

Katharine ([00:04](#)):

For many of us, a career starts with some kind of necessity to support a family, save up some money, maybe scratch an itch of curiosity or feed a desire for success.

Leah ([00:16](#)):

But we can also use our jobs to address other, broader needs, like the needs of our communities and our planet.

Katharine ([00:23](#)):

For Amanda Suter, her career actually started with a love—in this case, a love of rocks.

Amanda ([00:29](#)):

Because you're first and foremost an earth scientist when you're a geologist, right? You have a love of the outdoors, you have a love of rocks. For me, it was porous rocks, which kind of was what led me to working in oil and gas. But I think it wasn't the path that I would've chosen, to work in oil and gas. It's just kind of the opportunities arose...and that's where I ended up. And we also live in a world where you graduate with hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loan debt. And the industry comes to you like, "Hey, we're going to offer you six figures to come hither." And I'm grateful for the training that the industry did provide me. I learned a lot, but at the same time, I was really unhappy. So I'm glad I've pivoted.

Katharine ([01:17](#)):

Amanda built a career in oil and gas with stints in big corporations and small private firms. And as she analyzed, modeled and mapped, she saw behind the industry's heavy curtains. And one day she decided she just couldn't do it anymore.

Amanda ([01:33](#)):

I was having this midlife crisis of like, okay, I've been doing this for almost 10 years now. I understand the impacts now. And I just have this huge guilt. I have to make a change. I have to make a change.

Katharine ([01:50](#)):

This is A Matter of Degrees, stories for the climate curious. I'm Dr. Katharine Wilkinson.

Leah ([01:55](#)):

And I'm Dr. Leah Stokes. Welcome to part two of our three part miniseries, where we are answering the question. What can I do when it comes to the climate crisis? In part one, we talked about what we can each do in our personal lives: electrify our homes and move our money. And today we're exploring what we can do on a professional level.

Katharine ([02:15](#)):

Many of us will spend about a quarter of our waking lives at work. And with that number of hours, we have to prioritize our professions as a platform for climate action.

Leah ([02:26](#)):

Unless our job has the word climate somewhere in its description, we might restrict taking action to our personal and political lives, but that's a big missed opportunity.

Katharine ([02:36](#)):

The truth is that almost any job can be a climate job. Whether you're employed in an office, a restaurant, a warehouse, you have power to make your work, work for climate solutions.

Leah ([02:50](#)):

I noticed Katharine, you said almost any job can be a climate job.

Katharine ([02:54](#)):

Well, good listening, Leah. And I do think we have to be honest, right? That some jobs are just so deeply entrenched in climate harm, and some employers are so unwilling to shift course, that there may just not be a way to align those jobs with a just and livable future, no matter how much we want to and how hard we try. And Amanda had one of those jobs, but she didn't realize that at the start. And actually, at the jump, there was a lot to like.

Amanda ([03:24](#)):

Understanding that it's an industry that's volatile and it's commodity based. And so there are ebbs and flows and there have been major points of employment and points of unemployment in that industry. But going in, things were good. I was offered quite a bit of money for a recent graduate out of grad school, with a lot of student loan debt. And I was really invested in by the industry. And so I was really happy. I

was learning a lot. I was taking all these courses, not just on oil and gas, but on being a good leader. And I was in this environment with a lot of really smart young millennials who were fresh out of school who had really great, interesting degrees and interesting backgrounds. And it's an international community. And it was really fun without really paying attention to what I was actually doing as far as the impacts on the environment and on the community as well.

Leah ([04:19](#)):

Honestly, that sounds like a lot of people fresh out of school. Who wouldn't want to work somewhere that's investing in you, that's filled with cool people, and that's paying you a really great salary?

Katharine ([04:29](#)):

That salary piece is significant. We need to acknowledge the relationship between career choice and student debt, especially in the United States.

Leah ([04:39](#)):

So many people in our generation graduate with tens of thousands of dollars in debt. It's a big burden and it really affects the kinds of jobs that people feel like they can take.

Katharine ([04:51](#)):

I totally agree. I think the student loan conversation is part of the climate solutions conversation.

Leah ([04:58](#)):

So in Amanda's case, she graduated with a degree in geology, right? How did she end up in the oil and gas sector?

Katharine ([05:05](#)):

So most of the stuff that fossil fuel companies want to get out of the ground, it's not just right there on the surface, it's buried. And that's where rock people like Amanda come in. In fact, Leah, I'm going to blow your mind with some etymology here. *Petro*, as in petroleum, comes from the Greek for stone, and you've got to get up under the *petro* to get to the *oleum*, which is Latin for oil. That's what Amanda's job was all about.

