

Sheldon Gay (00:01.912)

Hello everyone and welcome to the latest episode of I Must Be BUG'N This is your host, Sheldon Gay. As I always say, I am super excited and so honored for you all to be here. Today, I have another wonderful, wonderful guest. In fact, in my previous episode, I kind of alluded to the excitement about this episode. And so we'll get into who our guest is in a little bit, but as we always do, let us start with a visual description for those that it's helpful for. So again, my name is Sheldon Gay.

I go by pronouns, he and him. I am a Black man in my forties. I have black curly hair that's faded on the side and the back. I have light brown skin. I have a mustache and a little tuft of hair on my chin that I call a goatee. Today I have on one of my hoodies of my design, which says "Decolonize Your Mind" Check it out in the merch store. It is a black hoodie.

And then behind me on the wall, I have a series of my favorite books and personal items, including a pillow of my design, which says "Labels Don't Have to Feel Like Pathology" And with that, I am again, super, super excited to introduce our guest today. And I'm just going to read off a little bit about him, but we're going to get like deep into this man's work and to everything that he's about. And so today we have the honor.

of welcoming Michael Asaku-Yeboah and he has over a decade of experience in the disability management consulting space and a background in mental health and addictions counseling. Michael has been a pioneering force in creating inclusive and equitable workplaces. Their innovative approach to supporting individuals with non-apparent disabilities has led to the establishment of the first ever neurodiversity coaching program in a Fortune 100 company.

And through their extensive expertise, empathy-driven approach, and proven track record of success, Michael has established themselves as a respected thought leader in the field of disability management and neurodiversity inclusion. Their North Star remains clear, to create workspaces that embrace and support the diverse needs of all employees, ultimately unlocking their full potential in driving organizational success. Michael, thank you so much for being with us.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (02:24.27)

Thank you to Sheldon. I'm more than excited and delighted to be here. I've been looking forward to this opportunity for a while and I must say I'm really, really excited this day has come. And so, yeah, as you said, my name is Michael Asaku-Yeboah and for accessibility reasons, I'll give a physical descriptor of myself. I'm a Black man.

Sheldon Gay (02:29.186)

Thank

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (02:52.701)

with a little bit of a scruffy hair. I'm wearing black rimmed glasses. I'm also wearing an African print that is light blue and white and some brown and a little bit of greenish color mixed yellowish as well. My background is white.

I'm sitting behind a white background and I do have some facial hair, a little bit of a mustache and a little bit of a goatee that goes around my chin. Yes, so that's the physical descriptor of myself. As Sheldon said, I'm really, really excited about basically working in this field, supporting

Sheldon Gay (03:33.902)  
you

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (03:51.593)  
people who are neurodivergent as myself and I see the world to be a place that everybody needs to be able to work in spaces that are inclusive and also are celebrated. So I'm really excited to be here.

Sheldon Gay (04:10.966)  
Yeah, no, literally getting the goosebumps as I think about like what this conversation can mean for folks. And so, yeah, you started to like dip your toe in a little bit, but yeah, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and what does neurodivergence mean to you?

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (04:26.559)  
Yes, a little bit about myself. I'm African, originally from Ghana, moved to the United States about, I'll say roughly.

get into 20 years, I would say, and did my master's in Rutgers with a master's in rehabilitation counseling. My first degree was in psychology from the University of Ghana. And while I was in university, I was one of those people who would go to class and would learn every other thing other than what is being taught in the class.

Sheldon Gay (04:45.58)  
Mm.

Sheldon Gay (04:55.928)  
Hmm.

Sheldon Gay (04:59.854)  
Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (05:10.791)  
because I really wanted to understand myself. I wanted to understand why my brain worked differently and why it was that a lot of people who would interact with me would say, Jesus, kid is really smart. But then if you ask me to do a specific thing, I'm all over the place. those are some of the things I was working really hard to understand.

Sheldon Gay (05:11.907)

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (05:32.871)

the

Sheldon Gay (05:38.178)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (05:38.937)

And lo and behold, when I went to grad school, it was very much like the same issue, but it was different because in the environment where I did my undergrad, was very much when we talk about education, it's centered around memory, like the one who is able to memorize and regurgitate.

Sheldon Gay (05:48.27)

Mm.

Sheldon Gay (06:04.174)

Mmm

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (06:07.519)

the information back was known to be the most intelligent because they are able to score very high on tests because they have good recall and those who learn differently were seen to be individuals who are not very smart. As we speak, I have a foundation in Ghana that is

Sheldon Gay (06:20.578)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (06:36.843)

focused on changing that narrative and the name of the foundation is called Neuronest Foundation. And what we are doing is basically working with teachers, educators to help them to spot individuals who learn differently and are able to work with my organization to tailor curriculums and also tailor teaching styles to

Sheldon Gay (06:56.493)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (07:06.749)

meet the individual's learning style and we go from all the way from elementary school all the way to universities. So these are some of the things that I'm working on with my foundation. But

going back to the question, so growing up I knew I did things differently. Went to my first degree, my purpose in doing psychology was to understand myself.

Sheldon Gay (07:29.355)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (07:36.905)

And then I still wasn't able to really understand myself that much until I went to grad school. And in grad school, because it was in the States and it wasn't very heavily memory-based, I excelled. I did really well. And I was like, wow. So that was when I began trying to really learn a little bit. that was

Sheldon Gay (07:36.91)

Mm.

Sheldon Gay (07:54.286)

Hmph.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (08:01.407)

when I got to know, okay, there are people who actually learn and process information differently. And that was piqued my attention. And from there, I worked in a series of environments, like a series of different fields from inpatient mental health to addictions to supported employment, supported housing, and then went to the vocational rehabilitation services. Then, then

Sheldon Gay (08:10.527)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (08:31.021)

moved into the corporate space. And so as I did, the main thing that drew me into the corporate space was the neurodivergence, right? Because I noticed that there were a lot of individuals who were struggling and were not getting the support they need because either even in college, if they had the support, they go to the working environment and those

Sheldon Gay (08:33.325)

Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (08:58.325)

supports were not available, so then they struggled. So that was what actually got me into the coverage space. And yeah, so that's a little bit about myself. When we talk about neurodivergence, I just look at it from the perspective of we all have the same biology, the brain. However, it works differently. It approaches

Sheldon Gay (09:01.582)

Thank

Sheldon Gay (09:20.344)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (09:26.315)

things differently. And to me, that's what neurodivergence is. We are said to have the same biology. However, the way the brain works is quite different. We approach things very differently. And it doesn't mean that you're broken. It doesn't mean that you are less off than the other person. It just means that you are not able to process information the same way as

Sheldon Gay (09:36.942)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (09:42.318)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (09:49.646)

you

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (09:55.455)

the next person and therefore if you're neurodivergent, your way of processing information is never going to be like the person next to you or the other person next to you. So you have to find ways to get to your goals, be it understanding how your brain works, understanding how you learn and tailoring things to you the way it should be or just learn to lead by your strengths and yeah.

navigate the world through those lens.

Sheldon Gay (10:26.691)

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. That there's a few things that you shared that were particularly interesting to me and that resonated. I know one of the main things was this idea that the difference in performance wasn't about someone actually not being intelligent, right? It was just about how that, you know, that intelligence quote unquote was being tested as it were.

And for those who may have had a difference in how they recalled information, that doesn't mean that they had no memory. That's a different thing. But how we access, it's making me think again about computers and how one goes to retrieve a file, or even a library. It's like, does one go to retrieve a file?

