

# Hummingbird **Humanity**

an LGBTQ+ owned business

## Hummingbird Hour

Parents Loving and Supporting their LGBTQ Kids

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00;00;10;20 - 00;00;27;00

Brian McComak

Happy Tuesday, everyone. Welcome to another episode session edition. We need to figure out which word we're using to define what we do each month here. It's not quite a podcast yet, but coming soon this may become a podcast.

00;00;27;01 - 00;00;51;12

Brian McComak

So. So stay tuned for those updates. Welcome to Hummingbird Hour. We are just letting our guests into the room and I'm going to give it just one more minute and then we will officially get started. So hang tight as we let everyone into the room and the zoom catches up with all those who've joined us, there's

00;00;51;12 - 00;01;00;04

Brian McComak

always that that one minute delay. I feel like I get the email notification that people are in my Zoom room and then I'm like, But they're not there. I can't let.

00;01;00;04 - 00;01;01;00

Brian McComak

Them in yet.

00;01;04;10 - 00;01;04;24

Brian McComak

Okay.

00;01;06;28 - 00;01;29;04

Brian McComak

Well, let's let's go ahead and get started. Happy. Happy Tuesday again, everyone. Welcome to Hummingbird. Our Hummingbird Hour is our monthly conversation series where we invite Thought Leaders and Changemakers to join us for a conversation about the wonderful work that they are doing to make a difference in the world.

00;01;29;04 - 00;01;53;14

Brian McComak

And I'm delighted today to be joined by Vanessa and J.R. Ford and will not join will do more formal introductions of both of them in just a moment. We before we dove in, though, to our official official welcome, I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the the tragic events of the weekend and the deaths

00;01;53;27 - 00;02;18;28

Brian McComak

and the murders that transpired in Buffalo. I know that many of us are processing what transpired and thinking about how are we part of the change that needs to happen? How do we continue to combat the systems of oppression and the reality that of rate of racism in our country and how racism is continuing to kill people

00;02;18;28 - 00;02;32;01

Brian McComak

and that people are losing their lives because of the pandemic of racism. So I want to just say that we're reflecting at Hummingbird about what we can do and how do we respond and how can we be part of that change.

00;02;32;13 - 00;02;54;12

Brian McComak

And my thoughts and my my heart is with all of those impacted and also just with the black community that continues to wake up to these tragic events. And I also know that thoughts and prayers aren't enough. And please know that Hummingbird and I are committed to taking action and continuing to be part of the change.

00;02;54;12 - 00;03;07;22

Brian McComak

And hopefully we can make the world a better place and a safer place for everyone. So I just want to just ask us just all pause for a moment and just take a moment of silence and then we'll return to the the events of the day.

00;03;19;19 - 00;03;19;29

Brian McComak

Okay.

00;03;20;29 - 00;03;36;03

Brian McComak

Thank you all for joining with me in that moment of silence. And again, for those of you for those impacted in Buffalo and around the globe, please know that we're thinking of you. Okay. We're going to return back to Hummingbird.

00;03;36;03 - 00;03;47;23

Brian McComak

Our I have to sort of navigate between emotional moments and exciting moments because I think this is an important conversation today that we're going to have. And I want to honor some of the other conversations that are part of May.

00;03;47;23 - 00;04;12;10

Brian McComak

So let's let's dove into our welcome or official welcome to Hummingbird Hour. So first, I'm excited to share that hummingbird humanity that we're continuing to grow. Hummingbird turns two this month. I still I still can't believe it's been two years since I launched Hummingbird Humanity with our live conversation series Hope, Heart and the Human Spirit in May

00;04;12;10 - 00;04;31;01

Brian McComak

of 2020. And of course, indicative of the events of this past weekend, the murder of George Floyd two years ago has catapulted conversations around racism and systemic oppression to the national and global spotlight, conversations that have been in play for many, many years.

00;04;31;01 - 00;04;45;17

Brian McComak

But many of us paid attention in a different way. And I'm really grateful that Hummingbird has been part of the work, too, to make workplaces better, workplaces more inclusive and diverse and equitable and place, workplaces where humans can thrive.

00;04;45;17 - 00;05;03;28

Brian McComak

So we are just happy that we're still we're still here and making a difference in the world. And thank you for all being part of the hummingbird humanity community. So for those of you joining us today, I would certainly welcome and invite you to share to share in the chat where you're where you're joining us from.

00;05;04;15 - 00;05;17;16

Brian McComak

Share your LinkedIn if you want to connect with others that are joining us today. This is as part of the hummingbird community. We all want to celebrate and amplify and elevate each other. So please share about yourselves in the chat and connect with each other.

00;05;18;12 - 00;05;30;03

Brian McComak

We've also enabled live captions for anyone who may be deaf or hard of hearing or who prefers to use captions. So click on the caption button in your Zoom bar using toolbar if you'd like to see the captions today.

00;05;31;08 - 00;05;48;13

Brian McComak

I also want to just acknowledge that there are several months awareness Heritage Month that we're celebrating this month as well. So we have Mental Health Awareness Month and certainly as many of you will know, I talk about my experiences with mental illness and how my journey and mental health is has been so important to me.

00;05;48;13 - 00;06;04;12

Brian McComak

And I know that's true for so many of you as well. So we want we want to make sure we honor Mental Health Awareness Month. It's also Jewish American Heritage Month and Asian. It looks like my script and our slides are in a different order.

00;06;04;12 - 00;06;25;14

Brian McComak

Mark and Lindsay will chat about that later. Now it's all it's all good. So it's Jewish American Heritage Month and it's also Asian-American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. So I know that many of you and many of your organizations are celebrating these different communities and working to share stories and help us understand and build greater awareness and

00;06;25;14 - 00;06;48;18

Brian McComak

understanding of each other's lived experiences. Today, in the spirit of our conversation, which I think is was what I would love to say, it was intentional and it just happened this way. It's also the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, which I think is, you know, certainly is a nice moment for us to be having a

00;06;48;18 - 00;07;10;09

Brian McComak

conversation today around transgender youth and the challenges that are that our transgender youth are facing across our country. So we'll talk more about that in a few minutes. Next month. Next week, we have our hummingbird, our special edition, amplifying transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming voices.

00;07;10;19 - 00;07;33;19

Brian McComak

So I'm delighted that we have a wonderful panel of come of of guests joining together all members of the trans non veterinary and non-binary and gender non-conforming community to share about their experiences, their perspectives, and help us understand the community as well and answer some of the questions that many of you may have to understand different life

00;07;33;19 - 00;07;53;15

Brian McComak

experiences than your own. So please join us next week as well. And then next month, I believe. In the next slide we have Rhodes Perry, who will be joining us on June 21st for next month's Hummingbird Hour. And Rhodes is a two time author and also an openly transgender man.

00;07;53;15 - 00;08;15;18

Brian McComak

So we'll continue our conversation for Pride Month and learn from Rhodes about how do we create cultures of belonging in our workplaces. Today, though, we have Vanessa and J.R. Ford. Vanessa and J.R. are nationally known advocates for LGBTQ rights and specifically transgender youth.

