



# Hummingbird Humanity

an LGBTQ+ owned business

## Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit

with Ray Arata

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**Brian McComak:** Welcome everyone, Happy Wednesday. Thank you for joining us for week 12, which is actually our 13th episode of "Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit" 'cause we had a bonus episode for Pride and Black Lives Matter. So that's just a little known fact that we like to keep you on your toes here at Hummingbird Humanity. So thank you all, thank you for joining us today for being part of the series I mean part of this conversation. If you're new here and this is your first time with us, just a bit about Hummingbird Humanity. I started this organization to champion human centered workplace cultures. I have, I believe that we've somewhere along the way or maybe we never had it, but we've lost the humanity in our workplaces. And I really wanna spark question and conversation and dialogue and discussion and reflection on how do we take care of the heart and soul of our companies? How do we make sure that we start from thinking people first in our work. So that's what humanity is all about. And that's really what this series is about is starting from the stories of the of these amazing humans who do work in the world to make the world a better place. But they're also humans just like everyone else. And let's at least try to start from their stories and hearing about their lived experiences. And then also to learn from them along the way from the work that they do, and how they have brought their humanity with them into their own work. So I'm delighted today. So again, thank you for being here. Welcome, glad to have you. And I'm delighted today to be joined by Ray Arata, who is founder of the Better Man Conference and that's actually where we met. We met at a Better Man Conference and this past fall at Moody's Corporation. And have become friends since then. He gave me a signed copy of his book that day, which is still on my bookshelf over there. And those moments where we connect with others who are passionate about this work is so exciting. And I'm grateful to be part of Ray's community, and really glad that he's here with us. And one of the things I'll mention that I love about Ray's work, one of the conversations that I have very often in the work that I do as a diversity, equity and inclusion practitioner primarily is, we need more men to be part of this conversation. Particularly straight cisgender white men, but we can also just say men, 'cause when I'm in rooms that I'm hosting diversity and inclusion events, I find that the room is primarily people of color, women, and then members of the LGBTQ+ community. Not to discount others who have passions, people with disabilities, for example, or people of generations where they feel like they're outside of the group. But that's usually what it's made up of is those groups that have been highly marginalized and stigmatized. And I really say like the people in those groups say, "We gotta be in the room." What we need though is we need men in that room, because they're often the decision makers Which is something we're working to change, to have representation at those decision tables. And I think Ray is really saying and is asking that question of, "How do we get men in the room? "And what does that look like? "And how do we start to change the paradigms for men "so they feel comfortable and safe in those rooms, "and they can then be part of the conversation," 'cause I found a lot of them actually wanna be part of the conversation too. So I'm gonna get too far into all the things that I wanna talk about. So as you can tell, I'm excited that Ray here. Ray, welcome. I'm so glad that you said yes to the conversation today. I'll let you share a few opening words, comments, whatever you'd like to share. I'm sure I've missed a bunch of things that we should know about you.

**Ray Arata:** Thank you Brian. And it's great to be here. There's so much stuff I could say but in listening to you talk about the need for white cisgendered straight men to get in the room. One of my goals is to get all men and humans into their

hearts. So that is what really showed up and popped up in my mind when you were saying that I will get to all the fun stuff as we have our conversation today. But that's what I feel compelled to say. And let's go so what do you got for me? What do you wanna know?

**Brian McComak:** Love it. I have so many questions as we can already tell. But before we talk about the work you do, which is where I went first ' 'cause I'm so excited about the work. Well tell us about you. How did you get to where you are today? Did you start on purpose work? Did you start in another path? What prompted you to get here? Tell us about that story.

