

ANATOMY OF AN APOLOGY IN A RACIALLY CHARGED WORLD: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM AMY PORTERFIELD - THE INTERVIEW

Jean (00:01):

Hello everybody. I'm introducing Amy Porterfield of Amyporterfield.com. Amy is an online marketing guru and a top right podcaster. She has been designated by Forbes as one of the top 50 social media power influencers. According to her website, Amy has a following of 250,000 people and a seven figure business. I'm one of her followers. She sends out regular emails about online course development.

The week after George Floyd's gruesome murder, she sent out an email with the subject header "Business as usual is out the window." And she was, "beginning a personal journey into what racism really is."

After that was a series of emails that frankly blew me away and culminated into two public apologies. I requested and received permission to interview Amy about what happened. And I am delighted to take you on the inside of Amy's journey through this, what must have been an ordeal for her. So, welcome Amy.

Amy (01:26):

Okay. Thank you so very much for having me. I'm really honored to be here. So thank you for this conversation.

Jean (01:32):

Sure. Okay. So before we begin, let's get some background information on you. Tell us about your work, your podcasts, your followers. How do you think about yourself?

Amy (01:46):

So I am an online entrepreneur and I help budding entrepreneurs grow their email list and then take their knowledge, know-how, and expertise and turn that into profitable digital courses.

Jean (02:01):

What's your familiarity with black people? Church.

Amy (02:08):

Yep.

Jean (02:08):

Friends?

Amy (02:11):

I do have black friends. I do have black followers, but I was raised and live in a predominantly white community. And so when the, I say when the movement started for me, because obviously this conversation was well before I became aware, but when I became very aware of what was going on, I also became very aware that my sphere of influence was particularly all white people, mostly white women. And so that's how I was raised and that's the community that I physically live in as well.

Jean (02:49):

Yeah. So how did you become aware Amy?

Amy (02:53):

Well, I became aware, you know, I think it definitely started with George Floyd's murder and from there, when voices became louder online about demanding justice. What happened in my world, and when I say my world, the internet marketing world, the internet entrepreneur world, there was a specific shakeup there, where many voices started calling out people that weren't doing the work, that weren't showing up to support this movement. And genuinely, honestly, that's me. If I didn't get called out, I don't know if I would have been as aware as I am today and as committed. I hate to admit that I don't know, but if I was being really honest, I think that might be my truth.

Jean (03:46):

That's what we're here for. And Amy, the reason I wanted you here is because I knew you would tell the truth. So thank you for that. Cause there's so many white people out there who are confused, not knowing what to do. Your truth will be so helpful and reassuring to them. Good. So the truth is what we're going to get, even if it's painful. Okay. So you, if I didn't understand you, you were called out on the internet. So you were called out publicly.

Amy (04:17):

I was called out publicly. First time in my life that I've ever experienced anything like that.

Jean (04:23):

Whoa. So you're sitting there and you're reading this or did a staff member bring it to your attention or you saw it for yourself?

Amy (04:32):

You know, interestingly enough, I have never talked about this, but when the George Floyd murder happened, I wanted to say something and I have a big social media following. So I wanted to say something, I didn't know what to say. And I didn't want, this is what so many white women say, especially white women entrepreneurs. I've heard it a million times. I said it. I didn't want to say the wrong thing.

And so my, my first big mistake was that I quoted somebody else. So I took what somebody else had said so beautifully about this murder, and I posted it like a repost, like I agree with this. Now two mistakes right away from the get go was number one, I posted something from a white woman.

So yeah. Huge mistake. Not even—I have come so far because I would never do that no. It was such a huge bias. I didn't even think—it was a celebrity. So I'm like, Oh, this is really beautifully written. It was a beautiful picture of George Floyd. I repost it. That was number one mistake. Number two, mistake is just reposting.

And so I went to bed on a Friday night and I looked at my husband and I said, I feel uneasy right now. Something is happening, I don't know what it is, but I'm going to have a hard night's sleep. And I didn't know what was stirring in me. I woke up, I have

every feeling right now like I'm reliving it, my body. I can feel it. I woke up Saturday morning, early cause I just knew. And I started reading my comments on Instagram and so many, mainly black women, but there was a mix for sure, saying, first of all, you're quoting a white woman. Second of all, what do you think, you're part of the problem, Amy, you're quoting somebody else. What do you think? How are you going to stand up? What are you going to do about this? And that's, boom, when I got into the conversation and not the most eloquent way. People were calling me out and specifically is that's how it led to people calling me out about my podcast.

Jean (06:34):

Wow.

So how long did that go on and what happened next? Just take us, just walk us through what happened next.

