0:08 Jean
I am more than pleased to bring to you this interview with Charles Shaw, who is global director for learning and development at Facebook. He specializes in diversity and inclusion. Charles and I have been friends for a number of years now. I really wanted this interview, and I'm grateful he consented. This is part one of a two part series.

0:37 Jean
After I get to know him, I would ask him: How did you become Charles Shaw? He'll explain it here. I wanted to cover this part of the interview first. In part two, we will dive deeper into the work he does. And the work he believes needs to be done to create inclusive cultures. So today, he's going to talk about four topics. First, he's going to talk about going up as a poor Black boy in a mostly Black neighborhood. You know the stats. His amazing mother had limited resources, yet set him on the path for success. He will talk about how she did it, and how he's thrived. Next, he'll talk about his dissertation. Now he has a subject that you might not have suspected he would research. I certainly didn't. You will hear his fascinating description of what he found out. Then he will talk about leadership presence and authenticity. Since I've known Charles he's shown up as an authentic leader. He will talk about how all of us can bring that part of us out in forth into the workplace. We will end with his thoughts on Juneteenth and pride month. Here is part one of the interview with Charles Shaw.

2:05 Jean
Hi Charles.

2:07 Charles
Hey Jean, how's it going?

2:09 Jean

Fine. I am so delighted to have you here. And I'm going to read now your very impressive credentials. So everybody this is Charles Damien Shaw, Ph.D. With pronouns he/him/his. Charles is global director of learning for diversity and inclusion at Facebook. He says his specialty is organization development, leadership and workforce development, performance management, diversity and inclusion.

Charles got his Ph.D. from Alliant International University in San Francisco with a focus on Organizational Psychology. He has a fascinating dissertation, which I'm going to ask him about in a minute. So y'all hang on, you'll be blown away when you find out more about it.

So let's start just with a general focus. Charles, I wanted you here, excited to have you here because you are the epitome of leadership in the racial and social justice arena. You're in corporate America in a Fortune 50 company, maybe a Fortune 25 for all I know and you have emerged as a leader with an impressive title in that setting. So let's trace your journey of how you got here. I know you grew up in Third Ward, Houston. So tell us about Third Ward. Tell us about your childhood and what that was like.

GROWING UP WITH STRUCTURE

4:02 Charles

Yeah, absolutely. So Jean, can I first say thank you for inviting me to talk with you today. Really looking forward to this conversation. And you're very, very kind. So thanks for all that acknowledgement.

I am proudly from an area of Houston called Third Ward and actually grew up in an area of Southmore and Dowling. And Third Ward, as many people may not be aware of, is one of historically Black community. So lots of rich history, lots of

prominent figures, and lots of people are just from the Third Ward in Houston, Texas area.

And from elementary school, all the way to high school I grew up in that area. And I'm particularly proud of that. When I think about that upbringing, it was humbling, honestly, to think about. I grew up in a single parent home. My mother worked every single day to ensure that we were provided for, and she would literally schedule time for my siblings and I to engage in the community, like super structured. She let us have fun with our friends. But what stood out to me was how thoughtful she was about who I engaged with, where, how I engaged and the types of activities that I was involved with. At a fairly young age, which included gymnastics, track, baseball, basketball. We used to do a game back in the day called kickball, which was super fun in the community, you may be familiar with that. But yeah, those are my fondest memories of growing up in Third Ward and going to a school called Turner Elementary, which I understand is no longer around. But also being a graduate of Jack Yates High School, which is a historically Black high school in the Houston Texas area. So those are some of the memories that stand out to me in terms of being for Third Ward and more specifically, Houston.

6:13 Jean
Turner? Is that corner Southmore and whatever that side street is, is that on Southmore?

6:21 Charles
No, it's not on Southmore. It's further deep. Like by St. Mary's, there's a church and a school. And I can't think of the street that it's on. It's slipping me currently, but it's not Southmore.

6:37 Jean
Okay. Yeah, I was getting it confused with the [...], because that's where my sister used to be.

6:46 Jean
So your mother was structured? And do you think that that early structure has affected how you developed?

