

Beyond Philanthropy Episode 7

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SPEAKERS

Monique Curry-Mims, Valerie Johnson, Dwayne Wharton

Valerie Johnson 00:00

Hello and welcome back to beyond philanthropy. I am Valerie I am here with Monique and we have a very special guest with us today to talk about DEI so I'm going to toss it to Monique to introduce our guest.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:14

Good morning, afternoon, evening, everyone who's listening today. Again, this is Monique and I am honored to introduce Dwayne Wharton of just strategies. Dwayne and I, we go back to like another life. If we met at an architecture event or even like an AI like a black Institute of Architects meeting like eons ago again another life ago. And somehow we both transitioned into nonprofits and philanthropy and stayed in touch. I am so pleased to have I'll say my partner in crime because I do partner with him on some dei stuff once in a while. Yeah, but I'm Welcome to have you to the show today. So introduce yourself and tell the people how amazing you are.

Dwayne Wharton 00:56

thanks Val and Monique. I'm honored to be here. Yeah. So we do go way back in as you know, being lifelong Philadelphian, I traveled some and lived other places, but this hasnt is still home. You know, it's a small circle, even though it's a big city. So working in the public sector, working in social service organizations working in any kind of Human Services capacity, you end up meeting other good people, it's been great to have been able to transition into this new space, and philanthropy and even consulting at really the same time, as you have been, Monique, Val, it's really great to meet you for the first time. So I work at Just Strategies. So we're a mission driven consulting company started in 2020. I was with food trust for several years, and even with another a number of great nonprofit organizations locally and nationally before that, but really transitioned at the end of 2019, and wanted to spend more time with my family, especially with my kids when they were going off to college, and also pursue a vision for being able to support organizations in ways that I felt were needed that was really centered in equity, that had a vision of how not only the work was being done, but how the people who were doing the work, were experiencing the organization until, you know, that's really, you know, the the foundation

Just Strategies. We do a lot of coaching, trainings on facilitation, we do assessments for organizations, and we really try to partner with nonprofits and foundations around centering equity internally and externally. So have you actually gotten more time with your family over the last two years?

Monique Curry-Mims 02:42

I was about to say that, because when I switch to consulting, trying to get that work life balance, you know what my son said to me, he said, Nobody raises me and I was like, what do you mean, who raised you? he was like, You work all the time. And I'm like, but I teach you right from wrong, right? Like I feed you I clothe you. He was like, Yes, I'm like, that's what raising is. Just because video games with you or you want me to doesn't mean that I'm not raising you. the work life balance is totally screwed. So I don't know about.

Dwayne Wharton 03:11

No, of course not.

Valerie Johnson 03:13

Well, especially with the enhanced, you know, interest, I would say in DEI work over the past 18 months or so since the Black Lives Matter protests after George Floyd murder, like people, people are more aware of DEI as a thing. And I think a lot of organizations are going after DEI consultants and DEI training. So I would imagine that you did not get the easy transition that you're hoping for.

Dwayne Wharton 03:41

That's correct. Um, that being said, you know, it is a, you know, a labor of love. And I've been able to, at times bring in my kids who one is a sociology major and the others an English major with a minor in sociology, who are interested in visit space as well into some of the conversations as well, as well as some of their friends. I had an intern with me, last year was our first equity and justice intern, a kid who's now a sophomore at Spelman and my kids are at Howard. But, you know, No, I haven't, but I think they one know more about what I do. And even if I can't, like log the same hours that I had hoped, at least I'm still home. I'm present, you know, we, you know, yell each other about being loud in other rooms during the kind of, you know, quarantine phase we're living in, etc. So, no, but you know, still a special time for sure. And very different than if I was still working for an organization. Definitely, definitely. Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 04:47

So October is Global Diversity Awareness Month. So as as we look at that or think about that, you know, I think that I recently did did a presentation around elevating philanthropy and did an outreach to nonprofit and philanthropic leaders of color asking about intentionality of dei and organizations. And even though a good number of people responded back that things were implemented, but they're still working towards it, which is what I like to hear, because it's not an overnight thing. There were a good amount of people who said that, you know, there were either, you know, philanthropic leader was a one fund that was instituted, but like, now, things are back to normal, or there was some random program, but it just wasn't authentic. So can you talk about that, like, what does it really take for an organization to be authentic in their dei?

