

Ralph Nader Radio Hour Ep 352 Transcript

Steve Skrovan: It's the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my trustee co-host David Feldman. Are you feeling trustee today, David?

David Feldman: Yes, I am.

Steve Skrovan: We're depending on you. And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. This one will really come home to you, listeners.

Steve Skrovan: I believe you're right, Ralph. A few years ago, executives working for Takata, a company that makes airbags, knew that the product they made for millions of cars could possibly explode like a hand grenade and decapitate the driver or the passenger of a car, yet these executives took no action. Many of us remember the space shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986, where engineers knew that faulty seals called O-rings were prone to snap in cold weather. When they alerted the higher-ups, they were told to be quiet. These are just a couple of examples among many where people do nothing despite their better judgment. This effect, called the bystander effect, is what our guest Dr. Catherine Sanderson focuses her research on. Her most recent book, *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels*, examines the factors that lead people, under certain circumstances, not to act in the face of a potential emergency. And we're going to talk to her about what we can do to encourage people who might otherwise stay silent, to go against the crowd, speak up, and take action.

We will, as always, take some time to check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter Russell Mokhiber, but first let's discover how we ourselves can become moral rebels. David?

David Feldman: Professor Catherine Sanderson is the Chair of Psychology at Amherst College. In 2012, she was named one of the country's top 300 professors by *The Princeton Review*. She speaks frequently on the science of happiness, the power of emotional intelligence, and the psychology of courage and inaction. Dr. Sanderson gave a *TEDx Talk* on "The Psychology of Inaction", which is also the subject of her latest book entitled *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. Catherine Sanderson.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Thank you so much for this opportunity to talk.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. You know, your subject is a central issue of democracy, no holds barred. When people ask me what's the biggest issue now in democracy, I say it's the lack of civic engagement and civic motivation, which you describe as why we act and why we don't act, and how to turn bystanders into moral rebels. I must say, this subject has been treated one way or another for centuries, and some people call it the epidemic of self-censorship--people not saying what's on their mind, not stepping out and turning out to town meetings and marches and protests and court rooms, etcetera. And nobody seems to develop a way to make it stick, because I might

venture to say that there's more self-censorship today, more inhibition today, with a few exceptions, than I've ever seen in decades of civic action.

You ask people around the country who are among the very few civic leaders at the community level what's your biggest problem? [and they say] We just can't get through to people. They don't want to react even when they agree with us; they won't go and petition; they won't show up at a meeting; they won't go down to the city council; they won't even want to go on a local radio show. There's fear. So why do you think your book is more likely to actually hit home, so to speak--people picking up this book *Why We Act* and saying Well, you know what? This is really encouraging me to speak out and to engage.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: It's a wonderful question. Thank you for that question. And your question powerfully illustrates how very, very timely this topic is. And I think we have seen in the last few months and, of course, the last few years that people are often profoundly unwilling to take a stand, unwilling to speak up, and in some cases that can have extraordinarily serious consequences. So, what I'm hopeful for is that one of the factors that I tried to lay out, really in the first half of my book, is why we don't act. And then in fact, it is a very normal human tendency for people to conform to those around us, to fear embarrassment and awkwardness, and to misperceive what people around us are thinking and feeling. And some of my own research has, in fact, shown that helping people understand the psychology of inaction can give people the confidence and the tools they need to speak up in all kinds of situations. So, I'm hopeful in part that my book can help people understand why they don't act and why other people don't act and that can, in fact, give them the courage to do so. But I'll also say the other thing that I think has really changed, and my book examines at some depth, is the power of neuroscience. That with advances in technology, we actually have really important insight right now into what's going on in the brain when people are in a group setting, and understanding that this is very, very normal. So I'm hoping that my book will give people insight and strategies to speak up in all kinds of situations.