6:56 Charles
Oh, no doubt, I think so much of what we learn as adults comes from our socialization and upbringing. And for me, I didn't even realize till I was much older, the cues that I was taking from my mother, really around how she had very little, but managed to make a lot out of it, or became so incredibly resourceful with what she had. And I think her resourcefulness is definitely something I picked up. Like how to structure your resources in such a way that it wasn't all or nothing game. Either I can get this or do this or I can't? So much of that was around here's what I can do at this time, right? and then maybe later I'll do something else, or purchase something else, or allocate resources to something else. And I think that my mom's secret sauce was definitely around structuring the resources that she had, and also structuring our lives to accommodate how we distributed those resources and those dollars. So that stands out to me the most in terms of what I learned from my mother.

8:13 Jean
Cool. So let's talk about race. You growing up in a predominantly, if not exclusively, Black neighborhood? What's your earliest memory of there being a racial difference?

8:31 Charles
Yeah, my earliest memory... I think for me, I observed that a number of our teachers in elementary were White and they weren't Black. And that White people essentially, in my memory existed in two places: in education, in the schools and on the television. And I associated that with authority, power, being better, having more. And so anytime my family and I discussed White people it was the idea that they… It's not superiority, it was positioning, I think, that they

were never without. Whether they had control, or they have particular positioning in society and in our lives.

And I would see that on television. I would notice how my family would change their voices to accommodate how they showed up with White people, either on the phone or in person. And so early on, it's some signal to me that there was a certain way we should be behaving when we were in the presence of, or around, or engaging with people who were White that was distinctly different than people who were Black, which felt more casual and familiar, and arguably safe. And so I didn't know that that was called race in the way that we talk about race now. I definitely knew that there was difference. And that difference was marked by the color of skin. But I couldn't have had a conversation with you about race as a kid. I knew that I fundamentally understood that there was a difference in the way that Whites and Blacks engage with each other.

SURPRISING DISSERTATION DISCOVERY

9:07 Jean
Well, that's fascinating. So let's fast forward to you going through high school, going through college, getting your Ph.D. You have a dissertation, which I've already told people is going to be fascinating. Talk about your dissertation, how you chose it? What you found out?

10:26 Charles
One participant just described the mood. And it was all just - what we would say, survive. And like, I remember listening to her. I could literally feel and touch the mood of what it meant to be in community with each other, listening to either Marvin Gaye or some singer during that time. And everything in the world was going on outside those walls or outside those doors. And it was just fascinating to me. And then some of the younger Black women talked about being entrepreneurs, and how listening to their family members talk about like

having to work a nine to five all day, and they hadn't thought about ownership as a business person.

11:10 Charles
I remember one participant sharing how members in the community at the time would meet in the basement of their home during the week to just have a party and commune and be in community with each other and listen to music. And do what teenagers and young people did. And it was if I could both see and touch and taste the mood as she described it. And so I wrote my dissertation using lots of imagery and words to capture the experiences of these different women as they recalled in their formative years growing up. The research on generational differences is really likened--

11:54 Jean
I just want to say that I have vivid basement party memories.

11:59 Charles
Do you? So you get it?

12:03 Jean
Ray Charles. That's my teenage and young adult years. Parties in basements.

12:13 Charles
So you get it. So in a lot of the research that I did prior to talking with this woman, that type of storytelling didn't come up. Right, so that didn't emerge in some of the more popular literature. But if you dig deeper into the experiences of Black women, and to different communities or persons of color, there are very unique stories that will emerge that are so important to tell and to share and to connect with.

12:45 Charles
So just like I'm sharing with you, you also can recall that, and you too, have also a shared and collective experience of that. And that's what made my research

around generational differences with Black women. so fascinating. There was a shared history, a shared perspective. And I know that Black people and Black women aren't monolithic. But there is something to say about a shared cultural and lived experience that speaks volumes.

13:14 Jean
I could go to Chicago, I could go to LA. Where is the party? In somebodies' basement, same music, same dance, and then it will get picked up by the White kids on television. But we generated it first.

13:36 Charles
Yes, as the story goes, as the story goes.

13:40 Jean
Yes. So tell me this. You're presenting on White generational differences at the workplace, and you're researching Black generational differences for your dissertation. Contrast the two, just pick any era and tell me what you see as a difference.

14:06 Charles
I think the biggest difference honestly, across all the generations, not even just unique to an era and it came out really clearly in all of the participants across all the different generational areas was hair.

14:29 Jean
You got that right.

