

How Dan navigates hard conversations

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0:00:01 Nicole Antoinette: I'm Nicole Antoinette, and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. Today's episode is part of our new series called But How Though, where I ask people that exact question, How? How do you get out of debt? How do you change careers? How do you stop comparing yourself to people on the internet? How do you have more fulfilling sex? Build stronger friendships? Decide whether or not to have kids? Each episode of the series explores a different question like that with a different featured guest, someone who is also bravely joining me to share the ups and downs of how they've managed to close the gap between what they say they want and what they actually do.

0:00:42 NA: Speaking of the how, let's talk for a second about how this show gets made, because behind the scenes, our podcast does things pretty differently in a few ways. First, we are 100% listener-funded with no ads or sponsors, and also all of our guests get paid, and higher rates are always paid to our guests of color, as well as our queer and trans guests and others with traditionally marginalized identities. The funding to create this show and to pay all the guests comes entirely from our Patreon community, which operates on a shame-free sliding scale that allows each community member to support from within their own means. Tons of fun stuff happens over in that community. I host live workshops, share exclusive bonus episodes and lots more. And no matter where on the sliding scale, your monthly pledge falls, you still get access to all of the same events and bonuses.

0:01:33 NA: So if you love this show, and if you wanna make a real time vote with your dollars to help keep it going, all while meeting the wonderful like-minded people who are already in our community, spoiler alert, they're the best, you can come and join us over at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. That's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. We'd love to have you. And now on to the show.

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0:02:00 NA: Alright, friends, here we go. I am joined today by Dan Lynn, who's here to talk about how they navigate hard conversations. I'm so glad you're here. Dan, welcome to the show.

0:02:10 Dan Lynn: Well, thank you so much for having me.

0:02:11 NA: So to get us started, I would love for you to introduce yourself, who you are, what you do, what you love. Basically, what are a few things that we should know about Dan?

0:02:22 DL: Oh boy. Okay, well, okay, so I am a gender fluid autistic, Mexican-American community facilitator and relationship consultant. I live in Portland, Oregon currently, but I'm from Los Angeles. I love my dog, I love animals of all kinds, I'm just one of those people who prefers animals often, the company of animals, especially on a day like today, which is election day, so a lot of comfort there. I'm a Taurus Sun. I feel like that's important to say. I've only kind of recently gotten comfortable with all of the ways that that shows up in my life, and I'm trying to talk about it

more and kind of learn a little bit more about it. I think it's a pretty good way to look at me also a Cancer Moon and Capricorn Rising, so if you're familiar with those, that might give you a little insight as to who I am.

0:03:27 DL: Yeah, I really got into this work, community facilitating and working with people through interpersonal relationships from working in retail for 14 years. I've been working in retail since I was 15, across a lot of different industries, and yeah, I just learned first-hand about the ways that white supremacy culture and just our culture of domination really shows up and scourges workers and customers and just people all throughout organizations and businesses. So I started working at this local coffee roaster here in Portland, and they really touted themselves as very progressive and kind of on the cutting edge of sustainability. They were really communicative about their values, that sort of thing, and I started trying to incorporate my... At that time, what was just kind of like a passion project, which was accessibility specifically for people of size, but also for people with disabilities and who have mobility devices and people who are pregnant, that sort of thing. Often retail and public spaces just are not created thoughtfully. You can slap a All Are Welcome sticker on the window, but if the space was not created with all kinds of folks in mind from all kinds of experiences, then that is really clear.

0:05:10 DL: So I started investing some time and energy into educating within that space. They allowed me to kind of put together a panel where I got to bring together some local fat activists from here in Portland. So I brought Shilo George, S. J Thompson, Carrie Fuentes, and they spoke about all sorts of things from infrastructure and seating options and tables and that sort of thing, to company culture and diet culture, it was really amazing. And unfortunately, it became clear that they were not ready to kind of examine the internal company culture that was really getting in the way of their kind of big values and... Yeah, so I started putting the wheels in motion to start Do Better Consulting. And so, yeah, I started that last year in 2019, I've been hosting public and private workshops around accessibility, and then that really kind of became a stepping stone, and I mean, everything is connected, right? So as I continue to learn more about all intersecting oppression and privilege and the nuances and complexities of being a human in this world today, I really found a love for working with people to build skills around relationships.

0:06:42 DL: And I'm coming from also a lot of... Just a real complicated kind of tumultuous childhood, and so it hit real close to home and I just kept meeting people who were all so hungry for better connections and more transparency and being able to show up as themselves with all the "good or bad, or complicated and messy." So yeah, that's kind of how I got started. And I love it. Every day I'm so excited to get up and do this work, even with this election and all of the stress and violence and everything that's going on, I still feel excited about what I get to put into the world.

0:07:35 NA: That's so beautiful. I didn't realize that you had started this so recently. Congratulations.

0:07:40 DL: Thank you. Yeah, yeah, I know. I find that kind of funny myself, I'm like... Even looking back right now, 12 months ago, I'm like, Wow, this was not that long after I had just started my business. I'm pretty proud of myself.

0:07:55 NA: Yeah, I mean, you should be, right? It's a good reminder sometimes that a year isn't a long time, like a lot really can happen.

0:08:04 DL: Right.