Ralph Nader: Well, you certainly have a lot of personal descriptions here, examples of people who haven't spoken up. You have sections on bullying and why people don't want to intervene when they see a sixth grader beating up on a fourth grader. And, of course, our interest is in institutional self-censorship. Why, for example, almost without exception, the Republicans in the Senate never challenged Donald J. Trump when he did the most outrageous things [like] lying, criminal behavior, bullying, misogyny, bigotry, [and] blocking legislation that would help all people including his own voters. So, this has been fascinating for people who go up to Capitol Hill and the same is true in the House. Most Democrats are free to speak up against the power of Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, who they have often called the commander-in-chief. And as a result they don't deploy their own initiative on bills and on hearings. So much of everything in the House has to be decided by the Speaker. Can you just move from the personal problems of why we act and don't act, and we'll get back to it--to the ones where real power and abuse is concentrated? I mean, you certainly have thought about this; you've said that this whole issue of not speaking out doesn't just relate to the person at the lowest level. And you say, "But people in the boardroom who are trustees, who are board members making tough decisions, corporate board members, who understand the factors that lead to ethical decision making, this has implications for hospitals, for law firms, for the military, for virtually all organizations." So let's say you're a citizen and you're up on Capitol Hill, what do you do with the kind of insight that you have equipped people who read your book?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, as you so wisely note, there are examples of inaction in all sorts of environments including, of course, in government at the highest levels and on Capitol Hill. Some of the earliest people to review my book were actually famous long-time leaders within the Republican Party--Bill Kristol, George Conway. And those two men in particular were some of the earliest reviewers and that's because the book precisely spoke to them about what was happening at the time and, of course, what still continues to happen today in terms of most Republicans, with a few notable exceptions, being unwilling to challenge anything that Donald J. Trump does. But as you note, it is not an exclusively Republican problem. So, what I think is important to recognize is that the psychology of inaction is the psychology of people. And when we talk about people who are in politics, the same psychology is operating in all sorts of circumstances. The psychology in which members of NASA let the Challenger Space Shuttle go up even while some people feared that there were problems. It's the same psychology that played out at Penn State that contributed to the long-standing sexual abuse by Jerry Sandusky. It's the same psychology that operates in locker rooms, within teams, on school buses and bullies. All of the common features are people; when people fail to act because of social pressure, because of inhibition, because of fear of rejection from their group, that's not good for any of us. And it's not good at the highest levels and the lowest levels. And I think far too often people think about the bystander effect as well [i.e.,] would I risk my life? Would I jump into a burning car or dive into a frozen pond and rescue a puppy or a small child? But the reality is those situations are unique, they're rare, and they require physical courage. My book really focuses on something else. It focuses on moral courage. the ability to stand up sometimes to members of your own group, your team, your colleagues, your political party, and to say, I disagree; this isn't right. And that imposes considerable risk to people, which is why many people stay silent. But we can all learn strategies to overcome the pressures that often lead us to be silent and fail to act.

Ralph Nader: Do you think moral courage is rarer and more difficult than physical courage?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: I think it's different. So, when we look at physical courage, there are times, of course, in which people are showing both physical and moral courage, but the difference is that physical courage can often be trained for in a very specific way. So, we train soldiers who are heading off into war. Firefighters, police officers are showing physical courage. You have to be very courageous to willingly have a job that involves running into a burning building. But we can also teach people moral courage and there are people who are what I call moral rebels who, in fact, profoundly show more courage in all different kinds of situations.

Ralph Nader: Well, do you know the frontline people on the COVID-19--the nurses, the doctors, the orderlies, grocery store workers, sanitation workers, mass transit [workers]; they're displaying both moral and physical courage. And people ask me, "How do we get Universal Health Insurance in Congress." I said, "Organize a few of these people in every congressional district and get them to meet their [US] Senators and Representatives and dare the lawmakers to stare them down," because they have a combination of moral and physical courage; where veterans go up on Capitol Hill and have a very powerful impact, because they've displayed physical courage. But this is a huge asset to mobilize, to get a country to act, wouldn't you say?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Absolutely. And I love that idea. It's very timely and the reality is those voices are occurring in every single state in the country, in rural areas, in urban areas, and

so could have a profound influence on politicians' willingness to vote and support legislation. Love that idea.

Ralph Nader: I might want to add a little vignette that I came across many years ago. The brusque World War II General George Patton - there've been movies made and books written on him - and he was once asked, "General Patton, how would you define courage on the battlefield?" He said "Fear plus five minutes."

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: [laughter] I love that. Perfect.

Ralph Nader: Which indicates a kind of impulse and self-preservation that leads to that. To try to translate that into the civic arena is really what your book is partially about. And you make a very interesting point on bodily images. I've noted that often people don't want to go out and be civically active even though they have a real passion on the issue, because of their appearance and their weight and thinking people will disparage them when they stand up and speak. Could you address that?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Yes, this is some research I've done in collaboration with my thesis students and has shown that overwhelmingly people are much more aware of what they think other people feel about them than those people actually are. So, it's, kind of, the example of if you're having a bad hair day, you may think oh, my gosh, everybody is noticing. But in reality, everybody is not, in fact, noticing. So, my own research has shown that when women arrive at college, they actually feel that they weigh about the same as other women. But as women spend more time in college, they actually tend to gain weight, but wrongly believe that other women are losing weight. And so that's an example of how we can become less accurate about our environment even with more exposure to it. And that's a perfect example of misunderstanding, misperceiving social norms around us. And although that study focused on the implications specifically for disordered eating, that same process can lead to lots of other consequences in daily life including an unwillingness to speak out about situations even [in] which other people may agree with you.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Professor Catherine Sanderson of Amherst, the Psychology Department, Amherst College in Western Massachusetts. She's the author of the book *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels*. You know, back almost 50 years ago, Catherine, we were getting material about the auto industry in plain envelopes by engineers who were desperately interested in having something done about unsafe cars, but were terrified of losing their job in General Motors or Chrysler or Ford Motor Company. And that gave me the idea [that] we need more whistleblowers. We need them to bring their conscience to work. We need them to come out and not be seen as snitches and disgruntled employees. So, we had the first whistleblower conference, I think in the world, in the very early '70s, turned it into a book. And there were about 200 people there, people who'd blown the whistle on the Pentagon, people who had blown the whistle on corporations, on corrupt labor unions, etcetera. And from that, we have seen some considerable progress. We have Whistleblower Protection Acts. We have Merit Board Protections for whistleblowers who are pushed around in their federal agency and they want to have due process to get protected; that needs to be stronger, of course. We have articles on whistleblowers. We have awards now on whistleblowers. And it's become an ethical dimension. They're becoming somewhat heroic and a lot of them are recovering substantial compensation for blowing the whistle on defrauding the federal government and taxpayers and recovering millions or billions of dollars by Justice Department action. Now, incorporate this in your vast research.