Dwayne Wharton 05:44

Yeah, yeah, thanks for that question. Um, I think, you know, this work isn't new. And, and, and I think there has, there have been people who have been doing this work for, you know, decades, now, right. But the impact and the methodology in which this approach continues to evolve, impact hasn't been made, and the methodology has continued to evolve. So I think when I first was engaged as like a staff member participating in like dei was at times like diversity work, where, you know, they didn't want to ever talk about race. It was like, I had four green m&ms, and you have three red ones, the red ones had, you know, represented two points. And the green ones are only one point, how do you feel like, I'm sorry? Are we talking about race? What are we talking about? Am I red or green? Like, why aren't we talking about it? Oh, we don't want to make people feel uncomfortable. Like, well, one, like if you're not willing to be uncomfortable in such an uncomfortable topic, typically, for people who are experiencing racism, then we can't ever get anywhere. So like, let's not protect the feelings. And let's really try to figure out what's going on and what we can do about it. So, you know, I think a lot of efforts now are really intentional about naming it. And I think, you know, some of the work is really started with assessments, being able to have an understanding about, like, what's happening in the organization, how are people experiencing it, typically, how are folks of color who have marginalized identities experiencing the organization. And oftentimes, it's a lot of surprise, and oftentimes, it's, it's really two different worlds, for white staff members, like they feel like recent and these issues around diversity, equity and inclusion, aren't really there, or that we're better than what we think we are. And for folks of color, particularly black women are like, nah, like, we, you know, are suffering. And these are the ways you know, and being able to survey the staff to have real conversations beyond the survey, because what we found is that oftentimes, when we survey we don't, we're not able to get into like, any real specificity and details in a ways having a real conversation. And, and focus groups were like, Alright, we just want to speak to the staff of color, we want to, we want to speak specifically to the black staff, you want to speak to Latinx staff, we want to speak to people who are champions of marginalized identities, people who are like, you know, making a stink with the organization, because you, you know, did this performative thing around George Floyd and let you know about it, people who were offended that like you have a Hispanic culture, but all you did was send them GOYA recipes, these are real things.

Monique Curry-Mims 08:39

These are real things? Goya recipes?

Dwayne Wharton 08:42

Right? So we want to talk to them and really hear, like, you know, what's happening, where the opportunities to like really help the organization understand how you're experiencing, and where they can do better. And these are hard conversations to have, but they're particularly hard for leadership and those organizations to hear. So what we really get a lot of is a lot of rejection, defensiveness, and, and frankly, like hurt feelings, about what they're discovering about the organization. And I think, you know, those are all natural reactions, and we try to prepare them that you will be experiencing these things. And also for folks of color, like, yeah, we're going to be talking about something that may be harmful and hurtful and cause pain to revisit, you know, for both groups, for white folks, and for staff of color,

how do you take care of yourself, you know, when we're going deep into this emotional states, you don't want to traumatize anyone by having these conversations but recognizing that that potentially that's there, what's a good self care plan within the organization who need we support, these conversations for all that's a part of it, after we do the assessment, and we really do want to understand, well, we want to make sure that organizations are all Talking about the same things in the same way. So like, you know, folks will mention things like microaggressions. And you know, how people of color feel when this happens at the organization, we want to make sure that everyone has the same language, like, okay, yes, that is a classic definition of what that is. talking about, like a structural aspect of racism versus an individual racism. This is how it's showing up in your institution. This is how it contributes to the larger structure of like societal, like racism that exists as well, and how they all intersect and interplay, and are mutually reinforcing, in terms of the outcome that we're seeing, we're going to make sure people understand that, like, how do we get here in the first place, and we don't want to take blame away from folks, and nor do we want to blame them, we just want to talk in a very Matter of factway. these are the historical things that have happened around white supremacy in this country, and everyone who isn't a white person has been impacted by it, white people were even impacted by it, you know, we see the burden that that folks are wearing, even to this day, in the form of like the opioid crisis and, and the inability for like rural America, like, and, and like the rejection of white exceptionalism, all those in and we'll say American exceptionalism, but like Toni Morrison said, the definition of America is whiteness or whiteness is the definition of America, it's like one of the same. So like, have these real conversations, give people the same language, talk about them, normalize talking about them, and then we can get into the planning. And I think the last part of this is that we want people who are closest to those issues, people who are being served, as well as people who are closest to doing the direct service to really inform what the plan is, for us to get through this as an organization. So it's multifaceted in our approach. And again, very different than the old ways in which we had these conversations where I don't think much progress was made at all.

