Hello everybody. Welcome back to It's Not You, it's the system. This is a podcast for getting self-blame, messy family stuff and internalized oppression out of the way so you can make the impact you're here for. As you probably know by now, I'm Lauren, an anti-capitalist coach and communication strategist, and I work with a lot of folks from non-traditional political candidates to heart-centered small business owners on everything from their inner.

To relationship skills and external marketing and com strategy, which is what I'm doing more and more of lately. And today I'm very excited to welcome Laneen Wells, the creative strategist, brand designer, and lover of snacks, and I love that Laneen, you have that in capital letters like Capital L, lover of Snacks, , who founded Sublation Studio.

I'm also very proud to call an Nina a client who I've been fortunate to work with for the last year or so. We're talking about that before we recorded. That feels very short and very long at the same time. So Sublation is a design and discussion studio that offers creative services focused on intersectionality, accessibility, and diversity through inclusive practices, education and advocacy.

Lane and bros. Process. Laneen embraces their own intersectional identity and integrates those perspectives into both their work and connecting communities. Through simulation, Laneen aims to show clients how their design and practices can be inclusive and accessible without sacrificing aesthetics or brand messaging and voice.

And I'm very excited to talk more about that. And finally, in addition to their love for all things art in design, Laneen is a bicultural, intersectional, multi, potential light philosophy nerd is hard of hearing, and a huge music fan. Laneen's an advocate for equity, justice, and healing, especially for marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Fueled by matcha, snacks, side-eye, and gratitude. And Laneen also loves languages. Uh oh. Laneen's love languages are playlists, and I always say gifts. I know it's gifs.

It's okay. We'll let it

slide. Yeah. I was like, of all people, you were the person I would trust to tell me it's okay to say that wrong. ,

my other designer friends would get upset.

I saved both ways, so don't worry. Okay. Phew.

 First of all, did you have matcha today?

I did. Vanilla matcha latte. Is that a

daily thing for you?

No, every two to three days.

Two to three. I love matcha. I haven't made it at home, but every time I'm out and I get it, I'm like, oh my God, why don't I do this instead of coffee all the

time.

So good. No jitters, good flavors. You can get the more grassy ones or more sweet ones.

It's awesome. Exactly. And no heartburn with my Adderall heartburn now from coffee. Ugh, so anything that feels like it was missing from the intro, I just read. Anything else about you perhaps on this present day that feels important to share?

No, that was a pretty, pretty spot on. Good

recap. Really good bio, written bio. I think I covered a lot. And so I, I'm really excited to talk with you cuz I, you are actually the first client or current client who has been a guest. I've been recording these and just started dropping guest episodes as of today.

And I think it'll be an interesting time to just hear more about your story. But in a way I haven't in the, you know, outside of the ways we've worked together. But in the little form I have folks fill out before they come on. You mentioned specifically getting into this idea of personal identity and graphic design.

How intersectionality and these fucked up systems interact with branding for your clients and this creative industry itself. So I'm really curious as to your maybe personal experience with that, but also what you see going on in your industry

generally. lots going on in the industry. . Yeah. Lots, lots.

Everything from, you know, sleazy marketing to gatekeeping, to all kinds of things. But, I think for creatives, what, or at least me, what made it particularly sticky is the idea of you know, As a creative, as a, when you do that for a job, you also kind of equate that with you as a person. So there's, the lines are really blurred between what is your work and what is your kind of self-expression, you know?

Lots of people say that graphic design is, you know, commercial. It has a purpose, and then art is just self-expression. But for me, sometimes those things are really blurred, you know, especially when you're doing client work. Or you are, you know, Giving your own input as well with the client. So those lines can get really blurry.

And I think that's where the identity part kind of factors in. As a graphic designer, there's no way that I can do my work without being who I am. , that's, that's gonna be in there. I, I just, I can't,

you know, I can't separate it. It's not like I can clock in and just be a designer and, and then clock out and go back to being me.

So a lot of the identity thing kind of feeds into both the work and how I interact with clients as

well. Yeah, it sounds like you bring your whole self to those collaborations.

Yeah. And that was a process to actually do that. Yeah. Bring my whole self. I definitely kept everything kind of segmented in the early days.

When I first started as a designer, I was like, I'm gonna show up in this kind of way, be this type of person, operate in this kind of way. But that just really, it didn't work out for me cuz it restricted my creativity. It was hard to always, you know, put up a facade or be a certain type of person at every client meeting, at every agency, at every, you know, every job.

And that was just exhausting. So I was like, oh, well if. Be myself all the time. I'm not gonna stress myself out as much, and I get to be way more creative. So bringing myself was actually one of the, the best things I did for my work. You know,

thi this sparks two questions for me. First is, have you experienced that the more you are authentic to yourself with your clients, the more authentic they are with you?

