



Hummingbird Humanity

an LGBTQ+ owned business

Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit

with Jeffrey Smith

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Brian McComak: Well, hello everyone. Happy Wednesday, happy Pride. So glad you're here. We're still waiting on just a couple more people to join, so we'll get started here in just a moment. But as Liz mentioned a moment ago, if you weren't here, please introduce yourselves and chat. Where you're calling from, if you'd like what you do, where you work, your LinkedIn profile. If you're in a job search or job transition, feel free to share that as well and network. So whatever you'd like to do to connect, to network with others. I think part of what we wanna do together here is also have have great conversations, but also build community. And I know I've met some great people as I've networked on other calls. So hope you'll find some other people to connect with here as well. And we'll get started here in just a minute. Okay, well fantastic. We'll kick off. So, again, happy Wednesday everyone. I'm so delighted that you have decided to spend a few minutes with us this afternoon. Thank you for being here. We are on episode eight or week eight of Hope, Heart and the Human Spirit. It has been such a great adventure and journey so far. And I'm delighted to continue that journey today. And my friend and colleague Jeffery Smith has offered to join me and join us for a great conversation. Our prep conversation earlier this week had me very excited about what we're gonna talk about today. I know Jeffery's probably a little nervous 'cause he's like, "I'm in the hot seat now." But before we dive into conversation with Jeffery, and we'll do some more introductions. I want to first just mention a little bit about Hummingbird Humanity. So Hummingbird Humanity, for those of you who might be new to the community is an effort that I started just under two months ago. And really, there's a couple things that I wanna do. I want to build community, I want to celebrate, to voice diverse voices, I want to highlight companies and organizations that are doing good work for the people that work, and their companies, and for the communities where they operate. And this series is really part of that, is really to center conversations around the human experience. And yeah, my long term hope is that the firm will also help organizations really build and establish human-centered workplace cultures. So that's what I'm hoping to do, and more to come on that in the coming weeks. Before I get back to Jeffery, I also wanna welcome a new person to the team. So some of you may be familiar with Angelo in the past, but now we have Liz Roy. Liz, you wanna come on and say hello to everyone?

Liz Roy: Absolutely, hello everyone. I'm thrilled to be a part of the Hummingbird Humanity team, a part of this conversation. I have the absolute joy of working with both Brian and Jeffery in my capacity as Director of Business Development at Jennifer Brown Consulting. So very excited for this conversation, very excited to meet you all as well. Thanks Brian.

Brian McComak: Thanks Liz, so glad to have you here. And for those of you who may not work in this world of fractional work, there's people like Jeffery and I, who and Liz has been in this role for a little while where we piece together jobs, whether it's through Hummingbird Humanity, or Jennifer Brown Consulting, or other organizations to be able to find ways for us to be able to make a difference in the world, and to do work that matches our skill sets. So as Liz mentioned, all three of us are engaged with Jennifer Brown Consulting, and then I also have Hummingbird Humanity. And I'm really grateful to the Jennifer Brown Consulting team, and Jennifer herself and Rob Beaven, who's the COO of JBC, who have been very supportive of this adventure as I've taken this new chapter in my journey. And I know all three of us here would give a lot of kudos to that pair, and the entire JBC team. So without further ado, I wanna make sure I introduce Jeffery Smith. So Jeffery is, as I mentioned earlier, is a friend of mine and a colleague. Jeffery and I, beyond working, being both part of the JBC community, we actually had a chance to work with a client together this past spring. And I had the chance to learn from this incredible man, and have the opportunity to work with a company who wants to do good work. So it was a great way for Jeffery and I to meet. What I realized though, as we were preparing for this conversation is I know Jeffery as the professional, and I'm like there's more to Jeffery as the person as well. So I got him to share a little bit of his story with me on Monday, and we're gonna talk about that today. But Jeffery, I know you have a quite a great, and impressive background professionally. So if you just wanna start with first of all share any words of welcome, and intro that you'd like, and then maybe just share a little bit about what you'd like to highlight about your professional history, and then we're gonna dive back into the personal.