00;08;16;16 - 00;08;38;24

Brian McComak

Their advocacy and work has been featured in The New York Times, Newsweek, The Boston Globe, The Washington Post and in Gender Revolution A Journey with Katie Couric. I'm a big Katie Couric fans. I'm a little jealous. In addition, they are members of the Human Rights Campaign's Parents for Transgender Equality Council and authors of the children's book tell

00;08;38;24 - 00;08;50;14

Brian McComak

them they live with their two children, one of whom is a transgender in the Boston, Massachusetts, area. Vanessa and J.R., I'm so delighted that you're with us today. Thank you so much again for saying yes.

00;08;51;14 - 00;08;57;22

Vanessa Ford

Of course, we love saying yes to things like this. This is wonderful. Thank you so much for having us.

00;08;57;23 - 00;08;59;01

JR Ford

Yeah, it's great to be here.

00;08;59;21 - 00;09;01;27

Vanessa Ford

Yeah. I'm Vanessa Fort. I used her.

00;09;01;27 - 00;09;05;04

JR Ford

Pronouns, and I'm J.R. and my pronouns. Are he him?

00;09;05;11 - 00;09;24;21

Vanessa Ford

And as Brian mentioned, we are two parents. I was also an educator in DC Public Schools for about 15 years, and we are the authors of Calvin. And, you know, it's a little unusual when you're an adult and you come to a conversation to open with a children's book.

00;09;25;01 - 00;09;35;05

Vanessa Ford

But let's all put on our children's hat for a few moments. Sit back, relax, and we'd love to share Calvin Story with you as the impetus for our conversation after.

00;09;35;16 - 00;09;37;18

JR Ford

Something about work right now. No.

00;09;38;06 - 00;09;38;25

Vanessa Ford

All right.

00;09;38;29 - 00;09;39;14

Brian McComak

And I think it.

00;09;39;14 - 00;09;39;20

Vanessa Ford

Was.

00;09;39;26 - 00;09;52;02

Brian McComak

Often while Vanessa and J.R. bringing up this book, I will share with the audience, I, as Vanessa and J.R. already know, I wanted to read the book, of course, before our live conversation today, and I read it about an hour ago.

00;09;52;13 - 00;10;00;11

Brian McComak

And fortunately, I have wiped away the tears. So if you're not ready for the tears to flow, make sure you get your tissues, because this is a really, really beautiful story.

00;10;01;11 - 00;10;19;18

Vanessa Ford

And we'll just note. Thank you so much, Bryan, that Calvin was inspired by our child's journey. And we will get into more of that when we are done. So please enjoy Calvin. We also wanted to note that we have this really large dedication.

00;10;20;21 - 00;10;35;21

Vanessa Ford

This book has been dedicated to each and every one of our trans child's teachers that they've had since they transitioned at four, along with some amazing trans activists and friends of ours. So let us begin.

00;10;37;06 - 00;10;40;16

JR Ford

For as long as I could remember. I knew I was a boy.

00;10;43;05 - 00;10;58;18

Vanessa Ford

I draw myself with short hair and a shirt like Papa. I dream about swim trunks like my dad and brother wore. I didn't tell my family until the night before our summer trip to Gigi and Papa. I was scared they wouldn't believe me.

00;10;58;26 - 00;11;08;26

Vanessa Ford

But I knew it was time to be me. Whenever I have to do something scary, my dad always says, take deep breaths and count down from five.

00;11;10;14 - 00;11;26;09

JR Ford

Everyone ready? Breathe in. Breathe out. Five, four, three, two, one. I'm not a girl. I told my family I'm a boy. A boy in my heart. And in my brain.

00;11;29;09 - 00;11;47;22

Vanessa Ford

We love you if you are a girl. Boy. Neither or both. We love you. Whoever you are. My dad said later. Dad told me the word for how I felt was transgender. Being transgender means other people think you are one gender, but inside you know you're a different one.

00;11;48;24 - 00;12;05;08

Vanessa Ford

I wondered how Gigi and Popo would react. As we got closer, I squeezed my stuff, lie into my chest. I had already told my family who I was. Now I needed to tell them my name. The same name is your favorite stuffed lion that asked.

00;12;05;26 - 00;12;09;28

Vanessa Ford

It's why I named him that. It's always been my name. To me.

00;12;12;03 - 00;12;34;16

JR Ford

Why don't we got the GM papers that told them my new name? He introduced me. Our summer trip turned out to be the best ever at the comic convention. Papa bought me my favorite costume, my suit, my favorite superhero side, my poster using my real name.

00;12;39;12 - 00;12;55;10

Vanessa Ford

At Waterworld, Gigi bought me and my brother matching swim trunks. Even the water slides felt better in them. In line for popcorn, I made a new friend. I felt proud to tell him my name. We spent the whole day together.

00;12;58;01 - 00;13;18;03

JR Ford

On the last day of vacation at the big outlet stores near Gigi and Papa. I picked out new clothes that night. I gave my family a fashion show. You look so handsome. Gigi told school was starting soon, and I knew there was only one more thing I needed to feel like me.

00;13;19;09 - 00;13;23;11

JR Ford

When I looked in the mirror, I finally saw me.

00;13;27;17 - 00;13;42;04

Vanessa Ford

That said there were other transgender people in the world, but I didn't know any kids like me at my school and school started next week. Being the only one felt scary. How would everyone treat me? What if my friends wouldn't call me?

00;13;42;23 - 00;13;45;23

Vanessa Ford

What if? What if? What if?

00;13;48;16 - 00;14;09;15

JR Ford

The first day of school, I dragged my feet to the door. Breathe in. Breathe out. Five, four, three, two, one. Welcome back to school. We're glad you're here. When the principal said my name, I felt safe and happy.

00;14;10;11 - 00;14;28;07

JR Ford

Violet's crept up to me, calling out my new name, too. Do you know my name? I asked. Yeah. Your dad told my mom you're a boy now. I've always been a boy inside. Are we still friends? Yes. Did you bring your jump rope to reason for recess?

00;14;30;20 - 00;14;46;03

Vanessa Ford

When I stepped inside my classroom, I couldn't believe what I saw. The cubby, the lunch chart, the homework station and the mailboxes. The name tag on the table. My new name was everywhere. Everywhere it should be.

00;14;49;04 - 00;15;03;24

JR Ford

I felt my fears start to go away. Welcome back to class. For morning meeting. We'll all share about our summer stories. Are we all share about our summers? I mean, just what I would say when it was my turn.

00;15;06;05 - 00;15;20;22

Vanessa Ford

I stood up proudly to share my summer summer story. But first I introduced myself. Hi, I said. My name is Calvin c a l v i n and I felt my what ifs melt away.

00;15;22;23 - 00;15;24;14

JR Ford

The end.

00;15;26;08 - 00;15;27;01

Vanessa Ford

Now the end.

00;15;29;20 - 00;15;44;28

Brian McComak

That's such a beautiful story. Thank you so much for for sharing the story with us and again for being with us today. So one of the conversations that we have at Hummingbird is that we believe that diversity conversations are for kids, too.

00;15;45;21 - 00;15;59;05

Brian McComak

And and, you know, I work with so many adults that are parents like yourselves, that are in workplaces and trainings that we're doing. And they're like, where do I find these resources? And how do I how do I talk about these conversations, my kids?

00;15;59;11 - 00;16;09;18

Brian McComak

I don't know if that was the inspiration for you to write this book or if it was just your own personal story or a little bit of both. But how did you get here? How did you end up with a book about about 20 hours?

