

Ama Agyapong: When we think about trust, we gotta ask ourselves, are we credible? Are we reliable? How In this episode, we talk with Ama Agyapong about how to build authentic relationships in the workplace and in other parts of life. She is a consultant, trainer and facilitator with over 15 years experience in human resources, including work with very large corporations as well as small- and medium-sized organizations. Ama Agyapong is the founder of *Inclusion Enterprises*. do we communicate? And, at the end of the day, when I'm engaging with people, is there a high level of self-orientation? Like, is it all for my own self-interest? Is it all for an ulterior motive or is it genuine? Is it for the betterment of that person or the group? Because that makes a huge, huge difference. And if we can say yes to those things, that means we're pretty good at building those relationships.

Sam Fuqua: That's Ama Agyapong, 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.

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

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we're so pleased to have Ama Agyapong with us for this conversation. Welcome. Hello.

Ama Agyapong: Hi, Sam. Hi Alexis. Thank you for having me.

Sam Fuqua: Well, to start with, your, uh, your handle, your nickname, uh, your social media name is *That Inclusion Lady*. So, I'm very curious how you came to that, how you chose that.

Ama Agyapong: Yeah. Thank you for asking. So, it was a, a mixture of looking at what's already out there, wanting to really present as my authentic self, and prayer and meditation to be like, what, what really resonates with me and the message I wanna put out there. So, I've seen, you know, HR lady, I've seen all of those different things, but I said, what do I truly stand for? And what do I want my community to feel? And I wanted them to feel included. I wanted them to feel seen, valued, heard, understood. And those are all, like, cornerstone, uh, definitions of inclusion. And I'm a lady, so I was like, huh, *That Inclusion Lady*, let's talk about it. So, that's kind of how it, how it came about. But it's really all about authenticity and, and connection.

Alexis Miles: You just mentioned community. And this is a show about conflict and conflict resolution and conflict transformation. So, in your opinion, what is the value of community when we're talking about things like conflict resolution and learning?

Ama Agyapong: Yeah, it's such a good question. I am a believer that conflict is good. So, I think when you have conflicts, you come to better forms of understanding with each other, better forms of communication. You walk away learning something. But at the very foundation of conflict and resolving that conflict is relationship. And I think when you have a relationship with someone, there is an inherent trust there. And that trust is allowing you to see maybe my flaws, maybe my imperfections, maybe some of my vulnerabilities and humility. And I think you build that from a collectivist community approach to this work,

um, versus just looking out for me and very individualistic, it's also looking at how my actions, how my words are impacting the community at hand. And again, I think it boils down to trust.

Alexis Miles: I have heard you talk about, on the one hand, community, on the other hand, the inner work of DEI. Can you talk about those two things and why they both are important?

Ama Agyapong: Oh, Alexis. Okay. So, um, I was once that girl who believed in meritocracy, solely. I believed in pull yourself up from your bootstraps. I believed in, because I came from a conservative black, middle class family. My grandfather was a sharecropper, but he worked his way to building a very successful lawn service business, and he was able to send all five of his children to college. And so, in my mind I said, oh, if my granddaddy can do that, oh, if I can accomplish coming from a single parented household, why can't you? And so, over the years when we talk about that inner work, it first started with understanding history. So, when I would make comments like, "Oh well, of course I understand gentrification," or "Why your generations of family's been in the projects." "Look at your projects." You know, from this very condescending and judgmental perspective. History first shut my mouth. Well, you understood the, the structural reasons and the systemic reasons for certain things. So, that was number one, a part of the inner work.

Number two, therapy, because it was really decoding and understanding why I felt the need to compare myself to someone else, and why I felt the need to exemplify the superiority complex, thinking I'm better than. And, and so therapy has helped a lot with that. But with therapy and reading and understanding history, where I was able to delve in even more is what my unconscious biases are as a middle class, heterosexual, cisgender black woman, and how my words and my actions impact other people that aren't like me. And so, that came with understanding what some of my privileges are, understanding what some of my disadvantages are, whether I wanna look at it like that or not. I still believe in, you know, we have the capacity to do the unthinkable. I'm a woman of faith, so my faith helps me a lot through that. But those are some of the ways that I have really talked, like, worked on myself to then present to the world what inner work could look like, even though I still make a lot of mistakes. But that recovery from the mistakes is what the inner work has helped with more than anything. So, I hope I answered your question.