0:08:05 NA: And I really appreciate what you said about, "It's one thing to put the All Are Welcome Here sticker on the door, or whatever someone's version of that is in a brick and mortar, online situation, and the difference between that and actually how the values are practiced," one of the things that I think about a lot personally, and in my work, is this idea of... How do we close the gap between what we say we want and what we actually do? And I think if I have traditionally thought about it from quite a personal scale, our individual behaviors and stuff like that, what we do in our day-to-day, that definitely extends to larger values as well, like you said, "Okay, is this company willing to make the changes that they have to make so that it actually supports the values?" Maybe, yes, maybe no, but that question of how do we close that gap is really interesting, and I love to hear that that's what you're working on.

0:08:56 DL: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, it's been really, really eye-opening and it's been... There's a lot that I kind of thought that I knew going into it. A lot of my work is based on lived experience and self-led study, which some folks feel more or less comfortable with, and that's neither here nor there to me. I intentionally went into this work knowing that I did not wanna pose at myself as... Yeah, that capital E, Expert, the person that you're gonna wanna turn to before you turn to anyone else because that's just not... That's not what I'm here for. I'm not here to blow anyone else out of the water, I'm just here to connect with people who find this kind of work meaningful and to wanna keep coming back to it when they're able to, when they have the capacity to. And so I've just found kind of a small but sturdy community in that, and yeah, that's... It's just... Yeah, I've learned so much. I am, yeah, going through all these processes and myself that what you're talking about, the kind of gap between the values that we say that we wanna have and how we put those into practice and how those look every single day, and all of our little choices here and there. Yeah, there's been a huge learning curve for myself as well.

0:10:21 NA: So I first found you through a former podcast guest, multiple time podcast guest on the show, Melissa Fabello, who's work I adore, and the first aspect of your work that I really dug into is the weekly Q&A segment on your Instagram called Hard Talks, which I mean, people can and should lose many hours going back through those saved highlights, they're excellent. And that's what moved me to invite you on for this episode.

0:10:44 DL: Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

0:10:47 NA: So in that segment, you take questions from folks about what they need help saying or communicating, and you provide really thoughtful and nuanced responses on how they might move forward, and so I'm curious to sort of start there and ask, for you in creating that series, what have you found to be some of the most common barriers to having truly productive conversations, especially around tough subjects, like what's getting in our way?

0:11:15 DL: So many things, I think right off the top, the first thing that I thought of was just... This is gonna sound... Okay, I'll just say it and then I'll unpack it. It's like the impatience that so many of us are carrying around with very good reason, that's what feels like it needs kind of unpacking is being the most perfectly patient person... "Perfect" in air quotes, of course, is not required for repair or moving towards right relationship, but I do see how impatience shows up again and again and again, and is so inhibitive of transparent communication, of being thoughtful and intentional, to not just create space for other people to show up authentically, but also for ourselves, like I'm talking about... Like I said before, all of those kind of messy and complicated incomplete feelings, the things that we classify as "bad." So, and yeah, again, I wanna say it's for a very good reason, many of us are surviving a lifetime of consent violations and people challenging our boundaries and caregivers who may have had the best of intentions, but we're still imposing their values and their hopes on us.

0:12:51 DL: And so it makes so much sense where that's coming from, but that's what I see a lot, is people kinda wanna dump the thing, this happened, can you believe it, and they're ready to be up in arms about something, that is genuinely painful, and that impatience is just kind of like the first biggest barrier to unpacking and understanding, how can we not just see the harm and distance ourselves from it, but really work towards repair and getting to those root causes so we can try to make sure it doesn't keep happening, you know?

0:13:32 NA: So I'm gonna probably ask you this a couple of times while we talk but can you give me an example or maybe an example of your own of how that impatience might show up?

0:13:43 DL: Yeah. Yeah, I would say I tend to be a very impatient person, I am autistic and I really thrive off of patterns, I am good at noticing patterns, I am good at kind of connecting things that feel or look or behave similarly, so I may be with somebody in this individual moment, and they're speaking with me, engaging with me, and maybe they say something that for me kind of triggers a memory of, I've seen a pattern like this before, and it may just be even that one, like one single instance, one single word or phrase or something. So it doesn't actually have to be a succession of action, but for me, I all of a sudden become hyper-vigilant and I'm looking for the next step in that pattern to go ahead and affirm what I know usually comes after that. Does that make sense?

0:14:50 NA: Yeah, that definitely makes sense.

0:14:52 DL: So while that is a very human thing, as we're constantly taking in information, our brains can't possibly just take in content, content, content and hold it all individually, we only have so much capacity. So our minds and our bodies try to kind of shorten these things and give us quick and useful information to us that says, "Hey, the last time this happened, your safety was threatened or you were put in a bad spot, you don't want that to happen again." So then my guard goes up in that direction. It makes sense. It totally, totally makes sense. And I really have to work to name that because as I've learned in relationships, I can get ahead of myself so quickly and get ahead of the relationship so quickly, so without this person even knowing it, I am starting to sort of build this mold around our conversation like, "Oh, I know how this is gonna go, I know what this is gonna

look like." And again, that doesn't exactly leave room for people to be different, to change, to fluctuate even in the context of one conversation, which is so huge, because again, as many of us are surviving trauma and surviving consent violations, and these kinds of things, we've been kind of corralled to singular ideas of who we are, and more often who we are to somebody else, and I think for me, the healing really comes from being given just abundant permission. Being allowed to expand. Does that answer your question?

