

Season 2, Episode 11: Emergent Strategy Podcast “Slow Down Your Slow Down with Geoffrey Jackson Scott”

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Geoffrey: (00:00:03) So, yeah, that was, that's a big piece of transformation for me with respect to emergent strategy is that piece and what it did for a group of people who were really looking to be human beings inside their work and not finding it.

(00:00:19): Theme Music (“Wolves” - Hurray for the Riff Raff)

Sage: (00:00:41) Hello and welcome to the Emergent Strategy podcast, hosted by the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, ESII. We are a collective of facilitators, mediators, trainers and curious human beings interested in how we get in right relationship with change. Today, I'll be guiding our interview. I'm Sage, ESII's architect. Emergent strategy is the way we generate and reshape complex systems and patterns with relatively simple interactions. Today's guest is Geoffrey Jackson Scott, co-founder of PEOPLMOVR, a facilitator, extraordinaire, a coach, and involvement strategist and cultural organizer. I'm so excited to be in a conversation with you, Geoffrey. Welcome. How are you today right now?

Geoffrey: (00:01:39) Right now. I'm doing all right. I'm doing right. Moments ago, we learned of the passing of bell hooks. So I'm feeling some kind of way about that. I'm in a quiet place in my closet. So I'm trying to hide from you my clothes and underwear <laugh>. So I'm feeling vulnerable about that and I'm feeling deep, deep, deep gratitude to be in connection with you.

Sage: (00:02:01) I gotta say you've always had great style to me. So doing this with you in your closet, like works for me. I just wanna name that and –

Geoffrey: <laugh> this is where the lowercase M magic happens right here in this closet.

Sage: Yes, but it is still magic

Geoffrey: (00:02:17) <laugh> oh, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Sage: (00:02:19) Thank you. Part of the reason we started this podcast is there are so many folks in the world, including yourself that were like, Ooh, that person right there. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. That's an emergent strategist. <laugh> Because we see how you're moving in the world and we see your work and feel deeply connected to it. And, you know, full transparency for folks who maybe like we have worked together, been in rooms together before. So I'm, I'm talking this is like we see it as if it's from afar, but now we've been up close. We, we know what you do in the world, you know. And so for us, we're like, oh yeah, Geoffrey's an emergent strategist. Does that resonate for you?

Geoffrey: (00:03:00) It does. It does. It's like how I found – well, there, there's sort of like two pieces here. One is about being introduced to emergent strategy. And then the other is the way that it transformed my work in the world. Some handful of years ago, right around the time the book comes out, some friends were doing a festival in New York called InterFest. I was one of the participants in the festival and they were having a keynote on a Friday afternoon, like three o'clock in Harlem. And I love these people and I thought, Hey, nobody gonna go to that. It's Friday afternoon in Harlem, but I love y'all. I'm gonna come to that. So I got myself together and I got on the train from Brooklyn and went up to Harlem and I walked into the room and there were some people who came to that.

Geoffrey: (00:03:45) I was like, wait a second. Who is this person who is speaking? Cuz this room is, people are here on a Friday afternoon. And this incredible human being comes in with a roller bag. And the most vibrant colors I've ever seen someone put together and was just an absolute burst of energy. Takes their place on stage, is introduced, has a whole conversation. And it was like having somebody cast a spell. I cannot tell you a single word that adrienne said during that time on the keynote. But what I can tell you is that I felt transported. I was in another place and another time. A space where everything was possible, all the ways that I'd been shaped, all the ways that I sometimes believe that what we have is what it is. All of that was disturbed. And I just wanted to be as close to this person as I could be. And so my friend, one of my friends who organized it was like, you need to talk to adrienne. You both speak in similar ways. You, you move in the world in similar ways. You should connect. And I can be more than a little bit shy meeting someone for the first time. So I was like, Nope, this is not the moment. I'm actually not, I can't do it. Cuz by this point, frankly, I was starstruck just by what had happened, the way that she had spoken. Behind me there was a book on the table and my friend's like, then get her book. So I bought the book, left immediately, cuz I kept feeling people trying to orchestrate a meeting. And I was like, I, there's no way we can meet right now. Cause we'll never connect beyond that. Cuz it'll be like, 'who's this awkward dude who don't know how to talk to people'. So I left and started reading the book on the train and just couldn't put it down, started to hear whispers in the world that there were going to be immersions in Detroit. So I wrote to adrienne on Facebook and was like, 'Hey, I'm reading this book. I'm hearing that they're gonna be these immersions in Detroit'. And I don't think the word was really wide at this point. It was like a little pocket of people who knew this thing. And so the response was, 'Hey, yeah, that is happening. I'll keep you posted'. And I really trusted, okay, I'm gonna trust that. That's a real commitment. And it was. So I was at the first immersion in Detroit and the rest is everything.

Sage: (00:06:07) Mm. I love that this started with your disturbance.

Geoffrey: Yes, yes. Yeah. It was deep. It was a very deep disturbance.

Sage: (00:06:17) That actually to me feels really resonant for many people who call the who, who are connected to emergent strategy or like connected deeply is that it disturbed us first <laugh> and, and for the disturbance to be something that you followed.

