

**Aditi Juneja:** Hi everyone, and welcome to this week's episode of the Self Care Sundays podcast we're excited for this week's guest, Jehmu Greene, who is a Democratic strategist, Fox News contributor, board chair of Vote Run Lead and former candidate for DNC chair. Before we get started with Jehmu I want to ask for your help supporting the podcast via Patreon and Radio Public. Patreon allows supporters of the show to donate a monthly amount to help with our costs including monthly maintenance fee and to pay our audio engineer. We'd also like to raise enough money to hire a transcription service to make our episodes more accessible to everyone. If you'd like to help us out, please check out [patreon.com/selfcaresundayspodcast](https://patreon.com/selfcaresundayspodcast). That's P-A-T-R-E-O-N. Com/selfcare sundays podcast. We also wanted to let you know that our episodes are now on Radio Public as well which you can download on your iPhone or an Android and listen to millions of shows for free including Self Care Sundays with no account necessary. YOU can also go to [Radio Public.com](https://radio-public.com) and search for Self Care Sundays. Thank you for supporting our show, it's the generosity of our listeners that helps this information become accessible to so many people in the first place. Let's get started. How are you today, Jehmu?

**Jehmu Greene:** I'm fantastic because um I'm in Miami and uh I'm gonna spend some time at the time beach once we finish this conversation and uh spend some time in the sun which is always great.

**AJ:** Yeah, so it sounds like you have your self care for today worked out. Um could you talk us through a typical day um and kind of how selfcare plays a role throughout your day?

**JG:** Well it's interesting actually but I mentioned spending time in the Sun, uh for me spending time in the sun on a typical day, is really important and uh this is a new development in my life where whatever is going on, whatever travel is happening, whatever crisis uh at the national political level or in my personal life that I am committed to stopping whatever I'm doing and letting the Sun touch not just my face, I think a lot of people get a little bit of sun exposure on your face but I'm very intentional in that I have to spend at least 20 minutes getting sun on my arms and on my legs and um ya know I'm also very intentional about getting sun without wearing sunglasses. I don't know if a doctor would say that's the right thing to do but it makes a world of difference in my ability to then get things done.

**AJ:** Yeah, um are there other habits you kind of picked up along the way or that you've been doing recently kind of as you are out there for just to make sure that you're feeling good and recharged?

**JG:** Certainly and I mentioned that I'm in Miami. I'm here for a Vote Run Lead training, the work that we're doing with uh We Work uh to bring trainings to their spaces around the country and that means that I've been traveling a lot and throughout my career I've had these moments where I travel a lot, where I'm only home for a few days and a lot of those times in the past I would go to a city, I would do whatever conference or speech or project I was working on and then spend all the rest of the time in the hotel and get on the plane and go home. And having just finished up the We Work Vote Run Lead training here in Miami, I've now got another 48 hours in

this great city with these great beaches and I'm going to allow this professional trip to give me time to be in the sun, time to be in the water and just not visiting a city and not taking advantage of the community, not taking advantage of whether it's an ocean, a lake, a culture, I've added that to my travel routine and it also makes me so much more productive when I'm in those cities.

**AJ:** Does it also feel like for you, then you're not um like rushing in and out like it gives you just a little bit more time to breathe so your trips aren't like, I know I like flown into LA, flown back that night and it's just psychotic its like 12 hours you are in one place. Do you feel like it gives a little more time to breathe, like you kinda like the trips a little bit?

**JG:** Absolutely. Whether it is extending the trip to be able to uh get some quality time or if it's just, even if can't extend the trip, one thing I will do is Ill find time to go to either my favorite restaurant or restaurant that's recommended by a friend, to just have the best meal that I can have in that hour and that break that slowing down certainly helps in this just hyper, uh hyper partisan, hyper ya know issue, form one minute to the next you don't know what you're gonna be hit with as a progressive and the pause, the pause form that restaurant meal, the pause from th4e extension of the trip in the cities that im visiting uh means the world.

**AJ:** So how did you end up kind of discovering these things were useful for you for your self care? Were they things that you've always done or used to do and have recently started? How did you kind of find your way to these habits?