**Ray Arata:** So I have the abridged version, is that in 1999, I experienced a one-two punch wake-up call in my personal life and business life. Whereby the mother of my three children, at one o'clock in the morning, two months into our new house. I got the "I don't love you anymore speech." Yikes. And then six weeks later, I had a one of my business partners, I had two business partners in the financial services arena. He left and went to another firm and he went from friend to foe. So I had a betrayal and a crack in the foundational picture of mummy daddy with three kids. And I was ill equipped to emotionally deal with all this not knowing that I had something to do with it. And I was invited by my manager. A woke man in the financial services industry of all industries, invited me to do a men's weekend. This weekend I can now say, was an initiation into healthy manhood or a journey to the heart, if you will. And it had me examine how the pained little boy in me was running the show. And how this outdated model of what it meant to be a man helped me see, not only was it not serving anybody around me, but it wasn't serving me either. And so with that weekend, I'd launched into attending a men's group regularly. I started staffing these weekends. And that was when people would come up to me say, "Ray, remember when we talked and you said," And I'd say "No, what did I say?" And this was happening frequently. So more cups of coffee with men who were attracted to who I was becoming as a whole hearted centered man. And women started saying, "Hey, could you talk to this guy." And so I kept doing these weekends, became a leader. Fast forward, here I am 20 years later. The work evolved into prison work, into me writing the book. And in 2013, I was introduced to a diversity and inclusion consultant who, she was a woman, and she said, "Ray, I'm really intrigued with what you're doing you know, "What would you do with a roomful of women leaders? "Having them want more?" And I'm like, "I'm not so sure." So I went back to my book, "Wake Up, Man Up, Step Up". And I came up with this whole workshop thing and she said, "You know what? "The women aren't ready to hear from you yet. "You need to go talk to the men, right? "You look like them. "You sound like them. "Why don't you go to a women's leadership conference "and listen." So I went to Watermarks, one of their events. And basically first event, I'm the only guy there and it hit me like a ton of bricks. All the stories my mum told me about being second born in Italian family, that my uncle, my godfather, he got all the rights and privileges and she didn't. Then I looked a little closer to home and my wife, who's the oldest of seven kids, the youngest brother is running a real estate business. And then I thought about my daughter who was gonna be graduating from Duke with a degree in computer science. So that was a man in the mirror moment number two, where I said, "Am I gonna stay in this man church "and just do these men's weekends? "Or am I gonna walk across the metaphorical street "and connect to leaders, and have leaders "who have male leaders who have position power and privilege "to use that to create shift in cultures." That embarked me on my journey. And after standing in front of groups full of women, talking to them about how to engage men, healthy and patience got the best to me and I came up with the idea of doing a conference that focused on the engagement of men as allies and partners, which is the Better Man Conference. So we talked to a couple of woke corporate people threw out the idea and I said, "I wanna bring forth healthy masculinity." And they're like, "What do you mean by that?" And here we are. So that's the abridged version. There's offshoots, but I'll stop there.

**Brian McComak:** Yeah, I love that, I love that And of course, there's so many questions I have, but I'm gonna go back to just the reality of the setting where I know before the call you were talking about you're in your office, but it looks like a bedroom right now. But you tell our viewers why that is?

**Ray Arata:** So I have three adult children. And because of COVID, two of the three moved back. And what's been interesting is you hear a lot about parents with younger children, Zoom classes, all that kind of stuff. And I don't hear that many parents with older children who have young, opinionated Growing. It's adults sending in the question of who am I, whilst their parents or step parents are in the house. And so my daughter Emma, who came back, she's been living here. Now, I'm happy to say and they know this. They're leaving. It's time. So my son's leaving Sunday and my daughter's leaving a couple of weeks, but they've come back and they actually healed. They did some real good work. We all did some work. Thank God, we had the technology of heart in the house, because all of us, we all got our buttons pressed. And we had the wherewithal and the heart to stay in it and grow and take responsibility. So it's a time that we will never, ever, ever forget that much I'm sure of.

**Brian McComak:** I'm curious just knowing what's important to you. But before we go to the work in the book, it sounds like you're close to your family. Is that part of what this journey has given you as a person? Is the relationships within their personal life in a different way?

**Ray Arata:** Yeah, when I woke up per se and I started to do my own healing, it introduced me to vulnerability. The power and strength of vulnerability, authenticity, emotional literacy. And what I've learned over the years is as I do the work, so do the others around me. So, right now my kids are with their mother over in Tiburon. And even though we're divorced, we do holidays together. We all get along. We're a new, more condensed, reformed kind of family. So relationships for me are very, very, very important. So yeah, that's a long winded answer to your question.

**Brian McComak:** Oh, I can, if you wanna battle that along winded answers. Let's game on 'cause I can talk. Well tell us, so actually I don't think I knew this part of the story, and I may have not heard it correctly. Did the book come before the conference?

**Ray Arata:** Yes, the book came before the conference, because when I wrote the book, the constituency that I was trying to reach was men in pain, or about to be in pain. And looking for a way to be better in their relationships, better in their community, better in their companies. And so when I wrote that book, it was one of those things where it needed to come out. So when I wrote that book, it helped me order everything. So now, my next book, which I'm happy to say, I have a literary agent, so that's a whole new ballgame. And they're gonna be putting it in front of a variety of publishing houses. The working title might be the "Allies Manifesto" but once again, I've taken everything that I've learned to reach men that are sitting on the question of what do I do? What do I say? Not say not do. Organizations, how do I deal with the men and everyone else who belongs to a marginalized group that wants to understand support and be supported by these kind of guys. So I was working on some of that this morning so here we go again

**Brian McComak:** That's awesome. Well congrats on the literary agent. I'm writing my new book so this is a whole my new book, my first book. I sometimes I'm like, "Should I say my first book 'cause it may be the only book that ever happens." 'Cause it's a quite the process of exercise. And you're gonna do a second one.

