

Mike Domitrz: Welcome to the Respect podcast. I'm your host Mike Domitrz from MikeSpeaks.com, where we help organizations of all sizes, educational institutions and the US Military create a culture of respect. And respect is exactly what we discuss on this show, so let's get started.

Mike Domitrz: This week I get to introduce to you a friend, really cool individual. Beth had a big dream to work at NASA one day. Not as a scientist, engineer, or astrophysicist, Beth is an expert writer, communicator, and story teller. Now, she says she's a horrible joke teller but she's working on it. We're going to learn all about Beth and how you get to NASA with being an expert writer, communicator, and story teller in some really powerful stories about your experience at NASA. Beth, of course we haven't said your last name either. Beth Mund, thank you so much for joining us.

Beth Mund: Hi Mike, how's it going?

Mike Domitrz: It is going wonderful. I'm excited to have you on the show today. I'm going to dive right in so our guests can learn all about you. First of all, how did you get your path to NASA? I mean somebody who's a writer/communicator, that's not what they think of when they think of NASA.

Beth Mund: No, traditionally you think scientist, and like you said, astrophysicist or absolutely engineer. And a lot of people think too that you had to have some kind of military background, which I tried and as soon as my parents learned, because back in the day they had, did you have an answering service phone? You know, where you hit the button and it would play back the message, right?

Mike Domitrz: Yes, correct. You mean like the little machines, the answering machines.

Beth Mund: Yes.

Mike Domitrz: Yep.

Beth Mund: So my parents, I was gone at school and they came home and they hit the play button, and it said, "Hello, this is Sergeant so and so, calling for Beth. Your appointment tomorrow is at 10:15, we can't wait to meet with you, Congratulations." And my parents, I did not tell them that I was trying to get into the Air Force. That was a mess. Let me tell you when I got home that day. Because they were like, "What's this?" And I said, "Well the only way to get to NASA is by joining the Air Force." And they were like, "I don't think so." So I had to find another option, another way. And my strength was always being a communicator.

Beth Mund: The reporter in me, the person who wanted to get the data, gather the information and share it. Little did I know that skillset was what was going to get me to NASA. So I just honed in on that, and through a number of odd jobs and fun experiences, both corporate and then I call it a street job, because I think

being a reporter for a newspaper is one of the weirdest, hardest, craziest jobs anyone could ever have because you're on deadline and you have no set schedule and everything is like, needed yesterday. And it was so fun and so hard. And I just crushed that as much as I could so it kind of fueled what I was going to need to get to NASA.

Mike Domitrz: Now what age were you when you set this dream?

Beth Mund: Oh my gosh, high school.

Mike Domitrz: Okay. Because if anybody has ever met you, they know if you meet Beth one day and bring up NASA, you're going to see somebody geek out in like instantaneous.

Beth Mund: Right?

Mike Domitrz: It's awesome, your passion for it is just blatantly obvious for anyone around you. So you take this path of being a communicator, and you get to NASA and if I'm understanding right, in the PR situation, in the Public Relations role?

Beth Mund: Yes, they call it a public affairs officer. So it sounds very government, because it was. You had, they actually swore me in as a civil servant. So I took an oath. I was standing next to a flag, I put my hand on something and swore to be a government civil servant. It was really cool.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, now you're there. And you have an incredibly challenging situation happen, I believe early on, correct?

Beth Mund: It was about two years in, yes.

Mike Domitrz: Okay. So two years in, you have an incredibly challenging situation. Are you comfortable with me asking about this?

Beth Mund: Yeah, we're going to talk about Columbia right?

Mike Domitrz: Yes, absolutely. So the Columbia explodes. Your role is what?

Beth Mund: I'm the first person to answer the phone in the news office, when the whole entire world started to call for answers.

Mike Domitrz: And I assume there's a protocol for what ifs. Is it this specific that if the shuttle explodes?

