Jean 0:01
Hi, Sunita.

Sunita 0:04
Hi, Dr. Jean.

Jean 0:05
I'm so pleased to have you here. I was so excited when you told me you had written a book, *The Power of Belonging*. And I wanted you here to discuss it, and particularly to connect it with your interest in racial justice. So to those of you who are listening, Sunita Sehmi is a global executive coach, providing astute coaching services to executives all over the world. And she has taken that knowledge and her own interest in belonging and her interest in racial justice and put it together in a book and she's going to share that with us. So first, though, let's learn about her. What I'd like you to do, Sunita, is tell us about your background, how you grew up and what led to your interest in racial justice and belonging.

Sunita 1:09
Thank you, Dr. Jean. Yes, so happy to share. I think it's a very long and deep story and it probably started even before I was born. My parents were immigrants from India. They moved to London in the mid-'50s. They were one of the first Indian families from Punjab to come and move to the north London area.

Jean 1:31
From where?

Sunita 1:33
The north. They came from Punjab, the north of India. Okay, so they're from the Punjab region. I think what was interesting is they moved eight years after the bloody partition of 1947, when India was divided and became India and Pakistan, and the British left India where they had ruled. And I think that's quite vital to the story in a way, because I remember my mum telling me when she arrived in

England, how disappointed she was because they had been ruled by the British, they had such an image of the British. And the reality was England was very cold. And not just in the weather, the people were very cold. And there was a reminder to the immigrants coming from abroad, especially, at that time, from India, which was they were not welcome and they were not wanted. So I grew up in London. I was born in 1966. And I grew up at a time in London, where there was a lot of anxiety on both sides. So there was a general influx of immigrants from the West Indies, from India. And then in the mid-'70s, Idi Amin kicked all the Indians out of Uganda. And these people who left Uganda had businesses, they had livelihoods. And they were just told to leave. And they just left. And a lot of them came to London. And a lot of them, they were not Punjabis. They were Gujaratis, which is a different population, they live in a different area, come from a different area in India. And they, a lot of them actually, moved into our area, maybe to the London area. And I think this almost heightened the anxiety.

Jean 3:46
Let me make sure I get this. So your parents moved, immigrated to London, and they did this by choice?

Sunita 3:57
Yes.

Jean 3:58
Okay. So they immigrated. And they discovered that London, the Londoners were much colder than they had thought, they thought in a way they were coming to a sort of a homeland, because they had been raised by British rules. Is that correct?

Sunita 4:11
Absolutely.

Jean 4:12
And instead of coming to a homeland, they discovered they were foreigners.

Sunita 4:17
Exactly.

Jean 4:18
Okay. Meanwhile, Idi Amin, Is that who kicked them out of Uganda? Yes. I remember the rule of Idi Amin. Yes. And I remember when that happened. So he kicked out all of these Indians. Now we have this other group of people who had been raised in Uganda who had thought that was their homeland, even though they were Indian. So now we have two separate groups of Indians from different places who either were forced or voluntarily came into this neighborhood in London.

Sunita 4:57
Absolutely. And I just wanted to say as well that you know, when I say my parents voluntarily came, I think it is true of a lot of immigrant stories, they came to better their lives. They came because they knew that the education system was good in England, they came for, I suppose, to future proof their children's life. But it is interesting, isn't it? Even as I'm telling you now, because you have these Punjabi immigrants, you had immigrants who were kicked out of Uganda. You had people from Pakistan. And what was interesting was for the indigenous population, the majority population, they had no idea about the diversity within those groups.

Jean 5:39
By majority population you mean Londoners?

Sunita 5:43
White Londoners, the White population, yes. So they had no idea what the difference was between a Bangladeshi, a Pakistani, an Indian, or somebody who was kicked out of Uganda, so there was a racial slur that was used at that time, which is called Paki.

Jean 6:01
Paki?

Sunita 6:02
Paki. P-A-K-I, which is short for Pakistani.

Jean 6:10
Right.

Sunita 6:11
But it was it was a very negative term. I mean, it wasn't an endearing term at all. And I think that growing up in London, what was really tough was the influx got heightened in the in the mid-'70s when Idi Amin, as I said, kicked all the Indians out of Uganda, and in our area, which was a White area before becoming very populated with Indians from Uganda. And slowly, slowly more Indians started moving in. As more Indians started moving into our neighborhood, more anxiety crept in. And I just remember that word Paki. It was the ultimate insult. It was the last thing a friend would say to you, a White friend would say to you, and there was no comeback on that on that word.

