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Amanda Kemp: Somebody has to come into a conflict with some grounding. With the commitment to compassion as well as justice. With, uh, some capacity and spaciousness. But if we both come into a conflict with a lot of need, anger, hurt, it's gonna be very hard to have it move us forward.

Sam Fuqua: That's Dr. Amanda Kemp, our guest today on Well, That Went Sideways! We're a podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Jes Rau. Our guest, Amanda Kemp, is a racial justice and mindfulness mentor, a scholar, and an author. She's developed a series of workshops called *Racial Justice from the Heart*. They're designed to help people identify their implicit bias and transform their conversations about racism. Dr. Amanda Kemp, welcome. We're so glad you can join us.

Amanda Kemp: Thank you.

Sam Fuqua: Well, as a way of introducing our listeners to your work with *Racial Justice from the Heart*, tell us what types of issues or conflicts the people you work with are commonly dealing with.

Amanda Kemp: Um, people who, who are attracted to *Racial Justice from the Heart*, um, are generally coming from a couple of places. So, if there are people of European descent, and it's primarily women, so white women, um, they're coming with a desire for stronger relationships with women of color, with some confusion about, uh, past interactions that didn't go well. Wanting to know what is their place in the movement for racial justice. What's the place that they can occupy feeling, um, they're doing their part, but they're also not taking over? So, that's one group of people. And then, in terms of people of color, again, usually women of color who come to us, their primary concern is, um, how do I take care of myself in the midst of advocating, organizing and speaking up for racial justice? How do I work effectively and how do I, um, heal my own wounds that are coming up from being a change maker or from being a person of color who is um, marginalized, you know, in various ways in this country?

Sam Fuqua: How has the present moment, uh, the last few months, changed your work or increased the amount of people who are seeking you out? What is different?

Amanda Kemp: You know, what's different now since the COVID quarantine and the killing of Breanna Taylor and George Floyd, more white-led organizations and people of European descent are willing to say there's a systemic problem here, and are willing to say, what am I doing about it? I need to do more. And, there are more people of color who, especially people of African descent, who are, I'm thinking about this one woman, a, a black woman who I talked to just recently who came to me for some one-on-one mentoring and, you know, she had been very successful in her business as a, um, a yoga studio owner, serving primarily white audiences, but the quarantine shut her business down. And as her business was shut down, she actually had the

space to really reflect on what was the mission, the specific mission of her studio. How did she want it to stand for social justice? You know, she started asking herself, what have I been complicit with or just willing to accept rather than to stand up and challenge in terms of, you know, uh, white domination and um, uh, racism? So, for people who haven't been actively involved in social justice, the recent killings and the, and the seeing of the unequal impacts of, of COVID and the quarantine has galvanized, uh, people of color into wanting to become change makers and also into really looking at themselves and saying, where have I been complicit? Where have I conceded to, you know, white supremacy? Where have I not centered myself? And, and, and now what do I do about it? Like people are asking themselves those questions, and coming to someone like me or a compassionate and truthful guide as they find the answers.

Jes Rau: Along those same lines, I've noticed, um, in some of the things that you write, that you talk about conflict as being generative and necessary, and at the same time, really deeply impacted by, um, kind of a whiteness ideology about how to do conflict and what's appropriate to, in conflict. Um, how might we navigate that and move around to truly generative conflict that's not stifled by some of these ideas that are wrapped up in, in whiteness?

Amanda Kemp: Yeah. Thank you. So, one of the things that, uh, that I've been investigating as someone who loves peace and love, um, how do I, how do I be mindful about conflict? And, um, and by mindful I also mean heartfelt. You know, I, I don't, um, it's not like an intellectual venture for me, or conflict to be generative. And, I also wanna say heartfelt because conflict is often painful. It can be really painful when you find yourself at odds of someone who you love. Uh, someone who you wanna connect with. Um, so, the way that we've been talking about conflict and racial justice from the heart is, um, starting from a, a place of self-honesty and self-balance. And what I mean by that is if I come into a conflict with you, and I am off balance, I am incredibly, you know, wounded, angry, grieving, how I come into that conflict, if I only come into that conflict with that, then um, there's less of a chance for that conflict to be generative. Somebody has to come into a conflict with some grounding, with a commitment to, uh, to compassion as well as justice, with, uh, some capacity and spaciousness. But if we both come into a conflict with a lot of needs, anger, hurt, it's gonna be very hard to have it move us forward. So, we start with, for example, in difficult conversations about racism, we train people. The first step is actually to check in with your wise self. To check in on your emotional and physical balance. If you're hungry, if you're tired, if you are, you know, feeling hurt, wounded, emotionally exhausted, ask yourself, is this the right time for me to be in a conflicting conversation? And, um, if you have any choice in the matter, if there's not a gun to your head, but if you have some choice in the matter, then we say, delay the conversation. You know, say, "Can we talk about, give me half an hour," or, "I hear what you're saying. I'm committed and um, I need a couple days." Um, "I wanna come back to this. I need some space to actually get myself together so I can meet you as a grounded person here." What we're advocating for is people being responsible in the midst of conflict. Meaning, responsible for themselves in the midst of conflict.