0:16:36 NA: Yeah. Yeah.

0:16:37 DL: 'Cause like, yeah.

0:16:40 NA: Yeah, definitely. I mean, well, as much as there can be an answer, I'm interested in kinda digging in, I think what you said about the tendency to get ahead of the relationship, I don't know that I've ever heard it phrased that way before, but I had this immediate spark of recognition with that this almost like the way I can think about it in my own life and relationships is there's been so many times where I have hesitated, starting what I fear will be a hard conversation because I'm already convinced that I know what the other person's reaction is gonna be, right, where like, "Oh, what?" It's almost like you've played the whole thing out and the other person hasn't been any part of that, well, then I'm gonna say this and they're gonna say this, or I know that they think this way, or this isn't gonna go well because... And you almost like write the whole script on your own, and the times when I have done that it's...

0:17:25 NA: I mean, I think it's partially a self-protective mechanism, right, wanting to think through all of those things, and there's certainly nothing wrong with that, but I've noticed that when I come to a conversation having already done that, it's like we're not starting the conversation at the same place, I have assumed so much about their intentions or their needs or their boundaries that we haven't ever talked about, and then it almost ensures that the conversation isn't gonna go well 'cause I've sort of already decided how it's gonna go. If that makes sense.

0:17:55 DL: Yes, I so relate to that. It's not... Like for me, it's not even that it's not gonna go well, it's just guaranteed to not go how I planned because I planned it in isolation according to all my assumptions and biases and predictive patterns and etcetera, etcetera. I'm sitting here in this vacuum like, "Okay, so then they'll probably say this," and I have very good reasons for assuming why... But humans are unpredictable. We are different from day to day. And everything I know about somebody while that is really valid, like a person can show up and be completely different based on whatever is going on in their day, like whatever place they're in in their healing process. So that's what I've noticed so much for me is that it's like... 'cause I, again, really leaning on those patterns for myself and knowing that that's a tendency that I have, it just helps me feel more stable in communication.

0:18:57 DL: So it's something that I value, and then I also have to be aware of it and also name it because then it shows up in these conversations and I'm sitting there getting disappointed as to why my plan isn't playing out, because it was a really good plan, I thought ahead for all of these contingencies, and then this human person comes and shows up as themselves, maybe with other

things going on that I couldn't have anticipated. It's just that's so unfair for me to be like, "Oh, how dare you step out of the line? I made us this very nice mould here. I thought you were gonna have a great conversation."

0:19:38 NA: Oh, yeah, so keeping with this, I guess, for another second, is there anything that you find that helps you when you're in that in-patient place, or you've gone three steps ahead of where the relationship with the conversation is? I think part of what I'm curious as we start to talk about things, is hearing about some examples of things from your own life, and obviously I can share some of mine, and then I'm really curious, not necessarily for solutions or fixes, because it doesn't need to be that black and white or that, I guess solution-oriented, but I do think, and it's obviously very clear from engaging with your work that you have learned things that are at least useful starting points to share resources and tools and stuff, and as much as we can get into that, I feel like would be really helpful for me and helpful for folks listening.

0:20:23 DL: Right, right. [chuckle] I practice transparency as... That's probably my biggest tool to combat all of the social conditioning that I have to appear, or be, or behave, or speak "Perfectly." There's this really intense pressure that in order to have what you're saying validated, to even be able to need, or want, or have the boundaries that you have, and to have them be upheld by others and honored and respected, that you have to prove your "Competence," again in air quotes. And so I really try to combat, resist that. I feel like that is such a... Just false idea that we have, that a person's thoughts, needs, opinions, boundaries, are only valid if they can prove their competence. I think that's so unfair and does not at all account for all of the context and the nuance of what we go through literally from minute to minute. So yeah, one of my biggest tools is just transparency. So, say I'm in a conversation with somebody and I'm getting three steps ahead and I can see this pattern starting to play out, I, at the next available pause, or I might literally raise my hand and just be like, "I'm so sorry, can you rewind or just re-say that for me because I was getting lost in my train of thought." And my train of thought being like, "Why did they just say that that wasn't what I thought they were gonna say," and whatever, and so...

0:22:16 DL: And it really does, it gets in the way of me actively listening to them, and I fall into the trap that so many of us do, where you're really just listening to insert your opinion, to insert your critique, to insert your question that you think is gonna break down all of this that you didn't plan for, all of this that you don't understand. And so, yeah, I wanna be able to offer that to people. That's something that I want. That's another thing, that's probably another tool, or something that I try to ask myself in the middle of the conversation is, when I'm about to say something like, "Oh, this happens all the time," at the end of a conversation, saying like, "Well, I'm gonna let you go now." And I'm like, "What the heck?" I'm the one saying this, why don't I say, "I wanna go, I'm full, I've... I'm really... I'm hungry right now. I'd like to step away and go eat and get off the phone right now," or whatever, but even just that level of transparency that's not pushing your needs on to somebody else and like, "Oh, for your benefit, I'm just gonna go ahead and let you go."