Geoffrey: Yeah. Yeah.

Sage: (00:06:36) Right. To me is part of, I think part of this, like if there is like an emergent strategy –

Geoffrey: Mm-hmm.

Sage: – profile personality profile, right. Like it's like follow the weird feelings, follow the disturbance, follow the angst. <Geoffrey laughs> Like that is something that feels really inherent in folks who grab this work and then begin to, to uh, work it.

Geoffrey: (00:06:58) Yeah. Yeah.

Sage: (00:06:59) What in the, in the, when you think about the work that you do and, and that initial disturbance and the what I'm hearing and, and as the, the transformation of your work moving forward, what did emergent strategy offer you?

Geoffrey: (00:07:14) One of the– I'll start with the biggest thing, like the most obvious offering at that time, PEOPLMOVR was in what I'm gonna call a performative mode. Working to transform the world, but doing, doing that work undercover the side pocket. So somebody would invite us into relationship with their organization. Always that work at the time was about audience development and community engagement. So we'd be invited in to support an organization making and maintaining new relationships with people who had never been there before. And that work is resonant at an institutional level with marketing, branding, PR, et cetera. And that's not language that I, frankly, that interests me and it's not language that we were using. We were really thinking and I was really thinking as the co-founder about this work as design. So I was borrowing a lot of language from design thinking and using it, but it didn't feel, I think a lot about how things feel in your body. It didn't feel like how human beings talk. So we were talking about research and discovery and delivery and, and you know, performing it and performing it expertly. But feeling like this is just actually not it. So there's a piece I'll read it to you for dramatic effect. There's a piece in emergent strategy that not only grabbed a hold of me and transformed the company, but is a part of how we begin every single project with anyone. We offer these words into the space.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: “So if the goal was to increase the love rather than winning or dominating a constant opponent, I think we could actually imagine liberation from constant oppression. We would suddenly be singing everything we do. Everyone we meet not through the tactical eyes of war, but through eyes of love, we would see that there's no such thing as a blank canvas, an empty land or a new idea, but everywhere there is complex ancient, fertile ground full of potential. We would organize with the perspective that there is wisdom and experience and amazing story in the communities all the time. We would listen, support, collaborate, merge, and grow through fusion, not competition.” Those words. It is not a lie to tell you that I cried when I read them.

Sage: Wow.

Geoffrey: It's everything that I ever felt and never had words to back up.

Sage: Hmm.

Geoffrey: It's everything I ever wanted to be practicing, but had no template, had no guide or rather didn't understand that actually I had everything I needed already. And those words at the end, 'listen, support, collaborate, merge, and grow'. Those words are like, wait a second. As we've been rooting around trying to find more human ways to describe the work that we're doing and the phases of that work so that someone in a finance office who's cutting checks knows we've cleared this phase. We can cut you a check. Or anyone moving through transformation, moving through a project with us can, can, can know we can orient to where we are. Discovery and delivery and all those things just never felt real and right to us. But boy, to tell you that a discovery phase is listening. Wow. So when you look like to go down on the details, when you look at a contract from us, when you look at a scope of work from us, the words that you are seeing that articulate the moves, there is a listen phase, a support phase, a collaboration phase, a merging phase, and a growth phase. That is what we are always doing. And inside of any phase, we are also making those moves. We're always listening and supporting and collaborating and merging, bringing people together across lines of difference, bringing those different perspectives together toward something, in support of the growth that they desire. The liberated world they're longing for like whatever, the, whatever the, why is the thing that's called us together. So yeah, that was, that's a big piece of transformation for me with respect to emergent strategy is that piece and what it did for a group of people who were really looking to be human beings inside their work and not finding it.

(00:12:01) Music Break: "Rosemary Tears" instrumental plays.

Sage: (00:12:25) I, it's funny. I feel like, well, I've read the book. I don't know how many times back and forth in so many different ways now I'm like, where is that in the book?

Geoffrey: (00:12:33) <laugh> I know, I wanna tell you, it's like, it's on page this, but I can't recall. I cannot recall, but I can tell you that that page in my book, <laugh>, it is so written on and underlined and circled and starred. Cuz it's a text that I go back to. I feel like since I picked it up that day on the table, I think about books a lot as time travel it. I don't know any other way to think about them. I'm a bookish kid. The library was my cultural institution as a young person. So for me, books are time travel. But my experience of reading adrienne's book was less about time travel and more about a conversation. We were somehow together in the present dreaming together about a future. And that was a different relationship to a book. I don't have that often. I can't think of another time that I have had that in the present moment. But yeah, that piece in the book is so written on in my, in my text. I mean, I even think about it sometimes as a text <laugh> yeah.

Sage: No, no. And I just wanna highlight the fact that when I asked you like the page and you were like, I don't know, that just meant you recited that whole passage from memory.

Geoffrey: Yes.

Sage: Not, not from memory from embodiment, you know. <laugh>

Geoffrey: (00:13:50) Uh-huh, Uh-huh, Uh-huh.

