

Unmuted - Episode 1

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, privilege, community, conversation, black, john, grew, agency, question, culture, called, hear, person, understand, guess, world, belonging, normal, values, bridge

SPEAKERS

Researcher

00:02

Hi everybody, this is in ElhamAli and you're listening to unmuted the podcast that explores deep and intimate conversations, stories and moments that matter with inspirational people on equity, justice, and belonging in their everyday lives at work. If you're interested in unearthing unmuted topics, people and ideas, then welcome home. Today we're talking about collective hope to bridge divides among people with John Bob simple, who is a change maker who lives to build bridges innovate and inspire real impact. A sought after communicator, John speaks on racial reconciliation, resilience, community engagement and leadership development with over 20 years of experience, and then on profit management sector. As a keynote speaker, John will ignite your passion to enact change. John is an inspiring speaker who will give you a framework to activate your values, cultivate the leader within a unified community to make a difference. We'll discuss everything there is to know about the role of shame in recruiting, understanding and vulnerability coupled with curiosity, to ground our humanity with our black community, and also layers of privilege among people of color. Thank you for joining us, John.

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Thank you so much at home, I am honored to be here. I'm excited to have this conversation with you.

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I'm so happy for us to talk today. I remember when I first met you, I had this kinship. I was like, I know this person, we're going to be really good friends. And we both describe ourselves as Third Culture kids, which is a term coined in the 1950s by a sociologist Ruth Hill, osim who wants to describe children who spend their formative years in places that are typically not in their parents homeland. And thankfully, globalization has allowed for this type of immigration and migration of people to be able to connect to each other. But it also comes at a time where Third Culture kids can develop their identities that that's rooted in people rather than places. And I know I identify as a third culture kid,

I'm half Filipino and half Marini and I currently live in the United States. I'd love for if you can tell us a little bit more about your background as a third culture kid. And you know, where did you grew up? And what was the community like that you grew up in?

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You know, I love that question. And just to start us off, I totally share the same thing. After we were done having our initial conversation. I felt a kindred spirit in so many different ways, especially around this element of identity that's connected and rooted in the United States. But so much different than what our parents experienced. My dad is from Guyana, South America. But he grew up in the UK, and then made his way over to the US. My mom is not from Guyana, she's Creole. She was born in Frankfurt, Germany, and then grew up in New Orleans and her family are largely Creole. But we've got some mixing there of black and Mexican and just a big old Gumball pot, just like you would expect from New Orleans, you know, I'm saying. And so what's amazing is my parents had a cultural difference that was apparent from day one. What was really important was that they were united in their faith. And their faith really provided the bridge to make what would otherwise be a difficult relationship work and work in a unique way. Meanwhile, I was being raised in a community that looked like neither of their normals that they came up with. For myself, it was largely a white community, on the north shore of Southeast Louisiana, a town called Hamden. It was nothing like New Orleans, it was nothing like Georgetown, Guyana, it was nothing like Frankfurt, Germany. And that created an opportunity for my siblings and I to come up in a way that was truly unique. And when I say unique, I'm saying, my parents were navigating what we were walking through every day for the first time, just like we were, except the difference, it was formative for us. And that meant my relationships with my neighbors and the people we went to school with, or church with, looks very different than the experiences of my cousins on either side of my family. And that created in some ways, a very different upbringing than I think I would have realized as an adult, but one that I still celebrate today because it's a part of the superpowers of a third culture kid. It says whether it be through language and being able to have multiple languages that you speak like yourself, or through languages of normals and ways and written rules? Well, guess what? I got to learn all of those because I was trying to adapt into that new world. And so yeah, that's one thing we definitely share.

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Wow, I wanted to touch on something that you said, which is, you know, sometimes you have to negotiate these hidden rules of engagement, especially when you're in different communities. Can you talk a little bit more about what that was? Like, as you're thinking about your childhood and then becoming a young adult and go into college? What was that like versus, you know, living in a typically a black community with black parents and black neighbors?