00;16;09;18 - 00;16;32;08

Vanessa Ford

How did we get here? We all started! So, as we mentioned, we have a transgender child. Our child currently uses they them pronouns and identifies as transgender non-binary. However, in 2015, our child told us very clearly, much like Calvin did, I'm a girl in my heart, in my brain.

00;16;32;27 - 00;16;54;09

Vanessa Ford

It was actually their fourth birthday. We had a house full of people for a housewarming, I think, and their birthday party. And at the time we thought we had a son, but we also were pretty open family. And so for we thought we had a son and he was in and they were wearing a dress, Elsa dress

00;16;54;09 - 00;17;11;17

Vanessa Ford

from Frozen and Lightning McQueen slippers. And so we were going up to bed on this birthday, I think it was March 21st, 2015. And I said, Well, Facebook memories tells me what day it was. I said, You are my favorite princess boy.

00;17;11;17 - 00;17;21;21

Vanessa Ford

And my child turned to me, looked me straight in the eyes and said, I'm not a boy. I'm a girl in my heart, in my brain. To which I said, Let's go brush our teeth and go to bed.

00;17;21;21 - 00;17;42;02

Vanessa Ford

Like, what a great day. What do we do with this information? So we started looking for resources and we lived in Washington, D.C. at the time and had some connections with the Human Rights Campaign and ended up talking with a number of trans leaders at the National Center for Transgender Equality Human Rights Campaign and getting connected to

00;17;42;02 - 00;18;04;12

Vanessa Ford

other families with little, little kids who were saying similar things. And what we found, it took us a few months, but what we found is that we actually had a daughter at the time that we didn't know. And in June it was July of 2015, our child Ellie chose their name named after a lovey, just like Calvin

00;18;04;22 - 00;18;19;06

Vanessa Ford

. They have an elephant lovey, and they chose their name. We started using she her pronouns and sister. And then about two years ago, during COVID, Ellie came to us and said, You know, she's not fitting quite right either.

00;18;19;15 - 00;18;36;19

Vanessa Ford

I feel like I'm neither or both and still figuring it out. But I know I'm transgender, non-binary, and they them pronouns fits me better. And we said, Great. And we've been on that journey since. Now very quickly, because I'm not very quick.

00;18;37;26 - 00;18;46;24

Vanessa Ford

We we're looking for resources. And there were no books that represented families like ours. So we had.

00;18;48;04 - 00;18;48;16

Vanessa Ford

I Am

00;18;48;16 - 00;19;02;28

Vanessa Ford

Jazz, which is a classic book. Jazz is a white woman now, but there were no other books with children of color, trans children of color, and there were no books in 2018 when we started writing this book with transgender boys.

00;19;03;09 - 00;19;27;03

Vanessa Ford

So we knew we didn't want to write a book just called Ellie and telling our child's entire story. So we actually interviewed lots of trans kids, including our own, to come up with this amalgamation of Calvin. And we got the name from a real transgender boy in Canada and wanted to depict a supported, no bullying, 100% affirmed

00;19;27;03 - 00;19;30;25

Vanessa Ford

transgender child of color at school and at home.

00;19;30;26 - 00;19;49;22

JR Ford

Yeah. And we've heard, you know, people talk about, you know, seems like a fairy tale and, you know, this isn't real. Well, it absolutely is real. You know, it's a part of our journey and it's a part it represents a lot of people's a lot of kids journeys, you know, and being supported by family, by friends, by

00;19;49;22 - 00;19;51;20

JR Ford

the school and by the community know.

00;19;54;16 - 00;20;06;09

Brian McComak

I have so many questions and as many as we promised before we went live. I'm going to go off script because I have some great. So I'm just going to go off roading. Don't go where I'm inspired to go.

00;20;07;21 - 00;20;31;06

Brian McComak

So I'm going to make make an assumption that you have have had to have I've been fortunate enough to help other parents or other families going through this conversation. What are some of the first. Yeah. And I'll just start for myself, like when I am in my mid-forties and I am from a generation that was advocating for

00;20;31;06 - 00;20;46;29

Brian McComak

inclusion for gay individuals like me, and certainly there's generations before me that fought that allowed me to be the person I am today. And when I started to learn more about transgender identities or non-binary identities or gender non-conforming identities, I'm like, I'm all for it.

00;20;47;00 - 00;21;02;15

Brian McComak

Like, everyone be yourselves. I'm I'm great here. But it was also confusing for me at times. And and so I like I've been fortunate to have people who've helped me on that journey. So I'm curious, what are the what are the questions you get and how do you what are the first things you offer for people who

00;21;02;15 - 00;21;06;14

Brian McComak

are like, I want to be supportive, but I don't even know what I don't know.

00;21;06;28 - 00;21;07;09

Vanessa Ford

Right.

00;21;09;13 - 00;21;10;05

JR Ford

It's a great question.

00;21;10;05 - 00;21;26;15

Vanessa Ford

It's a great question. I would say one of the biggest things that we got when we first transitioned and we're talking about, Bryan, a social transition right now. And what that means is name pronoun and the way that you dress and present to the world.

00;21;26;21 - 00;21;47;02

Vanessa Ford

No medical intervention. We're talking about young children here. People would say, is this a phase? Right. This has got to be a phase. And I had a therapist early on when I said something similar. And she told me people are who they say they are until they tell you otherwise.

00;21;47;18 - 00;22;09;26

Vanessa Ford

And I often tell people it's not our responsibility to understand the complexities of gender. It's our responsibility to respect who people say they are. So, yes, you might struggle. One might struggle with using they them pronouns, but it's our responsibility to try and to practice.

00;22;10;03 - 00;22;22;22

Vanessa Ford

We often tell parents of non-binary children and say, I'm just really struggling with the with the singular they to practice it. We've had some who put swear jars in their houses where when they mess up, they put a dollar in it.

00;22;22;22 - 00;22;38;16

Vanessa Ford

And then it goes to something that the child and the parent does together. So the phase is a big question. We get that for young children, but then it's teenage children who come out. They often will ask, Oh, are they just confused?

00;22;38;26 - 00;22;48;29

Vanessa Ford

Are adults who come out say, you know, they find another reason to kind of disavow people's identity. But again, people are who they say they are until they tell you otherwise.

00;22;49;08 - 00;22;52;28

JR Ford

Yeah. And I would add, I just thought of a new little phrase, but. Ooh.

00;22;53;16 - 00;22;54;00

Vanessa Ford

Time.

00;22;54;08 - 00;23;09;25

JR Ford

Accept and respect. Mm hmm. You know, when. Yeah, when you meet someone new, whether they're trans or non-binary, accepting them for who they are and respecting them is, I think, one of the first steps about, you know, supporting them.

00;23;10;02 - 00;23;23;17

JR Ford

But also, you know, for us, it was about educating ourselves. You know, we have the Internet available to us now know it is all around us is at our fingertips. The first thing that we really tried to do was do some research.

00;23;23;19 - 00;23;23;27

JR Ford

You know.

00;23;24;01 - 00;23;25;02

Vanessa Ford

So much research.

