaneous and still serve and adapt to the realities of the moment? Well, that was what was done, spontaneity, looking for ways to adapt, find more resources, to organize ourselves better, we continue mapping the community, to understand the needs in the different neighborhoods. That is something that we continue to do consistently all the time.



It's how we continue to identify talents, who are the people who have skills that can help us... The cooks, that's where the cooks that work at the community kitchen we have at the community center came from. And so on, people continue to appear, incredible people who have an interest [to help] and are not looking for anything in return, they just want to collaborate. So María also brought that beautiful part of Puerto Ricans that is like uniting us, many people joined giving their best, my best virtue is this and I want to be here for you and thus we identified many new people who could also contribute to the vision that was already in place at Plenitud and these people continue to contribute to that path. As I told you, it is a path that is defined as it happens, it is not like it was cemented and it continues to expand and adapt, so more or less that's where we are.

And in terms of food access, going back to Hurricane Maria once again, well, we realized, that, and this had already been identified, it had been seen, but more palpably, more tangibly, [Plenitud] realizes that we live in a food desert, because if we have no food supply... if imported supplies do not arrive and you do not have a regional capacity to provide food, well then, there is going to be a famine, there is going to be a famine, then at this point the Food Bank of Puerto Rico is mobilized, the food boxes, community kitchens, community stoves where food is handed to people and it was very, right, very shocking to see that too and say, ok, we have to focus now on access to food. Access to food is one of our top priorities. Uniting the different street vendors, our different local farmers and continuing to promote sustainable practices in that community, but seeing how we can continue to open spaces where there is healthy and fresh food available at all times, this continues to be the mission and a challenge, it is such a steep slope. But we're doing it, we already have like 5 to 10 different... local farmers, where we already have a... thanks to... World Central Kitchen, many donors, many private donors, Oriental Bank, The Peter Alphonso Foundation.

More recently, in the last two years, we were then able to establish this harvest packing and processing center. So, the small farmers who are helping us to sell their product, well, they may have a place where they can process their harvest. We are facilitating their business and, once again, promoting that union of visions away from the polarization of the political discourse and seeing how we can continue to shake hands to continue providing fresh and healthy food. There is only one supermarket in Las Marías, all the people who are going to shop for food have to go to San Sebastián or Mayagüez, which is about 45 minutes driving in these curves that with hurricanes are closed. So that's why these communities fall into this definition of a food desert. They have to travel long distances and what they have available right now, today in the supermarket, the fresh vegetable section is very small, it is imported and the rest



is canned and processed, frozen. So we continue in this fight, right now we have two... two places where we sell food and we are going to open a third place at the Healthy Basketball Court, which is a new community center that from that great experience with María, we realized that we had to have a space where people can come to shelter, to receive insulin in a safe place, where they have access to energy, where they have access to water. So there was a basketball court veery close to the farm, it was a roofed basketball court where there was a small space and that place was not being used and Plenitud decided to adopt this space, it collaborated with the municipality of Las Marías who was in charge of that basketball court and with a shared vision of making an oasis, a space that would serve as an oasis and also an educational center, a center where we could train people, as I told you, on how to install the rainwater collection system, a center where we learn about solar energy, where we give healthy cooking classes, where we bring the kids to after school offerings, where they can also have access to better food. So that court is adopted and it's all part of the response to this great hurricane that was that great lesson. And now what we do is, we have these different programs, which I think is like that great evolution of everything that was learned in this process of María and how then Plenitud is transformed into six programs. We have six specific programs addressing all these issues that I mentioned to you.

**NB:**

Wow, fascinating. So, I think to summarize, I'm doing some comprehension or trying to add just for the use of the record. But I would like to make two points respecting the time we have left. And also you have shared so much information that inside I am super excited to be able to learn all this very enriching perspective, and I would like to summarize it all in like two sentences after that, and I would also like to close with advice that maybe you or Plenitud would like to offer to someone who is seeing this and saying, "I live in x country and I have this desire to support my community and how the journey of Plenitud can inspire those people." These are tips that perhaps can be summarized, that can be given to those people who are seeing this and want to take action by seeing what has been fulfilled in their community and how it has shaped Puerto Rico. So, maybe we can start with the advice and if we have time, we can make a brief summary of what has been the journey of fulfillment. But nothing, let's start with that part.

**GP:**

Of course yes, yes. And I know that there is a lot to digest there, because Plenitud, it wasn't until after three years of working at Plenitud, that I came to understand what Plenitud PR was. In other words, when you work with permaculture and agroecology, how do you integrate so many elements? Sometimes even the community itself finds



it difficult to understand, but what do they do? They make water, they do bioconstruction, they plant crops, and they also work with children and of course, it is a complex, very complex concept, so I understand you and I am still absorbing what the experience of Plenitud is. But I can share some tips about the little things we've seen along the way from my perspective, right?