Jeffery Smith: All right, thank you Brian. Good afternoon, everyone. I waved to you and say hello. Good afternoon Liz. First of all, I want to say thank you to Brian. I'm really honored that he would even consider to have some time to talk about, to have me join in this conversation. And I think it's a great, great conversation, and really excited for him and for the work that he's doing here around Hope Heart, and the Human Spirit, I think is just phenomenal, really excited for him, and thank you, Brian for having me. Honored to be here. My professional story, I have been in the corporate space really for over 30 years, and literally 37 in one way, or shape, or formal this year. About 30 of those years were inside of corporate America, and the bulk of them, 25 of them, were with Procter and Gamble, where I think I really was able to find my niche so to speak. I spent the first probably 10 years of my career with P&G in business development in our healthcare business. I got involved in diversity and inclusion work during that time, and was involved in some of the initial ERG or ARG, I'm not sure which acronym most people use, but at that time, we called them affinity teams. So I've got involved in some of that work early in my career, moved from business development, pretty much into functional training, which led to HR. So I was a full scale HR business partner in our global healthcare organization, where I worked with global healthcare leaders, was actually involved in the global healthcare DNI strategy. So as a global business unit, we had a global DNI strategy, which I helped to lead for our global business. And then from my work in HR, as again full scale HR business partner, I lead the global DNI operations for P&G for about five years from soup to nuts, right? From strategy to ERG, to public relations from a DNI space. So I feel very fortunate to have had that career. Since that time, I've been doing some consulting, first with Diversity Best Practices, and now with Jennifer Brown Consulting for the last six years where I have worked with a range of clients, from small to large, from C-suite to first-level management around several issues, training, strategy, approaches, change management approaches around diversity, and

inclusion, and using some of the HR, and business development background, it all comes together from a DNI perspective. So that's a little bit about me. And again, really glad to be here.

Brian McComak: Thanks Jeffery. It's interesting to hear the various experiences that we get to have in our careers. And I think like you, I've been fortunate to have experiences that are diverse set of experiences, which I like that I get to bring those experiences to this work. And I'm sure that that's benefited you as well as you've taken this journey, and find ways to connect with diverse groups that do different things in the organizations you had a chance to work with.

Jeffery Smith: Absolutely.

Brian McComak: So Jeffery, as I mentioned at the start of the session, is that when I envisioned this series of conversations, which has over the last seven weeks, has taken us on an interesting journey of getting to know unique individuals, and also hear from their wisdom, and their lived experiences personally and professionally, I really wanted to start from hearing people's stories and hearing about their experiences. Part of my hope, as I do the work that I'm excited about is encouraging companies and leaders to understand the human side of the people that work at their organization, and understand their stories. And you were kind enough to share some of your story with me, and about your parents and your grandparents, and that history, which is all part of your journey to where you are today. When we spoke on Monday, and offered to share that today. So I'll let you sort of share that story in the way that feels right for you. I know that there were some moments that were powerful for me, and I'm sure there will be for others of just recognizing that the importance of understanding history, and this is the history of a person. But there are themes of that that I'm sure will echo across for others in the black community in particular. So I'll let you sort of take it from there.

Jeffery Smith: Okay, sure, thank you Brian. I'll start with my personal story, 'cause what I love about what Brian is doing is this phrase of embracing our stories. And so that's it's important to be in touch with it, and to again, embrace it and to share it. My story, I am the great-great-grandson of people who were born as slaves in this country. I am the grandson of sharecroppers on both my mother's side and my father's side who were sharecroppers in the rural South, really, from in the early 20th century, 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, really up until the 1960s. My grandparents made their living, their livelihood as sharecroppers in the rural South, in the state of Alabama. And as growing up, I heard a lot of stories about sharecropping, and what that meant. And actually my parents were also raised as sharecroppers, and in that environment. And I think one of the intersections with their story, and what we're seeing today is for those of you who may not be familiar with sharecropping, really quickly what it is, and what it was for my family is my grandparents would basically work the land that they did not own. But while they harvested the crops, they planted the seeds, they did all of the work, and all of the labor to produce the crop, they had to share it with the landowner. And it was, in essence, a way to keep them bound or in debt. And the number that I recall is that they would basically have to share

