

Speaker 1: Welcome to Change Making Connections, the podcast where transformative talks on social justice, leadership and beyond become more than just words. I'm your host, Beth Barilla. Each month I invite a global change leader to talk with me about the strategies and tactics that they use to cultivate deep transformation in their lives, their communities and their organizations. Tune in to changemaking connections for your monthly dose of inspiration and insight. Let's create a ripple of change together.

Speaker 2: Hi everyone, and welcome to this episode of Change Making Connections. I am so excited today to talk with my friends and co-conspirators and colleagues Mona Khan and Peter Godard. We've had the amazing opportunities to work together in the past. Just before we got on this recording, we were having our usual story sharing and laughter and deep connection that I hope I'm sure will continue during our conversation today. Just a brief bio and then I'll go ahead and put all of these in the show notes. Mona Khan, one of the social identity coaching lab. Co-creator has worked domestically and internationally built innovative participatory models for strengthening organizations and co conspired with women's L-G-B-T-I-Q, natural resource and Labor Rights organizations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the us. She identifies as brown, Desi, culturally Muslim, gen X, cisgender, heterosexual, and a mother third culture kid. Mona grew up in the global south, always aware of the education, skin color, and economic privilege reduced her vulnerability to harm.

Speaker 2: She comes from a family that holds intergenerational trauma and the legacy of partition in India and its history. She works with clients to cultivate resilience, bring their whole selves to the table and stand in their power. Peter Godard social Identity coaching lab. Co-creator is a leadership and equity coach who works for many years in the US K through 12 educational system. He is a white man, queer and part of Generation X from his French Canadian and Irish-American farmer lineage. He inherited the ability to grow a delicious tomato, unearned racial gender and economic privilege, and a commitment to justice. At the core. His coaching and facilitation centers joy, belonging, and justice. He invites clients to explore identity and power through the wisdom of their emotions and the body. He cultivates joy by co-creating community, a habit modeled by his parents who operated a small town grocery store where neighbors came and went all day long.

Speaker 2: Mona and Peter, thank you for being here today with me. Thanks for having us. Nice to be with you. As I was reading these and connecting with you, I just was reminded again at just the power of story and just the presence of joy and groundedness and awareness and connection. You both just bring in everything that I've ever experienced you doing. So thank you for that in the world. Maybe we can start by just having you tell us a little bit about your work that you do in the world and the kind of leadership and context where you work together.

Speaker 3: Sure. So this is Peter and Mona and I agreed before we began that I would speak first today, Beth, it's really good just to see your face and to connect with you. Yeah, maybe we could start with a couple of stories. I'll start with a couple of stories and Mona might share some as well. So Mona and I have been friends before. We were colleagues and work together for, I don't know, a number of years now. We met when we were both in

transition in our careers becoming coaches, going through coach training, and our work in the world really is centered around the question of power, identity and coaching. How can we support people to grow, to shift to work for justice, to co conspire for justice, not from a place of shame or guilt, but from a place of getting deeply grounded and appreciative about our own stories, our own identities, and then how we connect with other people from that sort of grounded place of really deeply loving ourselves and our stories.

Speaker 3: So in terms of who I am in the world, the work I do, I will put the joyful co-conspirator of Mona Khan at the top of the list always. We really have fun working together and we get drawn into all kinds of situations that I think we surprise our former selves at how comfortable we are in conversations where teams are in deep conflict or situations where people are really suffering or struggling with contexts where they feel their voices aren't welcome, where their voices are silenced and erased, and we step in and feel like we are a resource to do that work because we enter as humans first, we invite others to do the same. So as you were reading our professional backgrounds, we both have done a lot of work in the world, but when we created those bios, we almost didn't want to include the resume details because it's not the work we have done that we value about ourselves and each other, but really who we are and the stories we carry that we value and our ability to invite others to tell their stories. So I'll stop there, but it's really great to be with you and those are a few things that come up when you ask about the work I do.

