

Hummingbird Hour

Our Stories Guide Us

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- Welcome, welcome, welcome everyone. Happy Tuesday, happy pride. It's Hummingbird Hour and we get to kick off Pride Month today with all of you. If you're watching this at a later date, it's still happy pride because just in case you weren't sure, I'm actually gay all year round. And I know that my friends and panelists who are part of the, colleagues and loved ones who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, we're queer all year too. Like, so it's true for all of us. So glad you're with us and celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. I'm delighted to be joined today by the incomparable Graci Harkema. And we're gonna get to hear a bit from her in just a moment. So I'm going to take down our welcome screen here for Hummingbird Hour. Hummingbird Hour, by the way, is a weekly conversation series that is celebrating the 1 year anniversary of Hummingbird Humanity. I still can't believe that I started a business in the height of the pandemic, at the height of the pandemic and that it's still going strong and it's going strong due to colleagues and friends and people who trust us to do, to come into their workplaces and help make the world a better place. And some of those individuals are people like Ben Green, who's here with us today. Hi Ben. Ben, I'm gonna send you to the attendees group. But Ben will be with us in the chat and he'll be there to answer questions you might have. And Ben helps to make sure that you get all the fantastic links for all of the wonderful resources that Graci and I are gonna mention today. So Ben, we'll see you soon. Okay, let's see if I did that right. Awesome, last week, what I did, was I actually sent my guest host to the attendees space and so I'm like, oops, wrong person in attendees. So I'm glad that Graci is still here with me. Graci, you know, I'm a huge fan of yours and have been for so long now and I'm so glad that you're here with me today. Although it's happy pride, and we're not wearing rainbows.

- Happy pride.

- You wore your rainbow!

- Celebrate diversity, happy pride everyone.

- Happy pride, I love it.

- Let me adjust this so people can see this, there we go.

- That's fantastic, I love the pride. Well, we, I don't know if they, if we've, I think we have done it. We've updated all of the Hummingbird Humanity logos on the inter webs with our rainbow colors. So that's my expression of the rainbow. I love it, I love it.

- I love it. Well, Graci, I'm so glad you're here with us today and I know that you and I are both writing books and that's how we got connected. And your book is, and actually before, I'm gonna go to you in just a second, for those of you who don't know who I am, in case you don't, I'm Brian McComak and I'm the founder of Hummingbird Humanity and you'll learn more about me in the conversation. Let's get back to Graci. So Graci, I know that your book is about your phenomenal journey from Africa to the United States and then we're gonna talk about so many elements of your story 'cause, today's theme is Our Stories Guide Us and I know your story like mine, has really led me to the work that I get to do today, to change hearts and minds and make the world a better place. So would you tell us a little bit about yourself and particularly about how your story started.

- Yeah, definitely. And thanks so much for having me Brian. It's so great to be here with you and happy pride everyone. You know, the first thing that I thought of when I woke up this morning was, it's pride, it's Pride Month. And I think one of the reasons of why pride, and I'll get back to my story real quick, why pride month right now especially means so much is because, last year after George Floyd's tragic murder, I couldn't even think about pride, you know, I was so consumed and so heartbroken and so overwhelmed about, you know, not just what happened to George Floyd, but truly how our country was reacting in such a negative way. And there was a lot of positivity of people coming together and protesting and standing up for justice and accountability, but the ignorance and the hate and the discrimination that brought out on other people was so heartbreaking that I just, I felt like I couldn't even acknowledge Pride last year and so this year, you know, now that we finally had some accountability in regards to George Lloyd's murder, I'm proud, proud to be here, proud to celebrate with you all. So a little bit about my background, yes, I was born in the Congo, Central Africa and the place that I was born was a place that had a lot of civil unrest and there were riots and it was violent, especially a lot of violence against women. And my biological mother was caught up in that violence and as a result of it, she conceived me at a very young age very unexpectedly and she was dying herself and a lot of her family members had died from disease and malnutrition and she just wanted me to have a chance at life and a chance to live. She was super poor, I was born in a mud hut and then she brought me to an orphanage when I was a week old. And when I arrived to the orphanage, I was given 12 to 24 hours to live. I was so sick that the orphanage workers didn't even want me to be in a crib because they thought, nope, she's gonna die today or tomorrow, let's not take up a crib. Let's just put her in a toy doll set and place her in the back of the orphanage where no one could see her. Coincidentally, two hours after I arrived to the orphanage, an American family from Grand Rapids, Michigan happened be visiting the orphanage. They had four kids who were grown, it was a married couple. They weren't planning to adopt, but then they randomly just found me when the mother of the family had to go to the bathroom. And in the moment that she saw me, she thought I was a doll and my head moved then she touched my forehead and she heard a voice say, this is your daughter. And so my parents adopted me in that moment. And then we lived in the Congo until I was nearly 4 years old. I ended up becoming this very healthy child and miraculously was healed from all the diseases that I had without medical care and my parents wanted me to have an American education so we moved to the US. And, you know, growing up, I felt so different because of my exterior identity. I grew up in a very homogenous area where I was the only black female in my graduating class of 500 students. And so I felt like because I had already so many identities that made me feel so different, I was keeping it a secret that I identify in the LGBTQ community and that I'm queer. And I kept it a secret until I was 28 years old and it wasn't then, you know, being able to come out and fully embrace all aspects of who I am that then led me to my career in diversity, equity and inclusion work.