Amanda ([05:32](#)):

So I was a development geologist in the oil and gas industry, which means that I worked in fields that were established. So I started out my career in Los Angeles, actually in Long Beach, California. And I worked a field that had been drilled for since the '30s. So it had been really, really over drilled. And so we knew the oil was there and my job was to find the asset that makes the company money and then get that asset out of the ground. And in doing that, it involved a lot of geologic modeling. It involved a lot of analysis of the rock. It was kind of a really multidisciplinary job. And so it gave me an opportunity to see behind many curtains in the oil and gas industry. And all along the way, kind of trying to find my place seeing behind all these different curtains, having lots of different roles and kind of spots in the hierarchy. And so at the end of the day, I like the joke that we were just glorified color-ers. I made a lot of really pretty maps and then said, "Drill here."

Katharine ([06:35](#)):

I do love a map. I have to say. Amanda was in a unique position. She was working in the office and in the oil fields. So she had one foot in corporate helping to inform decisions about where and what to drill. And she had one foot on the ground seeing what those decisions would mean for people and communities.

Leah ([06:39](#)):

Well, some people might imagine that oil and gas production takes place far away from people out in the ocean or in a desert somewhere. That's not really true. More than 17 million Americans live within a half mile of oil and gas extraction.

Katharine ([07:12](#)):

It's pretty striking actually. And that's precisely where Amanda was. Figuring out how to drill around people who are going to school, working, living, playing on playgrounds, and just breathing right there, amidst the wells. You're not just out in the flat lands of Kansas. No, you are looking at maybe families and schools and things that are in the area.

Amanda ([07:36](#)):

Exactly. And in the biz now, in the city, we call these sensitive receptors. And so I was working near these sensitive receptors. Oh, the official term.

Leah ([07:49](#)):

Wow. I just struggled to even respond to that. What on earth is sensitive receptors? What kind of euphemism is that?

Katharine ([07:56](#)):

It's just like wacko corporate speak. And I think it is that corporate HQ disconnect, that if you're in an office under some fluorescent lighting, staring at a map in a conference room, it's a whole lot more convenient to just make the call to drill right there next to something that's labeled a "sensitive receptor." Then if it's labeled vulnerable kids with asthma or elderly people just trying to get some fresh air.

Leah ([08:25](#)):

It's a classic example of something like "collateral damage." It's a term that makes people distance themselves from what they're really doing and forget that this oil and gas extraction, this drilling, is happening in neighborhoods near schools or hospitals—that it's really hurting people in their daily lives.

Katharine ([08:45](#)):

And the more time that Amanda was spending on the ground around quote unquote "sensitive receptors," the more she was waking up to that, right? And as we know, the communities that are contending with extractive industry, they are more likely to be communities of color and they're more likely to be low income communities. So this is also a real dimension of injustice.

Leah ([09:10](#)):

I'll never forget when I was driving through LA a few years ago, and I drove past a giant facility that was clearly polluting. I think it was a refinery. And later on, I pulled it up on Google Maps and saw that there was actually a school backing right up on that huge, dirty plant. You know, that's the reality when we're talking about these projects.

Katharine ([09:35](#)):

It's the reality that really started to get to Amanda. By the time she hit her late twenties, she felt a lot more attuned to the world around her, to the number of wells that they were drilling. And frankly, to the role that she felt she was playing in causing climate change. And she actually moved from that first corporate oil and gas job to a private equity firm. So, on the finance side of energy. And she hoped that that might be a place where she could make some change from the inside out.

Amanda ([10:06](#)):

And I thought, okay, here's a place where I can have more say where we can start to think about the future. We can think about if I'm having funding at my fingertips, maybe it's an opportunity to evolve the industry and to start to transition what we're doing into something more feasible and more sustainable. And I think the realization in that experience, the concern was more of the bottom line for that company. And I can't speak for all, but for my experience there, it just felt like I was making a bunch of rich people richer. And not only were they not concerned about the wellbeing of the employees that were doing the work, but also I felt as though I was taking advantage of the landowners.

Amanda ([10:49](#)):

I think that when you're handing these landowner and these mineral rights owners so much money, not just to drill on their property, but you're using their water, you're using their land. You're putting roads on their lands. It felt a little bit like, yes, they're getting a lot of money for this, but what about the water? Are we draining their aquifer? Are they going to be watering their crops? And when I'd bring up these concerns, I was often laughed at and not paid attention to. It was more of "If you want to do environmental, go into environmental, what are you doing here?"

Katharine ([11:21](#)):

So this is what I meant earlier when I said almost any job can be a climate job. Amanda really tried to turn this job into a way to do good, or at the very least do a bit better. And the culture and the business model of the firm basically made that impossible. And it was suffocating for her, especially because Amanda was often the only woman in the room. So she felt really alone in a whole bunch of different ways.

Leah ([11:50](#)):

When you're working inside an industry that is leading to climate destruction, and you're the only voice and people don't look like you and you feel like nobody else understands the consequences of the decisions you're making...I'm sure that feels really lonely.

Katharine ([12:07](#)):

Yeah and to top off what had already been quite an exhausting experience, that company went under and Amanda found herself without a job. And in that moment

she thought, okay, maybe this is an opportunity to end this chapter in oil and gas and finally find a role in climate work. But that was a bit harder than she expected.