Amy (06:43):

So that was a rough day. Lots of emotions navigating through. I didn't know what to think or how to feel. And so, oh my gosh. I'm just gonna share a mistake after mistake after mistake, because the next thing I did –

Jean (06:59):

Before you go there, were you defensive?

Amy (07:02):

I was not. So that is one area that I am so hard on myself that no one could be as hard on me as I am on myself. So this is good and bad. I typically go to, where did I go wrong? And so there was no room for defensiveness. There's been moments. And we'll talk about that where I have felt a little defensive, but in this moment, no. I was at a loss. Like I had known. I didn't do good there. I did not do right, but I didn't know what right looked like yet. And so I wasn't defensive, but I was scared. I was scared about the cancel, the call out, what do they call it? Call out.

Jean (07:42):

Cancel culture. Yeah.

Amy (07:44):

I was scared about cancel culture first. I wasn't the only thing I thought about, but it was like boom in my face. So there was like, Holy cow, I'm getting called out online. And I know my heart. So I was like, I know that I stand for good. So I need to do right here. So one of the first things I did, and again, cringe-worthy, is I called one of my black friends and her name is Britt Baron. She goes by Beans. She has a presence online and I've said this to –

Jean (08:18):

I'm assuming that it's okay to give her name.

Amy (08:21):

It is because I've told this story publicly. And she knows that. And she's done anti-racism trainings in my business since. So she is somebody I talk about publicly, but I called her up and I said, I need advice. And what do you think I should do here? And I told her what I wanted to do, which was address the lack of diversity on my podcast. And she's like, no, I think this is a good thing. I think you should, blah, blah, blah, but blah, blah, blah. Meaning she went along with what I had suggested. And she was an amazing support, but I called a black woman to talk about my woes of being called out online. She never ever put me down for that, but I've since learned that that's not necessarily the best, first step. It's not fair to her. It wasn't fair to her, but she was an amazing friend.

Jean (09:14):

Well, that's one vote. Did you, did you look, did you look to her for forgiveness?

Amy (09:23):

Hmm. You mean forgiveness for what, calling her?

Jean (09:28):

Yes.

Amy (09:29):

So I've since apologized. Yes. So I've since apologized, yes.

Jean (09:33):

But I'm saying at the time you called her at first, you're horrified. You're embarrassed. You don't know what to think. I'm putting words in your mouth, but I can imagine what I would feel. And did you want your black friend to forgive you, or did you assume your relationship was beyond that?

Amy (09:53):

You know, that's a great question. I did feel like I had done wrong. So I did—there was remorse in that where I think that part of the conversation was, I don't have diversity in my business and on my podcast. I am so sorry for that. And I, and I want others to know. So maybe not at the depth that you're talking about, but it was, it was a subconscious feeling for sure.

Jean (10:18):

Yeah, I can. I can imagine that. Okay. So she said go forth?

Amy (10:26):

Yes. So I posted that on social media and that's also one of the very first emails I posted, which you put on your blog, which was, I have screwed up here. I have a podcast that is not diverse. I have over 300 episodes and only 10% are people of color. And most of those are men of color. And I serve women entrepreneurs most, first and foremost. And so I called it out and that was my first commitment to, I've got to make a change here. I've got to do better. So, and it was embarrassing and it was frightening to call it out. And I got a lot of feedback from that email and from that social media post, some people saying shame on you, Amy. I remember a guy in particular. I don't know why that one hurt me the most, but he said, shame on you, Amy, for having such

lack of diversity on your podcast and in your community. And that one I could, I could cry right now for some reason that hurt me the most.

Jean (11:30):

Yeah. Did you know him?

Amy (11:32):

No.

Jean (11:32):

Oh, but just, was it the words?

Amy (11:35):

Yeah, I think so where it just, I knew I had, I had done wrong. And what kills me the most about this is if you ask anyone on my team, you will know that I have said for probably a year, we need more diversity on our team. We need more diversity on the podcast. We need more diversity in the community, but I am the owner and leader of my team. And I said, I needed it, but I didn't know what to do. And I didn't seek out solutions. So I didn't make the strides to fix it. So that's why I never was defensive. I knew they were right. A lot of the times when somebody comes at me and says, shame on you, or you shouldn't have done this, I ask myself, is there truth in what they are saying, is there truth? And there was a lot of truth in it. So there's no room for defensiveness. I knew I had to get active, get to work, start making changes.

Jean (12:31):

Wow. So you knew that, that is so common people say, I knew, I knew I knew but I wouldn't act.

Amy (12:39):

I didn't act. Yes.

Jean (12:41):

Yeah. But it took them. And so it took a movement. So, okay. Here we are. You've sent out this first email, you got some positive, what's the ratio of positive to criticism?