50% of what they either harvested from the crop, or 50% of what they sold. So the landowner did no work, but got 50% of what came from the field. And so it was an ingrained way systemically to keep my family, my grandparents, my parents in a financially oppressed position. That's the way I would articulate it today. Is that it was a systemic way, right? To keep them indebted, to keep them from actually progressing. And even from having the mindset of breaking out of that, and how do you really do something different? Because for my grandparents, that's all they knew, 'cause that's what they got from their parents. And so they imparted that to their children because that was all they really knew. So being the son of sharecroppers, and understanding that system, and in essence its inherent unfairness is I think where as I look at what is happening today, in the social construct with what happened with George Floyd, this notion of systemic, and you're hearing people say systemic racism, or systemic oppression. For me as a black man, and I shared this with Brian, it reminds me, and I had a conversation, or my brother had a conversation with my mother who is 88 years old. And when he asked her, "what do you think about what's going on with George Floyd?" And she said, "it reminds me of what I went through, and what I saw my father go through when I was a little girl." And so for her, it's like 80 years later, it almost feels like we're in the same system. We've got the same systemic issues, are rearing their ugly heads today, but it just is in the form of what happened to George Floyd, the murder of George Floyd. So this systemic notion of sharecropping, and what it did to keep my family, and those who were sharecroppers financially and systemically oppressed, it's like when you see this system of law enforcement, this system of, or the institution of law enforcement, it just brings it all back up. And for a lot of, at least I can say for me and my family, when we see the George Floyd, the Breonna Taylor, the Rayshard Brooks, the Ahmaud Arbery, the Trayvon Martins, the Laquan McDonalds, the Michael Browns, you can go on and on, what other systems is this oppression baked into for me. So as the son of sharecroppers, I will say one more thing. I'm also the son of parents who were very much a part of the civil rights movement. Having been residents of Montgomery, Alabama, my father was a driver in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and 1956. So I told Brian, this was Uber without being getting paid for it, right? This was the precursor to Uber. He drove his brand new Chevy in 1956 to transport the black citizens of Montgomery who refuse to ride the bus based on the fact that Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat. So my parents were actively involved in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. My mother worked in the Montgomery Improvement Association with Martin Luther King, with Ralph Abernathy, they attended all of those meetings. So as the son of civil rights activists, as the grandson of sharecroppers, this means so much to me personally, and as a person who's had an opportunity to be in corporate America and be in these discussions, this is just, it is such a crucible moment for me personally, and I think such a crucible moment for society, such a crucible moment for corporate America, such a crucible moment for any corporation, any institution that has been systemically developed to be begin to ask yourselves what oppression, consciously or unconsciously, is baked into your institution? And I think from the work that Brian and I have done with some clients, this is what many client organizations, corporate organizations are having to wrestle with, is that individuals like me who has worked with people in the C-suite, and by the way, the C-suite looks a lot today like it did 40 years ago, 50 years ago, predominantly male, predominantly white, predominantly straight, that's it, right? That's the bulk of the C-suite. So a person like myself will look up and say, in spite of the fact that I've had a wonderful career, the breakthrough financial ability is at the C-suite level, right? That's life-changing corporate money is at the C-suite level. And so I think about, and I hope I don't offend people, but I'm just being me. I think about the landowner who was the sharecropper. It was baked in to keep my grandparents at a certain level financially. Yes, we may

be paying people of color and women more money, but are we systemically keeping them out of that breakthrough life-changing corporate money level that's out there? So those are the kinds of issues that come to mind for me based on my story, both knowing my parents, their background, their civil rights work, and the corporate experience that I've had. That's kind of where it all begins to come together for me from a personal perspective.

Brian McComak: Thanks Jeffery, thank you for sharing that with us. I really appreciate it. And there's a few questions I wanna follow up there with, but the first one is there was something you shared with me on Monday, and you've already explained sharecropping, which was, I didn't know what that was. And something that's happening right now that I wanna acknowledge just in my own experience is as Jeffery, we work together, I'm committed to this work, I'm committed to understand the lived experiences of others. It's important to me. I've learned so much in the last three weeks, and I'm continuing to learn. And something that I know we were hearing a lot about is what it means to be a good person. And so you were talking about how those sharecroppers in their minds might have believed that they're good people, and they're being generous, and being being kind to someone else, and saying, "hey, I'm gonna let you keep some of this money." And I think that that's part of what we're battling right now as well of that even good intentions aren't enough.