0:23:29 DL: I know that it sounds so small, but over time, I've just noticed my ability to own and name all kinds of little needs throughout conversations. Again, coming back to the autism thing, I can't just often sit down in a conversation and just shut the world out. I need to have other things

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I'm working on. I have other needs. Oftentimes like eye contact is hard for me, and that kind of stuff, so now I can own that, and I can say, "I wanna hear you, and I also want you to know that I can hear a little bit better when I am flipping through this magazine, when I'm looking at my phone, and I want you to know that I understand that that could be distracting. And so I really wanna know if you feel okay with this or like what we could do to compromise." So just like inviting people into your process. I just feel like we've developed so much shame for all of these very natural and normal ways that we just cope. We're coping throughout the day. As I was talking about before, we have this fluctuating capacity, my bandwidth changes.

0:24:45 DL: I also have chronic pain, and so morning Dan is a very different Dan than afternoon Dan. [chuckle] So I've found just a lot of peace, a lot of patience, a lot of collaboration, all these things that are really important to my values, in bringing others into my process instead of just assuming like, "Oh, it's really like... It's so rude to not make eye contact." Well, in this context, not making eye contact is gonna actually help me listen better. So what if I just loop them into that need of mine?

0:25:23 NA: Yeah, I... So I'm furiously taking notes as you're talking, I'm already like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," to this idea of... It's funny, it sounds so simple when you describe all these things, and perhaps the thing that I keep coming up with, with this idea of hard conversations is, maybe it is simple, but just because something's simple doesn't mean that it's easy. And I think sometimes the disconnect for me lives in that space of being transparent, naming your needs, naming your... What's happening. All of the things that you just said, inviting people into your process. Those things seem so simple, almost too simple to be effective, and yet they are the things that are effective. Oftentimes the simple answer is the most supportive answer, it's just that that doesn't mean that it's easy. Just because it might be simple to say, "Oh," whatever... Using the example that you said about eye contact, just speaking up for yourself and saying it, that might be simple, but it might not feel easy. "Okay, well, what are they gonna think? And how is this gonna be perceived?" And I think that that could apply to lots of other examples as well.

0:26:32 NA: It's all the other stuff. There's the thing, and then there's what we make the thing mean, or what we think that the thing means, or all the stories that we layer on top of why we couldn't possibly just be transparent, or just ask for what we need, and they're, for me already, I know we're only a little bit into this conversation, I feel like that is such a useful takeaway of, step back, what would happen if I were just willing to be transparent and just name what's going on here, or name what my experience is or, "Hey, could you repeat that," or, "Hey, I got distracted or I got three steps ahead or..." I don't know, I know I'm just repeating back everything you said, less eloquently than you said it, but I'm feeling very, very supported by all of these tools.

0:27:13 DL: No, I actually, I think that's so good, and I really appreciate you reflecting back to me, 'cause in your reflection of sometimes it's something that seems very simple, but it's very potent, I'm thinking, yes, you've reminded me of another piece, which is saying what you mean and meaning what you say, which is just like not the first time somebody has ever said this. [chuckle] I think a lot of us think that we're saying what we mean, but we're really... We're trying to communicate our feelings through these words without naming our feelings. Do you know what I'm saying?

0:27:50 NA: Yeah, yeah. Can you give me an example though?

0:27:52 DL: Yes, yeah. It's like the difference between a casual no, like a, "No, thank you," "Actually, I don't really feel like going for a walk today, but thank you so much for inviting me." It's the difference between that and like a curt, kind of, "No." The difference being, if you're wanting to communicate to this person, I'm upset that you asked me that when you know that I'm busy doing something else, that is what we're... What we mean, but what we say is "No," and you wanna say it in such a way with just the slightest hint of attitude that it lets them know that something is wrong, that they have misstepped, but that kind of alleviates the responsibility that we have to let people know when we feel like a boundary has been crossed, or when we've been harmed, or when we wish somebody had considered our circumstances or something. So, I really like to use the example of asking a question. So yes, we are in this kind of hellish moment in history that's also really transformative and powerful with the uprisings for Black lives.

0:29:17 DL: I live in the Pacific Northwest, and was it like a month ago or something, we had these horrendous fires, and amidst the political chaos, the protests, the uprisings, etcetera, I had all these people who are checking in with me and like, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" 'Cause it was just... You couldn't step outside. I couldn't even take my trash out. It was so scary. [chuckle] Like very, very... On top of everything else, and I just felt so drained by those questions. I'm sure so many people know what I'm talking about. Checking in on your friends has become a little bit more stressful these days. But when I'm saying say what you mean, mean what you say. My question to you is the question you really want answered, "Am I okay?" Or are you wanting to communicate to me that you care about me, and you know this might be an overwhelming time, and you would love to hold space to hear me if processing feels good. Do you know what I'm saying? There's a real difference. There's a real difference. There's, "Do you wanna know, Am I okay? Or do you wanna know, how can I support you? Do you wanna know, Am I okay? Or do you wanna know if you could send me a little cash so I can order some food and not have to worry about cooking?" Or all of these things. It just requires a little bit more intention.

0:30:44 DL: And yeah, it's just, it's so simple, it's so basic, but putting a little bit of thought into it, bringing it to the forefront of our awareness can really help to transform these relationships. And yeah, just build bridges to transparency and directness in ways that were often not taught how to do.

0:31:08 NA: Yeah, that's again, a good reminder of what are you actually asking, or what is the purpose of this communication is, I think it's really natural to default into whatever our scripts are for different social situations or different relationships, and I don't know that that's always a bad thing, but I think your point of, yeah, you're thinking about someone, you're checking in with them that, "How are you? Are you okay?" That's often, I don't think that's a malicious question. Right?