Amanda ([12:26](#)):

I really struggled in finding a new place in the climate change movement, especially because my skillset had been so refined. And when I stepped back and look at it, it really wasn't. I had a lot of applicable skills. I was a scientist. So I had a deep scientific understanding of what was happening, but I just couldn't find my role. And I would apply for jobs in environmental. I would apply for jobs in research facilities, and I just was coming up short and I could never find my place. Or if I'd get the interview, it didn't go well. And I felt like I had no role.

Leah ([13:03](#)):

I can imagine that if you show up with a resume with a bunch of oil and gas on the list, it's going to be hard to break into the environmental field. And that's even more painful when you really understand the consequences of the climate crisis and want to be part of the solution.

Katharine ([13:20](#)):

Absolutely. It was fraught professional territory; it was fraught emotional territory, but having spent a decade in the belly of the beast, Amanda was clear eyed about what direction she needed to go, right? No more of this “intra-preneurism” strategy, trying to change the fossil fuel industry from within it was time for change from the outside.

Amanda ([13:41](#)):

No one is going to go above and beyond. I mean, I think there's a little bit more of that now with all these companies pushing ESGs and things like that, but at the time, no one was going to go above and beyond to do what they weren't required to do. And so I felt frustrated because I could see the simple changes that needed to be made. And I was learning that policy really pushed change in that industry. And so I thought, “Okay, how can I help affect policy?” I have all this internal knowledge of this industry, I have a deep scientific and technical understanding—not just technical understanding of the science, but also of how it works in the field. I was on site for the drilling of the well, so I understood the complete process of the operations upstream wise. I didn't really have a good knowledge of downstream, but I knew that I wanted to apply that to policy. How can I help?

Leah ([14:33](#)):

Amanda gets it. Right now, we don't see fossil fuel companies doing the right thing. We need government policy to make them do the right thing.

Katharine ([14:42](#)):

Yeah. It seems like really the only way to truly transform the industry, certainly at the speed and extremity that's required is to legislate them into it. And that's what Amanda saw as the direction to take. Grab everything she'd learned from the inside and use it to drive progress.

Amanda ([15:00](#)):

And so I was just really searching and searching for job opportunities. I was searching and searching for people who were in the roles that I wanted to be in. And I came across a job with the city of Los Angeles as their administrator of their office of petroleum natural gas. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, jackpot!" I have no actual government experience, but maybe they'll actually want to hear from me. And so I worked really hard on making my resume, actually showing my skill sets that would apply. I was very aware of where I lacked. I wrote a killer cover letter and I got the interview and I was so pumped.

Amanda ([15:39](#)):

I got the interview and then they sent me some preliminary questions. I answered them, like, I can do this, man. This is all about my experience. I got to the interview and I bombed it. I was awful. I had no idea what I was talking about when it came to city policy. I didn't understand who the stakeholders were that were involved. I didn't understand really the climate change issues that the city was facing and the climate inequity issues that the city was facing. Especially I had seen them from afar and I knew that they existed, but I didn't really understand the health impacts, the environmental impacts, in the way that I needed to understand them. And so it was awful.

Katharine ([16:23](#)):

It was clear that Amanda needed to round out her knowledge before she could fully transition into climate work. And after checking out LinkedIn and looking at profiles of people in the position she wanted, she stumbled on exactly what she was missing. And it was an online climate school called Terra.do. Terra's mission is to get 100 million people or about 1% of people on Earth working in climate. And they focus on

not just intensive learning, but on building community. So Amanda enrolled in their flagship course, which is a 12 week program called Learning for Action.

Amanda ([16:59](#)):

The first day that you start with Terra, you have to write an intro. And I just sounded really, “Oh, poor me.” I feel so bad about everything that I’ve done. And I hate that I’ve been doing this for 10 years. I was clearly in this bad place of I regret everything. And so from the jump there, a couple of the Terra mentors and Terra instructors jumped on like, “Oh, we’re going to connect you with this person.” We’re going to connect you with this person, their former oil and gas people. And also just fellow peers jumped in and they’re like, “You have great experience. We can use this.” It immediately pivoted my brain into feeling like, “Okay, maybe I should stop feeling so bad and just start doing something.”

Katharine ([17:42](#)):

Amanda used her time at Terra to fill in the gaps in her knowledge and her skillset. She took classes on scalable solutions, energy policy, intersectional climate justice, and Terra actually learned from Amanda too. She brought up just how few resources exist for oil and gas folks like herself, looking to transition. And Terra ultimately created a class to help those workers translate their skills into the climate space.

Leah ([18:09](#)):

This is a great story. And it really provides a model for people who want a career transition to make climate work, their full time job. But we know that not everybody needs to do that. Most jobs can be a climate job and you don’t have to change where you work.

Katharine ([18:24](#)):

There’s a tweet I love from the brilliant Dr. Beth Sawin that echoes this point perfectly, Leah. And she says, “Everyone doesn’t need to leave their field and convert to a climate practitioner, but everyone does need to figure out how their field might best contribute to protecting the climate and how the climate change we can’t prevent will ultimately impact their field.”

