



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Anxiety about speaking up

Guest: Roxy Manning

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[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow

Hello, and welcome back to the Anxiety Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I'm delighted to be welcoming Roxy Manning.

Welcome, Roxy.

Roxy Manning

Thank you so much, Jaia. I'm so glad to be back here with you.

Jaia Bristow

I'm so glad to have you back on one of these events.

Today's conversation is super important. So we're going to be talking, because obviously, anxiety is such a broad topic, as I've discussed with many people throughout this conference, and one of the things around anxiety these days, especially living through the pandemic and racial tensions, the way they are all around the world and the way they're more in people's consciousness and everything else going on in the world, there's often this anxiety people have of how do we talk about these topics?

Now, as a trainer in nonviolent communication and someone who does a lot of anti racist work and inclusion work, I think you are very well placed to talk about this topic.

So shall we start by just talking a little bit about that anxiety? Where it comes from, how it comes up and how it shows up in people.

Roxy Manning

Absolutely. I think both of these issues that you've described, the pandemic and the growing awareness of the impact of racism and white supremacy around the world, as you say, they result in anxiety in somewhat the same way.

Both of them have an impact on people in knowing how to talk about it. So a lot of times people are thinking, I'm impacted by what's happening. So me as a black person, maybe someone who might have a health condition, I might be impacted by other people's choices and what they're doing in relation to these two topics.

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And I don't know how to speak up to advocate for myself. I don't know how to speak up when I need to make requests about things that are happening.

And people walk through the world with a huge amount of anxiety, like, what am I going to do when I'm confronted by this? What am I going to do when I need... I know someone who has to get on the subway every day and every single day they're like, I'm about to go on the subway, there are going to be people sitting next to me not wearing a mask, and especially now that it's optional, how do I speak up about this?

And so every moment is now navigating anxiety around, how will I keep myself safe? And actually, as I say that my whole body just relaxes because I get to that core issue. A lot of the anxiety that people are experiencing is, how do I keep myself safe? How do I connect with other people to keep myself safe in ways that are not going to create more conflict?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I spoke to Dr Patrice Douglas around anxiety and racial trauma, and we talked about that element of safety. And I think that's a really great conversation for anyone interested in more of that topic, especially around the racial element.

And I think what we're talking about, that comes into play. But as you say, with the pandemic as well, people are suddenly having to decide how much they... Take extra precautions and have all these extra decisions on big and small scales. And that's something that people from marginalized and oppressed groups can really relate to.

And here it's happening as well for, I think lots of different people in that category, especially people who are, whether they're immunocompromised or they're living with someone who is or they're just worried about their health and about the pandemic in general. And so it makes sense that, as you say, it boils down to, how do I keep myself safe?

And so often there's so much division around these topics where it becomes politicized. When actually it boils down to a very basic, essential need that we can all relate to about safety.

Roxy Manning

Absolutely. And I love hearing about the other conversations that you've had, and I really hope folks listen to that.

But part of what I'm interested in, too, is when I start thinking about how do I keep myself safe? Part of the anxiety comes up around, how do I talk to other people, especially when I can tell that they're going to have different viewpoints than me?

So if someone's not wearing a mask and I'm wanting to talk to them about putting a mask on, a huge amount of anxiety comes up. How am I going to bridge this gap? This difference between us?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I remember a time where I was on a train and it was during the peak of the pandemic, and masks were actually obligatory. And the person next to me had taken the mask off to eat or drink

something and then was just not wearing the mask anymore. And I felt so much anxiety about asking them, and I really had to build it up.

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And I could feel a lot of different feelings. There was anger that they just weren't respecting the rules. There was fear that they weren't wearing the mask and the impact that could have. Fear about if I spoke up what would happen? all these kinds of things.

And I think that happens so much that idea of, like, if I speak up about a topic that someone has different opinions on, what is going to happen? What are the consequences going to be?

And I think to some degree, we all have some elements of not wanting to enter into conflict. We want connection with other people. We don't want more division. We don't want conflict. And this is true, regardless of whether you're for or against masks or whether you prefer or don't prefer wearing one, or whether you have to or can't wear one.