00;23;25;04 - 00;23;42;19

JR Ford

That was one of the things that, you know, Vanessa is our researcher in residence here. So I thought, you know, that was one of the key things that was doing their homework. You know, even if you don't understand some of the terminology, there are resources out there, such as the Human Rights Campaign, the National Center for Transgender

00;23;42;19 - 00;23;50;10

JR Ford

Equality, that has resources out there at a one on one level to help educate, you know, the the common, you know, person.

00;23;52;10 - 00;24;10;09

Brian McComak

What? What do you think is the the most. I'm going to say the most. But my guess is there's a list of these of the most common misperceptions or misunderstandings as people are trying to understand what the stories you're telling them and the experiences of L.E. or of Calvert.

00;24;11;12 - 00;24;35;29

Vanessa Ford

I think one of the misconceptions is that. Parents and ideology and beliefs are forcing children to transition and that this is there there is a new thing that is in the anti trans world called rapid onset gender dysphoria.

00;24;36;17 - 00;25;00;24

Vanessa Ford

And it's not real. It's not an actual diagnosis or scientific thing. But this idea that this is a trend that children are transitioning all over the place and they're accessing medical care very quickly, doctors are pushing it, families are pushing it, when in reality, it's not easy.

00;25;00;24 - 00;25;14;13

Vanessa Ford

It's not easy for most people in the country to access the medical care that they need to support their transitions. It's not necessarily covered by all insurances. It's against the law in a number of states, which we'll get to.

00;25;15;07 - 00;25;44;23

Vanessa Ford

But I think this perception that this is increasing because of ideologies and easy access to care is not correct. What we've seen in the parent community and we're part of parent communities with over 10,000 families from around the country and world with all kinds of trans identified children, is that parents and school communities are working to be

00;25;44;23 - 00;26;02;10

Vanessa Ford

more accepting. And because they're more accepting, children are more likely to come out when they're younger because they're in environments that can support it. Of course, what we're seeing nationally are legislative attacks to try to quell that and really dangerous ways.

00;26;02;12 - 00;26;02;18

JR Ford

Yeah.

00;26;04;17 - 00;26;16;29

Brian McComak

Yeah. You know, I appreciate we want to highlight a couple of the things that have struck me in just our conversation so far. So I really appreciate the accept who someone says they are until they tell you something different.

00;26;17;00 - 00;26;32;21

Brian McComak

Like that's I think is a really beautiful message. And I think about the the journey that each of us, regardless of our gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation, which is not really part of today's conversation. That's a journey for each of us.

00;26;32;22 - 00;26;51;10

Brian McComak

And, you know, I remember when I first started coming out, I as a gay, gay man, I thought that I needed to be effeminate in my expression, because those were the handful of images I saw. And so and I happened to find this wonderful group of of of gay individuals.

00;26;51;10 - 00;27;03;24

Brian McComak

And all of them happened to do drag, which is also a different conversation than the one we're having today. That's a performance art. And and they were like, Brian, you just that's just not you just stop trying to be.

00;27;04;00 - 00;27;14;04

Brian McComak

Because I like I was like I was like, what's my word that I'm going to use? Because, you know, they would use whatever. I don't remember the words and I'm like, I'm going to call everyone beautiful. And they're like, Stop, just that's to stop you.

00;27;14;13 - 00;27;25;21

Brian McComak

And and I was trying to be something that I'm not. And so it is a journey for each of us. And I but I love, like they just said, like, just you just don't you don't have to be anything but just who you are.

00;27;25;21 - 00;27;39;02

Brian McComak

And and they accepted me for me. And, and my journey was fairly easy. I was fortunate to be born into a body where I identify with that gender identity, but that that's not true for everyone. And how do we accept them on that journey?

00;27;39;02 - 00;27;45;11

Brian McComak

And the world is not built for them. So health care systems and resources, all of those things.

00;27;45;20 - 00;27;45;28

Vanessa Ford

Yeah.

00;27;46;20 - 00;27;48;27

JR Ford

Health care, schools.

00;27;49;09 - 00;28;19;11

Vanessa Ford

Churches, community organizations, universities, they're not built physically. We're talking, you know, gender neutral bathroom access, for example. They're not built for nonbinary folks or transgender folks, but they're getting there and they're learning. And there are great people doing great work in so many of these spaces to become more affirming.

00;28;19;19 - 00;28;39;05

Vanessa Ford

And what you just said, interestingly, about trying to be something specific, when Elliot first transitioned, they were really girly, right? Like really just trying to show the world I am very binary in this space. And over the years that shifted some as they became more comfortable and had more knowledge.

00;28;39;13 - 00;28;54;04

Vanessa Ford

At 11, they're now 11 and a half, almost about what is available to them, what language is there and what ways can they present to the world? And they found their space.

00;28;55;20 - 00;29;09;24

Brian McComak

And it's a journey for each of us. And so, you know, I think that message of accept people who are as they say they are until they tell you otherwise is so important. And, you know, and it is a life long journey to understand ourselves regardless of our identities.

00;29;10;01 - 00;29;32;14

Brian McComak

I think that's that's a journey we all go on. You started to talk about the but the legislation that's that's sweeping the country and and is just terrifying in many ways I would say for me and and much of that legislation is is targeting the the transgender community.

00;29;32;19 - 00;29;41;14

Brian McComak

Would you like to talk about how that's you know, what what's your perspective on that legislation and how that's impacting you and people that that you know and love and maybe even your family?

00;29;41;27 - 00;30;06;14

Vanessa Ford

Yeah. Yeah. 337. That's how many anti. LBGTQ bills are currently this legislative session being heard in states across the country. Huge swath of states. 20 or so states. 150 of them are anti-trans. Another subset are specific to education.

00;30;07;05 - 00;30;32;03

Vanessa Ford

Almost all of them target youth. We're talking kids before, you know, and some are even extending it up to like 19 or 21. Alabama passed a law last week that made it a felony for doctors to provide affirming and I would say lifesaving care to trans individuals up to age 19.

00;30;32;09 - 00;30;53;24

Vanessa Ford

Luckily, that has been blocked in court. So that is a very good thing. But. We have friends in Texas where the governor came out with a letter that said teachers, counselors, community, people basically turned trans kids into child protective services so their families can be investigated.

00;30;53;29 - 00;31;12;22

Vanessa Ford

We have family friends who are being investigated by Child Protective Services for affirming their transgender children in Texas currently. Does that impact us in Massachusetts? No. Does it could it impact where our child wants to travel, where they want to live their life?

00;31;13;20 - 00;31;28;11

Vanessa Ford

Yes. Does it impact our community that we're part of? Absolutely. We don't let Ellie know a lot of the different things that are going on because, you know, they're focusing on finishing their project that, you know, for fifth grade for school.

00;31;28;21 - 00;31;48;01

Vanessa Ford

But we are actively involved in sharing those things. And about 20 bills have already passed banning medical care, banning discussion of gender identity and sexual identity in schools, banning Calvin and books like Calvin. So it's been pretty.

00;31;49;14 - 00;32;16;01

JR Ford

Pretty awful now. And, you know, to know that there are people out there who are trying to legislate our kids out of existence by blocking health care, by blocking even talking about know gbtc issues. It's sending a message to our kids and to the community that they're not worth it.

00;32;16;13 - 00;32;26;22

JR Ford

They're undervalued. They have no value. So trying to raise a part, a part of our country that we live in, it's appalling. It's horrifying.