100%. Yeah. And that was probably in the last few years. And I actually got to be brave enough to do that, something as simple as a out of office message instead of being like, I am out of office y, you know, very, formal and, and things like that. I was just like, listen, I need a nap. I'm tired, but check in again in two hours and I'll, I'll get back on your work and that kind of thing.

And I got so many responses from clients who were like, oh my gosh, I loved your out of office message. I loved your auto reply. It was funny or silly or caring. You know, on certain holidays, if I'm out of. I will say, you know, maybe check the land that you're on for land acknowledgements. Mm-hmm. , or I'll drop a link to you know, a specific cause that I feel like can be financially supported, things like that.

And I found that clients really were like, I was thinking that, but I didn't say that. And I was like, why not? You don't find these little spaces and say it. So

yeah, it, it's, it's disrupting the status quo in ways that might, on paper seem small. But for that client that day who said, oh my God, I love your out of office message about taking an app for them, that may have opened up a whole new idea of what it's okay to say at work and taking care of themselves and resting and all of that.

So I, I love that you are so intentional about, You know, disrupting those norms, especially in an industry where, you know, it's very deadline driven, , and a lot of cross team collaboration, which

isn't always easy. I also have witnessed you in a way, refining over and over what you do and how to say it.

A forever process for entrepreneurs. I feel like it's very normal. And it seems like you are continuously attracting clients who are more and more aligned with what you care about. Is that, would you say that is accurate?

Yeah, definitely. And I think that, It kind of happened accidentally. You know, seeking out those kind of similar clients, I was just like, oh, what are you doing over there?

I like that. I agree with that. Yeah, we're, we have value alignment. But then I actually made it more intentional in my business practices in terms of the type of work I take on the type of networking I do. You know, I wouldn't just go to a speed network event just to pass out cards and talk shop.

I'm gonna go to maybe something that, you know, community centered or, you know, maybe, designers at a certain phase of their career that I really resonate with or wanna help. So I tried to keep those things in mind and once I was more intentional, it was like, I don't know, the, you put the energy out and it comes back to you.

And I'm like, oh, okay. .

Yeah. And was it, I let me back up for a second. Cause the second question that I forgot for a moment here was when you were not yet feeling brave enough or comfortable enough to be more of yourself in. Professional spaces. Do you recall what it felt like to hold yourself back?

Do you recall what maybe the thoughts that came up were for you? Or even what your body felt like in those moments where you thought, oh, I could say it this way, which is really how I would say it, but I have to button myself up.

I. It often felt scary and suffocating. Those were the two kind of ways I would waver between, you know, sometimes and I wanted to speak up and I was like, oh, I shouldn't, I don't wanna rock the boat, or I don't have the title to be speaking.

I'm just a designer, not creative director, not art director. I don't wanna step on toes. It usually just, Felt scary, and especially sometimes if it was a specific project where that kind of backfired, I could have mentioned, you know, something that I saw preemptively, but I didn't because I didn't feel like it was my role.

And then it blows up and I was like, oh, if I had just spoken up, you know? And suffocating in the sense that it's just, you know, for anyone that has to show up in spaces consistently, in a way that's not natural to them, they'll understand that exhaustion, you know, whether that's code switching or what you wear or how you speak or how you dress or anything like that, it.

Constant work. It's just this thing that you're always evaluating, how am I looking, how am I sounding? How did they take that? And that was just, that in itself is having to wear those multiple masks was just exhausting and suffocating.

Yeah, exhausting was the word I kept hearing in my brain as you were talking, how much extra energy you have to expend.

Not only, you know, you're, it takes energy to be good at what you do. Even if I, it sounds. From everything you've shared with me, design and art and all of that is very natural for you and it takes intention and energy to be able to do that as a career and as a living. But that extra layer of you, especially mentioning code switching, which isn't something, you know, as a white person I'm really having to do.

But all these extra little layers of work and labor you have to do just to even be in a space to do labor for money. I can imagine is very depleting.

Exactly, yeah. The, the layers, that's, that's the best way to say it was all the layers. You know, I am a black woman, but I am still playing with gender expression and how I show up in spaces.

So, you know, when you throw in the race and ethnicity kind of thing and then you throw in that kind of expression, I'm hard of hearing as well. So that, just being in certain spaces where I'm like, am I missing the conversation? Am I gonna respond wrong or are they gonna laugh at me? So I'm trying to keep up with the conversation and interpret my brain's trying to do a bunch of.