**JG:** Well uh certainty one way I found it was I think I almost killed myself. I had no self care plan and the result were dire health consequences but how I found my way to where I am right now from a self care standpoint is that I remembered who I was as a child who was curious and active and without a job, without social media and that child was one who spent the majority of my time outside in the sun, in the water, in the lakes of Austin and so I'm certainly, this was always a part of who I was. I forgot that part and in finding my way back there was to remember who I really was.

**AJ:** It kind of um -- you mention that you had grown up in Austin. I know you've recently moved back to Austin, which um in our conversation offline feels like that largely an at of self care, moving back to that place.

**JG:** It was the biggest act of self care I have done in my 46 years on this planet. And it was not um not a decision that was made lightly and it was not a decision that a lot of people would think uh was the best move for me professionally ya know being in the media and moving away from the center of the media, New York. Some people may say its not strategic but moving home to Austin was about quality of life first and getting back to nature, getting back to uh connecting with a community that maybe is not hyper focused on politics every second of the day. My community in Austin, certainly they care about issues. They're engaged as activists in different ways but they're also more connected to their families and to the culture in Austin around live music and the boating culture and and really understand that the best way for me to heal and

and to recapture that spirit where I was as a child was to go to that place, my hometown, where that's where it all began for me um and so moving to Austin immediately, immediately my spirit changed and the way I knew that was going to happen is that every time I visited home I talked to people back in New York or DC in a professional context and they'd be like, "You sound really happy." When you get so many friends saying you sound really happy and they say it when you're home in Austin I was like okay I need to really listen to what they are saying what i'm hearing.

**AJ:** Yeah I think it's really interesting that those outside observation can really kind of help highlight and help you in like your own learning process of what's working for you and what's not. It's just like seeing yourself through other people's lenses.

**JG:** Yeah absolutely.

**AJ:** Um so you talked about it a little bit in terms of how you grew up but I was wondering if you could share with us how you think um your identity informs your self care habits? I know people um in the past have spoken about how gender or race makes it challenging or kind fears them away from self care because it's not what they see often or its not encouraged in communities or of women and then they kind of have to find their way back

**JG:** Ya know, certainly, as a black woman growing up in Austin I feel like I was really blessed to um be out of the kind of uh comfort zone. My parents are liberian immigrants um there's a Liberian community. I have cousins in Austin who strictly study to that liberian community. I have um cousins in Austin who grew up several blacks away from me and they never spent time at the lake. Never made it there but my experience growing up in Austin was through a diverse community of friends um and certainly the diversity of the uh community of of uh graduate student from UT which was my dad was a PhD student of UT which is why we moved to Texas. It brought us in contact with uh a more diverse community that embraced kind of the boding culture, embraced the hiking culture, embraced uh like I said being in nature so I've got this very different experience than many people in my family that we were right down the street and I think I big part of that was I stepped outside of my immediate community, my family community, my um racial community. I stepped outside at a very early age comfortable being outside of my comfort zone so self care for me is as a kid or as I embraced the community in Austin, a lot of times I was the only person who looked like me and that certainly comes with a level of barrier breaking discomfort living in our professional lives but it also meant I was exposed to opportunities that I'm not remembering as an adult.

**AJ:** Do you feel like there's something about navigating that? I totally agree that there's, that's it's wonderful to have more exposure to things to kind of get the opportunity to get to experience things you otherwise might not have but I know that sometimes people also talk about how it's important for their self to go back to their community so they don't feel like the only one and I'm wondering if that factors into your self care ever?

**JG:** Ya know a part of moving back to Austin i'd also reconnecting with family um I had family, I have a sister and nephews in New York so it wasn't like I was without family but ya know my mom is in Austin. My family when we come together we usually do it in Austin so uh not just the kind of uh activity or bring out in the sun uk motivated me to move back to Austin but it also reconnecting with family, I've spent more time with my mother in the past three months then I have probably in the last 15 years and we are playing scrabble, we are going to the gym, we are watching this show called American Ninja that I had no idea even existed and I'm now addicted to it because my mother introduced it to me and it's like the most exciting thing i'm doing in my life and I find myself thinking, "Wow, I'm watching American Ninja as everybody is watching whatever the President is saying or doing at this point and I don't feel like i'm missing out on a thing" and it's beautiful so certainly reconnecting with family was a big motivator to move home and knowing in my life professionally right now, I had that freedom to do that and I might not have that in a year or two years, so to take advantage of that was also really important.

