

Layla: Welcome good ancestors and welcome to today's episode, a fellow third culture kid who is using his difference to make a difference. Tayo Rockson is a writer, speaker, consultant, podcaster, professor and brand strategist who runs UYD management, a strategic consulting firm that helps organizations incorporate sustainable diversity and inclusive practices. Tayo is the author of the brilliant book *Use Your Difference to Make a Difference: How to Connect and Communicate in a Cross-Cultural World*. As the son of a diplomat, Tayo grew up understanding the nuances of multicultural diversity while living on four continents. Tayo and I talked about the importance of education, not perpetuating systemic oppression and learning to communicate more effectively to help build a better world. Hello everybody and welcome back to another episode of Good Ancestor podcast. I'm your host Layla Saad and my guest today is Tayo Rockson, the author of *Use Your Difference to Make a Difference: How to Connect and Communicate in a Cross-Cultural World*. Welcome to the show Tayo.

Tayo: Thank you for having me Layla. It's a real pleasure to be on. I'm glad we are doing this.

Layla: I am glad we are doing this. We spoke just a few months ago earlier this year. I was very privileged to be on your podcast *As Told By Nomads*, which I really want people to check out as well because I know it was a really rich conversation. It's really great to get you on our podcast now and switch the tables and dig into your work and your story and everything that you are about. So, before we get started, our very first question, who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned, familial or societal who've influenced you on your journey?

Tayo: The first and foremost is the late Nelson Mandela. That's been a driving force for me since I was a pre-teen living under two dictatorships when I used to live in Nigeria before we transitioned to civilian roles. But yeah the late Nelson Mandela,

we've got James Baldwin, Audre Lorde. There's so many but those are the ones and then living I'm a big fan of Oprah and I loved, you know, I don't know if you've heard there's a Layla Saad. I don't know maybe, you know, I don't know. You might die to look away because I wasn't sure. Yeah, but uncannily resemblance, uncannily resemblance to the one I was talking about but yeah those are my ancestors.

Layla: Ahh, thank you. I feel very humbled to be included in that list.

Tayo: Angela Davis too, yeah.

Layla: Yes, yes, yes. I have always been reading your book and so I knew some of the ones that were in there, Nelson Mandela is heavily referenced in here, Oprah, I know from your Of Kings and Queens series that Audre Lorde and James Baldwin are huge influences of yours as well which is, you know, you did this incredible series on YouTube and on social media where you share about various topics and one of them the Of Kings and Queens looking at people from Africa or the African Diaspora who have had huge influences, you know, what inspired you to start that series?

Tayo: Well, it's part of a bigger project that I'm working on and the reason is I don't think many people have truly investigated history to the appropriate lens and a lot of times when history is told about black folks or people of African descent is told from the lens of colonization, imperialism or you know, enslavement and I witnessed this first hand when I first moved to United States at the age of 17, college, you know, all these weird ideas of people being surprised by my English or my complexion or any of these things I feel like it comes down to people not being aware of their ancestry and not aware of just how rich in royalty a lot of black culture is embedded in and my hope is to help humanize those elements of history that have been erased or forgotten but also to give our young kings and queens something to look back on and say I can see myself on that and

I'm continuing the legacy of such and such. I think those things are important and they play a role into why the world is divided as it is today, but yeah.

Layla: Yeah. You talked about history actually in your book and there was something that I wrote down I wanna find it, so you were talking about...

Tayo: [Inaudible] [06:01]

Layla: Yes, the poem. So, I actually I wrote down like I want Tayo to read this poem. It's a poem...

Tayo: All right.

Layla: You have it with you?

Tayo: I have the book. So, if you read the book what they represent is I tried to make things journal authentic and I'm a poet that's how I started. I started writing since I was 15. So, in the book I included a lot of my poems but I have to find it here...

Layla: I can tell you, it's on page 113.

Tayo: Uh-huh.

Layla: Uh-huh and it's a poem called History Doesn't Have to be a Mystery.

Tayo: All right, this is my—I feel like I'm doing my book tour. All right, so the poem is called History Doesn't Have to be a Mystery. Here it goes, "History doesn't have to be a mystery and yet it is for so many. I watched these last stories of identity are trapped in misery, efforts to improve representation or silenced by fragility because to do this means taking accountability and since no one wants to face capability we teach a watered-down version of history that doesn't offend the majority. Marginalized

groups are made to think their origins are from oppression and that they did so little in terms of contribution so the cycle goes on and on promoting more ignorance and dehumanization. Why should I respect you or be curious about where you came from and all I've seen of your history is in chains and shackles. The experts that have made their way to my TV show you uncivilized and impregnabilities. No, I didn't need you to respect me because my systems have told me otherwise. What systems though? Systems that promote the exaggerated perspective of the west so it's easy for you to think of other coast and jest? Systems that have hidden the crowns of my ancestors. Systems that have justified death. Systems that have chosen comfort over courage do better. History isn't a mystery, it's a mirror, a reflection of the past that connects us to today. It's a chance to correct mistakes of propaganda and genocide by filling in the blanks of the parts of the world that we have brushed aside. Just because some of us fear what history might tell us about our current traditions and heritage, doesn't mean that we shouldn't tell complete stories of the past. History doesn't have to be a mystery, so why make it so. Doing so is literally divided in our world.

Layla:

Thank you. I knew you'd recite it a lot better than I would and I'm curious into where do that poem come from for you and I'll tell you just very briefly, you know, when I was reading that part of your book and you were talking about education and the world of education and the importance of when telling the stories of, you know, black and brown people like not just telling it from the start of colonialism onwards but really digging dip into precolonial history and I thought it was so important. You wrote something down, you said, precolonial history should include the study of Africa before Atlantic enslavement. The pre-colonial history of Asia, the history of indigenous Caribbeans, the history of native Americans, the history of Australian aboriginal history, the history of native New Zealanders and the history of indigenous south Americans, this promotes identity because it shines a light on the historical,

scientific, cultural and intellectual contributions of multiple cultures all over the world.