At the same time. And then you throw in anxiety, social anxiety, and it's just all of these layers all at one moment. And I'm just like, by the time you get home, you know, I'm just I'm wiped. And I'm like, wow, being a human's hard sometimes. But yeah, it's only hard and I, oh, not only hard, but it's additionally hard in those situations where you can't just be yourself.

Yeah.

And do you recall if there was there a certain turning point? For you where you decided fuck it, I'm just gonna say what I'm seeing and be my whole self in these spaces, or was it a gradual process

for you? It started gradual and then the snowball just was going fast. You know, once I just started to kind of, you know, leak out these little parts of my personality and for example, if I was, you know, defending a design decision that I made, you know,, it seemed like a small step at the time, but that kind of built the confidence where I'm like, yeah, actually I can speak up.

I know what I'm doing. I'm a good designer, I made this decision with. Behind strategy, behind all these other things. That's okay. And these small little decisions really just kind of exponentially built my confidence. And then after that I was like, actually, you just said something really racist, really misogynist, really whatever.

I don't care if you're a C-suite person. I don't care what your title is. That was messed up, you know? Or, asking questions, and not being afraid to look stupid. I've done that before in corporate America. After the meeting, actually, people have come up to me, they're like, I'm so glad you asked that.

I didn't know what that meant. And I was like, you guys are all just sitting in this meeting, lost in the sauce. No one was gonna say anything., so once I started doing those small actions, it was just really fast after that. And then the floodgates opened and I was like, I literally don't care anymore.

This is me . It's how I am. I just, I cannot, I do not have the energy I do. Wanted to put forward all of that extra work anymore. Once I realized how much of a burden was lifted, I was like, this is dope. I'm gonna keep rocking with this. It's still hard for sure, and I still have moments where I, you know, self-doubt or, you know, if safety is involved, where you might, might not be able to speak up in the ways that I want to.

But yeah, once the floodgates opened, it was all, I'll go from there.

Yeah. It's like, which type of difficult or hard do you want? Do you want the difficulty of keeping yourself small and silent and. You know, frustrated and exhausted, or the heart of. Yeah, I'm pushing on barriers and systems, and sometimes maybe pissing people off, although, oh, yeah.

Honestly, usually I've found when I think I'm gonna piss someone off, I usually don't, they're like, oh, okay. That's a good idea. .

And the ones that are pissed off, I don't care about anyways. I'm like, well, yeah, I, I was trying to piss you off. You probably should be pissed off. Go sit in the corner and think about what you did.

Exactly. And that shows you who they are. It's, that's part of, especially if you're freelancing. , working for yourself. That's one way of realizing what clients you don't wanna work with anymore. And that's something too I've witnessed from you, is how intentional. I feel intentional is the word of the day with you,

It's you're very intentional about who you work with, how you structure it in a way that is gonna serve what you need, but also deliver to the client what you know they need rather than what they think they need, which is not easy to do.

Not at all. Not at all. Especially, you know, they, a lot of times clients come to me and they, they think they know what they need, and I'm gonna definitely listen because I'm all about , equal collaboration.

You know, I, I don't like when someone's higher than or below someone. I like that the clients are experts in their field and I love learning from them and knowing what they know and kind of absorbing that and, but also design and creative strategy is my lane, and I'm gonna bring that expertise to the table.

So, you know, sometimes they, they might see things in a certain way where they think they know what they need, and inside my brain I'm like, actually no. You think you need a website, but actually what you need is X, Y, Z or something like that. So it's kind of Being able to read between the lines and kind of meeting in, in, in the middle between both of our expertise and what we bring to the table.

Really? Yeah. You know, it reminds me, I did a discovery call with someone a few months ago who's lovely. and they were looking for someone to help rewrite their about page, which is a common thing people come to me for and nine times outta 10, they don't need a new about page they need to do. Similar to the the coaching work you and I have done together.

Kinda it. It's like when you clean out a closet, you have to take out everything. It looks really messy for a second. Yes. Before you organize it and put it back. We need to do that with your brand and your business. Because if you're not clear on your offers and who you wanna work with, and it's the same thing.

If you are working on your resume for a job, you wanna get whatever your career path looks like, you have to start with what you actually want and what the overall aim is before you. Great. Anything, any content beyond that or else? Frankly, I, what I said to this person was, I could take your money and write this, but I don't think I'd be doing you a favor,

Yeah. That is so, and I've shot myself in the foot plenty of times before because I mean, I don't, I just, if someone comes to me and they're like, you know, this is what I need, and I know that that's not what they need, I'm gonna be honest about it. You know, you might not need a whole rebrand and, and new logo and new everything.