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You know, I can tell you, it was pretty difficult in the sense of, kind of where do you belong? So when I think that the kind of world where we're running toward inclusion, that question of belonging is almost the next frontier. And belonging was difficult sometimes, because I came from, you know, my dad's into things and immigrant family that ended up truly wanting to adapt to the culture that was there, why he had to hustle, he had to make life happen in America. And I think there's a lot of folks that are like that. And his experience as a black man was very different than that of the other African

Americans in our community. And my dad was, it still is to this day, if bonafide, 100%, Republican, there are elements of his politics that totally disagree with some of the norms we see from conservative circles. But by and large, his politics were pretty clearly aligned in that regard. The thing that's special is that there were still a common set of values, though, that I think held us together, both within the black community and within those outside of it. But unfortunately, that element of rejection, that element of difference, provided that there was a chasm that cross as an adult to be able to figure out who am I as this guy knees Creel, kid, and who am I as a black man, and my dad dealt with that different my mom dealt with that differently. My siblings have dealt with that differently. But I think as an adult, I had to be able to choose at what level do I want to find those synergies through celebration and culture, and those synergies through difficulty and pain. And I think it's both, I think there's both joy. And I think there's a challenge inside of finding those different layers of identity. I think the basis of my identity, being rooted in my faith, really, truly helped me to navigate that. But when it came down to building bridges within the black community, from white spaces, I had to make sure that my bridge was connected to both sides of that. And that was a choice. That wasn't necessarily something that came easy, because I think rejection from the white community and rejection from the black community is something more on my shoulder in some unfortunate ways sometimes. Yeah,

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it's, it's either you're, you're to where you're not black enough or the opposite. And it seems there were some protective factors like that helped you and your family together. And you talk about faith as one example of that. How did you create that bridge that you connected to your white counterparts? So some folks would say it would be language culture, movies are even like the vernacular of language of being able to like adapt. And so I'm curious about what are those mechanisms that you have or that you've seen in your family in order to adapt?

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One of those mechanisms, I think, in adaptation, really goes back down to understanding what is my purpose. And I think, pretty early on the language of being a bridge builder was something that I had to really embrace, or I was given the opportunity to embrace. Because I think, whenever you are, trying to identify how you're going to relate to a larger world, the questions start to come down to is what's normal, what's going to be normal for me? And how will we embrace people that are outside of me? What are the things that are important for me to be able to have and to learn? I think about the fact that one of the elements that I didn't know to call it this until until I did some research myself was code switching, right? Understanding okay, what's my time and what's my place? And what am I trying to accomplish here? And there's no chance of you can lose yourself in this, but it can also be very much so a strength that you get to utilize whether it be in the workplace or in a new environment. So, as an example, I think it's important if I'm in a new space to learn how to say someone's name, while people butchered my name, Marcelo. Okay, let me tell you what, like I went from, I have this name my grandfather on my mom's side, his name is John Quincy Adams. Right? I mean, just the most American born bred presidents are great. My dad's name is Keith window Bob simple. My grandfather, John, Stephen, Bob, simple. The first my my great grandfather Josiah, up some I mean, Moses, Josiah, Bob, some of these names are just rich. And then folks from the south call me Java.

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People from this, really to literally feel as if I am I mean, my grandfather would say stuff like I am, I am ruler of all I survey, you know, just this, this man who walks as my dad would say, rather for Kipling's, quote, walk with kings and have a common touch. And my name is John, Bob, are you kidding? Me, all of a sudden, I have to realize, I experienced that early on as a kid. And so that means I can put that in my pocket because my dad was called Keith Bob. And he used it as a way to engage people, and put a smile on their face and say, you didn't get it right. But guess what, I want you to remember my name. And I want you to feel good about the interaction you have with me. And there was a thing about who he was and made him this ambassador to new people that he had never met, I take that as a privilege, even though I have to correct people to say, just got a job. It's all right, I have to remember that that's a gift, a second gift that I think about in the realm of not just code switching, but also realizing that having that degree of curiosity is such a gift. Right? Whenever you come from the same place, and everybody around you is the same, you oftentimes assume that the world is such a different place. But whenever you come up in a culture that is so different from your own, every opportunity is a chance for exploration. And so that change for exploration means I'm going to find myself finding every commonality on camera with you a quick story to tell, I have a Lebanese friend, his name is Christian now. Christy and I were waiters at the Marriott Hotel in Tulsa, Oklahoma. One day, I was telling him my story. And I was telling him all about the experience of being black in the south by being rejected by both black and white people, and trying to find myself. And he went on to tell me his story of growing up in Lebanon, in the 80s, in the early 90s, where civil war was ravaging his community and what it was like for bomb scares and all that other stuff, and he looks at me and he says, Man, I feel so bad for you. And I was like, wait, what? Here's this, like, that had to be so difficult as like, you have bombs going off near you're like, oh, yeah, you said, and everyone I went to school with, saw themselves in me. And I saw myself in them. He said, I knew we were always on the same team with inside my classroom. Belonging was something that was mine. I never had to question whether or not they accepted me. We were all very much so yeah, boys and girls who picked on each other and all of that. But I never had to question whether or not I belonged. He said, John, I gain different skills from you from when I walked in. But guess what we share this commonality of difficulty that produce strengths that we never thought we need? And so I think that was a gift that I came out of always thinking of, what can I share with the person that's across from me? That's different from me. And that's something that to this day, is painful, but I celebrate it, because inside of that pain came some joy.

