

# Beth Gilmore Interview

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Senior Director of Organization and Developmental Initiatives, SHIELD

## SPEAKERS

Inbar Michael, Beth Gilmore

**Inbar Michael** 00:01

Great. Okay, so we'll get started. My name is Inbar Michael, and I'm a graduate student representing the University of Illinois Archives. And then I will have my interviewee introduce herself when you're ready.

**Beth Gilmore** 00:16

Sure. So my name is Beth Gilmore. I am the Senior Director of Organization and Developmental Initiatives for SHIELD. And I have been with the organization since May of '21.

**Inbar Michael** 00:31

Okay, great. Thank you, and for timekeeping. Today's date is January 12, 2023. We are here on Zoom to discuss SHIELD Illinois's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for inclusion in the University of Illinois COVID-19 Documentation Project. Okay, so my first question—kind of like, our warm up questions—I was curious, before you joined SHIELD, what department did you work for, and is it related to the University or is it separate?—because I know SHIELD Illinois is not necessarily connected to the University—or was it a department that's more recent?

**Beth Gilmore** 00:32

So prior to joining SHIELD, which is part of the University of Illinois System, I had two jobs. One, I owned a studio. It was primarily Pilates but we also did some shiatsu and Qigong. So I did that for part of the time. And then I was also a freelance consultant, where I was a senior director for a company called Transparent. And we were an organization that helped marketers navigate technology and database needs. As the market has just continued to change, we would help them figure out what solutions made sense and solve any number of issues.

**Inbar Michael** 02:05

Great, okay. Do you remember the first time you heard about the emergence of COVID-19? I know this was like a little while back, but—

**Beth Gilmore** 02:17

—I do remember hearing about it in probably December of 2019, just as it was starting to bubble up. Not a whole lot other than something was happening in China, of course. And then, obviously, things

began to accelerate as we entered 2020. I'm a pretty big news junkie, so I'm certain it was in one of the things that I was reading.

**Inbar Michael** 02:47

Yeah. And for the places you were working at did—I guess like March is when everything started to close down—so what was, what were your work places like, what were their responses to the pandemic in that timeframe?

**Beth Gilmore** 03:06

So I was working remotely for Transparent. So, no real big changes there. For the folks that didn't work remotely, given the nature of our work, it was very quickly decided that everyone would work from home. Obviously, decisions were made on a sort of rolling basis as more information changed March into April. But that was pretty easy and clear. Where my experience was definitely more interesting was at the Pilates studio. I was one of five owners, and we needed to make some decisions quite quickly, to protect both ourselves and the people that work for us, but also our clients. There were a lot of sort of varying responses. And so we did immediately shut the studio down, issued communication out. And then we're able to offer a number of virtual solutions for folks so that they could continue to get the support. So our studio was closed for half of March and then all of April and May. And then in June, we began opening the studio again with a number of mitigations. We're in the city of Chicago, so there were a lot of rules that were actually pretty clearly outlined for us, especially for fitness and wellness locations. So you know, we had people sign waivers, we were really diligent about you know, simple things like hand sanitizer, but also, you know, if people were not feeling well, we adjusted our cancellation policy to ensure that everybody was safe. We limited the number of people that were allowed in the space at any given time. So we really took quite a few precautions. We also had one room that, where someone if they were particularly high risk or whatever, but really wanted to be in person, they could be in that room so that they wouldn't have exposure to other folks. You know, a lot of stuff like that. And then, you know, we were wearing masks until...I don't even remember...2021. First, I mean, deep into 2021, for sure. And then slowly but surely—oh, also, when we first opened, we had no classes because we didn't want people that close together. It was only privates. And it was like max of four people in the studio. And we had well over 1000 square feet in the main studio, so nobody was close together. And you were always someone that you kind of knew and felt comfortable with. [Inaudible.] Does that help?

**Inbar Michael** 05:46

Yeah, yeah, that's good, to—it's good, it's interesting to like, hear how people dealt with the transition and everything. And so it does sound like at least for your remote work, you did work from home. And for the time, I'm wondering, especially with the Pilates, because that's like very much something that you do in person, although I know that people maybe record videos and things like that. But for the time that it was closed, were you doing any sort of work online for that, or no?

**Beth Gilmore** 06:18

I personally was not because I find the way I like to teach Pilates and do shiatsu is very hands on and present. And so I was able to not—and fortunately, we were able to get a PPP loan. So financially there were no concerns, but several of my business partners did quite a bit virtually. And truthfully, and not

surprisingly, one of my business partners in particular continues to do a lot of virtual, I mean, it's just a total testament to how the world has changed. And then in many respects, it opened up a much broader base of people who he can work with, like he has clients in other states, and does work from Mexico periodically. Was...just seemed unfathomable in you know, even February of 2020.

**Inbar Michael** 07:14

Right, right. Yeah. And so, with that, I'm wondering, so you had these two positions that you held before? But what was like your, how did you get into your SHIELD Illinois role? Like, how were you recruited? Or like, how is, did you like search for the job? Like, how did it come about for you?

