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**Bina M. Patel:** We don't have to have the same work, the same credentials, the same story, but I understand you have a story of why this matters to you, and that goes so far in lessening the distance, the disconnection, the distrust that people have of each other. If we could just understand what drives us, what our purpose is.

**Sam Fuqua:** That's Bina M. Patel, and this is, Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. In this episode, we talk with Bina M. Patel about how her work as a leadership coach and facilitator combines her decades of policy and nonprofit experience with neuroscience and practices like breathwork and mindfulness. She's the author of the book, *Say The Quiet Part Out Loud: Liberate Your Inner Change Maker*.

I am Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi Alexis.

**Alexis Miles:** Hi Sam.

**Sam Fuqua:** And we're so pleased to be joined for this episode of Well, That went Sideways! by Bina M. Patel. Hello and welcome.

**Bina M. Patel:** Hello. Nice to be here with you both. Thank you for having me.

**Sam Fuqua:** Well, we just mentioned in the introduction your book, *Say The Quiet Part Out Loud*, and so I wanna ask you about that title because I've heard that phrase used, uh, sometimes in a negative context. What did you mean by that title and why did you choose it?

**Bina M. Patel:** Great question. And actually, I think it's interesting when it is shown us in the negative because it shows us who people are, which is their quiet part. And many of us who do social justice work, conflict work, we end up, kind of, um, navigating the facade, and what's real is unspoken or hidden. So, it's interesting when I do see it used, um, kind of, on the other side of arguments in that way. But what I meant was it came from me actually using that phrase with leaders I coach who would say things like, "You know, I'm really just struggling at work and I'm trying and I'm trying." And they would, kind of, stop and I would say, "Say the next thing." And it was really hard to admit that they were experiencing, um, burnout or racism or misogyny or were uncertain about what to do. They were, kind of, at their skill level edge. So, there were these quiet parts that I realized if we can say them out loud, we can claim them, and then we can move on. And so, that's where the title came from, is helping people acknowledge, here's what's really around me, and we don't have to whitewash it. We don't have to give it code switch names. We can say the things we see about the world and how we're navigating them.

**Alexis Miles:** Well, in my experience, it's difficult for people to see that deeply into themselves or to articulate what it is they're actually feeling. How do you coach people into that understanding?

Because it seems to me that without having that level of self-communication, it would be hard to navigate conflict with another person.

**Bina M. Patel:** Absolutely. Such a great question. Um, you know, I think one way I've done this with folks is one, we go slowly. And, a lot of it is to take time to be present and gather observations. I think we move really quickly with ourselves and each other, and especially when there's conflict or tension because we wanna get out of it. A natural instinct. But when we can slow down and actually say what is present here, now, for me, for us, in this place, even if it's just, it's too noisy and I can't focus, that gives us a starting point. So, that's one place we start is we slow down and we, kind of, do some data gathering about what do we really know? I've also worked with folks then where we break down, what do we know and what's an assumption that we need to learn more about with each other. And then the third piece that I have found most powerful is to ask folks, "Where did this come from for you? Who taught you this way?" And sometimes they will say like, "Oh my gosh, I don't know. But if I think about it, my grandmother taught me that if I say this thing and someone else is uncomfortable, it's my fault." And then they start carrying and internalizing that. And so, those steps in that space to actually say you have agency in understanding where these stories around you and experiences come from, and we can understand that they have a home and an origin. I have found is pretty helpful for folks.

**Alexis Miles:** And when you say data gathering, do you mean internal and external data?

**Bina M. Patel:** Yes, absolutely. I am a practitioner of what in the West is known as mindfulness, what ancestrally we know as remembrance work. Um, that's the Pali and the Sanskrit words for what was translated, um, that became mindfulness is actually remembrance. Remember the stories, the teachings, et cetera. And so, I think that first place of where am I in this relationship, in this moment, in this experience, is critical. And not only because, of course, we're part of the relationship, but I think in systems of oppression, we often minimize or have been taught to dismiss our own agency, and then we're not implicated. And so, sometimes the problem is always out there. It's with that person who said that thing. And, it's like, hmm, let's for a moment understand that, and where are you in this relationship? Where are you in receiving that? What stories have you brought when you hear that language? So, it absolutely is the both-and of the individual and the interpersonal, if you will.