Sunita 7:24
I really felt growing up that I was, I didn't really fully fit in into my Indian culture and I didn't fully fit into the White culture. But there was a real sense that we were different. And there was a real sense that we weren't welcome. And we weren't wanted. And this wasn't our country. I was reminded of that very often "go back home." But this was my home.

Jean 7:55
Oh, wow. And what age are we talking about? How old were you when you were going through this?

Sunita 8:01
I was 11. I remember it started even when I was younger, but I think it was perhaps in England, by the time you're 11, you start high school. So this is where I think you're not as protected as you are in, maybe, the primary years of school. And I really it's really interesting as just as we're talking, and I'm reflecting on this, this feeling of just never feeling quite like in the in group. And I remember my mother saying to

me, when you're an outsider, all you want to, all you want to be is an insider, which was really interesting. So, there was a lot going on for them as well. And then for us, because we were second generation Asians. And they were desperate to hold onto their culture, and we were stuck in two worlds.

Jean 9:09
Wow, that's painful. So was there a feeling of not being good enough along with the exclusion. You didn't belong, but did you also feel something's wrong with us? Or else we would be accepted?

Sunita 9:30
I think it's an excellent question. I think that's something which was so unconscious. But you always felt you weren't good enough. And I was, I mean, compared to my siblings, I was lighter skinned. So I'm sure my sister and my brother got more racial abuse, because the darker your skin, the more racial abuse you got. People sometimes didn't know where I was from. But then they would still insult you. They would call me a Greek bitch. Or a Spanish slut It was the hatred of the other. And in historical sort of scene, just to set the scene for you, was this anxiety caused a real rise and peak in a party called the BNP, the British National Party, and the National Front, and these were extreme right parties. And do you have to think about children, Indian children or non-White children watching TV and just looking at the skinheads, they were called skinheads because they shaved their hair. Really like all off and it was so they could see the skin, and it was a reaction to the immigration, to the government, to fear.

Jean 11:09
Okay, wait. I'm getting confused. The skinheads, we have skinheads in this country. I don't know if they still exist. They've morphed into the Proud Boys and other White supremacy groups. But the skinheads were the counterculture folks who were White guys, is that the same?

Sunita 11:29
Yeah. Extreme, extreme parties. Extreme right wing party.

Jean 11:31
Yes. And so when you said they were reacting, they were reacting in fear or your community was reacting to them in fear at this, what have I missed?

Sunita 11:46
I think there was something about fear across the system in the country at that time. And I think the BNP party, I mean, now with what I know about racial justice, I think that there is deeply rooted fear, but it doesn't mean that you have to manifest it into hatred. But I did see anxiety on both sides. And I also saw people joining the movement, not really knowing what it was about.

Jean 16:33
Joined the skinheads, is that the movement?

Sunita 16:35
Yeah. In actual fact one thing I mentioned, I wrote about this in the first book that I wrote, I had a really good friend at school, and I think I was about 13. And he was a White boy and very, very interesting to talk to, very reflective. And I remember one day, he came into our math lesson and he had a skinhead cut. And he was holding, or he had some sort of, he had the union jack, the flag of England or Britain, around his neck. And he, we had been very friendly and at this time, he didn't even say hello to me. Very naive yet, very naively, I said, “Oh, hello. Hello, how are you?” And he was not talking to me at all. And he sat behind me in class and the class started, and I wouldn't let it go. I just thought “What's going on?” I didn't, it didn't click in my mind that he had become a member of this party. And I turned around, and I said, “You know what, why don’t you say hello to me? What's wrong?” And he just said, I mean, I don't want to repeat it on this podcast, but he told me “Get lost, Paki. Go home.” I was about 13 then, and I just remember being so upset that the math teacher said, “Sunita, turn around, you always have your back to me”. You know, of course because I was turning back to talk to my friend. And I was so upset. I felt like I had been slapped. And I remember saying to the teacher. “But Mr. Rogers, he just called me a Paki.” And he said nothing.