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Yeah. It sounded like there was some shared consciousness and shared solidarity with your friend. Oh, my gosh, yes, absolutely. Yeah. That he was able to own and that you wanted it to own to in your community. And I wanted to say on that thread, because I think that's where our journey will continue to stay in this course, is that there were moments in your life where you had to question your black identity and what it stood for as part of that shared consciousness. And you describe a moment in your life where you had your friend Beth, who asks you such an important question that made you pause and think very deeply about what your identity stood for, and for whom can you describe what that moment was like,

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absolutely. You know, Beth is a dear friend of mine and gave me a gift. I happen to be visiting Chicago and Beth and I had one to undergrad together. And in undergrad, she knew of my experience as a black man being pretty different. because the African American community and my colleagues

embraced me sometimes, but largely expected me to be who they thought of me to be. And that was probably a little too white why I joined the predominantly white or historically white fraternity instead of a traditionally black fraternity and I've made different decisions in my dating life and all that stuff. Well, Beth, she was white, she grew up in western Kansas, and she had gone on and got a master's degree in African American Studies. And she comes out of that with a degree of mindfulness. And I don't want to call it being awake. But she made a choice that she would learn about people identify with struggle, and run to do what she could to heal things. So one day, she asked me, she said, John, what are you doing to create agency for the black people? And I went to tell her us and yeah, better I hear you, but I'm not an African American. I'm actually I'm a guy knees American. I'm a Creole American. And I go through this whole like description of my identity. And she's like, Yeah, I hear you. And then she asked me again, I went back with the potato bag, size chip on my shoulder, and basically said, but I appreciate what other experiences are. But I've experienced this rejection and that thing, and that the other end, she says, Boy, John, you're on the north side of Chicago. If you walk outside of this restaurant, and you're walking down the street, what does anybody see at all? He said, You're just another black man wrote to them, regardless of those other identities that matter? You're just another black. So my question back to you is, with what you have, what are you doing to create agency and opportunity understanding for the black people. And that was the spark that started probably one of the most healthy journeys I've ever been on, that recognizes that my black experience may be different. And it may be unique to me. But there are all sorts of blessings and privileges and legs up that I've been given. Why because I had, I grew up in a two parent household, because guess what we might have been broke. But there was food on the table that my parents committed themselves to grounding their kids both in opportunity, economically, reminding us that we could accomplish and change the world every day, that we were designed to be bridge builders in a broken world, that I was given agency on day one, not on day seven. And it didn't wait until I got to school. For someone to tell me that I mattered. It broke me. And I think it made me question, so many of my relationships, and it made me question what I could do to help bridge gaps amongst the people that for all intents and purposes, I shared so much with despite the unique upbringing that I was, given who

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I was, I was not ready for that. That's a that's a big question. It's definitely makes me feel exposed and vulnerable. Because agencies to me, you know, I'm hearing responsibility, ownership for an entire population, an entire community. And, you know, I'm trying to reflect back and you're challenging me to think about this, like, you know, that harm, what agency and opportunity doing to impact the Filipino and behind communities, which is the two identities that I identify the most with. And when I think about agency, I think about big, flashy things to do. Big social impact activist, beyond the ground, be a martyr. But why don't you tell me like the tangle that from your little bit like, can I do as one person, you know, with the resources I have? And, you know, what can somebody do about that?