Beth Mund: Well, there's never a what if with NASA. Every anomaly that could ever happened, has already been determined and calculated. So you and I might fathom a what if in our lives, but let's say you build a car. The engineers who have built that car have already gone through every single possibility of if the

tire falls off, if it stops running in the middle of the highway. So those folks have already done that, right? And the folks at NASA have done the same. And everyone who comes on board gets a book of contingency plans. Whether you are the janitor, whether you are someone in an engineering division. Whether you're an assembly person, and especially myself as a public affairs officer. And that binder is tailored to you and your responsibilities at NASA. So they're not going to give you an overall binder. It's not like you know, again, back to the car example. Here's your car, if something goes wrong, here's everything possible that you need to know.

Beth Mund: No. If you're only going to be the driver of the car, not the mechanic and not the person that's going to assist you, then all you need to know is how to safely drive that car. So as a public affairs officer, my contingency binder told me exactly what needed to happen, what I needed to do and what procedures to follow. And NASA has a back up plan for a back up plan for a back up plan. So everyone knew where to go.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, so they shifted from a what if to a when.

Beth Mund: Yes, absolutely. That's part of the risk that gets calculated in every single mission.

Mike Domitrz: And so you're answering the call, and at that point, you do have protocol in front of you because they plan for this happening. Are you following the script, or do you have to pause and go, okay, this is a guideline, but I still have to word this right.

Beth Mund: So the words are not scripted but the procedure is. So the procedure is to answer all phone calls. The procedure is to be the representative and the spokesperson that I was assigned to be on every other regular today. Today was just, or that particular day in February was an anomaly day. And so I did my job just like any other day. However, the procedures were different. So you opened up the binder, you work through the contingency plan that has already been established. There are, and I want to be very clear. There were no answers. And that was the hardest thing to convey and to report. That we do not know what happened, we did not have any understanding even if they crew was alive, or had survived, or would be all right, or had perished.

Beth Mund: We did not have that at the time. Because when I walked in on that Saturday, I wasn't even on duty. A lot of people at NASA will work a mission because they just want to. And on that particular Saturday, the mission itself was officially ended in the sense that they were scheduled to return the Columbia crew on Friday. A whole day earlier. But because of a re-entry window that needed to open the following day, they got an extra day in space. So that meant everyone kind of got an opportunity to relax, the crew and everyone on the ground, they got to relax and enjoy the view and do some extra activities while on board. And that is a gift. That is not usually scheduled. You couldn't buy that time if you

tried. You just can't. So that was already an anomaly, that they had gotten an extra day.

Beth Mund: So the people who were officially assigned to support the mission were officially done on Friday. But on Saturday morning, I was watching with the whole rest of the world NASA TV or the coverage and I saw what everyone saw on the TV. On CNN and on all the news stations. And I didn't even think. I just went straight into work. I lived on the campus, or on the center. And I got into work within two minutes and I sat down and did my job and I don't remember sleeping, eating, taking a breath for the next two and a half, three weeks. And I really don't remember much more for the next two and a half months. But I did journal. And I'm really grateful I did. Because looking back, there was so much going on around me I would have otherwise missed if I hadn't captured it. But that's who I am as a writer, in order for me to process understand what was going on, I had to write.

Mike Domitrz: So powerful. And I can only imagine the lessons you're able to share. Because you speak. So the lessons you're able to share with organizations from that journaling has got to be limitless, the possibilities. And to get there though, you had to overcome some challenges. It is what's considered, you know space, and science, the industry, and for so long, and I believe it could still be I'm not sure, very male dominated.

Beth Mund: Oh yes.

Mike Domitrz: And so how did you earn the respect at NASA and in these roles?

Beth Mund: Yeah, good question. The way that you earn respect is that you show up. And you do the work. That's it. So there were a lot, do you know that at NASA, when we landed on the moon in 1969, the average age of the mission control support staff was 27? 27. Doesn't that blow your mind.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, that's way younger than people think. And in the movies, they all look like they're 50 year old white men in the control room.