Jean 14:41
Oh, good. So you get slapped twice, basically.

Sunita 14:47
Exactly.

Jean 14:48
Oh, that's so horrible. And you had no frame of reference, no place to put this, no way to understand it?

Sunita 14:59
No, because I think also my family, they were very fearful. And I just thought that would add to the fear. Or it would just confirm all their fears about White people. So I just, yeah, I didn't... Sorry, go ahead.

Jean 15:28
You didn't tell your family?

Sunita 15:31
No.

Jean 15:34
Was there anyone to tell?

Sunita 15:40
I think I could have talked to my sister. But you know, she also had, I think it was a very shameful experience. It was a very shameful and lonely experience. I remember my brother saying to my mum when he was seven, “Let's go home mum. Please, let's go home,” because he had been abused racially.

Jean 16:05
Oh I hear about the racism in England, against the Africans, but I had not heard about the racism against Indians also. And what you're telling me it was, at least it was just as intense and y'all experienced it. And the color in India varies also, from

light to dark, so I could see that infecting the whole thing. Well, so you didn't, so you had to live with that. It comes with that. Jump us from this literally traumatic experience to how you started gaining perspective on what was happening.

Sunita 17:02
So I think these early experiences shaped my interest and curiosity into racial identity, racial justice, in group, out group, inclusion, exclusion, although I wouldn't use those words at that time. And so I studied psychology at university and my thesis – this is 198 – my thesis was about how do minority groups in England perceive each other?

Jean 17:36
Internalized oppression?

Sunita 17:40
Exactly.

Jean 17:41
So about that, that's fascinating.

Sunita 17:45
So yes, and which was interesting. I think, I used to assemble a Pakistani group sample, Indian group sample, a White group of non-English, so I think I used Irish. And then I also used a Black population. And the Black population came out the worst, they were perceived the worst out of all the minorities. But you see this, that some of the responses, I remember them, they were scathing about each other. They almost were that you said the internal racism was stronger, or as strong as the racism that they felt, the cruelty.

Jean 18:33
Wow. So if you're doing your thesis on this, and you discover, you suspected it already, I'm imagining or you wouldn't have chosen it for your thesis. Right. So it was worse than you had even thought.

Sunita 18:49
Yes. Exactly. It was worse than even I thought.

Jean 18:58
Just curious, how did your committee receive that? Because I'm sure some of your committee members, your faculty committee members, were Englanders

Sunita 19:08
They were really interested. And I actually remember I never, never pursued it. But I remember my supervisor wanted both of us to do a PhD. But I didn't, I couldn't afford, or my parents couldn't afford for me to study further. But he was fascinated by that topic, because it hadn't really been looked at in in 1983 about how, on that level, how minorities perceive other minorities.

Jean 19:40
Right. Okay, so you got support from them at least?

Sunita 19:46
Yes.

Jean 19:47
Nobody said you. Oh, you can't say that. Oh, don't do that. You were able to tell the truth.

Sunita 19:55
Absolutely. Yeah. And I think that's very lucky. I went to a place in the north of England, in the north of England. Yes. And I was very lucky with the teaching staff because it wasn't a big institution. We got a lot of attention. And they were very caring, interested people and race was a big topic there.

Jean 20:17
Yeah. 1983 It would have been? Yes. Okay. So you did your thesis. Take us to your interest in belonging. You know, intellectual interest in belonging, obviously, all

along, you've been interested in it, right? As a 11 -year-old child you were interested, but it became something for you to study, take us there.

Sunita 20:46
I have been running workshops and working in this field. You know in Europe they call it DNI, DEI. It's called all sorts of things, some of them call it safety, inclusion, and belonging. So I've been working in this area DNI or DEIB, or SIB, safety, inclusion and belonging, whatever you want to call it.

Jean 21:23
Well, let's explore what DEI is, say the words, sorry.