There are many different ways to organize the data, but you know, there's not necessarily one way that's better than another. It's just about what is that environment calling for? so

understanding that, you know, is a powerful thing. So I'm glad that you called that out. It's interesting too. I think I would be remiss if I didn't at least touch on the fact that, you you're talking about

you know, being back home in Ghana, me wearing this, you know, "Decolonize Your Mind" hoodie and then thinking about the work of a lot of different folks in this space, namely, Lovett, who many people are familiar with, right, talking about, you know, pre-colonial, you know, interactions with neurodivergence. I don't know if you had any thoughts. I see you shaking your head, right? Like, I don't know if you had any thoughts or anything to add to that, but.

I think it would be really interesting to touch on that a little bit if you had anything to add.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (12:26.973)

yes. It's quite interesting. like you talked about, know, I grew up in Ghana. Like, I would say half of my youthful years was in Ghana. I never knew a lot about like, you know, slave trade, a lot of those, you know, the history.

Sheldon Gay (12:51.459)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (12:56.353)

Because we were not taught. It wasn't taught in our curriculums because it was basically very colonial. It was taken out, whitewashed until I would say roughly about 10 years ago when I came back to Ghana with a couple of friends and I decided to basically take them around the country.

Sheldon Gay (12:58.976)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (13:03.075)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (13:07.734)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (13:20.418)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (13:23.713)

So took them to place called Cape Coast. That's where they had the castles that were used to, you know, as a transit. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (13:33.154)

I don't know if, hold on Michael, think, I don't know for anybody else, but I think it just froze. So you were saying, can you, let's just, I'll probably just have to edit this especially, but.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (13:41.441)

for a second.

Yes, I would repeat the... So about 10 years ago, I brought back a couple of friends and I was like, I wanted to take them around the country. So one of the things we did was to take them to Cape Coast Castle. Cape Coast Castle is one of the castles that was used in the transatlantic trade. And when we went, they provided us like a history about slavery

Sheldon Gay (13:48.215)

Yeah.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (14:00.942)

Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (14:14.881)

They kind of gave us a whole history about the slave trade. And it was very...

like that was the first time I was hearing anything like that. Even though I had bits and pieces, I didn't have the first-hand knowledge, like, you know, going and witnessing it and seeing and you go like, wow. And one of the things that actually even got me was how Christianity was introduced. But then

Sheldon Gay (14:28.866)

Hmm hmm hmm

Sheldon Gay (14:38.808)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (14:53.887)

the way Christianity was introduced, it was so much that you would wonder that how could you preach something on the upper floor, you have a church, but right underneath the church was the dungeon where you kept people.

Sheldon Gay (15:14.954)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (15:17.013)

you know, and it beats my mind. And also going back to this same topic, our educational system was created in such a way that it didn't have any regard for people who learn differently. So clearly, if you are someone who was neurodivergent and you were not good at memorizing, then you were classified as

Sheldon Gay (15:35.714)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (15:44.878)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (15:46.956)

someone who wasn't smart, who wasn't intelligent. So you wouldn't get anywhere because you wouldn't pass any test to move forward or to be able to go to any of those good schools or big schools. So then your whole life is basically detected by those things, right? I would say I was lucky or fortunate to be

Sheldon Gay (15:50.146)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (15:55.544)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (16:09.324)

Right, right.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (16:15.837)

able to understand how my brain works at a point to know how to navigate my learning to be able to even make it out of my first degree. yeah, colonialism really impacted us in so many negative ways and in the neurodiversity space as well.

Sheldon Gay (16:21.218)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (16:28.972)

Right. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (16:40.226)

Yeah. Yeah, no, mean.

again, a couple of different trails we could walk off on. One that I'll touch on really quickly is how you just talked about the power of understanding, the fortune of understanding how your mind

works. And I think that's one of the, even with this design, this "Decolonize Your Mind" thing, is it's really about understanding the fundamental ways in which our mind and heart work and work together, right? And being able to

let go of these ideas that, know, lot of neurodivergent people, particularly those who are late identified, which again, many of us who are melanated and otherwise marginalized tend to be, you know, we spend a lot of our lives beating ourselves up, calling ourselves lazy, calling ourselves, you know, dumb, calling ourselves, you know, all these different things, because that's what either people directly told us or that's what the system told us. Right. And so, you know, having the fortune of

you know, being able to say, okay, again, I understand that, you know, whatever, maybe 10 of my friends, again, they go to access their data from their, you know, library, their mental library in this way. But I go to retrieve that information, you know, a different way. And so because I know that instead of me trying to just be like everyone else, let me, you know, provide myself with, you know, the right accommodations and the new.

ways of doing things so that then I can, you know, as well get, you know, get what I'm looking for and then, you know, perform. Because again, fundamentally it's not about like, you know, actual, you know, quote unquote intelligence. It is really just about understanding there's a different way. And so that also makes me think about kind of going back to the last piece that I really enjoyed that you shared was the work that you're doing, you know, back home.

Sheldon Gay (18:41.518)

Because I do want to get into the work that you're doing here in the States, but I didn't know if you maybe wanted to share a little bit more about the kinds of things that you're doing with your organization there. And then maybe even how any of that is related to the work that you're doing here in the States.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (19:01.151)

Yes, I would. I'll tell you a little bit about my work in the States and then would jump and explain a little bit about. So in the States, I work as what they call a coach, vocational therapist. I work with people who are neurodivergent and may also have other

Sheldon Gay (19:07.456)

Mm-hmm. Go ahead.

Sheldon Gay (19:21.166)

Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (19:30.023)

diagnosis as well or even if it's just a neurodivergence, I do work with them, but also those who are in employment or seeking employment. And I use an intersectional approach. So what I do

when I work with neurodivergent individuals is we do not just start with, hey, what is it you are struggling with? But hey, I want to understand you. I want to understand how your brain works.

Sheldon Gay (19:34.712)  
you

Sheldon Gay (19:43.96)  
Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (20:00.106)  
Let's start from there. Let's have, and I would give them a series of assessments, interest assessments and other different assessments just to get a better understanding of how they interact with the world, how they learn, how they do things, their learning styles. And also one of the things we do is we take account of like

Sheldon Gay (20:18.134)  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (20:23.618)  
Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (20:29.473)  
growing up what are some of the intersectional issues that they've encountered or some of their intersectional benefits, right? Because it's always not just the negative side, but also there. And you find out that there are a series of things that may impact an individual. One of the things that I talk about or I explain to people is that

Sheldon Gay (20:39.054)  
Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (20:59.003)  
What with neurodivergence, it's always going to be what has got you here is not what is going to get you to the next step, right? Because for a lot of neurotypicals, what has got them here is what is definitely going to get them there. And quite often it's productivity theater. They know what to say, when to say and how to say it. And

Sheldon Gay (21:08.364)  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (21:21.165)  
Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (21:27.391)

that has got them here and that is definitely going to get them there. So, and then also quite often, one of the things you talked about, is the decolonizing our thoughts, because quite often we've been made to believe so many different things, but a lot of times it didn't just happen. Quite often you find out that there are a lot of complex trauma. A lot of...

Sheldon Gay (21:51.448)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (21:54.338)

the amygdala hijack happening there where every time we are faced with something we've encountered in the past our brain shifts into that fight-or-flight mode and we are not able to really take time to think through things very logically but we immediately go to the same response that has not served as well over and over and over again

Sheldon Gay (22:05.039)

Thank

Sheldon Gay (22:08.772)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (22:23.169)

So helping people to basically understand some of these things and also navigating the corporate space. Navigate because quite often a lot of people are not aware of that. The corporate space, whether you like it or not, is a culture, right? And there are expectations that may not be communicated to you, but then you are being evaluated.

Sheldon Gay (22:30.031)

you

Sheldon Gay (22:42.287)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (22:48.857)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (22:52.075)

based on those expectations. So if you're neurodivergent and you happen to not go like, okay, this how my brain works, this is how I do things, you might be doing them and you might actually be scored lower or negative and you don't even know. And when that time comes,

Sheldon Gay (22:55.183)

Absolutely.