Monique Curry-Mims 12:06

No, that's always something that I've appreciated about the work that you do. And when we go after projects, there's always an education component, right? It's not just, we're going to come in and make your organization authentically DEI through these, you know, focus groups and surveys, but we're actually going to spend the time to educate you so that we all have that same foundational understanding of what people mean by micro macro aggressions, and what you know what's going on there. So I've really always appreciated the about your work. And this made me think of two things. I don't know Val if you want to talk about the presentation that you did, so I was really interested to hear how the audience reacted to that, like, what what questions or what learnings about that were.

Valerie Johnson 12:53

So I recently did a presentation on authenticity in the workplace. And it was with a former coworker of mine, who's a black woman. And we kind of talked a lot about what it looks like to be able to be your authentic self in the workplace, and how important that is for non white folks or non typical folks. This is in no way shape, or form me tooting my own horn, but we found, her and I, a very good working relationship where she felt like she was able to be her authentic self in the workplace. And I think it was impactful for both of us, you know, for me to see how she flourished in that, you know, space where she

really felt like she was able to truly come to work and be herself every day. So that's kind of why we put together the presentation. But it is interesting, Monique, we've done the presentation twice now and I think people are so it's one of two ways, right? It's like the people of color in the room who are just in the back, like over and over just going like YASSSS, like raising their hands, snapping clapping. And then the white folks in the room who are just like, I always, I always show up, like me, like, what do you what do you mean that I that people show up and just can't fit like? So it's such a weird dichotomy, right? Like, there's like people who like, never have the opportunity to show up authentically, who are like, finally somebody sees me. And then there's the people who always show up authentically, and it never occurred to them, that other people don't feel that way. So yeah, it is I can understand why there would be a lot of pushback when you're doing you know, your trainings and consulting work because it it does feel like you're being personally attacked as a white person when somebody's like, Hey, I can't be myself at work around you because I'm like, terrified that you're going to fire me and you're like, Oh, my God, what? No, I never wanted you to feel that way. I just want you to come into work and do your job and feel good and like it's, yeah, it does feel a little bit like a personal attack. So I have had to work a lot at not taking it personally and recognizing like, this is the structure of America. Like you said. America is racism, basically. So that's, but it's something that you have to work at, especially as a white supervisor, if you are in a more diverse organization, or if you're looking to diversify the staff at your organization, it's something that I think you have to be aware of.

Dwayne Wharton 15:16

Yeah, it's funny, like the work that we do, particularly like in our workshops, like we really do try to have some balance between a connection with each other. Because we believe that relationships and communication are the foundations for anti racist work. And then we also have like the educational component of it, and we want to have some reflection, and some actual, like, critical thinking related to like what we're just talking about, so much of it is really trying to help people understand like this, this notion of implicit bias and how things are show up implicitly, and the normalization of whiteness. So, to your point about like, being able to show up as your authentic self. It's like, why wouldn't you be able to, and not thinking about how everything has been designed, around and to support like whiteness in this country. And like everything that we see in the media, everything that we see in our books that we read, and like, you know, the conversations that we have, I remember like a few years ago, like the MLK movie came out and was received really well by a lot of folks. But then there was this critique, that LBJ wasn't like, talked about more. I'm like dammit, like, can't a movie just be about the Black man. Like, why does he need to be in the story? Like? I mean, like, Sure, there are plenty of examples and sites around that relationship and the role that, you know, advancing the Civil Rights Act, and those policies were but like, it can't just be MLK, do we have to have a white man in this? Decentering yourself is just, like really hard,

Valerie Johnson 16:59

It's really hard, Yeah.

Dwayne Wharton 17:00

Normalized to support that.

