

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



## EPISODE 87

*You Could Actually Move  
the DEI Needle Further  
Along by Hiring A  
Black Mentor*

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HAPPY EXECUTIVE WOMAN

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### You Could Actually Move the DEI Needle Further Along by Hiring A Black Mentor

You are far ahead of the curve if you're lucky to have authentic friendships with a **Black person**. I say that not to put you down in any way, but from experience, we will keep you honest and be 100% real with you, whether you like it or not.

I have always been that **safe "Black person"** that many white colleagues could come to and ask questions to help them better understand how to navigate the Black people on their teams. I answered their questions to help move them closer to understanding Black people, including me, a little better.

Well, tune in to this episode to hear about my white friend, Ellen's, experience and to learn more about what having a Black person as a mentor could do for you in your organization.

*See you inside...*

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So I mentioned in the introduction about my white friend, Ellen, so let me explain what happened with Ellen. Just thinking about it makes me laugh!

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It was back in 1995, times were very different then, and **I had a friend by the name of Ellen, who was such a beautiful soul.** She had a huge heart, and one day, she came over to my desk singing, "*the roof, the roof, the roof is on fi-yah!!! We don't need no water, let the ... burn!*" I couldn't help but laugh because in her innocence, she had learned something new. She had gone to a Black party, and she was so proud of it, and she wanted to share it with me so I couldn't do anything but laugh.

**Ellen was ahead of the curve.** She did not have one racist bone in her body. She was truly, truly interested in learning all about Black people and understanding our world, and so she had me help her navigate the Black world in a way that would not come across as offensive or get her beat up for going into the wrong neighborhoods as a red-haired-freckled-bouncy white girl who just wanted to fit in. She even helped coordinate my first wedding, making herself right at home amongst friends and family members. So much so, they were all telling me, "She is cool as hell for a red-haired white girl with freckles."

*I wonder how she navigated the world in 2020.* I wish I knew; we lost touch after I left that job. **But I digress.**

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The point I'm making here is **things could have been very different for Ellen had she not had me there** to share with her the proper etiquette, what would have been considered as offensive, even in a playful setting, where to go, what would be appropriate to say or do at certain times, and you get my point.

After Ellen, I continued to be that source, happily and voluntarily, as I thought I was doing my part in helping to teach others how we, as Black people experienced the world, this time in corporate settings.

During those times, if I'm going to keep it completely 100, **energetically, I was putting myself in front of the other person as a shield to keep them from having to deal with the energy of corporate/workplace trauma by individuals who didn't necessarily set out to harm but had no clue how to talk to Black people or how what they said would be offensive in any way.**

Was it a lot for me to deal with? **Yes.** Did it cause me energetic harm? **Absolutely,** but at that time, it was the only way I knew how to protect the people that looked like me and to help "*soften the blow*" if they were going to receive bad news.

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*Fast forward to 2020*, and I couldn't do it anymore. I could no longer take on the "energetic emotional weight" of those who looked like me in the manner I had grown accustomed to. I also could no longer, in good faith, continue to be *THAT* Black person that would listen to the off-color comments, remarks, thoughts, and jokes and then respond with something "*nice*," knowing how they truly felt.

As I continued to wrestle with, then come to terms with, the reality of the world and the DEI initiatives, **I asked myself several questions:**

- Do I still want to be the voice of Black (and Brown) people?
- If so, what would that voice sound like? What would it look like?
- Where could I use this voice that would have the most impact?
- Who would I want to share this "voice" with?
- What cost would I be willing to pay (or get paid) to do it?
- How could I make it less exhausting for me?

The more I thought about it, the more I weighed the importance of sharing this "voice" against what I was currently doing in my dating, relationship, and marriage coaching business, the more the vision began to manifest. If I wanted to make a difference, **I had to stop what I was doing and shift the direction of my business altogether.**

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*And so I did!*

**I shifted the focus from dating, relationship, and marriage coaching to helping Black and Brown women heal from corporate trauma, increase their confidence and leadership skills, and train and consult with dynamic organizations to create sustainable and conscious DEI programs strategically with a focus on leadership development.**

In case you were unaware, when a person of color shares their truth with you, *we are opening up ourselves to more trauma than we have already experienced.* We know there is a possibility that we may experience ridicule, verbal, mental, and emotional abuse, gaslighting, micro-aggressions, and all of the other things that we have come to expect in the workplace.