**Beth Gilmore** 07:32

I was very fortunate the job found me in May...April and May of 2021, SHIELD was transitioning to the phase where they were really going to expand the program and needed to be having a lot of conversations with schools and school boards and superintendents and principals and all kinds—and nurses—across the state, and they needed another individual to help hold those conversations. And so, as they were talking about the skills that they needed, my understanding was that they were looking for someone that was going to be able to pretty easily come in, learn the material and then be able to have those conversations with some senior individuals. And, you know, have respect and what have you. And so, Rhiannon Clifton had joined the organization in March and scrolled through her LinkedIn to see who she knew that might fit this bill. And I also think part of what they were looking for was somebody that didn't necessarily have a full time job that they were going to leave a company to come to SHIELD, because nobody knew how long we were going to be there. So I sort of looked appealing, because on LinkedIn, I'm listed just as a consultant. And so Rhiannon reached out and was like, "Hey, we've got this opportunity. Do you want to learn more about it? Ron's really great." And so I jumped on the phone with Ron and Rhiannon to meet Ron and learn a little bit about the job and then spoke with Beth Heller, who at the time was the Director of External Relations. And I was super excited about the opportunity. Prior to my life as a studio owner and Pilates instructor and consultant, I spent just about 15 years at a company called Star Com worldwide. We are sister company to Leo Burnett. So advertising. And I was supremely blessed, I worked on amazing clients, but I always sort of felt like I could have been contributing more to society. And so when Rhiannon and Ron called and Beth and said, Hey, we need you to use your skill set for good, I was super excited. And so— and candidly, I was very intrigued by the network that an opportunity at the University of Illinois would bring to me. So, yes.

**Inbar Michael** 10:08

Cool, okay. So, um, you—so when we first like got your information as a point of contact to reach out to, I saw that you were listed as the Vice Director for External Relations for SHIELD. I know that your position has now changed, I'll ask about that a little bit later down the line, but we were wondering with this position, what were some of the responsibilities that you held as the Vice Director? I think that you mentioned you worked with Beth Heller, I'm actually also in contact with her, and I saw that you two probably worked together on some things...sort of just, what responsibilities did you have with that?

**Beth Gilmore** 10:47

So, Beth was my manager at the time. I reported to her and, as I said, I was brought on to help get primarily K through 12 schools on board. And that involved, you know, we had a presentation that Beth

and the team had pulled together truthfully, even before I started, where we walked people through the program, what it was, how it worked, and then we're able to answer questions. And so my primary responsibilities fell into private schools.

**Inbar Michael** 10:48

Okay.

**Beth Gilmore** 10:48

And we worked with a, the, forgive me, it's not a word. It's not a phrase I use all the time, it's escaping me. Oh, the Midwest Coordination Center, which had received a bunch of federal funding. So I worked closely with Ron and that group to figure out a way to actually get some of their funding to support us—SHIELD—going live in private schools across the state. So, I owned all the conversations with private schools, I also owned the relationship with the Chicago Department of Public Health, because we had a separate relationship with them. And they had a number of schools, outside of CP—the Chicago Public Schools, CPS—that needed support. And so we were tapped to help them. And so I worked with them. And then the other really big piece that I had was, especially as we headed into the fall of 2021, there were a lot of new rules coming down around who needed to be testing, when, where. And community colleges were a really big priority. There are about 50 community colleges across the state. And candidly, initially, they had had very mixed levels of interest in participating in SHIELD and using the testing. And so I owned the relationship with the President of the community college sort of board, and then worked with all of the community colleges to get them signed up. And I think in the end, we had over 30 community colleges signed up out of about 50. So it was pretty substantial. We might have even hit 38.

**Inbar Michael** 13:13

Okay, so kind of relating to that. We were wondering, since you did do a lot of work with schools, did you face—or like, I guess, one part of the question could be like, did you have any challenges? Or was there any sort of hesitancy or backlash from the schools or parents like, what was that? What was it like navigating that?

**Beth Gilmore** 13:36

I certainly wouldn't use the word backlash, but yes. There was definitely...every school had its own sort of culture and attitude towards COVID and sort of how they wanted to deal with it. And especially over the course of the summer, we had a couple of things go on. When I first signed on to SHIELD, the way that the funding was allocated from IDPH [Illinois Department of Public Health] in the state, there was only—tests were only free for what's called tier three and tier four schools—no, I take that back—tier one and tier two schools. Tier three and tier four schools are schools that typically have more funding from their community from taxes or what have you. Whereas tier one and tier two—we should double check that before you publish this, but I'm pretty sure that that's the way that it goes. I have presentations that can verify that—but tier three and tier four tend to be more wealthy, tier one and tier two don't meet the same threshold and so the schools that it was free for, they were definitely a little bit more interested on the whole, there were still concerns that really ran the gamut. Some schools might be concerned about how they were going to execute it, you know. We had third parties that would come in and help facilitate the testing, but that varied a little bit depending on how many tests the school was

going to collect, because it really had to be sort of financially worthwhile. So, you know, did they have the resources and the people on hand? You know, you had to think through...when were you going to collect the tests? How were you going to navigate all the different grades? There were, it's a fairly substantial operational undertaking, and schools were already dealing with so much at the time. I mean, people hadn't been in school. I really can't like stress enough how incredible it is, what all of the administrators and the teachers dealt with, because it was, it was very interesting to see it firsthand. But so, that would make them resistant. They didn't want students to miss class time, they'd already been out of school, like, do we really want to add to this? There was—and then for some schools, of course, there was the financial component, because they did need to pay a piece for every test, it was a little bit tricky, because it was variable. So you didn't know for sure how much you were gonna have to spend because it was going to depend on how many people had to test. Another sort of important variable is we can not test folks without permission and consent. And so there was a very large debate about do you do opt in, or do you do opt out consent? If you do opt out, obviously, it's likely that your number of participants is higher, because you're telling people they have to take action to not be testing. But again, because depending on the school's sort of climate and culture, some schools were good with that, some schools not so much. And so there would be lots of conversations around consent and what made sense and what didn't and what was okay. And then the last is truthfully, like the community and how they felt about COVID. The sentiment and the relationship with COVID really varied across the state. When you look at our map, you can see, we tend to have a lot more folks testing sort of in and around the Chicagoland area, it definitely looks a little different as you get to southern and western parts of the state.