Leah ([18:46](#)):

Just like the climate crisis touches all of us. It also affects all of our work.

Katharine ([18:51](#)):

Absolutely. And we're going to come back to Amanda's story. But before we do that, I want to turn to some perspective from Jamie Alexander. Jamie is the director of Drawdown Labs at the nonprofit Project Drawdown. And she's a big advocate of just about every job becoming a climate job.

Jamie ([19:12](#)):

Drawdown Labs is really the part of broader Project Drawdown where we look at how we can accelerate the scaling of climate solutions quickly, safely, and equitably. Working with some of the biggest actors in society to use their influence and leverage. So corporations, investors, and philanthropies to really use their capital, use their resources to scale climate solutions in the world.

Katharine ([19:33](#)):

So full disclosure, Jamie and I used to work together at Project Drawdown where I was the editor in chief of *The Drawdown Review*. And before that, the lead writer of the book *Drawdown*.

Leah ([19:44](#)):

Well, thank you for that journalistic integrity statement, Katharine, very professional.

Katharine ([19:49](#)):

You're welcome.

Leah ([19:50](#)):

And those publications y'all created at Drawdown, they're basically catalogs of the world's climate solutions.

Katharine ([19:57](#)):

They show us that the world has a very full toolbox and the work that Jamie does is to try to move those solutions forward, particularly in the private sector and particularly by engaging employees. So the Drawdown Labs team created this amazing employee guide called *Climate Solutions at Work*. And it aims to really democratize climate action within organizations and companies.

Jamie ([20:24](#)):

Yes. One of my sort of biggest things coming into this role at Project Drawdown was that the traditional approach to corporate climate leadership was really, really narrow, really focused on, “Okay, we’ll reduce our emissions over time, get to net zero by 2050.” And that mandate lives with one team that’s like five or six people that doesn’t have a lot of resources. Traditionally didn’t have a whole lot of decision making power. And so we really sat down and got everything out on the table. What are all the ways that companies are or can influence climate action beyond their emissions? And that’s things like policy advocacy and their investments and how they’re tying executive compensation to climate outcomes and how they’re engaging with their communities. There’s all of these other things that they’re doing that we wanted to get out there in the world. And when we did that effort to get all of that out there, it brings in so many more people, it brings in so many more job functions throughout the company.

Katharine ([21:28](#)):

So what Jamie’s saying is that at many companies nowadays there’s a designated sustainability team or quote unquote “ESG team” covering all things, environmental, social, and governance.

Leah ([21:40](#)):

Oh, that’s a lot of things for one small team to cover.

Katharine ([21:44](#)):

Right? So at Walmart, for example, they have a dedicated ESG team of about 50 people. And that’s great. They’re working on things like switching over to renewables and ramping up supply chain sustainability and giving away some of their billions. But Walmart is a massive company with about 2.3 million employees globally. So the official sustainability staff is absolutely tiny by comparison.

Leah ([22:11](#)):

Oh my God, we got to do the math. That means there are .002% of Walmart employees worrying about the climate.

Katharine ([22:21](#)):

I love when you do math on the fly, Leah. It is a small neighborhood in contrast to a major US city’s worth of people. So when Jamie says democratizing climate work, that means spreading vital climate and sustainability work into every job, not just the

ones with ESG in the title. And Climate Solutions at Work is a tool to help employees and enlightened employers do just that.

Jamie ([22:51](#)):

Take sustainability out of one team's mandate and bring it across job functions to everyone. Employees across the company want to contribute more and more, and have emotion about climate change and feel like they want to bring it into their jobs and not have to leave and go work for a climate nonprofit, but do it from where they are.

Leah ([23:11](#)):

That makes so much sense. We know that the majority of people, both in the United States and globally, they're worried about climate change and those people work in workplaces. We should get them off the sidelines and into the game.

Katharine ([23:25](#)):

We absolutely should. And Climate Solutions at Work is basically a playbook to do that. So it starts off with context for why our jobs matter to the climate movement and climate work. And then it walks through eight different dimensions for transforming our workplaces from the status quo, i.e. not great, to climate engaged and climate positive, and it links to carefully selected resources for action on almost every page.

Leah ([23:53](#)):

I love that the guide also includes a section on how to make an ask, a strategic request to your employer about climate. We need more people to understand that they should be demanding concrete change from those in power and that isn't just elected officials and politicians. It's also often our bosses.

Katharine ([24:14](#)):

Absolutely. And we need more people to see ways that we are the people in positions of power, too.

Jamie ([24:21](#)):

We sort of wrote it to both be a helpful guide where employees could be like, "Oh, I work in HR. These are the five things I can do." As someone who works in HR or sales or marketing.

Katharine ([24:34](#)):

Kind of like a buffet?

Jamie ([24:35](#)):

Yes. A buffet. Yes, exactly. A beautiful cornucopia of things to do. And the other is a list of demands. So employees could either use it to be like, "Oh, I can help my company in these ways." Or they could use it to say, "Hey, these are all the things that my company is not doing and could be." And I want to use this guide to go to my employer and say, "What are we doing on this? Or how are we moving toward achieving these targets that we've already set?" So I think it can be used as a collaborative tool and as a, "Hey, we're not moving fast enough. And these are all the things that we could be doing. And we're not," as a way of movement building inside a company to ask for faster action.