What I want you to do is explain how can we expand quantitatively, as well as qualitatively, this whistleblower tradition where it ceases to be named with the word that speaks of defiance and just becomes a kind of professional duty by doctors, by lawyers, by engineers, by architects, by professors, or a civic duty by people. It's the way people say well, you've done a great thing here at work. Well, I'm just doing my job. See how it's normalized? And we want to normalize speaking out. Can you elaborate that?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Yes, I could not agree with you more. We want to normalize speaking out. And as you so wisely note, we often think about whistleblowers in pejorative ways. We call them rats or snitches. And that's really unfortunate. There's a wonderful example that I give my book, which is from one of the so-called whistleblowers from the tobacco company, Brown & Williamson, that went forward and described what the tobacco industry was doing. And what this person describes in the foreword to his book about corporate whistleblowers says "The name whistleblower needs to be replaced." His suggestion: person of conscience. And so, one of the most important steps, I think we can all think about, is recognizing that whistleblowers or people of conscience are doing tremendous good. It is extraordinarily important to have people willing to report on fraudulent acts, bad behavior of all types. Ultimately, that's good for the industry that we can see examples in the present day, of times in which whistleblowers in, for example, the Trump administration, have been fired for actually doing their jobs. But we can also see times in which whistleblowers have saved people's lives by coming forward and reporting on something that was being done. So I think we need to understand as a society that whistleblowers are doing a good thing for society and frankly, for their business, for their corporation, for their industry. Because identifying bad behavior at a low level, at a small point, allows that behavior to be stopped. And far too often, people look the other way, and they look the other way, and they look the other way, and it becomes a slippery slope of unethical behavior that becomes increasingly costly and problematic. So, yes, I love the idea of changing the culture, so speaking out is valued, prized, rewarded, appreciated.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know the fear of whistleblowers and their increasing protection society when they do speak out and act is actually being recognized by some enlightened corporate executives as important internal control and deterrent inside the company that they decide they're going to do the right thing because someone may blow the whistle on them. Tell people about this Corporate Whistleblower's Survival Guide.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Well, in fact, that's exactly the point that if you are afraid that a whistleblower is going to report what you're doing that is problematic, it's actually far easier to just maybe not do that problematic thing as opposed to firing the whistleblower, which can be even more consequential. So, in fact, it is good to have whistleblowers and it is good to have protections for whistleblowers because that benefits industries.

Ralph Nader: And there's actually a whistleblower's survival guide that you can get. The Government Accountability Project led by some long time stalwart people.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, they actually have that kind of material that's available free online for those of you who were thinking of speaking out. Now you have been quoted as saying, "What do we know of the people who do tend to call out the bully, to be a whistleblower in the corporate setting:

who are the people who stand up and do the hard thing; what traits do those people have in common? And can we learn to instill those traits in ourselves and our children?" I can't wait to hear your answer. That gets back to family upbringing and why a 100 children grow up not to act and one person grows up to act then you ask them, where did you get that kind of personality? And they say something like they had a lucky choice of parents.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Right. And I think it's important to recognize that there are people who are probably predisposed, maybe even at a genetic level, to be more likely to speak out, the so-called "moral rebels." People who are moral rebels tend to be high in empathy, so they're very good at putting themselves in someone else's shoes and imagining the world through that person's perspective. They also tend to be pretty self-confident. They feel good about themselves and they tend to be pretty low in social inhibition. They are not really worried about feeling embarrassed or looking stupid. But another really important finding is that parenting matters. And that part of the book was actually particularly meaningful for me to write. I'm the mom of three, two current teenagers and a 21-year-old, and that research points to two things. One, parents model behavior. If you look at people throughout history who have done extraordinarily courageous things and you ask them why. So, for example, why did some Germans risk their lives by hiding Jewish people in their homes during Nazi Germany? And overwhelmingly what people say is "My mom was always looking out for other people, or my dad was always stepping up and doing the right thing." So, we learn how to be a moral rebel from watching our parents. And parents have a profound influence on what we internalize as the right thing to do. But the other finding from this research, which as the mom of a very argumentative, 16-year-old daughter, I take a lot of solace in, is that children who argue with their parents, learn how to defend their own views, stand up for themselves; they learn how to get their point across. And those skills seem to pay off later on when those same student's children, are in situations in which they're experiencing peer pressure; they're able to stand up for themselves. So, we know that we, in fact, can encourage people to develop the traits of moral rebels to step up and do the right thing no matter what.