Speaker 4: So I was thinking about the first time that Peter and I came together and part of how we came together, and Beth, I'm not sure maybe we shared this before, is we started having conversations and we couldn't stop having those conversations about identity and power. And we found that there was a lot of, I would say, hesitation to have these conversations in the coaching space and even in the sort of world, these conversations felt rather sort of dicey or daunting. And so it started with these conversations in a shared passion for these issues. And ultimately I think we came together to define the values that we hold dear, what we say so that our audio, what we say we do matches our video. What we actually do, and it was sort of coming together and realizing for us and doing work around equity and transformation and belonging and conflict was really around five core values.

Speaker 4: One being joy, centering joy and restoration as part of what will make potentially or seed the soil for lasting change, which is not something you normally hear when you're talking about quote unquote DEI issues, as I like to say. It was a bit odd. And so we found we were both odd in this shared ground, which was great. And then there were a few others that another was about shifting power, that we were explicit that our commitment is to supporting others to shift power and to share power. Another was that ultimately we're seeking to support folks to self-define on their own terms not to understand. Yes, there is a narrative, there's a world that shapes us or sees us in certain ways, but really support folks to connect to their own wisdom and to self define however they see fit, to really discover and map out that landscape for themselves.

Speaker 4: Another is sort of co-creation that we really are about building community and co-conspiracy. How can we really honor the humans in the room help invite their ideas, their passion, their wisdom, so that what's created is really reflective of multiple perspectives. And I think the final one, we like to say, we can't think our way to liberation. We have to feel and experience it. So one of the joys of being Peter's joyful co-conspirator is really all that I've learned from him. And in our work around how do we lean into our mind, body, spirit, wisdom. There's a reason there are neurotransmitters in our gut. And so when we support folks to really lean into and trust and explore somatically what they're carrying, the work shifts from tactical to transformational. And I even as Peter would say, water gathering behind the eyes When I think about what that experience has been like for me, for us and for the clients we work with.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I also am feeling it. I'm feeling both my so must settle by being in your presence. Again, for the listeners, Mona, Peter and I have done some work together and then we win our separate ways over the summer. The three of us, the two of you have been working. And so being back in space with you again, even a virtual is settling my soma. And also just this ability that this presence that you both have in every experience I've ever been in with you, where you can hold the complexity alongside the joy and the human is like one isn't without the other, and sometimes in some equity or DEI spaces, the complexity overshadows some of the other pieces in ways that make it hard to show up authentically and in connection. And one of the gifts I think you two really have is being able to hold all of that alongside joy. And I'm curious, I love that you said that honoring your values and the way that you approach the work and the communities with whom you work shifts from, I can't even read my own writing here, technical to transformational. How do you see the difference between the two or feel the difference between the two?

Speaker 4: I think what comes to mind for me and Peter as we often say to one another, and Beth, I think for us a lot of coaching or consulting can be tactical. It can be transactional, it can be what do we do here? And I think I often say when I'm talking to clients, for instance, about sort of in one-on-one coaching is we can do coaching or we can have conversations where it's really about what are the steps you want to take for this particular issue or this particular meeting or challenge. But what I think Peter and I are best suited for, Peter starts shaking your head rapidly if you disagree with this, but what I think we're best suited for is people and organizations, networks, coalitions, whatever it may be that are seeking personal and or professional transformation. And by that I mean sort of really leaning into what do we want to be ancestors to and what does that mean in terms of the journey ahead and really engaging folks in MINDBODY spirit individually and collectively in a journey that can feel generative, that is unpredictable.