And it's not about the validity of the argument. Because there are certain people who are like, mask exempt for medical reasons. And it's the same like with my grandparents, sometimes they talk about, let's not talk about politics at the table. And it's like, but what are you defining as politics? Am I allowed to talk about my identity? Am I allowed to talk about my relationships? Am I allowed to talk about my lived experience, for example? Or does that become politics?

So we're living in this world with so much division, so many differences of opinion, but values. For some people, it feels like an opinion. For some people, it feels like it's not opinion, it's their lived reality. It's not hypothetical, it's real. And then there are differences in values and all this kind of thing.

So how do we talk about these things? How can we have conversations where we're looking after one's self and one's safety, and that's physical safety, but also emotional safety because it can be scary having these conversations, whilst also being respectful of the other people so that we're not imposing our beliefs on someone else?

Roxy Manning

Well, I think this is a really key question, and you've already started to talk about some of the things that we need to look at.

So one of the things you mentioned is, you were sitting on that train and you saw this person take off their mask and not put it back on. And then you start getting angry. And so that's probably for me, the first step.

A lot of times when we realize that someone is doing something we don't like, especially again, when we go back to safety, someone's doing something that's putting me at risk, we feel angry. Our whole self protection mechanism kicks in and then the anger becomes one of the stimuli for our anxiety. I'm feeling so angry at this person, I'm judging them. I'm thinking they're bad, that they're different than me.

And those thoughts then get in the way of me thinking, and now this is someone I can connect with. If I'm looking at you as my enemy, I'm going to feel angry. I'm going to feel anxious about trying to engage with you.

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So one of the very first steps that we need to do is to be able to look at that person, not as the enemy, but as another human being who is holding a viewpoint different than I am and doing exactly what you just described, thinking what might be some of the reasons that they're doing or saying this thing that they're doing?

So you mentioned this person who took their mask off, it might change how we're feeling inside, how we're reacting and not what we're going to do. I want to make that really clear. We're still going to make the request, but it might change how I'm approaching that request.

If I think, could this be a person with asthma? Could this be a person who has difficulty breathing and is trying to wear the mask out of respect for everyone else? And it's still trying to balance, what's going to help me be able to breathe and how do I help keep everyone safe? And if that's the case, when I approach that person differently, when I no longer see them as my enemy, someone who's holding mutual care?

So when we talk about things like the pandemic, it's a lot easier for me to imagine their humanity and think about why they might be doing the things that they're doing. It's a lot harder when I'm thinking about things like some of the racial violence that's been happening, and especially when we think about the racial violence that's happened in the United States and actually around the world with huge amounts of intensity lately. But we still need to be able to do the same mental move.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And one of the things that I talk about in the workshops that I lead is around often when we feel defensive or dismissive around someone, is to try and cultivate curiosity.

So it's looking at our own reactions, but also, as you say, rather than immediately jumping to, this person is my enemy and creating me versus them or us versus them, there's the good guys and the bad guys. And I'm sorry to use guys. It's such a gendered word, but there's the good people and the bad people, there's the goodies and baddies.

And of course, we always consider ourselves as one of the goodies, which means everyone else is a baddie. Whereas, as you say, we switch from that kind of defensiveness and enemy and conflict mode into curiosity. And there's a softening that happens when we do that.

And it starts with internal curiosity, so looking at both our own questioning, our own immediate reactions and curiosity about the other person. Because it's like, why are they doing that? Maybe they just, in my example, I think the person literally just forgot to put their mask back on because it's still weird for a lot of us, even after 2 years. It still feels strange sometimes to wear a mask and there it hadn't been even that long. Or maybe it was, I don't know why, but we immediately jump to the worst conclusion in our minds when there's so many other possibilities.

Roxy Manning

I want to add to that, though, there's a reason we jump to those first conclusions, and it's because so many of us have had the interaction that went wrong. When I've asked them to put on their mask, they blew up at me.

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And so I don't want us to dismiss the protection that our minds are... It's almost like a very protective move that our minds are doing when we go to, what's the worst thing that can happen? Because if I'm anxious about it, if I'm worried about it, I start to prepare myself for it.

But we also need to recognize that that actually gets in the way of us approaching the interactions in ways that gives us the maximum chance of success. So I want to be able to say to myself, as I'm looking, I'm going to keep using this example of the person with the mask. So when I think about that person with the mask, I want to recognize that there are reasons why I might be worried.