Tayo: Yeah and I believe that because when we look at the problems of today, the fabric of a lot of the conflicts that we are having today, you know, we hear people say I don't want, you know, just think about the outright or white supremacy, I don't want you to rub me off my history. You come into my country and taking away our pride and I'm often thinking wait this land is stolen. The part of history that you're talking about had influences from other traditions that you don't even recognize and if you're going to promote something you have to tell the full story and you know it becomes a whole ideology and political price and it's seen as if there is a cast system to highlight the amazing new book, but welcomes it, but that cast system really influences the systems we start to participate in but also the education, institutions that we promote because there's so much money given into these textbooks that barely got updated.

Layla: Yeah.

Tayo: Instead of compensating the teachers and you know, I'm a professor, instead of compensating teachers, we don't compensate them it's just, hey, let's get a second edition of this, we will change the one word or we will change the cover.

Layla: Right. Right.

Tayo: And there's nothing changed in the contents of that.

Layla: It reminds me of Peggy McIntosh's Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack essay, right? So with the list of 50 ways that, you know, that you have white privilege and one of them is when I'm taught about civilization and who made it the way that humanity is, I'm taught that it's people who look like me who made the world the way that it is.

Tayo: Yeah.

Layla: And so this idea of, you know, so blinking this back to the series that one of the series that you've been doing on Of Kings and Queens that we have a rich history and that our history is not separate to the main story of humanity, it's actually the beginning of it, it's the middle, right? It's the present.

Tayo: Yeah.

Layla: And it's not minor. It's not marginal. It is the story.

Tayo: Yeah, labor capital is what a lot of people needed in terms of financing the world the way it is, whatever is the British empire come in and the African continent British, Italy, Italian, Portuguese, all of them, labor capital, right? Imperialism. United States, a lot of the enslaved folks built the country, you know, the infrastructures that are here today if you're looking at the 16th, 19th project highlights details just how influential and important that was needed and all these things. We don't think about that when we were talking about history. We just think about, yes, this person invented this. This person invented that and you do not understand that in order for that to have happened there are certain things that needed to be there and I think that that does a great disservice to the traditions we claim to have and the cultures we claim to have because they are incomplete.

Layla: Right. I'm thinking about, you know, right now is we are recording in October and it's a British black history month and then in the US it's February 4 black history month and this idea that black history is this other thing that is confined to a month as opposed to something that is shaping, it's always there, it's always present. What do you see is the I mean I think for myself as a black person so many of the black people I know we don't just, you know, focus on blackness in that month but for many non-black people and very many white people that's the one

month in which they'll think about the history of black people. What do you think from the perspective of and I'm really thinking about like the context of your work, this idea of connection and this, right, the connection of they are not other, they are us.

Tayo:

Yes. Well, I mean connection to me is a personal and professional explaining. For the audience, I'm Nigerian but I grew up in five countries and four continents, so for me that creating for connection was something that I wanted to have because I had a huge identity crisis initially but then I ended up growing up as being black on four different continents and I got to see how people were defining who I was before that and as I was observing the world, you know, reading books of late Nelson Mandela and looking at that I saw that people just didn't understand how to connect. In fact, they will look at it through a fear based lens or you take this I don't have this lens instead of we can all participating in greatness narrative and I felt like I needed to breakdown connection in the work and I feel that connection to self is the first thing, connection to others is also an important skill to build and then a connection to history and the world and that's what I was trying to do because I don't think many people apply all those elements of connection. I think some people miss out of that connection of self and will become way more conditioned actually as opposed to intentional. If you ask a bunch of people why they believe what they believe or where the origins of the thoughts come from, they won't be able to articulate that to you and that is a problem because some of these end up shaping the policies that we have, you know, you go up into these positions basing your privilege and empowered and that makes you end up hiring, firing and promoting and creating policies about people that you have somehow conditioned believes about but you haven't investigated the source of that and so you take on things that were influenced by times they were not in today and that's the problem. So if you're not connected to that, it creates disconnect which is the irony of the whole thing. That's why

connection is important to me and that's the role I feel like connection plays into all of this.

Layla: Yeah. It's something that's very similar like aligned in our work is we both focus on it has to be the inner and the outer and that they cannot be outer action without that inner understanding. In your book, you walk us through a process of like things that are important for looking at yourself before looking at, okay, what needs to change in the workplace? What needs to change in education? What needs to change in, you know, other institutions? It's more like what are your values? What are your unconscious biases? What are your emotional triggers? What was your journey for that because I'm always really interested in how someone else's external teachings that they are sharing with work has come about because of their personal journey.

Tayo: That's a great question. So, I have always been a philosopher amongst my of friends or a curious one and you know, I have African background, I wasn't always encouraged, you know, I was supposed to be a lawyer, engineer, doctor.

Layla: Oh yeah, the only three jobs are allowed to have, right.

Tayo: Yeah or a failure.

Layla: Right. Exactly.

Tayo: So as a kid I'm the oldest of three boys and when we were that dictatorship I was this always questioning, okay, why, why, why and my parents will say shut up, shut up. When we started getting posted I was that skinny Nigerian kid with a thick Nigerian accent in French speaking country and American and I'm going through puberty and in a place where everybody got different, act a little different and that was the beginning. So I tried to—I thought very clear if I'm being honest. I have moments where I, you know, people make fun of my hair so I wanted to straighten my hair. I wanted to look like this side of

my skin I was looking I was like should I bleach or I could think of anything. I mean this is a 10-year-old and as I was reading up on the history of Nelson Mandela and all that I was thinking, Mandela has been all these years in jail, you know, 27 years in jail and there was a lot of reflection that came from that. The heroes that I even have, you know, what is the fictional [Inaudible] [17:25] I mean all of these folks they had to come to some level of who am I? Yo, who am I really before this? And everybody puts all these things on to me before mine and it really comes out to identity because the world we have today strips identity. Many people have their identity in favor of a same relations for all those things and as I found myself in the process of trying to assimilate because I thought that would be what I needed to do I found myself getting more comfortable so I looked at Oprah story as she transition from the talk show [Inaudible] [18:01] and I said all these people I admire were brave enough to be themselves. That was the first and I noticed. I don't know why I was thinking of this as a kid but this is just my head. And so I started to printout papers and my mom and dad always make fun of me but we had that dialogue in a dead end so I would printout papers of everyone I'd admire in sports or in politics or anything and I would just read up on every interview that I had and I had folders put onto my bed hiding from my dad because I don't want him to know that I was wasting all those papers and every night I would read through the paper, okay, this is what Lebron does. This is what Allen Iverson and all of them and I'll just read but I didn't know why I was doing it. It only makes sense in reverse now, but I was like okay this is the habits, this is daily habits and so every morning I will start to do that and I started reading more and more and it gave me this sense of understanding how everybody has a different lens. So in the book I talked about in the self-awareness part I call it the BTV and just like you I learned this acronym after I put the book out.