Ralph Nader: You know, my sister Laura has been teaching anthropology at University of California, Berkeley, for almost 60 years and her most widely enrolled class was called "Controlling Processes." And she encourages the students to point out in their personal lives, in their lives as consumers--as workers, as students--what the controlling processes are in their lives. And that's another way of opening people's minds as to why they self-censor themselves and refuse to act. And it's amazing that the papers these students write. I mean, one of them wrote a paper on the controlling process of fine-print contracts that they have to sign; you know, credit card contracts, for example, or insurance contracts.

They're sort of latent controlling processes here. But they may be latent in terms of public policy avoidance, but they're not late in terms of getting tens of millions of people to obey, shut up, and not challenge, and sign on the dotted line. Are you thinking of expanding your research more into the whole area of corporate coercion which is truly a massive understudied phenomenon?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Absolutely. And I agree with you that it is massively understudied. That became clear to me when working on this book in a new way. I also think that assignment points out something that we know very well in the field of psychology, that helping people reflect on and increase awareness of the forces [both] conscious and unconscious that influence their

behavior, can also help us gain insight into what we're doing and why. And simply that greater awareness and insight can help us stand up to various pressures and forces.

Ralph Nader: What do you think of the political science profession? I mean, political science, if it has to do with anything at the top of the deck is power--who has it, who doesn't, how it's misused, how to build it, how to democratize it--what do you think, as a psychologist, of the kind of work political scientists are doing?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Well, some of the work that I gravitate mostly to in terms of political scientists, again, wearing my psychologist hat, I actually described in my book in terms of the influence of the social world on our political views. There's a fascinating study that was done by political scientists at Yale in which they were trying to increase voter turnout. And I think most of us would think increasing voter turnout is a, you know, a really good thing to do. And they sent different brochures to households in Michigan. And some of them were giving information on their polling times and locations. Some of the brochures were talking about being an American and living in a democracy, you need to vote. And some of the brochures were talking about hey, this is what percentage of your neighbors vote and we're going to be updating this based on whether you vote versus not. And so that's a classic illustration of a study looking at different kinds of persuasive messages. And what they found? The most effective message at increasing voter turnout by these political scientists was the one that used peer pressure, social influence, psychology. Knowing how many of your neighbors vote, and that they will find out if you voted was a very powerful force getting people to the polls.

Ralph Nader: Well, I'd like to refer you to this book and you probably know about it called *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, by Drew Westen who teaches at Emory University in Atlanta. And he says "In politics, when reason and emotion collide, emotion invariably wins. Elections are decided in the marketplace of emotions, a marketplace filled with values, images, analogies, moral sentiments, and moving oratory, in which logic plays only a supporting role." Well, I'm sure some of our listeners are saying okay, you encourage people to act, how can they act where truth matters, not propaganda, not becoming a toady of what Trump has disseminated all over the country with his 25,000 falsehoods since he was inaugurated. In other words, let's move to the quality of the act. And how can you get people to act and react with evidence, with facts, with truth, with options for revision?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So that wonderful example from Drew Westen's book is actually, I think, one of the factors that led The Lincoln Project work to be so effective. Basically, The Lincoln Project was designing ads that were creating emotion, that were powerfully creating emotion and are widely seen as particularly effective for people who may be traditionally low-information voters. But again, you are getting swept up in this emotion that is created in the ads. I think one of the findings from the field of psychology very broadly, is that empathy matters, if we can put ourselves in somebody else's shoes. So how would it be if your child didn't have enough to eat? Or how would it be if your sister didn't have health insurance and was diagnosed with breast cancer? So, I think one of the most important things from the field of psychology is really helping people try to do better perspective taking. And that can help people endorse policies that perhaps aren't necessarily in their own best interests. So, for people who are more financially well off, it may not seem to make much sense to give more of your income to the government. And yet if that is an opportunity to increase, for example, universal access to healthcare, or a minimum wage that

allows people to survive and not be on food stamps or living in poverty, that can be a very powerful force in helping people really perspective-take and make choices that are good for society and not just for themselves.