Jeffery Smith: Yes, great point. Thank you for refreshing my memory. Absolutely, I think probably the landowner in their mind would have been saying, "hey, I'm the landowner, but I'm allowing you to keep 50%," versus the fact that as the person who did the labor, the way we think about, of course, the American Dream is if you work for it, you get it, right? That's the good intention of a landowner on hey, I'm letting you keep 50%. So you should be grateful, you should be okay. That's enough for you to survive, right? Maybe not to thrive, but that's enough for you to survive. It brings about where we again, another intersection of where we are. That people who are, I would say well-intentioned, they're egalitarian in their goals, they would say, "hey, I'm not a bad person." And some would even say, "it wasn't me, I didn't do that. I wasn't around in the 60s, or I wasn't the sharecropper." But I think it's important for people to have understand again systemically how that has all evolved, and to understand what we call the privilege that that, again, inherently jove into our systems. And so people even that are well-intentioned need to be able to say, "again, I have good intentions, but how do I go beyond that, right? How do I really get beyond just good intentions to get to a level of really understanding the impact on others, but also understanding how systems get built." And then there are people who inherently benefit, right? From that system, and then there are others that sometimes inherently are disadvantage by that system. And again, you're getting the viewpoint of someone might feel like well, you should be glad, right? And think about it today. Well, you should be glad there are more women or more people of color in the workforce, or in corporations, right? But that pyramid as you go up in an organization in most structures, the power, the decision making, the as I again, as I say the life-changing financial access, that group, profile has not changed a lot in the last 40, 50, 60 years. So the decision makers, the wielders of power and influence. Yes, there are some who have broken into that. But again, a lot of that profile has not changed. And I think that again is what we see, or what I see is the intersection between what's happening in the civil unrest that we see, and coming off of a health pandemic, right? Where we see all of this uncertainty, this instability, it's inherent that that is

going to spill over into human beings who show up at work, who show up and they can't separate the human spirit from who they are as an employee. And again it's forcing organizations and institutions really to have what I would call some critical, courageous and maybe difficult conversation.

Brian McComak: Yeah, I really appreciate that last point you made, and so many important messages in there. But I do believe that somewhere along the way, and maybe we never had it, and someone argue that we've lost a recognition that these are humans who work in these boxes. That manager is a human, that engineer is a human, that HR professional is are human, and so on. And I've started thinking, talking about we can't expect them to always work like the rules of that box they're put in. They have things that happen at home, they have things that happen they've seen on the news. They might just not feel well that day, and they might be dealing with depression, or anxiety, right? So there's so collection of issues, and I have not lived in the shoes of being a black person who wakes up to see another person in my community murdered because of the color of their skin. And I appreciate you sharing some of your stories, and what you're seeing, and how your life has been shaped by your experiences, and these experiences of those that came before you. In just honor that what I was just sharing there of I, and I know you can't speak for the whole community, you can only speak for yourself. But how are you feeling about this intersection of a pandemic and this emerging action activity around Black Lives Matter? And the hopefully , growing awareness that action is necessary? What has that meant to you? And personally and professionally, I realized that just for like for you, those two worlds intersect. Oops, I think I muted you by accident there, Jeffery. I'll let you control yourself.

Jeffery Smith: All right, there we go, unmute, all right. Yeah, it's such a powerful question. And as you were talking, Brian, one piece that came to my mind, we talk about this intersection of my story, and I think why it impacts me so much personally is because, for me, I think about this, George Floyd, that could have been me, right? My education, my career success, if you will, if you wanna call it that. My, all of the things that some may say, "man, you've been very fortunate." For me, what I realized is in that moment, if it were me, none of that would matter, all right? And that is, I think, where it makes this such a part of this conversation, and a part of this human spirit. And there's an ad, I don't know if you all have seen it, I'll just plug it real quick that my company, my former company P&G has put out about and it shows the commercial of a black man walking through, it's called The Look, is the name of it, so you can Google it and see it on YouTube, but it shows a black man walking through the street and he gets the look, and people start rolling up their window when he gets near the car, and everyone is kind of protecting their possessions. Long story short, they show a courtroom, and people sitting in there, and then when they say all rise, the black man walks in and guess who the judge is? It's the African American, it's the black man. And what it says is your status in society. Look outside of that context of your status. In many cases, it may not mean anything. And so that is, I think, where this comes together. But the notion of the pandemic, the cultural pandemic, and all of this coming together, what the pandemic created was what I would call a forced invasion and intrusion into people's personal home human spaces, right? Because now people had to work from home. And so, and now we're doing Zoom conferences, video conferences, so I've even had clients talk about some of their struggles to make people feel like it's okay to not feel you have to have the pressure to have this