Sage: (00:13:52) So that, that just for me really even deepens how, how much you hold that text in those words, in your work and in your self and how you're moving through in the walk that you have with this. And so if folks didn't know already, I did, but if you didn't know already why Geoffrey is one of our, our guests in this podcast now, you know, now, you know, when you walk that deeply with it, you know. I think there's so much for you to share about what it has done. I wanna talk about conversations a little bit, cuz one of the things we're also exploring in this season is the relationship between emergent strategy and other like political texts or thoughts, movements that exist, right? Like, so what are those, what are those connections that, that emergent strategies feels related to a sibling of that are living side by side with emergent strategy inside the people who are practicing it. So I'm, I'm curious if there are, um, political lineages, other texts that might have felt like conversations to you or other – and I love, I think a lot about conversations and time travel simultaneously. Like I'm, I'm in a deep conversation with Amílcar Cabral. Like that's my homie like –

Geoffrey: Yes!

Sage: – like I think about like um, not just what would you say to me, but then I'm like arguing back at the book and we go back and forth, you know? And so I'm curious if there are folks for you in a, in both a personal and political lineage that you wanna uplift or that feel connected to you as you're making this walk with emergent strategy.

Geoffrey: (00:15:29) Yeah. Oh God. I love everything about that question. Like the first thought, best thought is James Baldwin.

Sage: Mm-hmm

Geoffrey: (00:15:41) And to say just a tiny little bit about how I come to be this human in the world. I am from a small town, but my family has lived in that town for over a hundred years. So there's a really rich black community and black history in that town. But the way the school district lines were drawn, sent me to a predominantly white school. So that move that choice from town sort of propelled me on a whole other journey. And as the person that I am now in the world and the age that I am now, I see a lot of the ways that I was, it was communicated to me, my specialness, my separateness, my excellence. And there was a kind of seduction away from my people, our work, our creativity, our magic. So very late in life, very late in life. It was like, 'You know what? There's a point actually where I can't point to the school district as the catalyst for these things'. Like I actually do get to make an active choice about what I read and what I hold and what I know. So very late in life, I started reading James Baldwin and was so upset. <laugh> Similar kind of disturbance, but I was so upset by, um, by how much distance, by how long in my life I've both been deprived and also deprived myself of his wisdom. And I

mention him in this conversation because there's so much that he has to offer all of us about change –

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: – about transformation, about imagination. That feels to me in a really deep conversation with what's generated from emergent strategy and its connection to Grace Lee Boggs and transforming ourselves to transform the world. Um, so James Baldwin for me is a really big, a big vibration in a lineage. Yeah. Yeah. There are certainly others I could name, but that, that feels really major to me.

Sage: (00:17:55) And I, I appreciate you sharing the story of when, when you come to things, I've had a few experiences of that myself. Even, we were talking today is the day bell hooks became an ancestor. That, you know, I was, I was in my twenties in my mid twenties and their folks were like, I read the first book when I was, you know, 15 or something. I was like, Nope, that wasn't my story. I, I was, I was well into adulthood. What, what would be early adulthood and then had through her work, had an opportunity to look back in my life and, and both reckon with the, the coerciveness of, of the systems I was engaged in that wanted to shape me in a certain way for my quote unquote success. And then at some point my own complicity in it, you know, you know, and, and to be able to do that with love, these scholars have offered us, you know, is, is so beautiful. So thank you for sharing.

Geoffrey: (00:18:52) Yeah. It's like, I can't tell you the number of times and I, and I'm, and it's likely I don't need to, but I can't tell you the number of times that I have performed in knowing in rooms that is not real because the shame was so deep around what I didn't know by this point. Um, and God bless all the young people <laugh> who were like, I am this many days old or this many years old to the wisdom and knowledge of whomever. Like just that phrase as architecture, as a reclamation of, uh, knowing that you're late to, I love it and appreciate it and hold it. So, yeah. Oh. It is so, to me, it is such a loving act to be able to just claim as fact, 'I am five years old to James Baldwin'. Great. Great. Welcome. Welcome.

Sage: (00:19:44) <laugh> Yes. Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. I think welcome is something that in, in experiencing your facilitation and listening even, talk, you talk about the, the listen to grow sort of, uh, um, journey that you folk, take folks on when they're working with you, that you all go together. There's an invitation in your work, in your working with folks. Can you talk a little bit about what invitation can do and, and if that feels to you as grounded in your sort of personal pedagogy, as it does feel for folks who get to experience you.

Geoffrey: (00:20:25) Yeah, it does feel true to me. I was just talking about this a little bit. The other day with some colleagues. I've been doing some coaching folks who in pandemic are trying to figure out how do we, how do we do this work of inviting people to come out from safety? Um, if I can pretend that we're safe in our homes, it isn't the truth for everyone and go to a cultural institution. And I was reminded of, I feel like so much of my life and work has been a remembering in its most literal sense, like a, like a calling back

together. And I was remembering growing up in my grandparents' house. And as a practice, as a cultural practice, there was always enough food, et cetera. And it was like magic that a chair would appear from outta nowhere so that there'd be a place for you.