**Inbar Michael** 17:30

And with that, since you specifically mentioned you were working with private schools, was the approach to working with a private school different than how SHIELD worked with public, or is it the same?

**Beth Gilmore** 17:44

It was because our funding was a little—I mean, in terms, conceptually in terms of what we were conveying, no. We were definitely talking about the same situation. But because our funding source was different—so, the public schools were all funded by our partnership with IDPH. And Beth really drove that piece. The private schools, we had to create this relationship with the Midwest Coordination Center, and we were able to strike a deal where they were able to pay for the testing portion, but they couldn't pay for what we call the wraparound. And that includes the resources that I talked about earlier that go into the building to help collect samples. So when we were talking to the private schools, they either needed to self-collect—which then raised the issue we talked about earlier about making sure you've got the resources and the people to help facilitate the collection—or they needed to pay to do the collection, like to have a third party come in. And so that was really different. The exception to that was in the city of Chicago, where schools that were inside the city limits, CDPH would pay for that sort of extra layer of having people come in and help collect. So there was a lot to keep track of depending on what kind of school they were and where they were located. Exactly what they got was going to be a little bit different. And then we also had to navigate the fact that the Midwest Coordination Center was getting federal funding, and they had to answer to the federal government on where they were testing and what they were doing to get people to test and so I actually had to train a bunch of Midwest

Coordination Center employees on our materials so that they could call and express interest and I'd have to keep them posted on "No, we already talked to the school for X, Y, and Z reason, they're in, they're out." So there was a lot of triangulation that happened. But again, like the private schools had a little bit of a different attitude towards testing than a lot of the public schools just because of the nature of their environment.

**Inbar Michael** 20:03

Okay. And you kind of touched on these next questions, but I was wondering if there's anyone that you maybe haven't mentioned or any department that you haven't mentioned that you worked a lot with through your role in SHIELD? I know you talked about the Midwest Coordination Center, and also you mentioned you worked with Beth Heller and Ron [Watkins], or, I know you at least met with Ron, but were there any other groups that you were working with a lot, or people—

**Beth Gilmore** 20:31

—inside and outside SHIELD?

**Inbar Michael** 20:34

Specif—yeah.

**Beth Gilmore** 20:35

So, worked super closely with Rhiannon Clifton's team, in particular, the relationship managers, because the way the organization worked is, Beth and I and our team got the schools to sign on. But once they were signed on, they got passed on to the relationship managers, and the relationship manager basically became the account manager for the school to kind of take them the rest of the way. Onboarding the schools, as I'm sure you'll learn, if you haven't heard already, is a very significant undertaking. And so we would have to navigate that handoff. I worked with SHIELD operations, primarily Len [Musielak] and his team as we got the CRM [customer relationship management?] kicked off. When I first joined, we didn't have the CRM, and we deployed it in July, I believe, of 2021. And it was a little bit tricky, because we were trying to deploy software as we figured out what we needed it to do and had to start using it simultaneously. And software implementations often take like six months to do it right, and we were doing it, trying to do it in like six days. So that was a little crazy, and definitely required a lot of partnership between the teams and discussions and...do it one way and then we figured out we needed to do it a slightly different way...so worked really closely with that group. Anna...Pinsoneault?—I'm not gonna say her last name correctly, she never says it out loud—

**Inbar Michael** 22:13

We interviewed her actually.

**Beth Gilmore** 22:14

Oh, how'd she say it?

**Inbar Michael** 22:14

Um...I don't remember [laughs].

**Beth Gilmore** 22:19

Okay, so then you, please don't judge me. She doesn't say it very often. She just says, "Hi, It's Anna." And so that's okay, I'm embarrassed to admit that I am not. Anyway, she has an important role, as you know, in terms of her relationship with the public health departments. And so I worked with her a lot, particularly because of my close relationship with CDPH [Chicago Department of Public Health] and the work that we were doing with them. So that's definitely an important one to keep on the radar. We talked about the community colleges, that group and that organization was super important.

**Beth Gilmore** 22:59

You know, and then it was really the schools. Like I found myself having very regular conversations with the Archdiocese of Chicago in particular, as they figured out what they wanted to do around testing. But no, I think you hit sort of all the big groups and organizations.

**Inbar Michael** 23:21

Okay, great—and I know that that wasn't initially included in the questions we sent, we just added some additionally before. So were you, so you had this this position, were you still also working your other jobs at once or?

**Beth Gilmore** 23:39

I was not consulting anymore, and I was doing a little bit of Pilates work.

**Inbar Michael** 23:49

Okay. Okay, so your main focus became this job with SHIELD.