Beth Mund: Well that's because they're smoking, and they're probably already pretty weathered. Even though a lot of the men who worked there back in the 60s and the 70s, there were still women there. I think everyone has now become familiar with both the book and the movie Hidden Figures.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, powerful story and movie.

Beth Mund: Isn't it great? Did you love it?

Mike Domitrz: I did.

Beth Mund: And so women were actually everywhere. But what you're referring to now is, when I got there, and how I worked there was really the same path as most and that traditional sense of former military, that was still present, but that was more evident in the astronaut corps. There were still lots of engineers, there are still lots of physicists, and that's what you want at America's space agency. However, there were a million storytellers and a million other scientists who were women.

Beth Mund: And they worked just as diligently and I feel like we had a seat at the table but it wasn't equal yet. And there wasn't as many of us as I would have liked to see but that was okay. I was very fortunate to have gotten there finally. It took me many applications and many of them were rejected. And I'm so grateful that the one I got, because two of the previous ones were for jobs that I would not have enjoyed. They offered me a job that was an earth observing scientist writer, which is fantastic at the JPL, the Planetary Research Center, but I ended up working at the Human Space Flight Center in Houston, Texas and that's where our astronauts live, work and train. So that was the perfect place for me because when it came to people and the people that are going into space and making the discoveries and putting up cargo, I loved telling the people story. And there are other folks just like me who are at the other centers telling the propulsion story and the planetary story. And so I just fit right where I was supposed to be.

Mike Domitrz: Well that's cool. And you love talking about women and women in science. And one of the things you and I have talked about in the past and you brought this up, "Hey Mike, bring this up," is the difference in earning respect and earning validity. What do you mean by that?

Beth Mund: Well I think when you want to earn respect you want to prove something. You want to have some kind of thing that's a tangible that you put out there and I just feel like there's another part to that, which is your validity. What makes you valid and what validates you to be sitting at the table? And so I don't think that's a degree, I don't think that's your previous history. I think that it should just be an open invitation within our culture if you want to and are capable of doing the work. So women are valid, people with ethnic diversity are valid. This is without question, right? That's not something that should be earned, that's just something that should be recognized.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah and I actually teach the same thing with respect. I say we shouldn't be teaching to earn respect because you should treat every human being with respect. The moment I say you need to earn my respect it means I am in a role above you. I'm in a power position over you and you have to do what I want to be of value to me. Versus I respect you just because you're a human being, that's it. Now whether you earn the right to have certain privileges in this organization or to have certain rewards, that's different than earning respect, right? So you want to earn that job opportunity. You want to earn that raise, those things can be earned. But respect is something that should be, all people should be treated with it and realize that everyone deserves to be treated with

dignity and respect. Both towards myself and towards others. So I love that conversation.

Mike Domitrz: And you talk about there being more female astronauts and what it takes for that to happen. What do you see as being that? Now I'm fortunate that I get to do a lot of work with the US military and because of the military background of astronauts, I would assume that part of this is we're also seeing now an influx of women pilots that we did not have 30 years ago. It was almost non-existent. And usually our astronauts are coming from the pilot program, from what I remember. That could be no longer true. Is that true?

Beth Mund: We are almost there, Mike. But we're not yet. So the latest astronaut class was announced and about every two to three years they open up the candidacy program and astronauts are selected from thousands of applicants. And then when they announce the final astronauts, I'm like a kid on Christmas. I want to see who got in. Of course I don't have any insights as to who applied and who's going to get it, but I want to see how many women were selected. And in the last astronaut class I believe, and I could be wrong, but I believe that there was 12 total astronauts that were selected and less than half of them were women. So we're not quite there yet. The data, the majority of the astronaut was women, would be awesome.

Beth Mund: You know I recently did a speech where I showed in my Power Point slide, or one of my slides, that there were these four women on the International Space Station. Well that happened years ago. There hasn't been that many women in total at the same time on the Space Station in a long time. But like you said, that's also because we need more women pilots, we need more women engineers, we need more women scientists. And that has slowly become the truth but that doesn't mean necessarily that they are becoming that translation into astronauts.