Geoffrey: (00:21:23) And that a plate would appear from, I don't know where, that had not been there seconds before, but now it was there and it was full and there was enough and you were welcome. Because I come from that place and those people and have been witness to that way of making more space. It's a thing I think about really deeply. How can we make more space? How can the welcome be so invisible, frankly. That it's, it's like a gliding, it's like a floating, like it's happening before it's even happening. And you actually always already belonged. You were always already welcome. So I, I think about that and how to, how to create that kind of feeling for folks. I think a lot about feeling there's a little meeting design template that I've developed over the long term. And one of the first questions that I ask myself, if I'm designing a meeting, or if I'm working with somebody in design of a meeting, how do you want people to feel? What's the, what's the vibe, what's the energy. And to me, it's the most important question. There are others, what's your vision for the meeting? There are others, what's the purpose of this gathering, but how you want people to feel is so huge to me.

Sage: (00:22:44) Connect for me and other folks who are listening to that question of how do you want people to feel and how folks feel in the room and what that means about what is possible and what kind of conversations are possible in the space itself then.

Geoffrey: (00:23:02) If you don't hear it, I'll say it plainly. In the way that I work, there's a lot of ritual. It's not a word that I use often, cuz there's something, there's something distancing for some folks about ritual. So I try to be careful about where it feels possible to bring that language in, but there's a lot of ritual. One of the rituals, so if the reading of this text from adrienne is one of the rituals to create a kind of opening that's real and true. Another thing that I do when beginning with a new group of folks is I invite people to do a se uh, an introduction. I invite people to share, um, who are your people? What are your pronouns? What is your purpose? What are you up to in the world? And who are your teachers in the work that you're doing in the world? Uh, it is a practice that I've adapted kind of liberally from the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond from Monica Dennis and Rachel Ibrahim at the Move to End Violence and other places without question. So asking people about their people. Oh, I also ask about your place. On whose land were you born and on whose land you reside presently and what I'm trying to do. What I'm trying to generate there is, I believe, I'll speak about myself, the way that I have been shaped growing up in this country and coming from where I come from, there's a kind of short sight, a shorthand. I've been trained to see people and I understand them in a particular way and to quickly sort and categorize. And I believe that that same thing is true for others in this culture. And so how do we rehumanize if that's a dehumanization, how do we rehumanize?

Geoffrey: (00:24:51) So getting a sense of who your people are. And that's an open question. A lot of people talk about their lineage. Other people talk about my people are movement people, queer people, trans people. Like what happens, what I experience in those spaces is that people start to get linked up together at the root system. It's like, oh, wow.

I didn't know you were from there. I didn't know you come from this heritage. I didn't know that you really vibed in the deep way that you're describing with, um, uh, you know, BIPOC folks or, and, and, and. And I see people start to connect across lines of difference. What I think that generates is a, is like the beginnings of something that we can lean into under pressure. The beginnings of a kind of trust building that can support us when we start to have maybe more difficult conversations. There's much more scaffolding to do than that, but I find it to be a really juicy way to begin.

Geoffrey: (00:25:55) And to go back to your question about invitation. Pulling from somatics, part of what I also understand about this invitation, to recognize all of this, your people, your purpose, your teachers, is that all of this is also here. I think about this all the time. It's like if you're in a zoom and you see 20 faces, that room is so much more crowded than 20 faces. All of our teachers and our people and our histories and our places. It's all also here. It's all also part of the material that we get to work with to imagine forward a world together. And so I try to create a kind of disturbance that makes more space that invites both a recognition that that's all here, but to quite literally invite it all to be here.

(00:26:47) Music Break: "KiN" instrumental plays.

Sage: (00:27:10) Oh, I think you linked at the root system. I just, you know, I, I forgot to do my, my reminder folks to get a pen and pad at the beginning of this cuz there, because there <Geoffrey laughs> get your gems ready just in there. So there's so many beautiful – linked at the root system. Oh, that feels so that, that just hit me really in my heart like that, that depth, which is part of the, the, um, getting to who we are, like you said to our humanity before we do anything else.

Geoffrey: (00:27:38) Yes, yes. Yeah. It's like, who are we? I just started a new project a few weeks ago. 17 human beings. They meet every week for an hour, a colleague and I are their co-facilitators. It's an anti-racist group and they're really looking for support and guidance and anti-racism and part of what we understood at the moment of invitation is like, Ooh, so y'all just, y'all just meeting. Y'all just getting together. That's cool. How's that going? 'Well, this, somebody said this and this happened and that happened'. And it's like, okay, okay. I, we have a sense of how to support you in doing less harm to each other. I think we have to go an inch wide, a mile deep to continue quoting from emergent strategy and the world that supports it. And frankly, to move at the speed of trust. For the first three weeks and I could feel it. It's like everyone is losing their minds at the glacial pace of this work. And I know it.

Sage: Oh yeah.

Geoffrey: I feel it. I feel it. For three weeks, all we did were these introductions.

Sage: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: (00:28:44) 17 people takes time and we don't do a thing. And in a larger group, we certainly would break people into smaller groups to introduce themselves to each other

and do a report back or leverage the chat. But we are with these human beings for many months.