Leah ([25:22](#)):

Okay. So walk me through it. Katharine, I'm Joe Schmoe working at Corporate Company, LLC. How do I turn my job into a climate job?

Katharine ([25:31](#)):

Well, it depends on your unique role, Mr. Schmoe. Let's say you are in employee relations. Maybe you can be a climate liaison between employees and upper management. So they actually hear the climate concerns and ideas that are surfacing. Or maybe you're on the compensation team. Do you offer bonuses that are correlated with reaching sustainability targets?

Leah ([25:53](#)):

Yeah, or I just heard about this new company called RightHandGreen that actually gives these benefits packages to employers that they can help their employees electrify their homes. That's not just my crazy idea. It's a real thing that companies could be doing. And if you work in HR and you're looking for compensation, that's a great idea.

Katharine ([26:16](#)):

You are really picking up on things, Joe.

Leah ([26:18](#)):

Oh gosh, I fell out of character for a second there. Keep going, Katharine, keep going.

Katharine ([26:25](#)):

So let's say you're on the marketing team. Maybe could you ensure that you only work with agencies that don't also work with fossil fuel companies? Or if you're in the government relations part of the office, are you using your lobbying power or your campaign contributions for climate good? You start to get a sense that this kind of framework is really generative.

Leah ([26:48](#)):

Yeah. Or like Marilyn said in our last episode, are you making sure that your company's retirement plans are divested from fossil fuels?

Katharine ([26:57](#)):

Exactly. There are heaps of ways to do this. And sometimes the first step is as simple as just asking a question and not giving up until you get an answer. Say at an all hands meeting with the CEO.

Jamie ([27:10](#)):

What are we doing on climate? What are we doing on climate? What are we doing on climate? And get it at the highest levels, ask the question over and over and over and have strength in numbers. And I've seen that happen.

Katharine ([27:23](#)):

These are very good toddler, best practices. If you just keep asking for the Cheerios, at some point, you probably will get some.

Jamie ([27:34](#)):

If I bang on the table with a spoon long enough going to get what I want.

Katharine ([27:39](#)):

Most of the skills we need for building power probably happen around age two. I'm pretty sure this is what your twins have in store for you, Leah.

Leah ([27:51](#)):

Oh, great. Can't wait. But the truth is that many of us don't have easy access to the C-suite or the boardroom, but we can fuel a ton of change from where we are.

Katharine ([28:04](#)):

Jamie's a big believer in that. It's what she calls the power of the multitudes. Do you have a sense of how it starts? Is it just a matter of a few employees? Is it a kind of affinity group? Where's the soil where this starts to grow?

Jamie ([28:25](#)):

The most effective approach I've seen is where a few really passionate employees come together. They're emotionally in the work. It's like an emotional thing, I think, when it's really successful. And there's a positive thing that they're trying to achieve. There's maybe a long term goal. And then a more modest, quick win and achievement of an early quick win is really important. Because then it brings more people in, gets more people excited. And then I think if there's a longer term really exciting goal, our goal is to get the company to stop selling into the fossil fuel industry. That's our goal by year one. That really works as something to get people rallying around.

Leah ([29:07](#)):

That's the snowball effect. Companies can start by taking smaller climate actions, but then they need to go bigger. They need to do things like green their retirement plan. Maybe offer benefits to their employees to go electric, stop working with the fossil fuel industry as a customer, just keep building from there.

Katharine ([29:26](#)):

Exactly, things start to get really exciting when employees begin linking arms across functions or departments, and beyond that sustainability team, if there is one. And to push for a unified vision of climate action. But so often these big broad efforts, they start with something as simple as a conversation.

Leah ([29:45](#)):

That's right. When you meet another person who also cares about the climate crisis and they want to work together with you on it. But it can be hard to find those people.

Katharine ([29:54](#)):

It can. And this is actually part of the reason that The All We Can Save Project and Jamie's team at Drawdown Labs, we actually teamed up. So we took All We Can Save Circles, which is our unique model for small group climate dialogue, and we braided in threads from Climate Solutions at Work. And what we've seen is that bringing Circles into the workplace, that can spark conversation among colleagues. It can

build trust in community, which is really important for this work, and ultimately it can seed action for climate solutions.

Leah ([30:28](#)):

It's so true. Most of my closest friends right now are the people I work with on climate change. And setting up a Circle could be a great way, not just to get going on climate, but to make some friends in the workplace too.

Katharine ([30:41](#)):

Aww. Friends, we like friends. And I would be remiss, obviously not to note that the materials for Circles at Work are on our website, allwecansave.earth, they are free, they're open source, they walk you through everything. It's super simple and it is a really great way to grow your climate squad right in your workplace.