14:32 Charles
And the ongoing, persistent, relentless negotiation of identity as it relates to Black women's hair. And I'm glad you're laughing because I was so struck by this. The first thing I thought was, "Yeah, I don't spend time thinking about my hair and the judgments or what people may think of it." As a cisgendered man, I

don't think about that. I was struck that all the women talked about the ongoing negotiation of what to do with hair, how they may be judged by their hair.

One of my participants got called out in a board meeting, or some meeting where a woman made a comment about her hair being different than last week and how it had underwent a radical transformation over the weekend, like I don't know if it grew in length or something. But she was shocked and I think embarrassed by that public recognition of her hair by someone who wasn't Black.

And I think I write in my dissertation that what's unique to Black women as evidenced by the consistency of all the stories was that Black women and over and over negotiate identity in a variety of ways that other groups don't and other people don't. And so to be able to name that, identify that, and give that visibility, and there's tons of -- and this was in 2009-2010. So this is like a decade ago. And there's been a lot of documentaries and writings about hair. And I think we talked about it very normally and casually.

But at the time, I hadn't thought about it in that same way. One, I think I'm privileged because as a man who wears my hair pretty short, I don't have to think about those things and have never thought about negotiating it in the same way. But also the aches that I think that Black women carry around sometimes with respect to the hair on one side, and then the pride that's felt by hair on the other side. So just an interesting insight for me. And I listen to my colleagues who are Black women, and this whole thing about like, don't touch my hair like from Solange Knowles, Beyonce's sister is a very real thing. You know, not just physically but symbolically and culturally. It's a thing and I think people need to know that.

17:12 Jean
Okay, so let's take this to the workplace, cause I personally have spent an inordinate amount of time on my hair. So I have a story, but every woman, Black woman I know has the hair story.

17:30 Charles
Oh, yes. And all my participants had a hair story, all of them.

17:35 Jean
So I want to ask you, for the workplace for Whites, now hearing this, what should they do or not do? What are the do's and don'ts around Black women's hair?

17:56 Charles
It's a great question. I think the first do is get educated. I'm always gonna say that, do a little research. I mean, I can I can likely if I really think about it rattle off a do or don't list, I'm probably not the expert in this area. Do a little research, Google, YouTube. There's a documentary produced by Chris Rock on hair, just educate yourself to better understand the cultural context of Black women's hair. And I think if you're a woman, and you're not Black, I think you may have some of the same challenges and dynamics. But I think when you overlay the context of being Black with it, I think it takes on a different meaning. So that's the first thing that I would tell people who are wanting to better understand the historical context and the weight attached to hair for Black women.

I think in the workplace they're the usual suspects around touching hair, inquiring into hair. I think that many people who aren't Black and often White people feel very comfortable, like inquiring around hair. And I think sometimes it's particularly well intended. I think the question is, what's driving that curiosity particularly in the workplace, and what can often be a very intended to be a harmless gesture of acknowledgement, or a compliment, or curiosity can often turn into something landing really, really wrong that really lands wrong for Black women in terms of the gumption to either inquire, touch, get curious about publicly, that you may not do with your other colleagues. Right? And so I literally don't see a lot of people asking men, "Can I touch your hair? Can I touch your face?" So I think there's something to that that requires a little bit more interrogation.

20:14 Jean
So I'm surmising you're saying stay away unless you have enough familiarity or permission or something?

20:23 Charles Absolutely, particularly where you don't have relationships with Black women. Don't do it. Just don't do it. Educate yourself. And even the women that you do know, don't assume that they're comfortable with that either just because you do have relationship. I think the greater you can establish some trust, I would say err on the side of caution. And that's just historical context. And as you would treat any culture but in this particular instance, do a little research on Black women and hair. Read my dissertation.

20:59 Jean
(Laughing) Read your dissertation. I'll put that in the notes.

LEADERSHIP PRESENCE AND AUTHENTICITY

21:03 Jean
Okay, so you have told me that people comment that you're a different thinker.

21:10 Charles
Yeah.

21:13 Jean
And you've also commented on me about leadership presence. And the two thing parallel to me. There are a lot of people who are toying within the workplace, wanting to conform, wanting to fit in. But fitting in is contradictory with being a different thinker. Fitting in does necessarily mean having presence, because most people don't, so talk about how you see, what it means to you to be called a different thinker? What does it mean to you to have leadership presence?