Beth Mund: But if I may, when you look back at the folks who attend space camp, so there's millions of people all over the country and all over the world that come to experience space camp, which is kind of this wonderful playground of science and space where you get to play and experiment and experience space, right?

Mike Domitrz: So my cousin used to be a counselor at space camp.

Beth Mund: That's awesome. What's his name? Her name?

Mike Domitrz: Oh this is going way back. She's listening going, "Thanks, Mike." I'm telling our age but Renee Simkiss. At the time that was her maiden name.

Beth Mund: That's awesome because I was a counselor too and let me tell you, she gets a big gold medal because it is hotter than Hades down there in Austin. So good for her. She was part of the leaders that helped influence our next nation's generation of space goers because of all the alumni. And there's hundreds of

thousands of us that attended space camp. Five women have gone on to become astronauts. Five. That's pretty impressive.

Mike Domitrz: That's pretty cool. So they've tracked the people that go there as youth and how many of them go on to be astronauts as adults?

Beth Mund: Yes. And get this, one time when walking through the halls at the Johnson Space Center and I'm pretty fresh. It's only been a year, I still have a lot of spring in my step, I'm loving every minute of my life and I'm walking down the hall and I see this girl and this girl sees me and we're looking at each other and we both put it together in a heart beat and we're like, "Space camp." So not only did we both go to Space camp, but we both were like your cousin, was it your cousin?

Mike Domitrz: Yes.

Beth Mund: We were both counselors. And there we were at NASA, working at NASA. So there's a bunch that went on to work at NASA and there's an even smaller bunch, very small, only five, that went on to space to become astronauts. So whenever people kind of laugh and chuckle at Space Camp I'm like, "Hey, hey, people go from Space Camp and they start there and they become astronauts."

Mike Domitrz: So when it comes to that, you teach about what happens in space, and one of the topics you talk about is respecting each other's personal space in space. Can you elaborate with us on that, Beth?

Beth Mund: This is so much fun. Oh my word. Well first of all you can't be a claustrophobic astronaut. And nowadays, more so than ever, as I'm sure you're seeing and your listeners are noting, people are being hired based on their ability to get along with others. This is also true at NASA. Without a doubt. As a matter of fact, astronauts go on, when they first selected as an ASCAN, it's not a dirty word, it actually stands for astronaut candidate, so it sounds funny though, doesn't it? When you're an ASCAN, you go on a field trip or a safari or a ... You literally go wilderness survival training and you are really watched and followed and looked at because they want to see how, not necessarily how you survive. They're going to help you survive. And your skills should be pretty on point by the time you're doing that. But how did you get along with your team? When you were fatigued, when you were hangry, were you still pleasant to be around?

Beth Mund: So when you're up in space it's no different. You've got to get along. You can't take a break and go for a walk outside. You can't go for a smoking break. You've got to settle in and really have appreciation for each other's talents and a respect for each other's space. Sometimes, most of the time, actually, astronauts have designated spaces. And it's very much like a tiny little closet and you can go in there and there's a little curtain that you can pull and it's like the size of a sleeping bag. And all your personal belongings are in there along with the computer and that's your space. But that is such a small part. The rest of the time you've got to share everything. You've got to share your space, you've got

to share experiments, you've got to share the treadmill. Astronauts have to give each other haircuts. It's a team effort. You've got to survive together.

Beth Mund: So you can't let something like personal space, make you suffer an entire system or an entire mission just because you, you have to be respectful of course, but you've just got to learn. And they train for years prior, so they know each other really well. They know the good, the bad and the ugly by the time they're up there.

Mike Domitrz: So what are two or three lessons that you share with audiences, you share with people from all of these experiences that people can apply to their lives?