**Alexis Miles:** So Bina, I'm very curious about what this looks like. So, if I were a fly on the wall, what would I see as you are walking somebody through this? What does it actually look like?

**Bina M. Patel:** Yeah, that's such a good question. So, I'll share that recently I did this with a group of about 16 change makers from around the US and Canada, and we took almost three full days of practice that what you would see is an integration of breathwork, some neuroscience approaches, so the somatic plus the brain activity, um, to understand how are we writing these stories. And, what you would see is, um, time where people are taking a question that's quite powerful, like where did you learn this and how did it become yours? And they spend time individually and with a partner in the room, and sometimes they were strangers before they came in to do the journaling. So, they both write it and say it. And then, the second part I've worked with with folks is we rewrite that story. So, this is that part of saying the quiet part out loud and then it frees you to say, oh, so what else is there? So, what you would see are people looking at

this current state of tension, of, um, suffering, of challenges within themselves or deficiencies as they might be holding them, and we rewrite them. We say them out loud. And, it takes a long time. It's not a, a one hour or one day activity. But what we start to see is both the mind and the body and the intellect start to understand, ah, there's a different way to see this. There's a different way to see myself. And, if I can actually write this story that I'm not the problem, or, uh, no, I can slow down and it's okay. I can say something and it doesn't mean I'm disruptive.

For example, like, I was taught that as South Asian, if you say something, you're going to be impolite. And it took me years to understand what that really meant as someone doing anti-racism work was I had to let go of that, and so I had to rewrite stories. And so, that's what you would see if you observed the actual, kind of, real time coaching and facilitation is this engagement of many different modalities into moving past a limiting belief. If I may, I think one of the challenges we have in our sector around whether it's conflict or racism, all the things, in the leadership perspective, I often hear, you know, we just have to learn to let that go. And it's like, that's really hard to do. It's almost impossible. And what I've observed is that we miss, the other part is, so if we let go, what are we creating? What comes in that place? And, for example, if we let go of a story our elders taught us, that can be really hard. It can be heartbreaking 'cause they didn't mean it maliciously, but it shows up in our day-to-day leadership, our interpersonal relationships. So, what I try to guide people through is the letting go is actually making space for you to self determine. And letting go doesn't have to be a violent act. It's a necessary act of love of your parents taught you, but it's not what you need now, and you can let it rest for a little while if you can put some energy towards creating this new story for yourself.

**Sam Fuqua:** If you are called in to apply this in a workplace conflict situation, does it look any different there, and what would we see if we were a fly on the wall in one of those scenarios?

**Bina M. Patel:** Yeah. You know, I think one of the biggest things that shifts is we have to engage the concepts around what the organizational values are versus the individual only, right? Is that we're in a collective body when we talk about this at a workplace, and so it's not a free for all. We sign up to be part of these teams and organization, not to be a family, as such, but certainly to be a contributor, which means we're intertwined in some way. So, in workplaces, um, when I have done this kind of conflict or I dunno, sometimes it's not even just conflict, it's tension in the culture, it's not very explicit, there's just something that's in the way of deepening bonds and relationships in the organization, um, and that shows up in all kinds of ways like miscommunications and lack of collaboration and all the things. And so, one of the things that I really try to think about in the workplace is, one, a reorientation to the mission is, why is this important to you? And so, it, kind of, repositions the conflict, the tension, the relationship towards something bigger, which I think when you're in an interpersonal moment or even just yourself, um, is a little bit harder to do.

But you're there for an organization. And I will say, even this morning I was coaching someone and we had this, a similar conversation and we had to talk about what the boundaries are at the workplace of like why folks may not be prepared to hear about their journey in therapy at the workplace. Right? So, I think the other thing that I try to keep in mind is we have not equipped people to be on different sides of this relationship. So to say, we know what it's like to be the person who holds the conflict feeling or might have perpetuated it. But when you're surrounding

it, I don't know that we have really great skills to know how to show up in that moment and like, wait, let me step in to help, to heal, to facilitate, to coach. And so, workplaces also need some boundaries of, like, what do we have capacity for, together, to have an honest conversation about this.