21:58 Charles

Yeah, those are great questions. I think that this is the role of really powerful educators, is to draw out what's unique and powerful about any student or learner that comes through their class or in their presence. And so I knew in school, early on in work, that the way that I think about things, I struggled to explain an idea. I used to struggle with that. I knew that I had lots of thoughts around it, but I couldn't articulate it in a way that my colleagues or boss or peers would understand. Until a professor in grad school, I was explaining to him my experience going to a historically Black college and being on a debate team, and how successful I was, and how successful the team was. And he just asked me, why were you so successful in debate and the work that you did? I said, well, because I can take a theme, break the theme down, come up with clear points on the themes. He said, yeah, that's how you write papers. That's how you do research. You got really curious on the theme or the topic area. And then you start formulating some hypotheses as to either prove or disprove its validity of truth. And I thought, that's what I'm doing? Like wait, he said it in a way better than I could say, but I didn't have the language to communicate what I was doing. But I knew my thinking style approach, like big things, categorically, under those things are some things that need to be organized in a way to make meaning. And I didn't know how to articulate that.

And so when I'm faced with a problem, whether in business, at work, working with teams, or leaders, or managers, I'm really listening for themes. Categorically, I'm listening for connections that are both obvious and not so obvious. I'm looking and listening for tensions that may exist between subcategories or themes. And I literally approach my work that way. Like, how should we be thinking about this problem?

How should we be thinking about what makes it true or not true. But most importantly, why is this even worthy for conversation or to solve? And that's where I think about tensions.

So how should we be thinking this from a leadership perspective is how can we show up in the places that we work and really articulate for other people how we're thinking about a problem, how we've thought about it. And it doesn't have to be perfectly packaged.

But I think you can draw out how you personally think about the issue that you're confronted with and what may be the connections, whether large or small, and being able to share that and have other people build on it. And I think that's what leadership presence is that you have the courage to share an idea, or the way you're thinking about something, and have other people latch on to that idea, and then share how they're thinking about it. To either refine it, grow it, or jointly problem solve it.

And I think that's how I've been thinking about leadership presence. And if I'm in a meeting or working with a team or working with leaders, sometimes you put an idea out there not fully formed or fully baked, but that can become infectious and other people need some trigger.

25:37 Jean
I just want to unpack because you just said a whole bunch of stuff. So I want to unpack what you just said. First of all, there are some people who have thoughts. Go back to before you talk to that Professor. You had thoughts, but didn't think that you could articulate them well. You had a mentor who said: Well, this is the way you do it. What would you say to the person, to the you -- I know a ton of yous out there who have thoughts, but they're censoring their thoughts, because they're thinking, "I can't say it right and I don't know how to say it." and blah, blah, blah. What do you say to that person?

GET YOUR THOUGHTS OUT THERE

26:20 Charles
I say get your thoughts out there, start like practicing or experimenting with just articulating your thoughts in a safe space or with people who can support you. Because I think that sometimes we try to be really linear with our thinking or we want it when it comes out to be perfectly packaged and making sense. And I don't think creativity and innovation drives that way. I think just getting it out for other people to hear and making it visible or heard by the right people, or the people that you're working with. That collective exchange can shape the idea. So that's the first thing I would say, let's get it. Let's get the ideas out.

27:02 Jean
You use the word half-baked. Are you telling people who want to have a presence, want to be heard, that it's okay to surface half-baked ideas? Is that what you're saying?

27:19 Charles
Yes. Because I think that if it's fully baked then what room does someone else have or do you have to make it better? And I mean, that I think that's the spirit of experimentation and creativity and innovation. That by the time other people weigh in or you share your half-baked or not fully formed idea, you give it the opportunity to be refined and grown over time and improved over time.

27:49 Jean
So hang on, I know people who, if they surface an idea and someone contradicts it or changes it, they feel slighted and put down as though they had done something wrong. What would you say to that person? I'm sure you know people like that too.

28:11 Charles
Oh, yeah, for sure.

28:12 Jean

Can not stand for anybody to comment, because they feel personally humiliated if their ideas are not taken fully, exactly as they presented it. So what do you say to that person?

28:26 Charles

To that person I would say, distinguish the idea from the person. Right? I don't view a disagreement on my idea as a personal attack of me or an indictment of my worth or value. I think in the spirit of improving an idea or a project or an initiative, you need other people to disagree with you, to challenge the idea. In the spirit of improving it or making it better or testing the idea with another way to think about it. And their way of thinking about it is informed by their experience, their background, their perspective. And my view is that we need to be open to that, because that's how we all get better.