Valerie Johnson 17:03

I mean, especially if you've gone through the traditional school system, where you learn about them hand in hand, you know what I mean? Like, if you're a white kid that went to any public school in America, you learned that like, MLK wasn't who he was without LBJ and like, you know what I mean, like, and then when you grow up, and you watch a movie, you expect to see them both, because that's, that's what you were taught. That's what you remember from history class. And yeah, it's, um, it's a lot to unpack. It's work that needs to be done. For sure. Like white people, we got to get ourselves together.

Monique Curry-Mims 17:37

well, on the other side of that, so like, decentralizing, I read, it was like a Twitter conversation thread. And it was talking about what's going on in Texas. And the fact that it wasn't just white men, because it seems you know, they're making the case around like, men controlling the bodies of women. But the statement actually was, don't look at it's not just, it wasn't just white men that voted for it, it was also white women, because a lot of these was white women with the fact that it was promoting white supremacy, right. So like, these white men are doing this, and they're supporting them in order to keep, you know, the power struggles that and I'm just like, so they would rather put their own bodies and their daughter's bodies and their lives on the line, just to make sure they're supporting the men in the in the archetype of keeping America what it is. And I found that really interesting. It's something I've always been like, why did I just vote like that? But I've never thought of it in that way. Right? I was just like, she's stupid. Why is she in office, or something like that? And that did it too, is like, perpetuate something.

Valerie Johnson 18:52

You almost think like, Oh, really gonna put myself out here right now. But like, you almost feel like, but that's not me. Like, that doesn't apply to me. Like, I don't know, that's just it happens to me a lot. where like, I saw this new abortion ban pass in Texas, and I was like, Well, I would never happen to me. And then I started reading articles about like, it's possible. You know, if Governor Wolf in Pennsylvania gets you know, he's he's not running for his next election because he hit his term limit. So like, it's possible to get a republican

Dwayne Wharton 19:18

very possible

Valerie Johnson 19:20

in Pennsylvania, and still, my privileged white brain is telling me like, even if that law passes in Pennsylvania, that won't affect me and like, that is the problem. Right?

Monique Curry-Mims 19:29

Right.

Valerie Johnson 19:30

Like it does not matter what happens I still have enough privilege to think to myself like well, I'll be able to get an abortion if I want an abortion and that's not an okay way to think it's a very self preservationist way to think and I think that's a lot of the reason why white women vote the way they do because they're like, well, it doesn't affect me at all. Like it might affect you know, other people, but it's not gonna affect me and my family. And then, you know, that's, that's where how we got to where we are.

Dwayne Wharton 19:58

It's so painful. It's so painful and it just shows you how much like elections actually matter. So even like in a state, like Texas and like overwhelming, rural, conservative politics, but like, I would just name like lots of places in the south and even places like, you know, and Pensyltucky like, it is very possible. And I don't know, like when you like talk about how like white women have, like, you know, also contributed, but I would say like so many other groups as well like having like, you know, folks in the LGBTQ community voting in lockstep with the GOP justifying it because of economic reasons. I know, like, you know, black men who

Monique Curry-Mims 20:43

I know black men, black republicans

Dwayne Wharton 20:45

who are business interest minded, have also voted in that direction. Yep. Um, my good friends, I have a company of the apple and have this kind of marketing paraphernalia stuff that they do. And the best shirt that I got from them is like, vote like a black woman. Because like, consistently, you know, the American values that we talk about, that we're supposed to be like trying to live up to, and all the things about equality and equity and like making sure that people look out for each other, like, typically, like black women have held that, you know, and I think even for black men, like we have to do better, and like, bring folks along, but it's hard. It's hard.

Valerie Johnson 21:30

It's so hard.

Dwayne Wharton 21:31

And having conversations. We even talked, we talked earlier about like anti vaccine, and like, you know, again, like, and that covers lots of demographic groups as well. But how do you bring people along who simply just have a different way of looking at the world? Like, that's really challenging.

Monique Curry-Mims 21:49

That's even the climate. I was saying to my husband yesterday, I was like, how can there be climate change or anti climate change people? Look at what's going on. And my husband was like, because it's not about facts. It's about what they personally believe and feel and you can't change a person's ethos. And I was just like, but they're crazy.