Amy (12:51):

Probably 90% positive. 10%, some negative comments. Yeah.

Jean (12:56):

And we go straight to the negative comment and then we find one to upset. Right?

Amy (13:01):

You are right. Yes.

Jean (13:03):

Okay. So this one guy, this one shame on you. So now we are cringe-worthy. Do you, how did you get up? How did you make it? How did, how did you handle your emotions? You have to get up and function for people.

Amy (13:18):

Yes. I am an extra sensitive human being. I could cry at the drop of a hat, so I'm not going to pretend that there weren't tears, but I learned early on that white tears is not what people needed to see during this time. I was very clear. So behind closed doors with my sweet, sweet husband, I talked about how I was feeling: the shame, the embarrassment, the wishing I had done better a long time ago and lots and lots of tears. And that in the very beginning, I just was embarrassed. So they were tears of, and I felt sad that I wasn't part of the movement that I could do good and I wasn't. So there's so many emotions, but beyond those first initial emotions, I think what it was all about is the fact that I am a leader and I know that I can do better. So there's work to be done. And I think that was always kind of where I was coming from. I needed to be a part of actively dismantling racism. Like it wasn't about me anymore. So the tears happened and then I'd say, it's not about me, buck up Amy, let's get to work. So I did do a lot of pep talks during those times.

Jean (14:29):

Okay. So let me summarize for, cause this is Leading Consciously. Okay. You did not suppress your emotion. You did not go straight into action. You allowed yourself a grief process. You allowed yourself to feel that and to do that in the safety with someone who can handle it, your husband and in the process, as I'm hearing it, you had what I call the observer mode going on too. So while I'm sobbing in my husband's arms, I'm thinking Amy, you got to buck up, you have work to do. So you have dual things going on at the same time.

Amy (15:08):

Very much.

Jean (15:09):

Yes. Okay. So at some point it was enough tears, but the moment I'm sure there was something.

Amy (15:17):

There were some more later on, but yes, at that point I started moving forward.

Jean (15:21):

So you started moving, you started moving forward and what did you do? What happened?

Amy (15:30):

Okay. So, so from there, I wrote that first email, pretty much really great feedback. And then what happened was I knew that I couldn't get back to business as usual, but I also had a business to run. And I will tell you, in those first two weeks of when the movement really started to take steam in the online marketing world, I was very confused about, can I sell, can I move forward in the business and still be active in the movement? Can I do good while still running my business? I've got 20 full time employees. And so the bottom line was still as an entrepreneur, still very much on my mind.

And so from there, I decided to continue to move forward with a Facebook live I had planned. Now I want to be clear about something with this Facebook live. It was not to sell anything. It was not to sell my course. In fact, I had created a free resource to help people list build. And I was doing a Facebook live saying, I have something free today. I wasn't selling anything. But in the whole scheme of things, I was talking about list building, which ultimately is one of my products. If someone were to buy it months down the road. It's ultimately is how I make money. So I want to be clear on that.

Jean (16:40):

Okay. So those who don't know what list building is, would you explain that.

Amy (16:45):

So list-building in the entrepreneur world is attracting people to download, let's say a free guide, a free resource in exchange for name and email. You give them something to value. Now you have an email list that eventually when you grow your email list, you can market and sell to that list and build a relationship with those people and become their go to source. That's what an email list is.

Jean (17:06):

Okay. So you were about to do a Facebook live.

Amy (17:10):

Yeah.

Jean (17:10):

On building, on list building.

Amy (17:15):

Yes. So I decided that I can't make my next email. You know, I had the subject line of this email came out that said, we're not going back to business as usual. Here's where I've messed up. Here's where I'm going to fix things. And this is how I'm going to be an active part of this movement. So that was the first email. The second email was

about my free Facebook live that day, but I didn't want to ignore the movement. And so, and we were like deep into the movement. It was just getting steam online. So I had to address it because I didn't want to be tone deaf, of course. And I wanted to be a part of the conversation, genuinely I did.

So I started the email talking about the movement and how important it is and how I'm behind it and how we all have to have a voice. And then in that email, I tied that concept of having a voice to growing an email list because an email list gives you a voice to your audience. And I said, in fact, today I've got a free training, all about growing an email list. I'd love to see you there. And I sent the email.

Jean (18:16):

I'm far away in Houston, Texas reading. And I get to that and I said, Oh no.

Amy (18:24):

You know, I didn't know, you know.

Jean (18:25):

Oh no. It broke my heart for you and for all of us. Okay. So I could imagine that that was my reaction. What feedback you got?