0:31:37 DL: No, no.

0:31:37 NA: It's like, "But, okay, what are you actually asking here." And I have found that the more specific I can be in my communication, the more fulfilling that communication is.

0:31:50 DL: Yes, yeah, absolutely. Another thing that I'm thinking about is being intentional about tending to the responsibility that each of us has over the environment we create. And what I mean by that is, for example, I speak with a lot of people, a lot of people come to hard talks and they're like, "Whenever I hear a no, it's really hard for me, but I really want my friends to be able to tell me no, when it's genuinely how they feel," and so there's this piece of being transparent and naming what is ours and what we're bringing to the table, and that is already so powerful and flies in the face of so much that we are conditioned to. Again, with these white supremacists cultural norms, that's so important. And also, when we invest in coming up with creative solutions we are demonstrating to our people, "Hey, I'm responsible for this environment that I'm creating." It's not just that I say, "Hey, I know that I get a little sensitive to rejection, it feels like rejection to me when you say a casual no, even if it's for something small."

0:33:06 DL: But being mindful to check in about that. And so let's say somebody is really sensitive to that and their friend says, "Hey, do you wanna go for a walk?" And they say, "Oh no, I don't really want to." And then the friend is feeling sensitive about receiving that. They can circle back, not necessarily right in that moment and just say, "Hey, I know that I was feeling a little bit... That I can kind of be a little bit uncomfortable. I can be a little cold when I hear a no, and I'm just wondering how that landed with you." And just, yeah, that demonstration of like, "Hey, it's not enough for me to say this and expect you to then ascend the hill and meet me where I'm at, I'm gonna try to meet you in the middle, I'm gonna try to create an opportunity for us to just circle back and make sure that there's nothing that came up about them, around that." Yeah.

0:33:57 NA: Yeah, yeah, I'd love to talk more about this idea of saying and hearing no, 'cause I think that, maybe I'm just assuming that that's something that everyone experiences at least some difficulty with, maybe more so at different times and others, but can you share anything, maybe even just one thing that's been useful for you in saying no more confidently, or just in a way that feels better for you, and then also, like you said, being able to receive a no.

0:34:26 DL: Yeah, yeah. Well, definitely practicing with a trusted friend, so this is something that I've talked about a lot over on my Instagram account. I encourage folks to play a little game with somebody who you can speak to about your intentions and say, "Hey, I wanna practice this. This is something I'm interested in incorporating into our relationship. This matters to me. It's important to me. Do you wanna do this?" Right? So we start out with consent always, and also, again, being transparent about our intent, and then literally just practice saying no. Even asking for things that you're like, "It's okay, I don't need this. Hey, can I have a glass of water?" And then when your friend says, "No," because you have set this intention together, thank them, thank them for their no, and say, "I really appreciate you being honest with me. No problem," because we are so often encouraged and celebrated for self-sacrificing yes-es. If you work double shifts and you come home and you do the laundry and you make a big meal, and you clean the house, and everybody's like, "Oh my God, there's just no end to the giving, it's just... "

0:35:48 DL: And we see this over and over again, this martyr, or this... Just this person who lives to serve their people, and while maybe some of us truly find comfort in that, and so I'm not saying that

it's across the board wrong, I am curious about how that has impacted our ability to access a "No," in our body, because it's not just, "Do I want this or do I not want this," often, we think that it's a choice between caring for our friend and not caring for our friend. Do you know what I mean?

0:36:28 NA: Absolutely.

0:36:30 DL: And so, yeah, really being intentional to thank the person who said, "No," oh my gosh, I cannot tell you how this has transformed my life, I say nos, it's like I'm handing out popsicles and it's so good. [chuckle] It feels so wonderful for somebody to say that. And it sounded... It felt silly at first. It was like, "Thank you for your no," and we kinda laughed about it, and we're like, "Oh, what a nerd." But it was like, "No, this is the stuff." Over time, it became second nature, and I found myself saying thank you to a no before anything else. And it felt so amazing. Yeah, that has been definitely my biggest help with learning to feel more comfortable in that.

0:37:18 NA: Yeah. So I'm very interested in... Within myself, hearing you say that it's interesting to experience the resistance or even potentially the judgment that I have of the, "Oh, I have to practice." There's suddenly judgment that I have about... And yet, I don't know why because it's totally... Seems totally normal to me to practice many other things. I don't just assume I'm gonna be able to speak Italian, 'cause I decide to speak Italian, or to learn a new skill in my business, or any of these other things. Practice is really normalized for certain things, and it's... Then there's these other things like communication, like saying and receiving a no, that we're just supposed to magically be good at, and yet to your point, there's so much conditioning around that. There's so much people-pleasing, there's so much of that worthiness issue, and it's so much more complicated. And yet, what I think I'm too good to practice that? I could practice other things, but not that? I don't know, it's just interesting because I feel like that reminder that it's not a light switch, you're not just gonna get necessarily be better at something 'cause you just, "Oh, flip the switch," and now I can receive a no, and I never have any defensiveness or resentment or a rejection to hurt feelings. Of course not.

0:38:37 NA: And so that idea to bring practice, and even the way that you were describing it, it felt light to me and a little bit playful, and that's really welcome as well, because like you said, it can be really hard to hear no or to feel rejection, if that's something that you're really sensitive to. And so being able to practice it in a way that's safe and that's lighter, like why would I not do that? I just had never thought of that in that way before.