Speaker 4: And I think part of our role, have I completely gone off tangent? I may have, but part of our role here I think is we really stay with our clients. So as long as we stay with them, as long as we're listening deeply and really noticing what's happening, mirroring what we're hearing and witnessing and experiencing, and really inviting them to step into this journey as opposed to receive it that consistently. I find clients experience significant transformation and they'll often give us credit, which cracks us up. And what we'll often

say is, you are doing this. I think what we are doing is really, as you were talking about Beth sort of holding that space saying, we hear you. We notice you. We want to co-create space so you can really lean into who you are, name the things that are challenging, work through them together. It's almost like if we can get out of the way, if we can really help you put aside what's really getting in the way of your own learning and growth and your own sense of agency, your own sense of, Hey, what do I think here? What do I feel? Who am I? Who are we? Then that's the work.

Speaker 3: What you shared really resonates for me, Mona. And maybe I can just offer two stories that maybe make concrete in my own life where in my own mind some of what we're talking about. So one of them is this morning I went for a walk with my husband Bob, and I found myself talking about a time where I was fairly new as a leader. I might've been 30 years old and someone had the wisdom. I'm using air quotes for those who can't see my face to put me the responsibility of organizing, coordination, and learning for 30 data analysts who were in different geographic locations all over the city of Chicago. We all worked for Chicago public schools, and I felt totally overwhelmed. I already had a full plate of work before I received this responsibility. And although I had a lot, I thought I could offer everybody in these jobs had a lot that they had to offer too.

Speaker 3: And I thought, oh my God, they're going to see that I'm an idiot, or what could I possibly do with our monthly time together that could be meaningful to these people? And I just felt totally inadequate. So I turned to a new hire who was on my team who had filled one of those roles, and she just looked at me with a wisdom that I can now recognize and kind of smile and look back at. And she said, you don't have to have the answer. They already have the answer. Your job is to facilitate their sharing with one another and add something where you have something to add. And that is what I can sort of point to as my first real aha moment of what co-creation really looks like. And it's what we do with the teams we work with. We're supporting them to figure out what co-creation looks like for them.

Speaker 3: And some of the people that we work with come with these tremendous co-creation skills and other people, it's something really new to them or people know how to do it, but they need to build the relationships that are necessary to make it possible. So a lot of the work that we do, either within a team or in one of our liberation learning communities where we're bringing together people who don't work together but maybe work in the same sector or have a shared cause is really around building the relationships and habits that make co-creation possible. And I look back at that younger version of myself and think, wow, I really wish somebody would've put me in a liberation learning community. I could have really shortcut some of the things that were hard to learn. So that's one story. And the other story that comes to mind is just I think in a lot of DEI diversity, equity and inclusion spaces, there's a way in which the importance can make the conversations very performative or it can make the actions feel very much like we need to go through and check off a lot of boxes.

Speaker 3: I was talking with a friend where the go-to habit in their team is, oh, everybody's overwhelmed. Let's have a pizza party. As opposed to everyone's overwhelmed, maybe

we need to check on them as humans, or maybe we need to look at our strategy and see if we need to reduce the workload. And so when Mona, you described the difference between transactional and transformational, I think some of what we do for teams and for individuals is to help them live in that world of what are the real root causes here? What are the habits or the mindsets that need to shift in order to make things possible as opposed to sort of the pizza party side of what coaching or culture shift consulting could look like.

Speaker 4: I think there's so much about that that's about noticing with love. So we might, Beth, I'm curious to hear your stories about this that I think about. There was a time when we were with an executive team that was highly challenged, and I can't remember which one of us offered this, but one of us said, and that was part of the agreement with the team, is that we would be there to name what we noticed and support them to explore. And we were listening for some time, and then one of us said, so I notice that the topics raised by men are explored on this team and the topics raised by women are not. What's that about?

Speaker 4: And there was absolute silence and this team that had been so focused on, oh, we have a DEI issue, meaning that is entirely about race. Yes, certainly racial justice, racial equity, were live issues. And also simply noticing and noticing from a place of curiosity and empathy offered them aha moment or they actually experienced an aha moment of, oh, well actually, and it just shifted the conversation and it wasn't advice. It was simply listening deeply and naming what we noticed and not from a place of this is how it is, but from a place of that's what we notice. Is that what you're noticing and how do you make sense of it? So I think Peter, I don't know. I would say that's also a significant part of what we do, right? Is that noticing with love.