Layla:

Right.

Tayo:

I was like I could just have called BTV, so bias, triggers, values. So you need to know your biases because everybody has biases that's just how we protect ourselves and see the world, but what are your biases and what are the ways that you see certain people and I started to understand that as I was in different countries and I'll be like, oh, I thought that was, oh, that's not the case and then I was correct in myself as I was learning. Then triggers, I get triggered by bullies because I have been bullied emotionally but never, you know, quite physically but it's always because you are the different one, so they will try to ostracize you and alienate you. You put me amongst other people who ostracize and I was starting to realize, oh, wow, these are the triggers and so every time I would find myself seen reacting in a way where I couldn't control my emotions especially when I was a kid, my parents would tell me you better control your emotions, you can't just be angry all the time. Why are you always angry? And so as I was trying to tame my anger and for black folks, anger is it's a weird relationship. You almost—we are not told to be angry anymore. As I was trying to suppress a lot of my anger, I was learning about my triggers, the self awareness and then values I then realized that at a very early age especially when I came back to Nigeria and I went to boarding school and in boarding school you are essentially there by yourself and you are with the group of people and anyone has gone to boarding school I ended up being the head boy, people look up to you. But people try to break you down as well and I came there as this American-ish guy who hadn't been to America and everybody was so confused because I wasn't conforming to it what I thought were toxic elements in tradition. So then I said if I need to succeed in the next two years I need to figure out what my values are so I came up with my five core values, curiosity, courage, compassion, creativity, and joy. And my name Tayo means a warrior or the brave one that has brought us joy, so that was my journey. I was learning through that. I was like if I know my values, I'm not gonna let the world define me and I'm going to have my own boundaries and as I have my own boundaries, I will be confident and firm with who I want to be

and who I want to show about. So, yeah, observations with myself.

Layla: And that's incredible, you know, what's really funny is so we are both third culture kids who are African and we were both, so you were head boy in your school, I was head girl. We were definitely the geeks of school I know that for sure. I think we would have been friends in school. But something that I did at the beginning of this year was actually, well, right at the end of last year was sit and write myself a personal code of conduct get really clear my values, get really clear what was important to me and you talked about in the book, you know what is your personal code of conduct and I think this is so important for people who are thinking about how can I use my difference to make a difference, right? I need to get clear on who I actually am and not perform a personality that I think is the personality of a "ally" or the personality of somebody who has been seen as "woke" right? There's a lot of that going on right now where people are—there's a lot of urgency to create change and what happens, what I have observed a lot of times is that people out of very good intention to want to be part of change are not wanting to stop into the inner work. They are wanting to rush to the solution. What have you seen are the dangers of that?

Tayo: Well, there's a saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Layla: Uh-huh.

Tayo: And I see the reason why that is so prominent now is people have these good intentions of I want to do good and it's because they are reactive to it. They aren't proactive. A lot of times when you find yourself being triggered by the murder of George Floyd or what happened in Nigeria with SARS that's the only moment for many people that they think about it and they are like what can I do and then they maybe soothe a part of themselves that feels like they have done something whether they put out of

Tweets or elevated their ego made them see more woke. But then they go back to the day the day which is fine, I'm not saying anyone shouldn't go back to day to day but the problem is they've created that thin as just, oh, that happened.

Layla: Done. Right.

Tayo: Yes and the way you do that you misuse your privilege. That is the problem. That is the point of that. Those things in my ideal world to be a wakeup call for folks and say, oh, this has been happening all around me, I am just here now what have I done to insulate myself in such a way that I am just hearing about it. You know what, I'm gonna create an environment where I am constantly vigilant about this and I am going to do all in my power to make sure it doesn't continue to have that is the reaction that I hope in ideal world but when it becomes just reacting, do this for 2 minutes or two days or two hours, what happens is that the problem still persist and it then leads to this thing where there's distrust. We are working in similar fields and the many people who just wouldn't trust I don't I am not trusting any white person, I'm not trusting any of this, I am not trusting any of that and when we can't learn out to figure out how to bridge those divides, it's going to continue to separate and even in any system, man, women I've seen I was talking to group the other day and the man goes I'm just anti-feminine, so anti-woman and I was like I think he is anti-women I don't even know if he's anti-feminist like, yeah, women should just be here and all these things and I'm like what? And then something happened like the medium like, oh, that's horrible and I'll be saying how can you reconcile these two things? You haven't reflected on yourself because you act like you think these are the core values and so the danger is you look formative and you're part of the problem but you also create in this distressed cycle that doesn't encourage connection which is what we need to figure out to do to collaborate because how are you going to be able to know about the problem if you haven't had the lived experience but if some from that lived experience is not gonna

trust you because you've repeatedly shown yourself to be performative as opposed to be trying to be informative and consistent.

Layla: Right. One of the things that you talk about is importance of listening actively like how important listening is and I think that as we are just having this conversation around performativity in so called allyship there's often this question of okay so do I listen then or do I have to use my voice like when do I listen and when am I supposed to speak up. And if I'm listening does that mean I never speak up or if I'm speaking up does that mean I'm not listening, right? There's like these questions that I constantly asked. How do you go about answering that question?

Tayo: So, I go back answering that question by saying everyone has a circle of influence. So, whenever I'm gonna use myself as professor, I have students, right? I'm teaching up communication and they take on these lessons and then they apply that to their lives, I'm gonna communicate better to my spouse, my brother, my sister, my family, they are listening for the information and then they are presenting based on what they have. It doesn't mean you're powerless when you listen, it's your collecting and gathering information which is one of the things I said as a diplomat like my dad's job. His job is listening. And then you're using that information you have to better the society. So, if you're "ally" your job is I didn't know about the lived experience of people in the community or people in marginalized group, what am I gonna do? I have a family or cousin that always says to dispose out this rhetoric. I have a friend in Hollywood that Green Lights movies but the movies always do have a normative perspective. I'm raising two kids. Let me check the curriculum, right?