**AJ:** Yeah, totally. Um so you used to lead Rock the Vote and then even in your engagement with me I feel like you're a person who's really invested in young people and their political participation and I'm wondering how you think about the connection between civic engagement and self care.

**JG:** You know, certainly for me, um civic engagement for a big part of my life and still now has been a part of my self care where I don't think I could function in the most productive or um quality way where I would be happy if I wasn't working on issues that affected marginalized communities, vulnerable communities trying to ya know really connect and enfranchise people i'm with their political power and so civic engagement I think is an important ingredient for self care especially as it relates to building community and hopefully those that fall in the community offline. I think a lot of civic engagement has moved to the online space and so you lose that aspect of how it is actually a big important part of self care and I've been very intentional not just with this move, in the past few months of getting off of social media. For example, that's why I'm in Miami with Vote Run Lead and were trying to run for office and I know that there's a lot of, there's a lot of really hard issue that were confronted with right now, it has been extremely, extremely hard and difficult these past couple weeks with the separation of families and the Muslim ban and now with Justice Kennedy's retirement it's just one thing after the other, but the work that I do with Vote Run Lead to train women to run for office has fueled my soul in way that I am talking with folks who don't have that type of work and they don't know where to find hope in their life. They don't know where to ya know find the light in a lot of this darkness and without this work that I'm doing with Vote Run Lead I don't think I would be surviving this moment very well so it is, it is really really important um for my quality of life to be engaging people in finding their political voice, in building a political power and ya know standing up for the issues they care about and being it's because it fuels my soul.

**AJ:** As you're doing that with folks, what uh what advice do you have for them about how to make sure that they're doing it in a healthy way to prevent burnout so that they're not like

running themselves into the ground and you know burning out before like thirty? \*laughing\* Uh how do you kind of navigate that, especially as someone who, ya know, did burn out at one point?

**JG:** Yeah! I mean I-- I left Rock the Vote after five and half, six years and I remember there had been this moment when Cher uh had cancelled the concert because she was suffering from so called "exhaustion" and it was the first time I had heard this term "exhaustion" and I remember thinking to myself like, "*Oh my gosh*, these celebrities! They just make up everything, right?" And when I ended my time at Rock the Vote, I didn't know initially that I was suffering from exhaustion. I couldn't function. I-- I literally stopped and just stood in place, in my professional life, in my personal life, for about six months because I had been on the road 300 days out of the year, my entire life was *only* focused on work. And so to your question of the advice I would give would be to do the opposite \*laughs\* of what I did when I was in uh my thirties where my entire life was work. And if it wasn't related to the work I was doing, it had no place in my life. I didn't create any space for it and that almost killed me. It almost killed me with a very serious uh anemic problem that I had because I let my fibroid sgo on to a place of where my doctor called me after some tests and said, "Yeah, you need to uh get to the emergency right now. I don't even know how you're standing. I haven't seen anyone with these levels um be able to actually function." And I went to the hospital and had to get five pints of blood transfused um because all I cared about was work. All I cared about was the impact. All I cared about was the results and I had to like come to grips, through this very serious health situation, with that I can't make impact if I'm not alive. I can't like have results to these issues that mean so much to these communities and mean so much to me if I can barely stand because I don't have enough red blood cells. Um so you know, for me it was having to face that very dire situation and my advice would be don't let it get that far. Um I'm very fortunate that in that moment I went to the hospital. I'm very fortunate that my mentor actually looked at me and said, "You don't look well. I need you to go check in to the doctor and see what's going on with you." In that moment, my boss said, "Go take care of yourself." And I hadn't been telling myself to go take care of myself.

**AJ:** Yeah. So speaking of uh your work with Fox, what do you do to keep your cool as a democratic strategist on Fox? As like the you know as the democrat on Fox, how do you do that and how do you *especially* do that being a black woman and the kind of tropes that black women are often kind of antagonized into performing?

**JG:** I do hear from folks all the time like, "How do you keep your calm?" It's it's not actually that hard because I think of it as, I'm having a conversation and when someone says something that's ridiculous in my normal life, I don't necessarily pop off at them. A lot of times I'll just laugh in their face. A lot of times I smile. A lot of times you respond with humor. Um it's not normal from a human interactions standpoint to always be at level ten.