Sage: (00:29:01) Yes.

Geoffrey: (00:29:02) And it's like, you know what? We actually have time to go deep. So let's go deep. And we kept reminding them. And I get this wisdom straight from Monica Dennis and Rachel Ibrahim. I was a participant in a workshop that they ran for the Move to End Violence. And they were doing deep introductions in a similar way. And Monica reminded people of what it might feel like to take that time. And that where that feeling is coming from has more than a little bit to do with white supremacy and urgency. And we should really be mindful of that and question why we feel like there isn't enough time to get to know each. And who would that benefit? What does that serve? And so, and the final reminder for calling our attention to that was this is also the work and I've never let go of that. So I hold it so deeply as a value. That's like, it could take six months to do this and we gonna take it. We gonna do it. Cuz this is also the work. And I will be with you through the struggle of, I can't believe that we're taking this much time to do it. I will be with you in that feeling. But if we are going to move together, then we really need to know something about each other. We really need to know some stuff. I think about Octavia Butler in this instance, a lot. In *Parable of the Sower*, it's like you gotta know, who knows how to grow food. Who knows how to do this. It's like part of how we come to know who's got what in our collective is actually taking the time to come to understand each other, to come to see each other, to come to feel each other. So it's really, really vitally important. I think so. Yeah.

Sage: (00:30:45) Yeah. That moves me so deeply. Cuz I've been in rooms where <laugh> where folks are like, really this is what we're doing. This is what we're doing.

Geoffrey: Yeah. Yeah.

Sage: And it's one of those I often wind up in the question of, can people move at that pace? Like when is the dissonance so –

Geoffrey: Mmm.

Sage: – so violent because that's what capitalism is, right? Like I don't, you know, that they can't even begin to make that move. Right? Like that they're just, they're just sitting there vibrating –

Geoffrey: Yeah. Yeah.

Sage: – hard. And so I commend respect, y'all, you doing the Lord's work to sit with folks in that over time. And <laugh> and as the, the, the vibrations of that begin to break off the scales, right.

Geoffrey: (00:31:28) I am lucky. I will rarely go into a space and facilitate alone. I really need, I just to like, to be a part of a team –

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: – to have another set of senses, who's able to feel into a space and share back what's coming up for them. Like that, I, that's really important to me. And so the reason I say that is sometimes I can be a little insensitive to the vibration of like, 'Ooh, I'm actually gonna break under the pace that you're setting'. Sometimes I can hold it so strongly. Um, but it's great to have a partner to be like, 'Hey, let me tell you something. This is actually also potentially harming folks'. So we might have to like in, in, in service of slowing down, if this is a practice of slowing down, you can even slow down the slow down. Be like, let's pause on this practice and hold space that I think is being asked for where people really under, want to understand why are we doing this? And why are we doing this so slowly? And why and why and why? So to slow down the slow down and to have some conversation about that. And it's been a great gift of working with people who've been like, 'I see what you're doing. And I know that this is how we do it. And this is so great. But are you peeping this? Are you seeing this over here? Something is, people are being disturbed at a level that also wants some care. So let's do that. Let's lean into that'. It's like, 'Ooh, that's right. Thank you. That's right. That's right. Let's do it'. Yeah. It's like I'm down to, I'm – it's it just happened a couple days ago. Someone in this project wrote and was like, can I, can I just be with you? Can I talk to you? Cuz I'm having an experience in the process? It's like, yes, absolutely.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: We can, we can be together. So we spent an hour together just so that this person could share. This is what's happening for me in the way that this process is running –

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: – and I want to be here and to participate and to trust this and I need some support. Yeah, yeah –

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: – yeah. And it's like, great. Let's do that. And let's let this encounter be a part of that.

Sage: (00:33:48) What a beautiful container that you've created that rather than tap out, they know there's something there. Right? There's something, I can smell it. It's making my taste buds water. I can't get to it. Help me, you know, help me, like I think that the question of the reach out for help, the, the ask is part of exactly what it feels like. The sort of extended getting to know you is, is to do, right. To ask for help is about our humanity and our vulnerability. Right? So I love the multidirectional ways what you're offering moves people towards their own humanity and towards the collective humanity. Um, you said something a, um, I mentioned Grace a little, a little bit back. A little earlier, and I'm curious about how you're experiencing, uh, you know, Grace would say, 'What is the time? What is the time on the clock of the world?' Right. Like what is, what are the lessons of this time? Uh, even these, this idea of like slow down to slow down your slow down, like what are some of the things you're seeing around cultural shifts

around shifts in facilitation or your work that, or, or just how we are being fucking human beings and trying to survive in these these last few years. And what does that mean about moving forward? Like what are you noticing?

Geoffrey: (00:35:09) Part of what I'm noticing is at the level of the individual, this individual, me, myself, coming into pandemic and I'm gonna, I'll speak really loosely and casually just for, just for humor sake. I have my shit together. You couldn't tell me nothing. I was meditating –

Sage: Alright.