**Beth Gilmore** 23:53

Yes, this was my job.

**Inbar Michael** 23:55

Okay, and then...this is kind of...here, maybe I'll move this question...well, actually, this question could be for both, but, um, throughout the pandemic, how has the External Relations Department changed, developed, progressed?

**Beth Gilmore** 24:18

Oh sorry, you said that and I had an answer—to your last question, I also worked very closely with the community managers that were a part of the external relations team, but your question just prompted me to remember that I was about to say that and then it scurried out of my mind. So forgive me, you just asked me how has external relations evolved? Beth Heller is going to give you the best answer on that because she started with the organization in October of 2020. And really, she's still in that leadership role. Because I was on the inside of the external team really only until December of 2021. So I spent just over six months. And not surprisingly, when you think about what my role was and what I was brought on to do to get these schools to sign up, and the districts, we had really gotten most districts and schools signed up by the early part of October of 2021. So after that, the conversations like the work that Beth's external team did became much bigger and broader than sort of what I had been working on, because I was so focused on getting these schools on board.



**Inbar Michael** 25:46

Right, okay, so that question will also perhaps apply to this next one. But you don't have to answer it right away. But now you're the senior director of the organization and developmental initiatives department. How does this department differ from the one you were initially working with? And you said that you stopped working with the first department in December of 2021? So did you immediately transition to this next one?

**Beth Gilmore** 26:10

Yes. So, as things started to get a little bit quieter on the external front, in the October, November timeframe, Ron [Watkins] gave me a call and asked if I would start to support—we call it the "people team"—if I would start to just help out with the people team. And so at some point, in October of 2021, I started dabbling in that world a little bit, in particular, helping with the relationship with System HR, because they were a key partner in us and in helping us get, or, grow the organization, recruit and hire talent. And then Ron called again, in December and said, "Hey, we need to make a change and I need someone to become the Senior Director of the people team, and he asked if I would do that...for better or for worse.

**Inbar Michael** 27:19

And so the main—sorry, I know that I had asked maybe multiple questions at once, but what you just mentioned, is that kind of the answer for how the department differed from external relations?

**Beth Gilmore** 27:33

Oh no, I didn't talk about that. I only talked about the timeline. I'm so sorry. Thank you for refreshing my memory. I am just going to pull up one thing real quickly, that's going to help me make sure I don't miss anything in answering your question...sorry. So, my role was like a...completely different in the new organization. In terms of...all right, I did not, I do not multitask as well as I'd like to think...let me try that again...Oh, I see now what I did wrong...and this role in particular has really evolved over the life of SHIELD. So when I was on external, I was all about getting people on. All of a sudden I was over at the people team and responsibilities really ranged from—we were responsible for understanding what all of our hiring needs are, ultimately then recruiting all of those individuals—and a lot of that needed to be done in partnership with System HR, so navigating that relationship was extremely important. Once we recruited someone, we had to make sure that they got the right offers, and then that they were on boarded. We worked with a number of partners to help identify talent. We had lab search firms that we were working with because finding science talent, scientists in particular to work in the labs, was difficult and obviously mission critical to us being able to do what we're doing. So owned the relationship with Try Search and Lighthouse search firms as well as we began leveraging a temp firm and so part of what I actually did in my like, interim role was start to figure out what temp firm we should work with and we ended up working with Kelly Services, who interestingly, had also been working with SHIELD T3, which worked out great because they kind of knew what it was we were up to from the beginning. And then, our team is also responsible for employee management. So promotions, milestone bonuses that folks got, if there were performance issues, managing compensation and pay equity, like, who are we paying what and was it fair? And how do we, what do we need to do? We worked very closely with System HR on things like employee relations and leave, like those are things that System HR owns,



technically, but as sort of the people team, we would be frontlines to help connect folks from the organization with the right individuals at System HR. Obviously, had to navigate any necessary terminations for whatever reason that may be. We were responsible for the SHIELD climate and culture, and so, you know, what's going on in the clubs, or excuse me, in the labs, how do we think about culture development, we launched the SHIELD culture crew, which then spawned culture, communities, and other things. We oversaw diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. And then I kind of talk about process improvements as sort of the last bucket. That was really just to make everything else that I talked about previously, work more efficiently and effectively. Those other buckets are really the ones that we were responsible for. And I think in terms of how things have ebbed and flowed, you know, to give you perspective, Jacqueline was in my role previous to me, she so she would be able to really tell you kind of in the early days, what things look like, but when SHIELD was starting, the rear, real, real big focus was on hiring, right? Like, recruiting and hiring. We had to find people and it was a very tricky job, because we didn't know how long we were going to exist. So it's a very different type of recruiting, and it needed to happen fast and furiously. So if you think about the fact that SHIELD started in July of 2020...July 2020...and it had like, say, two, maybe three people. When I started in May of 2021, we were about 70. That's a staggering growth for a business. By the time the new year hit and we were rolling into 2022, we were hovering between 250 and 300 people. Um, so that was a massive undertaking. And really, as we hit the December timeframe, we really started to add in an even heavier focus on the things that I talked about in terms of the SHIELD community, the culture. The employee management piece really fired up, like we started implementing evaluations last spring, making sure that people were getting feedback. We really started having conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion and all of that. And then to keep things very interesting—so we were trying to get to 300 people and we're—I mean, we had weeks where we'd have 30 plus people starting in January and February of 2022. February of 2022 rolls around, and all of a sudden, we are not 100% how our funding is going to continue. And all of a sudden, my focus shifted to having conversations about setting expectations and preparing folks for the fact that we might not exist after the end of June of 2021 [does Beth mean 2022?]. And so we pulled together a whole people plan and we talked about how would we have an elegant separation with folks, like, what can we do to set them up for success? So as part of that, another major initiative that came out of my team in the spring last year, it was we had a massive professional development event where we had a keynote speaker, we did a women in leadership panel, and then we had three sessions, where at any given time, three different sessions were happening on different professional development and it included everything from salary negotiation, to some DEI topics, to finding your next job, to like a strengths builder session—...strengths builder? Is that what I mean? I always call it the wrong thing—but you get the idea. But then, as we got to June—oh, and in the like, March to June time period, we pretty much really ramped down hiring. We were still doing a few key science hires, and a couple of other random exemptions. But all of a sudden, we went from hiring 30 new people a week to hiring like, four a month. So very kind of whiplashy, if you will, in terms of like, full speed ahead, and just kidding, now we're stopping and oh, by the way, you just started in January, but we're not sure we're going to exist after June, so thanks for being here, we're gonna do our best. And then June rolled around, and it looked like we were, in fact, going to get funding. So now we needed to have everyone shift gears again, get really excited and sort through...you know, we were a brand new company building the plane as we were flying it. We had some operational things we needed to clean up over the summer, tighten up, we had to figure out what our needs were going to be for the fall based on how many schools and then all of a sudden, we found ourselves hiring again. And