29:11 Jean

So doesn't that mean I'm stupid, doesn't that mean I don't know. Doesn't that mean something bad about me?

29:18 Charles

No, it doesn't mean anything about you, other than you're courageous enough to share your idea in a public space with the hope and intention of making it better. It is not an indictment of you and your value and your worth. And I really want people to separate those two things.

And to be fully fair, to be fully transparent, I used to be one of those people. You disagree with my idea, I would shut down. And then I would withhold all of my ideas moving forward because I actually took it as a personal attack. I no longer do that. And I haven't done that in years. But I get it, because sometimes it takes people a long time to even muster up the gumption to even share. And once they share, their idea may be met with debate or disagreement. I think that's okay, like the swelling go down in the morning.

That initial shock to the system can often happen, but it shouldn't cause you to withhold future ideas to make something better. So I'd really offer that advice and moving through life people will disagree with you and disagree with how you think and your perspective. That's how life works.

30:29 Jean
All right. I didn't know we were going to get this out of it, but I am delighted.

Okay, so let's shift to L&D and D&I Learning and Development, Diversity and Inclusion. Let's talk about those two as concepts because a lot of people don't really, and especially, you're in a mega company, and you've worked in big, big companies that have that, but some of the smaller organizations, it's all mushed up together with HR. So just make a conceptual distinction for those who don't understand it.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

31:07   Charles
Between D&I and L&D? I think traditionally a lot of diversity and inclusion functions have focused on compliance. Hiring and recruiting, primarily hiring and recruiting traditionally. Learning and development has traditionally focused on training or building skill or developing careers or going through something an experience, either in person training, or online or E-learning where you are developing your personal and professional skills.

My role is to look at how do we build an inclusive culture through the education and development of people. How do we tap into mindsets, cultivate behaviors, get people to think and behave differently so that the people who work at the company feel a sense of being included, feel a sense of working on a team, feel a sense that they belong at the company. And that's very intentionally done. I think when you don't have those two, you can run the risk, D&I can run a risk of not focusing on the education or education through osmosis. And L&D can run

the risk of not considering who's on the margins. Or what's happening in the larger system that requires a different way to think about who's at the table and who isn't, whose perspective is being prioritized and whose perspective is missing? What does it mean for the people that I work with to be in a different country or different region or different office or different backgrounds?

So I love that I get the opportunity in my current role to really be intentional about how do we build an inclusive culture through educating people, through challenging ideas or assumptions, or cultivating ideas and assumptions in the spirit of creating a workplace where people can not only thrive, but they can really be purposeful about showing up as who they are. I feel very, very strongly about that.

33:26 Jean
Showing up as who they are. So the question I was formulating in my mind before you said that was, is it really possible to have an inclusive culture? You know, there are a lot of people out there who just think this is impossible in today's age. Two questions: Is it possible to have an inclusive culture? And is it possible to have a workplace where we can show up as who we are? Is that a pipe dream? Or is that possible?

34:03 Charles
I think it is possible. And I think it's this experiment that we've been undergoing for years. And I think it takes more than statements. I think it takes more than words on a website. I think it takes deep, fundamental and intentionality, for people to really come to work committed to creating an inclusive environment and their interactions in their decision makings. So yes, it is possible. But that possibility is a good intention unless we put actions and mechanisms behind it that really require people to be fully committed.

34:43 Jean
Give one action, just one.

34:48 Charles

I think one action that people can take is: Are their meetings fully inclusive? Are you prioritizing how your meetings are structured? Who's participating in the meeting and who's not? Who gets to speak up? Who has voice? Who doesn't?

35:06 Jean

Well, if she doesn't want to speak up, that's her problem. The floor is open. So how do you respond to that?

35:14 Charles

Well, I would say, what's preventing her from speaking up? Have you created the environment, wherever you are as a leader, manager, team member, for people to feel comfortable speaking up, and know that there are other ways to participate with not speaking publicly, by emailing or sharing your ideas? I think the real intention is, have you exhausted everything you can to ensure that the environment that you've created and meetings or the actions you're taking fully includes everyone, that you've removed barriers or friction…

35:46 Jean

Give an example, make this real concrete because people literally don't know what to do.