00;32;26;28 - 00;32;45;25

Vanessa Ford

And ultimately, because it's really hard to legislate adults, although we're seeing that happen with the, you know, abortion bans. Essentially we're trying these legislators are trying to erase the existence of trans and non-binary and LGBTQ people by targeting kids.

00;32;46;04 - 00;32;46;10

JR Ford

Yeah.

00;32;46;29 - 00;33;03;16

Vanessa Ford

And I will say, I just saw in the chat a question about language for non-binary. It's actually one of my favorite words and it's nibbling and it has not become common here, but it is very common in the UK for niece and nephew and seventies nephew.

00;33;03;17 - 00;33;04;05

Vanessa Ford

It's nibbling.

00;33;06;23 - 00;33;21;22

Brian McComak

Thank you. Yes, well, and I learned that for anyone who hasn't seen the Dolly Parton series on Netflix, that I learned the word living from one of those those stories, which was a beautiful, beautiful. I'm like, oh, I didn't know that one either.

00;33;21;22 - 00;33;34;10

Brian McComak

So I actually didn't know the answer to that question. You know, the there's a few other questions in the chat that I want to make sure we get to. You know, I wanted I want to ask just a follow up question, which is one of the questions in the chat.

00;33;34;10 - 00;34;01;12

Brian McComak

So something that we're seeing here, as you mentioned, like this, the onslaught of legislation that is trying to erase and criminalize transgender identities across our country or just even a race, LGBTQ plus identity. You know, I live in Florida and I I'm still like, I'm not moving, but I'm still like, what do I do in this state

00;34;01;23 - 00;34;15;01

Brian McComak

? And and how does that is how do I play a role and what does that look like and how does it affect people I love? And so those questions are certainly emerging for me and for so many individuals.

00;34;16;06 - 00;34;33;18

Brian McComak

You know, the one thing that I that we we've seen and particularly in recent years, although I think this has been a reality for a number of years, is that the the reality of capitalism and the involvement of corporate America is one of the ways that change happens.

00;34;34;14 - 00;34;50;03

Brian McComak

And so there's a more specific question for the two of you, of how have how did your employer support or not support? How did this play out for you in your in your professional lives as you stepped into this landscape of we're going to be advocates for this conversation?

00;34;50;11 - 00;34;56;15

Brian McComak

And then I'm curious to see what you're seeing happen in other corporate environments as we as this this legislation is sweeping the nation.

00;34;56;27 - 00;35;10;01

Vanessa Ford

Yeah. So J.R. worked for the federal government until recently, for almost 20 years. And so how was that for you? I know that. I know that they supported some of our work, but you did have to at times.

00;35;10;13 - 00;35;34;27

JR Ford

Yeah, I would say that they evolved. You know, I was able to actually share a story with several key leaders. You know, when we were back down in D.C., you know, I would say over the course of the last probably five or five or eight years, the federal government kind of as a whole has been more accepting

00;35;35;25 - 00;35;36;07

JR Ford

, you know.

00;35;36;11 - 00;35;37;23

Vanessa Ford

Minus these four years.

00;35;37;24 - 00;35;40;05

JR Ford

Somewhere in there. I don't know what the.

00;35;40;05 - 00;35;41;14

Brian McComak

Four years you're talking about.

00;35;41;27 - 00;36;04;20

JR Ford

We won't talk about those. But, you know, in my you know, in my in my federal career, I did see that. You know, key leaders were open to people being themselves and bringing themselves to work. And it's not, you know, widespread, but, you know, it starts really local, you know, as with anything, it starts with in small

00;36;04;20 - 00;36;19;08

JR Ford

groups. And so when we moved up to Massachusetts, you know, I was still kind of called upon to go back down to D.C. I actually flew back down to D.C. to go and share a story for Pride Month back in 20 was at 2018, I believe.

00;36;20;10 - 00;36;35;00

JR Ford

So there I mean, that wouldn't have been possible, you know, if we didn't have people advocating within the federal government for equal opportunities for us to share our stories, you know, coming from federal government, public service into the private sector.

00;36;35;00 - 00;36;53;04

JR Ford

Now, where, you know, I feel a lot more comfortable with being who I am as a black man, as, you know, as not a person who, you know, as normally I'm I'm normally, you know, a person who is usually the you know, the only one, you know, we talk about the only one.

00;36;53;05 - 00;37;11;11

JR Ford

I'm the only black person in the meeting or I'm the only person of color. I'm usually not able to share my entire self. So over the course of the last few months, I've been able to share our story, you know, as a interracial couple, as a parent of a trans kid, as a black man, all these different

00;37;11;11 - 00;37;26;09

JR Ford

intersections have been I've been able to kind of flourish in my current position. And I know that, Vanessa, you know, your organization is also been, you know, an ally, you know, for for our support as well.

00:37;26;24 - 00:37;45;02

Vanessa Ford

Yeah, I was a teacher when Ellie transitioned. And so Ellie actually kind of transitioned in front of lots of kids and lots of families, and it just became kind of a community experience. But I now work in edtech, in higher education and.

00:37;46;08 - 00:38;01;04

Vanessa Ford

My company sent out. You know, unfortunately, I have one or two folks who are here today, but not the whole company. But they're sending out the recording they sent out that this was happening. They need time. It's on my calendar, visible to all senior leadership.

00:38;01;16 - 00:38;15;03

Vanessa Ford

So they know that we wrote Calvin. They know that we do this advocacy work and they're supporting making it happen. My company is only about 100 or so at this point, so we're just starting the IRG work. But being involved in that has been really active as well.

00:38;15;11 - 00:38;34;26

Vanessa Ford

And also just what I see is, you know, companies need to step away from just looking at this issue in June and knowing that companies, higher education organizations that we have LGBTQ people in every facet of your company, your organization, whether you know it or not.

00:38;35;06 - 00:38;55;08

Vanessa Ford

So making sure that policies and practices are there. I use this framework for teachers, but it works for organizations and companies as well. And it's educate, affirm, include and interrupt. Make sure that everyone's educated on the topic. Make sure your policies, your forms, the use of language is affirming.

00:38;55;17 - 00:39;18;02

Vanessa Ford

Include make sure that voices are included in representation at different levels of your company. And if you notice something is amiss or if people aren't being included, interact. And if it's really hard to do that because you're in a place that has a bill like Florida, get support from local organizations who can help you make that interruption

00:39;19;15 - 00:39;20;01

JR Ford

. I love that.

00:39;20;02 - 00:39;27;16

Brian McComak

Educate. Affirm. Include. Interrupt. I get it right. My memory skills are still intact. I love that.

00:39;27;23 - 00:39;28;04

JR Ford

Good.

00:39;29;06 - 00:39;47;25

Brian McComak

I want and I appreciate that the journey like because one thing that I find happens for organizations or groups of humans or there's that you know, this cannot be down to an individual human or a couple of humans is we have to go on a journey sometimes just like let's start to understand which is the education.

00:39;48;12 - 00:40;03;13

Brian McComak

And then once we understand something, then we can start to say, I respect you, I see you, I affirm who you are. Then you're like, Okay, now I know that I can take some steps to like actively include you in the conversation, to include you in conversations where we know that we need your voice and identity.