Sheldon Gay (23:06.807)  
Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (23:16.54)  
Mm-hmm. Right.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (23:21.653)  
they would not tell you because telling you is going to be a lawsuit. So then something else is used, something you didn't do, something you did by didn't do well becomes the focal point. But the actual reason you're being put on that performance management plan is not because you missed a deadline. It might be because you

Sheldon Gay (23:27.503)  
Mmm.

Sheldon Gay (23:36.963)  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (23:52.385)  
cut someone off in a meeting or you...

spoke over someone or you pushed or pushed back with your managers. There are so many different little things that

Sheldon Gay (24:09.993)  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (24:14.689)  
or said something inappropriate, not because you intended to, but because that's how your brain works. sometimes things come and you've let them and now you are held accountable without anybody even considering that. this person is neurodivergent and sometimes they do not understand these cues, right? So my work, these are some of the things that I would

Sheldon Gay (24:23.641)  
Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (24:39.843)  
Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (24:44.199)  
work with people to understand and to navigate. And also they are quite often I work with people who've been placed on performance management, helping them to really understand what's going on, helping them to put things in place to help them to navigate the stress, to help them to

come up with a plan that actually works. Because quite often in the corporate space when you're put on a performance management plan, you are asked to do the impossible.

Sheldon Gay (25:05.327)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (25:14.433)

You are asked to do things that are just not realistic. So how to navigate those things are also really important and all of that. So those are some of the things I do in my regular day-to-day life. I work a 9-to-5 corporate job and then also run

Sheldon Gay (25:14.499)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (25:21.795)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (25:35.086)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (25:42.561)

practice on the side. So yeah, that's a little bit about the work I do and how that work extended to my foundation is that, like I told you myself, I'm neurodivergent, double whammy, ADHD, and dyslexia. working the neurodiversity space has been very, very dear to me because I feel like

Sheldon Gay (26:02.008)

Mm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (26:12.161)

Creating that equitable space is not just for others but also for myself. And the more we are able to educate and the more we are able to get people to understand why it's important to have such spaces, the better it is for me. So with the foundation, I noticed that it's a big issue because I'll tell you in Ghana there's

Sheldon Gay (26:17.731)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (26:41.301)

this label and I would try to do a direct translation. They would say, I would say it in the local language and then would explain it. Meaning that the kid is dumb, right? Yes. The kid is, you know,

Sheldon Gay (26:50.745)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (27:00.015)

Hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (27:06.207)

The direct translation is the head is like dead. Yes. So, and this is a term that is used for kids who, let's say they go to school, but then they come back home and at the end of their term, they scored, let's say it's 50 people in the class and they are the last.

Sheldon Gay (27:11.919)

Hmph.

Interesting.

Sheldon Gay (27:35.694)

Mmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (27:35.74)

or the 45th, 49th, 40 whatever and also anybody who goes after the 30 all the way to the 50 you're considered to be. But that's not true. It's not that they are not intelligent. It's just that the methods and the curriculums that are being used

Sheldon Gay (27:39.468)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (27:46.925)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (27:53.625)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (28:04.897)

doesn't work with the way their brain learns. So you are asking kid to read and read and commit things to memory and when you need it you ask them to regurgitate it. No, there are kids who learn kinesthetically. There are kids who learn visually. There are kids who learn acoustically. Are you considering all those things? Right?

Sheldon Gay (28:08.035)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (28:19.257)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (28:23.363)  
Yes, mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (28:34.141)  
if you are not considering all those things then clearly that kid is really going to not be the best kid but if you are to sit with that kid and talk to them about general stuff you find out that that kid is quite intelligent and so it is not that they do not have the capacity to learn it is just that you're using methods and processes that are not actually what would help that kid.

Sheldon Gay (28:51.375)  
Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (29:03.623)  
So what my foundation is doing is we are teaching, we run these workshops where we bring teachers and we train them to be able to spot kids that learn differently and we teach them how to basically get these kids connected to us. And what we do is once the kids are connected to us, we will do an initial screening.

Sheldon Gay (29:03.769)  
you

Sheldon Gay (29:15.183)  
Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (29:19.567)  
Mmm.

Sheldon Gay (29:26.287)  
Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (29:32.958)  
And if we find out that there is a possibility that they are neurodivergent, we kind of provide them with some immediate resources. But then we also kind of help them to gather all kinds of support needed for the time being. then we over here in Ghana, getting a neuropsych is as

Sheldon Gay (29:38.937)  
Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (29:52.302)  
Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (30:00.98)

even 10 times difficult than getting a neuropsych in the US. one of the things my foundation is looking to do is to where we are able to bring people on missions, like neuropsych evaluators on missions once a year. So we'll bring people from all over some universities who are either

Sheldon Gay (30:17.828)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (30:29.217)

just finished their PsyD and licensed and looking to do some work, some missions work. We'll bring them for six weeks and within that six weeks all the kids that we've identified, they would run neuropsych evaluations for them.

Sheldon Gay (30:48.196)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (30:49.331)

And with that neuropsych evaluations, all those kids, we go back to their teachers and we collect their curriculums. We tailor it to their learning style. We provide resources for that kid to be able to succeed in class. We also work with the schools to tailor tests and everything around the education to meet their divergence, right? And basically do that.

Sheldon Gay (31:09.218)

Mm.

Sheldon Gay (31:16.057)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (31:19.649)

over and then also for kids in the secondary schools, we are doing the same. We bring their teachers, we train them, we do workshops and then they are also able to identify these kids. would connect them to us. We'll start working with them. We'll do the screening. We'll start working with them. Once we do the missions, we'll have them complete the neuropsych and once we have the full neuropsych, we are able to use that to tailor their curriculums and

We do the same for the universities as well. So that is how the foundation works. So these are some of the things that we are doing. And I know in a short period of time, we also provide a lot of education. We go to schools, we go to churches, and we basically talk about some of these things, because quite often a lot of parents do not know that their kids are not

in quotes, dumb, it's just that they are neurodivergent and they learn differently. Right. So getting that information out there is actually helping because now people are beginning to go like, okay, I didn't know. And a lot of people are also coming out and saying, hey, my kid learns differently

and I didn't know what to do. I've been really worried and stressed out and they come to us to get some of the help that we have available. So yeah, that's a little bit about.

Sheldon Gay (32:23.6)

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (32:39.056)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (32:49.473)

Neural nest foundation.

Sheldon Gay (32:53.038)

Yeah, no, thank you for, first of all, for doing this work. mean, sincerely, I mean, I no longer work in the corporate space, but one, I think about when I was in the corporate space and, you know, to be transparent, I've been on a performance plan, right? And I know that a lot of the stuff that that was about, as you mentioned, is not about...

you know, whatever they tell you that it's about, it is about some of these other things about, you know, pushing back on your managers, which, you know, I'll raise my hand and say, yeah, I definitely was one of those people. And so, yeah, when you said that, that was like, yeah, very much so resonant. you know, so thank you for doing the work, but also for sharing, you know, you know, about the work and about...

you know, as you were talking about at the end, like this part about where, again, their parents and there are even individuals that don't realize that they themselves or their child or whatever, are neurodivergent, right? And so I think that I always like to kind of hone in on that because I think that there are many people who are listening, right? Or, you know, yeah, like who are listening to this who...

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (33:57.459)

yeah?

Sheldon Gay (34:15.181)

One, know that experience of that realization of like, wait. But I think there's also some folks who may be listening who don't realize, maybe they feel like they're different. Maybe they feel like the world doesn't understand them, but they don't understand that there are some particular ways in which if you kind of just understood this about yourself, those ways in which you're every day waking up feeling like, gotta do this thing again. If you understood there's that, you know.