**Ray Arata:** Oh, my goodness. That's an understatement.

**Brian McComak:** I didn't realize how much I was going to learn about myself in the process of writing the book. It's a great experience though. I'm curious, of course I've lived with in corporate America, for my career. I'm fortunate to be doing work outside of corporate America now, but I'm with corporate America as a consultant. But when I was in those in those four walls, and I was essentially in the landscape and I learned about the Better Man Conference, I'll admit, my first reaction was like, "I'm not sure that fits." And I know this is a conversation you've had with Jennifer Brown, and I've had with Jennifer Brown around, I also get that men need to be part of the work. And I also know that you've mentioned this earlier that even though it is the Better Man Conference, everyone's welcome, and I know you even those who live outside the gender binary are welcome. So it's a welcoming to everyone. But I'm curious, how have you found practitioners like me or companies or corporations? How are people...? How do people react to this conversation of, "There's a conference for men."

**Ray Arata:** A year ago, or now or four years ago. I can answer that, I can answer now it's like they get it. They totally get it. I'm pounding the drum a lot less that putting attention and intention on men is key. It's like what everybody already knows is that the vast majority of leadership positions are held by men. We know that. So why not go straight out at them? Why not leverage the under utilized and over represented majority men to be allies? And so, combating sexism and homophobia is one thing. It also applies to racism. So that for us, the tactic hasn't changed that much. Get these guys into their hearts, help them understand that privilege is not a bad thing. That it's something that one can use for the sake of other humans. And let's all do this together. So right now more and more companies, companies like Roche and Genentech, and Intel, and Oracle, and Cisco, and Moody's. They're all committed. They're all committed to doing this. And they recognize that they've got a ways to go.

**Brian McComak:** Yeah.

**Ray Arata:** Again, I could be long winded, but I'm gonna stop.

**Brian McComak:** It's okay. Well and you've actually had some of those companies host the Better Man Conference. So I know, Moody's bit and Unilever.

**Ray Arata:** Correct.

**Brian McComak:** Possibly other--

**Ray Arata:** The bank to west owned by BNP Paribas. They've been a host in the past.

**Brian McComak:** That's great. Well, I don't know we got close to getting Tapestry to do it. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. But I remember the aha that I had. 'Cause I had been curating events, creating events and our space that we're championing diversity. And I'd been paying attention to who showed up in the room. And I saw that group earlier write that list. And what I realized was men were missing. If there were men in the room typically they were gay men. I happen to know them. But we were missing the straight men. And then I'm like, "Wait Ray has this way that we can

maybe get some of them in the room." And I'm like, "Wait, we should do this." And unfortunately it didn't work out. But I still love the idea. Is that what you're seen as like, are those like light bulbs going on for--

**Ray Arata:** Yeah, my little mantra is going first. If I go, so can they. And so if I use my cisgenderedness, my whiteness, my Italian American, if I put it all out there, and I go first, I've known this from my mentor. 15,000 hours worth of work, that if I go and I showed them they can and they will. And so, even when the COO of Moody's, him and I had a coaching call before he went on and he said, "So what should I do?" And I said, "Be real. "Admit your screw ups, own that you made some mistakes. "Resolve to do better. "Tell the truth." And I get an email from him three days before the conference and he's like, "You won't believe this story I have. "But I'm not gonna tell you until we get to the conference." So you were there, he stood up and, he told the story and I remember him saying, "When my wife said you're just like the rest of them." Referring to a lot of those guys that need a little work. That you could hear a pin drop in the room, but what he may not have realized in the moment but was the his vulnerability, his humanness, made it possible for all the other men in the room to potentially go there. And even though my original idea for the Better Man Conference was for men, it's not just for men, it's for men and women. We've had breakouts, nonbinary breakouts, and we recognize that no matter how you represent it or who you are in a company, there's gonna be those straight men. So why not figure out together, how we can all move forward. So we've maintained that intention to be inclusive, otherwise we'd be hypocrites.

**Brian McComak:** Yes, I agree. Some people will know many may know that I've played with Gotham Volleyball which is the LGBTQ+ gay league and volleyball league in New York City. Or we typically just call it the gay volleyball league. And one thing that I make sure that we say though is everyone's welcome. Like it may be the gay volleyball league, but if you wanna play volleyball, it doesn't matter who you are. Come join us and there are people that are straight in the league. There are men and there are women, there are people who are from the transgender community, which is beautiful. And others I'm sure that we have we cover the whole span to counter diversity to a point, the whole point is to create a safe space for people who need this place to play volleyball. And that we would be hypocritical if we weren't welcoming everyone. So I love these organizations that we start from a center point place of how do we create a space for this community? But everyone's invited in those walls.