35:52 Charles

I think one of the things is like turning your cameras on and off. On a call, do you turn your cameras on? Do you turn them off? Or do you give people choice that either is acceptable? So do you send out as a part of the agenda, it's your choice to turn your cameras are on/off, we acknowledge that both are legitimate and valid ways of engaging. We want to hear from you but we also want to honor your choice. I think that one is the one I've been seeing most often is around cameras on and off in zoom meetings. And people say, Well, I want to see faces, turn your cameras on. And I think there's greater power in the choice. Letting the choice around inclusion be up to the person who's actually participating.

36:36 Jean
Especially if I'm having a bad hair day.

36:39 Charles
Especially if you're having a bad hair day.

36:48 Charles
Jean, the second part of your question is can we allow people to show up as fully as they are? If they get to decide what full authenticity means to them. Absolutely. And I think that's a nuanced question. Right? I think there's authentic enough, enough of myself to show up. And I get to decide in partnership with the company and what that means for me. I mean, obviously, there are guard rails, because I don't know if we want everyone showing up all the time. But I think the spirit of that is in a way that's productive and healthy for the organization and for the people they work with. And if it doesn't produce unnecessary friction for you to leave parts of yourself outside of the workplace.

I mean, I think we want people to feel engaged, happy, supported. And if that means that you need to show up as your most authentic self, absolutely. And if that's healthy and productive for the people that you work with and it's in alignment with the values of the organization, absolutely. I think that's healthy and we should be aspiring to that.

38:07 Jean
So if my authentic self wants to lay out your behind out because I don't like what you said, what's wrong with that?

38:15 Charles
Lay your behind out as in like disagreement?

38:23 Jean
Oh, I've cursed him out. Let's just take it to the extreme. I'm trying to get where the guard rails are. If I'm wanting to curse you out, what's wrong with that?

38:37 Charles
Well, I think there are behaviors that are acceptable and not acceptable with regard to how we engage with each other. And a minimum requirement is respect. If your authentic self requires disrespecting a colleague, then I think that's below the line, it shouldn't be acceptable. Remember, in the spirit of being productive, being respected, behaving and engaging in a way that moves us forward, that's acceptable. But if we're cursing people out or engaging in behavior we think it's not acceptable or unacceptable, not productive, I don't see a space for that.

39:21 Jean
Okay, so I was talking with someone literally, last week, who was explaining that some people just need to be told off cause they're racist, sexist, and wrong. What would you say to that person?

39:41 Charles
I don't think it's that cut and dry. I don't think it's that simple just to tell people off. And I think you can be direct with someone about what your perspective is on their behavior and the consequences for that, if you choose.

And there are variables, right? It depends on your relationship with them. It depends on the context, the situation. I always err on the side, I'm in education field, so I'm always on the side of what are we learning here? Who is this in service of? How do we grow from this experience?

And I don't think it's that cut and dry to simply tell someone off. And again, I don't know the context. But I would say more often than not, my experience of what I see people doing is authentically and genuinely trying to engage in points of disagreement, and behavior that may be counterproductive to our cause in creating a more inclusive environment or an inclusive world.

And there are extremes to a variety of different examples. When we're in extreme, I think there's consequences and implications for those extremes. I

found those extremes rare. I find what's more average is that we are having a disagreement on language, perspective, the role of law, the role of education, the role of all the different global issues and crises. But if the extremes are that you are not listening, you're compromising my and my people's humanity, you are advocating violence, you are doing things that are just absolutely not productive for what we're trying to do. I consider that an extreme. If this person is talking about that, I think there are ways to address that that may be relative situation. But I don't think that's the norm.

41:44 Jean
Okay, my response at the time was, does it work? Well, if you're laying people out, and call them racist and sexist, do they decide, oh, I guess I won't do that anymore? Or do they just add and call you a bunch of names? And so I'm interested, but people are torn between this whole issue of authenticity and showing up as who I am and what's productive. What I like about what you're saying is, and I might be putting words in your mouth, but what you're saying is that the question is, is it productive? Does it bring the team closer together or tear them apart? And that's the criteria for what's the limits of my authenticity?

42:45 Charles
Yeah, it's a good point. I agree. And what do we do with disagreement and debate and conflict? If you're willing to engage with me at a point of disagreement or conflict in a respectful way, I think that's above the line. I think it's fair. If that disagreement or point of departure of ideas lead to extreme behaviors, like name calling, and all that other stuff. I think that's an extreme, that means that something is broken and our rules of engagement for how we disagree.