Geoffrey: – and it's not, it's not true. It's not actually true. But <Sage laughs> but what felt true is that I was doing a lot of really important inner work. I was working with a somatics coach. I was meditating. I was, I was really in my practices and a series of things happened in 2019. In April, a dear friend took his own life. In July, my grandfather passed. By March of 2020, we were in pandemic. When my friend passed, I was still in my life and in my practice.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: When my grandfather passed, I held tighter to being in my life and being in my practices. When the pandemic came and was like, you know what, I'm going to eat. I'm going to watch all the Netflix. <laugh> I can't sit to meditate because there's too, there's too much noise. The vibration is too strong. I actually don't. I don't know if I can sit with this. And George Floyd is murdered. And, and, and so just like so many things were happening that, to overuse the term disturbance, that were just really shaking me at my core. I didn't know how to be with that. And so to scale that up to the level of what I've been noticing in, um, a space that I occupy in arts and culture, something similar was happening. There, there seemed to be in the conversations that I've been having and in the relationships that I have to people and places and projects. A very intense difficulty, of course, to sit with and to be with and a very strong desire to advance to solutions. I just need to get beyond this moment and to be. And in some instances, that's right, that's right. If we blow the tire and we try to get to whatever we gotta fix the tire. We don't necessarily need to have, uh, people and pronouns and purpose and te – we don't actually need to have a slow invitation to deal with the tire. We gotta deal with the tire, cuz we need to get, we need to get on our way. And some of the other things that I was witnessing people trying to process like, 'Oh, this is a deep institutional shift that you're talking about. I don't know that that can happen quickly on your weekend retreat, where you're gonna write the strategic plan for the whole organization and present it back and actually trust and believe that people are gonna live into that'. I don't, I'm, I'm curious about what you're practicing there.

Geoffrey: (00:38:05) Like what. I'm curious about, how that, how you, how the vision that you see for that working. So there was a lot of that that I was witness to and seeing and experiencing. And I would say that the longer, um, that the pandemic goes on the like, the more tension and more build up that I am witnessing. Yeah. Just like a, um, I'm thinking, I mean, I'm even holding my fist really tight as I say this. So just like a really

strong and deep desire for release is the thing that I'm feeling building up in folks. And as a facilitator, as a people who, as a person who's moving with folks. One of the things that I'm thinking about presently it's December. Some of our projects are going to take a little break until January. Have a couple meetings this week that'll be the last meeting until January. And it's like, how, what can we offer to folks that is it just a little, what is the release that we can offer? Yeah. And in pleasure activism and in, um, conversation surrounding emergent strategy with adrienne, my attention has been called to cultures of celebration. So I've been just trying to s— think about, and I did this with another team that is the EDI committee for their organization and similar kind of energy. And it was, it was the softest suggestion rooted in, 'Hey, you know, a lot of times in doing this work, we forget that there can be joy here, that there can be celebration. Looking back over the year, what have you achieved together?' And they just started making a list and what I was witnessing as they started making a list, there was a, in the beginning, it was a very, it was very slow. Well, we did this and it was like, there were more questions and statements then somewhere in the middle, it got, the velocity really picked up and they, oh, and this and this and that. And the, the, and then it started to get thin and they kind of ran out. It's like this, what you've generated is amazing and incredible and should be celebrated. And so we started talking about what does it look like to celebrate what we have done. If it's true and I believe that it is, that's small is good. Then even the thing on the list that seems small is about building a muscle toward a larger practice that you could scale. So just helping them find the joy and the ability to celebrate and not only celebrate as a small team, but to invite the involvement of the larger staff. It's like, you're not the only folks who are thinking about EDI and the institution. What are your colleagues doing? Well, we don't know. Here's an opportunity to ask and to make a larger celebratory piece, even if it's a year end review. The thing that we're, many of us are accustomed to seeing, even if that's how it manifests. That's fine. If it only speaks about your achievements as a small committee, we may lose the opportunity to celebrate the other work that folks are doing and to connect all of our work in service of equity, diversity, and inclusion across the organization. We'll lose the opportunity potentially to connect with other humans who may also be looking for joy and celebration. So I encourage them also to expand the conversation and to include those other voices. So that's what they've been doing.

(00:41:31) Music Break - "nightqueen" plays. "You know, they call me the night queen, 'cause I live in the dark. And I don't let nobody near me, and not betray my heart.

Sage: (00:42:14) Oh, thank you for that. Like, I just had a moment listening to you. Uh, um, I don't know if you saw it on my face as I'm, as I'm skipping <Geoffrey laughs> like, uh, um, what is it, what is a fractal practice of the culture of celebration?

Geoffrey: Hmm.

Sage: (00:42:27) You know, that's what it felt like you were just describing to me. And I was like, oh, self similarity within the organization in varying positions of people who are engaging with a similar vision, even if they're not all in the same room at the same time, and being able to —

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: – connect those –

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: – and celebrate those. Right. Like that's wow. Thank you for that.

Geoffrey: Yeah. Yeah.

Sage: Speaking of like culture, and I wanna, I wanna circle back to a, a brief conversation or just, you briefly used the word ritual because, and I feel like I get it. Ooh. Lord, I get it.