And instead of just letting my brain hijack me into, this person is going to be evil, this person is going to be mean to me, first I start to look for signs. Do I have reasons to be worried? Is the person wearing an anti vax sticker and also not wearing a mask? Then I might have some reason to think they might not be really open to my approaching them about putting the mask back on.

Or is it they just seem to be really engrossed in the book that they were reading while they were eating and they haven't put the mask back on. So I start to look for what can help me get clues around what my level of risk is?

The piece, though, is that I don't want that to prevent me from speaking. Even when I think the risk might be high. I see the antivax sticker, I can still approach the person. And part of the way that I can work with my exotic about that is to check around. If I'm going to ask something that might be risky, are there other people near me? Are there ways that I can keep myself safe? Are there ways that I can bring in this question that really honors what I could imagine would be important to them?

So saying something like, I really value everyone being able to choose what they do, and I'm also aware that right now the laws say that we need to wear masks, are you willing to put the mask back on after you've eaten? I know this was at the time when you said there were laws.

Nowadays it's even trickier for folks because we're thinking the laws don't say that and I'm really worried about my health. And so that I might bring in that vulnerability, I'm really concerned about my health and I'm immunocompromised, I'm wondering if you'd be willing to put your mask back on until I get to my stop?

It could even be like, I'm not going to make a huge ask that I really would want to make, but just really tying it into, here's something that you as a human being can do to support my welfare as a human being. And seeing if that helps me be able to take that risk.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think one of the reasons I love, there's many reasons, but one of the things I'm really picking up in what you're saying is the relationship between anxiety and trauma. When you say that that kind of anxiety exists to protect us based on history, and that a lot of the reasons that we might feel that way is because we've been in situations where we've tried to have conversations and things have gone badly, so it's normal that we're feeling anxious about making a request.

And then there's the kind of acknowledging that. So not repressing the anxiety, not being like, why am I feeling anxious about this? I should just do it and ignore the anxiety, because that can actually lead to too dangerous situations. And then it can reinforce the anxiety because then it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

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So I love that there's the kind of acknowledgment and so there's the accepting that the anxiety is there and being kind to that, and also looking at the reality of the situation. So taking into account what's happening, looking at the context of this. So taking it situation by situation and not applying a blanket rule for everything.

So it's like, if we're using the example of me on the train, like you say, it's looking at the person, assessing how safe they feel, how open they seem to be to receive things. Whether it feels like it's a political statement, whether they even have a mask to hand. Because whether there's all these different elements, whether there's anyone else in the carriage, whether the person feels like they might physically attack me or not.

And I could feel it was a lot of inner anxiety, like a lot of, how are they going to react? I wasn't afraid for my physical safety in that moment, or maybe around my health might have been because I already had COVID once at that point and been hospitalized for 2 weeks with it. So there was, like you say, that trauma, that, oh my God, I really want to be careful, I don't really want to be on public transport, but I don't really have much of a choice. So those kinds of things.

And so I love that idea of both acknowledging that there is a side of anxiety that is helpful, it's an alarm bell, it's a warning. And then we take that warning and we assess what's actually happening.

It's like if we hear a car alarm go off, we look, is there actually someone trying to break into the car, or did someone just accidentally bump against the car? How many people are there? You don't just hear the alarm and immediately call the police or run away or have an extreme reaction.

And I think anxiety is very much like that. It's like an alarm, and then you have to assess, what do I do with this alarm? Am I in real danger right now or not? What are my options?

And I love the fact that you talked about, it's not about deciding whether we speak up or not, it's about deciding how we speak up. So maybe we can say a bit more about, you've already talked a bit about that, but let's look at the different options we have around speaking up.

Roxy Manning

Absolutely. So the first option then is, and again, let's continue using this example of COVID. The first option is to be really clear inside of myself. I'm feeling anxious, and there's something that I'm really wanting that's important to me. And to be really clear about what that is.

It's really surprising how often our anxiety hijacks us. And so then when we end up speaking up, especially if we're holding any enemy images about that person, we speak up not about the thing that we want. We'll say something like, oh my gosh, why don't you have a mask on? Instead of, what I'm really wanting is if this person puts on their mask. But, 'Why don't you have a mask on?', will come out as confrontational, dismissive and the very thing that we're afraid of is going to happen.