Leah ([31:04](#)):

That's a great resource. Just like the other one we mentioned Terra.do, which reminds me of Amanda. She found her climate people by taking that online course. Did it ever lead to her finding a climate job?

Katharine ([31:17](#)):

Well, Leah, I wish I could tell you it was just absolutely smooth sailing, but sometimes our climate journeys zig and zag, even after we find our people. But despite a couple steps forward toward climate work, Amanda actually had to take a step back into a temporary job in oil and gas to pay the bills.

Amanda ([31:36](#)):

Right after I failed that interview and then right after I ended the first Terra course, I came across a temporary job at a company. And I remember just sitting at that desk my first day and I asked all the right questions. I said, "What are you going to be putting together an ESG? What are your thoughts?" And they said all the right things to get me there. And then I got assigned my work and it was exactly the same and I just felt crushed. And I just felt like, "Okay, I thought I could make change from the inside. And I clearly can't."

Leah ([32:09](#)):

Oh, that sounds so frustrating. She was back at square one.

Katharine ([32:14](#)):

Well, it was frustrating, but it wasn't quite square one. So yes, she was back in oil and gas. And yet again, unable to change the industry from the inside. But this time she was determined to get out for good and thanks to Terra, she wasn't alone. So she reached out to people from her oil and gas transition class and she did mock interviews with people in her cohort. And then a very faint light at the end of a very long pipeline, she got an unexpected call.

Amanda ([32:47](#)):

Somehow City of LA called me back and they were like, "Hey, you didn't get the job obviously, but we do still need someone with some technical expertise in this office. And so we're hiring a deputy petroleum administrator. Would you like to interview for that?" And this time I was armed and I was ready and I had all this not just knowledge but confidence to speak about those things. And I think that's one of the biggest things that they gave me is, all of a sudden, I had confidence to speak about climate change and to speak about climate inequities and to talk about the issues that every community is facing.

Leah ([33:24](#)):

Sounds like she was ready for this job interview.

Katharine ([33:28](#)):

She was in large part thanks to her climate community. So Amanda now works for the City of LA's petroleum and natural gas administration. And Los Angeles is actually one of the oldest urban oil fields in the country. And at one time it produced as much as a quarter of the world's oil supply. But after years of pressure from activists and litigation, local government recently voted to ban drilling.

Leah ([33:53](#)):

Wow, that's a big deal.

Katharine ([33:55](#)):

It's a big deal. And of course the hope is that ending drilling in LA could be the first of many similar bans in other places. So it's quite a story, right? A decade ago, Amanda was starting her career in a Long Beach oil field. And today she's on a team to help LA transition away from more than 5,000 active wells and to clean up nearly 3,000

abandoned ones. And those abandoned wells, they can leak, they can cause explosions in neighborhoods. It's a lot of work that needs to be done.

Leah ([34:27](#)):

So she's in some ways, right back where she started, but rather than harming communities, she's working to protect them.

Katharine ([34:35](#)):

Exactly. This time, she's responding to sensitive receptors the way you would hope you could respond to them. Turned out that her expertise in the oil industry, all that time behind the curtains, coupled with her climate education from Terra, made her uniquely qualified for this job. But it was people, her climate people, that kept her moving forward. Even when this journey to divest her career from fossil fuels got really hard.

Amanda ([35:03](#)):

I think before that, I was really alone and that's one of the best things that Terra gave me was, finally, I had this community of like-minded individuals. And you realize that you're not weird for being concerned about the climate. And I don't know how to put that. I think it's getting more normalized. Gosh, I hope it's being more normalized, but I had been so isolated in my thoughts for so long that I was really grateful to have that community and continue to have that community. And I think that's the network and the mentorship is really huge there also.

Katharine ([35:39](#)):

I think it's such a powerful thing. We cannot go it alone. We have to have co-conspirators, fellow good troublemakers, people to cry over whiskey with—whatever we need. We really do need community.

Leah ([35:57](#)):

Wow. Amanda pulled off an epic turnaround and I'm so glad that she's officially on team climate, but not all of us have to go on a grueling odyssey to make our job a climate job. Whatever we're trained in, whatever we're interested in or passionate about, there is a place for us and a need for each one of us to work on climate.

Katharine ([36:19](#)):

Absolutely. And that's true, even if you don't work a traditional job. Maybe what you've got to bring to the party is a whole bunch of TikTok followers or Instagram followers. Maybe you host really epic dinner parties. We need your talents to chat people up on climate and grow the narrative.

Leah ([36:38](#)):

Oh gosh, this is exactly like when I sat next to a YouTuber on a plane.

Katharine ([36:42](#)):

I knew you wanted to tell this story, Leah.

Leah ([36:45](#)):

So, this one time, I sat next to this guy and he was like, "You don't know me?" And I was like, "I absolutely do not know who you are." And it turns out he was like a YouTube influencer. He had, I don't know...

Katharine ([36:55](#)):

How dare you not know him.