**Sam Fuqua:** Maybe a counterpoint to that. I have seen leaders use, we're here for the mission, uh, really as an excuse or a diversion from their own failings.

**Bina M. Patel:** Absolutely. Or to create a workplace that is, kind of, the antithesis of wellbeing and sustainability, right? To drive burnout. I mean, that's the kind of culture I came up in, which is, you're lucky to work in the nonprofit sector, and we're here to be helpers, so do more with less. And, like, yeah, it's your job to be a program coordinator, but also Bina, can you clean up the kitchen before you leave on Friday? We were put in all these positions, and the, the rhetoric was, but you're so lucky to be a helper and, and be in community, and so on. I reflect on maybe in the leadership space, one thing I think about a lot is how we, kind of, raise folks as leaders to often aspire to a model of leadership. And when I think about diversity and inclusion, like how much of that is often put on racialized and marginalized bodies to have to do, and we tend not to implicate leadership structures, leadership cultures, and leadership individuals to have to do some growth and change making themselves. It's like, no, no, this is how leadership can look. You just have to contort yourself into it. So, to your point, Sam, I think we often miss the both-and of, it's always in relationship. And so, weaponizing the mission to hide behind, I think it only lasts so long. You get really high turnover in organizations. People are unhappy. And eventually, it shows itself.

**Alexis Miles:** Well, I am trying to connect all the dots inside myself of, of what you're saying. So, could you go back to the problem as you saw it, and then this methodology of this solution that you've come up with that sounds to me like it includes the whole person. Inside. Outside. All influences that shape the person includes the whole person. So, could you go back and connect those dots for me?

**Bina M. Patel:** Sure. So, I have often seen with, especially folks I coach, which tend to be not only CEOs but staff of nonprofits, foundations, social change movements, the problem I was seeing was this pattern of them pathologizing themselves. That they were the problem. They didn't know enough. They didn't say it right. They weren't educated enough. So many different things. And, if they could just figure it out, and get it right and perfect, somehow, this thing in their work for their community would be realized. Part of that problem too is that the pressure is quite high because it's a deeply personal and purposeful place when you work in social justice, right? Like, we're not making widgets. So, when you feel like, oh my gosh, it's so important we get this outcome, but I can't get this outcome 'cause somehow I'm not enough. That was the problem I was seeing. And what I engaged in was, no, no, but we all work in a system of oppression and colonizer culture that we've inherited in different ways. We're forced to navigate these systems, even in good-intentioned places that are aware of what's happening, it's incredibly hard to do this.

To your earlier questions, Alexis, because we have personal stuff, ancestral things, we have interpersonal and um, often these dynamics of racism, of othering, all of those things are hiding in plain sight. They're not big headlines. The conflict, the tension, it sits in passing. It's just, it

doesn't have to be a big blow up, as you know, right? Conflict can be this tiny thing. It's that thorn and it just keeps digging. And so, I thought about, okay, how do we name the system at play and give folks a bit of spaciousness to undo that internalized culture? And, like I said earlier, find a different pathway. What can they self determine as here's what I want my leadership to be when it feels sustainable, purposeful, collective, collaborative? Here's what it would look like. How do I tend to that kind of leadership? And a lot of that is the letting go of, as we talked about. I have to create some space for that. 'Cause I also saw a pattern where people said, I keep trying this thing. And Bina, I went to yoga, and I did the breathwork, but your brain works really fast. And so, they would try to show up to create these changes and be like, I'm powerful. I can do this. Whatever the narrative was. And before the sentence was out, they had undercut themselves, the neuroscience and the neuroplasticity of the stories. And, as I started to see that, I thought, okay, we need to get much deeper in how we engage the whole person.

It's not just somatics and holding trauma. And it's not just breathwork. And sometimes you're so scared, you're so stressed, you're so tired, asking someone to take a breath doesn't work. It just amplifies the unease, but engaging the brain and neuroplasticity can change that. So, it gives them another pathway. So, that's what I was doing. I was trying to see this problem as something bigger than an individualized pathology, and find different tools that people could use in real time, at work, that also wasn't like a weekend retreat. You know, we often do that. Go do this on the weekend. Figure this out on the evening time. And I thought, no, this is who we are all day, 24/7. We carry this around. So, that's how I created some of these tools and practices, and continue my learning and neuroscience and how to engage the brain and how it connects to the intentionality of how we show up.