Alexis Miles: Oh, absolutely. Because in, in my experience, people sometimes are able to see microaggressions against them, but they aren't able to see that they too commit microaggressions against other people.

Ama Agyapong: It starts with you. I, I always say inclusion starts with I. So, for me to be inclusive to someone else, and forgiving of their flaws, and forgiving of their mistakes, so then I can help my team want to try even more to have that growth mindset, I gotta have that with myself. I can't be critical of myself every time I make a mistake. I, I can't be having negative language towards myself because of certain aspects of me. Like it starts with I, and once I'm more inclusive to myself, then I can start building that empathy muscle to be more inclusive towards others. So yeah, you're gonna hear me talk a lot about myself because I had to start with the inner work with myself, with my kid to see what's around me, how do I operate, challenge different thoughts and notions to then be able to do it for someone else.

podcast, a moment in your life where things got off track, and what happened? What did you learn? How did you deal with it?

Ama Agyapong: Okay. I am gonna, I'm gonna answer this in two ways, okay? So, I'm gonna give two examples. This ex, first example was the catalyst to my inner work. This was at the beginning of my career. I was a brand new leader. I had just come from the financial industry. I had just come out of grad school, recruited straight outta grad school. So, going back to the superiority complex, you could tell me nothing. Okay. Like, I thought I was that girl. Um, and so, I go in, first time having leadership experience taking over a team of about 25, 30 people, I think. It was less than 50. And, I got my orders, let's go. Their whole thing was we have bottom performers. We need you to performance manage them out because it's impacting our margins, it's impact, so, all numbers, numbers, numbers, reports, basket size, all of these other things. This is for a Fortune 50 retailer. Great, I got it. I'm goal oriented. Let's go. I didn't spend time getting to know my team. I didn't spend time getting to know strengths. I didn't spend time building relationships or trying to seem relatable. I went in barking orders. And not only was I barking orders, I again was barking orders from a superiority complex saying, forget your institutional knowledge. I have all this book smarts. You need to listen to me. Not understanding the obstacles that they faced, any of those things. So my thing was, no excuses. If you have a problem, you can leave. That was my approach without observing anything.

And, though we made a little bit of progress, we didn't make much because our turnover was high, and then our engagement surveys were at an all time low. And by the way, I was speaking to people, by the way I was cutting people off, by the way I was just completely disregarding who they were as individuals and only looking at it as a transactional relationship, you come here to get a job, my response is you getting a paycheck, right? I had to have a focus group about me in front of me with the entire team, and it was awful, Sam. I mean, I heard how I made people feel. I heard how my actions landed, and again, I was sitting there completely obsessed with my intent. My intent was we have a business bottom line to impact. That's it. I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to do business, right? Complete fallacy. And so from that, that was the catalyst to saying, okay, either I'm gonna lose my job or I gotta figure this leadership thing out. And that is what started the inner work.

Now, one of the interactions that are most memorable that I've had during that time before the focus group about how much I sucked was, I had a conversation with a parent and she was late. Continuous, not continuously, but more than I preferred because of childcare issues and because her child was sick. So, she would have to leave, take the child to the doctor, like it was a, a sickly child. And come, now I realize that the child had had a disability, didn't realize that then, but I was just very callous to her, Sam. I was like, well, what can you, like, what can you figure out though 'cause you have a job to do. Completely disregarding the child. She got upset. Stormed out the office. Reported me. And now that I'm a parent that has had to take time off, 'cause I wasn't one then, now that I'm a parent that's had to take time off, now that I'm a parent that is recently divorced and a single mom, now that I'm a parent that understands how much you invest in your child, I'm like, wow, I was completely, tone deaf is not the right term anymore, but just completely out of the loop of being a human being. So, I would say those two. I know it was a long answer, but those two, um, are the most memorable. And one of the two was the catalyst to Ama becoming *That Inclusion Lady*.

Sam Fuqua: That idea of moving beyond the transactional relationship, uh, as a manager or as a, a colleague, how do you know how far to go? Because it, in my experience, it's different for different people in a workplace. Some people it is more like, I'm here for the job, I'm going home. You know, they still want

regard.