wonderful scenic background of where you live again, and all that intersection of the human spirit. For some people of color, one of the issues that the pandemic has created, Shelter-in-place, for a lot of black women, all of the salons are close. So I can't be on a Zoom conference, and I'm not able to get my hair done. What do I do? Again, these are some of the human issues that this pandemic has forced us to deal with. And then you put on the cultural pandemic, right? Of people seeing what has happened. And again, for me, as a black man, I go, "yes, I've worked with some wonderful clients. But I've been stopped by the police before. And I've had some incidences that I wonder why did they stop me? And I've learned, I've been taught how to respond to try to walk away alive." And so that is also very real to me because I think about in spite of all that corporate success, if you will, and for those who may be in an institution whether it's a corporation, whether it's educational, non for profit, governmental, where you have peers that are black, you have peers that are of another identity, or ethnic identity, and you say, "oh, look at this person, they're successful. You all have made it." But most of the people who are at that level realize, when I walk out of this door, right? If I get pulled over by a policeman, I don't know how that interaction is gonna go down. And the fact that I'm a CEO, CFO, CRO, SVP, EVP does not matter. And so that's why corporations have to be willing to talk about this intersection of that human spirit. Because that's what human beings are dealing with from the cultural pandemic, and dealing with all of the residual effects of the health pandemic, the Shelter-inplace, the having to learn how to juggle homeschooling while I'm working, and how do I manage all of those expectations? So it's very important, I think, as I share with Brian on Monday to have this conversation around the human spirit, and I think you mentioned something around Black Lives Matter as well, Brian. I think it's time for that conversation to be had, and for people to understand why this is a rallying cry for people today. So in objectivity, I can understand why someone would say all lives matter. No one is saying that's not the case. But when we see what happened to George Floyd, and it's happening over and over again, when we say black lives matter, and we hear the phrases all lives matter, it just feels like we're being discounted once again. And so I think again, it's going to take courage to have these conversations. But I can't I guess offer enough kudos Brian for this notion of the heart, hope and the human spirit. Because the human spirit is when we begin to understand these stories that come from human spirits. I think the rallying cry for me, and so I can only speak for me, and I think I have some friends and family who would concur is just hear us, please, right? Hear us and then help us. Hear us when we talk about what is systemic, what is institutionalized. Hear us when we say this. Don't discount us because then all of that discounting feels like 50%. You work for all of it, but you only get to keep 50%. And that's a very demoralizing feeling. And so I'll stop there, let you respond.

Brian McComak: Well, first of all you've shared so much that's powerful there, and honest and real. I don't wake up or live in a world where I worry about whether if I get pulled over by a cop, I'm not worried if I'm gonna get murdered. Like I that's not part of my lived experience, and I'm sorry that that's what you and others have to live with every day. I had a moment of around this question for myself a few weeks ago, as I was reflecting on what happened to George Floyd in particular, and hearing the rallying cry that we have to do better and black lives matter, and we need to talk about that. And the fear that members of the black community live in every day in the country, this country. I was pondering about the reality that I, there are countries in this world that I will not visit because I know that as a gay man, I'm not welcome there, and there are places that I'm so not welcome that I could be murdered, or I could be stoned to death, or other terrible, tragic actions could befall upon

me. So I choose not to go there. You don't choose, you may have a choice to live in other countries, but this is where you live, this is your home. And we have to do better. And that's why it needs all of us, and the rallying cries that we all need to pick up, and to take steps forward. And so in that spirit, I know that you and I have both chosen careers that we work with companies and organizations, and champion for change, and champion for leaders to make better decisions, and to hear and listen to the stories, and to elevate diverse talent. And there's so many different aspects to what we do. I wanna just go back to something you said earlier, and connect into that work that we do is you highlighted that systemic racism is pervasive throughout how we've built the United States as a country and all of our systems. We know we're hearing a lot of conversation right now around the police. And clearly, I'm no expert on the police departments, but without question, it's clear to me that we have to do something different. There's something wrong there. But there are other systems. And how do you think about that through the lens of the work you do, and the organizations you get to work with?