Speaker 2: Yeah. My experience of being in your presence is that that love is really evident. I remember one of the things that really attracted me to both of you was we were all in a training session together, a coaching training together. That's where we first met. It was virtual, so everybody was online, very big program, not particularly social justice grounded. And so those of us who were gravitated to each other, and every time you both showed up either in the chat or more in other ways, it was just so loving and accountable at the same time in ways that we don't always see people for good reason. I mean, we don't always have this, I certainly don't always have the skills. You're both often more generous than I can be in some spaces. And it just models for me. I remember my Soma gravitating towards it that we need more of this ability to be present.

Speaker 2: And I love Peter, you said, or Mona, I can't remember which one of you said it, the relations and habits that make co-creation possible and Alterna the ones that block it, and just the ways of showing up in our structures, our organizations, our professional, our personal lives that get in the way of those authentic relationships, even when they're hard, they can be loving and funny. You two are hilarious, but also able to have really intense and hard conversations, and that's a skill that I really honor and value. I don't know that all of us change makers have it. I know that I am still growing that

muscle. I'm curious, and feel free to jump in if anything, you have a little tangent you want to talk about, but I'm curious if you want to share more about your liberation learning communities and also how we get in one, but we can put that in the chat notes, how to contact Mona and Peter because they're fantastic, but tell us more about the liberation learning communities. They sound so empowering and transformational.

Speaker 3: Thank you first of all, Beth, for what you mirrored. We both think that with leaders, with change makers, everybody has superpowers. Everybody has their own version of queer magic, and it feels really lovely to hear you mirror the queer magic or the superpowers that you see in us. So thank you. We really do love our clients and we love the work that we do. We are very careful to select clients where we feel like we can be a good fit and not just a good fit, but where we can have joy in doing the work and the clients can have joy in doing the work. And the first time Mona said this with the client, I was like, oh, can you say that in a business development conversation? But Mona said, we're not everybody's cup of tea, and that's okay. I have come to adore that.

Speaker 3: I think we say that and almost every time we meet a new client, because we do our work in a very particular way that centers joy, that centers mind, body and spirit that centers shifting power. And I would say liberation learning communities is probably one of the places where we have had the most fun doing those kinds of things. They look different in different contexts, but what is usually common is that it's a group of between five and 12 people who are all committed to making change and working for justice. There's usually four key aspects of the activities that we engage in. But it varies because speaking of co-creation, and we have never had a liberation learning community where the whole purpose of the community or what happens in any given session that is core to the experience, that what happens here is entirely determined by the participants.

Speaker 3: And so part of where we have fun there is that that is already shifting power compared to a learning process where some objectives are set for the group potentially by somebody who's not part of the group. So within that framework, we often offer an element that's about restoration and healing an element that is about connecting and building community. An element of building skill, again, really based on what do the people in this community want to build skill around? And often that can look like telling stories. What are some situations in which you had to stand in your power and what did you learn from them? That can be a real skill building kind of conversation as opposed to here are Mona and Peter's top five tips about how to stand in your power. And then the last is co strategizing, really harnessing the collective power of the group to make change in the field that they work. So I'll stop there. Mona, I'm curious where you want to take the co-creation from here in terms of describing this.

Speaker 4: I think what I would add, what came to mind is, so I grew up in the Philippines and Pakistan, and so it took me some time to discover a Lorde and Pat Parker, Betina love and others, and I'm carrying the words of Pat Parker with me in this moment. And I might pet Mark Parker in the universe wherever you may be, or your spirit may be, forgive me if I get this wrong, but she said something like The day all the parts of me can



come along is the day we would have what I would call revolution. And I struggle to say that without bursting into tears because it feels so powerful, so joyful, so extraordinary to me. And Peter, I think part of what we are supporting folks to do in these community spaces is really invite and construct for themselves, reconstruct, unpack, explore, connect to inhabit all the parts of the self that they bring.