0:39:01 DL: Right, right. I totally see what you're saying. It's like this way that we've been conditioned to think that, again, coming back to the societal pressures to appear competent, I feel like a huge piece of that is appearing perfect and appearing like everything is effortless to you. Do you know what I mean? That supposedly communicates competence. Well, for those of us who are not societally celebrated and supported, those of us with multiple marginalization, so much of the world was not created for us, with us in mind, with any thought to the barriers and the harm, the intergenerational trauma, etcetera, that many of us are carrying with us. So this idea of this effortless-ness is so silly and it's such a product of white supremacy, because the only people who think that life can be that effortless are the people who are not experiencing these barriers in tiny

and large ways, just constantly. You know what I mean?

0:40:17 NA: Yeah, yeah, this idea of practice is interesting to me, and I'm curious if it's something that you have done in another realm of your communication, it makes a lot of sense, the example that you said about the neutralizing "no", practicing the "no". Is there anywhere else that you have found that practice of some kind has been useful?

0:40:40 DL: Yes. So yeah, practicing "no", that's the one when I have my unofficial official little game for, but often I feel kind of like in a practice, most of the time, I really just gobble up data, it's all very fascinating to me, I'm a very curious person, and so just practicing, letting that show, 'cause there's so much that I'm curious about. There's so much... People have their boundaries. And I'm like, "Why is that there?" Not that you have to justify it, I'm not at all challenging it, but I'm just curious, like why it is where it is? And allowing that to show has been so powerful in just, yeah, creating this sort of lightness in communication. Also practicing to let people know that when I'm asking these questions, my understanding does not determine their validity. I just say that as often as I possibly can, and I guess I should ask my friends if it's getting annoying, but for me, I'm like, I really can't ever hear enough that somebody is curious as to the why and the how, but regardless of that, they support me and are happy for me to make any choice that is right for me.

0:42:26 NA: Yeah, yeah, that's interesting. I feel like there's some helpful nuance there, this idea that someone can share something with you or say something and you can be curious about it and you can... If that's welcome, ask more questions about it in terms of deepening your own understanding, but how they feel and what their boundary is and what they're communicating is valid, regardless of whether or not you get to the same point of understanding. It's not their job to convince you to agree with them in order for them to be worthy of whatever the thing is that they've named.

0:42:55 DL: Right, right. It's like this assertion that variance is neutral. Again, we're just neutralizing it, it can be kind of uncomfortable to be celebrated for variants even. Screw binaries, for sure. But it's like, I think people often assume there's either you either judge someone, ridicule them, tease them, bully them, or you're like, "Oh my gosh, you're the best person ever. That's the best choice ever." And for me, any time I've experienced that, just excessive praise, it's always been so suspect. [chuckle] I'm maybe a little suspicious kind of person, which I think goes back to some of the tumultuous childhood things, but for me, it's almost equally uncomfortable, like, "Get me off of your pedestal." And my work is rooted in transformative justice, I practice non-hierarchical relationships, ethical monogamy, relationship anarchy, so hierarchies are a no-go for me. So yeah, being praised for this decision makes it harder to make a different decision later if my capacity has changed or my needs shift. So these are all things, it's just... Gosh, you just need to expand the ideas of what is allowed in our relationships, we're so used to like if one person says yes to this, then this is the trajectory that we're on, instead of thinking of it as just a yes to this simply opens another door to all the same options over again.

0:44:33 NA: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So I'd love to ask you a couple of maybe more specific communication type questions, I feel like these are all things that could easily go into your hard

talks series. And if you either have a story you wanna share in response or a tool or a resource, basically however it lands for you and whatever you think that you would love to offer would be really great. So the first is, what have you found to be helpful communicating with people who disagree with you, the thing that comes into mind is maybe it's a family member or someone with whom you do still want the relationship, 'cause I think in the more extreme binaries of communication, it's like, well, if you just don't have such and such the same thing in common or same value, then they're toxic and you cut them out, and I think sometimes that binary applies, but like you said, there's a lot more nuance. And so I'm interested if there's anything that you can share about communicating with people when you really have a fundamental disagreement or different... Of some values.

0:45:38 DL: Okay, so right off the bat, when you said that I'm like, "I don't know if you have somebody in your family, I'm like, "Oh gosh, that hit such a tender note for me." Right off the bat, I'm thinking that when we pause or step away from our relationships for healing, for just space to process with somebody else who can hold and understand us the way we wanna be understood, we are not abdicating our responsibility to that relationship, so pausing and stepping away from a relationship is not abandoning it. And actually, most of the time, if I have a fundamental disagreement with somebody, I do not pursue relationship with them, it's not that I delete their number and close the door forever, but I give myself that permission to take the space that I need to feel safe and safety is a huge thing for me, again, tumultuous childhood. So I have to give myself to that safety over and over and over again, because that allows me to come back to the relationship later. And I don't tell myself that upfront because I'm not trying to manipulate myself like, "Hey, walk away now and then circle back in a week." I'm like, "No, it's okay if you never come back to this," and that permission to never come back to it allows me the space to process it, and then I am usually able to come back to it, having given myself the safety that I needed, that that person was not originally able to provide. Does that make sense?

0:47:25 NA: Yeah, that definitely makes sense. Yeah, that idea of permission is interesting of how much... I guess how could the experience of the relationship would be different if you, like you said, give yourself that internal permission. Yeah, I like that.