I actually might need help with your messaging and your values and stuff first. And there might be a business specialist or someone better positioned to help you with that. Go chat with them first and then come to me. or if they're a small business. You know, and they're, they're thinking about the big flashy overhaul.

I'm like, actually, maybe there might be some other smaller scale branding that you can do for now, some semi custom branding instead of, you know, spending all this money right now when you're still unsure of your name or your positioning and stuff like that. So sometimes I, I shoot myself in the foot, but for me it's more important to really serve the client or the project in her needs, even if it's not always in my best financial interest and usually, Tends to work out for me.

You know, they'll come back around when they're at a better level and they're like, now we're ready for the rebrand, or, I'm not ready, but I know someone who is, and they'll refer me that kind of way. So it's really just acting in their best interest seems to have worked for me

so far. Oh, totally.

Yeah. It's taking the long view of things and not the short view. And it seems like you get. So many great, word of mouth referrals and it's cuz people trust you. You know? when you have integrity and you're honest about who you are and honest about who you aren't. Yes., I'm not the person to do X, Y, Z for you.

  that builds a lot of trust rather than someone who goes in the room. It is like, . Yeah, I know everything. .

I find that people, it's, for some reason, it's hard for them to admit that they don't know things. Yeah. And that's very odd to me. I'm like, there's, there's no shame in me saying, I don't know. Let me find out, or let me ask around.

  I feel like more people should be open to doing that, honestly. .

Yeah. It's, it's hard though. I mean, if you, especially if you have a career where you're the person in the room who's supposed to be the quote unquote expert. Mm-hmm. , when I worked on the Hill, I mean, 21 to 25. I was very young, so that was part of it.

But I had a boss one time who was really supportive and great. He wasn't much older than I was, and he goes, you know, Lauren, one thing you might think about is in these meetings, if you ever aren't following what a constituent is saying or what one of these, you know, advocacy groups is saying, ask them to explain more.

Because people love to teach. People love to share more about themselves and what they're doing. You don't have to. Always have it together. No one expects that. I, I remember thinking, oh wow, that's a lot less pressure than what I've been dealing

with . And honestly, none of us have it together. Like, let's be real.

We're all just humans on this rock floating through space. So we're figuring it out, figure it out.

  and you know, one thing that's come up a couple times is how as a, you know, there's, when I think of the graphic design world, It's logos and colors and a brand book and all that kind of stuff, which you don't, you know, you do that for your clients and it matters and you infuse everything you do with values around, for lack of a better word, d e i, but especially accessibility, which I know comes from a lot of your lived experience.

and I'm really curious. How you see those values showing up in the workplace in general and what you see as the gaps currently that we need to be focused on

bridging. I think it's, I think it's going, it's showing up. In small businesses, and I think bigger organizations in different ways. I feel like, maybe the bigger organizations are more on the checklist side of things.

You know, are we gonna hire quote unquote diverse talent? You know what I mean? It's like, oh, that's kind of weird. small businesses I feel like are. For a variety of reasons, can maybe enact those things in more direct ways better, you know? so it's definitely showing up in weird ways, but I feel like the gap is right now, and it's kind of happening slowly, but shifting from awareness to actual action and not in performative ways, and not just, you know, Instagram carousels of did, you know, but long-term permanent.

Action and change. and I feel like in the past few years, that's definitely been happening. but I do feel like another gap is still in the accessibility part. I feel like, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and all these things are, are still front of mind, but for some reason it's.

Seems like accessibility in all the forms that it takes is still kind of back burner. you know, in the, anytime that it is brought up, it's brought up in a legal, technical way. Our website should be accessible or else will get sued, you know, or we should have a ramp on our building or else we'll get in trouble.

And I'm like, eh, , there's more to this whole accessibility thing than just that. So I think that that's why I'm also, you know, so passionate for me that accessibility, especially in our digital age, feels like there is a gap there. That needs to be addressed. And you know, my personal lived experience of being hard of hearing, I feel like that's just in academia and design and business, there's so many pockets where people just kind of gloss over it.

Mm-hmm. .

Yeah. Cause and when you have done workshops and taught about accessibility and even, I think in your conversations internally with clients bringing stuff up, it's not just related to the design work you do, you have this very. Holistic view of all the different ways, that organizations or individuals can infuse accessible or accessibility, intentions and values and commitments into what they do.

 and I guess if, if someone's listening, and let's say they aren't a solopreneur, but maybe they, even if they freelance, they're working with larger organizations, do you have suggestions for some of the low hanging fruit that. Are obvious starting points that people just maybe don't see immediately?

Hmm. Oh, hanging fruit.