You you talked about dyslexia. like, it's not that, you know, I can't read at all or whatever, right? There's a different way in which my brain processes written data. And so now knowing that, I can let go a lot of that shame. I can actually get down to the process of actually, you know, helping myself and performing in the way that makes me feel.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (34:56.097)

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (35:14.265)

you know, good. And that, you know, again, if we're talking about some sort of performance based space, if it's not just like at home and to yourself, but if you are on a job, all of a sudden, things can turn around. Because I think a lot of folks too, they're like feeling either at school or at work that there's no way forward. They're like, I've tried everything or, you know, my teacher, particularly like my teacher or my managers, like asked me to do all these different things. And no matter what, like I keep failing. So

I must, the problem must just be me being broken. But, you know, with what you shared, right, there's this realization that there's, you know, an immense possibility that there's something else going on. And if we just tweak this thing, you know, out shoots the light from the darkness, you know, and that is a beautiful thing. So I'm not sure if you wanted to say anything else about that. have.

several other questions, but I wanted to make sure that I left you space to add on to that.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (36:12.001)

Let's pick up

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (36:17.865)

Yeah, definitely. mean, I could go on and on and on and on and on. Yeah. So, yeah. Yes. Let's go to the next.

Sheldon Gay (36:21.85)

Yeah, I'm sure we can do the rest of it just talking about this part, right? Yeah. Okay. So I guess even, you know, it's a kind of a good segue, right? But like, you know, my next question is really is why is this work so important during these times? I know right now, you know, you've talked about your, you know, relationship with, you know, Fortune 100 company or whatever. like, I know in a lot of these spaces, people are

either completely dismantling their DEI and belonging and inclusion efforts, you know, was actually, was it yesterday? I saw, I didn't get a chance to read the article, I saw it last night, but there was actually a study where they were saying that a lot of folks are just renaming things, right, because of what the optics might look like for others, but they're like, we understand that these are important. So yeah, like I guess during these times,

you know, why is this work that you're doing so important in your mind?

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (37:25.237)

So I'll tell you this, it's really really really important because you'll find out that if you're to really, if you're to do an inventory of a lot of these big companies, not just the big but most companies, you'll find out that a lot of the inventions, a lot of the things that make

Sheldon Gay (37:46.309)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (37:52.751)

Mmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (37:54.818)

them who they are were ideas from neurodivergent individuals, right?

Sheldon Gay (37:58.128)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (38:01.815)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (38:04.802)

I say that of late due to lot of the layoffs. What anecdotally I'm picking up is that

Sheldon Gay (38:12.069)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (38:18.717)

inventions, the bold ideas that drive a lot of revenue for companies. are also lost.

Sheldon Gay (38:23.632)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (38:29.453)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (38:32.639)

because

A lot of the people who think and process information differently are the ones that are quite often caught in the crosshairs, right? And I'm excited to say that with my work in the corporate space.

Sheldon Gay (38:43.966)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (38:53.813)

There's clear evidence that what we do actually saves a lot of money. The company's a lot of money. There's a lot of cost savings, right? Because if you are able to provide an individual with coaching, what is likely going to happen is that they have a space to actually

Sheldon Gay (39:03.321)

Mmm

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (39:15.865)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (39:25.213)

work through some of the barriers that they would encounter. They have a space to work with someone who understands some of nuances and would explain these things to them and would help them to navigate these very tricky and complex environments really well. But also,

Sheldon Gay (39:29.669)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (39:39.814)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (39:51.493)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (39:55.137)

We are able to prevent people from going on leave, right? Because quite often when that individual becomes overwhelmed, the very first thing they do is they go on leave. And once they go on leave, you're losing money. The work is not getting done. You are also having to pay their benefits because they would use up the health insurance.

Sheldon Gay (40:02.405)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (40:14.363)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (40:20.539)

Thank

Sheldon Gay (40:24.891)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (40:25.282)

They're going to go see their psychiatrist, their doctors, because they might be experiencing psychosomatic symptoms.

Sheldon Gay (40:28.389)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (40:33.122)

And also they are off work, might be on FMLA, are getting paid, short term disability, they are getting paid some parts of their salary and they are absent, right? But also...

Sheldon Gay (40:37.713)

Thank

Sheldon Gay (40:41.617)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (40:53.258)

we are able to actually help that individual do better if they were to decide to stay. Because now not only are they able to remove the barriers, they are really able to understand how their divergence impacted the work and what they needed to do. now that a lot of those things have been...

Sheldon Gay (40:59.333)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (41:22.572)

they've been made to understand what was going on. They are in a better place to actually make decisions that work for them and the companies they work for. So for me, these are some of the things that are really, really important. you know, it saves them so much money because now they do not have to fire that individual. Firing that individual and rehiring cost a lot of money.

Sheldon Gay (41:33.934)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (41:47.227)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (41:51.407)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (41:52.245)

Also, quite often from first hand information and it's heavily researched, Ludmila in Ludmila's book, she explains it. Quite often, neurodivergent individuals happen to be the work of these, but they do not report every single thing they do. So in that manager's mind, that person is slacking off. They are not doing anything.

Sheldon Gay (42:09.807)

Mm-hmm

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (42:19.237)

Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (42:20.072)

until they fire them and then they find out that, that is no longer getting done. That is no longer getting done. And then they now go and ask and they were like, yeah, this person was basically doing that and goes like, why didn't they say anything to me? Because to that neurodivergent individual, work is not a productivity theater. They are here to work. If you told them that is part of their responsibility, they were doing it and they didn't.

Sheldon Gay (42:23.653)

Hmph.

Sheldon Gay (42:27.419)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (42:35.536)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (42:44.313)

Yeah. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (42:48.785)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (42:49.686)

thing that they needed to come back and tell you that, I'm doing this. But because they were not reporting and they were basically doing all other things, you felt they were not really meeting the expectation of the role. So you let them go. And now there's a big void that you need about three or four people to do the same work that individual was doing. So these are some of the things we also prevent.

Sheldon Gay (42:55.001)

Yeah. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (43:14.661)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (43:19.658)

Right? We are able to help that individual learn how to prioritize, learn how to report work they are doing and take credit for it. So those are some of the things that my team does as coaches, you know, yeah.

Sheldon Gay (43:31.333)

He

Sheldon Gay (43:38.255)

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Yeah. Gosh, like every, this is again, I was so excited to have this conversation because every single one of the things that we talked about, like we could do entire podcasts, like series about, let alone, right? So like, I just wanted to really quickly tap into that because I think one, just from a work perspective, I definitively know that, you know, when I was working in corporate, there were a lot of things that I was doing that, you know,

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (43:52.254)

yes.

Sheldon Gay (44:10.225)

I know people will be like, oh, know, whatever your performance for you is coming up. it's like, you're trying to list off the things that you've done. then I started to, like, there was a point at which I realized, oh, wait, like, you all want me to count these? Like, I remember having distinct conversations with like my manager, with other people where I'm like, wait, that's, like you said, that's just a part of the, the role or whatever, like, or whatever. That's how this thing needs to get done. So I don't even, I don't even think about that, right? But.

The reality is too that I think a lot of us don't realize how many other people are not doing that or are not able to do that at that level. And so there are a lot of things that we are taking for granted. And so a hundred percent resonant there. And then, you know, I would also say that I think this is for conversation for another episode, but I want to make sure that I point out that

I think this also sometimes happens in our relationships, whether they be friendships or family relationships or otherwise, right? That I think that there are a lot of things that folks are doing and again, not realizing that, this, you know, is actually valuable or I think even too, one of the things that happens is people think that other people are noticing things because they noticed them, right?