- I love that. It's such a powerful story on so many levels and I know we're gonna talk more about that transition into diversity, equity and inclusion. Before I come back to your story, I just want to acknowledge and thank you for bringing

us back to, it had not sparked in my mind yet of what pride felt like last year. And I remember it was important for us at Hummingbird last year to find the balance between honoring the LGBTQ+ community while continuing to amplify and champion for, we need to do better for the black community in the United States. And like so many, I'm grateful. I'm saddened about the tragic murder of George Floyd. He didn't have to die and I also think his death has changed the world and has sparked conversation and action that we so need to take and need to continue to take. We've come a long way, we have a long way to go and, but then with that action and progress, you're right, I think it feels like, and with the world opening up or at least in the United States, I want to acknowledge that there are certainly still countries that are really tragically battling the pandemic and have had some sort of tragic losses, which is true here for the United States. We're also returning to regular life and so there's a lot for us to celebrate as humanity finds a way to move forward and to do better and to persevere. And I think that sounds like, that's a bit of your story, right, of, life finds a way and your mom found her way to you and you became part of a beautiful new family. Which I'm just gonna do a quick plug here 'cause I have to. Today we are, I think, you know this Graci, I don't remember if I told you, that Hummingbird Humanity is announcing our first, the launch of our first children's book, which comes out next month.

- That's so great.

- Yeah, and actually a key theme from that book is love is what makes a family. And the book and the message in the book is all about all the different kinds of families that exist and that every family is different, it's called "My Grownups" And it's written by my sister's future wife, the amazing Kate Costigan. So we're announcing it today as a part of Pride Month. And I think your story is very much about love is what makes a family.

- I love that, yes, it is, I love that. And congratulations, it's so important, you know, especially at a young age, that we have that exposure, that we have that awareness, that we have these resources. So that we don't have to be like me and wait till we're 28 years old to finally tap into our queer selves that are, you know, family structures that aren't necessarily, you know, the family structures that we've seen in the 60s and 70s and 80s, but really that we have this new modern family.

- Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So that's, and it is about the modern family and the story also depicts of people from all different backgrounds. And I really love that. The characters in the story are inspired by real people that have been part of Kate's life, which I also love. So we're gonna talk more about that in July, on July 20th, we have our Hummingbird Hour launch event. So you'll, so everyone please join and you can meet Kate and Sarah Kay Turner, who's also a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The amazing illustrator, Sarah. And we're gonna have a conversation about that book. But back to Graci, because, so thank you for letting me have a moment of joy about the book. I'm so excited to see it coming to life because just like what you just shared, Graci, is I've been really moved by the children's books that tell stories that expand our thinking about what a family looks like and about our different identities. And I don't know for you, you know, when I when I had a chance to hear Marley Dias talk about, as a kid, I don't know if you know Marley Dias, she's the founder of "1000 Black Girl" Books and she found that when she was a kid, she didn't have books, children's books, that had characters that looked like her. And she said, well I shouldn't have characters that look like me. And so should my other black and brown friends. Does that, do you have memories of books that represented you as a kid?

- Very few, I remember my mom, so my family is white. So I'm the only one in my immediate family that is adopted and also the only one who is black and who is African. And so my mom always made it a point to try to find books that had characters that essentially were non-white characters, because it was so hard even to find, you know, characters that were black. So she would hope for, or seek any other character that was an ethnicity that wasn't white. And every, I

don't know, at such a young age, I just remember thinking, oh cool, if this character is doing something, like I can kind of see myself doing that. I don't know and it's like we achieve what we can see. And so it's so important and so crucial too, that we have that representation in our books and in our media and in our surroundings because especially for kids, that they pay attention and they're so in tuned to that.

- Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So let's recap. You have quite a few identities that would fall in what we might call in our work as DEI thresholds. As individuals who can feel like others. So you're a woman, or marginalized in a underrepresented community. So you're a woman, you identify as black, you're an immigrant, you're queer and you're adopted. Did I miss anything?

- All the things, yeah, you got it, you got it.

- All the things. How have those experiences shaped you as a human?