Yeah. I mean, there's the. Kind of the tech side of it. You know, if they are a larger organization and they're having any kind of outward communications, like on social media, things like that, you know, simply captioning their video content, you know, where that's just a super low, barrier of entry to, to start enacting.

You know, there's tons of tools now that help you caption your content. and then on the non-text side, you know, it. Sticky in terms of, you know, who you're hiring, what holidays you're observing to give people days off, what kind of language or, you know, quote unquote culture you're building in the office.

You know, those intangible parts of access start to get trickier. but there's definitely small steps where you can take, where you're not, just doing checkbox and performative stuff when, and you're also not just putting all the work on. You know, specific employees, you know, I see these employee, resource groups, you know, where the black people are, have to be the head of it.

And I'm like, why are you, what's, that's horrible? You know? so I think that people just starting small, even in the big organizations in any way they can, whether that's, person to person, tech side, content hiring practices

that kinda. Yeah. Well, in the words to Adrian Marie Brown. Small as everything

Yes. Really it, it really is. And I find that that overwhelms a lot of people when we're talking about the tech side of accessibility. At least when I'm hosting workshops or talking to designers about it and they're like, I don't know where to start. I don't know what to do. And I'm just like, literally the small thing,

you know, social media capitalize your hashtag X. Honestly, that right there, you just gave access to anyone who uses a screen reader, and that's a massive number of people that are using assistive technology that now your content's available for. And that took you all of two seconds to do. So. I think that once people can breathe and pause and look at the small steps, they'll realize how achievable it is to just talk small.

Well, and I also think about the captioning thing for videos, because even if someone's not hard of hearing, they might be watching that on the toilet at work. Definitely,

yeah, on loud commutes. Maybe the baby's sleeping. yeah. You know, or English might not be their first language and their language learner.

There's so many other things outside of the typical ways that we see that people need access. You know, people think automatically physical access, like ramps and stuff like that. But there's you know, language access, learning levels. Other

ways. Yeah. And are you at, at this moment, doing consulting for people on accessibility stuff?

Again, I know it comes up all the time with your design and branding clients, but are these the type of things you're interested in expanding your business to include?

One day a little bit later down the road. definitely gotta get some more knowledge and experience under my belts. so right now it's kind of dripped in through my work, you know, when I'm doing strategy with clients and we're thinking of things such as photography and we're like, Hey, you know, who are the people represented in this photography?

And, you know, when you're writing the image description for this, what, what kind of words and language are you using? you know, if we're working on their branding, we're like, This is a cool color palette, but if someone has, if they're, you know, has low vision or they have color deficiencies, is this palette accessible to them?

So there's little ways that I'm dripping you throughout my work, but I'm not quite yet at the, the consulting phase where I kind of bust in and audit and be like, Hey guys. So maybe a little bit later down the road.

Yeah, you're not doing an accessibility audit, although I think you would totally be qualified to do that.

and I, super helpful cuz I would imagine a lot of people listening are thinking, holy shit, Laneen has a lot of knowledge to share. So, I just had to put that out there and I'd encourage anyone interested in working with Laneen to, send an email. I'm gonna link everything on the show notes. So one thing that I feel like has been a theme of our conversation, even though we haven't used the word, is boundaries.

Mm-hmm. Here is who I will be in spaces. Here's what I'm not gonna do, here's who I wanna work with, here's who I don't wanna work with. Those are all part of boundaries work. And I'm wondering in your. I don't know. I mean, would, would you say for you, a boundaries practice, is that something relatively new?

Is it something that's been growing for a certain amount of time? How did that come into your consciousness as a thing that both relates to your business, but also to just you as a human?

Uh, boundary Mark is definitely new. Super new past year, new like working with you, kind

of new . Aw, I'm so honored.

Which is funny, Laneen, cuz you knew so much about them when we first started working

together. I didn't know that's what they were. I knew where things were weird and I didn't like how certain things were panning out, but I didn't know how to approach stopping that cycle or, or you know? Yeah. And then once you were able to give me the words for that, I was like, oh, that, that's, yes.

That's what I'm experiencing and this is how I can change the situation. It was like a light bulb went off then. Ah. I'm

so glad. That makes me feel very honored because yeah, so many of the folks who come across my work or who are in takeup space or have filtered in and out of takeup space, there's so much knowledge, but it's the application that can be really hard because it's counter-cultural.

And that's part of why I like for me with my own boundaries and I've also, in the last year, I feel like learned exponentially more cuz it's forever learning process. But having scripts to fall back on and structured language, even though it feels robotic sometimes has helped me so much cuz it just takes the pressure off of my brain to have to come up with the perfect words to set a boundary or reinforce one.

  and are there certain situations that for you, because I, I have an idea of what they are, and I know a lot of people relate to it where boundaries just are a constant, oh shit, I gotta revisit this, or I need. Tune this up. Are there certain areas that that tends to be a thing for you? Yeah, I think the

two, the one I feel like I, I knew.