**Ray Arata:** Eventually, one of the end games is how can each of us individually create a safe space for the human being that is sitting across from us and one thing that you and I did not talk about, is that in The ManKind Project where I'm a coleader, I often get asked to be a mentor for other men on the path to becoming their leader. And three of my four mentors are gay. And I was curious like, "Why did you choose me?" And the answers were pretty similar in that they chose me because I represent that alpha, aggressive straight male that they need to do their work around so they can feel more safe, so they can be more in their power. So they could be a man according to them. So it's been an amazing journey for me to also get the blessing that I'm safe. But also to help me understand that masculinity has many different shades. And that one of our episodes that we're gonna be doing on our "Getting Real Series" is the shades of masculinity. What does that mean for a black indigenous man of color, or brown man, a gay man, a man in transition whatever the case may be. So I'm excited about that.

**Brian McComak:** It's interesting you share that because that's actually the space of getting comfortable with I'll use the term alpha male, has been part of my own journey, growing up not knowing that I was gay, but knowing that I felt different that I didn't feel like I fit with those alpha men, or those jocks or there's different ways that those groups come to life. And what I've learned as an adult, I've made friends with some of those men. One of my dear friends is a Secret Service Agent. And although it's funny, 'cause I don't think he's actually all that alpha, but I think that's because I know him as a human. He's just another guy. He has a wife and kids and he's just trying to figure out life like the rest of

us. But he's also accepted me for me, and we are friends and every time he's in my city for work, he says, "Let's get together for dinner." And he treats me no different than anyone else and I've had people like him in my life, who've helped me break down the way that I saw how I didn't fit with the alpha male. And I now see them as just another person. But it was work, it took some time.

**Ray Arata:** A little secret, there's a big part of me that never felt like I fit with them. So we talked earlier, I was covering my emotionality, my sensitive side. I've often felt more comfortable with people that belong to the LGBTQIA community and people of color 'cause I could be all of me. I could be flamboyant, I could be soft, I could be tender, and I didn't get chastised for it. And now at this stage in life, I'm just who I am all the freaking time and now I don't take it personally. Some of those alpha guys who I ride my bike with, pop their mouth off. It tells me more about them than it does me.

**Brian McComak:** Well the confidence that can come with age, which I completely get. I now host a live series on a weekly basis where I talk about my stuff. Every week, so this would not have happened 10 years ago. I didn't have that gut and that's, we get there when we get there. One of the things that I'm reflecting on is, you and I are both using all of these words around different communities and different ways that we define different groups. And also, you and I both share this, we go back to the fact that we're all human as well. But how did you get like, I know that for me, it's been a journey. And I'm still learning. Actually one of the things that I'm gonna check on afterwards. I think we have both used the word cisgendered with an ed and I think it's actually without the ed, I think it's just cisgender. So I need to check to make sure that we're both using the right word. So I'll double check that But I'm always realizing like, I have to pay attention to these words, and I have to learn how do I make sure I use words that are respectful for different communities. And for how they define themselves and how did you learn the language though of these conversations and how are you helping others get comfortable with it because that's part of this work.

**Ray Arata:** So trial and error in part. Two, surrounding myself with people that know more than me. So, Kriz Bell, one of my partners. Single mother identifies as queer. I've known her for many years. My first company was a company called Gender Allies. And it was myself and two gay women. One of them was a woman of color. So I mean, school was in session, learning curve like this to begin with. Now with that said, in terms of, for your listeners, and for just in terms of how does one proceed along this way, I always say we have to remember our humanness. Why do I say that? 'Cause I'm gonna screw up. I'm gonna make a mistake. So if I can acknowledge my humaneness and know am gonna make a mistake, I'm not gonna walk on eggshells. I'm not gonna have the intention to work on my own awareness and language so as to minimize its impact on other people? Absofreakinlutely. But what happens if I goof, if there's an oops or an ouch, I'm gonna clean it up. And I'm gonna resolve to do better. So it can be a slippery slope. So when anybody who's choosing to step on the path of becoming an ally, even that, like I don't call myself an ally, I'm forever an ally in training. That keeps me honest, keeps me learning. And so that would be my answer to how I learn, how I'm learning. And even like when you said cisgendered, I'm like, "Okay, I didn't know that." Did I go down the shame spiral and chastise myself? No, that's not gonna do anybody any good.