So we really take that moment to pause and say, okay, I have a sense that this is safe, that I can speak up. What is it that I'm wanting in this moment? And be really clear about that.

The next piece is to really lead with, again, an awareness sense. Even if you don't really believe it, there's a saying, 'Fake it till you make it', or 'Fake it till you're there'. It's like doing that kind of, I'm not

sure how this person is going to react, I'm not 100% trusting them, but I'm going to assume that this person is a rational, kind human being.

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And if I have that assumption, I'm going to respond so differently than if I'm going to look at the person with, this is an evil person who's going to do something to me. The level of anxiety and fear in our voice will be very different when we speak. And that's going to help reduce that person's anxiety and fear.

I don't know if you've ever had someone come to you with a request and you're like, I have to ask something of you, and I'm really worried about it. And your body immediately goes, what? What is it? Oh my God, what's going on? So we trigger their anxiety and fear with our anxiety and fear.

So really noticing inside of ourselves, what are some of the things that we can do so that when we speak, we're really speaking. Imagine that it's your best friend, imagine that it's your child. That I'm speaking with that kind of warmth and absolute like, of course this person cares for my well being energy that can invite that back from them.

We have our mirror neurons in our brain and so whatever is going on inside of our bodies is going to trigger that same energetic feel inside of their bodies and it's going to help them respond in the same way.

So this move, it's really subtle, but just put your child's face on that person's face and say, hey, hun, are you willing to put on a mask because I'm really worried about my health at the moment? Hugely different than, are you willing to put on a mask? I don't want to cause any problems. Really different interactions.

Jaia Bristow

It's interesting, even when you were demonstrating, I could feel it in my body, the different ways I was responding to your request. And I think it's so important to remember that the person opposite us is also a human with their own traumas, their own anxiety, their own history, their own stuff going on.

Again, it's that thing of they're not the enemy. And often when we think about the enemy, we dehumanize someone. They are a human, they have their stuff. And whether we share the same values or not, whether we make the same decisions or not, we're still all humans deserving of some degree of respect.

And hopefully, if we're trying to avoid conflict, then we have to factor in our own things, but their reaction as well. And that's what can be tricky at times.

And the ways you were talking as well, it really reminded me of that kind of cliché in relationships when someone's like, 'We need to talk', and immediately the anxiety of, oh my God, they're going to break up with me, what's happening? What's going on?

Whereas if someone's just like, hey, do you have 5 minutes for a chat? I've just got this thing that's on my mind that I want to talk through with you. Then it's like, oh, sure. But even if that is what they're thinking, if they use the words, 'Oh, we need to talk'...

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So it's the same kind of thing, the approach, the words, the attitude, the feeling. Especially sometimes things happen via text, we're talking about an example in person, but sometimes tone is so much harder to read via text, for example.

So again, it's like choosing words, explaining the intention behind the request can really help prevent the other person from jumping to conclusions. Because as we said, we've already jumped to conclusions and made them the enemy and we don't want them doing the exact same thing to us.

Roxy Manning

And you mentioned via text things are really much harder to read. What's the person's intentions? What's their emotional state? But in both texts, both online and in the real world situations, the other thing that I think really helps manage anxiety is when we realize we get do overs.

And I talk to my clients about this a lot. We often have this high stakes, I'm going to roll the dice and everything is riding on me being perfect when I approach the person the first time. That's not how life is.

So if I can really lower the stakes and say, I get to ask this question, I get to say this thing, and if it doesn't go the way that I want, if I notice from their reaction that something triggered them, I get to stop and say, hey, I'm noticing that something's up for you. Can we try that again? Or can I make sure that you heard what I wanted you to hear? Or can I check if you're experiencing any judgment in how I ask this of you?

So we get to do a lot of different things that can help reset and deescalate what's happening. And when I realized that this is not the only chance I have to have this interaction to make this request, my anxiety goes down.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. I love that lowering the stakes, knowing that there's always opportunity for, not even just a do over or repair, but in the moment of adapting again, in the same way we talked about, there's not just a blanket rule for every situation. It's like, check out the situation, the reality, adapt to that. And then as you're doing it, as you're having the conversation, check in with yourself, check in with the other person.

What are some other ways and steps and skills and tools we can use to have these sort of conversations and to speak up, to advocate for oneself whilst avoiding conflict?