0:47:40 DL: Absolutely, yeah, it's just, it's... So much of the time, I feel like folks are enduring real abusive dynamics and real significant challenges in their relationship, and they kind of come and they presented and they're like, "Okay, what do I do with this?" And I'm like, "First of all, the first thing you need to do is have your back here and know that the fact that you feel harmed by them, you feel unsafe around them, is valid and give yourself what you need. What you need right now is not to be diving back in trying to force understanding. Give yourself a little space to figure out some boundaries so that you can come back thoughtfully if that should feel okay to you."

0:48:31 NA: Yeah, it's almost... I know this isn't what you said, but what I'm hearing for myself between the lines here is allowing space or more space to sit in the discomfort of something not necessarily being resolved. I think it's really normal to have either that conflict avoidance or that real discomfort with, "This person's unhappy with me, I'm unhappy with them, this feels unresolved," like really wanting to rush to a conclusion to get out of that icky feeling. And what

you're saying here is, I think almost more than anything that's come up, so far, this is gonna be something that I'll think about a lot after this conversation, that how could I create more space for myself and can I let it be okay that I'm uncomfortable or that things maybe are in a period of not being resolved, whatever that means with someone else. And like you said, to step away and to be able to come back and just to allow a little bit more space as opposed to trying to bulldoze to some kind of a solution.

0:49:32 DL: Yes, yes. The thing that really out to me and what you said was that rushing and urgency is again, a tool of white supremacy, it is a cultural norm that we have been conditioned to that is not useful and truly truly pumping the brakes, slowing the fuck down is the biggest thing that... I feel like I say this with every single thing I've shared with you, but that has gotta be it, just slowing down, like, "What is the rush?" I know. We've just got this one life. But trying to fit this whole arc of collaboration and contribution and the process and the messiness and the space and all of the things that go into a relationship that honors both people's boundaries and autonomy, we try to squeeze them into these tiny little... It's like arbitrary, little... What's the word? Like timelines, sort of an arbitrary timeline, like I've gotta hurry up and turn this around, and I know that a lot of that probably has to do with our anxieties and who really wants to sit in uncomfortable feelings? So it totally makes sense. But it is not helping us to have sturdy and sustainable relationships. Not at all.

0:51:11 NA: Yeah. And this is, I guess, potentially a different situation than what we were just talking about, what about if you are the one who has caused harm in a relationship?

0:51:21 DL: Yeah, I think, again, it's super important to name that or name our kind of feelings that, "Oh, I think I maybe got the sense from you that you were uncomfortable when I said this, and I just wanted to open up the door and say that I'd like to talk about it," so we have to be mindful that we can't force anybody into repair. And one of the major pieces of transformative justice is that we're pursuing healing and justice in meaningful ways to the person who was harmed. So there's an accountability process we can engage in with trusted people in our lives, and then there's also this kind of accountability and this repair that we need to do with the person that has been harmed, but that requires consent. There's no healing when consent is not honored, so if the person is like needing space, we have to be able to give them that, but as far as an accountability process, again, trying to get to that root cause, where did this harm come from, why did I lash out of them like that, why did I do this?

0:52:35 DL: That can happen outside in our own, again, sturdy sustainable relationships, and something that has been really useful to me for that is going through the Pod Mapping Worksheet by Mia Mingus, it might have... I can't remember if it was Mia Mingus who actually created it, or if it was the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, but anyway, if you Google Pod Mapping Worksheet, they kind of go in and talk about how many of us have people we can turn to when we have been harmed, and very few of us have people we can turn to when we have done the harm. It takes a very specific kind of care, and I mean specifics to the person as to what you need to be tenderly held, who you can trust to really reflect back to you what they're seeing and hold you to sturdy values without imposing their ideas of who you should be.

0:53:34 NA: Yeah, I'm definitely gonna be Googling that. I feel like even as you're talking to, it's making me realize that I have a craving for more of these types of relationships and structures in my life, or even deepening existing relationships, and almost the idea of not having to wait until something "goes wrong" in order to have some of these conversations or start to establish this trust, and I think a lot about what does it mean to create a brave environment or brave relationships. I'm trying to almost not substitute the word safe with brave, but there's... I don't know, I guess it's not up to me. Am I creating a safe environment? I don't know, but this idea of a brave environment or brave relationships is really interesting to me, and I'm feeling inspired by what you're sharing, to have some of these conversations almost preemptively, like how can we work together to create containers where this type of communication will be possible in the future.

0:54:28 DL: Right, right, yeah. You really nailed that on the head, Mia Mingus says, forget harm and abuse, we don't even know how to handle miscommunication and misunderstandings amongst ourselves. And I just attended this workshop around Pod Mapping that she hosted, and she drew this graph that was kind of like this curve line that started low on the left and then curved upward to the right, and this is demonstrating harm over time, how it starts small, and then steadily increases. She's asserting that we need to start engaging in harm in these early stages because so many of us wait until we're talking major violations, major violence happening before we will intervene, and then at that point, we just outsource our repair to... It's not even repair, we outsource our "justice" to these state-sanctioned systems of policing and incarceration and punishment, when all along the way, there's valuable lessons that we can be learning, there's repair that we can be doing so that we're not ending up with these just explosions of compounded harm.