**Brian McComak:** Yeah, and you're right like it is being okay with the fact that it's not possible for us to have all the information and all the answers and all the understanding. If we can be open to learning. And along the way, there's a weekly I... My colleague, Lori Muszynski and I started a series, a learning circle where we are engaging together with two cohorts. Right now we're going through the book "White Fragility" together. One of the lessons that are learning is I think that Lori shared in the first session is this concept of calling in. We're in the room together, and we're gonna help each other learn. And actually this happened on a session earlier this week where someone who is, these groups are primarily white individuals who are understanding whiteness in a different way. And someone referred to

everyone who has felt like outsiders. And Lori and I just wanna I'm gonna have a call in a moment here of when we use the word outsider, we're centering whiteness as the right way and everything else is not. And that, similar what you have said the individual who had used the word said, "Thank you so much." Like it helps her learn and show up differently. The next time didn't go down the shame spiral. But that's not easy to do. It takes up some like practice.

**Ray Arata:** Yes, yes. Take practice, and what that practice requires courage. The courage to be uncomfortable occasionally. That's just part of the work. So if you've got that, keep going.

**Brian McComak:** Yes, and keep going and then keep going and keep going. Now I had a chance to go through, to join the conference in October and actually make some little credit for you. I got to be there because of Jennifer Brown Consulting and our mutual friend Robert Beaven, who said, "Brian, you should be in this room "and you should have this experience." So they helped get me in the room. I recall that you had a framework that you took the people through during the course of that day. And can you share that with us? How you're approaching the framework and the learning through the Better Man Conference?

**Ray Arata:** Absolutely. So the framework, how I do my personal work, how I often frame up keynotes, is what we call the Allies Journey. And think of the this, I'm gonna state the four steps, the Allies Journey as contextual and literal. So first step is acknowledge that I have bias and privilege. Now inherent in that first step, has us as men, look at man box behaviors and outdated norms of masculinity "cause they're often hidden. So let's shine the light on that as well. Not just biased, not just privileged. Step two, take responsibility for the impact of my bias and privilege and man box behaviors. And when necessary, clean it up. That opens up the door for an exploration of intention versus impact. Step three, listen with empathy and compassion. This is key. This is where diversity stories, and everyone has one. I love that phrase that Jennifer helped me see, that it's also where men and women make the journey from the head to the heart. And that opens up the door. And I was just writing in my book chapter this morning, around what are things companies can do to support men to talk act and think like a man. And one of them is be willing to do a qualitative gender assessment by asking women In your company, "What's it like? "What's going on for you?" With the intention to, without shame or blame, help men see what's happening all around them. Step four is, and all these steps are iterative, by the way, is committed to new practices and behaviors. Now the fifth step is lather, rinse, repeat, but I don't need to say that because you're gonna keep doing these steps over and over again. So what we did in the Better Man Conference is we inserted an experiential exercise that basically gave people an experience for that step. And then took them through. And so that's how we do it.

**Brian McComak:** You stole my next question Ray, which was, as I'm hearing these, my guess is, it's a bit like peeling an onion, that as you go through a journey than you realize, I have another journey to go through. And I've experienced it myself, the first time that I really came to understand that I have bias like, 'cause I don't wanna believe that. But actually, it's really important that I understand that I have bias, because then I can then choose to act differently. But then getting to the place where like, "Okay, well, "now I understand that racism is also part of who I am. "And then I will have racist aspects "that how I see the world. "And then I can also be intentional about that." But I don't think I could have gotten to that conversation if I hadn't gotten through the bias conversation first. And I'm sure that there's probably another phase that I'm yet to uncover, and I'll get there someday when I'm ready. But it's an ongoing journey.

**Ray Arata:** Yeah, Robin DiAngelo's book, and her term "White Fragility" the way I hold white fragility is, "Yeah, okay. "It's a condition. "It's a reality out there." But how do you wanna be? When I listen to our friends of color, they're saying, "You know I get that you got this white fragility, "but act, move on, be courageous. "We've been living with the

horse for generations, "So join us get past your fragility, "understand your fragility "grow from your fragility and join us." So there's a lot and that the trick is how can those messages that come from our friends of color not put the white people into shame and blame and defensiveness. All this is muscle building. So the Allies Journey which we initially created for men, we found also applied to allyship in general. Which we found applies to the current Black Lives Matter uprising. So the context is still there. And the nuances are different, but it's still apply.

**Brian McComak:** Are there when you with the Allies Journey, are there any of those steps that you have found are more challenging than other steps for people to go through? And how do you get them through over that hurdle?