Layla: Yes, exactly, because I think it's like when the focus is, oh, I have to do something that's so out there, right, so outside of that sphere of influence it almost becomes a very reasonable excuse why you're not doing anything because that's so far away from

you. But what's going on with your relationships to the people that you are in relationship with every day, right? The people at work. The people at home. People at your book club, right? The people at whatever hobby club you go to. That is your sphere of influence.

Tayo: Yeah.

Layla: You talked about just sort of circling back because I'm thinking about this sphere of influence and you asked these three questions, what is it? Who are your three best friends?

Tayo: Three best friends, last three places you lived in, and last three relationships. I'm not asking people to, you know, necessarily change, maybe you reflecting you need to change but the idea is I feel like the equation for world view is lived experiences plus exposure. If anyone is act, you know, why do we see the world what we do, how do we get here? I was asked people to reflect in their lived experiences and how much they're exposed to. So when you're reflecting your lived experiences, you're thinking about your three best friends who surrounds you the most? Each can come up to three, anyone that you consider your close best friends. The last three places you lived. There's a point in your life where you have your choice, your guardians or your parents they put you away and then people start to move based on, hey, I like where I grew up in or out of rebellion or out of love of family, you know, name all these choices. But consciously unconsciously we are making decisions and we are surrounding ourselves in different environments without, you know, actively knowing that and then where we move from those situations may be we are not as exposed or when we are embedded in the situations we are definitely exposed and then relationships, you know, I'm not telling I want to have different preferences or anything but I'm telling people to reflect on who they consider worthy or attractive so that they can understand that okay so this is something that I have here that I need to reflect on. I'm sure many of us have had those people I'm not sure people

would say, oh, you know, for a black person I think you are okay. You kinda good looking for a black.

Layla: And they tell you this to your face or wow.

Tayo: I have had so many as I go through the list of microaggressions that I have had, but all those things are good lens for you to give your starting point on where your thoughts are. It also allows you to think of two concept, what you think is right and wrong and also your definition of freedom and I think people have two definitions of freedom. For some people freedom is more power without accountability.

Layla: Do whatever I wanna do, whenever I wanna do it and I don't want anyone to tell me I can't do it.

Tayo: Exactly.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: And then for other people freedom is the ability to exist as who they truly are without punishment.

Layla: Yeah.

Tayo: If you have these two levels of freedom, the definition of freedom you can imagine a chasm that exists between that. That's two people think seeing freedom as a different way and it causes a lot of division and so I really want people to understand.

Layla: This is really I feel like light bulbs just went off in my head with that. Two definitions of freedom because, you know, we are looking at the decade's long civil rights movements, four black people around the globe, right? But especially right now black lives matter movement in the United States, right, and then the end-SARS movement in Nigeria, so it's like that definition, the

second definition of freedom is we wanna exist. We just want our dignity. We just want our dignity. We wanna be able to live the way that we are without being punished for it. And the opposition is often side the other side of that freedom definition.

Tayo: Yup.

Layla: How do we bridge that chasm?

Tayo: We have to be honest. Those way it starts the first. Many people who have those power, those responsibility have to be honest with the fact that look I am part of the problem and my power comes in the expense of others and what am I willing to actually unlearn? We both come from two of the major religions, Islam and Christianity and in Nigeria ironically those are the two ones, they are basically 50/50 and I remember as I was growing up with my spirituality and I was starting to figure out toxic elements of it and things to unlearn that was the same thing. I have to be honest I was like I can't just say sin.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: Go over here, you're an older person I didn't even know why it was a sin in the first place. And so that was a starting point for me for me to figure out to learn I was like, yeah, I am so part of this problem here or in a workplace for example why are most of the holidays due to Christian and I haven't said anything. Everybody is Christian, you know, Eastern Christmas and all these things but I don't know any Buddhist or Muslims that have Ramadan. We don't talk about Ramadan, you know, we don't talk to any of these things and so that's what needs to happen. It has to be that level of honesty saying the way I am does everybody feel that privilege? Can they feel like they can go safe to work, you know, go safely to work and have that? If that's not what has happened to everyone then I need to find out how to do that and that requires cultural humility.

Layla: Yeah. Cultural humility, I'm thinking about use the words or the terms global leadership, global citizen which I think as third culture kids is something that we just really resonate with because we've lived everywhere. We are used to interacting with different people from different cultures and so we have a global perspective but we are also even if you're not a third culture kid, we are in a highly globalized world. We are in a world where you can no longer—there's no country anymore where it's like this is the only people that are in this country. There are no other ethnicities in this country except this. We are in a globalized world and yet some people embrace that and want to create those connections and some people wanna keep the distance and try and enforce an old paradigm that just no longer physically exists.

Tayo: It doesn't, yeah. And you know if anything about those paradigms, those things are always influenced by the times whether it's the industrial revolution or all these things and I find it so funny that we as humans evolved countries evolved, all these things evolved and we don't wanna evolve tradition and I said in that poem we need to investigate our traditions and maybe we don't wanna investigate the traditions because they are afraid of what is gonna reveal about them. It wasn't that long ago things were segregated. Segregated bathrooms and many people will say if I was there I would have done this but I think based on whatever was considered okay at that time it didn't even cross most of the people's minds to think that this was like a bad thing and if it did cross their mind, they didn't wanna do it because they were gonna take away something from them and if you don't have that uncomfortable conversation with yourself where you're willing to lose some level of status or privilege or whatever for the advancement of humanity, there was not gonna be any progress. This idea that is a rosy, you know, I have a rosy picture of progress is gonna be a rosy is where the problem persists. We talked about white fragility and all these white tears and white all these things, it is

not even—I might could not just use white tears that it happens everywhere.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: If you're not comfortable with the idea that there will be struggle and pressure and resistance then you're gonna stay in that performative spectrum of change.

Layla: So, what's really interesting about this is you are naturally, someone asked me to describe Tayo, I'm like he's probably one of the most positive, upbeat people that I know, you know, he just comes across and is very authentic and also seems to really just really treasured joy, right? He just seems really happy as a person and yet you're doing work which requires this radical truth telling and you are doing work that requires looking at violence and oppression and all of those things. How do we keep our joy in that and I'm really thinking about Tayo like one of the questions that I had for you was as a black man in the United States in this year, I know all of the years have been tough but in this year especially how are you maintaining your sense of joy? How are you protecting it?