Speaker 4: So it's both a very personal journey and a collective one, because we live in a world that is designed as you and I like to say that is designed to silence or erase to shape us rather than be shaped by us. And so to have a felt experience of being in a place where who you are, where you get to kind of construct and connect to all the parts and to really experience it and then be in community with others, seeds, the soil, right, for that conspiring for equity and justice, for how do we shift power in the bigger world in which we live? So that's what I would add. And I think we have met. The other thing I would add is Beth, I think in the lead up to this conversation, one of the things you may have asked us is what gives us hope in doing this work?

Speaker 4: I thought that is such a bloody good question. And I think part of what gives me hope is we have met extraordinary people. They're badass, they're bedazzled, they're up to, as my people would say, up to good glab, up to good trouble. And so that we're inspired by them. So I think Peter, one of the things that, okay, here's a third thing I'm adding, which is the joy. We get so much joy Beth from this work because there are so many extraordinary people. And what we often like to say is our hope is that you can experience yourself as we experience you because what's possible when folks come together in this kind of a way, there's an alchemy to it. There's a magic to it that is an honor to witness and yeah,

Speaker 2: Oh wow. I'm feeling the magic through the screen, through the universe across the states that we are currently sitting in just how much we can all heal and how much can transform in the world when we can bring all the parts of ourselves, not only in the space in the room, but as an integrated whole that we each individually and collectively have a role in shaping, as you said, one of my favorite sematic. I haven't worked personally with this person, but I've read their work. And of course because menopausal brain, I am now forgetting the name, but I will put it in the show notes. It's astounding to me what flies out of my brain these days, but said that somatics isn't just about acknowledging how we have been shaped, but that we get to shape back that it's both and right? And I also have seen both in my work with coaching clients or equity partners through consulting, but also through working with students and other colleagues, the incredible inspiration and hope that can come when people claim their full power and step into that agency and work with each other to co-create that beautiful hole that can come when we create together, which is bigger than anything that we could individually bring.

Speaker 2: I'm also curious, a couple of my students just recently have reflected that it's really challenging for them to self-reflect, and I even invited some reflections on where their identities have been a source of strength and beauty and insight, Allah, our identity story work together. And some of them had a really hard time with that because they'd never

thought about that before, which isn't surprising, but I'm curious. It makes me wonder, I can feel the magic that would happen in the kinds of spaces that you're talking about. And what about those of us who have a really hard time claiming those parts of our power because of everything that has happened or maybe resistance or blocks? How do we work with that in a loving way? Not that I'm expecting answers, but just like, can you solve that problem? But just as a dialogue together, I can imagine some people being like their soul just resonating with this conversation and other people, I'm hungry for it, but I have no idea where I would even start.

Speaker 3: So Mona and I, let me be really clear. I'm not holding the answer Beth,

Speaker 3: But I would love to in this conversation and in my lifetime co-create some knowledge to understand this better. But I will say one thing, we asked people who had been through this experience to reflect with us about what was meaningful for them. And two stories stand out to me. One is about belonging but not belonging in the sort of a sense that the word is often used where I fit in here. But there's a way in which what I think participants reflected to us, they experienced is it was transformational and healing to be in a space where I was fully invited to participate wherever I was with all of my identities. And there's no expectation that I'd be like, you sound like you think you carry the same identities as you for each of us to both take up all our space with all of our identities and also to carry the expectation that we can build a relationship with one another. So I think that's part of it from one story. And then another person who we adore said something like, well, you two certainly don't mess around.