Geoffrey: <laughs> I try to be careful. I try to be careful with the people. [CROSSTALK]

Sage: Certain folks will just miss the whole thing. Right. Simply by –

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: – what it's labeled and, and actually understand like this has, it happens all the time. Yo-hoo it's happening all the time.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: But one of the things I believe, and I've just been taught over these is rituals have an opening and a closing. Mm-hmm. And I feel like we've talked about –

Geoffrey: Mmm.

Sage: – your invitation and your welcome and the, um, the extended grounding, getting to know folks as, as the opening. But I also, as a consultant and know, you know, you're facilitating different spaces that we are not going to be there forever. And I really follow the work, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. I've been quoting this for I don't know how many years about their EBX: Entering, Building, and Exiting Community. And I want folks, like, I would love to hear about your closing practices or exiting practices and, and how, and what moves you in those spaces?

Geoffrey: (00:44:04) Oh, there's so much to offer here. The first is, um, just a recognition and an honoring for being a person in process. So my practices around closing, my practices around everything are a constant evolution. The same is true with closing. And I say that to say, I don't know if I'm so good at closing. <Geoffrey & Sage laugh>

Sage: Facts. Yeah.

Geoffrey: (00:44:30) But what I can say is I really think about it deeply. The biggest piece about it that I think about it is as a consultant, I will not be with you forever.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: And what I'm trying to feel into now, not just at a, at the fractal level of like a meeting or a moment, but a whole project. How do we turn you toward each other so that your attachment and connection isn't to us so that it isn't about, 'Well, we can't do this work if you're not here.' It's like, I don't want to create, I, I couldn't be less interested in creating a dependency.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: There's a friend who's like, you're trying to work yourself out of business. I'm like, I do not care about that. That sounds like success to me.

Sage: Yes.

Geoffrey: It's like, I really think about how can we. Whether it's returning people to each other or turning them toward their collective wisdom, whatever that is. So one of the things that we've been doing on a few of our recent projects. You probably hear this, I mean, to be a solo voice in conversation, on a podcast, there's a lot of talking that I'm doing. One of the things that I feel sensitive to as a more visual person often is that there can be so many words spent in a project. It's like, wow, there people are saying a whole lot. Just like you said earlier about like getting your pen and paper. So we've been doing recaps, we run a deck, a slide deck behind the scenes. I don't often share a deck in a project cuz I really, I, I think a lot about people being together. And if we turn our attention toward a slide deck, we turn away from each other. I think. There's some moments when it's really important. We actually need that orientation. There's a new piece of content being taught or what have you. So we actually need to turn toward that to take it in.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: But when we're having a discursive moment, we've now received some content and we need to unpack it together. Well, that slide don't need to still be up. Like how can we like return to each other? So we've been sending a recap deck. There are a couple pieces of closing to my mind in practice in the recap. One, it's everything that was behind the scenes. So there's some transparency practice there. Like these were the desired outcomes. This was the flow that we were working from. Here are the slides that were shared. We always end the deck with, um, an opportunity for plus delta.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: We start every meeting returning to that of like, 'Hey, this is what folks shared'.

Geoffrey: (00:47:11) I mean, this is pretty standard practice for some of us in facilitation. And my practice around this comes from the Interaction Institute for Social Change. I think it's always important to acknowledge the lineage. But sharing the plus deltas that came in at the top of the next meeting and showing our work about how they've been incorporated in the flow and design for the current meeting.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: So there's some closing and connecting and also thinking about their collective wisdom and showing and modeling for them, how they might operationalize the wisdom that they have. So sharing the deck is a kind of closing having the, um, the plus delta, which for us phase wise is related to grow. Back from listen, support, collaborate, merge, and grow is something. The other thing related to, um, trying to turn people toward each other is we've actually started inviting participants in to build the meeting with us and to facilitate with us so that we are offering some of what we've learned as facilitators. Currently, and this is working currently because a lot of our work right now is working with internal groups and committees who have been doing their own facilitation, but without necessarily, um, a lot of skill to bring to that, or rather a lot of experience pedigree experience to bring to that. Cuz of course people have skill. It's about relationships and like being together. But there are some practical things –

Sage: Uh.

Geoffrey: I know, I know <laugh> I know, I know, but working with folks to build those meetings so that there's a more embodied sense of how to hold space so that when we do exit that people have some sense of how to do for themselves. I was, I'm on another project and um, there's somebody on the team that I love dearly. Uh, but one of the things that she loves to say is like, 'Yes, yes. I know you're doing that thing where you want to teach us how to fish'. <laugh> It's like, yeah, yes, yes, that's correct. But also if you're hungry say so cuz that could also nourish you.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: It doesn't have, I don't have to like withhold. If you are hungry right now, uh, we can, we can get fed right now. We can eat right now.

Sage: (00:49:20) Oh yeah. That is beautiful. That, that, that flexibility. That move along the spectrum of 'yes, yes, I'm teaching you how to fish' and <laugh> sometimes folks are like, look, <laugh>, you know, right now.

Geoffrey: Right. Right.

Sage: Right now.

