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Sheila Long: Hello, everybody, welcome to the head of the table podcast. My name is Sheila Long, and I am your host. I'm also the owner of Melamadoe. It's a co-working community for women.

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Today, we have an amazing guest who's also working on creating a more just Milwaukee. I'd like to welcome here to our podcast, Sammy Abner. I don't know if you go by Sammy Stein.

Sammy Abner: Sammy Stein Abner.

Sheila Long: Sammy Stein Abner. She's the executive director of Tycoon.

Sammy Abner: How do you say it?

Sheila Long: Tikkun Ha-ir.

Sammy Abner: Of Milwaukee.

Sheila Long: Of Milwaukee, okay, great. Well, welcome to our podcast.

Sammy Abner: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Sheila Long: Thanks for joining us. Can you tell us a little bit about your current role?

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Sammy Abner: Sure. I am the executive director of Tikkun Ha-ir of Milwaukee. Tikkun Ha-ir is Hebrew. That translates to repair the city. We believe that as a Jewish community, it is our obligation to go beyond ourselves and improve our community. Our mission engages the Jewish community to, in fact, build a more just Milwaukee by study, action, and civic engagement.

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Our focus areas are mostly around hunger, homelessness, and we're getting into more civic engagement and immigration issues.

Sheila Long: Wow, that is so cool.

Sammy Abner: Thank you.

Sheila Long: So rewarding too. Although, every day can be a difficult day, right?

Sammy Abner: Every day is a new adventure.

Sheila Long: A new adventure. Still, you're building something that's really making Milwaukee so much better and really engaging the Jewish community, which sounds like those are things that are really strong values for you.

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Sammy Abner: Yes, they definitely are.

Sheila Long: Great. All right. Speaking of being a leader in your field, what does it mean for you to be the head of the table?

Sammy Abner: I took this question as being about leadership itself. Also, that leadership doesn't exist in a vacuum. That head of the table means you're the head of the table because there are other people at the table with you.

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What's exciting about being the head of the table of Tikkun Ha-ir is the opportunity to bring together a cross section of the Jewish community, we may be small, but we certainly still have a variety of people who practice Judaism and observe Judaism in certain ways. Tikkun Ha-ir is an intentionally pluralistic space for the Jewish community. Acknowledging the various angles that people as Jews bring to the table is exciting.

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Also, how we then take those ideas and then listen to our partner organisations, that we certainly don't just think about how the Jewish community acts, but that it's important to think about what's the needs of Milwaukee, what are the pressing issues of today. That we are working hard to listen to those people and that as head of the table, I get to bring those ideas together, do a lot of brainstorming, which I love. Then ultimately help to drive those ideas into action.

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Sheila Long: That is so wonderful. Congratulations.

Sammy Abner: Thank you.

Sheila Long: Just to be able to work with all of the different organisations on a common goal, that's really going to make Milwaukee better. Being able to get all of the different ways that people practice Judaism, just to get everyone to have that common goal. Congratulations. Thanks for all of your work.

Sammy Abner: Thank you, Sheila.

Sheila Long: Who do you view as a leader?

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Sammy Abner: Who do I view as a leader or who is my role model?

Sheila Long: Yes, or who has impacted you as a role model or influencer? There were two parts to that question.

Sammy Abner: Cool.

Sheila Long: Sorry to throw you on that.

Sammy Abner: That's okay, I'm happy to think about all different types of leaders who have influenced me in my life. I would certainly start with my parents who were active in the Jewish community and in the broader community and were them.

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Also, really, my grandfather who started a business, so the idea of entrepreneurship and spirit has really been a part of my family line for three generations now.

Sheila Long: Wow.

Sammy Abner: Tikkun Ha-ir is still considered a mid-level entrepreneurial type organisation, with a small staff, and a small budget.

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Then thinking broader about role models for me who really embody Jewish values that then are put to work in the broader community. Some people that are average listener may not have heard of. A man named Abraham Joshua Heshel. Rabi Abraham Joshua Heshel, who was one of the first really well-known civil rights leaders from the Jewish community in the broader community and marched with MLK and was really inspiring this idea of praying with your feet.

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It's a really powerful idea in the Jewish social action space. A more modern role model is a woman named Rabi Sharon Brows, who runs a congregation community that is at its foundation about service in Los Angeles that I was a part of for many years. The way that she has integrated fully her Jewish self with her social action work.

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For me, I really found my way into this social action space, through Jewish identity. I really look up to people who also took that similar path.

Sheila Long: Wow. Well, congratulations, it's so great when you have wonderful influencers and leaders and they really help move you towards something that's so fulfilling, so congratulations. What would you say is your greatest accomplishment? It can be personal or professional?

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Sammy Abner: I was thinking about this, I turned to my friend when I was trying to brainstorm my answers. I said, could I talk about that time when I was in sixth grade and I won a cross country race.

Sheila Long: Really?

Sammy Abner: Yes, I was number one.

Sheila Long: All right.

Sammy Abner: It was really exciting.

Sheila Long: Okay.

Sammy Abner: It's really one of my proudest moments.

Sheila Long: Isn't that funny, I don't know how old you are, but you just look back on those moments, it's so great when you really win a race or something.

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Sammy Abner: Yes, sixth grade was a really formative year for me, as it turns out.

Sheila Long: Really?

Sammy Abner: Yes. Also, I would say the transformation of Tikkun Ha-ir, especially in this last year, we kicked off a huge series of family engagement, family volunteering that has never been a part of our program. We have very close to doubling our budget from when I first started in the organisation.

Sheila Long: Wow, good job.

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Sammy Abner: Which is very exciting. We just had this crazy fundraiser that had the most amount of people we've ever had participating. It was really turning a new chapter of Tikkun Ha-ir. I would say this past year was a really uplifting, just overall, general accomplishment.

Sheila Long: Okay. Wow, great. How would you tie in the cross-country race into what you're doing now? Is it like you're running and then you're getting to the finish line of what your goals are? Or would there be any tie in?

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Sammy Abner: Well, I would say, first of all, I'm a little bit of a competitive person.

Sheila Long: Great.

Sammy Abner: I'm constantly trying to do better and trying to work a little harder. I had been working with a coach. I certainly didn't just find the inspiration in myself; it was from all the training I had done and my teammates saying go, and my parents on the side-line. I got too excited because I talk with my hands.

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Sheila Long: That's great. Well, thank you so much for being on our show, this was so wonderful. It's so great to get to know all of these women leaders through different questions and just learning more about you. I really appreciate it.

Sammy Abner: Thanks. Thanks for the opportunity to share about myself and especially about Tikkun Ha-ir.

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Sheila Long: Okay, great. Do you have any social media handles that you'd want people to look at? Do you have a website?

Sammy Abner: We do. THI-Milwaukee.org is our website. We're on Facebook at Tikkun, T-I-K-K-U-N. Ha-ir, H-A -I-R of Milwaukee. Our Twitter handle is @thimilw.

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Sheila Long: Way to go. You remembered it. Those are just so hard just to get it right. Great job. All right, well, thanks a lot for being on the show. We're really inspired by what you do. Thanks to our audience for tuning in. We really encourage everyone to be the heads of their table. Be it winning the cross-country race, which will encourage you down the road, or using your faith to move things in the right direction, or just seeing someone in need and being able to reach out a hand. We encourage you all to be leaders in your community, as well. Thank you.

Sammy Abner: Thank you.

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Sheila Long: Thanks to everybody for listening to the Head of the Table podcast. Please, feel free to look for us wherever you find your podcasts. Let your friends know, as well. Thanks, everyone.