Roxy Manning

Well, as we're going through the conversation, there's a skill that those of us who are really practicing NVC, nonviolent communication, use that I think it's really important, and it's a skill of self empathy.

So we're going to get triggered. I want people to really recognize that some of these interactions that we're talking about, absolutely it's going to be hard. And one of the ways that I can deal with my anxiety throughout it is to always check in with myself in every moment.

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It's like as I'm talking to you, I'm also saving a part of my brain power to check in with, how am I doing? What am I needing in this moment? And it helps me to recalibrate in every moment of the conversation.

So if you started off with, now I'm really interested in the relationship conversation, but the 'We need to talk', as soon as I get that response and I notice my response, I don't just automatically respond like, what? What's the matter? What did you do? I don't go there first. I kind of check in with myself and say, whoa, I just had a flush of a rush of anxiety come up. What am I scared of? What am I wanting or needing?

And I own that as mine, not necessarily what the person said or did. And so I could say to myself, like, oh, I'm really worried that this person is maybe contemplating ending the relationship. Is there anything that he said that made me think that, or that she said that made me think that? No. Oh, okay. Well, then let me take a deep breath and then say, yeah, we can talk, but if it's going to be a really serious conversation, I might need some time to prepare myself.

So just checking in with myself lets me know that, yeah, I do have a moment to talk, as long as it's something that I'm not going to need more space to get myself in the right headspace.

As the conversation proceeds, if I'm having this conversation with the masc person, one of the concerns that a lot of people and you mentioned that tie between trauma and anxiety, one of the concerns that a lot of folks have is I'm going to find myself in a situation where I'm not safe, and then because of trauma, I'm not going to leave it.

A lot of people end up in these conversations, it's like I want to leave, I don't feel safe, I'm actually feeling battered. Whatever's happening isn't safe for me, and I don't know how to exit. And if I can really practice that self-empathy skill, again, checking in, is this still serving me? Does it still have the chance of getting me what it is that I was wanting when I started this conversation?

And if not, it's okay to leave. If I'm feeling really anxious beforehand, I can have my exit line set up. So it could be something like, I realize I have to take a call. Thank you for talking with me. And that's an exit line that if I know it's there, once I'm doing that checking in, I can leave in a way that doesn't require me to come up with the perfect line in that moment that's going to help me leave safely.

So this continuously checking in and having an exit strategy is another thing that I recommend.

Jaia Bristow

I like that. And like, for example, in my train situation, an exit strategy could be, oh, I understand, in that case I'm going to go sit in a different seat or something. Because I was in the window seat, they were in the aisle, so I would have had to ask them to move. But there's ways where we can, I think, look after our safety. So it's trying to engage but still make sure that we are safe.

Roxy Manning

I have one thing about that.

[00:26:40] Jaia Bristow

Definitely.

Roxy Manning

I want to be super clear because, say, okay, I'm going to move to another seat, might still be like, oh, that's scary for me to say for some people. And there's a way that we kind of really focus on, we should be courageous and always say the right thing.

And I also want to advocate for it would be perfectly okay in that situation to say something like, oh, I'm going to go to the bathroom. And take myself to the bathroom and go to a different seat. And that way it's always noticing what's the level of risk and vulnerability that I'm willing to bear in this moment?

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think one of the things I was reflecting on as well is around harm, and so the importance of speaking up because it's scary, and I think it's really important we talk about ways of making it feel safe and less scary.

But sometimes we also don't want to speak up because we don't want to cause harm to the other. But by not speaking up, we're actually causing harm to ourselves. And I know that in that moment on that train, I was feeling so uncomfortable, and there was all these voices in my head about what I should and shouldn't do and say and about the person and what should and shouldn't happen. In the end, I finally did speak up, and I was just like, oh, would you mind putting your mask on? And they were like, oh, sure, and put it on. And it was such a big deal in my head and the reality was so not a big deal.

And I have a lot of skills through doing this work, through having done NVC courses myself and all the work that I do, that I was able to notice all of that. But it's still, even having done so much work, I still have a lot of trauma, I have history, and it was still scary.

And so, like you say it's really important to practice self-empathy as well, but just the importance of speaking up, I think is important to talk about as well.

Roxy Manning

And we started talking about both the pandemic and some of the racial violence that's been happening. And I want to go back to that a little bit because there is the fear.