I think an important part that we mentioned at the beginning is that working with passion, working with that call, like listening to our body and working for that passion, I think it was key at the beginning and it continues to be an essential key in our team and we see it in how each of the team members has this drive, it's like innate in people, it's not like I have to go to work, more like, I want to do more. The service, I think that we have, right, a service that is the healer's service, I think that in the service we serve ourselves and having that vision of service as a pillar, beyond what we receive in return, helps in a social vision.

Another piece of advice that I can give you is that... pay attention to those mentors, to the mentors who are along the way because we have never known how to do this and we continue to learn from our mentors every day so knowing to have that conscious mind that this person has arrived and wants to help us and has a lot to contribute and has experience, respect for the elderly, those older people who already come with a lot to contribute and recognize that--celebrating it and listen, listen carefully. So the mentors have been key, I think, in this process, and in every project I think that this attention is important and that they are the ones that little by little have helped us get to where we are.

And the part... you also have to have numbers in mind, how to understand numbers. Because passion alone does not work. I think you have to have a passion brain and a number brain. So also finding in mentors or external or internal help, analyzing what our strengths are, who are those people who do have that drive for knowing the calculations-- and the donors, who has the voice of working with donors, and who has that voice to make others fall in love, to continue injecting that... that love for the service and at the same time how we make the problem visible and how we can catalyze so that other people want to do the same is important. So that diversity, the value of diversity and more, cementing the organization on very clear values also helps. This also happened along the way [for Plenitud] in the evolution of the organization, so it's not linear and I think everyone is going to have something, every organization is going to have their own process, but defining values is good.

And we follow "servant leadership" that has about 10 specific pillars that more recently have become more... integrated into what it means to know them well as a



team and work on them. We have some values and harmonies that we follow that go hand in hand with what permaculture is, compassionate communication. Good pay is important for your retention, fair pay, let's say, fair pay is extremely important for talent retention, to cover our basic needs. So that part is important, I think that from the beginning we were all volunteers and suddenly it is important to have a salary for everyone so that they feel sustained in the tangible sense, they feel supported.

Another piece of advice that I have is not only to depend on proposals because the proposals are not sustainable, you can write most of the proposals with any donor that you go to work with, they will be for an A, B and C and when that is over there are no more [funds]. But, there are donors who want to have a consistent and recurring relationship then it is like how do we work that, how do we work finances in a way that we do not have to constantly depend on external input. So, in this sense, having different, different ways of financial inputs-- tourism, in monthly donors, a monthly membership that helps you sustain the costs, for example, administrative costs that are the most difficult to obtain funds, the entry from proposals, the funds from selling a book, right? We have a book on agroecology, that was a compendium of many people's [work], selling that book helps us, selling vegetables, all of that has helped us sustain ourselves, right? In a consistent way, versus if you are behind the proposals all the time, well that's not my recommendation, based on the experience I've had, right? Based on my experience at Plenitud and also in other non-profit organizations.

So what else can I tell you? I think those were my top key recommendations. Oh, and pay attention... I think there is specific attention to be given to the individual, member of the team, to their needs, knowing how they are doing. Not only asking how they are doing, but have moments of great intention to find out how they are doing and pay attention to their emotional and physical needs, that takes a lot of effort, that takes effort, but it is worth it because that's what life is all about. Actually, at the end of the road, that is what real life is and what permaculture is. So... if we pay more attention to our personal growth-- as our own relationship with ourselves, as the same, I am my own mother, like seeing ourselves in that same relationship that I am also part of this and I am a person with needs, paying attention to that internal part and also paying attention to that very close human relationship with each person in the team. For me, in this particular organization, this has been key to the success we've had. So I think every organization should have that element.

**NB:**

Glenis, I have learned a lot from this conversation and I thank you so much for your time and I thank you and the entire Plenitud organization for also having the availability, the openness to share this entire journey that I know will be enriching for





so many people who want to give themselves to this search of how to address the problems that our food system has because it truly is a global problem. And what a beautiful example, one that has focused on starting with ourselves, you just talked about this importance of knowing ourselves, but taking that personal care to what is closest to us and thus transforming more and more lives. And definitely this entire conversation that we have had has provided an example of how that can be done and is being done. And... And well, I thank you so very much, right? for opening up those experiences so willingly.

**GP:**

Sure, sure. Thanks to you for this opportunity and nothing, eager to continue collaborating with you and happy that we continue to meet to continue working for the same purpose. So celebrating that.

**NB:**

Definitely. So what I am going to do now, having a better vision of what we are talking about, is to make an introduction. So I'm going to do a short introduction so we can use it at the beginning, now that I have a good way to summarize the conversation. So [NBS1] thanks to Glenis for being with us today. Glenis joins us from Plenitud Puerto Rico. She is the programmatic and administrative support consultant for the organization. And today we are going to be talking about all the many ways in which Plenitud has been a central entity and continues to be an organization that specifically supports everything that has to do with food security in Puerto Rico and with a very special focus on permaculture and the ecological principles that are so important in this topic. So Glenis, thank you for being with us today. Super. Ok, I think I'm a reporter, but let's see how this all fits together.