Leah ([36:57](#)):

Yeah. I don't know. He had millions of followers and I was like, "Great! You know what you can do? You should start making videos about the climate crisis." And I had a whole plane ride in which I could try to convince him to do this. I went home and looked him up and I don't think he ever made a climate video. But the point is he could have. All of us have platforms. All of us influence people. And every YouTube channel is a climate channel in a good way, not in a climate denial kind of way.

Katharine ([37:24](#)):

Critical distinction. And also if Leah Stokes sits next to you on a plane and gives you very excellent career advice, you should damn well take it. I just got to say.

Leah ([37:33](#)):

I mean really.

Katharine ([37:35](#)):

If you're out there YouTube airplane buddy, we see you or not. There is still a space for you in climate work.

Amanda ([37:44](#)):

Every skill set, whether you're in tech, whether you're in fashion, even if you don't have a degree, if you like to garden, if you like to teach, there's opportunities. I think as we are learning about the problems in the world and learning about all these different levers we can pull, I think it can be overwhelming. I've been in the place where you just feel like you're worrying about recycling a cup and the impact that it's going to have if you don't do that. And you feel like a failure if you don't get that one cup recycled. I think we just have this all or nothing mentality. And sometimes again, moving forward and just doing something is enough, because that's going to lead to new opportunities. Every little step that I took every little tippy toe or two feet forward to one foot back, ended up guiding me down this path. I just didn't know I was on it at the time.

Katharine ([38:36](#)):

Releasing the idea of perfection feels really important for any of us on this wild climate wayfinding journey because the reality of our lives is that the road is rarely linear. And sometimes honestly, certainly in my experience, it feels more like scrambling through a thicket than walking a clear path.

Leah ([38:56](#)):

And the climate work often feels that way too. There are epic failures some days and you've just got to get up the next morning and keep working because there are also going to be successes. Taking on the climate crisis is going to be a challenging process. It's not just going to be a straight line.

Katharine ([39:15](#)):

And on those days when it feels like the boulder is rolling back down the hill, we definitely need our climate squad to help us get through and to help us quiet that little voice in us that says, you're too tiny to matter within this vast system. And to keep helping each other find footholds for action, wherever we are. And Jamie shared that serious workplace transformations can and do come when as little as one person finds a foothold and digs in with tenacity.

Jamie ([39:49](#)):

I've heard stories of a fleet manager at a big tech company who literally worked in the garage where all of the company's cars were and he ran a back of the napkin calculation around how much cheaper it would be for the company to switch over

their fleet to electric vehicles, and got that eventually into the hands of the CFO. And they ended up switching over their fleet to electric vehicles and installing charging infrastructure. And there are so many examples of that. I think the possibilities are endless when you step back and think about the broader connections between climate and your job and the more we can share stories of what's working and what's happening, I think the more we can get it done.

Katharine ([40:33](#)):

These are the ripples we always talk about, Leah. Just one stone dropped in the water can ripple all the way through the pond.

Leah ([40:40](#)):

That's right. We live our lives in widening circles.

Katharine ([40:43](#)):

That we do, Leah. And making waves in our professional circles naturally spills over into our personal and political lives too. So this framework – personal, professional, political – there's lots of permeability between them. And when we have the tools we need to tinker on climate in our work every day, we're also better equipped to chip away at the harmful systems those jobs may be plugged into also.

Jamie ([41:10](#)):

I struggle with capitalism and whether it is compatible with thriving life on our planet, that's something I think many of us struggle with. And I think the Climate Solutions at Work guide for me was a bit of a way to explore—can employees be a bridge between capitalism and a different model that doesn't totally burn down capitalism? And say in the eight years we have left to halve our emissions, is this a way to move beyond our capitalist system in some way that is more worker-led? That values longer term thinking versus quarterly returns? That sort of starts to move us beyond this take-use-waste society that we're all a part of.

Jamie ([42:00](#)):

Because I think the reason that we're so entrenched in this existing system is the focus on quarterly returns and profit, and employees are not tethered to that. Employees don't have to report to their investors on how much money they made. They can have a moral authority. They can have the clarity of vision and purpose that, I think, if there was a successful movement to build power throughout

companies, more employees having that power, what's possible? I mean, I think a new scenario is possible where we move away from this deeply entrenched system to one where more people have power and ability to shape the future.

Katharine ([42:40](#)):

I love this idea of climate as a spark for building worker power, and worker power as a boon for climate action.

Leah ([42:48](#)):

Just look at the headlines from the past few years, today's workers are not shy about holding their employers accountable for racial and environmental justice.

Katharine ([42:56](#)):

All those things they conveniently proclaim in their brand messaging and social media accounts. And Leah, some of the labor organizing wins that we've seen at Starbucks, at Amazon, these honestly to me feel like bright spots for employee power that can be leveraged for climate action. So the story at the heart of this episode was about Amanda's transition from climate-harming work into climate-helping work. But let's bring in some examples before we close of people who have made their current jobs, climate jobs. Leah, what do you got?