Ama Agyapong: Yes. So, I think if you have a question, you ask. And so, one of the questions that leaders often don't ask is, how do you like to receive feedback? How often do you want to connect with me? When you are having those conversations, I think it's important to at least start off with having a set of questions that you ask everyone because you're gathering data. So, I think it's important to start with data and, and then you follow with passion. And so, some of the questions I tell leaders to ask are things like, you know, tell me something about yourself that I can't read on a resume. If you were to win the lottery and work was not a concern, bills were not a concern, what would you do for a living? You know, what, what questions do you think people would ask you more? Like, these are questions that you can ask anyone regardless of their comfort level of how deep they wanna go to just start getting information. Once you get that information, I think it's important to study your team.

So, spend time with them possibly doing what they do. Whether it's they're teaching you something because again, people love to talk about themselves and they love when you're curious about what they do, and you can highlight their strengths. Spend time allowing them to teach you something where you're not always the one teaching. I think another thing is when I say study your person, look at the little things. So, do they have something on their wall that seems important to them? Do you overhear them talking about a soccer game or something dealing with their family? When you listen and then you follow up, those little pieces are making deposits in the proverbial bank and building those relationships, where you're saying, I care about you as a person, not only your output as a person. Does that answer your question?

Sam Fuqua: Yeah, it does, and it's really smart, I think, advice.

Ama Agyapong: But it's slow, so it's not immediate. A lot of, you know, a lot of leaders just want, oh, I wanna build a relationship in a week because we have a lot of stuff to do, and that's not always how it goes. It really starts with genuinely wanting to get to know someone, listening, and asking open-ended questions through curiosity.

Sam Fuqua: And it takes time, as you said.

Ama Agyapong: Yes. Yes it does.

Alexis Miles: Something you just mentioned just makes me think of the importance of, of relationship building. It sounds like you're saying that's paramount. Without that, nothing.

Ama Agyapong: Without that, nothing. Like, how are they gonna trust you with their flaws, if there's no relationship? How are they gonna trust your intent in the moments we need grace, if there is no relationship? And if you're scared of them because of how they present or some, some certain identity or you know, some preconceived notion, how are you going to truly build a relationship, see their strengths and see their unlimited potential? Because that's what most people want. They just want you to see their unlimited potential. That's why like Harvard Business Review wrote about building trust and having high expectations, and challenging goals is a part of it because it's saying, "Hey, I see how great you are and

don't know how to do that in the workplace. They think it's either, back to your question, Sam, they think it's either all business or I'm telling you all my business. Like, and there is an in between, but again, people need to learn that skillset of building relationships, which is why I teach it. And you would think it's common sense, but, but it ain't so common.

Alexis Miles: In terms of building relationships, how do you do that in an environment where there's a lot of diversity, a lot of different identities?

Ama Agyapong: I think this is gonna sound really simple, however, what has worked for me is listening more than I speak. And asking genuine, open-ended questions. And, why I say genuine is because sometimes I hear people ask open-ended questions with a intended response in mind, and that's just disingenuous. So, I think it's, one, doing your own research because it's not their job to teach you everything about their culture and their history and all of those things. So, doing your own research. I think it's being humble enough to admit when you don't know something or when you do make a mistake. And if you're not always trying to be right, and you listen more than you speak, I, I think relationships naturally just start to build, especially through curiosity. If you're genuinely interested in why a person does something or what their family does when they celebrate certain things, or you're asking questions about some of the differences, but then you also highlight and notice some of the similarities. And, and you truly wanna know why people operate the way in which they do, because different is in deficit. So, if you start off saying, difference is amazing and I wanna celebrate it, it just has a, a different perspective and tone and it works. I've seen it, I've taught it, I've, it, over and over again. It, it really does work when you are building those relationships and you're doing it through wanting a transformational connection versus a transactional one.

Alexis Miles: So Ama, what you're saying reminds me of race and gender in the workplace. And, people find it hard to talk about race and gender in the workplace. So number one, why do we find those two things so hard to talk about? And then number two, what can we do to start bringing those conversations to the table with curiosity as opposed to defensiveness?