so then we had to shift gears back to hiring. We kind of got people launched in the fall, and then my team again in October, shifted, started to shift gears to "Okay. Yes, we're good. But now we know for sure that we're done testing at the end of May. And we've got all these people. And we've got to think about what is our shutdown plan." And so that responsibility falls to our team to kind of lead the conversations around—so like, I have a spreadsheet that's called "the runway," I call it the runway spreadsheet, and it has literally every single employee and based on their position, when we think they're going to be done in the organization. Okay.

**Inbar Michael** 37:01

Okay. So real quick, just to clarify, this all happened in this whole like going from, we're hiring a bunch of people to oh, we may not an existence organization happened in 2022. Right?

**Beth Gilmore**

Correct.

**Inbar Michael**

Okay. And then now, you're saying that your role is also starting to include, or maybe has included for some time already, like the work towards transitioning towards the closing of the company. So are there talks about SHIELD closing down, or I don't know what the proper term is, but like—

**Beth Gilmore** 37:35

—So, the way to think about it—and actually, thank you for reminding me, I need to draft an email about this very topic—so based on our arrangement with the IDPH, we are on track to be testing through the end of the school year, and our labs will shut down July 31.

**Beth Gilmore** 38:01

Okay.

**Beth Gilmore** 38:03

So it means that we very much know, kind of, what our end dates are. We used our November all org meeting to set the stage for folks to think of the future as commencement. We actually joked in today's all org that we wanted to make sure people weren't suffering from senioritis. Right? It's our final semester, we still need to be delivering great work to the schools that are testing. But we're also mindful of the fact that every single person needs a new job, and so we have a team dedicated to, we call it the people development plan, "people development and coaching plan." And that includes everything from supporting people with their resumes, preparing for interviews, LinkedIn, general skills development. We're doing a lot with LinkedIn Learning and Coursera. And having presentations to help people...like today at four, there's a session about interviewing tips. So our goal is to make sure that ideally, everyone will leave SHIELD with their next job lined up, assuming that's what they want, you know, different people have different needs or desires, and that they are better for having been at SHIELD. Obviously, the day-to-day experience and the work that people have been doing is amazing. A lot of people have gotten to try things they've never been able to do before, you know, just develop all kinds of new skill sets and certainly all kinds of new stories about things that they're good at, right. And so that's another piece we're working on, is helping people talk about their SHIELD story. And then

we're also offering all of this additional support and development, which we have been offering professional development since the big day we talked about in May, like it's a very large temple of what we do as an organization. You know, we've done everything from email etiquette to communication best practices to productivity. It's really pretty incredible. And so we're just doing everything we can to make sure everybody is set up for success.

**Inbar Michael** 40:41

Right. That sounds great, that you're able to provide that for everyone, especially knowing that there kind of is like, a point in time where SHIELD will close. And so, you mentioned the spreadsheet that you have, so it sounds like the way that people will be..is laid off, like, the correct..? I don't want to, it sounds like—

**Beth Gilmore** 41:05

—I say rolled off just because it feels like a little more gentle. But yeah, essentially, yes. I mean, it is. There are organized layoffs and end dates for people.

**Inbar Michael** 41:19

Okay, so it's kind of structured. It's not all people, like July 31 is the last Day, it's kind of like, set. Okay,

**Inbar Michael** 41:26

Okay, so for July 2023, that's when, like, testing will end, but for leadership and other positions, they'll continue 'til the end of this year. Okay.