Like, you know, for those of us who are, you know, really good at pattern recognition or like just recognizing differences, we think that everybody else like, they'll notice the thing is, you know, in place all the time or whatever. And the reality is that not everyone is noticing those things. And so this can cause, yeah, just a lot of different disconnects, you know, whether it be

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (45:43.85)  
Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (46:04.857)  
inside of a workplace, inside of a school or outside of it. So, yeah, I just wanted to make sure that I noted that. Yeah, let's talk a little bit about maybe what are some of the biggest challenges that you have to achieving these goals that you have and also like how some of them are.

you know, unique or exacerbated for Black and otherwise and melanated folks? Yeah, like what are some of the challenges that you've seen to try to, you know, enact these different programs or, yeah, that kind of see the change that you're pushing for?

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (46:51.436)  
So one of the main things that actually is a major issue is that...

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (47:07.24)  
like people understanding

what is going on with them.

Sheldon Gay (47:14.671)  
Mmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (47:16.928)  
what is going on and also knowing that there's actually help, right? And knowing that there's help available and also how to even access that help and how to, because I wouldn't tell you a lie, it's not every company that has coaching that

Sheldon Gay (47:24.145)  
Mmm, yes sir.

Sheldon Gay (47:31.729)  
You

Sheldon Gay (47:46.437)  
Mm-hmm

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (47:46.643)

is able to create the space for neurodivergent individuals, right? It's only a few because a lot of people feel it's a luxury. And because they feel it's a luxury, it's not invested in, right? A lot of companies wouldn't invest in coaching program.

Sheldon Gay (47:52.165)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (48:00.049)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (48:08.507)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (48:16.31)

to support neurodivergent individuals. Also, even if you are individual and you want to access it, it's quite expensive. Insurance doesn't pay, so you would have to pay out of pocket.

Sheldon Gay (48:19.301)

Hmm.

Sheldon Gay (48:28.025)

Hmm.

Sheldon Gay (48:34.694)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (48:36.116)

Right. So you find out that it's quite often like people working in tech who access some of these services and it needs to be available to everyone. So those are some of the challenges that I've noticed is a big issue. And you find out like a lot of people do an initial and you go like, yeah, I know this would have been the best thing that would have saved my job.

Sheldon Gay (48:50.811)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (49:06.097)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (49:06.134)

But I can't afford it.

Sheldon Gay (49:09.719)

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, I, hmm. Yeah, it takes me back to what you were just saying a bit ago, right, about how the...

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (49:11.81)

So, yeah.

Sheldon Gay (49:27.245)

more aware, the smarter companies, let me say it that way. was trying to avoid saying smarter, but it is what it is, right? The smarter companies recognize the value in this work and say, well, okay, yeah, sure, it'll cost us X, but to do this, but the lack of doing this is going to cost us some multiple of X. And so it's actually cheaper for us to be invested in this so that we are retaining

you know, the, you know, most innovative, we give ourselves a chance to retain the most innovative, you know, minds as we are, you know, looking to, I mean, I would even think, I'm thinking like in the moment, but like, I would think even at some of these larger companies, right, that have established brands where, you know, some of these brand lines may be kind of, you know, you know, kind of saturated in their market or whatever. And they're like, well, how do we create a new, you know,

product line or service line out of this thing, well, having folks who can say, well, know, this has been used for whatever, for whatever, 50 years, but it could actually be used over here. And if we just tweak this thing, And those are the kinds of minds that you need to be able to stay innovative. so again, just thinking about the value that some folks miss because

they only thing that they see is, when I'm telling them to keep doing it exactly the same way we've been doing it for 50 years, they're pushing back and saying, hey, why not whatever? yeah, yeah, yeah. like, mean, even to that point, I guess, are there things that some organizations tend to be challenged, like they maybe are slower with

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (51:08.352)

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (51:24.562)

moving on that you found ways to ease or that you think that there are ways to make smoother as you can.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (51:36.611)

yes, yes. I've had a number of people reach out and for consultation how to basically create neuro-inclusive workspaces and there are so many different ways to, depending on the organization, depending on the culture that exists, also depending on how you've set up the organization, right? Quite often it's a matter of

Sheldon Gay (51:51.122)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (51:57.126)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (52:03.142)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (52:06.388)

understanding that there's no one size fits all situation here. Everything needs to be tailored, right?

Sheldon Gay (52:12.645)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (52:19.234)

for your organization, need to understand what are your goals, what you set to get out of like, and also helping them to understand what they are actually missing. If they do not support neurodivergent individuals, because quite often people feel like programs like this are DEI, but then when they begin to understand there's

Sheldon Gay (52:25.315)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (52:34.427)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (52:45.701)

Hmm

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (52:48.424)

actually a lot of benefits they are getting and some of them are huge financial benefits then they go like wow yes

Sheldon Gay (52:57.232)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (53:02.523)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (53:03.944)

Okay, so it's not just me doing charity, it's actually me thinking deep into the future. Because the fact that you are putting someone on a performance without understanding if they are neurodivergent and understanding that their whole environment has been set in a way that doesn't get the best out of them is a big problem, right?

Sheldon Gay (53:08.719)

I don't

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (53:34.349)

So once we are able to help you to understand that and you are able to now create an environment that actually brings the best out of that individual, you're actually going to reap 10 times more than what you were before, right? So those are some of the things that are really, really, really, really important to get organizations to understand and to...

Sheldon Gay (53:37.872)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (53:49.893)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (54:02.496)

begin putting on that lens to navigate in ways that actually helps them to create the space that they are able to get the best out of employees who think and process information differently.

Sheldon Gay (54:18.725)

Yeah, yeah. I guess to that end, know, as you were kind of starting out in this work, there any surprises that you encountered? Like, wait, I didn't realize that it would have this type of impact. like, you know, I'm sure that then it changed your work or informed the things, you know, maybe share, can you share like, you know, one or two of those stories of things that you.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (54:34.013)

yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (54:38.796)

yeah. yeah.

yes, definitely. know, starting in this space, especially the coaching space for neurodivergent individuals, vocational therapy, it was just passion, right? Started with passion. we need to create this space because myself, I'm like that. And a few years into it,

Sheldon Gay (55:01.765)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (55:06.651)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (55:12.96)

we were able to look at the data and go like,

Passion is yeah, but we actually doing something The data is showing more than just it being a good thing The data is showing that we are actually able to Save this company a lot of money and also make them even more so Okay Wow not only are we just doing the right thing but

Sheldon Gay (55:22.437)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (55:29.061)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (55:38.789)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (55:47.811)

we are actually able to show the money as well. So for me, those are some of the things that are really, really, really important, right? That I learned as I started doing the work. didn't think that was, I knew, yeah, it's a good thing to do. But now, having done it for a while, I know there's enormous.

Sheldon Gay (55:51.982)

Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (56:15.658)

economic benefits to the employer, to the companies that have some of these programs running.

Sheldon Gay (56:26.907)

Yeah, I mean

sure there are plenty. Are there, you know, without sharing any names or sort of identifying, you know, markers as it were, is there, you know, anyone that might stand out or that might, you know, be helpful for folks to hear like where, whatever, the numbers just jumped off the page or where, you know, whether it be financial or where, you know, the retention numbers changed or

I don't know, like is there again without any, yeah go ahead.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (57:04.364)

So I do have data that I could, but I'm not in the position to, because I'm not representing any organization. I'm, yeah. So, but I would tell you it's very significant, right? And it's not only like one particular company, but a series of companies have noticed that those benefits. And I've slowly seen it

Sheldon Gay (57:11.238)

Okay.

Sheldon Gay (57:16.966)

Yeah, yeah, That's.