Jeffery Smith: Yeah, thanks Brian. I think that's what's been so real for me, is to think about this notion of systems in the work that I do now, in my experience in corporate America. Lemme share something, and I think I shared a little bit of this was you on Monday. Even in my experience in corporate America, when I first got into corporate America, there was a black woman who was an administrative clerical worker at the organization I first started working with when I got out of college. And what she came to me one day and what she said to me, and these literally were words, she said, "they're watching you. They're watching." I'm like, "who's watching me?" And in essence, what she was saying is all of the white male managers, right? They are watching you. Now, she didn't say they're looking to help you succeed. Her implication was they're watching you, and they're waiting for you to mess up. And once you mess up, you're out of here, right? Very different mindset, right? In terms of you invested in me by hiring me, but all you are doing is watching me. You're not coaching me, you're not trying to develop me, and any development I get, and most of what I got when I was at that company, I had to do a lot of it myself, right? I had to do it myself, but the mindset of oh my God, you're watching me. And I think maybe the way that I was raised, and as I think about my parents and grandparents' stories is like, oh God, so now I work more nervous than I do free. And so, for me, when I think about that, that says to me, there was something systemic in that corporation around how they were looking at me. And I would be as bold to say, looking at other people that look like me. And so when I take that story Brian, and I carry it out, it says to me that in corporations, this notion of what is inherent in many of our systems, and I have seen them, some work well, some not so well, where systemically, give you an example, I've seen in organizations where, yes, there were people of color, who made it to an executive level with their peers. But what the demographic, or what the analytics told us is that it took them on average seven to 10 years longer to get to the same level. So I'm 20 plus years in my career to get to that level whereas someone else is 10 to 12 years to get to that level. Well, why is that, right? And if it takes me 20 years to get there, at 20 years, I'm looking at the downside of my career versus if I'm 10 years, I'm looking at a totally upward trajectory. So what does that say? That there is something institutional, systematic in how we look at talent, evaluate talent, talk about talent, promote talent, that is giving us in essence, the end result and the end product that we still see today in many organizations, many corporations, many businesses, where the power wielders, the decision makers, the again, life-changing, financial breakthrough money makers that circle stays pretty small. And the rub or the tension is that you do see individuals of color having long careers, being able to travel the

globe like I've been able to do, and to work in many places, meet many people. But when I look at the civil unrest, and when I go and look at a lot of the clients that I have seen, that I've worked with, and organizations, the question becomes is that organization number one aware of the systemic processes that are in place that may inherently advantage some, and inherently disadvantage others? And if they are aware of it, are they willing now to really address it? So that's where all of this comes to convergence and confluence for me is that these, while some may look at these and say they're two totally separate worlds, I don't see it that way. I see that these worlds are coming together in a way like never before. And again, for those who may be on who have a corporate perspective, to me that's it. Is that employees, and maybe not just your employees of color, but your employees that make up the Black Lives Matter protesters right? Or that have children or sisters or brothers that make up those protesters. And we see protesters are not just black people protesting actively today. That they're I think the question for many of them is, what systems are out there perpetuating behavior? Maybe they don't murder inside of corporate America, but what systems figuratively perpetuate the inability for people to breathe in a corporate and community sense. And I think that's the conversation that the protesters and the mindset of the protesters, that's the conversation they want to have. Is let's look at systems and institutions holistically. And I think that the task for corporate leaders, for business leaders is to do that kind of audit, have the genuine, transparent conversations. And I think as a business person, then look for how to you develop, and grow business opportunities out of these human spirit conversations, because Brian, I don't see them separately. I see if you recognize this human spirit, I do think it will position you to be better able to serve human beings who buy products, who buy services. I just inherently believe that it will return the investment if you do that. That when people know that you're investing in their human spirit, you'll get more out of human beings.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well I fully, fully agree with that. And my foundational beliefs and leadership in HR were based on a book that I read in college which is called *The Customer Comes Second*, and it's about hey, let's take care of the people like that work for us like people first, and then they'll take care of the people who are our customers. And so I've really tried to embrace that in my entire career. What of course, I've learned a lot since college. And one of those learnings is centers around this disappointing, sad, tragic reality that different people are treated differently. And there are ways that that is maybe the right thing to do. And maybe there are ways that's the right thing to do, and there are a lot of ways where it's actually impressive and holds people back. And one of those those learnings that I've uncovered and have reflected on is that particularly straight white cisgendered men are given opportunities long before they're ready for that role, officially qualified or ready. But they're given that opportunity because someone sees potential in them. And in theory that sounds cool, right? Someone says, "hey, I see potential in you, I'm gonna give you this chance. I'm gonna help you grow, I'm gonna mentor you." But what happens to diverse and marginalized and stigmatized communities is they don't get that chance. They are expected to demonstrate that they can do the job successfully, and meet every quiet criteria and qualification before they can move into that job. And that keeps people back, and hold people back, and hold and collectively, if we're talking about one individual, then that's sad and disappointed, and I don't want to happen. But when it happens to an entire community of people, that oppresses an entire community.