Tayo: Yeah, it gets me emotional. Okay. So this has been for many not feel has been great professionally but it's been tough emotionally.

Layla: Yeah

Tayo: For me every time I feel like I have some moment of breath, there is Jacob Blake, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and then it's always been a bunch of these things and the interesting thing for me is I'm already the oldest within my family and you know, Nigerian and then...

Layla: Same.

Tayo: A lot of cultures, the oldest is sort of like you have the secondary parental role, so therapy has been essential for me and in therapy I've learned how to change my relationship with anger. I described myself as an angry optimist, I heard that from [Inaudible] [36:27] and I feel it's the most appropriate thing for me. I smile when I'm happy and joy is one of my values but I've learned how not to suppress my anger and be okay with my anger. That's the number one thing because for a lot of black men and women and individuals, you're told that the angry you are the more threatening you seemed and I would even say that a lot of my initial instinct to be joyful at first was because I wanted to make the other person feel comfortable in all these different cultures and so I just let go of that idea. And I was like I'm gonna be angry and I have no reason to suppress it and then I find moments every week to decompress with therapy. Therapy is very essential for me. I go to therapy every week and I don't forget the mental and physical element of taking care of yourself so I'll go on a walk, I'll workout or to something and those things to me centered me and then the other thing is I connected the, you know, I love that you call it, you know, you always talk about your ancestors but I always connect to my purpose and understanding how I'm continuing the legacy of those things. For me purpose fuels me, you know, every time I feel drained I'm connected to the purpose because I remember why and I just know that if I'm not saying something, recognizing the platform I have someone else might not be able to get to somewhere and so that drives me. So, those are the things I do.

Layla: Thank you for sharing that because I think so many of us are struggling this year especially if you're in the United States and then the added layer now of what's going on in Nigeria for you and your family and it's been a year where I know for myself I have had to communicate a lot with my team about, you know, I'm actually not that okay.

Tayo: Yes.

Layla: I have to step back quite a lot, you know, I've been on sort of a sabbatical on social media and sort of stepping back because it takes a lot to keep showing up when like you said you never get a chance to catch your breath because there's always the next thing and one of the functions of white supremacy and systems of oppression is to keep us constantly on this hamster wheel, right, of fear and trauma and shock and pain and making the choice to simultaneously say I'm gonna honor my anger at everything—my grief, everything that I feel and I'm gonna protect my joy and my mental and emotional well-being like it's my job. I'm gonna do both of those things.

Tayo: Yeah. That's been a thing for me I think I was always sometimes I'll be worried about—I will have some shame about, hey, am I—can I be happy now or other times I'm like, okay, I'll be happy and it does internal dialogue, but I wanna bring this up because I've always had great respect for you, I even had great respect for you when I was doing this anti-racism campaign 30 days and I was like I was thinking I'm gonna model Layla's Me and White Supremacy and then I think I had sent you a message but you were on sabbatical so I was like I'm just gonna go through how she did it. And I put out this call it was after the death of George Floyd and it was in the month of June I'm gonna show up every day with a lesson and I was using all my platforms nine of them and I think when I was on day three I felt like I couldn't get out of bed and I was like how did she do it? And I was having to find some source of energy. I ended up doing it but it was draining.

Layla: Yeah. Yeah. I paid for it for months afterwards I'll tell you that. And it's why I always say I'll never run that, you know, Me and White Supremacy as a free challenge ever again because there's a huge cost to pay that in the moment from our purpose and our passion, right, that we wanna do something, we wanna be part of change, we wanna educate people and bring people along, we don't realize the personal sacrifice we have to make as part of that work.

Tayo: Yeah.

Layla: Yes. So, I hear you I mean I don't know how I did it to be honest with, all I know is that God was there. That's what I know.

Tayo: God was there, that's right.

Layla: God was there. It's all I know because it wasn't me that's what I know.

Tayo: Yeah, I call it #letstalkbias and it was the amount of questions and things are coming and I was like he said this is what you say you're gonna do that. Yeah, but all that I hope the audience is understanding because sometimes people get, you know, they are like what's the conversation or what do we need, you're just talking it. It's research, it's work, it's emotional labor.

Layla: Actually, there's no amount of compensation that can ever pay for the toll that that kind of work takes on you. There is actually no financial compensation like the life force energy that you lose from that, there is no financial compensation for it. The reason we do the work that we do is because there is something higher than us that's calling us to it. I mean it's so fascinating hearing your story about how you used to research all these different people and sort of study them but when do the moment for you come when you were like this is the work that I wanna do in the world.

Tayo: Those are gradual process so August 22, 2012, I was living in Virginia at that time and I had sort of given up on this because I had applied to over 85 jobs because I'm not a citizen, they would tell me they don't sponsor visas, they won't do all these things, so I wound up convincing one of my previous internship opportunities and say, hey, can you just get—I need like because the only way I could stay to the country and then even they said yes but they had me pay my—they are like woah.

Layla: Oh, wow, yup.

Tayo: Well, you're gonna have to find a way to get us this lawyer fee and so I was like okay I guess I'll pay for it and it was so—I was at that place August 22, 2012 I was about a year into this job I said I've tried and I was in this small town that didn't feed any of my boisterous personality and I was driving to work burgundy Toyota Camry at that time and I got to depart where the road merging to the highway and I was cruising down my lane 60 miles an hour and all of a sudden my lane gets cut to half, you know, lost control so I'm sort of in another way, someone get hid, poof, one car, poof, two cars, poof three-

Layla: Wow.

Tayo: -and then boom I hit the left car again, the car lifts up, it's about to flip over this bridge I'm 22 years old and the only thought that came to my mind at that time as cliché as it sounds was have I done everything I said I was gonna do?

Layla: Wow.