We've been talking about speaking up where I can really imagine the other person as a full human being. Somebody who probably has my interests at heart or at least is neutral about that. And when we're talking about things like racial violence, we have lots of ample evidence that that's not true, that the person might not actually, and might be clearly stating things that leads me to believe this person does not have my interests at heart.

And so when you talk about the importance of speaking up and the anxiety that comes with it, in that situation it's a whole other game.

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So there are a couple of things here that I think are really important. I always remind people that if I'm going to speak up in a situation like that where I'm pretty clear that other person is viewing me as the enemy, or might be wanting to do harm for me, this is where it's so important to know for myself, why am I speaking up?

We often get into these situations where something happens, I'm feeling really strongly about it, and I think that the only thing I can do in that moment is to speak up, that speaking up is the way to meet so many different needs. It's a way to say, this is not okay. I'm not standing for this anymore. It might be around protecting other people around me.

But if I have clarity about why am I speaking up in this moment? That can help me to decide how much level of risk am I going to bear. I'm still going to be anxious. It's still going to be scary. But when I'm really clear that I'm speaking up for this purpose, for these reasons, it can make it a lot easier to say, I'm still going to choose to speak up. And then I'm also going to choose to speak up in a certain way because I'm clear about what outcomes I want.

And this one, this feels so important to me because when we talk about and, you know a bit of the work that I do, but when we talk about speaking up in these situations, part of what I'm really advocating in our world is that if we want this to change, if we want this kind of racial violence and racial animus to stop, we need to be able to speak up and interrupt harm when it's happening in ways that don't continue the dynamic of, and I'm going to make you my enemy now because you've said something to me so you're now the bad person.

And so I often advocate for folks, I'm feeling anxious, I'm feeling scared, I want to speak up because this is not all right. But I want to speak up in ways that will really change what's happening, that create the possibility that this person who's seeing me as their enemy, can see something different.

And so it might be something as simple as saying, hey, stop, this is not safe for a lot of people here. And I'm going to take these folks and move away. I'm not saying you're a bad person, you're an evil person, but I'm doing this very functional speaking up. I know that I want to get this person for safety. Great. Do that and don't engage with the person in terms of naming them as a bad person, evil person, because that's leading to that continuing, we're seeing each other as enemies.

Or it might be that I want to speak up and talk with you, and I've actually had people do this, like, why are you talking this way? What's leading you to like, you don't know me, so why do you have these beliefs? And I might actually want to engage in a conversation with someone. Imagine how scary that is and how powerful it could be if we could actually have that conversation.

So if we find ourselves with the capacity and the will, and fully wanting to name that this is a choice and that no one should ever feel that they have to speak up to someone like this, but if we find ourselves with the capacity and the will, then our anxiety can actually support us in the conversation.

I can imagine saying to someone, and I have, I'm feeling really scared about talking with you because I have a sense that we really don't see the world in the same way. But I really want to understand. I want to understand what's behind some of the things that you're believing? Because if I don't understand, I don't think we'll ever find common ground.

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And so I'm not hiding my anxiety and I'm still going with, and here's the reason why I'm speaking to you. So I'm inviting them into the same curiosity with me.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think that understanding why we're speaking up is really important, knowing the intention behind it, because it also helps guide how we speak up, which you've spoken about then and we've previously spoken about is so important, but it helps us stay true to the intention so that we don't get derailed and caught up in a tangent or reactivity or it's just being very firm and clear.

And I think, especially when we're not speaking to strangers, we're speaking to people we love, then it's particularly interesting. My best friend was recently telling me about going home to her family and conversations she was having with them. They definitely don't share the same values and she comes from a very conservative white family. I'll leave it at that.

And it was really interesting because she could see herself getting riled up by some of the things she was saying. She definitely didn't want to get in conflict with her family because she loves them. And so she started just asking questions and trying to clarify. Or sometimes just not going along with it, just saying, I don't agree and this conversation is making me uncomfortable or things like that.

Sometimes it can be simple. Sometimes we think we have to, with one problem we have to change the other person's mind or resolve all conflict in the world. And sometimes it's just a case of just, I'm not okay with this.

Roxy Manning

I love this idea about, because so many people have anxiety about this very thing, speaking to family members about things where we disagree, speaking to people we love. Or it might be speaking to coworkers people that I need to be in an ongoing relationship with.