Ralph Nader: You know, what I think some of our listeners . . . and we have very serious listening audience here and I try to empathize with what they are now asking as they listen to us converse. But I think some of them may be saying you know when people don't act, one of the collateral detractions to it, to put it mildly, is they give up their power. They give up their sovereign power under the Constitution, We the People, to politicians who then give it up to corporations who dominate Congress, say, in state legislatures. They give up their power to corporations that are able now to control their money and their credit-debit payment systems economy and charge them and penalize them at will. They give up their power in so many ways that concentrates more and more power of the few over the many. So, this isn't just a matter of personal assertiveness, you give up your power to Congress that then gives up its power to the military industrial complex, and you have over half of the federal discretionary budget going to empire and boomeranging wars and not rebuilding your own community with bridges highways, transport, mass transit systems, schools, drinking water systems, all good jobs and good public services. So, I think by way of extending the importance of your work, let me make a suggestion. There is a huge gap between academic research and civic action research.

And I always, whenever I pick a book up, *How Democracies Die* by two Harvard University professors, or books by Sandel and Diane Allen and others, I always look in the index. And almost invariably there's a complete exclusion, perhaps not consciously, of the civic reports that groups put out every day [like] Public Citizen, Common Cause, People for the American Way, American Civil Liberties Union, and the kind of materials they get together in litigation, which is accessible, and the kind of materials they put in testimony before Congress and state legislatures. And I think both sides are losing as a result. Because I remember once a famous administrative law professor wrote an article in a political journal saying he couldn't think of one thing that political scientists have ever developed that has practical applications in terms of how the law and its implementation can be improved. So, I think both . . . but the amazing thing about it is that the professors are clueless. You try to call them; they don't return the calls. You try to write them; they don't correspond. They don't connect with this vast civic community. Vast because these groups have millions of members who support them around the country, and they're very empirical. They're often too empirical and not theoretical enough. And the accusation can be reversed for the academic world. Do you recognize that gap and would you have any suggestions on how to overcome it?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I think that's an extremely important point, and I actually think that, far too often, the rewards within academia have been writing articles, and chapters, and books that are for a very select and small audience. That basically likeminded people are sharing their most recent thoughts and findings and evidence with another very small group of likeminded people. In some cases, that's even subfield, so just portions of psychologists or portions of political scientists or so on. And so, I think that the world is better off if people are integrating different ideas, reaching out to people from different backgrounds. One of the things that was, in all honesty, most challenging for me in writing this book, my training, of course, is as a psychologist, but my book delves into issues of history, and the civil rights movement, and the Holocaust. My book delves into, as you and I have discussed, issues of whistleblowing and corporate fraud, and that

was hard material for me to master because it's not my area of expertise. But I think that my book is better for having done so, and I think that all academics could actually do more in terms of reaching out to people who are so-called "in the real world" and who are really the boots on the ground. So, I appreciate that suggestion. I welcome that suggestion, and I think that's an important lesson and suggestion really for all academics across the spectrum.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know I actually had a situation where it worked very well. There was a famous political economist at the Institute for Advanced Study and he was writing a book on Exit and Voice, how systems in our country are concentrated in the hands of a few. And the way they dilute resistance is they make the members of the system, like the stock exchange, quit easily. So, if you don't like the way things are run, sell your stock. You don't have to worry about having voice as shareholder inside a corporation vis-a-vis management. So, this book was called something like Exit Voice [*Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* by Albert O Hirschman]. And somehow, he got in touch with me and I gave him hundreds and hundreds of consumer complaint letters that I would get through the mail. And he found that as a treasure trove of analysis. So, there's an example between a collaboration that can enrich both quests--the quest for rational thought that's meaningful in everyday life, and the quest for rational action to change everyday life. So, I hope that you will look into this and try to explain why, even with a penchant simply to write for your own circle; why just the search for data, to use a modern term, but actually the search for factual and empirical information among citizen groups, is not sought out by the academy.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Yeah, it's a very important point. I think it has been undervalued and therefore underutilized. And I'm frankly hopeful that that's changing. I think there's been a growing awareness that both sides are actually much better served by having a combination of empirical evidence and people who are practically in the field doing work on all different kinds of issues.

Ralph Nader: Do you think that civic skill training and starting in elementary school where you teach them about the civic development of their community where they live, and you begin teaching them about civic activities, and going to town meetings with their parents, and doing what one author found out was an enormous reservoir of moral codes that children have; Professor [Robert] Coles at Harvard has written books on this. And a woman [Barbara A. Lewis] actually wrote a book about Kids in Social Action [*The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose-And Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*] when her fifth-grade class started a project to uncover a local dump that was a few blocks from their own school. Do you think that would help? I don't mean just memorizing civic principles, but actually moving from a knowledge of civic history to your own community, civic engagement, and developing civic skills, you know, how to write a letter to your legislator, how to use the Freedom of Information Act. Do you think that would increase the number of people to overcome their inhibitions when they become adults?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Absolutely. And I think especially if that training was ideally accompanied by some action. So, if students could have the opportunity, for example, to go and participate in a town meeting, or to watch a town meeting, or to write letters, for example, to their local paper; having those sorts of models, whether it's teachers or older siblings or parents or community members, can be a very powerful force; people may not understand their opportunity

to use and exercise power if they haven't been exposed to it. So, that would seem like an extremely important and worthwhile goal for all school districts.