Let me repeat that... **all of the other things that we have come to expect in the workplace.**

Think about that for a moment.

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Most of us carry these experiences with us from job to job. After a point, we stop speaking up because it's too painful and damaging to us emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and financially. If you've ever had the trust of a Black or Brown employee in the workplace, and you did something to lose that trust, **nine times out of ten, you will never get it back, and they will never let you know it.**

Being honest as an employee doesn't always end well for us. So I asked myself, *how do I fix this?*

**I happen to be that outspoken Black employee willing to share**, but that took years of growing through the workplace trauma I've endured over thirty-plus years to get to this space.

I mentioned this before, but I had a former coworker reach out to me to inquire about my experience in corporate during the #metoo movement, and I honestly couldn't remember. She worked at a previous company, and was inquiring about an experience at that company. *I just couldn't remember!* That doesn't mean that nothing happened to me in that particular work environment, but it could have been that I was so sure that no one would believe me or that it was such a common thing that had I said something, I would have lost my job over it.

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So I may have done what most Black and Brown people do, **we stuff it down deep, or we block it out completely.**

If you're a white person in the DEI space, and you do not have a Black mentor to help keep you honest and help you understand the gaps, the microaggressions, the inappropriate comments or behaviors, ***then you're not doing all that you can do.***

If your goal is to help Black and Brown people, you need Black and Brown people on your team who are not afraid to step on your toes to move DEI forward truly. Otherwise, what is the point?

**If you don't know what you don't know, you need someone who does.**

Companies waste a ton of money every day on DEI consulting firms that will tell you what you want to hear to get you to write the check for fear of offending you. People of color may even own the companies, but will they tell you what you need to know, or will they continue to let you off the hook for fear of stepping on your toes or not winning your business?



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John G., someone I have a ton of respect for, shared an analogy during a conversation. I want you to know before I share this. I want you to know that I am paraphrasing and I'm adding quite a bit more embellishment to make sure that the point is made. So forgive me, John, if you're listening to this, and if you feel that I've butchered your thoughts:

*“[As a consultant] going into a company and telling them what they need to do differently is like going into someone else's house, uninvited, telling them that they should change the drapes, move the furniture around, you don't like the paint on the walls, and you think they should change it all to accommodate you while you there.”*

#### Who would want that?

It's not the visitor's house. *They don't make the decisions*; their likes, dislikes, preferences, and opinions were not consulted before building the house, so *why do they feel they have a say in decorating it?* That's what it's like in some companies that say they want to do DEI the right way but refuse to do it or even face what must be done to do it successfully.

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However, as a company hiring DEI consultants or creating departments and not empowering them to make long-term, transformational decisions, **isn't that what you're paying for?** For someone to come in and help you to identify what you're doing wrong or what you need to do to change the culture in your organization? Or are you/your organization only interested in checking the DEI box?

**Having a Black (and Brown) mentor on your team would help you see more clearly, and actually speak TO the individuals your programs and initiatives were supposed to help, vs. talking at them and retraumatizing them.**

*It's time to stop playing with people's emotions and wasting the company's money.*

Suppose you're in the C-Suite and have a personal or professional mission to move the DEI needle forward. In that case, you *MUST* have a Black (and Brown) mentor on your personal advisory board, especially if you are considering leading the effort for your company.

Your leadership will look to you for guidance, direction, and course correction. If you focus on your personal growth first, you will also understand the need for your

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leadership to grow.

*No worries*, let's get you headed in the right direction first, then we can discuss how I can come in to work with your teams. Head on over to my calendar and let's talk about what mentorship could look like for you and your team.

<http://www.calendly.com/coachanitacharlot>

*See you in the next episode...*

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To learn more about how to partner with Anita, go to <https://anitacharlot.com/services>.

To join the waiting list for the upcoming For My Black and Brown Sisters monthly membership community, go to [bit.ly/formyblackandbrownsisters](http://bit.ly/formyblackandbrownsisters).