Sunita 21:28
Yeah, diversity, equity, inclusion. I've been working I would say I've been working informally, all my life. But in an organization. I've been, while I was working for organizations in this field, even in the leadership field, I noticed that teams, and when people had a very strong bond, and a strong sense of belonging, seem to do better and be better. I didn't frame it as belonging then, I think I was thinking about something called psychological safety, which is something that was termed in the '50s. And then sort of rehashed again, by Amy Edmondson from Harvard Business School. But I suppose in my mind, belonging is something which is much deeper, it goes further than inclusion. And very often, in workshops, we talked about inclusion, we talked about exclusion. But I felt that belonging was something that, to me, it felt that you didn't have to be at the table to belong. But somewhere the inclusion felt that you had to be there present. But belonging is a feeling that you don't have to be physically present. And you can still belong. And it's a feeling that it's sustained over time. And I think if it's good for motivation, it's good for engagement. And that's what the research shows as well. But I think more than anything, I think it's good for... it's just a good place to be in life where you belong.

Jean 23:46
Basically, when drive is connection, and belonging, But belonging is a much stronger word. It's interesting that you chose that.

Sunita 23:59
Mm hmm. Yeah, I mean, I agree with what you said, it's strong, it feels stronger. And I think what you said as well about the connection piece, that's so important. We're social animals.

Jean 24:11
So here you are, you're now executive coach, you're now talking with people all over the world, about their desires to be a leader. Now, I've got to ask you a really simple, basic question. Okay. And I'm asking because some people really do not get this. If it's a professional organization, and people are hired to do a job, why in the world would it matter whether they feel like they belong?

Sunita 24:49
And that's a very interesting question, and that's a good question. Whether it seems obvious or not. I have to say, first of all, the world is changing. And I do think about the context where I live in Switzerland. I've been here for 30 years, and 30 years ago, your private life was here and your professional life was there, there was a separation, that doesn't happen anymore. There isn't the sense of community, people go less to church or to other religious gatherings. So work life has become very important. And belonging as a result is extremely important in professional life. And to the extent that non-belonging, the research that I did, and what I discovered just by talking to people, has so many detrimental effects, not just on performance, on emotional well-being, physical well-being, on burnout, on how they show up, how they leave a legacy.

Jean 26:06
Okay, so... Why does that matter? If the purpose of the organization is to get something done, and the purpose of the individual is to fulfill a task? Why does how I feel even matter as long as I can do my job?

Sunita 26:36
I think it matters, because it's the I think Deloitte, McKinsey, E.Y. and Jung have all done research. Belonging has a definite impact on performance. So it doesn't matter, If you're thinking about numbers, purely from a minimum empirical, purely

from a profit and loss, it matters, because people perform better when they feel have higher belonging, you can keep talent, that's another area where belonging comes into the mix. The new generation coming want to be part of something they want to feel part of, whether it's a community, an organization, a team. So, again, belonging becomes very important if you want to retain the talent. So it's definitely a hard skill.

Jean 27:37
It's a hard skill. Okay, so there is. So you're saying belonging is good for the individual mental health, well-being, all of that good stuff. And belonging is good for the organization in terms of being able to retain people because people want to feel that they matter, and they want to feel that they feel connected to others. So it's good for the organization and for the individual. Okay, So now before you made a distinction between psychological safety and belonging, help us understand that difference, and you also invent and include, so help, let's start off with psychological safety and belonging, help us understand that difference.

Sunita 28:24
So in my mind, the psychological safety is where you are part of a team, or part of a group or family or community, and you are not worried about making a mistake, or you're not worried about being judged. There is a safety, an emotional psychological safety you feel about being your true self, your authentic self. And I often use the example of there could be a conflict, but when there's psychological safety, you keep talking, you know? It's not, we don't break the bond, we keep talking.

Now, inclusion in my mind, is when people feel part of something, they are... they might not feel the safety but they're included. So you are added to the list, you are given a seat at the table. Belonging for me is something which is about being your authentic self, not necessarily being physically present. But knowing that there is always that seat at the table, I feel that there's something different, it's a deeper level than psychological safety. It's almost like the safety and the inclusion, the safety part is that, it's a given. And then you have the third layer, which is the deepest layer, which is belonging. And I stress the fact that I think, so strong, is

having a sense of belonging that you don't need to physically be there. And you know, if you think about our lives now, and I did this research pre COVID, I think it's quite telling,

Jean 30:33
Telling in what way?

Sunita 30:36
How important belonging is in our organizations, because we're not seeing each other, because we're not physically close. Right?