- Oh my goodness. You know, I think that's such a multifaceted question. There were so many times because I felt othered and because I felt so different, just from literally everyone in my life. I tried to minimize my identities and I didn't talk about being adopted, I didn't talk about being African, I didn't talk about moving here, I didn't talk about having to learn English. You know, there were all of these things that I didn't talk about. Obviously, I certainly wasn't gonna talk about being queer because I felt like, oh, that was just too much. You know and the realization hit me where this was, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago, and I was at a local gay bar and it was a Friday after work. And, you know, I was just exhausted and I was, keep in mind I was not out at this time, and I'm sitting at the bar by myself I'm like, oh, you know, and this guy sitting next to me and I'm like, oh, thank God it's Friday, right? And, you know, he was in his space and he was having some sort of a day too and didn't know really anything about me. And he says, you know some derogatory things towards me and he was like and you don't even know, and I don't even know why you're at a gay bar and you don't belong here and you're just this rich bitch and you have all of these things, pardon my language. And I looked at him and at first I was so offended, like how dare he, you know, categorize me as all of these things that I'm not. And then it dawned on me I'm like, I haven't shown myself. He was saying all of these projections on me based on what his perception of me was, not based on the reality of who I was. And so it was at that moment, that day where I realized the importance of sharing my story and sharing my identities and being proud of my identities and not hiding them. Now, I thought that hiding my identities was like this safety net, but really hiding the identities of who I am just gave people the wrong impression. And I wasn't able to actually have authentic, real connections with people because they were getting this different image of who I was. And so when I finally was able to share who I was and those identities, then I was able to connect with people in this deeper way where other people realized, one, that they weren't alone and two, that they had support. That they had somebody else who actually saw them and it's, I haven't looked back since. You know, ever since that day, it's been like, all right, I just need to be open, you know, you need to be vulnerable, you need to show yourself. And sometimes it is, it does get a little scary. You know, there are some situations where, you know, I have moments where people might not accept who I am but those are also not people that I need to have in my life.

- Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And so, so much of what, even though we look different and we clearly are different humans in so many different ways, the messages still resonate. And that, one of our philosophies at Hummingbird is, a shared humanity, individual experiences. And so, you know, even though our experiences are very much individual, we have a shared humanity in that. And when people, when they first see me, they'll say, he's probably a straight-cis-white guy and we'll come with all of the, and I know lots of great guys who are straight and cis and white guys who wanna do

right by the world and make the world a better place. But then they're like, why is this person in the room talking about diversity and inclusion? And I, then I talk about my experiences with mental illness or being HIV positive or being as a gay man and all of a sudden their perspective changes but unless you know the rest of the story, those first impressions can lead us astray and often do lead us astray. And you know, the other thing, I had to look up your post this morning. I love the messages you wrote, the message you wrote with your post for today's event. It was so beautiful and I know you and I are both huge fans of Brene Brown and what you just shared reminded me of a quote you shared in the post. "True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are, it requires you to be who you are." That's the incomparable Brene Brown. Yes, yes, lobster That's how you found yourself, right? I just have to be okay being me.

- Yeah, you know, when I was hiding all of those aspects of my identities, it was because I was living for other people. I was living for the acceptance of others, that I would meet their expectations. And that that acceptance would give me belonging and I never got it. And I kept searching and I kept searching and I kept searching and I kept, you know, and as I was searching for others acceptance, I was losing who I was. To the point where like, I almost didn't even know me, you know. And when I read Brene Brown's "Braving the Wilderness" Which is one of my favorite books of all time, I highly recommend it. And in that, in the book, she references that quote. And I realized, you know that in my journey of finally, you know, just accepting myself, I no longer was seeking belonging from others. I already had it internally and that's what true belonging is. Is being who you are, belonging to yourself fully, not trying to give yourself to this group and this group and this group and this group just to gain their approval. That's finicky, that will blow away with the wind, but when we are true to ourselves, that sound. You know, the sun rises and sets with us. So it's so vital that we accept who we are, not for others, but for us. And I know that journey, for me that journey was a process and it took a long time. And when I finally got that and really to, in coming out and not just being okay with who I was, but being proud of who I was. When I was able to accept who I was internally, that made me accept all of my other identities and how I show up externally. And so really, it was this transformation from the inside out that then when I was out and proud, then I was also proud of my African identities. I was also proud to be black. I was also proud to be a female and in corporate America, instead of feeling like I was stigmatized or marginalized, and that, you know, that internal acceptance and that true belonging literally changed my life and working in the diversity and equity and inclusion space, I realized that we have so much conflict and so much strife because people aren't valuing other people. And also, you know that leads me to Brene brown and in "Braving the Wilderness" Another quote of mine that I love is that "people are hard to hate close up, move in" When we move in and we allow ourselves to be able to see others and to value others. And that allows us to minimize the hate and the discrimination. And it's so powerful that we accept ourselves and that, so that we can see others.