Sam Fuqua: For the white people you work with, I think you mentioned compassion, and I think compassion and empathy are, are there, right? Uh, but how do you turn those feelings into action rather than just having them sort of become pity or something that is not helpful?



Amanda Kemp: Well, we start with people of European descent who come to us. Is, we start with examining your own implicit racial bias because most European Americans really don't understand whiteness. They don't know that they have a white frame of reference, a white perspective, that they operate inside of a white script. They think that they're just individuals. And, that is a result of a whole history of legislation and institutionalization of racism in this country. So, it's not surprising that they have that perspective. But they do, and they're completely, typically unaware that it really is specific to them and their racial group. So, we don't start with have compassion. We start with if you're, if you're already waking up motivated saying, "What the heck is going on?" "Oh, how do I stand shoulder to shoulder with you, Amanda?" Then what a lot of people of color are saying today is look at yourself. Start talking to other white people. Get really good at moving other white people along in terms of understanding institutional,

and racism and understanding whiteness, because that's how, that's, that's a lane that you can occupy well, you know, and that lane does not involve you pitying me.

Jes Rau: That's great. And, in terms of the ways that you support folks of color who are looking for, in, in particular, um, black folks or African American folks, looking for ways to fortify, I heard you in a TED talk that you talked about white folks often show up afraid to say something wrong, and that people of color show up with exhaustion, um, because it, it makes sense that there would be so much exhaustion. What are some of the ways that you would recommend, um, supporting people of color who are experiencing that exhaustion or who are coming at these conversations with that, kind of at the forefront?

Amanda Kemp: So, so, recognizing that, um, for the first time this summer, we created a woman of color self-love and transformation bootcamp. And, the whole bootcamp is built around increasing women of color's capacity to receive love and to love ourselves. And to see that as, um, not selfish, but as generative, that is fueling us so that we can lead and give in our communities in ways that are like, uh, I wanna say ecologically sound. You know how there're sustainability practices? So, I wanna say to lead and give in a sustainable way. Where we find ourselves exhausted, that is telling us that we have not been filling up our cups. And, the problem with exhausted leaders is that they are dangerous. They make decisions and have an impact, um, that in fact, could harm the very people who they wanna serve. Or, harm the very vision that they say they wanna bring into life. When we're exhausted, just think about yourself when you're exhausted. You know, how much more do you yell or do you shut down? You go numb. You drink more. Um, you don't sleep as well. You know, it takes you longer to write that email. You take an email written to you in a way that says an attack. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. But, all you have is, is need. So, you're in this cycle, the spiral of you keep giving more and more and getting angrier and angrier. And, I'm saying this out loud. This is my experience. I just want you to know I'm not coming from a theoretical place. I'm coming from a lived experience place with this. So, if we're exhausted of people of color, it is not the responsibility of white people or the white system to replenish us because in fact it cannot. It does not. It's just not built for us. We have to notice our exhaustion, our anger, our frustration, and turn some of that energy and attention into loving ourselves, increasing our capacity to receive.

You know, I was just on a call this morning with our bootcamp members and one woman was just, you know, she's a warrior. So many of us are warriors. We're very good at going to war. Standing up and fighting for our communities. The problem with that is that when you only have the warrior, um, where is the 'no' inside of you? Where is the space for you to receive? You know, this particular person said to us, on the one hand, she was like, "Everything's great. Everything's great. When I go in, I take care of business." We're like, "Okay." And then she said, "But yesterday I said to my husband, no one should be this busy. What's going on? This is too much." So for the, those of us who have that real powerful sense of responsibility and who are used to running what I call the point, or being that bird who's like at that Z point in the formation, the problem is that when we say yes all the time to the needs and, and et cetera requests, um, then we're preventing other people from stepping up and developing their leadership. And, we're running our, our, we are draining our health, and we're just gonna get angrier and angrier.