Dwayne Wharton 22:10

Or how, how to change and that's, that's, that's a million dollar question for sure. And you have people who, you know, you hear plenty of accounts of folks who are in the ICU and their last moments

Monique Curry-Mims 22:24

want the vaccine

Dwayne Wharton 22:25

Yeah, like are still critical and think is a conspiracy. And it's crazy. I've had to like block some of my favorite rappers. Like, why are you promoting like, they're no microchips in dollar bills, like, stop, like, there's no implant. What does it stick to your arm? You're not turning into a zombie. Like, I love your music. You're crazy.

Monique Curry-Mims 22:44

And the chip is in your phone, the government could track you and hear everything like,

Dwayne Wharton 22:48

Are you kidding me?

Monique Curry-Mims 22:49

Right? Like, you're crazy about making up dollar bills, but you're not gonna think about your phone.

Valerie Johnson 22:54

No. Like, I remember I was texting my brother one time and said like, hey, what show did you go see on Broadway last week, and he said To Kill a Mockingbird. And I was like, Oh, right. Cool. How was it? I got so many ads in the next two hours about the Broadway show. To kill a Mockingbird.

Monique Curry-Mims 23:10

I've got one better for you. In July of one year, one of my co workers got one of those like medicine ball chairs. And I told my husband, I was like, Oh, I want a medicine ball chair. And I showed him which one I wanted. And I just knew he was going to get it. So I never like looked at it again. So that was July, I thought I was gonna get my birthday. He didn't get it for my birthday. Got it for me for Christmas, though. So he didn't he didn't even get the one that I actually wanted. that's fine. It was still a good chair. But the ads, the actual chair, that I looked at you would think like I would get ads for the actual chair that I looked at. So I'm sitting in my office putting my chair together. Never said the name. Never looked it up. Never anything. I'm putting the chair together. Put the chair together sit at my desk get on Facebook. That's the first ad that pops up. I'm like, Okay, so now I have a camera cover on my I'm like, okay, they've got to be in my camera. There's no way they knew

Dwayne Wharton 24:05

from listening

Monique Curry-Mims 24:06

that's not even the chair that I asked for. It was crazy. Yeah.

Dwayne Wharton 24:09

So anyone who listens to this podcast is not gonna get medicine ball pop-ups as well as Broadway shows. Expect that.

Valerie Johnson 24:16

Exactly, yeah. Um, to dial it back to it. We have to do this, like at least twice an episode. But to bring it back to philanthropy. I think bringing people along is something that you mentioned. And I think that's something that we as fundraisers especially have to think a lot about because a lot of organizations are doing the internal DEI work. But we as fundraisers have to figure out how to stay true to our missions, stay true to whatever diversity statements we've made as an organization and still communicate with our donors and still remain, you know, ethical about our decisions with donors and how we're communicating to donors and what kind of donations we're accepting. I don't know. About all, you know, fundraisers, but I have been kind of more involved maybe than I thought I might be in the work that's happening internally. So I'm curious if your clients are doing the same thing where fundraisers are a part of the work that's going on in some of the consulting work that you're doing. And then if you have any advice on how to bring people along, who maybe are not participating in the DEI work, the agency is doing.

Dwayne Wharton 25:28

Oh, goodness, I think these efforts are mutually reinforcing. So I think for foundations, who are expressing interest in being more equitable in their approaches, it means lots of things it's looking at, like their staff composition, its looking at their board composition, it's looking at the ways in which they are informed about where their needs and directions could be. Oftentimes, nonprofits serve as a proxy for poor communities, but how can foundation tap directly into communities and hear exactly who they think has been worked by them? And also have their strategies informed and those ways. for nonprofits? I'll also say, in terms of the foundation side really quickly that like, even like, how it invests money? Are you know, is your whoever your financial manager is? Are they able to manage your ways, which are also working to advance equity? So is it like socially responsible investment happening? Where do you definitely know where you want to invest your money as well as where you don't want to invest your money? And then also, in philanthropy, it's like, you know, once you've made those decisions, and you've led that organization, how do you get out of the way, in terms of like making the application and the dissemination of the funds easy and quick? How do you make it sustainable? So can it be multi year, and can it be general operating so that they can use it to invest in ways that they want to like, y'all know, these, like, in the middle of trust, based philanthropy things, from the nonprofit side, it's like having some bravery to like, have hard conversations with foundations. And because, you know, there's always like, I would think, some kind of like, spectrum of where we are, are all on on our kind of like equity journeys. It might be some things that you know, and that you want to apply in your work that you're afraid to, because you don't think people will support it, bring it up, introduce it, like help a program officer understand that there are opportunities to like, you know, do better in these ways. And I think oftentimes, nonprofits are gun shy about that. And we think that, you know, foundations have to hit all the rules. And I don't think that's the case, I think, you know, working on both sides, because, you know, coming from the nonprofit leadership side, but I'm also a trustee, with kind of