**Ray Arata:** First of all, what I've found and this is an indirect answer to a question you haven't asked, is that most companies are at step one. Most human beings are step one. Now, not mainstream, D&I practitioners, people like ourselves, but a lot of people are at that step one. And so probably one of the most difficult steps is the intention versus impact nuance that falls under take responsibility. That's a difficult one to do. I love everything related to the heart, so I wanna skip to step three, as often as possible, and to help people be human. And what I've learned and what I teach is this work. And of being an ally requires a partnership of the head and the heart. Conscious head conscious heart. So, conscious head is where you need to start or get to, you might be a heart centered guy like me, but you got to gotta your level of awareness and understand bias, bust the bias, interrupt the bias, rewrite the bias, whatever you need to do, so that you stay awake hear in your head. So it's in one respect, all the steps are difficult, but I would say that's step one, and two, is where most people are. And that's where most of the work needs to happen. I find that by the time we get to step three, we're all human. We just need to be given permission to be so.

**Brian McComak:** You just reminded me of a conversation we had in the learning circle session earlier this week. Actually it was last week, where what was happening with the chapters that we read and "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo, before that session, they made us all really uncomfortable, 'cause we're all facing this stuff about ourselves as white people and what it means for us. And one of the members in the group, who has, he's currently in an intentional listening phase. As a professional he said I just learned how to listen better. And so he was just watching what was happening around the group and he said, "I'm just gonna step in here 'cause what I see is "we've skipped from discomfort to solving an action. "And we skipped the, how do we process this, "and how do we sit with it, "and how do we understand it? "How do we accept it? "Yes, we should get to action "but it's a group that is primarily executives and leaders. "And people that have been taught, "we need to go forth and solve something and make it happen. "And that's not a bad instinct. "But in this conversation, "it's actually not gonna serve us well, "'cause we're gonna miss the point." I love that he brought us back to like, "We gotta process it first "before we can even get to "how can we be part of the solution? "What does that look like?"

**Ray Arata:** Was the group mainly men?

**Brian McComak:** Actually, these groups are primarily women, interestingly enough. As you would expect, the groups are primarily women and gay men. We do have... We intentionally we've invited a few straight men, straight white men to be part of the group, 'cause we wanted that and they've been great contributors. But I think it's mostly what we really attribute to is less about the gender dynamic and more about what it means to be an executive in corporate America and what's expected of us and how we're taught to assimilate to that. I hope--

**Ray Arata:** The reason why I asked the question is it reminded me of the work I've done on my own journey, and how I learned a long time ago that us guys tend to wanna fix. And us guys weren't taught to process. Now, in a traditional gender binary construct one can make those assumptions. And inside companies, if you look at it through the optics of what women have had to do in order to survive and thrive, they've overinflated their masculine attributes and assimilated. So there's a part of me that, wants to invite more men to adapt and incorporate their feminine attributes and to somehow let women know, "You know, what? "Those feminine attributes that you didn't think served, "we need them." So that's why I asked that question. 'Cause going to action 'cause of the story I was making up as I was with a bunch of guys, let's go straight to solution. I was wrong.

**Brian McComak:** Yeah, well, and what I think is, I'll say right about the assessment is, no the people in that room weren't primarily men, but the people in that room have grown up in a world designed by men and have adjusted to corporate America designed by men. So that's how they show up in the room.

**Ray Arata:** Exactly.

**Brian McComak:** And they're like, "No, we have to put all that other stuff away." I think that's why you and I share this passion for the heart and soul. The book I'm writing, hopefully, will come out next year, as we were talking about before maybe it early in the conversation, live conversation, not easy. But it is about, how do we get back to heart and soul. Because I think we've lost a lot of what we need to bring into the our four walls of corporate, any corporation, because we're leaving heart and soul out of it, and we're all trying to be these action oriented, solution oriented individuals. Which is good, I don't wanna discount that. But we're missing part of the conversation of there are people that work there. There are humans that work there. And all the products and services are all bought by humans too. And if we don't think about humanity, I worry that we're missing something.

**Ray Arata:** I call it the new technology. I have a thriving coaching practice and pretty much all my conversations of late have been just this. I was talking to a CEO yesterday. I'm like, "Instead of focusing on the success of your company, "why not pay attention "to what's going on right in front of you "through the lens of humanness. "People are struggling. "You're struggling, hit pause acknowledge, process, "slow down, connect." It's this kind of foundational work that needs to happen. I mean in my own opinion is that COVID and the uprisings as a result of George Floyd's murder, have basically shone the spotlight on the futility of all the other stuff that we've been doing and it's demanding, demanding that we be human. 'Cause that's the only thing that's gonna get us through this. So part of me is like, "Bring it on." Bring it on. It's the only way we're gonna get out of this together. My two cents.