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You know, I think for all of us, we're different. But I think one of the places I had to start was like, man, what, what do I have right now? Like, what is what is mine right now that I can share? And I think it started a big part was to learn right? I started to invest in to understand what are some of the out of control challenges that black men are facing across this country and where realizing and we've got at the time, this is almost 10 years ago, more black men in prison than in college, that there was a pipeline to prison that was going from kids that were not seen as fighting for right in education, and

finding their way in our criminal justice system. And so I had an opportunity, I was invited to join something called the Black Male Summit, where the black male initiative said, Guess what, we will do something better. Okay, so where do we start? Well, we got to learn great we learn. All right, let's put on a put on an event. Well, that first year, I'll never forget, we had over 200, African American young man all across our state that we invited to UCLA campus, my alma mater, and in the room on that planning committee, we had, what in my mind would have been like, these are black men, right? Very much. So grew up in the culture very much so had graduated from, you know, esteemed universities and all these things. And I had this sense of comparison. And then I had to remind myself, but what do I bring? Right? Well, I bring understanding how frameworks work and how system work. You know, I brought to the room, an understanding of many of the white spaces that could help our efforts or could get in the way of our efforts, and I raised dollars, and I have done all these things are brought my ability, what can I leverage in that room that is uniquely me today? I think that's the key element of creating agency is to say, Do I understand the challenge? And what do I have to give? I think the second thing I think about mentorship and the value of what does it look like to just take on one young man and say, what are the challenges you have? And how can I walk alongside you? i This one kid who attended a workshop that I had, and gets into the workshop, and I didn't think he cared at all. I just challenged some narratives and stuff inside the room. And it was kind of cool. And I was like, Breck enough. This is great. Well, this kid finds me I'm walking down the street, 23rd street, Oklahoma City at nighttime. For anybody else. Let me set the tone for you. This is an art district, to where it's not fully flipped over. But it's almost flipped over a little bit of gentrification, but it's still kind of unsavory. So I'm walking down the street into this coffee shop, and this young kid runs behind me and grabs me on my on my right shoulder, and I'm like, holy crap, like, I'm

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ready to like,

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throw balls is about to be a problem. A turn around is one of the kids that attended a seminar the year before. And he said, hey, hey, Aren't you Mr. John? I said, Yeah. He said, I wanted to let you know, I did what you said. So what do you what do you what do you do? He said, Man, I found somebody who cares about me, then I asked him if they would be my mentor. And then I told him what my goals were. And then I asked him if they could help me get there. And this is what I'm doing with my life. And it all of a sudden, it punched me in the face with agency really is, it is the ability for someone to know and to believe that it can be different, and to both God's grace and self efficacy, that they could help reshape their narrative, that they don't only have to take what's been given to them, but rather, they have options. They have choices. They have agency. And I think the power of the organized macro, linking arms with other people who care about it, learning about the problem that's important, with the micro allowing yourself to be an example to leverage that which you have in your hands to offer to one more. And as my Scriptures, the Christian bible describes, that much is given much is required. How can I leverage that much more to help make sure that people like me know that there's someone who's armed, or has been given that much more, and is truly able to leverage that gift for their Betterment for the betterment of people who may not ever, ever meet?

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It's such a powerful story because it really tells us the different levels of agency, there's awareness of

the problem, there's awareness of the definition of the problem. And then the higher is like awareness of potential solution and it will awareness of collective action. And with the story of that student who has gone through that to identify the mentors to identify the question their career path, that's just amazing because that's impacting one life that can impact even generations of people. And you talked a little bit also about, you know, you had access to potentially social capital in your area. And we talk also a lot about privilege. At one point, we can touch on white privilege, you know, and what that means, but also privilege in the brown and black community, and what that means for us. And there's a really good essay by Peggy McIntosh, she wrote an essay called white privilege unpacking the invisible knapsack. And she wrote, and I quote, I realized that I had been taught about racism is something that puts others at a disadvantage, but also had been taught not to see one of its core learning aspect, white privilege, which puts me at a disadvantage. So a lot of the times we talk about privilege, it's only related to like wealth or economic prosperity, but it actually applies far more broadly. And he touched on this too, when we had earlier discussion, it can be assigned not to just to like population groups, it can also be assigned to athletes, to people at financial power, individuals who can attain higher level of education, which includes me, or membership to even religious groups. I wonder like, to what extent that kind of advantage that you've had in your life helped you or potentially, even like, precluded you from attaining agency and supporting others attain agency. I feel like