Sheldon Gay (57:30.311)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (57:34.231)

springing up even if they do not have an in-house coaching program they do use a third-party coaching company to provide it it's just that for me understand because there are so many different coaching companies that would say they provide coaching but then do not understand how to create the

Sheldon Gay (57:39.761)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (57:47.728)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (58:03.252)

environment that actually gets the best out of it. it's not just the, it's not just, yeah, coaching helps. So we are providing everyone with coaching, but what kind of coaching it is, right? One that is really able to understand the neurodivergent individual, understand the intersectionalities that they come with.

Sheldon Gay (58:06.855)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (58:26.492)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (58:32.638)

and also understand the environment in which they are, the culture that they exist in and helping to create a coaching program that is able to do that. So those are some of the things that I would say. I mean, cannot say that, yeah.

Sheldon Gay (58:47.794)

Yeah, that's Yeah, no, that's fine. We don't need anyone in trouble for the podcast. But as you talked again about intersectionality, I want to make sure that we just at least touch on that again a little bit. Again, as you're making all of this impact, you're sort of customizing these solutions, these coaching opportunities.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (58:56.418)

you

you

Sheldon Gay (59:17.65)

for folks, have you noticed where that intersectional piece can be particularly relevant or really revelatory, right? Like where people are like, oh, I, again, I thought this blanket would work for everybody, oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (59:35.277)

yeah.

yes, yes. There's so much here and I would just want to highlight just a subset, The intersectionality of someone being minority, Latino or other minority and also being neurodivergent. Quite often a lot of they are

Sheldon Gay (59:46.662)

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (59:53.084)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (59:59.869)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:00:03.399)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:00:07.874)

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:00:12.672)

barriers or shortcomings or difficulties quite often are interpreted differently and sometimes the way it's responded to is very much like, yeah, the stereotype is what it is and even when you have

Sheldon Gay (01:00:25.276)

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:00:34.896)

Yeah, of course. Right.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:00:42.324)

all the information and you are providing education, it's very much like, to what extent do I believe you?

Sheldon Gay (01:00:50.746)

Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:00:52.994)

To what extent is it not their laziness? To what extent is it not just being all over the place? To what extent is it not being just, that is how they do. They've never been, right? So those are some of the intersectionality issues that we come across.

Sheldon Gay (01:00:57.436)

Yes.

Sheldon Gay (01:01:03.334)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:01:11.352)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:01:23.25)

One other one is also complex trauma. Complex trauma where the individual has

Sheldon Gay (01:01:23.25)

You

Sheldon Gay (01:01:26.979)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:01:34.686)

experienced a lot of the negative.

Sheldon Gay (01:01:38.706)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:01:39.981)

talk from people, loved ones, and they've now grown to believe it and that's what shapes their behaviors. Even when that person who said it is no longer there, the voice is still in their brains and it keeps on telling them. And these are some of the things you need to work through with a number of people to get them to a point.

Sheldon Gay (01:01:47.409)

Mm-hmm.

you

Sheldon Gay (01:01:54.534)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (01:02:00.306)

Yep.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:02:09.411)

I always say this when I work with individuals around task tracking and also prioritization. One particular approach I teach people is the Eisenhower matrix. And I have to, when we talk about the third quadrant, which is not

Sheldon Gay (01:02:22.578)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:02:39.107)

not important but urgent quadrant quite often people push things to you to do and because we've not mastered the art of Saying no or pushing back or saying hey I would get to it when I get to it we jump on it and we get it done, but then because of perfectionism

Sheldon Gay (01:02:41.625)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:02:56.178)

you

Sheldon Gay (01:03:05.382)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:03:06.671)

once we are done with those things and for those people and we get back to our stuff it becomes very much like okay how do I do but then the perfectionism part and in our brains we've we've have this thing where we believe that consistency is perfectionism is perfectionist

Sheldon Gay (01:03:12.924)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:03:24.293)

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (01:03:32.1)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:03:33.899)

Right. And so what ends up happening is that if we miss one, we failed. So I've had to literally get people to understand that. And I redefine consistency with them. Right. I tell them that consistency is not perfection and consistency is as someone who is neurodivergent, your definition of consistency is going to be having the courage to pick

Sheldon Gay (01:03:41.432)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:03:50.834)

you

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:04:03.776)

back from where you left off.

Sheldon Gay (01:04:05.893)

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:04:07.636)

If you don't have that courage to pick back up from where you left off, you are always going to start afresh and you're always going to feel you failed and you're always going to abandon things midway and you're always never going to finish things. And that would constantly be how people would.

Sheldon Gay (01:04:22.61)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:04:32.65)

address you or how people would identify you.

Sheldon Gay (01:04:35.805)

Yeah, yeah. mean, through personal experience and through the observation of others in my life, you've touched on some really important things. think folks have heard me talk more and more recently about the work that I hope to be able to do, the research that I hope to be able to do around a lot of what you're talking about, right? And how this is

uniquely true, like you said, us as Black and otherwise melanated, certainly otherwise marginalized folks, because to me, talked about two things that sort of the broader neurodivergent community will be familiar with is, which is one, like rejecting sensitivity dysphoria, which I know isn't a, I think it's an official diagnosis, but it's certainly an experience, right? And so this idea that someone

could be even more sensitive to even just the possibility of criticism, that can apply to people in general. But when you live an experience where your core being, how you present to the world

is automatically going to receive criticism, that is just going to be exacerbated. And so you're carrying that.

further with you into your job, into your schooling, into your relationships, into all these different things. so having this access to deconstruct that and find a healthier way to engage with those experiences is really, powerful. And then the other thing is around perfectionism.

Right? you are someone and, you know, maybe it's because of, you know, the, was reading a book this morning called "Black Genius", by Tre Johnson. and he talks about this, Tre, hope for hopefully you'll eventually make it on the, on the podcast as well. But, it was kind of perfect timing because he was talking about Black paranoia.

Sheldon Gay (01:07:00.731)

And what he was saying is that, you know, there's this experience that when you go into particularly like a workplace and you know that everyone is watching you differently, right? When you know that your one mess up is amplified, it makes you much more sensitive to any kind of error or any kind of, you know, look from someone. And so this idea of, again, there is a general...

approach to challenging perfectionism, but when for you, it is a matter of survival or a matter of actually keeping your job or whatever, your ability to maintain a friend group, a diverse friend group, right? In particular, that's when, yeah, that is a lot harder to dismantle that line of thinking. And this is again, why your work is so powerful because I know for me,

One of my affirmations that I try to read to myself every day is that "perfection is persevering through the imperfect process." That's it, right? Because otherwise it's like, oh my gosh, I didn't do this thing exactly right. And I know that I've experienced that with other people who.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:08:12.534)

That's it.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:08:18.198)

Yeah.

Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (01:08:25.623)

our neurodiversion. You can do something nine out of 10 times exactly right. That one time is the one that just like completely, and it's like, what? And so, yeah, man, like you talked on some like really, really powerful things.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:08:36.74)

Exactly.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:08:45.219)

Thank you. Thank you. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (01:08:45.683)

Yeah. So as we round out, I'm looking at the time, I borrowed a lot of your time so far, but I want to just round out and talk about a couple of different things. These are just of like just general things that you might want to share with listeners. And we've talked a little bit about this already, but if you could name maybe one or two keys.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:08:54.583)

No problem.

Sheldon Gay (01:09:13.223)

to neurodivergent healing and thriving, what would you share with folks?

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:09:19.905)

very first thing I would share is that we, neurodivergent individuals, need to learn not to take ourselves too serious. Because quite often, that is where the perfectionism and a lot of the issues that bring us down actually happens, right? So understanding that we are not broken, we don't need to be fixed.