- "People are hard to hate close up, move in." I love that, I love that, powerful. And it reminds me of the corollary phrase or a concept, we might talk about there is fear. Fear drives so much negativity and actually is a, a root of hate and wait just, and this is where, you know, I go back to the shared humanity individual experiences of, just get to know the person. You don't have to agree on everything, I don't agree on everything with the people I love the most. Like that's not the way that humans work, but respecting each other and understanding each other that is a way to overcome the fear of the unknown and to dispel with some of the hate that exists today. And you know, I think the other part of this that remind, and I'm hearing this so much in what you're sharing and would love to hear, you know, as I say this, a lot of this, if this resonates for you is, when I share in workshops, I talk about how, the things you're gonna see first about me are that I, well, if you're in a room with me you're gonna know that I'm six foot, six inches tall 'cause I'm a really tall human and that I'm a white man that you're probably going to guess that I'm cisgender, you may or may not guess whether I'm straight or gay but those are the things you're gonna figure out first. The things that I think are actually more compelling about who I am, are my love of my family, my battles with mental illness and with HIV and my journey and sobriety. And, you know, those things are much more, you know, my love of Bosco. I know you have a dog, that's your, is your family too. Who's also in all of your social media, because that's another version of love, is what makes a family. And our four legged friends are members of our family in very real ways. And like, those are the parts of me, that

collect snowmen. 'Cause I like to collect snowmen, 'cause that makes people smile. And I, and so I find joy in the fact that people smile and just like you did every time I talk about the facts that I collect snowmen, those are the things you wouldn't see unless I shared them with you. And those are the things that, those are the parts of me that guide me, that fuel me, that lead me to do this work which is the hardest work that I've done in my career. And I wouldn't change it for the world because I love that I get to make the world a better place. And so someone, you know, who might not take the time to get to know the rest of my story, they might leave with a different impression of who I am. And so that leaning in to say, hey, let me understand a little bit more about you. And I always tell people when I do workshops as well, I'm not in the space to make you, and I agree, like that's not what I'm here for. I'm here so we can learn from each other. So let's do that. Does that resonate for you as well? I see you you're nodding yes, so I'm guessing it does.

- Yes, a hundred percent. And my goal too, you know, with my workshops, again, like yours, my goal is not for us to agree. My goal is for us to start thinking in ways that we hadn't thought before and to take, for us to get in the habit of taking one step outside of our discomfort, you know, to get over that fear or at least to confront that fear so that we can open up and grow and see things in a new light and a new perspective and see people in a way that we hadn't before.

- Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So we're now talking about the work that we get to do, and I intentionally use that phrase 'cause I, and that word get. I feel like I get to do this work. And one of the reasons I say that is because I, like I don't, some people don't get to wake up and say, I look forward to what I get to do for work today and I do genuinely enjoy this work, as hard as it can be at times and as emotional and emotionally draining it can be at times, I'm so grateful that I get to do this work. I also realized that for me to be able to do this work, people have to let me into spaces. They have to choose to trust me. They have to choose to say, this is someone who can help this conversation. And so I'm just always so grateful. You have a really beautiful story of how, how this, you know, how sharing your identity as a queer person and how that happened in your journey and then how that led you to the work that you do today. Would you share that story with us?

- Yeah, definitely, excuse me. So it was June, actually, 2013, Pride Month. And I had an interview for a tech company and in the interview, and one thing I'll just note that I oftentimes forget to share. When I walked into the office, there was a sign that said Tech System celebrates Pride Month with a big rainbow flag. And I thought, oh, that's cool. That's really cool that they have that. But keep in mind, I was not out at this time. So I'm sitting in the interview and the director had asked me a question. He says, tell me of a time when you had overcome adversity. And so this, the interview, the position I was interviewing for was an HR and recruiting role. And I thought, okay, easy question, easy answer. I could tell him about being adopted and how it felt like, you know, growing up in a very homogenous area and, you know, overcoming adversity in terms of like, my physical exterior identities. But for some reason, I just felt like that was a cop out. And that really wasn't the answer of overcoming adversity because really I was just playing a role. You know, I didn't feel like I had really overcome anything. And so I told him, I said, I'm overcoming adversity right now in this moment. I've been making up stories of fake boyfriends for the last 10 years, but the truth is I never had a boyfriend and I identify as gay and I am queer. And then I remembered, you know, it was an interview and the words just kind of spewed out like word vomit. And his response to me changed my life. You know, there was this pause and I'm like, oh no, I'm either gonna get this job because of this answer or I'm not gonna get this job because of this answer. And his response to me was that he was proud that I could be my authentic self with him. And then if I worked there, he saw leadership opportunities in me to help other people be their authentic selves, because he would never want anyone to show up in the workplace feeling like they couldn't be themselves. And it was like, oh my goodness. You know, it was like the magic words I had longed to hear for my entire life. That validation and just that permission to just be me and not to be something that I wasn't. And so, yeah, I got the job and was fast tracked into a diversity and inclusion position where I had mentors and sponsors. And I was in this leadership development program for a year to help equip me to all of the things, diversity, equity and inclusion related and how to work with, you know, fortune 500 to fortune one companies,

how to build strategy, how to build workshops, how to facilitate. And it was, you know, and I love that you say also, you know, the work that we get to do and that's how I feel as well, is that I felt like I was called to do this. Like, oh there's a job where I can help people live and work more authentically. And I can help teams collaborate and communicate and work stronger together by them simply showing up as who they are and valuing and seeing one another for who they are and for their strengths and seeing those identities as strengths and not stigmas. That's a job that yes, I would love to do it. And so it kind of just, you know, fell on my lap. I never thought, oh, I'm gonna grow up and go into diversity, equity and inclusion. I mean, I didn't even really know what that meant when I was younger and even in college, you know, there was some classes on it but it wasn't like, it wasn't a major, it wasn't a full discipline. And it was my coming out journey and my coming out way that propelled me to do this work.

