

Speaker 0 00:00:00 I'm on the apps like a lot of us. And yeah, I was looking, you know, scrolling through, I was like, he's kind of cute and the person happened to be Chinese. I thought he was kind of cute and I was interested. So I message, "Hey, how's it going?" And then he messages back, "oh, not into Black guys, sorry, just a preference." And my immediate knee-jerk reaction was, yeah, a lot of Chinese guys just aren't into Black men. And then I remember thinking, huh, well you just used a massive broad brush, on an entire group of people. And that's where I go back to empathy, actively listening, questioning.

Speaker 2 00:00:34 I'm Jade Pichette, They/Them.

Speaker 3 00:00:36 And I'm Erin Davis. And I use the pronouns She and Her

Speaker 2 00:00:39 Welcome to Uncovering Belonging,

Speaker 3 00:00:42 A podcast that explores the professional and personal stories of unique voices of what it means to belong

Speaker 2 00:00:47 And the journey to finding our authentic self. Erin. I am so excited today to introduce you to Jefferson Darrell (He/Him), the founder and CEO of Breakfast Culture.

Speaker 3 00:01:00 I'm excited as well because Jefferson and I had the opportunity to connect and get to know each other a little bit. And so I'm excited to do a bit of a deeper dive.

Speaker 2 00:01:11 Yeah, definitely. I met Jefferson early in the pandemic, online, when private work Canada was trying to pivot to really try and find enough virtual content because we had been doing so much in person. And so Jefferson was one of the people I got introduced to very early on because of his background in diversity, equity and inclusion work, as well as his specific knowledge in terms of how you do that in a marketing context. And so his marketing background and so he did a really, really amazing webinar for us called "Woke Marketing: Rainbow Edition" that our partners loved. He's also become our Anti-Black racism action plan consultant and he's become one of the people that I really value and admire in my network. And so I'm so excited to introduce you today to Jefferson and just like myself is calling in from Tkaronto or Toronto today. And so welcome Jefferson.

Speaker 0 00:02:06 Thank you Jade. Happy to be here.

Speaker 3 00:02:12 This is Erin and I'm recording this after the fact to provide our listeners with a content note and let you know in advance that throughout the conversation Jefferson shares experiences of suicidal ideation as well as Anti-Black racism. We wanted to take a quick pause and encourage you to check in with yourself so that you can decide whether this is content you're able to engage with at this moment before listening on. Tell us a little bit about your story. How did you get into this work?

Speaker 0 00:02:42 Thank you Erin. Happy to share my story. It's funny, I often hear how did you get into this line of work? And I can't speak for everyone obviously, but I suspect a lot of people who listen to this. But I think we're always, always just doing this because we have to for our own survival. Mm-hmm <affirmative> <affirmative> for me specifically, part of it was my own life experience, lived experiences working within an organization when there was quite a bit of um, racism, specifically Anti-Black racism. And through that I also found out about some of the gender discrimination that was happening there. Homophobia that was happening there as well. And I end up becoming this go-to voice for the marginalized peoples in the workplace.

Speaker 3 00:03:21 Tell me more about that.

Speaker 0 00:03:28 So I spent eight years in this organization. I always say I spent seven years too long. It was not a good time for me. I was extremely depressed, frankly to the point of I felt suicidal Sunday morning at 3:00 AM was always the worst. I would literally wake up in a cold sweat, dreaded going into work the next day that said, when I say suicidal, I need to qualify this. Um, I was in therapy for about three or four years and I was going through all of this. My therapist kept asking me, do you have a plan to take your own life? To be clear, I did not have a plan to take my own life. I felt more hopeless than helpless. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, behavioral psychologist Will Smith, not Will Smith <laugh>, but the psychologist Will Smith, he actually did a study on this, he called it Racial Battle Fatigue or RBF.