Sheldon Gay (01:09:31.219)

you

Sheldon Gay (01:09:39.027)

you

Sheldon Gay (01:09:42.671)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:09:50.954)

We just need to learn how to lead with our strengths. I've learned that ever since I stepped into my strengths.

I've not looked back and yeah so those are going to be some of the things that are really really important for us and also learning to teach people.

Sheldon Gay (01:10:06.888)

Hmm, okay.

Sheldon Gay (01:10:15.422)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:10:22.785)

Because the more we just try to assimilate, the harder it is for people to actually understand who we are and work with us. So we need to get people to understand how our brain works. One of the things that I do when I work with some of my customers is teaching them how to teach other people how their brain works. It's perfectly fine. Yeah.

Sheldon Gay (01:10:27.016)

Mm.

Sheldon Gay (01:10:33.884)

Yes. Yes.

Sheldon Gay (01:10:49.864)

Hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:10:52.547)

to the point that sometimes you have to say, you know, sometimes I may go round and round and round. All you need to do is just stop me and reflect back what I've said and I'll be able to catch myself and know where I am and to reorganize. And that's fine. Hey, sometimes I may lose thought or I may have difficulty finding the right...

Sheldon Gay (01:10:59.901)

You

Sheldon Gay (01:11:10.26)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:11:22.103)

vocabulary, bear with me. Sometimes my brain thinks faster than my mouth. I may be thinking, but then my mouth will didn't be in the same speed teach them, right? The more we are able to do that, the more we are able to create an inclusive workspace where people do not judge us.

Sheldon Gay (01:11:23.39)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:11:29.672)

Mm-hmm

Sheldon Gay (01:11:33.94)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:11:48.418)

The very moment we try to run away and shy and try to be something we are not, that is when people use their own assumptions to now create a narrative about us that is not accurate. So yeah, those are some of the things that are really, important to me to get people to understand and to navigate.

Sheldon Gay (01:11:58.974)

Mm-hmm.

Right. Right.

Sheldon Gay (01:12:14.162)

Yeah, I love that. in particular, the semi unspoken piece that you talked about, is sharing all of this without like when you can do it, actually, it's more like the combination of the two things when you pair the two things that you share one, you know, kind of this this authenticity piece of kind of understanding yourself and like standing in that. And then as well, being able to share that.

but from a place that doesn't include shame, it is transformative for us in how we feel about ourselves and how we are able to operate unto ourselves, but it also has this multiplying effect for how the world reacts to us and how the world can support us, right? So for those who are looking to actually, you know, listen and share space with us, all of a sudden,

Like you said, they don't have to go into any of sort of assumptions about like, they're not actually listening to me because I know one of the things I used to get in school was I used to kind of look off and teachers would think it was me not paying attention. But me looking off was actually a way for me to actually pay attention to the words that they were sharing, right? And so being able to advocate and speak up for myself, I didn't have it at the time. I wish that I did, but if I had, I'm...

it would at least give me the opportunity to say, teachers, you know what? Sheldon's like really dialed in because frankly, what often would happen is they would try to shoot me a gotcha question. And because I'm feeling like, you don't think I know this? And so there's this like these cycles that we can just break. mean, I don't wanna, I mean, again, any of these things we could have whole conversations about. So I just love what you shared. Thank you so much for saying that.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:13:42.488)

Yeah.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:14:08.47)

is up.

Sheldon Gay (01:14:10.721)

Another thing that I would ask is, you what are one or two things that you just wish that the world knew or build more capacity for?

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:14:20.707)

empathy.

Sheldon Gay (01:14:21.983)

Mm-hmm

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:14:24.321)

empathy and understanding that the fact that

someone is good at something, doesn't mean they are bad at other things, right? We need to live in a society where we learn to work, lean on each other's and not put people down.

Sheldon Gay (01:14:39.113)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:14:54.993)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I know that empathy piece is crucial to everything that we've talked about today. And again, it starts with ourselves. more that we can have empathy for ourselves, think, excuse me, we both know that...

we tend to judge others more when really there's a lot of judgment going on inside of ourselves. And so the more that we can silence that and just honor our own humanity in its difference, its frailty, then when we look across at someone else, we can say, you know what, maybe I didn't like what they said or like what they did, but there's probably a deeper story here. And so let me get curious about that and make space for what might be going on.

as opposed to just leading with the frustration or the, know, the, doesn't make sense to me. What's going on in your head? What's wrong with you, right? And that even goes back to, again, all the stuff we were talking about with parents and teachers and bosses who were looking across at somebody and wondering why X task hasn't been performed in the way that they expected that it would. And so, okay.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:16:14.563)

That's it.

Sheldon Gay (01:16:17.525)

Let me stop before I am on this soapbox for far too long. But having said that, this has been a great discussion. You told us a little bit about some of the work that you're doing, but maybe

remind us of the projects or if you have other projects that you have going on and then tell people how they can support you and stay connected going forward.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:16:27.736)

it.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:16:39.925)

Yes, definitely. Yeah. The main project I want to basically focus on here is the Neuronest Foundation. If you're someone who does neuropsych and you're looking to basically do missions to Ghana, please reach out. If you're also someone who wants to help with this...

Sheldon Gay (01:16:51.625)

Mm-hmm.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:17:09.153)

project creating neuro equitable schools and neuro equitable work spaces. reach out especially in Ghana and our goal is not just to be in Ghana but to begin to expand to other African countries. So yeah reach out you could find me on LinkedIn and let's make the world neuro inclusive. Looking forward to it.

Sheldon Gay (01:17:22.015)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:17:29.898)

Mm-hmm.

Sheldon Gay (01:17:33.865)

Yes. Yes, thank you so much. And I will put all those links into the show notes for folks. But Michael, again, so glad that the universe saw fit to connect us. Absolutely love and proud of, but also inspired by your work. Thank you for taking time to join me on this episode.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:17:55.267)

Thank you.

Michael Asaku-Yeboah (01:17:59.798)

Thank you to Sheldon. Looking forward to more of this. Awesome.

Sheldon Gay (01:18:05.43)

Yes. All right.

Sheldon Gay (00:02.658)

What a really special conversation. I am absolutely honored that Michael joined us. I had the opportunity to meet Michael months ago when I moderated a panel that he sat on. then afterwards we had a conversation and I was a hundred percent certain that he had to be here

and share his voice and his message with the podcast. And so I hope that you all enjoyed that. Again, his work, he's particularly working with corporate clients.

is really important because many of us are out here working and spending most of our lives working. And so having spaces as neurodivergent people, as know, melanated and otherwise marginalized neurodivergent people, it is really important that we have advocates like him, that we have people that we can go to like him, that we have people who are advocating at higher levels to change the environments.

so that again, we can feel even better about not only our ability to be productive in these spaces, but also just to feel like we can live authentically in these spaces. And so again, we talked about a lot, a whole lot this entire conversation, but I wanted to just kind of pull us back to the like three key takeaways before you go out and hit them streets. All right. So the first one is, you know, really about recognizing and understanding yourself. Again, that's really the,

basis of this entire podcast, right? You know, I must be bugging is, you know, kind of this play on the fact that I spent 41 years of my life kind of thinking that I was the one that was, you know, bugging, right? And then I realized something about myself that completely transformed my future, right? Me doing this work is about understanding, wow, how powerful it is to understand something about yourself that, you know, maybe others are seeing or maybe that others don't understand.

But most importantly, the more that I can understand myself, the better that I can feel about myself, the better that I can love myself, the better I can draw boundaries for myself and with others. And the more that I can advocate for the things that I actually need, which are all things that really drive the fundamental things that we're looking for here, which really are about joy. And so again, I also particularly loved him talking about the tools like the Eisenhower Matrix.