Jean 30:47
Okay, so the 11-year-old kid, whose friend turned on her overnight, flat tuned out. She lost inclusion. She no longer felt part of their friendship. She lost psychological safety. He called her a name. There was no, he excommunicated her, he banned her, banned and she was no longer safe. And she'd lost belonging in that circle, that network of friendship of the two people, so she lost all three. Of those three, which do you think you've felt the most intensely? Or can you tease it out?

Sunita 31:50
As well speaking now that I think the thing I felt most intensely was the not belonging, because I had a hard time belonging to my family, I always felt different. I always thought differently. I always felt like a bridge between the in group, the out group, the other out group, I always was trying to be an ally. So at school, the one or two relationships that I had, especially with this boy, because he was blond, and he was really fair skinned. We were so different physically. And it was almost a badge for me, because it was almost to say, I mean, I never told my parents that I was friends with him. Because at that age, my parents were quite sure that you wouldn't, you couldn't have boys as friends. But it was a badge of honor, it was that this... sorry, go ahead.

Jean 33:07
I've been accepted.

Sunita 33:09
I've been accepted. And also, you know what, they're not all the same. Because I heard that both sides, all the time. “The Whites are like this,” “the Blacks are like this,” “the Indians are like this.” And we still hear it now. You know, we still get words that you know, “he's very German” or “she's very Swiss.” What does that mean? And I just think whenever just one thing was said a layer, there's so many layers to us.

Jean 33:55
So let's go back to him, when he did that and turned on you. What happened to your bloody belief that they are not all the same?

Sunita 34:07
Yeah, I started to think my parents were right. I said to myself, maybe they were right. Maybe they did have it in for us. Maybe they did want to get rid of us. And that was really hard. Just really hard.

Jean 34:27
Yes. Okay, so let's come back to your book. Can you talk about examples from your coaching experience, of belonging of someone who did not feel belonging? And then either what the organization did, somebody in the organization did, that turn it around for them, or something the person themselves did to increase their sense of belonging

Sunita 34:55
Yeah, unfortunately, I haven't got any stories where the organization changed, which is quite interesting. In the stories that I have, the people I interviewed, there were two things that happen. Either they change departments or they change jobs.

Jean 35:13
Whoa. So there's no hope? Once you're excluded, you either get out or..?

Sunita 35:22
It's interesting actually, that's what I, there are very few companies who really walk the talk. This could be because it's a new concept. So for example, in where I live, we

talk a lot about diversity, and inclusion, and psychological safety, and belonging. I'm not sure whether we really know what that looks like in an organization.

Jean 35:55
Well, that's sort of, I get... that brought me down a bit. Because I'm very optimistic as you well know. And so I'd like to believe “Oh, yes, it can be, it can happen, organizations can change,” but you're saying your research has shown...? No. So your advice to someone who is not feeling as though they belong, is to just get out?

Sunita 36:25
No, my advice is not that, these are the choices that people made. I think that I'm an optimist as well. And I think also when, when I was interviewing the people, when I was interviewing the participants, there's a lot of hindsight, very few people use a current example. So they're examples from the past. And they themselves, a couple of them said, they wouldn't have framed as not belonging, or as not being included, they would have framed it as maybe something else. But I think what's interesting is, I don't think it's, I don't think it's about giving up hope. I think it's perhaps educating and guiding organizations and leaders to really show what it's like to be an inclusive leader, to create real belonging, because very often, when I get called into this work, now it's changing. But before the top leaders weren't doing this type of work, it was middle management, or it was people who didn't have power. But you know, leaders are instrumental now. I mean, I think you'd agree in how they shape people.

Jean 37:56
That power of powerful and don't have many, don't even know how powerful they are.

Sunita 38:06
Yeah, yeah, that's very true Dr. Jean. They don't know how powerful they are. So I think there's not, it's not about there's no hope. I just think they haven't been given the right tools. They don't know how to, and I think when, sometimes, when you don't know how to have that conversation, or you don't know what to say, in a lot of organizations, we don't say anything at all.

Jean 38:32
Okay, So I want you to talk to the person who feels like they don't belong. They have a sense; I really don't belong here. What can they do to either increase their belonging or to rectify the situation? And then I'm going to ask you to talk to an organizational leader who has a group of people and they're doing fine, and then there's the outlier. Okay, so let's start with the individual.