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each of us has a set of circumstances that we can control and those that we can't control. The first time that I started to talk about privilege and an uncomfortable environment, I was at a predominantly white church, where a friend of mine was the pastor. And, you know, this was 2019. And he starts off our conversation with this, this congregation is like, So Josh, tell me about white privilege. Like Brah, I had no idea that questions the first one. And that's that's the moment I was like, alright, well, you my friend, are you not? We don't know what the first question is, at least before we have a conversation. And so we started there. And this current lesson is looking at me, and I'm the only person of not white person of Brown of any other ethnicity. And this congregation was so gracious and so loving, and I think they were leaning in. And so I said, What, before I talk about why prudes, I'm talking about my privilege, right? Let me tell you about the privileges that I have. And if you identify with the train of thought, let's see where we go. I said, you know, I, as I was saying earlier, I grew up to personnel. So I had the unique benefit of that the social determinants of health. I didn't say that at the time. But I know that to be that where I lived, only aided in my ability to keep moving forward. My father, and my mother gave me the ability to code switch in whatever environment I know what the unwritten rules of business are, understand what the unwritten rules of polite conversation, I recognize that in certain cultures, the value with which I speak conveys one thing, and I understand in other environments, that the valium was which I use conveys something completely different. My wife and I, we got married, we were given a huge gift for marriage. And they said that most of your fights will be about what is normal, right? What is normal, you're arguing for what's normal, you're comparing someone's behavior to your expectation of what's appropriate. Well, guess what my privilege taps into my knowledge of the normal. And when we start to look at how that normal metastasize into economic systems, guess what? I ended up being an example of the diversity and room in a lot of places. Why? Because I understood what those normals were. And then I went to tell him, I said, if I snap my fingers right now, and we find ourselves in southern or central Mexico, where guess what everybody around you speaks a completely different language, and has new expectations of you in regards to how business is done. And how they see you is no longer as a person where influence or dollars might rest. When Americans travel around the globe. There's always the assumption, hey, guess what, there's the white guy over there, I can probably get

something from them. That looks like x, except now the expectation is, you're a threat. Or the expectation is you're lazy or the expectation is you're vulnerable. You are to be saddened. All of a sudden, we can start to see privilege with honest eyes of what are the assessments of how our world sees to people, and what are the normals of what prosperity looks like? Or what trust looks like? Well, guess what I was given the privilege to understand that world. And because my parents, my dad in particular, and my mom, because my mom will keep it real like that, however, choosing to say, I want to adapt to this new environment like any great immigrant poet. Well, he gave me some gifts to understand, how do you unlock some of those rooms? When I think about privilege, that's what I think about. And I think when we go beyond that, in 2022, Elm, I think you and I got some other privileges that we can think of why every company in America wants greater amounts of diversity that understands,

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doesn't just want diversity because when that person shows up, and they break the rules, that's when that value of diversity and inclusion starts to bend. And it gets to the point of breaking. But guess what, that privilege allows me to stand up in some unique ways. And that's one area, I think a second area of privilege that is kind of unseen, is in corporate America that if my were dominantly, white friends who identify as Christians go and share about their faith, some people might hear oppression, they might hear exclusion, when I do it, they think of especially if they don't share that faith. They think of Dr. King, they think of the struggle, that black privilege, when I talked about faith is a completely different image, even though I didn't grow up in the black tradition. So I think at each of those different places, there's an introduction of those normals, those accepted ways of doing things that give me a leg up in social, in economic in business. And in sometimes it's a leg up that I own, I earned. A lot of times it's something that was given to me. And I think it's something that we can invite all of us to say, what is a normal that I take for granted? That is helping me? And then what are those macro stories that may be helping me that I don't even see,

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when you volunteered to that pastor, and you said, you know, here are my privileges. My aha moment when he said that was that you decided to share first and to empathize first, rather than some typical narratives that would say, like, tell me about your privilege, you know, I'll put you on the spot. And, you know, what I find fascinating about that moment is that some breakdowns in humility, like that have to come before we have breakthroughs with with people. And it seems like, you know, humility, and empathy. It was a really big part of your career, but it continues to become values in your lifelong career in, you know, nonprofit organization management, even your work previously in regional food banks in Oklahoma and community and team building. And I wanted to touch on this idea that you talk about curiosity and a sense of humility. And I want to share with you the opposite. So collective rage is, is this idea that anger can fuel moments and conversations like this, in order for communities, organizations, and even countries to be able to shift systems and to shift policies and processes and eventually to create social movements that can overhaul the status quo. Anger has become like, a pretty predominant emotion to be able to shift conversation we've seen that happen, you know, in 2020, with social unrest, movement, and, and that's part of collective rage. And that's where we harness, you know, individual rage that turns into community rage. Well, you talk about something else, which is collective hope that's driven by ideals and values and principles rooted in an empathy and specifically into curiosity. And I'd like you to talk a little bit more about, you know, conversations that you've had in the past, where you've had deep empathetic conversations with a

friend of your Steve, who is white, and you've had these conversations and difficult ones, too, that require us to like, unravel information and history and potential trauma and their whiteness. And can you tell me a little bit more what those conversations were and why did you decide to lead