Beth Mund: Oh thank you. Thanks for asking. People are always asking me what are some of the lessons that you learned at NASA. So what you asked me earlier about the Columbia experience was that I had that binder. NASA had the plan and the understanding that when something will happen and does happen, what is the plan? Everyone I tell when I'm on stage should have their own contingency binder in their life. And maybe even in your work, if possible. So when I went on maternity leave, I went through and I put together a contingency binder and handed it to my staff. And they were like, "What's this?" And I said, "Everything you possibly need to know when I'm gone for the next couple of months." And they were looking through the tabs and they started throwing me out some curve balls like, "What if this?" And I'm like, "Page 62." "Well what if this happens?" And I'm like, "Check tab number four."

Beth Mund: So it's not about trying to be a Debbie Downer and think what could possibly go wrong?

Mike Domitrz: Yeah because I could see people going, "This is really dreary. You want me to go home and think of all the worst things that could happen to my family?" So how do you balance out what to do contingencies on? Most people say if you're married you should have this plan for if something happened to one of you. Very few people do. Very few people even have a will or a trust. But even if you have a will or a trust, there still

Mike Domitrz: ... often isn't a living plan. How I'm going to live my life after that?

Beth Mund: Right, so let's put it this way: If you've communicated your life's wishes in any way shape or form, at work, at home, personally, to one person, is that enough? It's really not. So, if you write it down, anyone can either have access to that as needed or someone can look at that and say, "This is pretty clear, she wrote it down." And that's what I'm talking about in the contingency binder, and I think any life insurance person or representative would tell you the same, it's only about planning and have a plan, that's it. It's the same thing about when you're kids. Whoever has kids, I'm sure has had the discussion what to do if you encounter a stranger, what to do one day if mommy's not home and you get to the house before mommy, here's how you let yourself in. That's just a plan.

Beth Mund: My difference is I'm asking everyone to have that contingency binder in case you're not of right mind, in case there's other stressors, in case something really throws you that curve ball, and now, when you're not functional, like literally cannot function like we were at NASA where we were all looking at that screen and we were all seeing the same thing the whole rest of the world was seeing. Open the binder and start. Here's another great story: When I had my first child, my mom came over and she said, "Here's the best advice I can give you, put the baby down," and I was like, "What? What are you talking about?" Well, you're just baby brained and you're just crazy and you don't know what the baby needs yet and you've never held this thing before, and it's so emotionally over stimulating and if you just put it down, then you can step away for a second and think, "Oh, I should probably get a bottle ready. Just put it down." Isn't that funny?

Mike Domitrz: That is.

Beth Mund: Same thing as NASA, defining the purpose of the mission helps you stay on mission and make it successful. So, you asked me earlier, what other things do I share on stage and the other thing I say all the time is, "If you love space, or if you are a space geek, or if you have anyone whose ever wondered about how does space touch my life, or how can I get involved or invested," I always show them the hundreds of thousands of benefits that we have from space based technology, and that is something audience loves. They just can't get enough of that, glasses that have lenses that protect us from the sun, filtered air systems, filtered water drinking systems, lots of things that I can go on and on forever. I think I'm going to be doing a whole episode separate on my podcast on space based spin offs.

Beth Mund: So, those are the two things that audience most resonate with. A contingency plan that's in a binder, and you can put into that pretty much anything in your life, and then the space based technologies that we have gained from our exploration of space.

Mike Domitrz: I love it and you're a big fan of three books: Tom Wolfe's The Right Stuff, Etiquette by Peggy Post, and any book by Nancy Drew. So, I love that, love that you wrote that. You also have website, BethMund.com for anyone listening, but you also have casualspace.org, what's casualspace.org?

Beth Mund: Yeah, it's casualspacepodcast.com, thank you, and it's so fantastic. It just launched, and it is the place for us space geeks can totally geek out. It's the place where I have interviews and shared stories, and we highlight the space stuff that is non technical, it's not formal, it's not scripted, we just talk space. It is so much fun, and I would love it, Mike, if you would be a guest on the show for Casual Space, because that's it, we just enjoy talking about black holes and what Elon Musk said last week, and what's the next rocket that's gonna launch, and why do we get to space, and is there aliens, and we just have a bunch of fun talking about those kinds of topics.