Leah ([43:34](#)):

Well, two people come to mind for me. One is Max Moinian. She works for her family firm. It's a real estate company, but she felt like she wanted to do more on the climate crisis. So first, in her day job, she turned it into a climate job. She now does sustainability for the organization, doing things like figuring out how to make the buildings more energy efficient or set up composting programs. And in her free time, she also runs this amazing Instagram account called Future Earth. It has hundreds of thousands of followers and every day, every week she is sharing inspiring ideas for how people can take action on the climate crisis and keep hope alive during these trying times.

Katharine ([44:18](#)):

I love that account. Future Earth, check it out. Okay. Who's your second example, Leah?

Leah ([44:24](#)):

Well, the other one is somebody named Jonathan Klein. He was a school teacher, right? What you might not think is a climate job. I think he taught fifth grade and he went to a climate strike with some of his students and realized that the climate crisis was worse than he understood. So he decided to get more involved, in this case in greening schools, he now runs an organization called Undaunted K12 that is trying to electrify schools in California.

Katharine ([44:56](#)):

I love that name, Undaunted. That is something that all of us need to be a little bit more of. So folks, that is our take on answering the question “What can I do?” from a professional perspective. Find ways to connect your current job with climate using tools like Climate Solutions at Work and find ways to link arms with your colleagues. So maybe you start building trust in community through something like Circles at Work.

Leah ([45:21](#)):

And if you find yourself stuck in an industry or organization that can't, or won't change, you can also take the path that Amanda took, what we could call professional divestment, where you take your talent, your time and your energy and you pour it into climate solutions.

Katharine ([45:37](#)):

I think this professional divestment thing has some real legs and I think we should all take heart that that is possible even after a decade in oil and gas. And maybe you need help from a program like Terra or other initiatives to retrain workers for just transition. And the key, as Amanda's story reminds us, is not only to equip yourself with the right knowledge and skills, but also to find your people and to build climate community.

Leah ([46:04](#)):

And if you still need some help imagining what a new climate career might look like, check out this little quiz that Sunrise made called Green New Careers. We'll link to that in the show notes. It's a little quiz and they'll give you some tips and you'll be shocked to hear that Katharine and I both got the same answer, which was the Communicator as our career type.

Katharine ([46:25](#)):

Maybe wild confirmation bias, but I have to say, Leah, I took it as a sign that we are on the right path.

Leah ([46:31](#)):

And in the next episode, we'll be turning to our outer circle, the circle of the political. And I couldn't help but notice that Amanda would not have been able to get that job in LA, if it wasn't for the political action and advocacy that was going on in her city. In order to get it, the job had to exist. And that's where political action is so critical.

Katharine ([46:54](#)):

You do have quite a nose for the political, Dr. Stokes.

Leah ([46:57](#)):

Well, I am a political scientist.

Katharine ([47:00](#)):

Speaking of things that are in job titles. So tell us, what do you have planned for the third and final episode of our mini series?

Leah ([47:09](#)):

Well, we'll be diving into another story of local community organizing, this time in New York city. I talked with Sonal Jessel, the policy director of the nonprofit WE ACT for Environmental Justice about the powerful role individuals can play in campaigns for climate policy. And we'll also hear from Caroline Spears whose organization Climate Cabinet is making political action on climate easier than ever. Instead of relying solely on activists for change, she's working to help us elect climate forward candidates all up and down the ballot.

Katharine ([47:42](#)):

Ooh, from the corporate office to elected office, I am excited to get political, Leah. And it does feel like this could be helpful for getting our hands on those Cheerios. If it is the last thing we do.

Leah ([47:54](#)):

At least we could get some cereal. I mean, really. A Matter of Degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes.

Katharine ([48:05](#)):

And me Dr. Katharine Wilkinson.

Leah ([48:07](#)):

We are a production made in partnership with FRQNCY Media, the 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara and The All We Can Save Project.

Katharine ([48:16](#)):

Thanks to our funders and supporters who make the show possible. Energy Foundation, NorthLight Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and the 11th Hour Project.

Leah ([48:25](#)):

If you're digging the show, please hop on Apple Podcast or Spotify and give us a five star rating or leave us a review.

Katharine ([48:34](#)):

Jordan Rizzieri is our producer. Catherine Devine is our associate producer. Enna Garkusha is our supervising producer and Michelle Khouri is our executive producer.

Leah ([48:44](#)):

William Cagle and Ellie Katz wrote the script and Isabel Moncloa-Daly and Becca Godwin were script editors. Matthew Ernest Filler is our lead audio engineer, mixer and sound designer with dialogue editing and additional mixing by Claire Bidigare-Curtis.

Katharine ([49:00](#)):

Rose Wong designed our new show art and Sean Marquand composed our theme song. Additional music came from Blue Dot sessions.

Leah ([49:08](#)):

Research fact checking and production support by Amarachi Metu and Daniela Schulman.

Katharine ([49:13](#)):

Come back soon as we tell more stories for the climate curious. Can you hear him? I wondered if you could hear him. Okay. Let me—what is that? It's the cat. I think I'm just going to have to do the thing to him that he hates, which is lock him in a bedroom. So I'll be right back. This is the cat.