Immediately when I started working with you was work boundaries in terms of how I deal with clients. you know, I worked in corporate America and with agencies before and I knew there were certain situations where I don't like how this operates, but I didn't know how to change it or if I had any capacity to do it, you know, the roles that I was in.

And once I was able, lucky enough to. Work for myself and work at the studio. I was like, actually, these things don't have to be this way anymore. You know, I don't have to, my time doesn't have to be dictated by quote unquote emergency emails and, you know, fire drills and stuff like that. Mm-hmm.

  so the work one was always something that was on my mind. I'm like, how do I change this? And then for me, I think relationships in terms of just. Communication, whether that's friendships, romantic or otherwise. I feel like those kind of boundaries were also quite a challenge. Still a challenge to, to continually uphold.

You know, it's not just a set it and forget it, you say a one time and that's it. You might have to say that conversation several times with the same person, or you might have to keep having those conversations with different people based on your situation. So I think that, yeah, the work and, and the personal and woo

Yeah.

Especially if. Whether it's work or personal, someone who's known you for a long time and maybe was used to you not having the boundaries that you have now. I find newer relationships for me are so much easier to navigate. Cause I'm like, oh, you met me when I was a lot more together on the boundaries.

Right? , have you laid down the law from the, you know, from the scratch than it's so much more easier moving forward. But once you already have a pattern or a type of way of being with someone and then you have to put that boundary, I think that that's what's hard. It's interesting because I learned that it's not just me in the boundaries.

I always felt like I'm the one, laying down the law, but it is so much about you as it is the other person as well in terms of how they receive it or how they might communicate or their own boundaries as well. and that kind of shift in framing of the boundaries, I was like, ah, okay. I'm not just being a bully telling everybody how I like it my way or the highway.

You know? There's so much more

to. . Yeah. And it's a kindness for people too. I get very anxious when I'm in relationship with someone who is struggling with their own boundaries. because then I'm like, well, I don't know what you need from me. I can't tell. And, and what I used to do is try to manage their boundaries for them.

Like, oh, you don't need to tell me blah, blah, blah. And I would set their boundaries with me for them, which was. Much a mind fuck and not helpful. And I wasn't doing them any favors either cuz I was just kind of guessing what they needed. but it also is very exhausting. So nowadays if I encounter that, I'm just like, here's what I'm doing.

You let me know , we'll go from there. ,

yeah. Leaving that open for, I think communication for exploration and also reminding myself. How I express a boundary or even the boundary itself might change over time. And that's okay. Huh? You know what I need now might be one way, but you know, three months a year from now, I'm like, actually no, I, I can remove that boundary.

Or I need to change how it is, or, you know, change how I communicate it to other people. And they're not these rigid rules that once you set it, that's it. You can go back on it, you can change it, you can remove it if you. .

Yeah. And you know, one, one commonality you and I have too is in the past it may be in, I'll just speak for myself in the present a little bit too.

sometimes we fall into the unpaid, unofficial therapist role for friends. Yeah. .

Nope. Facts.

and I didn't realize that's what was going on until. After it may, it's also, I think, an age thing. Cause when I was younger I had more energy and more patience even in some ways where I was like, this is fine, whatever.

And I was also, you know, using substances so things didn't mm-hmm. can't me quite as clearly. But as I got into my thirties, I was like, I'm really tired after I talked to this person every single time, or, Ooh, the. five or six times I've hung out with this person. I've barely shared anything about what's going on with me, and it's just been about them.

Or they're always calling me when they have a crisis and this feels above my pay grade. And I know for a fact there is at least two. Well, yeah, two people I know who listen to this podcast also struggle with that, I would imagine more so. Do you have any reflections advice for people who tend to find themselves in that unpaid therapist role?

For people they care

about? I'm still muddling through it myself. but I think the biggest advice for me was actually self-reflection on why does this feel icky? Why do I feel drained? What, you know, what makes me not wanna answer? This person's call , you know, also wondering, well, what about me makes this person feel like they can always call me in crisis?

What about our previous dynamic? Set it up that way. You know, maybe I. Was always in that caretaking role and I didn't speak up and, and say, oh, actually my day was bad too. Or, or, you know what I mean? Just really just kind of pausing and, and reflecting, and that's not to put blame on, on me or, or you know, right.

To put blame on themselves, but just to kind of look at it from all angles in terms of how that situation came to be and also why you feel the way that you feel about it. It might be resentment towards that person, or it actually might be something completely unrelated. Maybe in the past you were put in a position where you always had to cater to everyone else, and it's not necessarily.