**Alexis Miles:** So, what I think I'm hearing is that individual leaders would sometimes feel all of this conflict and tension internally and externally, and blame themselves.

**Bina M. Patel:** Yes.

**Alexis Miles:** Oh, if I weren't so screwed up, I'd be doing a much better job out there. Let me try harder.

**Bina M. Patel:** Yeah.

**Alexis Miles:** And never really checking in to feel sense, what's going on in your mind?

**Bina M. Patel:** That's right.

**Alexis Miles:** Or to acknowledge, oh, I'm, I, I was shaped by this environment.

**Bina M. Patel:** Mm-hmm.

**Alexis Miles:** This is not all on me. Some of this is systemic.

**Bina M. Patel:** That's right.



**Alexis Miles:** Some of this is ancestral.

**Bina M. Patel:** That's right.

**Alexis Miles:** So, it sounds like looking at both the internal and the external forces, and coming to a still point, it sounds like where, where you feel more balanced.

**Bina M. Patel:** Mm-hmm.

**Alexis Miles:** You can sit more fully in, in your own internal and external resources. Am I getting that right?

**Bina M. Patel:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. That it's, it's the place, that point of stillness, so to say, where we remember we have a choice. It's not predetermined, right? These ways and stories we've been told about what's possible in the world, who we're supposed to be, how we're supposed to behave, we have choices. And it doesn't always seem that way. Um, you know, I'd say the other side of this, just to offer is, as you were saying that Alexis, the other pattern often is when people are in that place of pathologizing themselves, um, they do shut off that awareness internally, and the problem becomes out there. If only they would behave differently, if the boss did it differently, et cetera, et cetera. And it still comes back to what we talked about earlier. Where are you in this? Where are you? And you can show up in ways and choose ways of practice, of healing, of presence, of boundaries, that will influence other people. But we can't oppress other people into being better humans, right? It starts with us and remembering our agency. And so, that's what I was really trying to get to is reminding people they have power and purpose and that they are enough. These are not their stories. And we can support each other and love each other enough to create new stories about our wisdom and our contributions.

**Sam Fuqua:** How has any of this changed for you, uh, what you're hearing from people you coach, or how you approach it with the changing nature of work? Part of what I mean by that is we're not together as often. Or, is that a factor?

**Bina M. Patel:** I think it is for some, not for everybody. I have heard of some folks who are doing better at taking care of themselves, at slowing down, at being present, because they're not in the office every day, of course. Right? So, there's some spaciousness there. The one thing I would say I think that's changing in terms of the relational part is some of what we used to do informally. And so, it just takes more effort to hold those bonds. But what I have seen is people who knew each other, um, we're still able to know each other even if they were across the country, if they moved, if it was virtual. And so, I don't know that I have a full answer for that because I continue to also be curious about how is the virtual world, the distance world, and I will say the political world, kind of, Sam, I get that same question, but how is the nature of work changing because of political issues surrounding us right now. And what does that mean? There's a lot there. And, I think what's happening, I'm seeing like, um, how to say, a tightening of bonds that were already present. And, if they were a little bit loose or shaky, those are harder to reengage or rebuild, is what I'm seeing. Um, there's been this kind of doubling down of, oh, here are my people and we're, we're staying together. Uh, so the social circles, if you will, the relationships are a little bit, sometimes less fluid.

And in a workplace, what I have seen is it creates some clicks, or it's hard for people to be new in an organization when there's that bond already among some and they're far away from each other. I think the last thing I would offer is I'm seeing more people, not in a malicious way, in a curious way, mostly, question each other of, like, what drives you to do this work? Whatever we're doing in social justice or at this foundation or nonprofit. Why are you here? Why does this matter to you? And I'm noticing that question come up more and more with clients I work with, with people I coach, as a necessary component of understanding how they build a relationship. It matters, the purpose of an individual, as part of that relationship building, which is really interesting because I think in pre-pandemic, and even pre-MAGA, in some ways, when you ended up at the same organization or at the same table, you were like, cool, here we are, and I, kind of, got to know you and it was more organic. And now I find it's a much more pointed question around relationship building.