**Beth Gilmore** 41:26

It's staggered. And the way to think about it is, you know, the first round is June 30, and that tends to be sort of frontline individuals that, you know, they are associates and processors, they don't manage anyone, you know, they're the people that are in the schools collecting the tests. Well, once schools done, we don't really have a whole lot for you to do if we're not testing. Same thing with processors. And then, end of August is when our site team leads, the manager level positions, and the majority of our scientists are done. And, you know, the reason the managers stick around is just to wrap up any loose ends. As you can imagine, it takes a lot to start a company, but it also takes a lot to ramp a company down. Like we've got a lot of assets and materials and things that need to be organized. And some of it's being distributed, you know, back to the University, all kinds of different things are happening, and so that's kind of why we're rolling off. And then the last group is leadership tying up final loose ends, that will be done at the end of December of this year.

**Beth Gilmore** 43:02

Correct.

**Inbar Michael** 43:03

Okay, so, um, I'm assuming that this is a part of your role today. Are there any other focuses that you have within your position as of now within SHIELD?

**Beth Gilmore** 43:17

No, I think I really, you know, I am a senior director, which means that I sit on all the senior director meetings where we have conversations about strategic decisions, but from my department, this is really my focus.

**Inbar Michael** 43:29

Okay. Okay. And with that...Well, I guess, if you don't mind—you don't have to talk about if you don't want—but what are your plans after this?

**Beth Gilmore** 43:45

I'm still sorting it to be totally honest. I have a lot of interests and passion projects, particularly tied to developing female leaders. Because I think—this is more than you need—but I believe that we spent years developing female leaders to be like male leaders and women are different. And that there is a lot to be gained from coaching women to leverage the best of what—and it doesn't have to be women, but that's kind of where I started just because of reality—so I am exploring some opportunities there to try. I'm very fortunate, I can kind of pretty easily bounce back to doing more Pilates or finding other marketing-related consulting gigs. And I am not my only income, so I am actually pretty jazzed at the opportunity to pivot again.

**Inbar Michael** 44:49

Okay, sounds great. I'm glad that you have options out there for yourself.

**Beth Gilmore** 44:55

Very fortunate.

**Inbar Michael** 44:57

Yeah. With that, we'll start to kind of wrap things up. So I have the concluding question that I included. And the first one is this pandemic has been a roller coaster of waves and variants and constantly changing guidelines. We're wondering what your thoughts were on SHIELD Illinois's responses to the evolution of the pandemic? Like, how do you think it was handled by the company.

**Beth Gilmore** 45:24

Um, you know, nobody's perfect, but I think overall, we've done a really nice job. If there's one thing—so we have a couple of things, we have a lot of things that we say over and over again here at SHIELD—one, change is our only constant, it's in our DNA. I don't know if you've seen, have you seen our values yet?

**Inbar Michael** 45:48

I have looked at them when I initially start working on the project, but it has been a couple of months.

**Beth Gilmore** 45:52

That's okay, that's actually part of it. That's one thing that my team worked closely with the senior directors on and deployed as well, back in January. But so, change is our only constant. And we joke that we move at the speed of SHIELD. Because we, this organization, I think, was truly impressive, and its ability to adapt to the changing circumstances. You know, as the governor, you know, issued new

executive orders around who needs to be testing and all of that we were able to pivot and adjust and support and be there to help, you know, schools, including universities, and what across the state respond, which was really amazing. You know, so much of our success lies in the brilliance of the original test that was created by the researchers at the University of Illinois, and the fact that the test has always been good at catching the variance. Right, it was very interesting—so Delta really took off in the summer of 2021 just after I started as we were having a lot of conversations with schools, and it was great to be able to, as part of our presentation, say, hey, yeah, our test because of the way that it works, definitely is catching these variants. And that continued to be true as Omicron became present. And then, you know, we evolved to being able to do sequencing so that we could see sort of what's happening and what, you know, variant is actually showing up as positive in our tests. All of that was done, everything's de-identified by the time we do sequencing so you don't know who the individual is. But that's pretty incredible, right? Like we were never knocked out, because we couldn't identify a variant. And that was hugely valuable. The days of Delta like that August, September, October craziness, and then that pivot Omicron—Omicron? All of the sudden I have brain freeze—and the amount of testing that was being done. And the outbreaks, we did outbreak testing at that time, like I went into a school in Oak Park to help test because they were having a massive outbreak, and we didn't have enough people to be on site. And then, I think, pivoting to create the contract that we did with this state and IDPH for this school year, to be able to continue to test in an environment where people are exhausted, like everyone's so sick of COVID and doesn't want to deal with it anymore. And that we figured out a way to continue to support our organization and be able to offer this to the schools that wanted to keep testing is pretty awesome.

**Inbar Michael** 48:51

Great, positive, positive outlook. And we did talk about some challenges, but this is like more overall. What do you think have been some of the most challenging parts of working during the pandemic?

**Beth Gilmore** 49:06

Working in general or being at SHIELD?

**Inbar Michael** 49:10

I think this is more like a general question. Yeah.