- You are, I feel like you're channeling Ben Green who's with us in the attendee space or maybe vice versa, Ben Green has been channeling you. He, when Ben talks about and Ben, since you're with us and I'm gonna talk about you, can you put it in your valuing link in the chat for us so everyone can see your TEDx Talk and just for full clarity for everyone watching and listening, Graci and I, who are on the screen today, do not have TEDx Talks but we will someday and we're all gonna have books. So we endeavor to be as fantastic as Ben Green, but Ben yeah, absolutely. And Ben is a phenomenal human and a member of the Hummingbird team. He's also an openly transgender man and an educator and he did a TEDx Talk to help others understand his lived experience. And so I think in the spirit of Pride Month, like we wanna celebrate all aspects of the community. And so definitely take a look at, at Ben's TEDx when you get a chance. You know, speaking of that though, Graci, you know, I, I think that's an important message that, you know I remember, when was it? A couple of years, two or three years ago I was working with a pride group at tapestry. And which was, for those of you who may not have heard that name before, it's the home of coach Kate Spade and Stuart Weitzman. And that group, the pride committee was predominantly comprised of members, people of color who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. There was an individual in the group who was, who identifies as transgender, an individual who identifies as non-binary. So people, and most of them were Gen Y and Gen Z. So people who don't look like me and I was there to help them figure out how we're gonna celebrate pride at tapestry. And I remember this conversation and I don't remember exactly how it opened or how it emerged, but they said, Brian, our experience is that pride tends to center cisgender gay white men. And we need pride to really celebrate the full community. Can we have other faces and other voices represented and other stories represented this year at tapestry. Of course the answer was an easy, yes, let's do that. And we did beautiful things together. And coach did some really beautiful things that year as well. Celebrating the broad spectrum of the community. I'm curious, what's your experience been like that? As a member of, as a woman in the community, as a person of color in the community, what's that journey been like for you, of seeing how the community has made progress there Or still need some work has some work to do?

- Yeah we have so much work to do. I think, you know, I must say, media has helped us come farther. You know, shows like "Orange is the New Black" And having Laverne Cox as one of the main characters as a black transgender woman in the forefront, helped us be familiar, I think and also shows like. "Pose" Which I'm watching right now. I love it so much, has expanded that we are now, you know, we're visualizing and we're thinking about all the letters, you know, the queer identities we're not necessarily thinking of, you know, what the media portrayed it, even in the nineties or two thousands where we would see a gay man was portrayed to be white, cis and flamboyant. And we would see a lesbian portrayed as being also white and more masculine. And I appreciate, and that was, you know, honestly it was kind of one of the things that made me kind of afraid to come out, was that, oh, well, I didn't fit this stereotype. Can I, will I still be accepted with the community? Our own community has work to do. I appreciate that media is helping us move along and helping us expand and truly to be more inclusive, but we need to do so much more work in this community. We put so much focus on, you know, these labels that, these labels mean you must be this image or you must look like this or you must act like this, but really, you know, there isn't a look to being queer or a look to being a LGBTQ and we need to start believing that internally, you know, first ourselves as a community so that allies can also see that.

- Absolutely, and you know, there's something we talked about the other other day about how, how easy it can be to feel like, let me say it differently. I guess it feels like it's right. Like it's happening over there. It's not impacting me. And so getting, and this sort of goes back to that quote you shared earlier from Brene Brown, of is, get up close and get up close and get to know the person and understand what's actually happening to real individuals in the real communities that look different than you and. "Pose" I know, I cannot say that I've watched. "Orange is the New Black" I've heard amazing things. And I did get to sit next to, oh my goodness. I'll have to see if I can look up her name. One of the actresses from. "Orange is the New Black" She sat next to me when I was watching the preview of. "Be More Chill" On Broadway. So, my sister was with me and she's a huge "Orange is the New Black" Fan and she's like, oh my goodness. So I'll look her up in just a moment. But, you know, I think the, you know, those, but stories like "Pose" And. "Oranges is the New Black" Are still, you know, we can call them out or identify them because they're the exception and not the rule, of stories that are representing broad communities. And for us to be able to be allies, it helps us to understand, like when I wanna be an ally for communities of color and for women. So how do I get closer to those stories? And one of the ways I do that is by having great conversations like this and of course you and I have had conversations that weren't live with everyone. And, but how would, how do you encourage colleagues and friends and clients and employees and the people you get to work with and spend time with, how do you, what are the things you would say would be helpful for them to become allies and to still expand their perspective on the world?