Ama Agyapong: Ooh, that's a good question. And it's, it's a loaded question. So the first thing is, why do people struggle talking about race? And I wanna go with this quote I heard, I read in a book called *Disruptive Thinking* by T.D. Jakes, and he says, "I can't get a PhD without learning about you, but you can get a PhD without learning about me. And so, when we think about what's taught, what's emphasized, what's celebrated from childhood, oftentimes it's not race. Oftentimes we are taught to shy away from race." I'll never forget, I was in the grocery store and it was a little girl with her mom and, little white girl, and she said, "Mommy, look, a brown girl." Because I was in a town that didn't have a lot of black people and she was excited and I was cracking up. I'm like, I'm rather brown. Absolutely right. But the mom was mortified. Mortified. And you, she turned red. She tried to, you know, hush her child up. She just kept going. And think about the type of message that sends to that young child. So, from, to maybe three or four from that very young age, you're telling this person, race is not something we talk about. Actually, because of my negative reinforcement, race is a bad thing. And so, I think it starts there. American, America has a lot of demons when it comes to race. We haven't truly rectified it, and we haven't really taught it. And because of that, there's a fear when we talk about race, and I think it starts there. I think we've gotten a little better

with gender. But it's still a lot of parity there as well. And then your second question was, what are some of the things we can do in the workplace? Is that correct?

Ama Agyapong: Yeah, so I think it starts with understanding history, and truly drawing connections on how oppression from the past impacts the present. And I think that is a disconnect for a lot of people. Some people might even understand history, but they say that's the past. So, why can't we just move forward? Civil Rights Act of 1964. Like we, we should be past that. Where we're not realizing generational trauma and how it's passed through genetically. We're not realizing, perfect example, my great grandmother died at 103 in 2018. Her parents were slaves. Think about that. My grandmother, who's 91 years old, that I talked to him every other day, needed a pass to get, get on South Beach. I'm from Miami. A, a, a working permit to get on South Beach. I remember hearing stories about the only beach in all of South Florida that black people could be on. We don't think about how that impacts the present. And because of that, it makes race hard to talk about because oftentimes responses are denying, discrediting, ignoring, minimizing, and that just starts to build more and more of a rift. And so, what we can do in the workplace is, one, know your history and understand the impacts of current day. Another thing we can do is again, lead with curiosity in asking questions. And finally, think about your privilege. And what I mean by that is that when you understand your privilege, then you can offer some type of empathy.

Here's another example. My brother and I grew up doing sports. We have pretty good genetics. Our, our, my parents are fit. And though we eat well and we work out, 50 percent of that is genetics. Even if we didn't eat well or work out, we would still be kind of fit. And so, one day he made a comment about fat people because we have weight biases, and he was saying it from a very callous perspective, and because I have done some of the inner work, I was like, do you understand our privilege though? We don't know what it's like to have certain allergies. We don't know what it's like to have thyroid issues. We don't know what it's like to have certain genetics in us and have all these ailments that impact our weight. Like, we don't know what that feels like. So, though we work hard, we can't discredit our hard work, we also need to acknowledge our privilege to maybe have empathy for someone else. That's just an example when it comes to weight. So, think about that, what that can do if we think about the same thing through race, through gender, through disability, through sexual orientation and gender identity, because each one of those identities has a set of experiences that maybe we don't understand or know.

Alexis Miles: Thank you for that response. And I really appreciate you giving a personal example because I think frequently people think experts in the field like you, people who are highly educated, have it all together, you know, they have no issues. They have it all together. And it's very helpful to know that, oh, we all share the same struggles. We might have different approaches to dealing with them, but we're all human. We all share the same struggles. Joys and sorrows.

Ama Agyapong: Yes. Oh, I love the way you said that. Absolutely.

Alexis Miles: What do you do when you are in a situation, having a conversation, in the interaction, your heart start racing, you feel the blood rush to your face, hands start trembling a little bit, and you, you've

been hijacked. Um, what can a person do in that moment when having a conversation about race or disability or anything that, that causes that kind of reaction?

Ama Agyapong: Oh yes. So, one really good thing is you gotta know your triggers. So, you, you mentioned several things, Alexis, you were like, your heart starts racing. You know, your face might become flushed.