Speaker 0 00:04:15 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And it talks about the physical, mental and emotional impact that racism, especially systemic racism, but racism period can have on racialized peoples within the workplace. And I was a very much a textbook of example of that and it was a horrible, horrible dark time in my life. And I realized I don't want anyone else to have to go through what I went through. And that's one of the

reasons why I got into this work cuz I'm very much, you know what if I'm gonna complain about something, let me come to the table with a solution. And I took all my learning and my experience and I put it into um, Breakfast Culture.

Speaker 3 00:04:49 So maybe a bit of a follow up Jefferson, you kind of at the beginning of your story shared this, I would say sense of exclusion in the role that you were doing, right? And have you found a greater sense of belonging now that you have this organization and you get to dive into this work every single day?

Speaker 0 00:05:08 Um, there's that old saying that when we don't get a seat at the table, we'll often leave and make our own tables. And that's basically what I've done.

Speaker 3 00:05:16 I hear that

Speaker 0 00:05:17 No without its own challenges because I operated at a C-suite level, but I was never given the title and I was never given the compensation that goes with that. Right. So I never received that golden parachute to start my own business. I'm bootstrapping it all myself.

Speaker 3 00:05:33 Totally.

Speaker 0 00:05:35 Um, it's funny, I received a really good piece of advice when I first started my company. I make sure you partner with people whose values align with yours. And that's something we do look for. And if anyone you're thinking of partnering with their values don't align with yours, no matter how attractive that partnership looks, don't partner with them because it's not going to end well.

Speaker 3 00:05:54 Yeah. And you're also speaking to, to not only sort of the words on the paper but also living those values every single day, right?

Speaker 0 00:06:03 Oh,

Speaker 3 00:06:04 Exactly. It's kind of exciting when you think about it from the perspective of like, okay, I get to start from a place of what's gonna work for me so I have this sense of belonging and how can I bring other people into this space so they can have that sense of belonging rather than the opposite of try to fit yourself into this system.

Speaker 0 00:06:24 That's one of the three "Be's" of what we call our um, well marketing offering. "Be authentic" to your brand. If it doesn't make sense for your brand, that's okay. You're not necessarily gonna speak to everybody and if it doesn't make

sense for your brand, don't try to fit yourself in, as you said where it doesn't make sense.

Speaker 3 00:06:38 Absolutely.

Speaker 0 00:06:39 Um, the other “two Be’s” are “be present” and “be prepared.” Well that's for another discussion.

Speaker 3 00:06:44 <laugh>, I suspect they might weave themselves into our dialogue. I'm gonna turn it over to Jade and give them the opportunity to dive a bit deeper.

Speaker 2 00:06:52 Thank you Erin. I appreciate the depth of vulnerability and many pieces that connect to some of my own histories of a previous workplace. And this quote really stuck in my head, the James Baldwin quote of “the place in which outfit will not exist until I make it.”

Speaker 3 00:07:09 Exactly,

Speaker 2 00:07:10 At least for the three of us. We've had to go outside of um, traditional spaces to create that space for ourselves. But we're helping and trying to create that space for others. So what are some of the barriers that you see in terms of actually bringing that space from these consulting spaces, nonprofit spaces to a space where we can actually see people who look like us who have the similar experiences as us?

Speaker 0 00:07:39 I find one of the biggest barriers is I have a lot of clients approach Breakfast Culture with a solution already. Hmm. They've already made the decision of, well we wanna do training versus let's talk to our people first, see what we might want to actually train them. All right.

Speaker 0 00:07:55 So I had one client that came to us in 2020 during the Racial awakening. They skewed heavily with a number of white employees. So just anecdotally observationally, they realized okay, we may have some problems from a systemic racism issue that didn't surprise them and that came out in the data. But what also came out in the data, which completely surprised them, was 40% of their staff had hidden disabilities and they were just gobsmack. They're like, wow, we had no idea. Eh. The other piece that came out was, um, majority of their um, employees were under the age of 35 and anyone over the age of 35 felt like, oh, so you're giving me the “hey boomer.”