- You know, I do the same thing myself, is just taking time to educate ourselves. I'm a huge fan of, you know, documentaries are great, you know, yes, I love reading as well. Podcasts are wonderful, but for us to be an ally, you know, being an ally is about listening and listening is also, that's about learning and showing up and speaking out and for us, and for me, you know, to be an ally, I need to ensure that I am aware, that and listening to the right types of dialogue, the right conversation, the right content, so that I can understand. And I do the same thing with, you know understanding journeys of folks who are non-binary. You know, when I was younger, I had no idea what that meant. And so, what it took was me taking those steps to understand, to learn, you know, we do the same thing like, when something new happens, when there's a new phenomenon with, in our world and our society or we're hearing about something on the news, we are so quick to do our due diligence where we get on our phone and we research things and we learned about it. We need to do the same thing when it comes to the queer communities as well, or other identities if we're not as familiar in order for us to be an ally, we need to learn, learn their journeys, learn their stories. And, you know, I'm grateful for, you know, the media too, right now, FX has a really great documentary series called "Pride" And it's six short films essentially on the history of pride in the LGBTQ community. And it's amazing and it goes through different decades, you know, decades by decades. And it's wonderful. There are also some HBO documentaries on transgender communities that I absolutely love and have learned so much about. And also, you know, I spend time with people who have a different journey than me. And I spend time with my trans and non-binary friends, to learn about their experiences. It's not, you know, to poke and prod and ask inappropriate things. But just to understand, you know, their day to day, just how I want people, you know, who are not black or not people of color. I want them to be allies for me. And, you know, my black identity, I need to be allies for others, for their identities as well. And it doesn't take much, we already know the tools. We already know how to research. We already know how to read the books and to watch the movies. And we just need to show up. We need to show up for them and speak up, so that when we see injustices happening, that we can speak out and not turn a blind eye and you know allyship is so important. It wasn't the people in my life who identified as queer that help support me on my journey. It was straight allies, straight allies were my biggest supporters and my biggest help and helping me be comfortable as me. It wasn't the queer community. And so that's just goes to show how important allyship is, that we show up for one another, especially people who have a different journey or a different background than we do

- The actress, her name is Dale Soules, she plays a Big Frieda in "Orange is the New Black" So I had to look it up.

- So cool.

- Yeah, so it was great to sit next to her and going back to what you just shared. So many powerful messages there of, one of my phrase, the phrases I like to say to, say to leaders and challenge to leaders is, to remember that listening is an action. I feel like we, so much of what we teach leaders and I've been one of those leaders. So this is also advice for me, that I try to listen to was, is you must solve the puzzle. You must take action. You must have things you need to share. You must have wisdom to impart. There's all of these things that we absorb as leaders that we should do. And actually, and some of that's true and some of it's helpful and sometimes it's so, sometimes it's the right answer in the right context. But what we've forgot to share is, and sometimes listening is an action and asking questions is an action, is an important action and asking someone else to help you understand or expand your perspective on something is a powerful step to take and inviting other voices to the conversation is critical. And, you know, and I invite my team to, and the colleagues that I get to work with, I say, I actively want your voices and your challenges and your participation. And if I forget, raise your hand and remind me, say, hey Brian, I think you're off course here. And just cause, 'cause I know that I still might default to some of those things that I'm still working to unlearn. And I know that I need those other voices because my responsibility is to be an advocate and an ally and occasionally an accomplice for others to make the world a better place. And that means I need to listen. I need to learn, I need to understand. And I need to take action when those moments arise and being a bystander doesn't cut it for me anymore. Like I have to, when something's gotta be said, I got to say it. And that means it might be uncomfortable. Now I try to do it in ways that are respectful, that invite people to the conversation. But that's not always easy either. And, but I got it, but that's what I'm here to do. So I know that you get to be in lots of spaces where you're helping to change hearts and minds. And I'm curious, what are the things that you're finding as you're working in the DEI space or with your clients, what are the topics and questions that are emerging the most or the needs that are emerging the most?