00:40;04;01 - 00:40;17;07

Brian McComak

And then when you get to when you get confident, then you can also say, now I'm going to actually be an ally and advocate at accomplice. I'm going to actually interrupt when I see something happening that is not respectful or that could be harmful.

00:40;17;07 - 00:40;23;09

Brian McComak

Like how do you sort of step into that? But it's a journey like we don't start all the way in ready to interrupt. We got to go on that journey.

00;40;23;25 - 00;40;42;03

Vanessa Ford

Yeah. And that journey can be really led by led by leaders. Right. It's sometimes important for leaders of companies to say maybe like you were saying earlier, Brian, that people may not understand, but they have to take that journey if they want to provide an equitable environment for employees and for those that we serve.

00;40;42;24 - 00;40;54;29

Brian McComak

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And as you were talking, something else that came up came to mind. But I because I was I was it sort of triggered for me in the question around some of the labels and language we use.

00;40;54;29 - 00;41;07;14

Brian McComak

And my starting point of understanding gender outside of the binary that I was comfortable with and understanding sexual orientation outside of the binary that meant I was I was comfortable with is is not maybe the right word. It was just sort of I understood.

00;41;07;15 - 00;41;26;27

Brian McComak

So then it was like this new sort of aha. That we shared the the gender unicorn resource. Are you familiar with that resource. Yep. It's a great resource to understand the the constructs of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation through a spectrum versus versus a a specific binary construct.

00;41;26;27 - 00;41;33;26

Brian McComak

And, and you've been on that journey with, with, with Europe, with live as as they've been sort of figuring out where do they fit on that spectrum.

00;41;34;02 - 00;41;51;14

Vanessa Ford

Exactly. And we also like to remind everyone whenever we talk that everyone has a gender identity. So when schools are saying like we can't talk about gender identity with kindergartners, then they can't line up boys and lines and girls in lines.

00;41;51;14 - 00;42;14;12

Vanessa Ford

They can't talk about gender, period, that everybody has a gender identity. Everyone on this call has a gender identity, whether you thought about it or not. Well, you know, trans people and non-binary folks are often confronted with having to address it because it's incongruent with maybe how they were assigned at birth.

00;42;14;21 - 00;42;24;26

Vanessa Ford

But I love the gender unicorn. It really shows the intersectionality of all these pieces and kind of the beautiful diversity that can be encapsulated in like a single human. Yeah.

00;42;25;16 - 00;42;40;20

Brian McComak

Absolutely. So one of the other questions on language was, you know, we talked about the term for someone who's nonbinary and sort of instead of niece or nephew, we never name. Is there another term beside son or daughter?

00;42;40;25 - 00;42;48;24

Brian McComak

What what does what's the term they use to refer to Ali kiddo. Yeah I'll yeah.

00;42;49;13 - 00;42;59;07

Vanessa Ford

Our child. Our child Ali. Our kiddo Ali. People hear the name Ali and then they'll immediately go to she and let's say Ali uses they them pronouns. Then they say, okay.

00;42;59;18 - 00;43;01;26

JR Ford

So yeah, we'll correct.

00;43;01;26 - 00;43;19;29

Vanessa Ford

Correct. But we always say my child and with their brother, you know, they have an older brother who's only 17 months older and he is a great ally and a wonderful little human. He's almost 13, but we will say Ronnie and his sibling.

00;43;20;19 - 00;43;37;09

Vanessa Ford

And so it took a while to kind of eradicate that gender, very gendered language from just our everyday conversation. Right. It's e people want to know they they will say, oh, you have two kids, one of each.

00;43;37;18 - 00;43;37;28

JR Ford

Yeah.

00;43;38;25 - 00;43;47;03

Vanessa Ford

And we're like, you know, for five years, we're like, yep, one of each. And now we say, we have a son and we have a transgender, non-binary child.

00;43;48;19 - 00;43;50;16

Brian McComak

And how do people react when you tell them that?

00;43;52;12 - 00;44;12;21

JR Ford

Well, I will say if it's in a conversation that I think we feel adds value to to the conversation or part of the conversation that we're having, then we'll go into that. But if it's just someone who's not really relevant to our sphere, we typically won't entertain that.

00;44;12;25 - 00;44;22;03

JR Ford

But for someone who is, you know, a value in importance to us, then we'll go into a conversation about, you know, a very, very broad conversation about what that means.

00;44;22;14 - 00;44;38;02

Vanessa Ford

And sometimes like calling the doctor's office. Yet this doctor, at this point, everyone in the office should know that the office is 30 people. They don't know every single client who walks in. Yeah. So I don't go in every time I send my child Ellie and they say she and I say they use they them pronouns and

00;44;38;02 - 00;44;39;25

Vanessa Ford

that's what I leave it at. Yeah.

00;44;40;00 - 00;44;44;09

JR Ford

I mean I we went to the White House a couple of months ago. And. Did you.

00;44;44;09 - 00;44;46;24

Brian McComak

Just namedrop? I think you just. Yeah, I know. Yeah.

00;44;47;25 - 00;44;48;28

JR Ford

I mean, you know, I was just.

00;44;49;14 - 00;44;51;19

Brian McComak

Hanging out in the White House, you know.

00;44;51;19 - 00;45;08;29

JR Ford

As we do. Yeah. Ali was with us, and we were going through security, and one of the police officers misgendered them, misidentified them. And at that point, you know, we were going through security and I was thinking, well, is this a teachable moment or do we just let this pass?

00;45;08;29 - 00;45;26;29

JR Ford

And I talked to Ali about it after the fact because they were misidentified. Right. And, you know, like they're so you know, it's those types of moments where we really have to gauge. Is it worth us to talk about it or is it something that we'll have to kind of bottle up, unfortunately, and talk about after the

00;45;26;29 - 00;45;37;06

JR Ford

fact, which I did. I talked to Ellie about it and said, you know, I just wanna let you know that through our visit you may get misgendered because people don't think majorly.

00;45;37;20 - 00;45;39;25

Vanessa Ford

Right? Don't know.

00;45;39;27 - 00;45;40;17

JR Ford

No.

00;45;40;18 - 00;46;02;09

Vanessa Ford

That you use they them pronouns. So in that says they them on it and. Though, the White House. I will give Jay our kudos for this. J.R. was invited with Ali and about ten folks to meet with Vice President Kamala Harris on Transgender Day of Visibility and had a really amazing visit.

00;46;03;02 - 00;46;14;12

Vanessa Ford

When we lived in D.C., we met with Secretary DeVos to try to convince her to put out. A statement in support of trans kids that didn't work.

00;46;14;12 - 00;46;16;21

JR Ford

This is when I pulled back the Title nine guidance.

00;46;16;24 - 00;46;36;03

Vanessa Ford

Yep. And, you know, I think we've been really lucky to be in these spaces and let feels generally affirmed. But if people say, Wait, what do you mean? We will say. Those are the pronouns they use. And then again decide like which dichotomous key of advocacy.

00;46;36;12 - 00;46;48;16

Vanessa Ford

When when do we say what? And I JD, I love that you said how do we navigate sense of agency when to speak up and correct someone and them being able to speak up for themselves? I think we're figuring that out now.