Tayo: I was about to die essentially die I mean and then I hadn't and I was thinking all the Nelson Mandela stories and all these things and Oprah I was just in this town and the job I hated and adrenaline kicked in, I slammed my breaks, I somewhat managed to get out of the car, my car was completely crushed, totaled and there were two other cars hit, but I was in the middle of the highway and nothing had happened to me. I was like okay God, this is it. So, I tried to shift my mindset so before that my fear was not failing. That's part of what I was conditioned as you know, the way I grew up don't fail, you can't get this great, you can't get that, don't look it as what will your family think, my extended family, so my fear became shifted from not failing to now achieving my potential and so once I shifted, I lost all elements of what I was supposed to do and just did what I know I am meant to do and I quit my job, so I went

down on visa status and then in America, it's either school, work or love if you just stay legally, marriage, school or that so I said I was gonna go to school so I came down to my visa status, got my MBA then in 2014, about a year and a half after that I launched my podcast that was when it started to fit in. It was a gradual journey because I just knew I was launching the podcast and I thought I eased with that that led to speak in, led to consulting and my blog was also out there in that moment and I still write and people started to re-elect my ideas then I think it was after Trump election that things happened in a sense where it wasn't more sporadic anymore. People were like, hey, this guy has been writing about this for years now, let's have that and it was more intentional but it was a long gradual process in 2012 to get there, but yeah.

Layla: That's incredible and it is I mean the journey for all of us is this long meandering journey I know it has been for me but that turning point of that specific date, right, when you knew no like my life has to mean something I don't wanna die with regret. I'm sure that stays with you...

Tayo: All day.

Layla: Yeah. That shift though in 2016, so you've been doing this work all this time that 2016 comes which is a very activating gear for many of us myself included what have you been grateful for in your journey since then? And what do you wish you didn't have to deal with and I don't mean white supremacy or any of these because we don't wanna deal with it but just what are the sort of the parts of it that our heart that no one talks about or that you think should be talked about more?

Tayo: I think it's the sometimes it's the loneliness, I'm usually being alone, I've always been alone. I went to boarding school, I grew up in five countries and four continents. I haven't been able to see my parents because of visa restrictions for almost four years now. But we stay close. We find a way to stay close but there is

a certain loneliness that comes with that you have an ambition that many people not wanting to jump on board with you and that loneliness is gonna mean you do your own research sometimes, you being in addition to partition a researcher but also some of that has to wondering to yourself explaining certain things and pitching yourself and I remember even the journey to getting this book it wasn't that people believed in my idea. People were like we have all these books before and I had to tell them that well you don't have a book from a millennial black kid that didn't grow up here but it took me a year to get the book and then when the book started to do well, I was like, oh, hey, hi...

Layla: Oh, of course, right.

Tayo: So it's those moments where you know you're gonna have to do a lot of it to prove yourself. They are not always the fun parts. Things that I'm grateful for are you start to really think about your parents and now you are raised and just the privilege of my dad being a diplomat and I don't think that privilege for granted. I as marginalized as I have been in parts it's possible to be marginalized and privilege, those things they can go hand-in-hand and that privilege is something I'm always grateful for because if I didn't have those lived experiences, I'm pretty sure I would have had very close minded on many things. It's something I don't take regret at all because I think it feels it feels a lot of my work and I've also learned to appreciate my hyperactivity in myself because those things used to be punished as a kid. I was always bouncing off the walls and I always did well on school but you know I was like, you know, arts weren't promoted just science and math and all these things and I did reasonably well in those things but I tried to— my true self is an artist and so I was always grateful that I never really let those voices suppress those parts of me because I feel like ironically those things that suppressed me for are what I used to tell stories now.

Layla: Yeah. And I'm very grateful for the privilege of working for myself because it is how I can fully express myself where we are very similar in some ways but we are very different in personality. You are full of energy, I am the opposite, right? So what I love about my work is I can go in the library and read many, many books and be by myself, right? I can have one-on-one conversations as opposed to being in large groups, but it comes back to this importance of like use your difference to make a difference. It was who you are and not being someone else. I think if I tried to be like you or you try to be like me or being...

Tayo: Yeah, you'll be different

Layla: Exactly. It would be a disaster.

Tayo: That's the importance, right? So what I—the book *Use Difference Make a Difference* is much of a personal celebration of self as it is a way for people to understand diversity, equity and inclusion because people have a weird relationship in anything that's different. If you look at the cause of any conflict in the world, it has been because of some level of difference, ideas, religion, gender, whatever and the better we are, a change in our relationship within ourselves I know the better will be, you know, the more comfortable will be with being who we truly are. So, yeah.

Layla: Some of the concepts that are sort of towards the end of the book are these bigger questions or these bigger concepts that we know from past good ancestors like Nelson Mandela have been so integral to change and movement forward but that we struggle with because we are in our anger and we are in our pain, things like forgiveness, things like grace and compassion, things like not cancelling each other, how have you found having that conversation and how do you, you know, how do we honor like I don't have to forgive you, right, but at the same time

forgiveness is this bigger altruistic action that can help change things.

Tayo: Honestly, this year has been tough for that.

Layla: Mm-hmm. I'm sure. Uh-huh.

Tayo: I was gonna be honest, but you know, for me the great Nelson Mandela quote about forgiveness, you know, being prison sometimes if you hold on to that is something I've learned with conflict resolution the way that I approach it is we don't have to see eye-to-eye or be friends or any of these things but you need to understand this concept and how this matters to me and I have gotten so firm about my boundaries and reclaiming my time that...

Layla: Yes.

Tayo: For me, I was joking saying it was not even a joke it's like my boundaries—I'm real work in that middle area where I know people are influenced like, you know, kids or people that we influenced or teachers or students or whatever, they influenced because those people sometimes because of the way we have in our world and having really reflected on their thoughts and they just isn't the influenced by these folks which is why I'm actually the angriest with those two people on the boundaries because they don't realize the power that they have. People just spewing out those things without knowing how harmful they are. So, I reconcile it that way and I have learned how to examine why I need to forgive. If I find the anger I have is more self-serving as opposed to actual issue related. I have tried to be humble enough to let that go and just say okay so I don't need to hold the grudge here, it's fine, it's been 10 years, I'm not talking to this person but it doesn't matter just let it go, live it alone. Yeah, I just have to had all those honest discussions myself because I can be grudge-builder, I'm not gonna pretend.