- Well, honestly it centers on what we're just talking about, is what can I do? Is a question that keeps coming up almost every day or how can I be an ally? And you know, one thing I wanna share with you, my dad had cancer. I've never had cancer. I didn't know exactly everything that he was feeling, everything that he was thinking, everything that he was going through. And it wasn't my job as he was in the hospital getting chemotherapy. It wasn't my role to ask him how terrible it felt or how sick he felt. It wasn't my role to ask him to relive his trauma as he was living the trauma. And I wanna frame this in the context of where we're at in society, oftentimes, especially with, you know, where we're at with, you know, post George Floyd's murder. Systemically, everything that the black community has been experiencing for hundreds of years. Everything that we're seeing that our Asian community has been experiencing, especially over the past year and a half, with hate crimes doubling in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. And then we also have, you know, the conflict with Israel and Palestine, our job, even though if we don't identify in those spaces, our job is not to ask them to relive their trauma as they're living their trauma. Our job is to show up for them. So for my dad, I didn't ask him about how terrible he felt. I just sat next to him and that when he felt too ill in the hospital to speak, I advocated for him. I would say to the nurse, can we get a blanket? Can we have some pain meds? Because I would pay attention to his body language. I would pay attention to the cues to assess what he needed and be his voice. And during those times, my voice carried further than his voice did. And that's how we need to look at people in these situations, as well. Is to be able to use our voice and to speak up for others because the voices of allies are going to carry even further than the voices of those who are living the trauma or who are being marginalized. And I never once had to say, dad, what do you need? I just paid attention, I spent time with him. I anticipated what he'd need. I'd bring him something, you know, I'd bring him a game. I bring him something to distract himself. I would, I also did do, I did research on, you know, looking up symptoms or side effects of chemotherapy to guess what he went through, but I didn't want him to live through more trauma when he was already going through so much. It's just about showing up and being a voice. My dad is now great, he's in great health. He has been cancer-free for over 10 years but I didn't have to go through, I didn't have to

have cancer to know what his needs were. We don't have to be a member of the LGBTQ community in order to show up and be an ally for somebody and to know what their needs are. We just have to pay attention. We don't have to be a person of color to show up and to be an ally. We just have to spend time, we have to be present. And if I could have any, you know, give any takeaways for any, for those on our call. Be present and use your voice, your voice is powerful. Your voice also was a privilege. Use that privilege as a tool for good and as an opportunity to empower others. If each person did that, our world would be a much different, much better, more equitable inclusive place.

- I'm intentionally pausing because that was powerful. Thank you, thank you.

- Thank you.

- There was a comment in the chat that said great analogy and what I really, there's so much that I appreciate about what you've just shared and what you've just challenged us all to do as, you know, to take accountability and responsibility for showing up, for learning, to not depend on the person we wanna be an ally for, to teach us to find other ways to learn and to access that information, whether it's researching online or watching a show or reading a book, or you know, we're in an information age where we can access information so readily and so quickly and then take action. And sometimes, that taking action is just to be present and to let someone be wherever they need to be and to be quiet. And to say I'm here for you or you're safe here. And I think that's such a powerful message. The analogy in particular though, I like because, cancer, if you, and I've also, my mom also battled cancer. And so it's a, and fortunately is also healthy and doing well today and I'm glad that your dad is as well, but it's, you're right, it's a journey that I didn't know anything about. Like others, other people got cancer and it wasn't something that impacted me in such a powerful way. And I knew it was, you know, hard. And now I've seen my mom go through that and figuring out how to show up for her and what that looked like was a journey. And it's a journey that we can all connect with in a different way. 'Cause it's not, we don't put that in the same bucket as a different race or ethnicity in our minds. But the reality is, it's all just a lived experience. And some lived experiences create more challenges than others because of the way that that what happens to us or what happens in the world around us. And so, just taking the time to say, you know what? I can be part of this in a way that might be helpful. I might be able my people to make this person's life or day easier or better.

- A hundred percent, definitely.

- So, wow, I don't know where we go from there 'cause that was super powerful. I feel like you just did the mic drop moment there, Graci, lets, but you know, as we wrap up, you know, and we have we have a few more minutes left. And of course, if anyone is with us and has a question, feel free to ask questions in the chat. I know one of the, like you, and I talked the other day about how we stay relevant on current information and topics and who we follow. And I know that you and I are both, as well as Brene Brown, we're both Glennon Doyle fans. So I would love, if you could share why you love Glennon Doyle and also what are some of the other ways that you stay up to speed and relevant on, like on the things happening in the world today.

- Oh yeah, thank you. You know, Glennon Doyle, so I love her book "Untamed" I read it last year, shortly after it came out. And you know, one thing that I appreciate about her style is just, I felt very connected with her in terms of our backgrounds, even though I've never been married to a man, I did grow up in a very traditional household where, you know, it was the mindset of when you grow up you're going to marry a man and you're gonna have children and you're gonna follow these footsteps that have been laid out before you. And what I appreciate about Glennon is, she broke