So when it comes to training now based on that data from what their people actually told them, it actually informed the training. So in addition to racism training, there needed to be ageism training, there needed to ability training, they needed to review their policies, their accessibility in terms of the overall organization. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So that's where I say as I find that's a barrier cuz a lot of times I have clients reach out to Breakfast Culture and they just wanna immediately go to training. Skipping that step, that first initial, let's collect some data.

Speaker 2 00:09:01 I see this so often in the work that I do as well and I've seen Erin nodding as well. It is something that's systemic, right? And I think sometimes it's coming from a place of, well we just need to do something because otherwise we're gonna be perceived as doing nothing. Oh yeah. It really is something that a lot of organizations need to rethink. You know, how do we actually start at the beginning and look at this from an intersectional perspective and recognize that there's no one issue to be able to make a community feel completely included.

Speaker 0 00:09:36 You hit the nail on the head. Our courses are built to build on each other. We start with Diversity and Inclusion in 101, very foundational. Our second course we recommend after that we call it Power and Privilege. That's breakfast cultures approach to unconscious bias training. We flip it and we talk about how we all benefit from forms of privilege. For example, in D&I 101, I do a quick little privilege test where I put up seven very common privileges in North America. I'm sure we can think of them now. Or you male. Are you straight? Are you white? Are you cis? Are you able-bodied? Do you have so economic privilege and were you bought up in the Christian faith at fought an exhaustive list for me as a Black gay man. I score five out of seven on that list. And that's a high score. And this is what I'm saying, we all benefit from some form of privilege. And then that sort of third section of exercises, we break them down. So we call them ally as a verb. We have a racism edition where we just look at white privilege and how white people, men, women, trans, et cetera benefit in today's society. We have a women's edition where we look at male privilege and the patriarchy of misogyny and how men, Black gay trans men even benefit from male privilege in society.

Speaker 2 00:10:43 Definitely.

Speaker 0 00:10:44 And if anyone comes in, well what about, what about, you're right, there are other people who don't have these privileges. The only one who wins when we get into Oppression Olympics is the oppressor. Agreed. And so that's why I always like to tell my clients, I don't care who you are, but before we do ally as a verb, we are doing power and privilege first to help avoid that. What about is a and Oppression Olympics.

Speaker 2 00:11:06 Yeah. That's so important. I know one of the most powerful anti-racism trainings that was like designed by Chanelle Gallant, it was called uh, Beyond White Tears. And she got a lot of support. One of the things that she kept going back to in that was, let's make sure to reaffirm, what about looking at that issue specifically? So when it came to racism, you know, as a white person, I may be a disabled trans femme and I could go on, but what about the experience of a trans femme of color who's disabled in that same experience and really needing to focus on that. So making sure that people have kind of this broader understanding of power, privilege, how it interacts in the world, how we all have privileges but that things can interact differently when those different privileges and oppressions interact. Exactly. So I'm hearing like look at the broader picture, step back and then focus in on specific forms of marginalization. What other things have you seen that work really, really well to make kind of that systemic change?

Speaker 0 00:12:17 Biggest thing I'd say is empathy. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> empathizing with other people's perspectives, number one. Number two, active listening. Hmm. Don't you listen to understand not to counter. And then number three is questioning, like questioning our own biases.

Speaker 2 00:12:34 Right.

Speaker 0 00:12:35 May I share a quick little story? Of course. I'm on the apps like a lot of us and yeah, I was looking, you know, scrolling through, I was like, oh he's kind of cute and the person happened to be Chinese. My thought was kind of cute, name was interested. So I message, "Hey, how's it going?" And then he messages back, "oh not into Black guys, sorry, just a preference." And my immediate knee-jerk reaction was, yeah, a lot of Chinese guys just aren't into Black men. And then I remember thinking, huh, well you just used a massive broad brush, on an entire group of people. And that's

where I go back to empathy, actively listening, questioning. And I thought, you know what? That's a racist thought. Why did I think that? Where did that come from? And learning from it and moving forward. Mm-hmm

Speaker 2 00:13:17 <affirmative>, that initial voice that comes up. I like to describe that as the voice of the oppressor in all of us. But really that second voice, that second moment where you say, oh wait, why did I think that? That's who we truly are though. And so I think there's hope when we take that moment back and um, move beyond it.