0:55:53 NA: Yeah, I feel like I have so many other questions to ask you. I guess the last one, maybe that we can talk about for a couple of minutes, is anything that you have found to be useful in either starting a conversation or noting something harmful or offensive that was said? The type of communication that I've heard you referred to as disrupting work. Can you talk about that a little bit?

0:56:20 DL: Yeah. How do you step in and say, "Hey, I know you weren't talking about me, but I noticed this?"

0:56:27 NA: Yes.

0:56:29 DL: Yeah, yeah. Oh my gosh. So this happens a lot. For example, in my fat justice work, I am a fat person, I've been in a fat body my whole life, oftentimes people who are in smaller bodies, people who are thin... We'll say, "I've heard what you have to say, I'm all for it." And how do I go out and tell my other thin friends, "Stop saying that, stop using this language, whatever." And what I say every time is, again, own what parts of that you personally feel upset by. We don't need to be speaking for other people and saying, "Hey, if a fat person was here, that would really hurt their feelings." Like that is not what's going to bring this person in, what's gonna connect this person as to why they should want to change. Their relationship with you, what have they done to you, to hurt you.

0:57:34 DL: If you are somebody who is against weight stigma, who sees it for the violent oppression that it is, then say, "Hey, when you set this word about this person crossing the street, it really made me feel uncomfortable. I really am working to the dismantle weight stigma and diet culture in my life, and I'd love to be able to bring that into our relationship too. This made me feel like I wouldn't be able to talk to you about it," as opposed to allowing that savior complex to take over that hat that I have this, "I'm on the high horse here and I am calling you out." And even if you come in in a gentle way, people will perceive it as like, "Oh, you think you know better?" If you're not connecting it to, "Hey, this hurt me. This made me uncomfortable."

0:58:30 NA: Yeah, and that requires almost like a little bit of extra work or necessary extra work of why is it not okay with you when somebody says X, Y or Z. I think it's easier perhaps to default into, "Oh, I know this isn't like an okay thing to say, so I'm gonna lean on that," as opposed to your point of, "Why do I think this is harmful? Why is it..." And like doing that work, I feel like lets you speak from, like you said, a more personal perspective that then will likely land better as well.

0:59:04 DL: Right, yeah, this sort of arbitrary "We're not allowed to say that," it just creates conditions where people can argue, argue, argue, and so this is the whole... This is it, right? We're building these sturdy relationships so that we can leverage them in these sorts of instances and say, "Hey, I really wanna do this with you. Can we work on this together?" And that's... It's powerful, it's transformational.

0:59:31 NA: Yeah, I think that that's beautiful. I think that's a great place for us to start to wrap up, and I wanted to ask you, if you could leave folks with one maybe small call to action based on our conversation, what would it be? Either a question to ask themselves or maybe a small action to take? What would you love for folks to do after listening to this?

0:59:52 DL: I have this quote that I wanna read. Maybe that? Is that okay?

1:00:00 NA: Absolutely.

1:00:00 DL: Okay, this is from the workbook *Fumbling Towards Repair* by Shira Hassan and Mariame Kaba, two prominent voices in transformative justice: "Thinking, organizing and acting beyond the success, failure binary whenever possible, is instructive. Messiness in a process is the norm rather than a failure. Get comfortable with this." That is just, probably one of my favorite things, it's hard to pick one thing from that book, and I know that I don't have to, but as... My biggest call to action is embrace the instructive nature of trial and error, and don't expect to be perfect. Something that Nicole Lee says is, "Our movements do not require perfect people, people who appear perfect or people who are good at pointing out the imperfections in others," and I just really, really wanna encourage folks to not expect to be experts. Not expect to be the best at this and actually the trial and error, that's the shit. That's the stuff.

1:01:19 NA: Yeah, let it be messy, and if you don't expect yourself to be perfect, can you also allow other people to be messy and imperfect as well?

1:01:26 DL: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

1:01:28 NA: What's the best place for people to find you and say "hi"? Do you have a particular favorite way to connect with new folks?

1:01:34 DL: Yeah, I love when folks join the little Instagram community we've got going on over at DoBetter consulting. I have a link in my bio there to my website and ways to connect with me. I love to work with people on a one-on-one basis, and I do some short free consultation if anybody is curious about what it might look like to work with me in that sort of supportive relationship. Yeah, yeah, that's probably the best way to find me and find out what I'm up to.

1:02:12 NA: All right, and I will put a link to your Instagram too, for sure, in the show notes, so people can just click on that. Dan, thank you so much.

1:02:18 DL: Thank you so much. This was amazing, incredible. I so have appreciated your contributions and your questions, thank you so much for having me.

[music]

1:02:26 NA: And that's our show for today. Our music is by Adam Day, who also handles our sound editing. Thanks, Adam, you're the best. And huge thanks as well to every single member of our Patreon community for making this honest conversation, this entire podcast, and so much of my other work, like my twice weekly personal essay newsletter called Good Question, Possible. Your monthly funding allows me to keep creating resources and gatherings for folks who crave honest conversations, both with themselves and others, and I fully believe that these conversations can change our lives, our relationships and our world. To join us, just come on over to patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. Our community operates on a shame-free sliding scale, so you can feel good about supporting this work from within your own means. So I'll see you over in the Patreon community, yeah? And until next time, I want you to know three things: First, that you are enough; second, that you are not alone; and third, that I'm totally rooting for you.

[music]

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