Sunita 39:12
So, I would say to that person. Why don't you belong? Where don't you belong? How do you belong? I would do some sort of audit, or analysis. I think of...

Jean 39:32
They don't know me, they don't recognize me, I go to work and people, they're friendly. They go off and have lunch together, and I'm not invited, I don't know what I've done.

Sunita 39:50
Could you join them for lunch? Could you ask if you could join for lunch?

Jean 39:54
Oh, I wouldn't dare.

Sunita 39:58
Why wouldn't you dare?

Jean 40:01
Because if they say no, then I'm humiliated. And if they wanted me to come, they would have invited me.

Sunita 40:10
Are you the only one doesn't go for lunch?

Jean 40:14
Only one.

Sunita 40:16
And how long you've been working in the company?

Jean 40:18
Four years.

Sunita 40:22
And four years, you haven't been invited for lunch?

Jean 40:23
No. I'm about to cry. I literally have somebody in mind as we're talking, Sunita.

Sunita 40:31
Horrible.

Jean 40:33
Yes. And that is what she told me, after she'd been there six years. But she told me that. Yes.

Sunita 40:44
This is what happened in the research, somewhere people were talking, sometimes they just may be quiet, the suffering that goes on. And there is silent suffering.

Jean 40:54
What would you say to her? Let's just summarize.

Sunita 40:58
Well, I would advise this person to talk to her boss and get the lead and get the boss to speak to the whole team, or get somebody from outside, depending on how much she wants. I mean, it's been going on for a long time, for four years. So maybe as she reached a threshold, where enough is enough? I mean, four years is quite significant, why it's been going on for four years? Why they have excluded her and why she has allowed herself to, or has she said something, I don't know. But do

you see what I mean? So I think it's about taking, taking it out of the box and making it open with everybody and having a discussion about it.

Jean 41:48
Okay, so here she's assuming it's racism, she's a Black woman. So let's just put that on the table. And there's, the other groups are, I think there's two Latinxs, most of the others are White and the Latinxs have managed to fit in, she has not. That's assuming that's what it is. But what you're saying to her is, you have to basically take charge of your destiny.

Sunita 42:18
In some ways, I guess, Dr. Jean, I think that's true, I think that the feeling of powerlessness, is really, it's a really hard place to be. And I think that when you have the power of choice over your destiny, that is something that could be a key to unlock, maybe old situations or patterns to go forward. And I think that's a horrible place to be, but you're not invited for lunch for years . So I would really encourage that person to take some of the power back and to put the fish on the table and ask the question.

Jean 43:18
Okay. And going to her boss, and just saying what's happening here would be as a possibility. Okay. So now the leader is watching. Yeah, always go off to lunch, watching this one person excluded. They get I don't have any right to govern someone's social life. They get to choose their friends, if they want to go have lunch together and is not on work time I have no right to interfere. What would you say?

Sunita 43:54
Well, it's not good enough. First of all, I think this goes back... Sorry, go ahead.

Jean 44:05
No, I'm through. I'm sorry.

Sunita 44:07
No, no, I think it goes back to what you said about leaders don't realize how much power they have. And one thing I'm sort of always a bit stunned. But when you say "you're a role model," and they're almost like, "Oh, am I?" And I think this is where you sort of, I would take the leader but what type of role model do you want to be? And how can you watch all this and not say it's your role to get involved. You're not a leader from nine to 12 and then from one to two when they're having lunch you stop being a leader. So I feel that a lot of responsibility and accountability is on that person, actually, because they have allowed a lot of this.

Jean 45:08
I totally agree with you. The ability of people to say, "not mine, not mine to do" continues to astound me. So yes, you're not a leader part, you're not a part time leader during the workday.

Sunita 45:25
No, no, and it's really the leader's responsibility. This is something which I think is, I've noticed in organizations that there's a workshop, you attend a workshop, or you do some coaching. And then the people above you just don't behave in the, I would say, in the appropriate, respectful way, this is about respect. And I just, I just feel so... sometimes a bit disillusioned. And this is where leadership starts with you, if you are in a leadership position, you have the power, the influence, and the authority. Use it for good.

Jean 46:13
So what is one step, Or the first step, either one step, or first step, I don't care, that leader should do in that situation. Now, mind you, this person is going to be probably terrified, because they're trying to be a role model. And they're stepping into uncertain waters. They've never intervened in something like this before. So what should they do?