Speaker 3: I went back recently and I heard the recording of this. I was trying to make sense of this for myself, and I was sitting by myself in my living room, thank God Bob, my husband wasn't even home. And I just bursted out laughing. And I haven't told you this mud, but I laughed so hard I cried because I don't think of myself that way. But the way this person was reflecting on the experience was you made it clear upfront that this was going to be a space in which nothing was going to be extracted from you. Nothing going to be expected from you. But the invitation to reflect, the invitation to be real, the invitation to name what's true for you was explicit from the beginning. And I think as this person was sharing this, I don't feel they felt like the expectation or the invitation was high, but they also felt really supported.

Speaker 3: And it made me realize as a one-on-one coach, I do a lot of that work too, as does Mona, that the labor of reflecting in that way, one-on-one can be a lot for some people. And so doing that in community I think for me is part of the answer to the question that you posed that it may be really hard to connect to my stories or it might be painful to connect to my stories, or there may be a barrier between me and my stories that is there for good reason, it's a trauma response or it's based on how I have made myself successful and well up until now. But somehow what I notice is that when people are modeling for each other, this is what it looks like to imperfectly connect to my stories and share them with you, it seems to get easier.



Speaker 4: And I think my mind is going in so many different directions that I'm sitting here thinking, which thread do I choose? I think what part of what is coming up for me is, Peter, you and I have often been heard from clients, and early on we were a bit perplexed by it because we didn't quite know what to do with it or how to take it. But consistently clients were saying, Peter and I have said, we're very explicit that we have very different ways of identifying very different looped experiences, different sort of relationships to privilege and different ways of noticing and understanding the world. And the way in which we experience one another's differences is then part of what we're offering any coach, what any coach or consultant is that the way you experience differences in one another or the way a community of people can experience difference with one another can really shift something from a zero sum or an adversarial space to a learning space, a generative space.

Speaker 4: And I was thinking, Beth, about what you said that, well, what are, okay? There may be certain kinds of conversations where I remember one time coming home and my husband said, so how was it? And I'd just been with my sister and and I said, it was amazing. We had a three hour conversation about the difference between fear and anxiety, and there was this dead silence. And my husband said, I'm so glad you have them, right? Because that is not a conversation that he would ever really want to have. But I think when you have spaces where each person is bringing a different way of navigating or understanding the world and you make space for it, there is different wisdom, different learning, different ways of being, doing and knowing that then can sort of weave together. And so that in our experience has been really, really powerful as a way of surfacing wisdom that wouldn't come otherwise and as a way also of meeting folks where they are.

Speaker 4: So for some really, they may be seeking restoration and healing for others it may be, okay, what does it mean to get real about equity here? So here's the action that we want to take, or here's what this means to me. And for someone else, what equity and inclusion or diversity means might be something very, very different. And so often we go straight to, well, what's the DEI plan when really what we have found is making space for, well, what meaning does that have for each person? What would that look like to get real about equity and not to see these as competing definitions or ideas so much as what are the wisdom? What are the ways forward that we can connect across these different ways of navigating can give us, right? And so I think that's maybe also part of the magic. I think hopefully any coach offers. And I think what we often seek to offer an liberation learning community

Speaker 2: So needed, I have this vision of a group of people kind of weaving a quilt or a web of community, each kind of holding the gifts and wisdom they offer, which will be needed, what you offer is needed in a different way than what I offer. And that when we create the space for all of that to be able to serve the way it community serve, community serve justice, liberation in the way that it's meant to, we seed and grow a very different world, but when everybody's kind of forced to get in line. And the other example that came to me as you were talking was just the early negotiations of my wife and I in our marriage and how we show up very, very differently. And we were having a very hard

time figuring that out as we tried to get the other one to come along to our O way of doing things until we realized the beauty of partnership and that she carries things in some ways, I carry them in others.