And I still have very important reasons to speak up. I still want this person to understand, either maybe where my boundaries are, or where I'm experiencing harm by some of the things that they're saying or doing.

And if I can hold on to, I'm speaking up not just to prevent the harm from happening, but to also have hopes of maintaining a relationship, of maybe planting seeds that can create a relationship where we can both be more authentic, then it changes how I speak up and what I'm going to focus on.

Jaia Bristow

100%. And talking about coworkers, let's speak a little bit more about that. Because I think we've talked about speaking to strangers and in public environments and how to manage that a little bit. And we've touched a bit upon speaking to loved ones, whether that's family members or partners. And the intention is different for me. The intention when I'm speaking to a loved one is to maintain that connection whilst also staying true to my values and my experiences.

When I'm speaking to a stranger, it depends on the context, but often it might be more about safety in the immediate. It's less about actually... It's important to see them as a human rather than an enemy,

but it's not so much about, oh, this is a really important relationship in my life and so I want to maintain that connection for that reason.

[00:36:03]

But then we have people like coworkers, people that we see everyday and we share things with but it's not a personal relationship. And especially when it's not like a situation where you can just walk away. Like on the train, if I disagree with someone on the train, I can sit in a different seat, and then I'll hopefully never see that person in my life and whatever.

But when it's coworkers, similar to family, where you're seeing them often more regularly than family, but there's that kind of... It's not quite a personal relationship either. So what are some ways to manage talking about one's identity, talking about racial dynamics, talking about the pandemic, talking about any of these topics, which are like hot topics right now and scary topics and topics that create division?

Roxy Manning

Well, the first question I would have is, why do you want to talk with your coworker about that? Because you've got to start there. If the person is doing or saying something that's really challenging my values, maybe they're making a homophobic comment or something like this or saying some anti racist slurs, if only it would be anti racist, but saying something racist, then I'm really clear that I'm wanting to interrupt that behavior because I also want to feel welcome in my workplace.

And so I want to be super clear about it. If it's just that, oh, this was in the news and I want to talk about it with someone, then I would say maybe that's not the coworker to talk to about it.

So we need to be really mindful about who and why we're choosing to have interactions with. If it's the former, though, then we really want to say something. And so some of the things that I would do, there are a number of things.

First is, people are so much more responsive when we have private conversations. And a lot of times with coworkers, it's like there's a meeting happening, we're in front of everyone and they've said something. If I confront them in that meeting in front of everyone else, even if what I'm saying is gentle and kind, etc, they're going to have so much shame coming up. It's like, oh my gosh, now everyone's looking at me, everyone's thinking this about me, that they might not even hear what I'm saying.

So I often like people to start with, can you have an individual private conversation with that person first to the extent that you feel safe? And that way I start to gauge, is this person actually open to hearing me? Are they able to take in what I'm saying when we don't have the whole other layer of public venture that the person's having to deal with?

After I've had that conversation, if it continues then I have a couple of different purposes for speaking up that might happen. So I've gone into organizations where there's a coworker who continuously says things that are challenging over and over and over again. Someone has had private conversations, sometimes management have tried to intervene, and the person still says these kinds of things. While whatever legal stuff is happening to take care of that behavior, there's still the question of what do we do in meetings?

[00:39:10]

And so in that case, I might be really clear, why am I speaking up? Is it because I'm actually thinking that this person is going to shift their opinions? Or is it that I'm just wanting to stop the behavior? Or is it that I'm wanting to let other people know, I see what's happening and it's not okay?

And each of those options means that I'm going to be speaking up in a different way. One of them might be saying to the person, hey, this is something that we've agreed not to talk about. We need to change the subject. I'm not engaging with the person. I'm just stopping the behavior. So I don't have to really work myself up like, what am I going to do if they say this to me or that to me? No. All I'm saying is, no, we're not talking about this.

And that's going to be my response to whatever they say. We're not talking about this. It makes it a little easier for me to manage the fear of speaking up if I know that it's going to be a contained conversation.

If I'm speaking up because I'm worried about the impact for me and for others who are present, then I might speak up not for that person, but to everyone else.

So it might be something like, I've talked before about naming micro aggressions. Wow, I'm really concerned hearing that comment because it really is putting forth this view, for instance, that... One of the comments I hear is, black folks aren't like hard workers. And so I'm really worried about the implications of the statement that was said. And I want to be really clear that this is not something that I believe and that I think really is one of the values in the workplace.