Speaker 0 00:13:36 And I don't think we do enough of that in today's society. I think we're just looking at things through our own cultural lens.

Speaker 2 00:13:43 Agreed.

Speaker 0 00:13:44 And that's the part that um, I find is kind of scaring me now.

Speaker 2 00:13:48 Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. There is fear. There is fear that is happening in the world, but there's also hope too.

Speaker 0 00:13:53 And I thank you for that cuz I often forget about the

Speaker 2 00:13:56 Hope. Right. And that's why I still do this work.

Speaker 3 00:13:59 I love that.

Speaker 2 00:14:00 So I'm gonna pass it back over to Erin.

Speaker 3 00:14:03 Thanks Jade. And I'm just uh, sitting here reflecting on all of that hope Jefferson for you. What are we working towards? What are we trying to get to? What does that look like for you?

Speaker 0 00:14:13 Ultimately I think empathy. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> as human beings just empathizing with other people's scenarios and situations. Um, which is often very hard to do. Some of these lessons I've learned personally, case from point 15 years ago is diagnosed with a very rare neurological disorder that left me paralyzed from the waist down. I literally had to relearn how to walk. And it's funny cuz I started seeing how people treated me when I had these mobility issues and it really taught me a lot about ableism. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And I remember friends of mine invited me to a restaurant. I was hunched over, had to use two canes, literally. I could not walk and and chew gum at the same time. I had to think about every single moment putting my foot down, rolling from the heel into the toes, making sure my weight's distributed there as my balance. Good, okay.

Speaker 0 00:15:01 I can lift up my next leg now. And the hostess said, oh, do you know what table you might be looking for? And spoke to me as if I was stupid. I just looked at her without skipping. But I said, I just can't walk. I'm not dumb. And that's where I go back to empathy and just put yourself in other people's shoes. Whether that's women, whether that's trans people, whether that's racialized people. And I just don't think we do enough of that. So in terms of working towards, that's what I'd say is a space I think we're trying to get to. And then also from an organizational lens, let me start looking at systemic issues. Has a lot of the challenges that marginalized groups face often do you fall under systemic issues based on a lot of these individual assumptions?

Speaker 3 00:15:44 100%. And I think we don't create the time to reflect, we don't create the time to have empathy, if that makes sense. And I'm worried about that. So I think a reminder for folks to how are you actioning? Rather than just talking about it.

Speaker 0 00:16:01 As Jade quoted earlier, I often do quote James Baldwin myself. And one of my favorite quotes from James Baldwin is, I can't believe what you say because I see what you do. Mm-hmm.

Speaker 3 00:16:11 <affirmative>. Yeah. It's so true. Actions absolutely speak such volumes. Totally. So what do we need to focus on to build a more inclusive world?

Speaker 0 00:16:22 One thing I've recognized in the D and I space, a lot of it is actually marketing.

Speaker 3 00:16:26 Yeah.

Speaker 0 00:16:27 A lot of it's really public relations, which is my core background. Public relations at its core is about changing public perception, getting people to think differently so they'll act differently. In the past I used to use my power and my action was buy my widget, whether that was theater tickets or watch the television network that I worked for or buy the soap that I was selling. Now the action is I want you to start thinking differently and thinking and questioning yourself in terms of why am I thinking this way? Where is this coming from?

Speaker 3 00:16:55 Yeah.

Speaker 0 00:16:55 And I think if we start focusing on that more as individuals, I think the world would be a much better place personally.



Speaker 3 00:17:02 Absolutely.

Speaker 2 00:17:03 We've talked for quite a while, it's such a great conversation and I know we can talk a lot longer, but I wanna throw us into the rapid fire. So do we feel ready at first some rapid fire?

Speaker 0 00:17:16 Sure.