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with empathy? You know, I think for any of your listeners, Steve is a placeholder name, to reflect on the fact that like, we all have to have a safe space to be honest. You know, I believe that there's no change in shame. And whenever we use shame, it has a life cycle that will only produce one of two things. Often, for some people, shame can produce, our eyes being open, and guilt coming about that says, Man, I want to do something about this. But oftentimes, it can just push people away. I think in this conversation that we're referencing, my friend was honest about, Hey, John, I don't get it. I don't see it. I don't understand it. Guess what, when I see these things on the news, they're external from me. I don't recognize myself as part of the problem. I don't, I don't connect those dots. I don't see what you see. And I think the modern or current use in response to that is shame. Hey, guess what? You should know better now you should do better. Hey, guess what, if you will, if we've been through 2020, if you can't see this, and guess what you're like, there's so many responses. And I think in collective anger, we are making real righteous, absolute change that is necessary and important for this moment in our culture. And yet, and yet, when I sit myself down, and I think about, man, what's it like when I can't see something in somebody? What is the what's a blind spot? See, a blind spot actually says, It doesn't matter. If I have two eyes and a reviewer view mirror, there's a spot around my vehicle that can have me crashing to people, because I'm blind to it. Well, I know what that's like, one of the ways that I empathize with Steve that days, I told him, I said, Man, I get it. If the whole world was burning down, and everybody said it was my fault, and I had no idea what the heck they were talking about, I would feel not only mad, I'd be real confused. I would be absolutely befuddled by the fact that all the world's problems are on me. And they can never define what it is I've done, what the heck? Well, I started to tell him, I said, I recently moved to a community that has a far greater population of Native American people. And when I was in college, one of my Native American friends would tell me all about sovereignty. And he told me all about the proper role of government, amongst his sovereign people. And I laughed at him. And that was almost 15 years ago, where I would sit there and I would tell them, then, if x is true, then why is reality that's not possible. I'm not that I'm an educated but I know stuff. will suddenly, in the last year and a half of being in this community with four different tribes, my whole world's been blown up a world I've lived in since 2003, you will talk about blind spots, there's commercials, documentaries, we have an entire education system that does an imperfect job of presenting this, but I've had the chance to learn. I was blind. And it wasn't until I was in proximity, that my humility was activated. And it made me become a student. Maybe ask the question of what can't I see? And maybe start from phase one, we said, well, we're almost 17 years in and I've been fighting reality the whole time, I got a long list of things to learn about. So all of a sudden, I think my conversation with Steve was now about, Hey, can I invite you into a process of learning? Except he invited me? And he said, John, I'm not gonna tell you the answers that you want. I'm not going to tell you that I am awakened to everything. And now I agree with you. But I will keep getting together. That was heartwarming.

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And then the same time pretty raw, because what you did right there is like when we hear another person's feelings, and in this case, it's Steve's feelings and needs, we're able to recognize our common humanity with them. And the more we hear them, the more they'll hear us and the

reciprocal process. And we reject shame. We reject evaluating person, we observe what's happening. And we give them a space and invite them in, rather than just saying the weight of the world is on you, and you need to change and we want to focus on you know, soul, soul transformation rather than behavior modification to be able to do that, and that's exactly what you did right there. And, you know, at times people are like, let's say, like, I don't have time for this, you know, it's not why should I do this? So my responsibility, you know, as a black and brown person ain't got time. So, you know, what empowers you, for example, to stay connected to your compassionate nature, even under the worst circumstances? And, you know, I'm, I'm thinking about even like, the harshest reality, I'm thinking about Eddie Hossam, who was who remain compassionate even while they were subjected to the grotesque conditions of a German concentration camp in and so how do you remain that? That level of compassion and empathy, despite all that's happening in the world right