**Brian McComak:** Yeah, well, and I'll add my two cents, and now we have four cents. I have a similar perspective and actually the add I might get to offer there is, first, I would say, knowledge of the pandemic has been impactful in significant ways for everyone. And we know that if not to marginalized communities, the black and brown communities in ways that we are still going to understanding and that there's some things that we have to pay attention to there. I also like to believe that there's always some silver lining or something we gain from something. And I think it has forced us to slow down as a world and it has forced executives to pay attention to humanity and what their people need. Now, is everyone getting it? No. Is there more work to do? Absolutely. So I'm realistic as well. I'm also optimistic. But I think there's something that hopefully this is gonna give us and I'm curious as you're having those conversations with individuals or with leaders, how are you helping to encourage them on this journey? What are those conversations like of leaning into humanity? My guess is it's probably different as well if you're talking to a male leader or a woman

leader, or if you're talking to an individual for themselves or if they're leading a company. How are you helping them get there?

**Ray Arata:** I used to filter myself and I stopped doing that about a year ago, and I started trusting myself around the humanity aspect. And so I just start riffing on a lot of stuff we've been talking about today. The necessity of being human, I changed my vernacular a little bit. I educate about what healthy masculinity is. I educate about having head and heart. I educate and share what we've been learning and creating these spaces on Friday calls where people are struggling. I'm inviting them not to do an end around on that, but to go straight at it. And a phrase that came up for me is we need to tend to the business of being human before we can tend to business. And that is what's freaking present right now. And if you bypass that, you're missing the boat. And if you value your people, and you take time and you maybe even share your own struggle, saying, "This is hard, this sucks, I'm sad." Whatever one's truth is, you give other people permission to do the same. It grounds people, it unites people, and then they can do their work. So when I start talking like that, I have to expect them to hang up and they're not, they're not, they're saying, "What else can we do?" "What do you think Ray?" And I'm like, "Wow. Okay, keep talking."

**Brian McComak:** Keep going.

**Ray Arata:** So that's very high level to answer your question. That's what I've been noticing. And that's fuel for me to keep bringing it. Keep pushing it, pushing to, pushing it. And then watch what happens.

**Brian McComak:** I'm curious when you use the phrase the business of being human. I guess I have a hypothesis, which is why I'm asking the question that, this may be based on my own bias, that a woman might be like, "Oh, I know what you're talking about." And a man might be like, "What do you mean?"

**Ray Arata:** So I have a fair amount of experience of either attempting to bifurcate my speech when there's men and women in the room. So I've chunked it up to being human. So here's what I mean by that. In my new book, I came up with six heart based leadership principles that apply to all human beings. One is emotional literacy. Two is vulnerability. Three is authenticity. Four is accountability, Five is inclusivity. And six is love. So those principles as a leader as a human are anchor points for us to walk through life. And if we, you, I, everyone on the call chooses to adapt, bring more of those forward, there's lots of dividends gonna come your way. Your connections will increase, your leadership will, I mean think about it. If I've asked a room full of people first and this is when I do with the men and the women I'll say, "Hey guys, watch this." I say to the women in the room, "If I admit that I don't have an answer. Or that I'm afraid, or I'm not sure." Versus, "I got this." Do you trust me more or less? Or a show of hands if you trust me more. And most of the hands go up in the room, I'm like, "Guys see that? I just told the truth. It wasn't like I got this, I have all the answers, but I was human." So one of my messages is, vulnerability engenders trust, it creates connection. So as a leader, regardless of your gender or how you identify is very very important. So I could give you examples for all those heart based leadership principles, but a lot of my work has been focused on getting men caught up. And doing away with the outdated playbook of what it means to be a man. That largely falls on men to take responsibility for that. And there's some responsibility for women that have contributed to the old model. So we all need to throw that book away and be in a conscious rewrite, which is, well this year's theme for the Better Man Conference is it's all about him. Healthy, inclusive masculinity. And we're going to, I'm envisioning a collaborative rewrite of what that healthy masculinity looks like for everybody. Not just men, not just white men. So I could go on and on and on and on.

**Brian McComak:** Well you now reminded me of the Gillette commercial of what masculinity is, a rewrite of masculinity. Maybe we can find that and put it in the chat. Liz is like, "Brian, I heard."

**Liz Roy:** I'm looking

**Brian McComak:** I'm so grateful for Liz, 'cause it helps allow me to stay in the conversation. I wanna ask, you've mentioned a couple things that you're doing. And so, Fridays tell us about Fridays again, what is it? Is it every Friday? What is it? Is a series--