Amy (18:41):

Okay. So what happened was, I'm not going to name names here. And so I appreciate you respecting that, cause I know you do, but what happened was there was a woman, a black woman with a prominent, huge audience. And she was an activist and she was on my email list and she made a video and she said, she never named me. And I, and I praise, praise her for that because she knew if she did, I would have gotten a lot of backlash and she wasn't looking for me to get backlash. And I just, I thank God for her every day because she taught me a lesson without, having to call me out in a negative way. But she made a video and she said, I'm on this woman's email list. She sent an email that was we're not going back to business as usual. And then the next email she sent, she tied the movement with the way she makes money. And she was teaching a lesson saying, this is the problem to all of you who are doing that. She did this, here's the problem. And one of my students said, Amy, I think this woman's talking about you. So I went to the video and I watched it and it was very clear she was talking about me without naming me and instantly I just, my heart sank. I had no idea. And you know,

I ask if you're cool with it, will you explain what I did wrong? It's, it's hard. I'm not the teacher here. I, I can tell you my experience, but I cannot teach this. So would you take a moment to explain what I did wrong?

Jean (20:13):

Okay. You get messed up together. It's just feeling. The movement. There are so many of us who have been waiting and waiting and waiting for something like this. And a saint had to die a gruesome death in front of us all to galvanize, not only the country, but the world. So we're all pent up, ready. Anger is exploding. Protests are exploding. And then here comes Amy saying, I realized I've had this monolithic group here. I'm going to expand. I'm going to do better. And by the way, join, here's how to market. Here's how I do my business. Come, come market with me. The two conversations don't go in the same paragraph.

Amy (21:10):

Don't even go in the same email.

Jean (21:11):

The same email.

Amy (21:14):

Yeah.

Jean (21:14):

They don't belong. Nobody. Everybody respects you for what, people respect you for what you've built. I'm a follower because I respect what you've built, but don't mess with my movement like that.

Amy (21:30):

Right. And in her video, she said, basically that I then put myself into the conversation as though I were the teacher. Like, let's talk about the movement. Now let's talk about my expertise. So all of a sudden I was the teacher and, and I am not, I am so far from it.

And so she, she talked about that that is a problem. And many white people do that and it's unfair and it's disrespectful. And I was like, Holy cow, I had no idea. But in that moment I knew, I got it. I got it instantly. I wasn't, again, I wasn't defensive because I'm like she's 100% right!

Jean (22:09):

Yeah. I didn't think that you were putting yourself as a teacher. That was different, but equally insidious. Yeah. I thought you were messing with the movement and thwarting the movement. And I knew that I really believed your previous email that you want—you're sincere and wanted to make a change. And since I'm about people wanting to make changes, I was rooting for you, but then to intermingle it like that, was just offensive. Yeah.

Amy (22:43):

And I, I apologize to you and to everybody I offended. I understand what I did now. And I'm so very sorry.

Jean (22:51):

Well, here's the good news, Amy. You, because you've messed up, a lot of people will know not to do that again. Somebody had to be first and had to be public and you did it. And because of who you are, you have now been a shining example to others of what not to do. And as we will talk about what to do if you mess up. I want to say one of the things, one of the things I talk about people, how to speak your truth and not get killed. So that's what I say I do in my work. And if you're going to speak to your truth, you will screw up. You will mess up. That's inevitable. And so knowing how to recover from messing up, that's the skill. And that's what motivated me to ask you here and to write that. Okay, so I'm jumping ahead. You got it. Then what happened?

Amy (23:51):

So then I wrote a third email. So this is all in like a week's time. The third email was I'm canceling my Facebook live. I am not ready to talk about why I'm canceling it, but I promise to follow up when I get my thoughts together. But I just wanted to let you know, don't show up today at this time, I won't be there.

And so I didn't make it dramatic or anything like that. I really needed to send an email so people wouldn't show up, but I wasn't ready to talk about it yet cause I didn't know how to talk about it. And so I sent that email. I got a lot of emails. Amy, I hope you're okay. Is everything all right? A lot of my friends called me. What's going on? You never cancel a Facebook live. Are you okay? So all of that, which just felt embarrassing to me. Like I don't want to be, I, here's something funny. I am an expert in my field, but I do not want to be the center of attention all the time. I don't want all those calls and people asking if I'm okay, so that didn't feel good, but it was just part of the process. But in the meantime, I called a friend of mine who spoke on stage at one of my live events, a woman of color, who's also a diversity, equity and inclusivity coach and consultant. And I called her and I said, I need some help. So that was the first time I officially reached out to an expert.

Jean (25:10):

Okay. So on my blog posts I put a picture right at this point of a woman, facing into a cabin. That was the image I had of you at that time.

Amy (25:23):

Yeah.