So, first is understanding what, how does my body respond when I'm triggered and getting upset? That's number one. Number two is it's okay to say how you're feeling. And some of these things are so simple, but you can say, "I'm starting to get upset right now. I'm feeling it. I'm feeling it, and I, I don't wanna derail this conversation. Can we take a break? And I promise we can get back to this 'cause I wanna hear what you have to say. It's important, but I also don't wanna get in the way of your words." And then take a break. Right? But oftentimes we want to ignore how we're feeling. I, I've, I've experienced this because lately I've been getting real mad. Every time I watch the news, I'm pissed off. I'm like, are you kidding me? Are we saying these people don't exist? These experiences don't exist? And I've had people to poach conversations that have a different opinion than me. And I love having conversations that are a different opinion than mine, as long as it's not steeped in homophobia or xenophobia or racism or sexism. Right? So, like, my oppression can't be, you are just misunderstanding. So, I've had to be like, you know what, I value what you're saying, but I'm not hearing it right now. My emotions are getting in the way. So, can we, can we take a pause because I don't, I don't want this conversation to go left. And that's it.

Alexis Miles: And when you take that pause, what do you do during the pause? What are you doing?

Ama Agyapong: Oh, that's a good question. Oh, you ask good questions. I am breathing. I might pick up my Bible and read a scripture. I might listen to music. I might call a friend, like an accountability partner who challenges me because sometimes it might be my own stuff. Not necessarily theirs. And so, I need to process through that. And so when I take a beat, it might need to be a quick beat where I just go take some deep breaths, take a walk. I love the sun 'cause it gives the vitamin D to restore the energy. Science behind that. Or sometimes I gotta take a couple days. I typically don't, my beat's not longer than 48, 48 hours because that kind of just loses the moment. But the one thing I always do, so after I do that, after I breathe, read, call an accountability partner and just listen to music, I always circle back. Because if not, it is sending the signal and it's a strong statement, but it's sending the signal that they don't matter. Their words don't matter. It's almost like abandonment in the moment, and I never want that to happen. So, I always circle back. Is it still good that we talk about this? This is what was happening with me. I'm just transparent. I'm, I'm ready to have this conversation again. And if they don't wanna talk, that's fine. I've done my part.

Alexis Miles: So it's all again, and once again, it's all about relationship building again, and, and trust.

Ama Agyapong: It's relationships and trust. And speaking of relationships and trust, you know, when we think about trust, we gotta ask ourselves, are we credible? Are we reliable? How do we communicate? And, at the end of the day, when I'm engaging with people, is there a high level of self-orientation? Like, is it all for my own self-interest? Is it all for an ulterior motive or is it genuine? Is it for the betterment of that person or the group? Because that makes a huge, huge difference. And if we can say yes to those things, that means we're pretty good at building those relationships. But if we look at that and we're saying, no, I'm actually not credible, or, no, I'm not reliable. My words don't align with my actions. I don't do what I say. Okay, great. Now you know what you need to work on. Or, I'm super selfish and every time I'm doing

something or talking to someone, it's all a part of this plan. It's all calculated. If that's who you are as a person, love you. I love that for you. Do, do your thing, boo. But if you want to build real relationships where people trust you and trust what you say and know you have their best interest at heart, that's something you gotta work on. Charles Green has a trust equation, and I love the trust equation because it makes it very, very tangible. What can I work on? What can build trust? And it's based on science and different studies and how the brain oxytocin gets released. And so, it's brilliant. But after you learn this

Sam Fuqua: Ama, can you give us some ideas for if we're trying to build trust, not on a supervisor, uh, supervisee, but a peer level, colleague in a workplace, someone who comes from a very different background than ourselves. How do we do that in a way that's not, uh, where we can avoid putting our foot in it or microaggressing?