Ralph Nader: Still unfortunately, the deep-seated inhibitions rooted in the world of psychology and other sources of awareness are just overwhelming. I mean, you can actually have adult courses in civic skills, and most of the people who take them will revert back to their own inhibition and self-censorship in fear of retaliation. But, of course, if you just get 5% or 10%, that's a big thing since the whole history of justice in this country always flows from a few people speaking out and multiplying themselves over the course of years. That's true for the whole Populist/Progressive movement and civil rights, consumer and environmental movement. But it is sad to see when someone like Trump, who doesn't think, doesn't read, lies by the hour, bullies by the day, creates a fantasy that millions of people enter into separating themselves from reality and endangering their own prospects, and their own livelihoods, and their own sense of awareness-- has reached a point where it almost toppled our electoral system. So, this is something that raises the kind of work you do to a level of enormous urgency. Before we conclude, Steve, David, I bet you can't wait to pitch in here.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I . . .

David Feldman: I'm afraid to speak up. Go ahead, Steve. [lots of laughter]

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, that's right. So, I'm going to speak up. There's actually an old joke that says when you're 20 years old, you worry about what everybody thinks of you. When you're 40 years old, you stop worrying what everybody thinks of you. And when you're 60 years old, you realize... nobody was ever thinking of you. By the way, I can't vouch for this . . . how factual. It's not a peer reviewed joke, so I'm sure there's exceptions. But you were talking about . . . both you and Ralph were talking about talking to your kids and modeling behavior. But I wanted to know, Professor Sanderson, how do you personally talk to your children about moral courage? I mean, what do you literally say to them? Is it as hard as the sex talk, or do you just say, "Just read your mother's book?" How do you broach the subject?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Well, that's a really important question. And I will say my book is dedicated to my three children and the phrase is "with hope that you will never be silent about things that matter." So that is the dedication to my book. Because my hope really is that my children will not be silent about things that matter. And I'll say that I do it in two ways. One, I do it through my actions. So, they see me. And there are times in which students have heard me having an argument with the colleague on the phone; there are times in which I've discussed at the dinner table speaking up about some wrongdoing that I thought was happening, sometimes with some cause or people not liking me. I was on the school board in my town when my children were younger and I will say that was a profound opportunity of sometimes taking positions that were unpopular and sometimes experience consequences for doing so. So, I would say I do it in part by my talking, but I also do it largely in terms of them seeing my actions. And I'm hoping they will understand that this is something that we value. It's not just talking the talk; it's walking the walk.

Ralph Nader: Well, I have two comments on that. By the way, Professor Sanderson dedicates her book to "Andrew, Robert, and Caroline with hope that you will never stay silent about things that matter." Two questions on that. Why do so many children rebel against parents who are very

outspoken publicly and they become more silent and more inhibited rather than carry on with the tradition of speaking out?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I think it can actually cut both ways. I think there are times in which if there are parents who are speaking out, the children may be seeing their parents paying a price. They may see their parents being attacked. They may see their parents experiencing some consequences. We have certainly seen, again as we are recording this, we have seen some examples of death threats against Republican Secretary of State, for example, in Georgia, who has dared to say yeah, the voting was not problematic despite what the president has said, and yet he's experienced death threats. So, in some cases, children may learn very intimately of the potential consequences for speaking out. But I will also say that it can work both ways. I'm struck by Mitt Romney, in particular, who became the only [US] Senator in the history of the United States to vote in favor of impeachment for a president of his own party when he voted to impeach Trump. And that was a really courageous, morally courageous stand. So why did Mitt Romney do that? Well, if you look at his father, George Romney, George Romney also took a very unpopular stand, a pro civil rights stand, in the 1960s. And so, we can also see examples of children modeling on their parents for positive. So, I think you can actually cut both ways.

Ralph Nader: Actually, that's a very good example because George Romney, when he was head of a small auto company, went to Congress and testified critically of the Big Three emphasizing style over safety, emphasizing horsepower over safety. That was brought to my attention as a young man, and it was very motivating, so you're right on that example. But you're also very candid - apropos your question, Steve. Listen to this. On page 96 of Professor Sanderson's book, *Why We Act*, she says . . . this relates to your question, Steve. She says "When he was 10 or 11 years old, my son Andrew came home from hockey practice one day and confided that one of his teammates was repeatedly taunting another kid on the team in the locker room. I asked Andrew if he had told the bully to cut it out. Andrew was horrified at my question. He said he didn't want to butt in. Why? Because he didn't want that kid to then start bullying him." Isn't that a typical example? So, did you straighten Andrew out on that?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: I did. And I'll say that I talked to him at some length about the importance of being the person to speak out, and that probably other people in that locker room also thought the bully was being a bad guy, and how it's important to do something in the face of bad behavior. And I will say that Andrew is now a senior in college, so he's significantly older, but he has certainly done some things that have been hard stands and important stands, and I really respect his ability to do so.