Specific person that is, you know, setting you off or anything, it's just the dynamic or that role. So that reflection of all that stuff was like, oh,

okay, . Yeah, that self-knowledge is key because otherwise you're just kind of floating and don't really know what to do about it if you're not clear on what's going on for you.

Right.

Yeah. Or you're just reacting and, and you don't know why, you know, you just, I don't wanna say lashing out, but. It'll help you be intentional for when you do set that boundary as to why you're doing it. And it might not be, oh, we have to stop being friends. It might just be like,

actually we need to change how we communicate or, or you know, maybe it might be something like, I'm not always the first person to offer, I'm having a bad day, so if you could just ask me every now and again, I'll open up then, you know what I mean?

That kind of thing. Yeah.

Yeah. And I think a big reason I do the work I do is because I am. Energized and oftentimes, and also much more comfortable when I'm not the focus of a conversation. Mm-hmm. , which is ironic because I created a program called Take Up Space, , and like taking up space in with your voice and your life and your relationships, all that stuff.

because I, at the same time, was a show choir kid and loved performing mm-hmm. and did like that kind of attention too. So it, it's, I, I've always had that tension between wanting to take up more space and feeling good when I do, but also so much more comfortable for me to just be the listener. Mm-hmm. and, and yeah, the shadow side of that is then sometimes I shrink.

Right. So, anyway, I, I don't really have a question or a point to that other than just to share it and say, Very, very common, I think, especially if you've been socialized female.

I think so, yeah. And I relate in several ways in that, you know, I, in my, in creative life, or I guess personal life as well, I've always been like kind of behind the scenes type person.

I don't, I don't like the spotlight, you know, I will help. Run the show and get it going, but I will not be on stage performing at all.   You know? and even, in my design career, when I was working in-house as a designer, I was like, oh, I will come up with the ideas and, and execute and everything, but I'm not presenting to the client.

I don't even wanna, you know, if we're all in a design meeting, people are like, oh, Laneen did a great job. And I'm like, shh. Like, be quiet. Like, stop. You know, I, I don't like any of that kind of thing. and that kind of bleeds over into the friendships or relationships as well, because I'll take that backseat or that more quiet role.

Uh, and then I. Would find myself kind of resentful of this. Yeah. One way friendship. And I'm like, well, how much of a role did I actually have to play in this? You know? so again, that back to that reflection of, of what all kind of led to the situation.

Yeah. I'm so big on helping people focus in on what is actually in your control, what's in my, what do they call it?

Sphere of influence. Nice. yeah, cuz there's so much out of our control and so many systems that work on us, which is why I'm not here to help you blame yourself more for , whatever you're struggling with. that's capitalism and so many other things. But, yeah, and, and it's interesting too, Laneen, because you seem to really thrive though when you do workshops and teaching and group mentorship, which in a way is you.

Taking the spotlight or being in the spotlight. But it sounds like for you that's very different than being on the spotlight, if that makes sense.

Yeah, no, that's, and that's one of the things I also, I, I've always thought about is what about that kind of interaction makes me feel more comfortable than, than, you know, maybe being in the spotlight.

And I think it's because I like walking alive alongside people instead of in front of them, you know? . And even in the design community, there's lots of gatekeeping in terms of you know, do you have a formal design degree or not? And all this stuff. And I don't know, I just, I just love being in community with people and, you know, seeing community as a practice, things that you do altogether.

  sharing knowledge as much as possible. I don't like the limited pie slice mentality. you know. And just even in certain topics that are discussed in the design community, it comes across as very academic, you know, this kind of academic discourse. And I feel like that gate keeps people out as well.

And I'm just like, and it just feels very weird for me to like picture myself in the, in the front with the flag and charging forward. And I'm like, ah, I don't like that. Like, let's all get in a line and do this together. So, Well,

and that's very top down power over leadership, which is not what the future is, right?

Like it, you're about mutuality, solidarity. That's, that's what lights you up. And that's also what we need more of in the world. That's what I think that's the type of leadership people. Not only just respond to naturally because of biology and evolution and all that stuff, right? We wanna be connected, but it's also the future of work.

I mean, workers have so much more power today than they did pre pandemic even. and if someone has that type of dominating leadership style or even, you know, someone's teaching a workshop and it's just, this is how it is, good luck. Figure it out. That's not really resonating anymore. I don't, I don't see that growing in the same way.

I see what you're talking about growing.

Yeah. I think that might, hopefully, fingers crossed that era has had its peak, that pyramid kind of thing. you know, and especially spaces of social justice, I feel like, you know, we're all gonna get further together than, than solo, and whether that's everyone in their own little pockets and then coming together, but, you know, they.