Speaker 2: And when we create space for both of them and understand the different roles that each can play, life is a lot easier. But also it's just richer. It's just more abundant. And our partnership is more nourished and think about how that can be kind of rippled out. And that really is in my view, not that it should be me speaking, but I'm even skeptical of the language of DEI because it feels like the most current buzzword. And we've all been doing this work, we've seen many buzzwords come and go and it can be helpful to speak a language that people recognize, but ultimately underneath it is what it is we're trying to create beneath the labels. So I'm curious, there were other questions that we talked about and so I'm happy to go in whatever direction you feel like, but I'm curious, given our work together, if it's worth spending a little bit of time talking about why stories are so important, come up several times, and one of the gifts of working with you is that there are always stories, and I love them and they seem really important to the liberatory world that you support people in co-creating. Shall we talk a little bit about why stories?

Speaker 4: Sure,

Speaker 3: That sounds great.

Speaker 4: So I have a nagging thought that keeps, nagging is the wrong word, it's just following me along and it's not quite on story, so I want to That's

Speaker 2: Okay, invite it into the

Speaker 4: Space. You can take this out. No worries. And I think it connects to story in part, I think there is this idea that many in the coaching community, I think in coaching programs of the coach is blank slate. And we've talked about this in the past. And yes, my perspective is that of course, ultimately as equity practitioners, as coaches, we really want to center the voices of those in the room that we're supporting. And also if we are asking folks to harness the courage to express who they are, to be who they are, explore who they are, and not to do so ourselves, doesn't feel in line with our own values. And so story is sort of, and there's a way in which folks externalize work around equity and justice and DEI, right? So it's about a system shifting, which of course it is, but it's about other people shifting or other practices or leaders.

Speaker 4: And I think what we have found is identity. And we often we'll get approached by coaches or leaders organizations to say, what's the plan here? Or what should we do here? Or how do we talk about this? And what we often say is equity work starts with the self, right? That unless we're on our own journey around how identity and power and privilege and vulnerability has shaped us and the lens we carry and how we make sense of the world, that we are far less likely to be able to do something meaningful around equity in the world in general. And so I think that's partly Beth where story

comes in. Partly it's for us, I think a lot of this is about what does this mean for you personally, individually so that you can then begin to navigate this work in community or collectively with others. But I think story is such a powerful way to reach, to connect, to build community and what we call co conspiracy, that which requires centering humans, which requires revealing who we are, not expecting that, but really inviting that.

Speaker 4: And also I think it's where we're more likely to, I don't know. I think it, for me, story creates a bit of a magic where you can connect with one another, you can connect to your own sense of joy and history. I think it helps move people out of the professional. Let's connect as our titles and our institution space and really begins to build that, oh, here's who we are. And when people feel seen and connected, they're so much more likely and more able in our experience to conspire for equity to get real about what can we do together to shift power. I don't know. Peter, what comes to mind for you when it comes to story? Why do we tell so many stories and listen to so many stories?

Speaker 3: Can I tell a story about story?

Speaker 4: Please do. It's very meta.

Speaker 3: I have so many thoughts about this. I'm sure we could do a whole short podcast just on this question, but a story comes to mind for me, which is one of our values is self-definition. And I think one of the, it's not the beginning and the end of equity and justice work, but without self-definition, I think we have found that really meaningful work for equity and justice isn't possible. And so in one way, story is a shortcut to that. Joy is also a requirement, and we have found story is a shortcut to joy. So I would say without going meta, which I will, those are two ideas that come to mind. The meta is that I think it connects us within ourselves to a sense of groundedness. And I think it opens possibilities for connection with others.

Speaker 3: So I think the story I'd want to tell is when I was 16, I had a parent who passed away suddenly, and it was an experience that really got me to sort of shut down a lot until a later point in my life. So much so that I really struggled when somebody else had loss in their life to even know how to be there for them. And so one day someone really important to me passed away, and I got on a zoom call with Mona and she said, how are you? And I said, well, this happened. And all Mona did for 20 minutes was to say, can you tell me a story about what made this person so important to you? And can you tell me a story about a time where that person was filled with joy and suddenly I became the best guest at any waker funeral? Because everybody would stand around awkwardly and I would say, oh, I'm really sorry to hear about your dad. Can you tell me a story about him?