Sheldon Gay (02:23.746)

because again, for those of us who are gifted or otherwise neurodivergent, sometimes it is challenging for us to make decisions about what it is that we should do, we should be doing in a particular moment. And that may be because maybe we are someone who has multiple talents or multiple interests, or maybe we're easily dysregulated for many different things. Maybe we're folks who just, again, have

trouble choosing what should get our focus in the moment. And so an Eisenhower matrix is a tool that can help us with that prioritization. And so now, instead of wringing our hands about stuff or beating ourselves up about decisions or kind of wantonly making these decisions and then looking up a week, a month, a year later and wondering, what did I do with my time? Or not feeling like you got close enough to your

goals and wondering, well, I was working hard, but why wasn't I feeling like I actually accomplished my goals? Well, again, that's where key things like that third quadrant that he mentioned, which, you know, is related to things that are not so important, but feel urgent, right?

That's where this stuff can come in because now instead of us spending that time, because again, you know, those of us, when something feels like it might be important or urgent, right?

That's when we start to like lock in. And when we start to bucket the things out in our lives that we realize, oh, you know what, like this is important, but not like urgent, right? this is, you know, yeah, like this is important, but not urgent. All of a sudden now we can go, or sorry, this is not important, but urgent, sorry about that. I wanted to make sure that I say that correctly, right? This is not important, but.

there's some urgency behind it, or at least feels that way. Now, instead of us using the top end of our spoons or our brain loaves or just our capacity, instead of using that premium space on it, we can delegate or we can ask for help. And we can understand that it's a good choice because we've now bucketed these things out. We've realized if

Sheldon Gay (04:45.133)

I'm going to achieve my goals. If I'm going to feel good about myself and my decisions, the thing that I need to be doing is worried about the things that again are absolutely most important. And so these are the things that again are an Eisenhower matrix isn't for nor are diverse people, but certainly these kinds of tools can be helpful for us. so again, understanding that you have those challenges is the first step. And this is again,

how things can be transformative. Because now I'm not beating myself up about how I'm choosing things. Now I'm not feeling overwhelmed. I can kind of have a tool that helps me make that decision much more easily. so this, again, is very much so true at work. Our ability to understand ourselves also helps us to advocate better for ourselves. And so regardless of whether or not you know,

we ask for accommodations, regardless of whether or not we are quote unquote out in the workplace, our ability to advocate for ourselves and to express our needs and to communicate exactly what they are is 100 % rooted in our ability to fully understand ourselves. And so I really appreciated him bringing that up. The next thing is really about recognizing and combating perfectionism. And so, you know, the first thing is for those of us who are masking or

are familiar with the fact that we mask most of our lives, Masking itself compels us to be quote unquote on, you know, all or most of the time, right? And part of that, you know, is about how masking helps us to not draw attention to ourselves, right? By being the squeaky wheel, right? Or the wrench in the, you know, the gears, right? And so this

this ability to recognize where we may be overly masking, trying to be perfect so that nobody notices us or shames us. And that's really what a lot of this stuff is getting down to, our desire to avoid shame. When we are doing that, we're not giving ourselves the grace that every human should be afforded. And that has tolls, takes tolls, I'm sorry, on our body, on our minds, and our souls. And so again,

Sheldon Gay (07:09.336)

for those of our minds that, again, are very particular about every little nuance and things being exactly right and that just being a part of our brain wiring, but also for those of us who have experienced things in our lives where people didn't give us that grace, know, maybe a parent, maybe a teacher or whatever shamed us. And so again, in our desire to avoid that, we are overly concerned about quote unquote being perfect. This is something that needs to be called out.

And so again, you know, as we think about those of us who are melanated in other than marginalized, right? This is even more true or it can be more true, right? Because we already stick out because of how we show up in the world in other ways this idea that we don't need one more way or we don't need, you know, yeah, we just don't need one more way to kind of stick out and for people to be paying attention to us or for people to find another reason to unjustly

critique us, right? That's something that we absolutely, you know, need to be aware of. And so, again, as we look at both ourselves and others in our midst who, again, come from melanated and marginalized communities, recognizing that perfectionism in them and giving them grace and kind of, you know, being a voice that works against the shame and the guilt that they may be feeling is, can be really powerful.

Um, and so this is also a thing too, for like, when we have the opportunity to ask ourselves when, you know, somebody new joins the team or when, you know, we realize that maybe this person is someone who doesn't look like, sound like, or whatever, right? They have just different views than what we would consider our inner circle. gives us pause to wonder, hmm, how am I showing up for them? Am I giving them that grace and that, that respect that they, they deserve?

Am I, again, just exacerbating things that they may be thinking about in this space? And so all of that leads us into the last thing, is really about the importance of understanding, reflecting on, and communicating culture. Culture itself is not just what's in the employee manual or the school handbook. It's emergent. And it's deeply reliant on

Sheldon Gay (09:36.235)

unspoken expectations. And for those of us that know who are doing this work, right, we know that unspoken expectations are pretty much just a guarantee, or at least a seed planted for resentment, to expose itself later on down the line. And so it's a great opportunity to ask yourself whether or not when you are providing feedback or frankly, sometimes when you're simply critiquing them, you know,

Are you giving them the full opportunity to adjust or are you simply assuming that they should know this thing because you know it. But the reality is, again, all the things that we know, not everybody else does because maybe it is an unspoken, you know, expectation. All right. And so, yeah, as I've said before, like check in before you check out. Right. And this is again, a really, really important point. And so to that end, you know, as we were thinking about being truly transformative,

in our spaces, whether they be our jobs, our groups and organizations, our schools, whatever it is, right? This is also an opportunity to challenge those norms. Why do we need to work in an office, As a question, rhetorical or otherwise, right? It was something that was derided before the pandemic. I remember bosses and managers

being like, no, no, no, you've got to be here. Like that was the entire idea. They told us that there was no way for people to be productive if they were at home. And now you couldn't find a top tech job opportunity that doesn't at least offer hybrid. It's almost unheard of now. What if we similarly put the energy and resources that we spent on monitoring work hours and

whether or not somebody is on every single call or whatever, what if we put that time and that resource, that set of resources into things like benefits for people or the accessibility updates that we say that there's no money for, right? That it would just cost too much. What if we took that time? What if we took that money? What if we took that thinking, that strategic process to think about how we might do better?

Sheldon Gay (12:00.59)

Right, because I think many of us have seen that many companies or many organizations will gladly put free coffee and beverages into the refrigerator way before installing, you know, light dimmers or buying a box of fidget spinners for every meeting room, right? And what does that cost? Right. So again, let's start to challenge these norms that we have just simply accepted and think about,

What if we did try to do this a different way? And what could be the implications? mean, Michael talked about, right, then there's plenty of data out there, right, that shows that making these kinds of changes has both qualitative and quantitative impact. And so the burden for addressing these things absolutely should be primarily on the system, right? That's on the company, on the school, on the organization, whatever. But we know that organizations, right, are made up of individuals.

And so we each can do our part to make sure that we're showing up in, you know, as our best selves and that we're giving people the opportunity to see themselves and, you know, not through a lens of shame, not through a lens of critique, right? And that we are also questioning the ways in which we are showing up that are really just reinforcing these systems that we say that we dislike. And so there's that, right? So again, if you are somebody, right,

who is looking for help navigating spaces where you don't always feel seen, safe, or celebrated, go ahead, visit my website, [sheldongayisbugging.com](http://sheldongayisbugging.com), it's in the show notes, right? And schedule a call with me so we can make a plan for how you can address those things where you are. Okay, so thank you again for listening. And as I like to say, right, remember these three things. Take time today to help a child feel seen. Make sure you start with the child within yourself.

Next, don't be clever, be wise, change yourself and you will surely change the world. And lastly, as always, labels don't have to feel like pathology. All right, take care.