Makes me think back again to the d e I and accessibility stuff. I don't see justice and equity inclusion without the accessibility. All these things are together and they're not just, separate. I think of people kind of like running a, a race where, their legs are tied together.

You know, someone gets a few steps ahead and the next person get a fus a step. We literally all have to do this together.

So Yes. Yeah, we all get free together. Yes. What's the, the quote? our liberation is bound. I think that's Lila Watson. True. Yeah. so I, I always ask this question, and I gave you a heads up before we recorded , but what has been fun for you lately?

Because I know holidays are weird for people. We're just, now, we're recording this kind of mid-January, so this is probably a strange time to ask you this question, but I'm curious.

honestly, it's, it's. Interesting because design outside of work has been so fun for me. Just, you know, looking at old type books and old ways that, you know, design was made.

I rewatched this documentary called Graphic means and just. Looking at old illuminated manuscripts, all of this creative stuff outside of the strategy design, design, your mission, your values, you know who, who your clients are. Just stepping away from that and just pure creation, has been super fun.

And just even watching people knit or so, or anything that's creative besides, you know, being on the computer or design has been, Fun, in video games, getting back into video games, honestly, that just, it's very dangerous. I can start and then three hours later I, I haven't, you know, moved my spot or eaten, but I'm sucked into this world of whatever it is.

But

yeah. Well, it's the right time of year for that, you know, so good. and what kind of work are you doing at the moment? What types of clients are you looking for? Do you ha, I mean, I feel like you had a pretty full plate before the holidays, but are you taking new clients at the moment?

Yeah, definitely.

I'm always looking for, not always, right now, I'm looking for new clients. I'm assuming that in the summer I might need another little bit of a break. But, really I'm, I'm looking for ones that are, are value aligned with me in the sense that, you know, obviously d e I and accessibility is important to them, but even if they're not, if they haven't started that journey, they still have a place for it and they understand the space that it could take in their organization.

so they don't necessarily have to be centered around social justice, but there are lots of ways that it can be infused in what they do. You know, everything from. Know, maybe there might be a

yoga practitioner that wants to look into how they approach that and honoring the original traditional methods of it.

It might be a design school and, you know, speaking with the design students, how do they approach the industry in a maybe more ethical way or the things that they do or how they work with clients? so it can be anything really, industry wise. I'm industry agnostic. I will dip and dab in everything, but as long as those kind of d e I and accessibility values are there, then I'm definitely on board to explore, to

see what can.

Yeah, and I know you do a wide range of different types of projects and there's also, if someone needs from A to Z , all things design and branding, you can do that too. I know you've done stuff on retainer before for people, so there's a lot of different ways you can work with Laneen if you're sitting here listening like, Ooh, that's what I need.

well, I will definitely link your website and all that in the show notes, but is there anything else that you want to point people to before we.

well, lately I've been hanging out with my newsletter for some reason. That's just been my gem. I feel like it's great to get my, my thoughts out.

So it's on ck, it's S B L T N, that's ck.com. and it's really been great to kind of have a two-way conversation. I feel like social media's been a one way yelling into the void, but with the newsletter, people can respond and they reply and they ask me questions or they give me their thoughts and feedback.

And again, that kind of feels like community and practice. So I'm, I'm loving that.

Oh, I love that and I love that you're on CK Sub is the future. Yes, I think I'm, I need to make the switch for MailChimp. I'm just too lazy at the moment. , or too busy I should say too, too full at the moment. that's great. I will definitely link to that.

and what's also great about sub is you can explore similar people too. So if you jump onto EM'S page, you can probably find other like-minded. People to follow and, and check out what they're putting out there too. So, well Laneen, thank you again. Especially because I believe you said this was your first podcast you've

gusted on.

Yeah, I am probably gonna need a shower. I wash up all the sweat and nerves and probably get a nice hand massage cause I've been ringing my hands the whole time. But all good. I'm definitely trying to get. You know, more comfortable with this medium and, and I love it naturally. Honestly. It's just gonna take a little practice, but I am so appreciative to be in this space with

you, especially working with you over this past time, and to get to chill and hang out and chat with you.

It's

great. Yeah. Aw, yeah. This was so great and I feel like I learned stuff about you. I haven't known from the way that we've worked together before. And, I'm grateful that this was a space where you felt like you. Step forward, you know, more than maybe you usually do. So I, I hope this was helpful practice, and I'm excited to see you on many more podcasts in the future.

An open invitation to always come back here anytime. Ah, I'd love

to. Thank you.

Thank you. All right. Bye everybody.