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now, I gotta say, and he's a great example of someone that can teach us all something. All I knew is that it's cheap, to be hopeless, and then costing, our world provides so many opportunities to be any constant state of anxiousness and anger. And we have to make a different choice. I, first and foremost as an individual that comes from my faith, knowing that, as I said recently, but God's not done with me, so I can't be done with people. Bryan Stevenson says that we are more than the worst thing that we've ever done. When I look at climate science, as an example, there are people everywhere who are planting trees, like tomorrow depends on it, because we have to do what we can, while we can, we have to remember that our existence and this time and this place is not fabricated. It's not an exact an accident. And so I have to believe that at a moment where the light seems dimmest at times, then I have to be a part of building solutions that include true telling that include responses when vulnerable people are picked on and kicked around, it's a problem, I'm not going to act like I'm not frustrated and angered and saddened and tired of excuses, I'm there. But I do know that hopelessness will snuff out any chance to change. I do know that anger will not build nearly as fast as the Taliban. I do know that when I look at the future, and I want to have for future generations, I want to be on the sides of folks who did everything that they could to improve the conversation to build the bridge to heal, not to tear down. And I think there are some people whose job it is to tear down oppressive structures, they were called to go in, and through absolute pressure, create change. And there are those of us. And I like to include myself, to be the types of bridge builders that says, a bridge doesn't exist until there's nothing underneath. A bridge doesn't exist until there's truly a gap. That's the purpose of a bridge. A bridge is what we show up whenever that it doesn't make sense on either side. And sometimes that comes through hard conversation. But it always I believe, starts from a place of proximity, a place of humility, a place of empathy, and remembering that I need the same grace that I need to give to other people. I have to deal from a place of grace and accountability, accountability that says we can't stay where we are. But grace that says, Even when you keep falling, I'm gonna keep showing up. I think here in the United States, we have a question. And that question is, will we start from a place of hope that tomorrow can be different? Or will we start from a place that says I must tear down more than I build? I'm hearing what

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you're saying, because anger has a life serving code. When we judge other people, we contribute to violence. And what you're saying is that when we listen for their needs, their feelings, we no longer see people as monsters. And so you're where you're using is that you're using empathy, humility and curiosity, in order to hear our own deeper needs, but also the needs of others. And so you're rejecting

in a sense like life, alienating communication and violent communication and you're embracing you know, non violence like what we've heard from you know, Dr. Martin Luther King and and Mahatma Gandhi in their pursuit for civil rights. And, you know, I want if you can take us to a close and walk me through what that room would look like, how can a person increase collective hope? Whether I'm talking to my friend, my neighbor, even my co worker, or even if I'm part of a team and my company, what does? How does that conversation look like? It talks about proximity, but also humility? Is there anything else that you would like to add to that?

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You know, I think one of the ways that we can help shape that room that you're talking about, is to ask ourselves the question of what what is the end that we have in mind? Where do we want to end up? And how can we do something that hasn't been done and start from a place that I think puts you at risk? You know, earlier, you'd say, sometimes, people would say, Man, I ain't got time for this, I ain't got time for it. Guess what? A very common thing I hear oftentimes is, as a black person, it is not my job to do your work person who wants to learn. But here's the truth. If we all have that attitude, there's a good chance, there's a good chance that a lot of folks may be missed, right? Now, I agree. It's not my job to do somebody else's work. But can I cross that chasm as much as I can? I can, can I make myself that list as a builder? And I'm not suggesting everybody needs to be that person. But to start off a conversation that says, Hey, what is it that you don't understand? And let them say, This is what I don't understand? What is your story look like? Give myself a chance to share my story. A story I often will tell is something that makes me feel vulnerable. The first time I was arrested by an officer who was for an expired tag. And as I'm sitting next to this massive German Shepherd, I am unbelievably mortified because I knew this moment might happen to me. But guess what it means something a lot more than just an expired tag, hey, I'm sharing a bit of myself at risk as an invitation for someone to do the same. So vulnerability is a powerful first step, I think a second step is to understand what your boundaries are, to be able to let that person know, there's a chance that I might be triggered by a voc. I'm gonna try to treat you with grace and all of those things, but know that this is where my boundary is. I had a moment where I didn't set that boundary. And I got rolled over and I didn't respond well. So I think vulnerability and boundaries are helpful. I think the third thing that should be present in a room is a common set of, of ideals, hey, do we share the value of x and allow that to be a grounding place to when that conversation goes to a place where you don't see eye to eye? Can you go back to that grounding value? I think that goes a really long way. And then finally, I think we can't do it alone. I think about my plants in my yard. I plant pollinators. Pollinators are these beautiful flowers that attract bees and butterflies. And their job is to make pollen go to all the different things you need pollen to show up at. Well, guess what pollen is needed to grow my tomatoes. Those pollinators help the growth process. I think we've got to grow with other people and find those pollinators in our lives that can help us have these hard conversations that can coach us through them or ask, hey, guess what, I'm gonna have this conversation can we get together afterwards, I might be triggered, upset, exhausted, I might need an outlet afterwards. So I think we've got to remember, we can't do these conversations alone. And so to identify who those people who can push us forward, even in the times where it feels most difficult. That's so