**Beth Gilmore** 49:15

Definitely the virtual dynamic is...there are some really glorious parts about being virtual, the flexibility, that sort of independence, all of that, but there is a lot to be said for interacting with and meeting people and being with them in person. And I had a number of personal conflicts on the major events where SHIELD got together and so I kept missing those chances to meet people in person. And so every time I do it's that much more extraordinary. Because I've gone so long not doing that...I don't know, maybe I live in a bubble. I feel like that's really been the hardest part. I mean, obviously, it was really difficult when we didn't know a lot about the disease, and we were needing to stay apart and businesses like my Pilates studio had to shut down. I mean, that's scary stuff. And the funny part is, like how quickly we thought we were going to be back to normal. Like, I remember having conversations and thinking, we said in, you know, March, April of 2020, that like, "Oh, by November, you know, we'll be back in and we won't be wearing masks" and we were wearing masks for so, so much longer. We got back in, we were

really lucky, we were a business that was able to open relatively early. And because of our loan, you know, our landlord loved us, because we never missed a payment in the end, like we were able to...that was incredible. Um, you know, I think the—I have one more thought and then I'll stop talking—I think the other challenge is just how divisive COVID and all the things associated with it, have been. I think that's been a really big challenge on society, right? Like, are people who have the same mindset, are they not? How do you navigate that? People have been pretty difficult and belligerent, you know, the number of folks that have just been doing their jobs and in some capacity been assaulted, either verbally or physically, is heart wrenching. And so I think that is a major, major challenge that the pandemic, unfortunately, it just—we have, we already had divisiveness, but this was like a whole new, very personal level, where it was impacting people, everybody literally in every moment of their day to day. And I think that has been really unfortunate.

**Inbar Michael** 51:56

Right. Yeah, I definitely resonate with the last two points that you made, especially because I was in my undergrad at the time. And I remember them being like, oh, we'll be back in a couple of weeks. And then a quarter turned into a whole year. So it's pretty crazy to graduate online. Yeah.

**Beth Gilmore** 52:16

Yeah, I can only imagine. Yeah, I mean, that stinks. Your senior year, it's special.

**Inbar Michael** 52:22

They had a way for us to walk the stage, but I don't think it was anything like a, like a college graduation. It was very informal. And then...what are your thoughts on...do you think we'll ever return to pre-pandemic operations, or do you think the workplace has changed forever?

**Beth Gilmore** 52:46

The workplace has changed forever. You just don't go back.

**Inbar Michael** 52:50

Do you think that these are good changes, like it makes things more flexible? Or like, kind of—

**Beth Gilmore** 52:53

—For the most part. I think, obviously, we're not going to be pre-pandemic, we're not going to be exactly like the heart of the pandemic, we're going to find new way forward. And I think there are, to be honest, I think there are a lot of conversations that the pandemic has forced that are a long time coming. And I do think in the end, we'll all be the better for it. I mean, even when you think about manager, like the, the uncertainty, the sort that everybody was experiencing, the emotions and the, you know, the steady state of concern about family members and friends, and were they gonna get sick, and what if they were at high risk, and it was going to be really—there was just like, a lot going on, and I think, personally, that now managers are dialed in in a different way to more than just getting the work done. And if they're not, truthfully, I don't think they're going to be successful long term. That is definitely the way of the future. And we see that every day even with, you know, with our team. This is a group of people that signed up to help with the pandemic. So I kind of think they're a unique breed in general. But, yeah no, there's, there's definitely no way back.



**Inbar Michael** 54:15

And my final question that I have written down was, did you learn anything from this pandemic? Whether it's like yourself, or the work that you've done, or about SHIELD, or like the people that you've worked with?

**Beth Gilmore** 54:31

I have learned an enormous amount. Let me think for a second if I think about how to categorize it...um, I would go out on a limb and say I tend to be a little bit more of a thoughtful—in that, in an analytical way, not like I'm nicer to people kind of conversation. I like to think I'm nice to people too, but that's not the point—You know, I was someone, I was a senior vice president at Starcom. And I woke up one day and was like, I don't want my boss's job, this isn't what I want to do, I need to be contributing differently to society, I am going to leave. And so I spent a lot of time thinking about what I'm doing and what I want to be doing. Am I making the contribution that I would like to? And I think the pandemic, sort of accelerated that and amplified it, if you will. In terms of really getting me to focus on, you know, what I really care about my relationships and things like that. So I think there's that element of learning. I think, the, the oppor—I'm so grateful for the opportunity to come back to SHIELD and to have done both of my jobs. To be totally honest, my external relations job, for me, was pretty easy. I've spent my career learning new businesses and new clients, that's what I did in advertising. It was why I loved advertising was I'd worked on everything from multiple brands at Procter and Gamble, to Kellogg's cereal to Oracle to Morgan Stanley, to Nintendo, like, I was blessed. And the thing I loved the most was learning something new, solving their problems, making their situation better than it was before, and then I go on and do something different. Because I love to learn, and so it was amazing. So coming in to SHIELD, it was—I'm a reasonably intelligent human, as most of us are here at SHIELD, and I was able to understand what I was talking about pretty quickly. And then, especially at the end of my career, I just went out and talked to people, I talked to CMOS [DEFINE], I talked to marketing directors, I'm very comfortable talking to people about the things I know. And sometimes things I don't know. Transparent was a whole learning phase for me, for marketing technology and stuff like that. So that was like, easy. I learned it. I went out, I talked. If I didn't know the answer the problem, I went out and found it, you know, so—but this role in organizational development, where I had a team of people reporting to me and again, I had to be mindful of what was happening across the organization. I haven't had people report to me in this fashion in eight years, and I will tell you a heck of a lot has changed in terms of what people are looking for. I mean, obviously, when I managed before, I was primarily in-person. It happens that at the end of my career, I actually did a fair amount of remote, but it was before video, I did a lot on the phone and moving around and I traveled an enormous amount, so I'm used to not being present with people, which has made, I think the pandemic a lot easier. I spent my last five years at Starcom. I was almost never in my home office, basically. So that dynamic was pretty easy. The video has been really different. But point being, I've learned a ton about managing people and how needs have changed, just as the world has evolved over the last eight years. And then all of that was exploded and changed even further in the pandemic. I've learned a huge amount about, you know, the impact that the individuals and the leadership of an organization have on an organization, and how to think about that and different actions that you need to take about the challenges of managing the company's culture and their climate. And are people happy? Are they not happy? Some people are never going to be—you know, like, all of those different pieces have been pretty incredible. I personally, have really learned