And if that then becomes the issue that moves into an extreme, now that's not safe, that's feeling like we're not particularly productive and we have to make different decisions when we are in that extreme. Do I disengage with the person? Do I remove myself? Is there an escalation to something more consequential? I don't know, I think there are different decision points, but I'm

solving for what I find in my experience, on average, people are more than willing to debate and engage in a more productive conversation. And then there are extremes and those people if that's their decision to engage in that behavior require a different type of engagement.

44:10 Jean
I want to start wrapping it up. So my question is, you described yourself as a Black male. You're in a position with learning and development and D&I. What is it that some White people know but most don't in the workplace? If you had to describe something that White people will say "I want to learn", what is it that you think they need to learn?

44:53 Charles
That's a really good question. And we're going to talk about White people, but I only want to caveat that it could potentially be people from all different backgrounds, but there is a very distinct and particular dynamic with Whites, relative to Blacks and arguably other cultures. Which is historical context on why Black people, Asian people, of Asian descent, indigenous people got here today. The historical context of these histories that are both steeped in harm, atrocity, unjust legislation, laws, treatment that have made the wave for the types of conversations that we're having today, that have in a number of ways produced a nuance of experience and understanding and an inconsistency of understanding about Whites that often make it very difficult to comprehend these issues, to engage with Blacks, to engage with Asian employees, or Asian people, or indigenous people, or Latinx people that are often taken for granted.

So one example is the hair conversation. I see White people genuinely and authentically admiring Black woman's hair in their mind. And asking to touch it is void of the historical context as to why that might be problematic, around physical space, around identity, around the casual nature of even asking a Black woman about her hair and being able to physically make contact with it. Why might that be problematic?

46:55 Jean
And ownership of my body.

46:57 Charles
And ownership of a body. And why might that be problematic given the historical context. And that I think when people start to educate themselves a little more about these experiences, you're like, more often than not, that informs a different way of engagement, of building relationships, of having friends and family members, that if you didn't have it wouldn't produce the same outcome or the same relationship.

So that's why I think that White people in particular could benefit from that I see most as a point of education and either lack of understanding or less familiarity or proximity to. I think that's so clear to me, I'm going yeah, I can tell this person either doesn't have that context or it doesn't have those relationships.

47:55 Jean
I can tell this person doesn't have that context or have that relationship. Okay, let me just think about on that phrase. Let me paraphrase this my way and you tell me if I'm on target or not what you're saying. If I'm having an unease with a person of color, I need to inquire into history as to the source of that unease rather than inquiring into what I did wrong, or why that person is so sensitive or anything. Would you go that far or am I taking it beyond?

48:35 Charles
No, I don't think it's so simple or that black and white. I think you need to identify what's causing you dis-ease.

48:51 Jean
Because the other person is acting all weird. That's why I'm uneasy.

48:54 Charles
I think you need to identify what's causing you dis-ease or like discomfort. I'm suggesting that if your unease or dis-ease is happening consistently with the same types of people over time, then you may want to educate yourself as to what's causing your dis-ease, what historical context you need to be thinking about unrelated to this group of people or these people, and use that as one data point among a number of other data points in terms of your relationship, your level of interaction, your level of trust. But I think that historical context can certainly help as well as one data point.

And Jean, I love your questions, and hopefully I'm answering your questions. But I think the problem is critically thinking about the overlap and complexity of these things. They're not as cut and dry and simple as problem/solution in terms of our culture.

50:03 Jean
So narrow it down, Charles, because people going to hear this and if they hear, oh, it's very complex, and you have to think of things. They're not going to get any guidance, they're not going to know what to do. So I need something much more concrete. If you want to narrow it down and make up as a simple example of where people need a historical context, let's do that.

57:55 Charles
Where my mind is going is around indigenous people and the comments we make around the lowest man on the totem pole or why the Washington Redskins was problematic or eating Buffalo Wild Wings. And in indigenous cultures, animals are spiritual symbols and are viewed as sacred. But if you're in an interaction and you make an offhanded comment around something related to one of the examples I just gave you. And you're in conversation with an indigenous person who may be rubbed the wrong way, because what you thought was a very casual interaction, talking about Buffalo Wild Wings, and the lowest man on the totem pole or the Washington Redskins. The things that you and your family have heralded and have loved throughout the course of your

entire life and your indigenous colleague thinks that the way that animals have been used in the inappropriate ways that disrespects or dishonor some of the indigenous and native tribes, you would note that without doing education on the role of animals and indigenous and native culture.