Jes Rau: As we are talking about that, I've been reflecting on your role as a coach and the, um, the idea that it seems like that's what we need. Like we see all these trainings, these like two-day or um, if you're lucky, uh, trainings and equity and inclusion and, um, different things that are happening in the workplace and those don't seem to be moving the, the needle on a large scale around, um, creating a more equitable world. What does seem to be doing really well is this idea of coaching and supporting people. Do you

agree, first of all? And, how can we potentially move that to a bigger scale? Um, if what is really needed is that more one-on-one or small group coaching to really move forward on racial equity.

Amanda Kemp: So, we need it all. I think we do need organizations and companies to do these large group trainings, getting us all on border some common frameworks and vocabularies. Just so, what do we mean when we say racism, for example, what do we mean? We say racial equity. What do we mean when we say whiteness and a white frame of reference? Like there's some key things. It would be so helpful if they were part of our everyday vocabulary that had some stable meaning attached to them. So, that's one thing. And as you said, uh, learning about something is different than implementing it. It's different than integrating it into yourself and then having it influence your actions. So, what we know from, uh, education, you know, about like best practices that introducing people to concepts is great. Having discussion about it, also great. Um, but having a way to have engagement over longer periods of time gives people the opportunity to integrate, and to, uh, take action and reflect. And that's what small group work does. That's what, uh, you know, small group coaching or mentoring can provide to you. The space to look at your implementation and to course correct when you need to, and also to, uh, love yourself in the process of learning rather than, you know, stay within the dominant paradigm of good or bad. So we, we promote a learning paradigm, which is, I'm an evolving human being and therefore, I'm making mistakes, and I'm evolving learning rather than I can't make any mistakes because otherwise I'm bad.

So, in terms of scaling that up, one of the things that we've done in my company, *Racial Justice for the Heart*, is we just implemented a training for trainers program. So, we just had our first group complete in June, um, and then we'll start a new group in September, and that really is to



encourage people to lead where they're planted. So, for example, one of our facilitators who just completed the training with us, she just started a small group, discussion group, for white women in her, her circle in New Jersey. And, um, I'm thinking about, uh, another one of our members, uh, people who completed with us, started a, um, an online training program for Latinx women. And yet another person in our group has organized a men's group. So, I think what's needed is for organizations, businesses, even for healthcare, to start investing in small group mentoring or one-on-one mentoring, not just for the upper echelons, but for, you know, people at, in various, at various levels inside of an organization.

Sam Fuqua: As we close, what would you like to leave, uh, our listeners with? Anything you, you'd like people to keep, uh, top of mind?

Amanda Kemp: Well, I, I welcome your, uh, listeners to check out a free masterclass we have called *How White Women Can Talk With Women of Color About Racism*. I think that's gonna give you some very basic, uh, insight and context for the conversation, and some skills that you can build up, uh, prior to you, um, you know, trying to initiate, uh, a conversation about a conflict or even to build up a partnership. I think if you, if you listen to some of the, to that masterclass, it's gonna prepare you. To know what you need to do so that you can be a strong partner or ally. What I wanna leave you with is that it is possible. Um, I really want all of us who are working for racial justice and liberation, I really want all of us to act as if we have already won. The question is how long is it gonna take us to get there based on all the defensiveness and fear and shame and guilt that we are carrying. If we do the work, if we put some of the effort and energy into releasing, healing, we can move more rapidly towards that, that new future. But, we're being cheered on by the people in the future. We're being cheered on saying, "Come on, you can do it. You can do it. We've got this. We've got this."

Sam Fuqua: Dr. Amanda Kemp is a scholar, author, and a racial justice and mindfulness mentor. You can find out more about her workshops at her website, dramandakemp.com.

Our podcast is called Well, That Went Sideways! We produce new episodes twice a month. You can find them wherever you get your podcasts, and on our website, sidewayspod.org. We also have information on our guests and links to more conflict resolution resources at the website. That's sidewayspod.org. Our program is produced by Mary Zinn, Jes Rau and me, Sam Fuqua. Our theme music is by Mike Stewart. And this podcast is a partnership with The Conflict Center, a Denver-based nonprofit that provides practical skills and training for addressing everyday conflicts. Find out more at conflictcenter.org.