Jean (25:24):

What am I supposed to do now? You said, I have to gather my thoughts, but for me, what that means is what am I supposed to do? Emptiness. So you reached out to an expert to close that gap so that you weren't floundering by yourself. Cool.

Amy (25:39):

Yes.

Jean (25:40):

And so what advice did you get?

Amy (25:43):

So I let her know everything that happened and she said, okay. So we need to issue an apology email, if you're up for it. And she said, you're going to need to be honest and open about what you did wrong with zero defensiveness. Because I want to be honest about one thing, because obviously I've made many mistakes along the way. Where a little defensiveness popped in then I said, it's not allowed. It's not about me. But where it popped in for a minute was when this woman who made the video and you and your blog posts also thought this, that I was selling something. And so I was talking about the movement and then go buy my thing. And I wasn't. So I had to—this is a lesson. This is one lesson I can share, is that when you would say, Oh, but you didn't get the story right. I'm not racist. You didn't get the story right. Does it matter? Does it matter if I was selling something or not? I combined the two together and I shouldn't have, so that's how I get past my defensiveness. Does it matter? Are you focusing on the right thing? I wasn't focusing on the right thing. So that I was able to get rid of quickly, but I wanted to share my hiccup in that conversation.

Jean (26:53):

Sure. And let me say something about that. When people accuse us of something, we do get technical.

Amy (26:59):

Yeah, technical, exactly.

Jean (27:04):

Technical. And you say, but I wasn't standing on the fence. I was standing beside the fence.

Amy (27:13):

Yes.

Jean (27:13):

So it does not surprise me at all that you got technical.

Amy (27:16):
I got technical.

Jean (27:17):
But me, you're, you are about making money online, period. I don't care what you're doing. Is it a freebie, is it paid, it does not matter; making money online. And so that's what, that's what you do, and how to be successful.

Amy (27:38):
Yes.

Jean (27:38):
How to be successful. Let me talk about that, how to provide a useful service and be financially rewarded at the same time.

Amy (27:48):
Thank you. That feels good. And that is truly what I do. So yes.

Jean (27:51):
Yes. And so that's what you do. And so if you're standing beside the fence, under the fence, it does not matter.

Amy (28:00):
And I'm glad you brought that up. And when you say it in the way of the technicality around it, like getting technical, I was, I could have easily stayed there. And so I went there and then I thought, Nope, not going to be there. It's not about me. And so I moved on and so I worked with my consultant and said, okay, so how do I do this? And, and we went back and forth. And then we decided to draft the email that's on your blog post, which would be email number four, which is, here's where I went wrong. This is what I did that wasn't right. Because a lot of, I knew a lot of my white audience would not understand it. So I said what I did wrong. And then I said, I won't do this again. I'm going to continually learn. And one thing that I started saying after

that email and I put it in that email is that this was a forever commitment. I'm willing to mess up. I'm willing to learn. I'm willing to be humble. This is my forever commitment to be a part of this movement. And so I, here I am. And that's the email that I sent. And let me tell you again, I was embarrassed. I felt ashamed. I did not want to send that to 250,000 people. But I had to.

Jean (29:09):

How did you know you had to?

Amy (29:20):

How did I know I had to, you know I'm talking a lot about my emotions and my embarrassment and shame. Really though, the reason I knew I had to send that email is that innocent people of color are dying in the streets because they are, in George Floyd's situation, black. Like it is disgusting. It is horrific. It has to stop. So when I think about what the movement is about, I am a hundred percent behind it. So who cares how I feel, who cares? Right. I had to do it despite myself because I believed in something bigger. And I really had to ask myself like, Amy, are you doing this just so you don't get called out anymore? Like I had many conversations with myself. Are you just scared of what people are going to think of you so you just want to cover your tracks? Are you being performative? Like I learned all these new words in two weeks flat that I had to ask myself, are you doing this?

(30:18):

And the answer with that apology email was no, I got, I got what I did wrong. So that's why I felt like I had to do it.

Jean (30:26):

And who were you talking to? 250,000 people are a lot of people to talk to, you had to have an image. You had to have an avatar of someone or who you were talking to.

Amy (30:40):

Yeah, that's such a great question. I have to say, I was talking to two groups. There was the group of, African American and black men and women that were on my email list

that have probably never felt seen by me. And I was talking to them first and foremost. And that, to be quite honest, it's probably a very small subset of that 250,000. And as a marketer, you're always taught to talk to the masses. And I like flip that on its head and said, I'm talking to the people that genuinely need my apology right now.