Layla: Right and just in the larger context like even beyond the personal in the larger context there's many reasons to hold a grudge or maybe not hold a grudge but just to be suspicious of the other, right? The weary, the self-protective because of what history has shown us and what present times are showing us. I have been saying a lot like, you know, when people asks do you have hope that things are gonna change and I have been saying a lot in the context of black lives matter it's really up to people who have white privilege to give us reasons to be hopeful. We are here. We have been here. We stay in the work. We are inspired from our ancestors. We are inspired from our purpose to continue the work but we can't just keep carrying it. We can't just be the only ones who are doing it.

Tayo: Yeah. I'm glad you go to that direction because I'm learning to do that as well because I think after June, many people started—I think your book made best seller again that month around that.

Layla: Yes.

Tayo: There was a circulation of black, yeah, so everybody started I know this black person, I know that black person, I remember you know, I'm still been getting all those emails what I realized that I was like this is one of the first times I've ever had leverage and I was like if anyone is gonna ask me I'm not sugarcoating anything.

Layla: Nothing. Right.

Tayo: I would say exactly what you're saying I was like, if you really wanna know how to solve a problem that you need to start reflecting on these things that has to happen and this is the burden you have to start carrying as well.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: And so, yeah, that's what I'm doing.

Layla: Right. I mean I'm so glad that you said that about, you know, I'm not sugarcoating not that you would sugarcoat before but really this is even more now of a reason why I will not but there is this expectation oftentimes like present this in a way to us that makes us comfortable, present this in a way to us that makes it palatable. You're talking about in your book like how to counter oppression in the workplace, in schools, right? And what was the third one I think in...

Tayo: Yeah, it was media and it was a bunch of...

Layla: Media, right. I was gonna say entertainment but it was media.

Tayo: Yeah, media, entertainment, all those, yeah.

Layla: Mm-hmm and you go quite into depth about what are some of the issues so for example one of the things that you talked about in the workplace is the issues that when it comes to recruitment and for the inherent biases of who is doing the recruitment? What are the standards by which you are doing it like we need to actually pick a part and look at this and so we can tell you to do something that needs to be done but do it in a way that's not gonna upset you.

Tayo: Absolutely and with recruitment because I spent a lot—that's probably what I spent the most of my time doing with my consultancy, it's when I asked people reflecting their biases I know people would think of people as intelligent or dumb based on where they go to school at, you know, like did you go to an Ivy League and I'm like let me ask you.

Layla: Yeah.

Tayo: Do you need an Ivy League for this particular position or not? And you see that uncomfortable realization like oh, no, but it

would be nice to. And I'm like but why? Tell me why it's gonna be nice to have. And then having people walk there and then they will go I didn't think of that way or when it comes to sometimes people who are dyslexic and they spell things differently and people like well, this person doesn't know how to spell, he's not intelligent, and I'm like, what? You don't even invite the person into the room to even know what ideas they have. May be his job is even right in there. It happens all over and it's just all these simple things that we don't even think about and many people are too focused on being this good people and I always say you could be a good person participating in a bad system which is what we have a lot of.

Layla: Mmm.

Tayo: That's why I would think that, yeah.

Layla: Yeah and it's all of these I mean in this context of recruitment all of these hidden ways that systemic oppression is there, it's maintained by people who are often even unknowing of how they are maintaining it, it's not just a racial slur or slur or you know, an action that we can all say, okay, that was harmful. It's baked into the system. So, we've talked about—in this conversation we talked about education, the importance of teaching, you know, pre-colonial history and just knowing your history. We've talked about the workplace. When it comes to the media, you've talked in your book about the responsibility that journalist have.

Tayo: Yes.

Layla: And how they can approach how they tell stories. If there are any journalists listening to this conversation right now, what do you want them to know about the power that they have right now and the responsibility that they have?

Tayo: So, I'll use end-SARS, right, so there have been a lot of misinformation, which plays around the perpetuating intensity and I said that in the book, but it's important for journalist to know how to build relationships with the communities that they report about, that's the number one that I want any journalist to understand but not even just for sources but also for perspectives.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: If you're a journalist, inherent the yes, you have lenses and in America we have you know, we have a liberal lens and CNN or Amazon BC and you know, conservative lens and Fox, there has to be some level of painting and presenting multiple sides and that comes from having true relationships with folks and being able to ask open ended questions and for opinion pieces, yes, you can include your opinion but I really want journalist to start talking more about different perspectives so that other people can start coming to their own conclusions because I think it's very dangerous when people jump into this conclusions about certain countries or certain identities without actually having contacts or backups because people have different starting points. Not everybody is gonna be as well versed as you are or as you assumed your lead is to be. It's so dangerous because I can't tell you how many times people always surprise that I'm Nigerian. I cannot tell you, you know, people would yeah all their imprints jokes.

Layla: Is it because of your accent or is it because they have an idea of what a Nigerian person is?

Tayo: Accent, face, and apparently like you look different, you should be black or your accent sounds this or you're very articulate.

Layla: Oh, that old gem.

Tayo: Or you're not territorial, you're feminist, I don't know people say like, yeah, yeah, all Nigerians know of this. I'm like, yeah, it is a number of it. And so I just think those things play a role into that but it is yes it is journalism, just really establish those relationships.

Layla: Yeah and you're really making it clear the importance of really getting clear on your biases so that you can understand what's stereotypes you might have in your mind about people because that will influence how you tell the story. This stereotype that you have of Nigerian people, the stereotype that you have of black Americans, stereotype you have about LGBTQ people like whatever the stereotypes are, that's how you're gonna tell the story.

Tayo: Absolutely.

Layla: And this goes outside of being a journalist, right? We all now have our mini platforms, our social medial pages.

Tayo: That's so true.

Layla: Right?

Tayo: Yes, that's so true.

Layla: Yes. Yeah. And we are constantly telling stories and so how are we telling those stories? How are we presenting them?

Tayo: You know, it's funny you brought that up because it's so true that's also what's affecting the journalism industry, the speed.

Layla: Mmm.

Tayo: First information because many of us now are "I guess" I know a journalist don't wanna hear that. I guess reporters sort of but we have platforms.

Layla: Citizen, we are citizen reporters.