Jeffery Smith: Absolutely, I mean, and I think, I talked, I mentioned one story to you, but I have another one where when I first started in business development, and a lot of the language of what I was told was in essence, and I'm paraphrasing. This may not have been the literal words, but the way that people spoke to me was as if they really expected me to fail, right? Is that they expected me to fail. I would hear things like, well, I give you an example. Someone said to me, "you know if you fight, you get fired." And I'm thinking to myself, why don't you tell me that? You think I'm actually gonna go into a healthcare professional's office and start a fight? Do you think I'm gonna start a fight at a worker? But someone said that to me. Now why they felt the need to say that to me, to this day, I can't really tell you. But that was the kind of message that says, I'm expecting you to do something that is gonna make me, that's going to make me terminate you. So you know if you fight, you get fired. So what am I saying with that? The point is, I was not looked at as a person with potential. I was looked at as a person who I'm gonna have to manage the problems, and you're gonna have to prove yourself. So the difference Brian is many people, and again, we've done some work around bias and what drives that, but when you look at a person and say, "I'm going to promote you and give you special projects based on potential," my experience of what I've seen personally, what I've seen with others in similar settings, is we're not gonna promote you on potential. We're gonna make sure first that you're not a problem. And if you're not a problem, then you've gotta prove yourself. And that I think is what creates that disparity of again, yeah, you may get to that level, but you're eight years, it takes you eight years longer to get there. And you've heard people say, "I gotta work twice as hard." Well, if it takes me 20 years to get to where it took someone else 10 years to get, there you go. That's double the time to get the same level of achievement, compensation, access, voice, influence. And I think that my experience is again, I'm thankful I'm fortunate, I persevered, I had some people that helped, but when I think about it, I was not necessarily set up to succeed inherently or intentionally, and that goes back to what I said around are organizations, corporations willing to look at what is embedded systemically. What are the residual effects of that? Now, it doesn't make people bad people because they benefited, right? As you mentioned, the straight white cisgender male doesn't make that person a bad person. If you're now sitting in a C-suite because you've benefited from the system. I'm not saying you're a bad person. What I am asking you to do is to acknowledge how you benefited, and be willing to pull the cover back on some systems, or some processes that maybe you didn't build with your own hands, but they're there. And I think the cry for again, the Black Lives Matter protesters, the intersection of that cry socially, with the intersection of it in others spaces that we live and work in, is we're asking every system to be examined. Because this is not the only system, and the only institution that has bred this kind of behavior. And so we're just asking other institutions, other systems to examine themselves. And I think the other key, Brian, is that we're also asking for genuine transparency, right? In this space. We're asking for the dialogue to be genuine, for the transparency to be genuine. And to maybe acknowledge, hey, I didn't know that that was your experience. Because again, a lot of the items that I'm sharing with you, I don't share this a lot. This is not always a part of my dialogue. Why? Because I have a mindset that says I'm still going to try to succeed, I still want to be a team player, I still want to make things better, I still want it to work. I wanna have the spirit of my parents as civil rights activists that said, I'm going to do this because I yet believe in the hope of something better. And so I compartmentalize a lot of that, and just go forward. And so sometimes because we don't talk about it, a lot of people might not know that again, as I look at this one incident, it opens the floodgates on a series of incidents that now feel for some very burdensome or tiresome, and that's why I think this is a critical conversation to have.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, and it was fiercely critical, and one of the realities I appreciate is that this time, with the videos that were shared around about George Floyd and others like Ahmaud Arbery, and the stories of Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, and there's so many of those stories which is tragic. But because we're all home, in our houses, everyone watched the story. And so what feels like for the first time in my life that I'm aware of that people are actually paying attention. And there's a leader who that you may have heard him share this recently who's a Chief Diversity Officer at Moody's DK Bartley. He said recently on a call in this question of people who are just getting into the conversation of we have to do better, or leaders who are just getting to the conversation. Should we shame them? Should we welcome them? What do we do? And he said, "I don't care when you get to the party. I'm glad you're here. Let's make something happen." So I'm gonna ask you an unfair question because it's not possible in the time we have left to solve it. But you have such great experience working with organizations, you have a passion for this work, you've seen change happen in your lifetime. What are the top words of wisdom or advice that you're sharing with whether it's other people in your life of what they can do, and or what you're saying to leaders about what they can do?