**Sam Fuqua:** But it does seem ultimately healthy, like a healthy trend?

**Bina M. Patel:** Oh yeah, I think so. I think the more we can talk about where we come from, who we are, our change, I work with folks and talk about change maker origin stories. What was the moment that you can go back to, maybe it was last week, maybe it was when you were a kid, that kind of radicalized you? I have one I wrote about in my book that came to me when I was an adult. I didn't remember it for so many years until I was asked. And it was about standing on the street in India with my dad and seeing a boy of almost exactly my age across the street, and his hair was orange and mine was black. And standing with my dad on the street and asking, why does he look different? And we were like, this little boy and I eyes locked. We saw each other. And my dad said, he doesn't have the food you have, right? And I was only seven years old. And we talked through it and my little brain didn't understand, of course. And I said, well, who's gonna feed him? Where, where's the food coming from? And my dad said, well, his parents are probably doing the best he can. I remember realizing he lived under the train platform. That's what I was looking at.

And, when I was asked this question of, so what brought you to this work? Somehow, that day, this story just flashed and I had tears in my eyes, and I remember then that was probably one of the first moments that changed me. In which, it was like, wow, there can never be no one. Someone has to show up. And so, I share that because to your point, Sam, I think it's a great thing that we spend time talking about these things that used to be icebreakers or, like, retreat activities as part of how we show up together. And, I'll just offer, I have noticed teams that felt distant from each other or there was mistrust, distrust across teams, when they have done this activity of talk about their change maker origin story, we grow relationships. It's, like, it takes an hour and we've traversed so far into healing that relationship because we see each other of, like, we don't have to have the same work, the same credentials, the same story, but I understand you have a story of why this matters to you. And that goes so far in lessening the distance, the disconnection, the distrust that people have of each other. If we could just understand what drives us, what our purpose is.

**Alexis Miles:** You mentioned MAGA earlier. Do you think that asking a person who is committed to MAGA, um, their origin story, or a story they remember that sparked their involvement with

MAGA, do you think that would create a relationship between them and a non-MAGA person so that they could see each other differently?

**Bina M. Patel:** It might. I have to say, I don't totally understand MAGA world, right? Like it's, it's a hard one for me to get my head around sometimes, and I'm just gonna say, I don't think we all should assume it's our work to do that, I have to say. There have been places I have been where it feels unsafe or beyond a boundary of mine. Like, I just don't have capacity to have to build this relationship. But, I do think space that helps us remember, any of us, remember where we come from, who we come from, who we are here for, that remembrance practice of going back to these stories, I firmly believe that can open up something different in us. So, it may not build a relationship, Alexis, but it may unlock the heart of that person that's pretty closed off to people who are different than them, for example. Or, that's really myopic and, like, zeroed in on this one issue, this one topic, this one thing that matters to them, and they're missing the intersectional and contextual story. I do think remembrance practices like that could help unlock that.

**Alexis Miles:** You, you might have just done this, but what is one thing that listeners could do today, tomorrow, um, to, to come into this relationship you're talking about?

**Bina M. Patel:** Yeah. Take a deep breath. Lean back in your seat. I would offer and go back to that story of whenever it is that you are open enough to the world to be changed by it for the better, and turn your heart towards helping, not towards the fight back, but the fight forward. Physically turn your body towards what's possible towards each other. And, I think the last thing I would say is, um, start closer. We often wanna go fight the dragons, Alexis, to your point. And it's like there's a lot of love and care and growth we need to do right here, right around us with our own people, our own compadres, our own sisters, our kin, before we have to go fight the dragon, and the people who are furthest from our understanding. And, it's like, let's, you can start here. Remember, breathe and start where, where your people are.

**Sam Fuqua:** Well, Bina M. Patel, it's been wonderful to talk to you and thank you for the advice and uh, so much to think about. We appreciate it.

**Bina M. Patel:** Thank you so much for having me, and the, just openness of this conversation. I'm grateful to you both. Thank you.

**Alexis Miles:** It was such a pleasure.

**Sam Fuqua:** Bina M. Patel is a leadership coach and facilitator. She's the author of the book, *Say The Quiet Part Out Loud: Liberate Your Inner Change Maker*.

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