foundation, I'm actually the board president, and I, you know, the board president of Sybert foundation for a number of years and still involved in a black giving circle, we want to hear from folks, and have it be informed in terms of like fundraising, and messaging, and like doing it ethically, like those are so important, but if you don't know what your values are, and if you haven't had those conversations, to do the work, to establish them in a modern way that reveals issues that we're talking about, then you'll probably miss the mark, you have to have these intentional conversations across the board, for nonprofits, as well as foundations to really figure out like, what your values are, where do you want to make the investment and really be intentional about that.

Monique Curry-Mims 28:49

Something that was said in the survey that I did from our last presentation, A couple people talked about equity audits.

Dwayne Wharton 28:55

Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 28:56

And so I don't know if that's something that you have experience with, or if there's a resource that people can use, like, here's a site or somewhere where you can gain an equity audit, that can start you on your journey, like do you know of any resources like that?

Dwayne Wharton 29:12

We do do that. And, you know, again, I talked about a little bit earlier, it's like, you know, surveying staff and one-on-one interviews and focus groups. There's also a document review. That's pretty comprehensive, looking at the employee handbook, looking at your strategic plan, looking at your proposals, you know, is the language to your point earlier about is the language that you're using, framed in a deficit way when you're talking about the people that you're serving? Like, you know, pretty good indicator of that is like, you know, would you be okay with speaking to the people that you're intending to serve using that same language that you put in your proposal or not. So like, you know, we have like scorecards that are created and ultimately, you know, you get an assessment report and it's a snapshot of where you are, you're never fixed. It's always like a journey and every day is an opportunity to get it right or wrong. Yeah, there are plenty of awesome resources that exist online. You know, Vu, who was actually you know, who spoke at the philanthropy network conference a few years ago, and was really the editor at nonprofit with balls has a great matrix that looks at like, all of the categories, not all, but lots of categories related to how equity shows up in the organization and you know, everything from like your grant making to your to your decision making, to like how you're investing your staffing, work, all that Where are you? Right? And I think in the end, he gives you a score, based on how you answer this survey, and like, whether you're a really cool grantmaker, or you're one that like, really needs to do some work.

Valerie Johnson 30:55

We will, we'll find that and drop that in the show notes. We both we love Vu. And I have to say he's gotten extra spicy in the last six months, like I thought he had no fucks left to give, like, three years ago

when I started reading his blog, and like, he's just off the rails just saying all of the fiery things lately. So if you're not already reading nonprofit AF, please do it. Because that's another one where I just sit back and snap and I'm like, Yeah, yes. Perfect.

Dwayne Wharton 31:23

Love to hear that.

Valerie Johnson 31:26

Monique, are you seeing that with your clients that there's that like fear to upset a donor or fear to upset a funder, like fear to really stick to your guns from an equity perspective?

Monique Curry-Mims 31:38

Well, so I'm going to say no, because I think part of working with my clients is not only do they interview me, but I interviewed them as well, because a lot of the work that I do is grounded in the equity of the stakeholders, right? So no matter how you're fundraising, no matter how you're doing strategic planning, how you're doing program, organizational development, it's always grounded in that voice and in that need. And a big part of what I push is that narrative change. Right, so going back to what Dwayne was saying earlier, like, it's not about focusing on that one person or the trauma of one family. But it's really talking about the issues that you're trying to impact, and what your theory of change and what you're actually doing successfully or not successfully in making that change, and really pushing for them to understand, but for foundations to understand that in order for us to successfully do this work, we need operating dollars, we need professional development dollars, we need to be more equitable and diverse and inclusive in the work that we do. So really making sure that we're having those types of conversations so that it's not an issue. I mean, there are some people that probably would push back, but again, because that's where my work is grounded, I make sure that those other clients that I'm working with, it's hard to, it's hard. I don't want to bang my head against the wall, right? And I don't want people just be like, get us money, get us money, and I'm like, I can get you money. But like, I really want you to make an impact. And that's what we're here for.