**Ray Arata:** So the story behind the Friday calls was they wanted "Shelter in Place" I saw a bunch of long faces on my partner's call and I said, "Can we get..." and I'll spare the expletive freaking real, and do a real check in. 'Cause on all of our calls, we check in and we reveal we say, "Today I'm feeling sad "or I'm afraid or, something's got my attention "or whatever the case may be." It brings us together and that day on "Shelter in Place" everyone had a bomb drop. And the idea occurred to me we need to create this space for leaders to do that so they can be present for their people. So I researched with a couple people. Next thing I know we're doing "Getting Real" in times of crisis series, using one of those heart based leadership principles a week, bringing a guest on and then putting people into breakout rooms, three, four or five, six people and saying, "Here's a question we want you to answer." They connect with other people, they get real when they come back. "What was that like for you, put it in the chat "or raise your hand." And it is an engagement model that helps people be human. And it caught like wildfire. And next thing you know, we did how white people, white allies can show up to combat racism. That was our most attended call. And then there was Pride Month and we had two different sessions there. And so between now and the conferences, we're gonna be doing them every other Friday. And they can based on the link that's in the chat, they can see what those are, they can sign up for them, share the links, encourage them to come. And so the idea was just an idea until we implemented it and people loved it. So we're gonna emulate that engagement experience at our virtual Better Man Conferences as well.

**Brian McComak:** That was my next question is well, how often do you do the the beverage? Sorry, the beverage man conferences, Better Man apparently I'm thirsty. How often do you do the Better Man Conference? Are you going virtual this year? How do people join--

**Ray Arata:** At the beginning of the year we were gonna do London. And it was gonna be hosted by Moody's and Citi and New York and San Francisco and then COVID kind of blew everything up. But now we're doing a Pacific Time, an Eastern Time and a Greenwich Time conference. September 17 for Pacific Time and this is all on the website. October 8 for Eastern Time, and I believe October 29 for Greenwich Time. We're looking for sponsors and people do attend for, all three conferences. We're finding that because people don't have to travel, it's a lot easier. So we're gonna be cognizant of Zoom fatigue, create a very interactive experience. Eduardo Placer, who you've had on the call, is gonna be our illustrious host. Again, I can't wait. He just makes me laugh and warms my heart when he is Eduardo. So I'm looking forward to him bringing his is overlay to the conference.

**Brian McComak:** Eduardo just a joy.

**Ray Arata:** He is,

**Brian McComak:** Yeah, well that and actually, I met Eduardo, the same day, I met you at the Better Man Conference at Moody's this past fall. And then I'm like, "I have to know him. "He's just a light and a joy, and a good spirits." So well, I'm looking forward to those conferences, this fall and I would encourage anyone who's watching or listening, please check those out. It was a powerful day. And I think for me, the thing that was most powerful that day was... And again, this week we've talked about this so statement won't be surprising, although it was the other side of the coin of I'm so used to being in rooms that were talking about diversity, equity and inclusion, and I don't see men there. So I just got used to that. And now I'm like in day I like, "I got to see men "like in the room and they're part of the conversation." That was super exciting.

**Ray Arata:** And they were being real. I can't tell you how many diversity and inclusion professors came up to me like, "I can't believe this Ray. "These men are being real. "They're emoting. "They're telling the truth. "This is awesome." And that comes from years of knowing how to create the space for men to do that.

**Brian McComak:** I love that, I love that. Well we're just about out of time. I'm gonna flip the slides again and just mention a friend of both of ours who is going to be with me. Joining me next week, Katie Mooney. I see Liz is a fan. I know, I'm sure Ray, you're a fan as well--

**Ray Arata:** Yeah.

**Brian McComak:** Hold on Katie and it's our final episode of the Hope, Heart and the Human Spirit series. So I hope you'll join us next week. We'll be back at the regular time at 3 pm Eastern Time next Wednesday. So please join us. Ray I'll leave with just two questions for you to answer. One is how do people reach you if they wanna get in touch, and what brings you joy?

**Ray Arata:** So if they go to [bettermanconference.com](http://bettermanconference.com) and subscribe on our newsletter, that's one way to be in the know 'cause we send out blogs that I write. Some of my partners that they write and if they wanna email me [ray@bettermanconference.com](mailto:ray@bettermanconference.com) What brings me joy, the bicycle brings me joy 'cause it brings me freedom and release. But more than anything else, sitting around the table with friends and family. And where soul food and real food are enjoyed. That's it for me. And what I can do on the weekends with family I wanna do in the workplace.

**Brian McComak:** I love that, I love that. Ray, thank you so much for joining us. It was a pleasure. Liz, as always, thank you for being with us. Your beautiful smile.

**Liz Roy:** Oh, thank you, my pleasure. Thank you for inviting me. Love this conversation.

**Ray Arata:** Thank you, Brian and Liz and everybody else who was out there. I hope you got some nuggets to take away and next time.

**Brian McComak:** Absolutely. Again, for all of you joining thank you for being with us. I wish you well. And be kind to each other. We'll talk to you soon.

**Ray Arata:** Bye bye.

**Liz Roy:** Bye everyone, thank you. Thanks, Claudia.