So I'm speaking up, again, not to change their mind, but to put a different narrative on the table so that we can all hold on to it.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think there's another element which is also sometimes speaking up to protect a specific person. And sometimes it's speaking to them rather than the person who said or done something harmful.

So an example of this that someone told me about is there was a woman in a male dominated work environment, surprise, surprise, and she was getting interrupted a lot in meetings.

And one of the men noticed that. And so every time she'd get interrupted, rather than saying to the other person, oh, you just interrupted her, he'd either interrupt the person who'd interrupted or wait till that person was finished and then before someone bounced back off was like, woman, I won't say names, but to the woman, oh, I believe you were just interrupted, would you like to continue with your thoughts?

Or if someone stole her idea and rephrased it was like, oh, thank you for sharing that. I think that was what so and so just shared.

So again, it's not creating conflict, it's just highlighting in a more gentle way of just pointing out the facts of, oh, you were interrupted, would you like to continue? Not, so and so you interrupted so and so and like those kinds of dynamics.

[00:41:58] Roxy Manning

So I think it's a yes and because there are ways that that kind of speaking up can still put the other person at risk.

So when I go into workplaces where this is really challenging, someone might say something like, woman who was interrupted, woman, you were interrupted. I think you were speaking. And then, oh my gosh, the person who interrupted them said, I didn't interrupt you, did you? And now this person who might have less structural power is going, no, it's fine, it's okay.

And so one of the ways that I really advocate for folks to approach that kind of situation is to take full ownership of what you're wanting. So instead of saying, hey, I think you were interrupted, which could put that person on the spot, I could just say something like, you were saying this and I'm really interested to hear more about that if you have more to say.

And that way it's still inviting them back into the conversation, still addressing the interruption, for everyone else it's really clear what you're doing, but it's not putting them in that position where they're going to have to possibly be called out, like with your boss saying, I didn't interrupt you. You don't mind that, right? Or we had that idea together, right? So it's really making it clear what's happening.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. I think that's a really important distinction. So it's not putting the person on the spot, it's just reincluding them into the conversation.

There's so much more we could talk about. There's so many more areas they want to go down but I'm aware of time. So before we wrap up, are there any other points that you do want to add that we haven't touched upon?

Roxy Manning

I think it's not so much adding, but it feels important to let your viewers know that I really want to encourage people that recognize that your anxiety is a signal, and it's a signal that, just like you mentioned earlier, you get to choose how you respond.

So pay attention to your anxiety and then decide for yourself what's important to me in this moment and what are the things I can do that will really support this thing that's important to me?

And if we hold that as a way of working with our anxiety, it gives us a little bit more room to do just enough. Not to push ourselves to do more than feel safe or doable for us, but just enough to attend to our needs in that moment.

And if we keep doing just enough, eventually we start to have more expansion into what's possible for us. So just do just enough in that moment.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And the more we do just enough, the more we rewire the neural pathways and the less scary it gets, so that suddenly speaking up becomes almost automatic. We're not thinking about it. And I know that I've noticed that in my own experience, I've seen that happen in friends and other people where it's just, someone will say something that sounds off and they'll just be like, oh, why did

you mention that that was a black person? Why is that relevant to the story or something? Whatever it is, something really simple.

[00:44:52]

But it's not a big deal to do it. And at first, it is a big deal when you're anxious. Speaking up is hard. But that's why there's all the things we've talked about today, the self-empathy, figuring out the intention, looking to see if you're actually safe, relying on allies and other people all these skills.

And again, if people are interested in finding out more about nonviolent communication work, you can learn a lot more of these skills and practice these skills, and then slowly it gets easier.

Roxy Manning

Yes, absolutely.

Jaia Bristow

Roxy, thank you so much for your time today. As always, I've loved this conversation with you.

Roxy Manning

Thank you, Jaia. I'm delighted, as always.

Jaia Bristow

How can people find out more about you and your work?

Roxy Manning

Absolutely go to my website, roxannemanning.com and you'll be able to read some of my articles about some of these topics and also see my upcoming events.

Jaia Bristow

Fantastic. Thanks again.

Roxy Manning

You're welcome.