a lot on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion front, which I'm supremely grateful for. I think it's so important. And I would say like, I've, in hindsight, I thought I was pretty good at it when I was working previously, but there's just, we're having such honest conversations now—or more honest anyway—that I've just learned a ton about things that I would look at through a different lens than I did before, and I'm extraordinarily grateful for that as well.

**Inbar Michael** 59:47

Thank you for sharing. I'm really glad to have heard everything.

**Beth Gilmore** 59:51

Oh, thank you. I'm sure there's a million more but I would say those are the big ones.

**Inbar Michael** 59:58

Yeah. And kinda...so that was my last question, but like, before we conclude, I was wondering if there's anything else you wanted to add that you feel like we didn't talk about? Or any final thoughts.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:00:11

I feel like we really covered so much. I think for me, as I sit here and sort of reflect back on my 18 months and you know, SHIELD's two and a half years, I think the most important piece is, holy smokes, like, what this organization accomplished, is incredible. And I say that as someone who has had sort of a peek under the hood, to a lot of organizations and a lot of world class organizations. I'm very sort of grateful for that experience. And I know, I've seen what it takes to get things done and to drive change and to create an organization, and the work that has been done over the last two and a half years is truly unbelievable. The fact that we were testing, and that we have, in as many places as we were, as accurately and as quickly as we were, is unbelievable. And the resourcefulness and the commitment of every individual in this organization, to make that happen, was a truly magical thing to see. That being said, sitting here today, holy smokes, can I also see like—Oh, I understand why maybe people typically do recruiting practices a little bit differently and a little bit—there is a reason people really take time to make sure you've got the right person in the right role doing the right thing, because it's better for the individual, it's better for the team...you know, that kind of stuff, where it's like, oof, this has been a wild ride, but I'm super proud to have been, even just played a small part of this organization, because I think when people look back, they're gonna be like, Oh, my gosh, the state of Illinois, like they really had it figured out. And SHIELD was just, I think, a really critical piece of that. So I would say those are my final thoughts.

**Inbar Michael** 1:02:15

Great. Thank you. Yeah, and to add like, I'm not from Illinois, I'm from California, so like, coming here and learning about the whole SHIELD project was like, well—I mean, I don't—maybe I just wasn't like, as in touch, because here I'm working on this project and hearing about it a lot. But also, like, we hear about it through like our school emails and things like that. But I don't know if California had something like that. So it's really cool to have this like cohesive company working across the state.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:02:43

I mean you're definitely at the epicenter of it. I would say California would definitely be on the shortlist of states that did a pretty good job. But I don't think that they had anything quite so centrally deployed. And I think that's what's really unique. And the relationships that Ron and Beth in particular cultivated early on with this state. And that's true, obviously, you know, there were a lot of people cultivating with the governor's office and IDPH. But the next level that they started to create with, particularly the schools and the sort of Gov— ISBE, the Illinois State Board of Education, like all of that transformed our ability to deploy this testing. And I will admit, I learned a ton—we didn't even talk about this about just like the schools and how they work and how they're funded—and it's fascinating.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:03:46

Yeah, yeah, I worked in a school—this was still in California—but I worked there last year in a high school, and it was also very eye opening. Especially during like, the time where everyone was coming back, it was the student's first year back. You know, in California, we had done the entire year of 2020-2021 online. In Southern California, some schools were reopening, but not in the Bay Area, which is where I'm from. So I was coming back, and you can really see the impact of it, like directly on the students. So really changed my view on schools as like being an educator. Yeah.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:04:24

Right. Well, and the important role it plays beyond just as an academic institution, like what it is from a social perspective, potentially a safety net it is for some individuals, it's really pretty incredible.

**Inbar Michael** 1:04:36

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. I really appreciate your responses, and we actually ended up finishing up a little bit early. So thank you.

**Inbar Michael** 1:04:37

You're very welcome. Thank you, you know where to find me if you need anything else. And enjoy the rest of your break. Although it seems like you're working pretty hard.

[COULD WE CUT INTERVIEW OFF HERE?]

**Inbar Michael** 1:04:58

Yeah. Oh, real quick. Sorry, this is, I mean, the interview part of this is over, but did you ever get an email about an interview agreement form? If not, I will send that to you.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:05:15

It does not ring a bell but I bet you that I did and I just don't know where it is. Who would it have come from, do you know?

**Inbar Michael** 1:05:25

Joanne. But if not, I will send it, because now all of us who are working on this project have access to the form to send, so I can also send it.

**Beth Gilmore** 1:05:34

Oh, I just got the wrong Joanne. Hang on. I'm having—I know Joanne because I oversee all of your hiring. Like I knew your name before you came. Tell me Joanne's last name again. Oh Kaczmarek, there it is.