00;46;48;16 - 00;47;06;04

Vanessa Ford

Right, Ellie is 11 in many spaces we've had to advocate behind the scenes, behind the scenes at school, behind the scenes at the doctor. But Ellie, when has been had a very vocal voice, because they're in school six and a half hours a day and they have spoken up.

00;47;06;10 - 00;47;19;08

Vanessa Ford

They've brought in Calvin. They used to bring in other books. They would explain to their class their identity. And we've supported that. They haven't wanted to do national advocacy like we have, but are okay with us doing it.

00;47;20;00 - 00;47;48;03

Vanessa Ford

And obviously I'll just throw this out there. We started this advocacy work when Ellie was very little, and so ultimately we gave consent for images and and stories. Ellie has never done an interview themselves. And we would often ask, will this article, documentary conversation webinar, will they look back on this when they Google themselves and find it

00;47;48;12 - 00;48;05;23

Vanessa Ford

and see that it was for good and that it moved the conversation and equality forward? And if we weren't able to say yes to that, we didn't do the event. And I would say there's only one, maybe two things that we've done that have been we've looked back like that didn't go as planned, like that was not

00;48;05;23 - 00;48;21;22

Vanessa Ford

what we were really thinking. But we actually every year, you know, they don't remember being four or five now, so they don't remember some of these experiences. And they we've sat with them and we've Googled their names and watched the videos and the different things and they've been really proud.

00;48;21;22 - 00;48;41;18

Vanessa Ford

Their eyes welled up and they are kind of like, Wow, you did this for me and for us. And it's, you know, are we making the best decisions all the time? No. Does any parents? We try, but we definitely try to instill in Ellie language.

00;48;41;18 - 00;48;58;25

Vanessa Ford

So sometimes Ellie will let misgendering slide because they're also figuring out how they present to the world right now. So sometimes they'll present and people will say, Oh, you're feminine, and sometimes it'll be more masculine and you know, still trying to figure out how they want to present to the world.

00;49;00;03 - 00;49;11;15

Vanessa Ford

And because of that, they can get misgendered as male or sometimes and they will say like, no, I use they them pronouns. I'm transgender. Yeah.

00;49;11;22 - 00;49;12;26

JR Ford

And move on.

00;49;16;14 - 00;49;30;09

Brian McComak

You know that question? I think for for those of us, whether it's from our far from our own lived experience or because that we've decided to be agents of change or some combination of both of which. When is it?

00;49;30;10 - 00;49;49;21

Brian McComak

When is the is it time to spend the energy and to give of myself? Or when is the time to say, I'm just going to accept and move on, whatever that acceptance looks like? And it's a it's a it's an everyday decision, I think, for for us to as as part of this conversation, I, I really appreciate

00;49;49;27 - 00;50;06;08

Brian McComak

you sharing around how you are have been engaged as as parents with with Elie about the role that you've chosen to play and whether they want to be part of this or not. And how that plays out and how you're making those decisions, you know, because, you know, I think that's, you know, similar to what you were

00;50;06;08 - 00;50;19;11

Brian McComak

saying earlier, which is another lens on the conversation around this. Are parents forcing kids to be to be different identities and those sorts of things, which I don't believe is happening. There's there's this is a different part of that question, right?

00;50;19;11 - 00;50;25;17

Brian McComak

Of like, ah, what is the role that the choice you're making versus the choice that your child is making? And how do you have that conversation?

00;50;26;07 - 00;50;45;13

Vanessa Ford

And, you know, there there are many choices that we make as parents and as advocates. But Ella's identity was never a choice. It's just who they are. Right. And they're figuring that out. And I think the more that folks can understand that these identities are who people are, that these are not choices.

00;50;47;17 - 00;51;07;05

Vanessa Ford

We'll continue to to move things forward for sure. And I see Katherine noting, you know, having to perpetually justify and explain existence is exhausting. And so as parents, a lot of the work that we do is behind the scenes still so that Ellie doesn't have to do that.

00;51;07;05 - 00;51;22;29

Vanessa Ford

So we sent Ellie to middle school starts in fifth grade in our town and we're just outside of Boston. And, you know, we met with the principal and we met with the teachers and we explained these are their pronouns and this is their story and this is what we expect out of this school that's saying that it's

00;51;22;29 - 00;51;41;29

Vanessa Ford

affirming to everybody so that when Ellie went in, the teacher said, I've never used they them pronouns singularly. Ellie's had an amazing experience. They haven't been misgendered. Every email that we get from the school uses they them pronouns, and I think that removes some of that energy.

00;51;41;29 - 00;51;58;29

Vanessa Ford

So Ellie can be 11. We're not going to be there forever. Ellie's going to go into higher education, some kind of trade. She they're an artist, right? Or or a traditional college experience, and they will have to advocate in that space.

00;51;59;26 - 00;52;12;17

Vanessa Ford

But I just encourage folks for from a parent perspective and again, from a company perspective, trying to take as much of the weight of having to justify existence off of people as possible.

00;52;12;25 - 00;52;13;20

JR Ford

Yeah. Yeah.

00;52;16;17 - 00;52;28;25

Brian McComak

We have 8 minutes left. And I still have so many questions, though. Yeah, well, and something that that was I was just that came to mind for me was something that my sister and I learned from our parents.

00;52;29;08 - 00;52;39;01

Brian McComak

And this wasn't about our identity or lived experience, but that there would be things that learned they learned about like that happened in school that they didn't feel was like that. What? That's not okay. I need to address that.

00;52;39;10 - 00;52;51;17

Brian McComak

And what I was really grateful for our parents and how they chose to handle it was they would go have those conversations and they didn't tell us that they had those conversations. They didn't want to create little monsters who are like Mom and dad are going to go fix it.

00;52;51;23 - 00;53;06;29

Brian McComak

They told us years later that we had those conversations. We were a part of that journey because we wanted you to have the best experience you could have. But they also wanted us to be responsible little humans. And and so that's I'm hearing that as well, like that balancing act of how do you navigate that?

00:53;07;18 - 00:53;10;13

Vanessa Ford

I think parenting is one big. How do you navigate that?

00:53;10;25 - 00:53;11;06

JR Ford

Yeah.

00:53;11;26 - 00:53;16;02

Vanessa Ford

I feel like that should be a parenting book and then it's just blank because nobody has the answers.

00:53;16;18 - 00:53;16;20

JR Ford

Oh.

00:53;18;00 - 00:53;33;09

Brian McComak

I love that. Well, I want to I want to ask a couple of questions just for you, J.R. And certainly, you know, Vanessa, you may have some thoughts here, but one thing that I you know, when we think about the the intersectionality conversations, the various lived experiences, you're a father.

00:53;33;28 - 00:53;49;09

Brian McComak

And in this conversation and I you know, I know that so many times in our country with the expectations we have of men, that there are a lot of fathers who are like, I don't understand my role in this and don't know if I can be having this conversation.

00:53;49;09 - 00:54;00;15

Brian McComak

And you are clearly leaning into this conversation. How has that been for you as a man who grew up in this country and and so subject to all of the messages that I was and other men are subject to as well?

00:54:01:00 - 00:54:04:18

JR Ford

Yeah. Do you have another half an hour? Yeah.

00:54:05:22 - 00:54:11:02

Brian McComak

So I was like, I'm going to ask this question, realizing it's sort of unfair and is therapy now.