Speaker 3: So I don't even know if I've told you this, Mona, but I think part of the reason that we tell story, what I'm learning from that, why am I telling you this in regard to why do we tell stories, is I think stories are deeply human. I think when everything else has fallen apart and we're at a moment where somebody we care about has died, the one thing that I have seen that can still help is telling stories. And that's coming from somebody who is,

as I told you, the reason really uncomfortable in that situation. And so I think if story can help there, then my God, where else can it help? How can it not help when we're building community? How can it not help when we're in conflict? How can it not help when we're trying to connect to our deepest sense of purpose?

Speaker 4: It's a really beautiful story. Thank you for sharing that. I am thinking, Beth, about what you, in our work, there are some who love story, who think, oh yes, count me in. Here are a thousand stories. And there are those who say, oh, no, no, thank you. I'm not a storyteller. I don't have stories to tell. So maybe it's not always about telling it, right? Maybe it's about experiencing it or reconnecting to it or reclaiming it that there's so many ways of connecting to a story. And do we have time if we don't? Sure. No, that's fine. I was thinking about, for somebody who's thinking okay story, what do you mean? The story that comes to mind for me is a client I was working with, this was many years ago, who was a young person coming in recently elevated into a leadership position and really wanted tips and tools for building confidence and holding what she described as an imposter syndrome.

Speaker 4: She said at one point, you have to understand I'm a blue collar person walking into the boardroom. And it was a throwaway line. She was sort of racing towards another point she wanted to make. And I said, can we explore that? What does that mean to be a blue collar person? And it was so, evokes such a deeply emotional reaction that we had to stop the session and we figured out over time, okay, when you're ready to have this conversation, we can have it if you'd like. And so we resumed another time and she said, okay, I'm ready to explore it. And what we unpacked together was sort of the story of what does it mean to be blue collar? And this woman who was walking into a boardroom holding this idea of, oh, I'm unlike these peers who are much more class privileged who have gone to these Ivy League schools or whatever it may be.

Speaker 4: They're so much better prepared. She was holding that story and when we began to unpack what is the story of being blue collar, she was connecting to, oh, it means I'm deeply resourceful. Oh, it means I'm committed to my family and to community. It means I'm hardworking. It means I honor my commitments. It means I am energetic and hardworking. I mean, then she created the story of what it meant to be blue collar. And then coming out on the other side of that exploring and sharing of story was realizing, oh, wait a minute, I'm a badass, which is an American term I've now adopted, right? I'm a badass. What do you mean? Of course my people are built for tough times. I can do this. But it was really connecting to story that allowed her to do that, that a thousand tips and tools, however great they are, would not have offered her that.

Speaker 2: Yeah, wow. Thank you for sharing that and coming from within, coming from within her own truth and mirrored back by someone in relationship with her was part of it. Tools and tricks would've been an external transactional thing. Might be helpful at times, but not the deep transformation. Thank you to being in conversation and community with you is always so life affirming. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

Speaker 3: Thank you, Beth.

Speaker 4: Yeah, thank you. Beth, thank you for being our co-conspirator in the identity story work and thank you for being interested in what we do and for holding this space for us to share what we do. We hold it so dear this work and our commitments so dear that it feels like a privilege to be able to share this with you and have you kind of mirror and dialogue with us around that. So thank you so much for inviting us in.

Speaker 2: My pleasure. It's really inspiring to me and very healing to be in conversation with the people who come on the show doing amazing work in different realms. And I particularly am inspired and empowered by the way. I mean, I think we've all talked about how some elements of the coaching world, at least as some of us have experienced it, don't necessarily support this deeper transformation liberatory work. And sometimes I think seem really scared by it, but the way you approach it is just so life-giving that I want the world to know about it. So thank you so much.