(31:16):

And so that was first and foremost, and that's why I wanted as much honesty and sincerity in that email as I could. The second subset though, I really do believe that I was talking to a lot of white women. And the reason I say that is because as a white woman, who surrounded herself with only people that look like her, I didn't know what I was doing wrong. I was so ignorant that I had genuinely no clue. And so I knew they wouldn't either. And so I, you know, the reason I said yes to this podcast and the reason I said yes to you republishing my emails is I know there are some women that need to understand what I did wrong so that they get it and they themselves don't have to make that same mistake. So that was genuinely the second subset I was talking to.

Jean (32:02):

Wow. Okay. And when you, that second email, you talked to me and I said, wow, she gets that. And I want to know what happened because I want others to know what happened. So that's when I sent off the request. I mean, it was instantaneous. Yeah. Can I, can I do this blog, and can I interview you? Yeah. Okay. So once you get that second email, now how did you feel once you sent it out?

Amy (32:38):

Right before I sent it out, I looked at my community, customer, sorry, my marketing, the person who runs my marketing and I looked at her and I said, my audience is going to be like, what is wrong with this girl? This is like our second apology email in the last week. Like she's weak. This girl can't get it together. She's making a hundred mistakes. Now, remember, I am harder on myself than anyone will be. And so I was feeling those things. And then once again, I was like, it doesn't matter. You have to send it. So there was that thought and then I sent it and then I thought, so it is, there it is. I put it out into the world and genuinely, I think that was the moment, by the fourth email, second apology. It was like, let's get to work. Let's get to work, internally in my business and externally. And that is what we've done ever since that day, we have gotten to work,

some things that I've never put out there because I don't want to be performative. Is that the right word?

Jean (33:39):

Performative? Yeah.

Amy (33:41):

Yeah. And, and I will tell you, there's this interesting, fine line I walk because people will say, what are you doing, Amy? Are you sticking with your commitment to be a part of the movement? And other people will say, Amy, just shut up and just do the work and stop being performative and telling everyone what you're doing. I get both. And so I have, at that point, I had to say, all right, I know who I am. I know what I stand for. I know what kind of leader I am. I'm going to go forward, following my gut at this point. And using my, I officially hired my DEI consultant. I meet with her every single week. She is deep in the business. She has done a full assessment of everything externally and internally over the last 45 days on my business. And now we're getting to work, implementing the changes from hiring, to culture, to my community of customers, to my podcast, to scholarships that I offer, to anti-racism training. Like it has been a huge part of the business, some internal, some external.

Jean (34:43):

Wonderful. So let's, let's be clear. You put your commitments in that fourth email, what you just described just now, the message you gave, you put those in the fourth email and said, here's what I'm, here's what I'm going to do. What was so impressive to me about that is a lot of people say, I'm sorry, what's the matter, you can't take my apology, and you didn't do that. You apologized. And you said, here is how I'm going to make up, reform, redeem, whatever. Do you use a word for that?

Amy (35:17):

You know, I, I probably say here's how I'm going to do better. Here's how I'm going to be a part of this conversation. But I like all the words you used as well. They ring very true to me.

Jean (35:28):

Okay. So here's, how I'm going to do better, redeem and become part of the movement and to move forward. And so you have begun work on that.

Amy (35:37)

Yes.

Jean (35:39):

Wonderful. And you've hired a consultant, which is wonderful.

Amy (35:43):

Yeah.

Jean (35:45):

Your staff, 20 people, you said. Behind the scenes, they are watching all of this. What was their feelings? Their reactions?

Amy (35:55):

You know, they were incredibly, incredibly supportive. I have, women of color on my team, not enough, but I do, in very prominent roles. And so I was very careful not to lean on them too heavily to get their advice and their feedback and what they think. But I was very fortunate that they were so just forthright with how they feel and, and what's going on. And I wanted to make sure they felt very supported during this thing while their leader was out there publicly apologizing all over the place for the mistakes I had made. And so my team was amazing. And one thing I learned through this that worked for me is I over-communicated internally while this was going on.

(36:37):

So as the apology emails were going out, where, when I was struggling to get it right, I'd make videos and, privately put them into my Slack channel, a communication channel I use, saying, here's where we're at guys. And then continuing to say, please

give me your feedback if you have it. So it was a very team effort although I was at the forefront, they were very much involved.

Jean (36:59):

Okay. And, and supportive.

Amy (37:01):

Yes. Very.

Jean (37:02):

And I can imagine they carried the emotions with you.

Amy (37:06):

Very much so. Yes. I was most worried about a woman on our team. She is, a black woman who is the director of community on my team. So I have four directors, they're at the highest level and she runs community. So she is very much involved in what people are saying to us. And so she was probably at the forefront of my mind, but I talked to her on a very, I always talked to her on a very continuous basis. So we had a great communication going.