00:54:11:02 - 00:54:28:15

JR Ford

But I certainly had to navigate my own journey as a man, as a black man, as a parent, an interracial couple, as a supportive parent to a trans kid. So I had a lot of a lot of things to unpack.

00:54:29:13 - 00:54:45:16

JR Ford

But, you know, the thing that I, I kind of go back to is having the awareness that I have all these intersectionality. You know, I'm an introvert. You know, I, you know, internalized, you know, as traditional men do.

00:54:45:16 - 00:55:01:05

JR Ford

We, you know, internalize a lot of our emotions and feelings. And so, you know, seeking out mental health services, you know, finding a therapist was a part of my own journey, even outside of L.A., you know, to unpack, you know, why?

00:55:01:07 - 00:55:22:29

JR Ford

Why am I the way that I am, you know, as an adult? So a lot of that was done through therapy. And I still I still, you know, go to therapy to continue that that conversation, you know, an understanding of of myself, you know, about, you know, toxic masculinity, masculinity that, you know, that we kind of are

00:55:22:29 - 00:55:45:29

JR Ford

that's in the you know, in the main, you know, conversation today that we talk about and think about. A lot of it comes from being afraid of change, you know, to something that you have grown up in or you just been, you know, socialized, you know, about, you know, and it's not divorced from other problems that we

00;55;45;29 - 00;56;07;28

JR Ford

have in this country, you know, about racism, about bigotry, about xenophobia. All these different things are kind of founded in what we call these traditional and conventional values in this country. And guess what? It's all bullshit. You know, and I'm just to our.

00;56;07;28 - 00;56;08;09

Brian McComak

I don't know.

00;56;08;24 - 00;56;09;06

Vanessa Ford

I know.

00;56;10;09 - 00;56;10;18

JR Ford

I know.

00;56;11;17 - 00;56;12;11

Vanessa Ford

Very.

00;56;12;11 - 00;56;12;23

JR Ford

You know.

00;56;13;15 - 00;56;21;26

Vanessa Ford

Whether and Jacob does not curse that just took me by a lot of time. I think the events recently and everything is bringing it out. Well, you.

00;56;21;27 - 00;56;44;13

JR Ford

Know, you look at all these different obstacles that people have that they they they arm themselves with, you know, whether it's, you know, their values, whether it's religion, you know, whether it's, you know, having all these different obstacles that people put up because they're afraid of change, something that's different that they that they haven't learned about, that

00;56;44;13 - 00;57;01;07

JR Ford

they haven't seen before. And those are some of the obstacles that that I had. But again, it goes back to the awareness and the acknowledgment and the action that I took for myself to become a much more caring and empathetic human being.

00;57;01;13 - 00;57;11;19

JR Ford

So a lot of people are afraid to do that. You know, a lot of men are afraid to do that. And they are themselves, you know, to you know, to their family, to their loved ones. And so it takes a lot of work.

00;57;11;19 - 00;57;26;12

JR Ford

But, you know, again, you know, you have to. Take the action in order to create the change and to bring people in to your world who you love and support. And so for me, you know, all those intersections, you know it it's exhausting.

00;57;26;13 - 00;57;31;14

JR Ford

But, you know, you have to continue the work. And, you know, it's something that I continue to this day.

00;57;32;00 - 00;57;54;25

Vanessa Ford

I will also say that one of the pushback we got kind of from trolls on the Internet was like, oh, this liberal white mom is forcing this on her child. And this poor dad and this black dad couldn't possibly support it became this whole racialized conversation when in fact, I struggled more in the beginning than J.R., J.R.

00;57;54;25 - 00;58;04;09

Vanessa Ford

and Ellie are like this J.R. tough. Sell me into bed every night. It's Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad. All the time and always has been from the beginning.

00;58;05;23 - 00;58;08;09

Brian McComak

We're not supposed to have favorites, but it happens, right?

00;58;08;10 - 00;58;12;18

Vanessa Ford

So I know I'm working on I'm working on moving up the ranks.

00;58;12;18 - 00;58;16;00

JR Ford

I call it having your favorite people. Yeah, people. Yeah.

00;58;16;14 - 00;58;28;06

Brian McComak

Absolutely. Well, and favorite people change over the course of time. And you know what? We as parents, what's most important, I'm sure, is that your child has someone that they love and that they're loved, you know? And however that works out as beautiful.

00;58;29;11 - 00;58;42;29

Brian McComak

Well, I know that again, I would love to keep going. So I know Mark is going to add into the chat how people could connect with you too and how how they can get the book. The book. Calvin But you know, just for anyone who is watching or listening, how do they how do they find you on

00;58;42;29 - 00;58;44;27

Brian McComak

on the interwebs and how do they buy the book?

00;58;44;27 - 00;58;46;05

JR Ford

CALVIN All.

00;58;46;05 - 00;58;51;17

Vanessa Ford

Right. So Calvin's available wherever books are sold, so online or.

00;58;51;17 - 00;58;53;27

JR Ford

Locally to your local bookstore. Go for.

00;58;53;27 - 00;59;10;14

Vanessa Ford

It. Yeah, go to your local bookstore library. Ask for it. We also it's coming out in French, in Canada, in Swedish and in German in those countries as well, which is kind of exciting. You can go to J.R. and Vanessa Ford dot com, which is our Web site and contact us.

00;59;10;14 - 00;59;21;01

Vanessa Ford

And we're also the Ford family on Facebook where we try to share advocacy, not just elevating our own voice, but the voices of others, which is really, really important to us.

00;59;21;27 - 00;59;34;24

Brian McComak

I love that. I love that. Well, this has been such a wonderful conversation and I'm so glad that that we are we know each other now. And I look forward to future conversations and collaborations as we wrap up.

00;59;34;24 - 00;59;39;28

Brian McComak

I would love just to invite you both to say any final words or messages you'd like to leave everyone with.

00;59;43;18 - 00;59;48;15

JR Ford

Love and be yourself. Support any way you can. Yeah. Yeah.

00;59;50;07 - 01;00;05;20

Vanessa Ford

I'm going to go back to people are who they say they are until they tell you otherwise and just do the work yourself and you're not alone. There are communities of people, organizations working to make the world a better place for trans and non-binary people.

01;00;06;15 - 01;00;15;00

Vanessa Ford

Let your voice be heard and don't wait for a conversation. Start one if you need to. And we're always, always available to chat.

01;00;16;05 - 01;00;27;08

Brian McComak

I love that. I want to I want to share with you what one of our guests said in the chat. What an inspiring and authentic couple, which I couldn't agree more. I'm so glad that we get to know you both.

01;00;28;01 - 01;00;39;23

Brian McComak

And thank you all for for being with us today. This has really been such a magical and beautiful conversation, and you are both truly an inspiration, the messenger. I look forward to following you and learning more from you.

01;00;40;09 - 01;00;53;01

Brian McComak

For all of you that have joined us today. Please come back next month when we're here with Rhodes Perry. Actually, next week, when we're here with our our trans non-binary and gender non-conforming community and colleagues, and the next month with Rhodes Perry.

01;00;53;02 - 01;00;58;07

Brian McComak

So until then, stay safe. Be well and we'll see you soon. Thanks, everyone.

01;00;58;26 - 01;00;59;21

Vanessa Ford

Thank you.