Valerie Johnson 33:13

Yeah, I mean, I think for for me, I haven't been put in any, like uncomfortable positions, per se, where, you know, a donor flat out says something that I'm like, Ooh, I'm gonna have to, we're have to push back on that a little bit. But, but I do wonder, like, would I stick to my guns, if somebody said something like, overtly racist in front of me, if they were also like a huge funder of ours, like, I would like to think that I would like, I would like to think that I would be able to say, like, Hey, I'm gonna push back on what you just said, and I want to, like, you know, chat a little bit more about, like, why that is maybe something you shouldn't say in the future, but, but in the heat of the moment, like, things have definitely happened where like, it kind of goes right over my head, because, you know, well, meaning white lady over here focusing on getting the gift. And then afterwards, I'm like, I probably should have maybe I should like, so. Um, yea.

Monique Curry-Mims 34:14

I think that also goes back to like, when I was when I was working as like a DOD I definitely had those moments. And again, showing not being able to be authentic and myself, I had to eat it, because it wasn't my organization. I wasn't representing myself. I was representing the organization and what my executive director wanted me to portray, right. So a lot of times I had those conversations. And that was actually one of the pushes for me to step outside of that and work for myself because I want it to be authentic. I didn't want to have those conversations. There was one instance where the conversation and it wasn't that anything was actually said like, but it was just it was how it was said so anytime. So You know, myself, it was a, our vice president who was also African American. And then my assistant, my development coordinator, who was white and then a program manager who was white. And the funder only wanted to hear from the program manager and any time I spoke, or the vice president spoke, her whole demeanor changed. And one time I went to answer a question because it was for a general operating grant. And I just we're doing a site visit. So I just took her to one site, and she started asking about the other site. So I hopped in to talk about the other site. And she was like, No, I don't think I want to hear from you. I want to hear from her. So then I looked at I looked at the program manager, she looked at me, she was like, actually, I don't know that program. That's not the program I manage. I think Monique would be better at answering that question. She's like, Well, fine. All right, then. And I was just like, wait, I have to get permission from one of my subordinates to answer this question. But also, like, I set this meeting up, like, my, this is my meeting that I set up with you. And after that meeting, I was like, I have never want the punch a funder in the face before. I think I need another job. But I think I need to change careers because it was just yeah. And first, and then I went home and I cooled off. And then the next day I came back to work. And my assistant was like, so do we have to deal with them? Like, I'm sorry, the way you were treated, though, like the amount of disrespect that was given to you for the level of position that you have, I was offended for you. And I was like, okay, so it wasn't just me. She was like, No, and I'd rather us find another way to get that money than deal with them.

Dwayne Wharton 36:11

Yeah, yeah.

Valerie Johnson 36:35

Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 36:36

So it happens. But yeah, I had to eat it.

Dwayne Wharton 36:39

Well, I think that's why like, you go into your consultancy, right? I can choose people that you want to work with. And even for this work, like, we want to do X, Y, and Z is like, Well, you know, we don't do that. And, you know, we can push back in ways that I think are trying to bring people in. And I think if they're able to do that, and receive it, then I think for us, we're able to have success. But we also have folks who, like don't want their behaviors curtailed, they're perfectly fine showing up the ways in which you just described and aren't open to critique or growth in those ways. People are like, well, I don't have

a problem or, you know, it doesn't, you know, affect us in that way. Because we're not a racist organization,

Monique Curry-Mims 37:20

right.

Dwayne Wharton 37:21

And, you know, I'm not a racist, and I'm a good person, and it just kind of automatically tries to alleviate themselves any responsibility for their own behaviors, or even to understand and grow in this space. So that's why these conversations are so important.