Mike Domitrz: I would love to be on, that's for sure. And you know I love just hanging out and chatting with you, so I would absolutely be thrilled to be on.

Beth Mund: Let's geek out! Let's do it!

Mike Domitrz: Alright, that sounds great. Hey, I want to thank you Beth, you've just been as awesome as always, your energy is just so contagious, it's just fantastic to be around. Thank you so much!

Beth Mund: Oh Mike, thank you for giving the opportunity to me, and I really appreciate what you do as well, because helping you serve as an advocate for voices everywhere is so very valuable, we can't thank you enough. And when it comes to talking about respect, you are the leader in the industry. I love that you have conversations like this because it helps women especially, and it helps women who are scientists and are engineers, and a lot of women who want to have that validity and want to have that already present respect that everyone should not earn, but already have, and as us space geeks, we all say thank you.

Mike Domitrz: Well, thank you very much Beth, and for all listeners you know what's coming up next, next up is our question of the week.

Mike Domitrz: Before I answer this week's question of the week, I'd love to ask you a question: Would you please subscribe to this podcast, the Respect Podcast with Mike Domitrz. By subscribing, you can make a huge impact. Now, you might be wondering, Mike, how does my subscribing to your podcast make a huge impact? Well, here's how: For every person that subscribes, it raises the rankings of the show in the search engines. So, for people who care about respect like yourself, when they're doing a search for podcasts, they're more likely to find this show, thus providing an awesome opportunity for us to spread more respect around this world, and all you do is hit Subscribe under your podcasts. Plus, the second benefit is by subscribing you automatically get every episode right into your phone or whatever device you're listening to the podcast on, it happens automatically. So, subscribing also makes your life easier.

Mike Domitrz: Now, let's get into this week's question of the week. Oh, and by the way, you can always ask your questions of the week by joining us on Facebook in our discussion group, it's called The Respect Podcast's Discussion Group. Go there on Facebook and ask whatever questions you would like me to answer and or address in this segment of the show, and then listen to each episode to find out when your question is included.

Mike Domitrz: This week's question of the week is Mike, how do we teach mutuality in the corporate workplace? Now, as many of you know, this is what I do for major corporations and organizations of all sizes, is helping them learn this lesson. I'm gonna give a super short answer to this. Here's the key: when you don't lead with mutuality, you tend to lead with dictation, which means you need to this, you need to do that, and you over there need to do this. So, then what happens

is your management always trying to hold everyone accountable to the jobs you dictated they do, which is very unhealthy because nobody has buy in and people feel like they just have to, they're not doing it because they genuinely want to.

Mike Domitrz: When you have mutuality, you have everyone on the project doing something they want to contribute. They know they bring as a strength or an asset to the project, and when you have that, you have what's called buy in, and when you have buy in, that's when you don't have to hold people accountable because they hold themselves accountable. And that's what my friend Sam Silverstein, the person on accountability in the world, that's what he teaches, that accountability is not by management holding people accountable, it's because you have buy in on such a level that individuals hold themselves accountable. And that's the beauty of mutuality, everyone holds themselves accountable 'cause they respect their roles and everyone's roles in this mission 'cause this was mutually agreed upon. We came together at a place we all wanted to be there, together on that journey, together. That's mutuality in the corporate workplace.

Mike Domitrz: Do you know what I would love? I would love to hear your answer to this week's question of the week. So, would you please answer what your answer would have been if you were asked that question today on the show. All you do is go our Facebook page, we have a special group where we have these discussions called the Respect Podcast Discussion Group. So, The Respect Podcast Discussion Group, and share with us what would your answer have been to this week's question of the week, and take a moment, post us a new question for future episodes. What question would you like to hear me answer on an upcoming episode? That's all done on Facebook in our special group which is The Respect Podcast Discussion Group. Can't wait to see you there.

Mike Domitrz: Thank you for joining us for this episode of The Respect Podcast, which was sponsored by the Date Safe Project at datesafeproject.org. And remember, you can always find me at Mikespeaks.com.