Jean (37:37):

Okay. So you started implementing the changes. I made my blog post Anatomy of an Apology in a Racially Charged World: What We Can Learn from Amy Porterfield. An apology in a racially charged world. So what were, hindsight now, lessons learned? What advice would you give to someone else who is entering this journey?

Amy (38:12):

I think the advice I would give; now, remember, I always have to preface this. I am not the teacher here, but based on my own experience.

Jean (38:22):

I'm asking you.

Amy (38:22):

Okay, good. Thank you. I get nervous about that, but thank you. I wish, this is the advice I would've given myself now, looking back, slow down, just slow down because there was so much emotion. I wanted to fix it yesterday. I wanted to say all the right things. I wanted to show that I was in this. I wanted my community to feel supported and my team to feel supported and loved that there were few times that I rushed, which is why those mistakes happened. And I watched my peers do horrible, and I shouldn't say horrible, big mistakes as well. My peers.

Jean (39:01):

I know of one of them.

Amy (39:02):

Yeah. And so, so I think I would have told her, I would have told me slow down and think about what you're doing and really be mindful and intentional versus reactive, reactive, reactive. And so that I think is the best advice I can give someone. And then of course, every defense you have, you have to put down, you have to. If you genuinely care about what is happening, you cannot make it about yourself and that's not, and I'm not saying that's easy. I'm saying it's essential. It has to happen.

Jean (39:36):

Okay. So let's talk about that. You cannot make it about yourself. Tease that out because a lot of people say, why should I have, I'm White, I haven't done anything. It is about me if somebody is attacking me online and smearing my public name, why is that not be about myself?

Amy (39:58):

Okay. I had to give a lot of thought to this one. So I'm so glad you asked. I, before I worked with my DEI consultant, I actually had a DEI consultant on my podcast, Erica, I'm going to say her last name wrong, Courdae. And I apologize, Erica, if I said that wrong, I'm nervous. And I get names wrong when I'm nervous. But I had Erica, a DEI

consultant, on my show and she said something that I have taken with me throughout this whole thing. It was early on. So it was perfect timing. And here's what it is. I told her, but Erica, I felt attacked. I felt like people were coming at me. Why did they need to come at me so mean and say such hurtful things versus, you know, teach me in a way that's nicer and a little bit softer and I could hear it more.

And this is what we said behind closed doors. I didn't say this on my podcast. We talked before my podcast and I was saying, I'm getting hung up on that. And she said, that is what is called tone policing. And I didn't ever know what that term meant before that day. And basically the way she explained it to me is that tone policing is monitoring how somebody else says something to you. And if they don't say it in the way you think they should say it, then what they're saying is wrong or inappropriate or not right for you. You're putting down their delivery and totally not hearing the message of what they're saying or even considering why they're saying it.

(41:26):

And when I learned tone policing, that is when I realized someone might come to me with all the anger in the world. And rightly so. Look at what some people have gone through: the prejudices, the racism, the opportunities they never got. And here I am living in privilege and I'm judging them for being mad at me? I can't have anything to do with that. And so when I learned tone policing, you can come at me and you can be mad and say nasty things and, and tell me I'm wrong. And all I ask myself is, is there truth in that message? And oftentimes there is.

Jean (42:00):

That's beautiful. I distinguish between the message, the medium and the messenger. And some people think all three have to be fine. And what you're saying is pay attention to the message. If the messenger delivers it wrong, so be it. The medium, they deliver it, it's wrong, so be it. It is the message. Does the message have validity? And so that is wonderful. And for you to get that is amazing. Yes.

Amy (42:30):

It was a huge lesson. Probably the, I think Erica, every day in my head about that one was the most powerful to me because I think that's where the defenses came down. I stopped worrying about how someone was saying it and listened to what they said and also where they were coming from. So that was, that was a blessing.

Jean (42:49):

Yes. And I can say for myself, what's amazing to me is that I have had more anger since George Floyd, that I'm thinking that was repressed anger over the years. And so I had an interaction just this week with someone where she said, you're sounding nasty and I'm thinking, well, yeah.

Amy (43:12):

Yeah, yeah I am.

Jean (43:13):

I'm not meaning to, but I am. So I have that same conflict because of what I do. I'm like you with what I do, I want to present and be a certain way in the world. And it's hard. So with that said Amy, contrast who you were in the world before this began and who you are now in the world, how do you describe the difference?

Amy (43:42):

Before I was ill informed, unaware, uneducated in many ways around this movement. And I literally didn't know what I didn't know kind of thing.

Jean (43:59):

But what's some of the good stuff. Don't just do the negative.

Amy (44:02):

Oh, some of the good stuff as well?