Ralph Nader: I could just hear some of our listeners saying, "Yeah, but in a rough area in the city, you speak out like that and you might fear the violent consequences." How do you advice youngsters on that one?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I think the good news is there are lots of different ways in which people can speak out. And we often think about speaking out as standing up and courageously calling out bad behavior. They can actually be something very small. So, one of my friends described a story that happened to her daughter Claire this March. And so, Claire was adopted from China when she was a baby. She is living in Boston, sort of, mid-March of this year, right, is the coronavirus pandemic is sweeping the country. She's on a bus one morning going to work. The bus is crowded and a man on the bus stands up and says "You should go back to China." So, he's

yelling at her, he's pointing at her, you know, "You should go back to China. You and your people brought us the coronavirus pandemic." And not a single person on the bus stood up and did something. Now, you can imagine, clearly this man is crazy. No one on the bus thought that Claire had individually brought the coronavirus pandemic here, but people on the bus had choices. And so, an example in that situation would have been to just go over and sit with Claire and be like, "Hey, what are you doing this weekend?" "Hey, oh, you know, do you have a warm enough coat?" you know," etcetera, [That] could've distracted her; [he] could've been an ally in that situation. In some cases, people can of course call 911 and file an anonymous report. So, calling out bad behavior does not have to mean putting your life at risk. It doesn't have to mean standing up on a crowded bus and yelling at someone and potentially getting attacked as a result of doing it. There are lots of different ways in which we can support people who are being bullied, and we need to pick the strategy that makes the most sense in terms of the totality of the situation.

Ralph Nader: That's a very important point. What do you think of the politically correct pressures on people not to act because they're not supposed to say the wrong thing; they're not supposed to call out people? That's rampant on college campuses.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: It is and I don't think it's a good thing. I mean, I have to be honest about that as the mom of two students in college and also, of course, as a professor, that I think the pressures that lead people to be silent are actually detrimental because it can lead people to be so afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing that they in fact stay silent. And in some cases, that can really mean that people are not even given a chance to try to share their view, share their input and so on. So, when we become as a society so afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, I also think that could be problematic.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, I've seen this ferocity against the wrong words or phrase, ethnic slurs, racial slurs, gender slurs, and an indifference at law schools, for example, about the conditions that adversely affect people in these categories. And it's really an amazing uproar over words, but you ignore the deeds, like what's going on in the inner city. You say a racial slur, you can lose your job. But if you're head of a company that's redlining areas in New York and Boston and depriving poor people of getting loans and mortgages, nothing happens, other than you collect your bonus. Do you ever look into the split between the society's cultural aversion to certain words and the draconian penalties that even powerful people are imposed on that they lose their jobs but the deeds are ignored?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I have not personally looked into that, but it's, of course, exactly in line with my book about the potential consequences of people not speaking out in different situations, and how we need to understand the social forces that are very normal and very natural that can have unintended negative consequences. Great point.

Ralph Nader: I mean, I went to Harvard Law School to speak about a year ago and this was pre COVID. And the room was packed with very vivacious law students. They were pretty diverse. And I was not talking about politically correct verbal behavior. I was talking about corporate crime. They were going into corporate law firms to defend corporate crooks with all the power of the corporation to grind down the poor plaintiffs who might be suing them for product hazards or being ripped off. And it was just like water off a duck's back. If I stood up there and started challenging politically correct verbalisms, there would have been a minor riot. I think this is a very serious cultural problem that's emerged and it ought to be paid attention to. That is, people who

are sensitive to issues of law and ethics and morality, are very alert when it comes to moral transgressions of a verbal kind. But they just can't roll up their sleeves and start acting on the ground against the real abuses.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: I agree. And I think one of the challenges within college campuses is that people in their late teens and their early 20s are very, very conscious of social pressures, of social forces; that fitting in is particularly prized during that age group. And so that can have a really negative consequence in terms of stifling free expression and free speech because there is such massive concern about saying or doing the wrong thing. And I do think that can be really detrimental.