Ama Agyapong: I wanna start with the person with, like, a different identity. I, I think it's really important to ask yourself, would I build a relationship, like, as you're building what you think is a relationship with that person? Am I approaching this the same way I would approach someone that I look at as similar to myself? Someone I respect the same, someone I think and admire. Um, someone that I feel comes from a, a same, similar background as I do. And why I say that is because that's typically the most genuine level of trying to connect with someone. And so, I would say start there. When I say start there, it can be something really practical. Like, if you, if it's a colleague and you're constantly on Zoom meetings, right, and they say something that you actually think is important, like, send them a, a DM, "Hey, that was a great idea. Thanks for raising that." Or, you notice, you know, you start to see patterns and trends. Going back to observing, listening more than you talk, and acknowledging someone's brilliance. Say that to them. "Hey, our last three meetings, you have really been brilliant in this aspect. Would you wanna connect over lunch?" Like, that takes vulnerability because they can say no and then you feel rejected, right? But the gamble is so great. It can be things like asking someone if they need help with something in the workplace, because oftentimes it's, this seems very, uh, competition focused. It can be something like even with your leader, because they're human beings too. You can ask how I can support you. Right? And so, those are very practical ways we can start just reaching out, reaching out to say, I am here. I'm here to connect.

When they are different than you, when you start the conversation off and you're treating them as you would someone that's like yourself, because it's, it is interesting, there's a, a, a dual sided to having different identities. We want to be seen as different, but we also wanna be treated the same. Right? It's, it's very, very interesting. We wanna be celebrated for our differences, but we also want to be looked at for our group identity. And so, I think it starts off with finding maybe some similarities and when you notice differences, ask questions about it. Um, and not asking questions from a perspective of, I want you to teach me about your culture, but from the perspective of I want you to teach me about you. And so, an example could be I used to have a, a team full of, um, people from the middle, Middle East and North Africa, and they all celebrated Ramadan quite a bit. Well, I had a general knowledge of what Ramadan was and how they celebrate Eid at the end, and I made accommodations. So, it was just an easier 30 days for them. But I also wanted to know like, how do you celebrate it with your family? What are some of your family traditions? How do, how, what does it mean to you? And so again, understanding how that person has a group identity, but then starting to drill down lower in that iceberg to, to also know who they are as individuals. But that piece takes time 'cause going back to the relationship and the trust, you can't feel entitled to trust. We are outta understand it builds. But it builds first by, by, I think, finding similarities.

Sam Fuqua: You know, I used to be so generic and frankly stereotypical, where if it was a guy, I'd just talk about sports, you know. It was an attempt to connect, but a very, uh, the sort of the safest, blandest way.

Ama Agyapong: Yeah. Yeah. And I, you know what though, Sam, I think starting off that way, great. Right? You all are trying to build a relationship, but at some point we gotta go past the stereotype. At some point we gotta go a little bit beneath the surface. Um, and so to your point, it was very bland, very generic, which

representing a group.

Alexis Miles: You just raised something, Ama - discomfort. And, I have heard you say you have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. So, when we feel uncomfortable, when we're trying to go beyond the superficial and, you know, scared, am I gonna say the wrong thing? Am I gonna ask the wrong question? What if I look stupid? You know, what if they think I'm nosy? That's discomfort, uh, that's uncomfortable to feel like that and to have those thoughts running through. So, how does a person learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable?

Ama Agyapong: Repetition. You, you just gotta keep doing it. It starts with knowing that your worldview isn't the only worldview. And your experience isn't the universal experience. And so, once you get past that, right, an example is an able-bodied experience versus someone who has a disability. Those are two very different lived experiences. And, even me sitting here saying, able-bodied versus, I'm like, am I supposed to say that? I don't know. So, there is discomfort even mentioning that because that for me is, is the group I've had the least amount of exposure to, and that's where I've had to do the most work. But it's repetition. So, the more I put myself in those situations to have to ask a question or to not know, because I've been knowing a lot of things, Alexis, but what are the moments I don't know? I gotta put myself in those situations and then when my brain is like, shut down, don't say anything. They're gonna think you're dumb. Nope, I am not. I'm gonna challenge that thought and I'm gonna ask an open-ended question. I'm going to ask, how do you experience that in your shoes, right, in your worldview? I'm gonna ask those questions. With maybe the fear of coming off a certain way. But again, I'm making it about me if I do that instead of making it about them. So, it's repetition. Reprogramming yourself in those moments. You have to pay attention to your body, you know what's going on and say, nope, this is what I'm gonna do. Usually responding with an open-ended, genuine question. You hear me say that a lot. And then making it about that person. I think those four things really helps to start feeling comfortable in the discomfort and knowing I might get corrected right now. And then I've learned something. And then I can keep going.

Alexis Miles: So, it sounds like you're saying that kind of authenticity, the openness, uh, willingness to feel uncomfortable is what it takes to learn and grow and develop an, develop an authentic relationship.