Sunita 46:36
If they're really frightened, and they don't feel apt enough or capable enough to have a conversation with the team alone, I would get somebody external, to have a

conversation. However, that's not always easy. That's not always an option. The only thing to do is to have an open conversation, and not just one conversation, because that's another thing is, I think, sometimes leaders in real people's lives, in leadership positions, it's a series of conversations with the consent of this person who's not included. I think the leader has to remain objective, but also has to say that this is not okay. This is not the way I want my team to behave. This is not the way I want us to behave going forward. And maybe the team needs to think about new rules, team rules, or new ways of working. And I really wonder about this group going off for lunch. How about their awareness this one person is not being invited?

Jean 47:56
So let's say the leader, literally what should the leader do? Convene a meeting of everybody saying Y'all have to invite her out to lunch?

Sunita 48:07
No, I don't think it has to be as brutal as that. I think it could be just taking the temperature, first of all. And hearing people speak and letting people really talk about the team and how they're feeling about the team members. And then he or she could say, I've noticed that you go for lunch and x is not invited. Can I ask why? Put it on the table. Because what can happen, Dr. Jean, is the safe way is to have I want to have a one to one with this person. I have a one to one with that person. I have a one to one. But I always think let it out. Get it out in the open. it might feel really uncomfortable. It might feel like this is getting worse before it's getting better. I think it is the best way because then also as a leader, you are demonstrating we're having a team discussion. I'm not doing a one to one. I'm not doing this private one to one discussion. I want to start as I mean to go on, we're a group we work together.

Jean 49:21
Should the leader talk with the person ahead of time and say I'm doing this?

Sunita 49:26
Yes. Yes, I will do that. Definitely...

Jean

If the person says, “I don’t give consent,” because they don't want to be humiliated, then what?

Sunita 49:36

Then I think it's hard. It's very difficult for the leader. I think the leader then maybe has to do the one to ones. If you can't get again, maybe give an option to that person, shall we have a group meeting? And I'm happy to talk on your behalf? Or would you prefer I have a one to one with them? And that's the delicate part. Because it depends on how this person is feeling. Because that's another thing. When we talk about in the culture, where we call it out and point it out and say it out and whatever. That's not always convenient for people. They don't want things to be at the open, it could be dangerous, it could feel psychologically unsafe. So of course, he or she has to check with that person. And if that person says no, that's also interesting.

Jean 50:35

Yes. I'm thinking that this person, and someone who would let them go off for four years, and do nothing, would not want an open discussion. And that's the real dilemma of it. So that person will have to figure out how to get stronger first, to be able to speak on their own behalf.

Sunita 51:04

Yeah, that's the tragedy of this situation, it's been allowed in the system, it's been allowed. And I mean you've got so much experience, you've seen this in lots of different setups, and communities, it happens in families, it happens everywhere. And this is where you need people to be a bit of a truth teller, or at least say what's going on.

Jean 51:35

Yes. Okay, so we are out of time. It has been a delight. I'd like you to say the full name of your book, your name, the full name of your book, you said you have two, so let's promote both of them and where they can find them. And if someone wants to reach you, what should they do?

Sunita 51:58
Thank you, Dr. Jean. So my first book was called *How to Get Out of Your Own Way*. And it is for women, for women who want to win. And it's specifically for women. It's actually a coaching book for women. And I wrote it for women who can't afford executive coaching because I'm often in a room full of White men, changing now, but this book was specifically written for women in mind. And the second book, which is out at the, I think in June, is called *The Power of Belonging*. Both are available on Amazon, I think Book Depository, and other sites. And if you want to reach me, I'm always happy to connect. You can email me at Sunita.sehmi@walkthetalk.ch

Jean 53:32
Okay, it will put this, we always have highlights, and so we'll put this in the highlights your email address. And this has been wonderful. This has been informative. And it's got me thinking now about the situations where I know that I could do a better job of speaking up on behalf of people who might not feel that they are belonging. And so I thank you for that.

Sunita 54:07
Thank you, Dr. Jean, it is such a pleasure talking to you and you know how much I admire you. So thank you so much for saying that.

Jean 54:13
Well, thank you.