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inspiring data that it's also we have to reject moralistic judgment, where we say that somebody is wrong or bad, just because they don't act in harmony with our own values. But we give them the space as well to understand their own basic needs and where they're coming from, and leverage the

type of values that you're talking about. And as you're thinking about largely macro and ending on this is how can organizations and systems in general, foster and cultivate a culture of organizational healing? How can they start cultivating a collective hope in their organization?

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Well, I love that question. I think the cultures that we create are kind of redefining those normals and making sure that we have authentic alignment with the values we espouse. And I think authentic alignment shows up and says where are we today? Having a sense of evaluation that says on whatever the thing that we've identified as our challenge? Where are we right now? I think after we go through that process of evaluation, invite the people into that space to inform that answer. I remember talking with one CEO, and they were saying, Hey, man we're doing we're doing pretty well. And then you talk to some of their employees know, like, now and that's wasn't one of the number one, you know, top six jobs of the CEO up there with, with strategy and business development is culture. Well, guess what? You got to know your culture, just like soil, I've got to test it, what is it, that I want to be in the soil from which my people and my business grows. So we've got to evaluate that piece, then the second thing is, we've got to engage all the right parties to make sure they're part of this, Hey, the soil that I'm growing in, I need to make sure that it drains well. So peat, moss and sand that's going to help guess what, all right, I gotta have my frontline or my individual contributors, they got to be involved, my executives, they gotta be involved. Hey, guess what, I can't force people to be at the table, I've got to invite people to be at that table, why this is going to cost something of them and cost something of me. So I've got to evaluate, I've got to have an invitation to make sure all the pieces are together. I think a third thing organizationally that we've got to be able to do is have a common definition of where we want to go. We oftentimes talk about diversity, equity and inclusion. And everybody's got a different mentality or thought around what that means. So we've got to be able to have a common definition, both from a place of where we are, but where we want to be. And that is going to be rooted in conversation. I think a fourth step, that's going to be important. And this is something that is probably most difficult. What is the tangible progress look like? What is it tangibly to express our values in an authentic way? And how can we do that together? Who is going to be on a boat that we want to sail on? And who are the folks that say that doesn't align with where I am, and give people that opportunity to say I'm out? I think in many of these cases, we want to force this to happen quickly. But we have to know that if we want tangible change, it might take some time. And that time may mean our organizations look different after we've gone through that process. I think when we evaluate where we are, when we have an invitation to have the right people as a part of that conversation, when we make sure that man, are we are we talking about the same thing, we have a common language of what is meaningful. And then when we look at tangible change, are we willing to look different than when we started and to take the time in order to get there? I think in each of these steps, it can help bolster us that much more. If we can do that with a sense of humility and empathy, and a commitment to where we want to be. I think that real change is possible.

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So inspired, how can folks have a conversation with you? Where can they find you? How can they connect with you?

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You can get in touch with me via LinkedIn. I'm John Bob, simple. Check me out. I'd love to continue

this conversation. And there's a lot of thoughts out there. I'm not your guru. I'm a practitioner. I am trying to humbly do this. And so let's have that conversation. If you want to have a broader discussion about me visiting with your organization, I'd love for you to check me out. I'm with hawks agency, hawks.agency.com. I'm one of their speakers. I would love to engage with you in that space, or shoot me an email John at Hawks agency.com. Let's have that discourse because the truth is, I would imagine you thought Amen. For some of what I've said, and you probably thought Nah, bro, you don't get it. Well guess what? That means that you're different from me. And that's a gift and let's discuss.

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Thank you so much, John, appreciate you. Thank you for being on the show.

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I'm so blessed to be here.

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