Geoffrey: Right.

Sage: In order to –

Geoffrey: (00:49:35) And I had to, I really had to learn that I, that this, this discernment between leading people, supporting people toward their own wisdom. And sometimes people are like, no, actually I just need you to tell me.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: You have wisdom and experience to offer to this and what I'm asking right now in this moment is for you to tell me what you would do in this situation. And I've had to and will continue to, I think, develop some discernment around knowing when that is actually, when there's a clear request that's made in that direction. And when white supremacy and urgency are working on me and I'm shaped to respond in that way –

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: – in service of, of movement. When it's like, ain't nobody ask you for that right now actually. You've crowded out some potential growth because of your shaping toward urgency that is here, that is a part of your makeup. That is a part of your inheritance. And you weren't really attuned to that in that moment. And so something, you know, there's, there's something that happened here for folks that was maybe outside the design.

Sage: (00:50:40) Oh, thank you for that. Thank you for that last piece cause I think it, it, it is, uh, a reminder and I think that holding change does a really great job of this, of understanding and particularly thinking about Makani Themba. Understanding what we bring to a space as facilitators, not some objective tool to be used, but also what is it that we, what we have to offer a space and also what is it we're bringing around our own shape –

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: – that meets or not the needs and the requests of folks that we are engaging in that moment.

Geoffrey: Yeah.

Sage: (00:51:09) You know, and like really having to do that inter– I think facilitation, I think folks miss sometimes the level of internal work it takes to be a great facilitator. You know, like it really like and so thank you for talking about that and how that moves through you. So what are you, what's on the edge for you? What are you experimenting with now? Or what are questions, like what's a question that you're holding in this moment for yourself or your work for, for movement? Like what is a question that you're like, uh, I'm sitting in this right now, if you don't mind sharing it with us.

Geoffrey: (00:51:46) Hmm. <Sage & Geoffrey laugh> I, there's so, there's so many things which is true, always. So here, there are two things that are coming to mind right now. So I'm just gonna run with them. I just saw something on Instagram. It was, um, sister, Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs talking about grief in the same relative moment in the social media sphere, I witness Andrew Garfield talking about the loss of his mother in grief.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: In the same time on the clock of the world, to go back to Grace. Um, we are moving through and with a pandemic.

Sage: Mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: (00:52:34) Something that I am sitting with as a facilitator and a question that I'm holding about my capacity. I'm very curious to know, and to see, and to practice around what it is that I might have to offer to holding grief.

Sage: Okay.

Geoffrey: (00:52:54) Yeah. Yeah. We just did a survey on our project. I'll get a little bit more direct and I've been looking at a lot of the feedback today and the thing that is coming really clear is, wow, there's so much history here so much that happened before we arrived.

Sage: Mm, mm-hmm.

Geoffrey: (00:53:13) How do we tend to that? What do we do there? How do we support people in holding and grieving? And if letting go is what is asked for, then how do we support people in letting that go? And having a company called PEOPLMOVR, where we are moving with people, then some, you know, this is a part of what we, what we are invited to move with people through. And I, thinking about how we're shaped, knowing how I have grieved. My practices around grief. It's like, oh. You know, sometimes, sometimes we're not, sometimes we don't have what we need. And so those tend to be, for me, moments when I'll invite in a partner to work on a project. Where it's like, I'm seeing a need here and I actually don't have what is needed, but I see that you have, I see that you are working in this space. Would you like to hold this group with me? So it's definitely something on my mind with a couple of projects actually, where I'm like, there's grief that wants to happen here. There's a healing space that wants to be held here. And there's a kind of softness that I have. There's a kind of care and love that I have, but there's something else that's also required. And I don't want to get in there and practice on people and get 'em all wound up and mess 'em up. <laugh> Yeah.

Sage: (00:54:38) Yeah. Oh, thank you for that. I think there's there, there's so much around grief right now that that is teaching us. There's so much grief that is teaching us what it means to be with grief and the role of grief and transformation. And first starting with ourselves. Geoffrey, I can't say enough about how grateful I am you said yes to this time.<laugh>

Geoffrey: (00:55:03) I wish like to, as the nerdy high school kid that I was. I was reminded of that shape when you were inviting me and was like, 'What? Me?' It was, it was definitely a flashback. <laugh> I did everything, but run around my bedroom and started kicking my feet. Like, oh my God, I can't believe it. Yes. <laugh>

Sage: Yes. That's the best feeling. And, and yeah. It certainly shows in, in what you've offered in, in that conversation together. And, and I'm so grateful. Thank you so much for your brilliance, for your, for your deep caring, for, um, for the way you hold culture in this work and in, in your body. And if folks want to connect and learn more about PEOPLMOVR, they can, uh, go to Instagram and PEOPLMOVR, M O V R, right? Like is, is that –

Geoffrey: Yes. Yes. P E O P L M O V R.

Outro: (00:56:10) This podcast is produced by Natalie Peart. Music for the Emergent Strategy podcast is provided by Hurray for the Riff Raff and their album *Life on Earth*. To support the ongoing work of the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, please make a donation at alliedmedia.org/esii.