Jean (44:04):

Yeah, yeah, because you need something to build on.

Amy (44:07):

I was in it for the right reason, doing the business I do, I do it for the right reason. And I know that to my core. I literally want to help people have financial freedom and location freedom and build the business of their dreams. That has always been my mission. I always want to do that. And so that part, I felt very solid in. The challenge is that I wasn't including everybody in that dream.

Jean (44:31):

Yeah. I did not feel included in that group.

Amy (44:35):

And I'm so sorry for that. And I know you're not looking for an apology from this podcast, but I still want you to hear it that I'm so sorry that you didn't see yourself and what I was creating for what I thought for every female entrepreneur that wanted to build something in their businesses. And so now where I am now and who I am today, it's that I, I'm more educated.

(44:57):

I have so much work to do, but I'm more aware of what I don't know. And so now I seek it out. So I've expanded my social circles and I started following many different women of color. And I started getting on the telephone with some of them and talking to them about their experiences and what it looks like and where I can do better. And also we started changing our language. I want to give you a quick example. I just got off the phone with my DEI consultant and two of my content people on my team. And we always taught something called ideal customer avatar. And it's that one person that you have in your mind's eye, that when you're creating marketing material, you are talking to one specific person. So your message really resonates. And what I uncovered is that I was creating a problem with my students, because I would say, what does he or she look like, what is their age?

What is their name? And I'm thinking that many of my white female entrepreneurs, when they thought of their customer in their head, that person was white and she was in my head. I didn't even know it.

Jean (46:06):

Right.

Amy (46:06):

And so I, now, because you asked where I am now, I'm more aware. So I'm looking at how am I teaching my students and where can I add more diversity and inclusion? And I don't know. So that's why I have a consultant. That's why I needed help today. Like, how do I do this? But at least I'm starting to teach differently. And I pray that that makes a difference in my community.

Jean (46:27):

Right. That's wonderful. And I think there was at one point I could sense that the avatar was white. And that was when, but you, what I want you to hear is you are good. And I just pushed that aside because I wasn't in the business of, of, of resurrecting you, I'm in the business of learning what you had to offer. And so you're so good that I stuck with it.

Amy (46:56):

Thank you.

Jean (46:58):

Yes. Okay. So what gratifies you about where you are now?

Amy (47:10):

I feel inspired. I feel that I can make a difference. I feel as though I'm part of the conversation and there is so much gratitude in that, and I feel very accepted, and this is going to sound a little bit weird, but for so many people that didn't need to forgive me for my shortcomings, didn't need to continue to follow me or accept that I had done wrong, but still trusted in me. So many people in my community have said, look, I

wasn't happy, but I'm still here because I know that you are willing to do the work. And I feel very grateful for that.

Jean (47:47):

Yes, indeed. That's wonderful. So is there any question that I didn't ask? Anything you want to add that was not said?

Amy (48:00):

I think that the last thing I'd add is that you have shown me lots of grace. And when you first reached out to ask, if you could republish the emails, my first thought was, why, why do we need to put that out into the world? Why do we need to show, you know, show other people what I did? And then I thought, no, I, I know this woman's heart. I know why she's doing this. And then when I saw your questions for this podcast, when you gave me a sampling, I thought, why, why am I putting myself in this situation? What if I say everything wrong? And what if I do a horrible job of this? And then I came back to, but you promised yourself, Amy, you said you would be part of this conversation. Good, bad, and ugly. And so thank you for giving me so much grace.

And thank you for pushing me in the most loving way to have these conversations. Even when, to this day, they are the most uncomfortable things I've ever done, but the most important work. So thank you.

Jean (48:58):

Oh, you're welcome. So I will say that, I think that part of what's wrong in this world and how, what the breakdown is, is people can't admit wrong. We have a culture where to admit wrongdoing is anathema. That means that you're a terrible person and you'll be condemned and cancelled and all of that. And that's, for me, that's the mindset that got us here. If the mindset were, Oh, you messed up. Here's, here's how you, here's what I can do to redeem myself. Oh, good. You redeem yourself, welcome back. We're all together again. That's what it takes because none of us, none of us are without breakdowns, mess ups and goof ups. I've certainly had my share. And if we have a world where, what you are doing in this podcast and what you did, and those series of emails, we have a world where that was normal, we would have a wholly different world.

Amy (49:56):

Yeah, that is for sure.

Jean (49:59):

And so that's what I'm looking for. That's why we're here. So thank you. And –

Amy (50:04):

Thank you.

Jean (50:05):

Okay. So tell people how they can find you.

Amy (50:11)

Well, thank you so much. I am at amyporterfield.com and again, thanks for your time.

Jean (50:17):

Okay. That's it.