Ama Agyapong: Yes, it does. In release. And when you just said that, it made me think of, it comes with releasing this notion of perfection because especially women struggle with this idea of perfection. I have to always be right. I have to always have it together. I have to always come off a certain way. I have to always be, and no, actually you don't. You have to always be you. Because nobody does you better than you, right? And a part of being you is getting corrected. A part of being you is being authentic, being vulnerable, not knowing, and failing fast, failing forward, failing and getting better, failing and learning, failing and sharing. And not sharing so you can condemn someone else. Oh, I learned not to say this word today, so how dare you say that now. No, no, no, no, no. You were just not perfect at that two days ago. Right? And so sharing to say, this was my lived experience. Hopefully, it can help you because this helped me. That it, it really

does start, start with that. Being open and letting, just letting go of per, perfection, which is just a notion that's baked into the culture and society we live in.



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

S5E12 - BUILDING AUTHENTIC WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS WITH AMA AGYAPONG

and in their hearts so that they can approach conflict and relationship building with more skill?

Ama Agyapong: Yes. I think one, we have to know feedback, conflict, communication, like that's an art and a science. And it's an art and a science we don't come to this world knowing. And so, just like we study how to be a doctor, how to be a leader, how to be a lawyer, a lot of us study how to be a mom, we also need to study how to communicate, how to navigate conflict, how to provide and receive, and receive, feedback because that is an art and a science. So it's a skillset we have to build. The other thing I'm going to say is, and I've learned this from motherhood, and I know we talk a lot about intent versus impact, but it's very different when you're living it in the moment. So, example, um, we had just come home from wrestling. I'm cooking dinner, my son knows, he's six, give yourself a bath. We have this whole routine going. I still hear the water running. I'm like, "Hey, have you, have you started bathing yourself?" He's like, "No." So I get mad, the food's on the stove. I come in with a attitude and I, he's like, "I got it. I got it, mommy. Now I got it. I, I, I, I, I'm almost done." And I'm like, "No." And I grabbed the, the, the rag and I start giving him a bath. And he starts bawling, crying. And I'm like, yo, like, what is wrong with you right now? Like, I'm just, you're crying because mommy's giving you a bath, right? And so he, I finish, give him his towel, go get dressed, go check on the food. Like everything is super, super rushed. 'Cause typically, our bias takes over when we rush. But, when I'm making sure he has ointment on his skin and all this other stuff, something told me to pause. And I paused, and I asked him, I was like, "When mommy gave you a bath, why, why, why did you start crying? Like, what was happening for you in that moment?" He said, "You weren't listening to me." I said, "Okay. And when mommy doesn't listen to you, how does that make you feel?" "It makes me feel sad." "Okay. Why does it make you feel sad?" "Because I told you that I had it. And when you didn't believe me, you didn't believe me, you didn't listen, and it made me feel like you didn't trust me."

So, in that moment, Alexis and Sam, I had a choice. I had a choice to completely minimize, belittle, disregard what he was saying because I knew what my intent was. My intent was we just left wrestling, and I gotta get you fed, and you gotta go to bed on time so you can have a great day the next day at school. That's my intent. I'm being a good mom. That's the intent. Or, I can sit there and listen to the impact and acknowledge that. Because acknowledging the impact is sowing a seed of trust that's gonna flourish into this beautiful plant that I am going to benefit from the fruit of later. And my friends, that is what I wanna leave you with. In those moments when you wanna be wrapped up in what your intent is in the moment, think about what seeds do I need to plant today? What seeds of trust, what seeds of connection, what seeds of relationship building do I need to connect today? 'Cause I'm focused on them and not me to build this plant that's going to yield fruit that we both can benefit from later. So, that is what I will leave you all with.

Sam Fuqua: Ama Agyapong, thank you very much for this conversation. Really valuable. We so grateful for your time.

Ama Agyapong: Thank you. Likewise. Your brilliant minds, brilliant questions. Just thank you for this space and trusting me with your audience.

Sam Fuqua: Ama Agyapong is a human resources and diversity consultant, trainer and facilitator. She's the founder of *Inclusion Enterprises* and that's where you can find her on the web at inclusionenterprises.org.



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