David Feldman: What about the role of student debt and not having a safety net in this country? Do we find cultures have more people speaking out when they're not afraid of losing their jobs because they'll lose their health insurance so they'll end up on the streets?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I don't know of research that has directly examined that issue, but I do think when you look at people in terms of their power position within a company, it is often easier to speak up and do the right thing if you are not afraid of losing your job. So, I have tenure at Amherst and that actually is very freeing, because it's really hard to fire a tenured professor. And so, there are times in which I feel perfectly comfortable speaking out about something where 15 years ago before I had tenure, I probably would have stayed silent. So, I think . . .

David Feldman: Is that the psychology of our system? Did they set it up so we're terrified financially so we don't speak up?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Well, I mean, there are more consequences if you get fired, right? If you get fired and if you are able to get fired, and that's particularly true if you are in a situation where your job is not just your job, and your income and your ability to pay your rent or mortgage, but your job is also your health insurance, for example, right? The potential consequences of speaking out, of not getting promoted, of not getting advanced, can seem particularly salient.

Ralph Nader: Well, somebody asks you . . . in conclusion, we've been talking with Professor Sanderson, author of a very concisely and vibrantly written book *Why We Act*, if somebody asked you, why should somebody buy this book, or why should somebody buy it for the library? How would you answer?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: So, I've been talking about this subject for a couple of years now in my process of writing the book and of course, now publishing the book. And when I talk about it, every single person says to me the following, every single person. "Yes, I can think of a time." And they tell me a story. They tell me a story of a time in which they saw something in a restaurant, at an airport, in a grocery store and they didn't speak up. And sometimes these are events that happened 20, 30, 40 years ago and the event still haunts them. So, what I would say is, if you've ever been in a situation in which you've seen or heard something problematic and failed to speak up and you've wondered why, or you've been in a situation in which something happened to you and no one stood up or supported you, then this book will help you understand why that happened and how it could go differently. I talk in my book about universal experiences that we've all had of recognizing, hearing, seeing something problematic and failing to speak out. And I help people

understand why, and I give practical tools that people can use in their personal and professional lives to speak up in the face of all different kinds of bad behavior.

Ralph Nader: Do you censor yourself?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: In terms of my teaching?

Ralph Nader: Anything.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: I think I do so less than I used to, because I think I'm pretty conscious of the importance of being authentic. And I try very hard to be authentic in my personal and professional lives in terms of what I think and feel, sometimes with consequences.

Ralph Nader: I've often said that if I ever meet a person who says they've never self-censored themselves that I'm likely to have met a visiting Martian.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: [laughter] That is true. But I think there's probably a tremendous range on the extent to which people do that. There's actually a scale in psychology called the "self-monitoring scale." And people who are high in self-monitoring are very conscious of how they present themselves and very deliberate. And people who are low in self-monitoring tend to do so to a lesser extent, not to no extent, but to a lesser extent.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, I mean if people have to self-censor themselves just to get along with one another, like, how do you feel today? Okay. When you really don't feel okay. That's minor self-censoring, sort of developing the smooth relationship in daily interactions. But it is true; even the most outspoken people that you've ever read about will self-censor themselves even in the area that they're outspoken. Do you have a website or anything?

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: My website is sandersonspeaking.com and people can watch versions of my talks and check out my books and other articles on that any time. sandersonspeaking.com.

Ralph Nader: This has been a very interesting conversation. We're talking with Professor Catherine Sanderson, Chairman of the Psychology Department at Amherst College in Massachusetts. She's the author of the compelling new book *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels*. Thank you very much.

Dr. Catherine Sanderson: Thank you so much for the great questions and attentive read. Stay safe.

Ralph Nader: You too.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dr. Catherine Sanderson, author of *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels*. We will link to her book at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* Morning Minute for Friday, December 4, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber. In the early 1960s, one woman saved the lives of 100,000 children in the United States from premature death and severe birth defects. That's according to a new book, *Frankie: How One Woman Prevented a Pharmaceutical Disaster* by James Essinger and Sandra Koutzenko. The book is a biography of Frances Kelsey, the Canadian Board Food and Drug Administration doctor who, in

the early 1960s, said no to Thalidomide, the anti-nausea drug that the pharmaceutical company Richardson-Merrell wanted to market in the United States. Kelsey, not convinced that the drug was safe, kept putting off Merrell, demanding that they answer more and more questions until a year later, the ugly truth was revealed. In Europe, thalidomide had caused thousands of babies to be born with severe birth defects. When the truth came out, the drug was banned worldwide and Kelsey became an American heroine. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. And thank you again, Dr. Catherine Sanderson. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to ratsreformcongress.org and also check out *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We'll link to both of those. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

David Feldman: Our theme music "Stand up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. And our intern is Michaela Squier who unfortunately is leaving us today for greener pastures. We wish you well. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And thank you, Michaela Squier, our intern who helped us and I hope helped herself learning how to act apropos our program today with Professor Sanderson.

[Music]

And who will hear your voice
Don't let them fool you
You have the power in your hand
I'm only trying to school you
Listen to me, people, do you understand