away from that and that she discovered herself and her authenticity. And so I felt this strong connection with her and her journey. And as I was writing my memoir, I was reading "Untamed" And which are lots of, it's a memoir where she's sharing lots of aspects about her life and her journey. And so, yeah, in staying relevant, I listen to podcasts that Glennon Doyle has. I also listen to Laverne Cox podcast. I've been big into podcasts lately. And what keeps me grounded is, and relevant is, keeping up to date on other people's journeys, others experiences, especially others who have an identity that that's different than mine, so that I can relate so I can understand. So when I'm engaged with conversations with folks who may be of those identities, that I can begin to get it. And I don't want people to think, okay, we have to understand every single thing about every single identity we're not going to. But what matters is that we try and that we listen and that we understand and that we show up. We don't have to be the experts but we can show up. And it's so powerful. And it, you know one thing that resonates with me as well, you know, a quote that really is standing out to me right now, is I know what as I'm talking about this, sometimes people will think, well, I don't know what to say or I don't wanna say the wrong thing. It's okay, we're humans. We're probably gonna say the wrong thing at one point or another, but that's all right. It's about, if we do say the wrong thing, acknowledge it and continue on. And the quote that really stands out to me is from my Angela, what she says. "People are not going to remember the things that you did. They're not going to remember the exact things that you said, they will remember how you made them feel" And it's all about where your heart lies, where your attention is, because what's in your heart will come out. And when you have good intentions and when your heart is in a good place, that will exude. And that's what people will gain from. They're not gonna care about the specific words that you say, they're gonna care about how you care.

- Those are powerful words from Maya Angelou. "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. People will remember how you made them feel." I'm sure, I think I had that backwards but they're still powerful words. But we don't have to be perfect that's the whole point, right. And it's such an important message and you're right, we will make mistakes. Sometimes I like to introduce myself or just joke that I'm human and I'm inherently flawed. Like that's just the way that we're built and I can also be continuously trying to learn and do better and that's okay too. And allowing, just giving each other grace that we're just, we're all just doing our best and some days, this is where, well, one, I love that you're a huge fan of quotes. We're gonna have to have a separate conversation about quotes, love quotes. And actually with my book, there's quotes are gonna play a thematic role in sort of sparking different reflections throughout the book. So, maybe I'll have to borrow from some of your favorite quotes as well. In addition to make sure that you're quoted 'cause that's gonna happen too.

- I love that, that's great.

- Yeah, and you know, I think it's, you know, it's it's such an important, you know, conversation for us to just think about, of like how do we allow people to be human? And in the book. "The Four Agreements" Which is one of my favorite messages. One of the things that talks about is, one of the messages is, is that we're all just doing the best we can. And so sometimes your best isn't very good. And sometimes you're gonna knock it out of the park but give yourself grace and then do the same for others. And sometimes it's easier to do that for others. In my book, I sort of hold myself to high standards that are often unrealistic. So that's the bit I'm working on, just giving myself grace as well. Well, we're at the final few minutes, I'm gonna ask you to share some final words here in a moment. And just for those of you who are with us and watching and listening. I wanna just highlight some of the upcoming Hummingbird Hour events we have, next week we have Julia Hamilton and Natasha Porizkova. They're going to be joining us to have a conversation about how we can support queer women and the community as a whole as well specifically in our workplace. So how do we amplify queer women. On the, so that's on June 8th, on June 15th, Ben Green, who's with us today and Bryce Salado who are both openly transgender men, are going to talk about beyond pronouns, so, you know, that conversation is gonna highlight how, yes, sharing your pronouns as a person who is a safe person for those who live outside of the gender binary in one way or another is a great step and then what do we do next? What happens beyond pronouns? So

I'm excited about both of those conversations. And then we have a provocatively titled event on June 29th called LGBTQ+ Pride, it's not inclusive. And that will feature Andre Herring and JD Valladares-Williams, who will, who are both queer men of color, who are going to talk about a bit about what we talked about earlier in this conversation of how pride has so much over the years. And still, I think in their experience has, is really centers cisgender gay white men and how we need to do better in supporting the rest of the community. And that message has actually been really a central theme behind our programming for pride this year at Hummingbird, is how do we elevate and amplify voices of others in the community. So I'm so glad that Graci joined us today as the kickoff for those conversations. So Graci, as we wrap up, would you like to share any final words or thoughts or words of wisdom or hope or what is your, what is coming up for you here?

- Yeah, thank you so much. So my parting words are that inclusive, equitable environments allow us to be our authentic selves and to have the opportunity to reach our potential. If we can't show up as who we are, we're missing out on our purpose and who we are supposed to be. So be you be.

- Be you, just be you. Graci, this was such a pleasure. I'm delighted that I get to know you. I'm delighted that I get to learn from you. I'm delighted that I started following you on LinkedIn and reached out, 'cause now I get to have another beautiful human in my life. And thank you for sharing your stories and your words and your messages and your insights. Such a powerful conversation, so thank you so much.

- Thank you Brian. I really appreciate it, thank you so much. Ben, thanks for all of your technical support and for all of those tuning in. Thank you, thanks for being here. You are powerful, your words are powerful, don't forget that. Be a voice for yourself and also be a voice for others.

- Be a voice for yourself and be a voice for others. Great words to wrap up with. Thanks everyone, stay safe and be well, we'll see you soon.

- Bye.