And so for me, that's a prime example of using education to better understand indigenous and native culture. And then in what ways at work, might this interaction have gone off the rails or a comment that was intended to be innocent, really is landing with profound, harmful impact and potentially eroding the relationship. That's an example for me of historical context and the relationship of culture that not only exists for indigenous people, but for Blacks, for Asians, for various cultures around the world, but without that context, our interactions can often erode and become problematic if we don't have it. That's just one example.

52:34 Jean
it's a perfect example.

Thank you.

52:38 Charles
I was wanting to give examples of casual interactions that go off the rail because that historical context isn't understood or unknown. And again, that's just one example.

And so I ask people very specifically now that you know that, what would you do differently? What approach would you take? How would you approach the conversation now that you know?

53:08 Jean
Right. Great. Okay, so I'm gonna end with one question. You are here, I'm interviewing you, I want you hear because you have accomplished a lot in your

life. Go back in time to you at age 20-21 starting out, what advice would you give yourself?

53:37 Charles
I think I would... I love these questions. I would probably say eat more, just eat. My 20 year old self. You know, I think for me as a Black gay man, I would have told myself that it's going to be okay, you don't have to have it all figured out. Be who you are. Speak from your truth, do the best that you can for your family and your community. And don't try to have all the answers. And I think that's been the challenge for many young people that I see now who try to have it all figured out at such a young age and life unfolds. And I think the real test is having a strong support system and a community and friends around you. So as you encounter the different points of life that you can embrace it and make the best decisions that you can at that time. That's what I would have told my 20 year old self.

JUNETEENTH AND PRIDE MONTH

54:48 Jean
Don't think you have to have it all figured out.

Okay, so you mentioned that you are gay. It's Pride Month. It's Pride Month and Juneteenth. What's the significance of both holidays to you?

55:08 Charles
Well, Juneteenth has been celebrated in Texas for years, and I'm so glad it's now a federally recognized holiday. It's around liberation, jubilee, and emancipation. And as equal as much as we celebrate the atrocity, we need to celebrate the emancipation and the freedom that comes along with this holiday means. I think Pride Month is a public recognition of members of the LGBTQ+ community, being visible, living, thriving, and celebrating the different aspects of their identity.

At the intersection of Juneteenth and Pride, is the recognition of LGBTQ+ people of color and Black people who sit at those intersections, living authentically and as wonderfully as they know how. And for other people to see them living these incredibly glorious lives. And I think that's the significance of both Pride and Juneteenth that I'm particularly excited about. I wore my shirt today to acknowledge these intersections and what it means for me, who I am, and also the work that I'm doing.

56:29 Jean
Well, that sounds like a segue into a part two. So thank you Charles, I'm delighted to have you here. And thank you for most provocative and informative interview that took us places I had not anticipated.

56:49 Charles
Well, thank you for the opportunity. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation and I hope to people who are viewing this they take away a few things that will help them along their journey.

56:59 Jean
Hello, again. Hope you enjoyed that as much as I did. Here's what I got from the interview with Charles.

First of all, I started out with the question of how could a Black boy who grew up on the corner of Southmore and Dowling in Third Ward, Houston, Texas, end up as a leader at Facebook? You got a glimpse of the answer to that question. And it's partly that he had the good fortune to have an amazing mother, who recognized his potential and provided this structure and opportunities for him to excel. So at a young age, younger than a lot of people, Charles learned he had gifts and how to use those gifts, and how to have the determination to succeed. Second is the hair thing from his dissertation. For those of you who want to understand why this is such a big deal, check out Chris Rock's documentary on

hair. The main thing is that I wanted is for you to see a gay Black man talking about authenticity and leadership presence.

Right now we have members of Pathfinders, coaching clients, personal friends, all asking, Can I really show up as myself at my current job? As Charles explains, yes, you can. But you have to work at it and it doesn't just come to you. We will all falter, we will all be corrected. So if we can learn from that and keep going, then that will make all the difference. Charles has gifts. And he got off to a great start. He put time into who he is today. He's worked hard.

Thank you for listening. I'll see you next week. And if you enjoyed this and enjoy the blogs, please subscribe and post in the comments. I would love to hear from you. Thank you. See you next week.