Valerie Johnson 37:36

Yeah, I mean, I think one tip listener, for me, Oh, my gosh, I could say that now. listener. So one tip I have is just pay attention to who's speaking like when you're when you're in meetings, like really sit back and and pay attention, like who's speaking up voluntarily? Who's dominating the conversation? Who's asking questions? Who's providing the information? If you're having like a two sided conversation with like a donor, And you know, program staff. Just pay attention. Like, who does the donor want to hear from? Who are they listening to? Who are they providing their full attention to? I've just, I've learned a lot, just sitting back and watching. Like, even in staff meetings, like, just getting a sense of like, which staff are comfortable, which staff aren't comfortable, like, which staff will speak one on one, but they won't necessarily speak up in a group and like, and then I start to wonder why that is. And then I start to pay attention to the demographics of who speaks up more often. And who doesn't. And like, nine times out of 10, like white dudes are gonna white dude, and they're gonna talk no matter what. And like, if the women of color, maybe don't talk no matter what, and it's not always like that. But like, if you're looking for patterns they are there. And the other tip I have is one of the most like empowering moments of my career was I was having a meeting with a state senators chief of staff who was a black woman, and the white male CEO of my organization and me, so I set up the meeting. Because of course I did. And I had all the information. And I put together the information packets. And I was really like the detail holder for what we were there to talk about. And he, the CEO, obviously, felt that he was the one who was going to be talking right and I was just there to, you know, be there. And she was not here for it. Like she directed all her questions to me. Like even when she directed the question to me, and then he would answer the question, all of her follow up questions went right back to me again, like she really refocused that conversation and like made it clear that I was a part of the conversation, she recognized my effort, she recognized my value. And that was like such a turning point for me. Like I have intentionally tried to do that for other people throughout the rest of my career and really make sure that like, everybody in the room gets a say, the person who actually knows what they're talking about is the person that gets to speak up. So those would be those would be Two little tips I have I don't know, Dwayne Monique, do you have any final tips for our listeners?

Dwayne Wharton 40:05

I mean, I think those are great examples. And I think there's always opportunity to get it right. The example that you're citing, again, we talked about decentering yourself and thinking about how you can shift power. And I have to think about how I show up as being a black man who is of a certain age, like

in that kind of sweet spot, where like, I'm not too old when people discount me as like being crazy old man. And I'm not so young, where you get dismissed because of your age, but in that sweet spot, but like, how do I shift power to my team members who were oftentimes younger, and women, and, you know, historically have been marginalized just because of their race as well, because they're women of color. So like, those are things that I need to also continuously have at the front of mind, when we're engaging with like a new client who clearly like, you know, went after us because it's a black man led consultancy company, we want that and like, but also centering people who are fantastic and will be doing so much of the work. And so there's always opportunities, no one ever gets it right. Just being one, this learning journey is important. And we've talked a lot about like organizational structure and showing up. And this is a personal journey for folks. So I would ask, like, What are you reading? Like, how are you being formed? You know, there's like the standard stuff that we talk about, like white fragility by Robyn D'Angelo, and you have, like, you know, Ibrahim Kendi. And everyone, like how to be an anti racist got a lot of popularity, but I would say like, reach back instead. And like, really look at how, historically there has been racial progress. But also, immediately following, there's been a backlash, and there has been racist progress towards it, and we see it showing up in lots of ways. You know, for philanthropy, of course, like, you know, Edgar's decolonizing wealth has been like, really popular. But think about, like, you know, there's another book that I love, like, why I'm no longer and then in it, talking about race, specifically to white people. So why I'm no longer talking about race to white people, right? That's one and me and white supremacy is another so like, educate yourselves and realize that there's always work to do. And you should be able to answer that question like, What are you reading right now? Who are you listening to? Who's informing your thinking? And you should have lots of sources for that. So I love that. That's a great question to ask yourself.

Monique Curry-Mims 42:31

That is, I think that's a great a great way to end this episode. I want to thank everyone for joining us again for another episode, and we will be back next month and next month, we are part of BPHL. So we will be coming to you live and our topic is philanthropy versus everybody and really talking about how Philadelphia itself is unique and what we can be doing in philanthropy and also just as a city of stakeholders to really uplift ourselves. So we want to thank you once again for joining us. This has been beyond philanthropy