Jeffery Smith: What I'm saying to leaders is in essence, be genuine and be vulnerable, and that's okay, right? And also acknowledged what you don't know, and it's okay, as a leader to not know something. I think many times as leaders, as I've said to other clients, leaders many times get rewarded for how much they know. And they get rewarded for how successful they are, which speaks to their intellect, their bandwidth, their capability. What I think this requires, because as you said, there are some who are late to the party. We're glad to have them. Absolutely, absolutely. But be genuine, right? And whatever you say, be genuine. Be vulnerable, say, "hey, there are some elements that I don't know," right? It may even be vulnerable to say, "yes, you know what, I am late to the party. But I'm here now and I'm not leaving, right? I'm not leaving. I'm staying for the dance." That is okay to be vulnerable, and to begin to acknowledge what you don't know. Now, I'll be bold and say this, right? I said this actually to some close friends of mine. I said, "hey, I was really glad to see the recognition of Juneteenth, right, that's great." But I also said, "don't give me a holiday without change, right?" If all you're gonna do is give me a holiday, and nothing's going to change, I'm like, "keep the holiday." It's a good first step or an acknowledgment, but I'm like this. See me when you're ready to talk behavior change, when you're ready to talk organization change. Let's really get down to it. And so, I hope that helps because it's going to take genuine vulnerable leaders and to really engage in critical, courageous conversations. There are not a lot of people who have the skills to be honest with you, to really productively talk about race and racism. That's why we haven't talked about it, because we I think we're a little afraid of it. And I'm asking leaders also at this point to not be afraid of it. Please don't be afraid of it. However I can help you, I'd be willing to help you, but don't be afraid of this conversation, 'cause it's a conversation that must be had at this point.

Brian McComak: Thanks Jeffery. And you may have noticed, I added it to my question as I was going through it, 'cause I was gonna ask you how do we resolve it. And that was the unfair question 'cause it's not... If we had that answer, we would both be really rich right now. And so I appreciate what you

shared, and I think that echoes the two key messages I've been sharing with leaders I work with is you have to have the conversations, you have to lean into the discomfort, you have to try to have an understanding. So seek to understand is really important. And you have to take action. There has to be real action. And I love the Juneteenth, and the recognition of Juneteenth is an action. I love that get donating to organizations that are fighting for racial justice is a great action. Keep doing more actions though. Keep taking more actions, because it's going to take a collection of actions across millions of individuals, across all of the as many companies that we can get onboard. That's how we're gonna make a change, and we have to do it together. We're coming to the very end. I want to just before we do our final wrap up with who's coming next week, I just wanna ask you Jeffery, what gives you, as we wrap up here today, and as you look towards the future, what gives you hope?

Jeffery Smith: What gives me hope, believe it or not Brian is when I think about the stories of my family, right? Of my grandparents and my parents, and where we've come from. Yes, yes, I do, honestly believe we have a long way to go. But when I tell you, I was not a sharecropper, when I tell you that I along with my four siblings are all college educated, three of the five of us are master degree. That gives me hope, right? That when I can see the progress that has been made, while we haven't made all that we want to make, I'm hopeful because we have made progress. We're no longer sitting at the back of the bus. We're driving it now. So that's the hope that I have that we will make continual progress in the days, weeks, months and years to come.

Brian McComak: I will share that. We've definitely seen progress made. There's clearly much, much more work to do. So thank you for sharing that with us, sharing your hope, sharing your stories, sharing your thoughts on how we can make change together. I just wanna mention as we close out here next week, we are going to have Mindy Scheier joining us. Mindy Scheier, some of you may know is the founder of Runway of Dreams, which is an organization that endeavors to put people with disabilities on the runway. And Mindy, just like Jeffery today will share her story of why this is very personal to her, as well as the work she's doing to help organizations find representation with people with disabilities. So I hope you'll join us next week as we go to week nine of this conversation. Jeffery, again, I just wanna say thank you for being here, thank you for sharing with us. I am committed to this work. What gives me hope is that I know that there are so many others like you and me and Liz, and who are committed to making change, and it's gonna take all of us to do this. So I'm so thankful that there are people like you who share your stories and use your voice for change. So thank you for being here.

Jeffery Smith: Thank you for having me.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, I know it's 4:01, so I hate to say goodbye 'cause I'd like to spend the next three hours, or six hours or 10 hours with Jeffery, but I'm sure we all have things to do including Jeffery. So I'll bid you all adieu now, and hope to see you next week. Take care of yourselves, bye bye.

Jeffery Smith: Bye bye, take care, stay safe.