Speaker 2 00:17:18 <laugh>. So our first question is, if you could recommend one book, what would it

Speaker 0 00:17:24 Be? It's a book called "What If: Short Stories to Spark Inclusion and Diversity Dialogue." It's written by Steve Al Robbins PhD. What I love about this book is for people who are not familiar with the D and I space, it's very accessible.

Speaker 3 00:17:38 I love that. And I actually have not read that book. So it is now officially on my list. So next question, what brings you joy? No matter what?

Speaker 0 00:17:49 I think it's springing time with my niece. We'll just go on adventures and we'll go check out like art exhibits or we'll go check out dance things. We'll just do something fun together. We'll sometimes just cook together even.

Speaker 3 00:18:01 I love that.

Speaker 2 00:18:03 Yeah. That's absolutely beautiful. Now I want you to be my uncle. So what is your theme song for today?

Speaker 0 00:18:11 It's been an oldie but a goodie from the 1990s Love Inc. "You are a Superstar. Reach for the sky, hold your head up hard for tonight and every night you are a superstar." Anyways, I can go on.

Speaker 3 00:18:26 Side note for everyone if you're able to. Getting up and dancing is just, I think another opportunity for joy. But back to the questions. Who is someone that inspires you but doesn't receive enough credit?

Speaker 0 00:18:42 Two people came to mind. So one is my friend Ken might be shooting myself in the foot when I say this, but a man by the name of Randall Pearce.

Speaker 2 00:18:51 So our final question, what is one call to action you'd like from our listeners?

Speaker 0 00:18:57 When you have those biased thoughts, those discriminatory thoughts, those racist thoughts, those homophobic thoughts, those transphobic thoughts. We all have them. Like your lying yourself if you don't, I want you to stop,

pause, and question where is that coming from? What's happening? Why am I thinking what has caused me to have this thought?

Speaker 2 00:19:19 That's an amazing one. Thank you so much Jefferson, for joining us today. It's been such a pleasure.

Speaker 0 00:19:27 Thank you.

Speaker 3 00:19:31 So great to hear Jefferson in reminding us about how important empathy is and active listening and this idea of questioning ourselves. Where is that bias coming from? Because we all have it. We can't eliminate it, but we can definitely interrupt it. So I appreciate his perspectives there.

Speaker 2 00:19:50 Yeah, I share everything that you said and we've talked about this in previous episodes. We're becoming more and more divided. Mm-hmm.

<affirmative>, everybody's just kind of going to their own sources. Mm-hmm.

<affirmative>, including probably many of our listeners who come here because they share a similar belief system that you and I do Erin even though we have very different experiences. Right. One of my go-tos is the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People and Habit five is actually seek first to understand and then to be understood. And that goes through everything that Jefferson was saying and frankly how he works in the world. So I've been grateful for

Speaker 3 00:20:31 That. Me too. Thank you so much for tuning in. We hope you enjoyed, learned and uncovered deeper belonging with us. Connect with us on LinkedIn and let us know what part of today's episode resonated most with you. Many thanks to our production team, Editor and Producer Shawn Ahmed Communications, Luis Augusto Nobre and production support, Connor Pion. We would also like to thank and share brief message from our sponsors, Pride at Work Canada.

Speaker 2 00:21:12 For 2SLGBTQIA+ people in Canada to confront today's economic challenges. They need good jobs with rising incomes because of stigma, stereotypes, bias and discrimination against 2SLGBTQIA+ people, empowering community members with skills is simply not enough of a strategy. Pride at Work Canada operates as a member services agency for employers, offering institutional education and guidance to organizations that make a commitment to supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. The vision we share with our employer members is a Canada,

where every individual can achieve their full potential at work, regardless of gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation. For more information about our membership and programs, please visit [prideatwork.ca](http://prideatwork.ca).

Speaker 3 00:22:08 And of course, most of all, we'd like to thank you for joining us for this important discussion. For more information about today's guest links reference and a transcript, check out our show notes, which are available on Private Work Canada's website. Thank you so much for coming on this journey with us to Uncovering Belonging.