**AJ:** Mhmm.

**JG:** And I think we've gotten to this place where, in media, that we think like to be successful, you have to be at ten when you can actually dial it back and be engaged in an issue or conversation that you're really passionate about that has really strong meaning to communities um in many cases can really be a life or death and you can really have authentic conversation. And I think that's what audiences are looking for. They're looking for authentic conversations. They're not looking for performances! And so I have no interest in performing. Uh that's not, that's not who I am.

**AJ:** Yeah. Do you think--

**JG:** Except for at karaoke.

**AJ:** \*laughs\* Do you think, do you think kind of that authenticity and also not being at a ten means that when you are at a ten it's just much more notable.

**JG:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And the Fox News audience knows when I'm at a ten and I get feedback that they can see that if an issue, if a conversation is going to get me to the level, I think they take notice that, "Oh wait a second. This must be a little different dynamic here. I need to pay closer attention to it." Um and you know Aditi it is also very intentional as a black woman, and knowing that when, not to conservatives but even, this is with the progressive community and the democrats that this is the angry black woman. And so I'm also very intentional and able to stop myself from playing into that type of perspective from a strategy standpoint. Um I don't think it helps any cause or any issue that I care a lot about and want to move forward to fall into that trap. Now, even in times where I might be angry about something, I keep in mind, "how is the audience going to respond to that anger?" And that's what helps me stay calm.

**AJ:** Yeah its, you know, I think you're right from a strategy standpoint that you always have to be mindful of how you are perceived and received but at the same time there is something just deeply frustrating about knowing that you have to do work that you know other people don't have to do because they don't-- there's not that same baggage and stereotypes that exist for them.

**JG:** Yeah! It is frustrating and I certainly am not perfect at it. I've lost my cool \*laughs\* on many occasions and um you know certainly around things that are very connected to my family of you know formerly undocumented immigrants, my parents having immigrated from Liberia.

**AJ:** So, we talked about kind of your perspective as someone who is often um on the news. What advice do you have for people um given that there's just so much news, a lot of it's really bad, so what advice do you give to people who are kind of hopeless to the current state of news? We spoke about it a little bit when we were talking about civic engagement but I'm just wondering your perspective on that.

**JG:** So certainly, first and foremost is to get off of social media. I have done that certainly more so of late where I'll take weeks off of Facebook. I will have very limited engagement on Twitter and I'm say that as someone who works in the media! But I had to check myself and make a decision of: Is this helping or is this hurting? And so by removing myself from those conversations, it has been extremely helpful but I know that I'm also really really far away from hopelessness right now and it's due to the fact that I am focused, I mean *laser* focused on the one thing I can do to make a difference, the one thing that I can do to move us forward and that's training women to run for office. So the work that I'm doing to train women to run for office on a weekly basis proves, it provides this instant gratification for me that you know what? It's all gonna be alright and it's because of these women and their stories and their commitment and their passion and the opportunity that they are bringing to our politics um and I wouldn't get that if I was reading my Facebook feed or you know stuck on Twitter all day. I think you have to get offline and really find the one thing that you can do to make a difference. And that, for me, is this.

**AJ:** So on that amazing note, I want to thank all of our listeners for listening to another episode of Self Care Sundays. I am excited to announce that Self Care Sundays is now streaming on Spotify and RadioPublic. Before we wrap up here, I want to offer a special shout-out to our patrons on Patreon. Their generosity makes our show possible and are a huge reason why you're hearing this episode today. We are especially grateful for the support of our super contributors:

Vicky B.

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**AJ:** Jehmu um it was so great to have you on today. Where can our listeners find you on social media although you often are taking breaks from it.

**JG:** \*laughs\* Yes they can certainly find my social media accounts, I can't promise that they're going to get content um you know constant on stream but um [@Jehmu](https://twitter.com/Jehmu) on Twitter, J-E-H-M-U. I'm the only Jehmu on Facebook, I think. It's great, at first I thought a name like Jehmu would make it hard but as long as you put in J-E-H-M-U, you'll be able to find me on all of the different platforms: Instagram, Facebook, social.

**AJ:** Awesome! Um I'd like to thank the person who made our show art - Leah Horowitz and the amazing artists who made our show music, 4WheelCity.

On behalf of our producer Jess Talwar, our communications interns Kennedy Freeman and Sophie Gomez, our audio engineer Cato Zane, and myself, thank you for listening and we'll see you next week.