Tayo: Citizen reporters. We have platforms, we are not considered like sources even though again that speaks more to a culture where we are not as—not many of us as research focused as maybe you say you and I will love to go to library and read.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: Because it's not, you know, we have many things that provide information for now so why would we in our head think of that. So, there is that idea to be first because we might lose our jobs or we might, you know, our platform and all that but I do feel like there's a balance. I don't want the integrity of the news or report to be sacrificed.

Layla: Yes. Yes. Of course. But that point about speed is really important to note as well and I'm thinking about how the speed which news spreads now because of social media and if something was wrong in the story it then creates this ripple effects which can be harmful or people don't know why they are sharing it or people don't know if that was the correct thing to share. Yeah, so what do you think is important when someone is considering this is a crisis that's happening or situation that's happening and people are asking let's amplify this. What should people be doing before they just go ahead and repost?

Tayo: In the book I stressed the importance of being our own fact checkers, right? I think that's the habit that we need to start training ourselves to do more and more. There are many stats that show people sharing stuff based on headline you know, because it confirms their beliefs and we need to do the same thing we used to do. We used to—in school you show your work, right?

Layla: Right.

Tayo: Sigh your sources for papers. That is the same sort of thing. We need to be able to at least come up in your head with three sources or these reasons why you believe this is that. Look up the quotes if you see quotes, who is the person that said it? Where is this side from? That's the stuff we need to do. I know it's gonna sound like extra work to people but that's when this is gonna change when we start training our kids and ourselves to do that because if it goes on Twitter, goes on Facebook and on Instagram it's like yup, that's it, yup, Bob look.

Layla: Right. Well, it's like the black squares that we shared earlier this year and we ask people why they were sharing it and they didn't know why. Black lives matter, you know, just sharing it and showing solidarity. Have no idea what this is actually about though.

Tayo: Yeah. That is the question. So you said it. Maybe people should ask themselves, hey, why am I sharing this and what am I actually sharing? I think that moment can pause and think about that.

Layla: Mm-hmm. There is a story that you shared in the book and I was thinking about it today because I was wearing my Lion King t-shirt and I don't know if you know the...

Tayo: I know the story.

Layla: You know the story—do you wanna tell the story?

Tayo: Ugh.

Layla: I laugh to myself I was like I cannot post it, I cannot do the interview in my Lion King t-shirt because that's—it's too unannounced.

Tayo:

So, okay, so when I first came to the America I was 17 and I remember the biggest arguments was funny we were just talking about this with my professors, classmates and roommates and it was about whether I was Nigerian or African, same thing, no, you're not like your English was too good, you're black or do you talk like clank, clank and I was like, no, so I would say, no, do you have gems? Yes. Do you have houses? Yes. Do you all live in huts? No. And then when they will bring up that clicking sound of like, yeah, you're talking about the tribe in South Africa but that's not, you know, I'm from West Africa and then some kid out of nowhere was just like carrying this imaginary baby and we were all looking at him like what's happening? And he goes nants ingonyamabagithi baba and then I was like Lion King space and he's got it. I'm from West Africa. What about Nigeria and West Africa don't you understand it? But it was on and on and then I was like I can't be the only Nigerian you ever met I mean it was back and forth like that and I didn't even just think about them I thought about the people that were in their sphere of influence your brothers and sisters, you know, how they can just be influenced by what's happening and then if someone goes and says, oh, yeah you know, I met this guy that sleeps with monkeys and just like the Lion King and he's from my school and he's from Nigeria, I can go see his uncle with friends and they start seeing them and then that kid grows up to be someone that can hire someone and sees a Nigerian and we are like huh, no. I want this person in my company. That sort of.

Layla:

When I read it first I laughed, not because what they had done was funny it was just imagining how do you even process this as it's happening in the moment and I was also thinking about my mom because she told me when they moved from East Africa to Wales, right, in the 70s I mean they would get very similar comments and people would ask them do you live with animals like do you live with lions and monkeys and do you have houses or do you live in huts and my mom coming like they live in a big house like she couldn't understand why they would think that of

her and they couldn't understand why she wasn't saying yes, that's how it is in Africa. And my kids have not yet been to Africa. This was the year that we were supposed to go to Africa. I haven't been since I was a kid. My parents go multiple times a year. My husband has been almost once a year. His mom still lives there. I hadn't been back and I was waiting for the kids to be old enough and then for us to all go together and then COVID hit and we couldn't go. But we really talked to them about, you know, we really make it clear like this is what your culture is. This is who you are. This is part of your culture so that they don't get those stories indoctrinated in their minds as well and what really strikes me about it is that, you know, on the map like not the map that is the normal map but the map of how the world actually is, Africa is huge. There are so many other countries that fit inside of Africa with plenty of space to spare, right?

Tayo: The second largest continent in the world. So, yeah.

Layla: Right. So when you're saying that South Africa, I'm from West Africa, I don't think people realized how far away those places are from each other and how completely different those cultures are and that the only thing that you have in common is that you have melanated skin and that's it.

Tayo: Yeah. And you know, I always tell people is like you can have so many different versions of melanin in Africa and even white folks in Africa and Arabic folk and you're like you're thinking of me as the whole representation of Africa.

Layla: Right. Our families Arab African, there's all different kinds of African but when the stereotype idea of what an African is we know it's stereotypes are but that it drives home this idea that the African continent and African people are down here, right? That comment that 45 made about shithole countries.

Tayo: Yes. Yes, I remember. Yeah.

Layla: I guess what I'm trying to ask is like even though we have this very connected and globalized world, still there is this othering, there is this far distancing othering beyond going to Africa.

Tayo: Yes.

Layla: How do people really build their understanding so that they are not reverting to stereotyped understandings?

Tayo: Well, on the education portion book I said after education self is education of an environment and so it's collecting and gathering information, actively listening and being active part of community and I was using my dad's background as diplomat to tell the story, that was the lens and that's it. Finding your inner sure luck but we need to start having that habit of collecting and gathering information. I think many people think that education stops within the four walls of the school system. We need to understand that this is an active—I can't express to people enough the things that I have to learn more about the LGBTQIA community. First of all outside of school because when I first get to America I went to a very, very conservative university called Liberty University, I don't know if anybody knows it. It's the largest Christian University and so they had different ideas and it was I had to be intentional a lot. I need to learn about a community that I have always not familiar with and that's an example and so if you're thinking about othering, when you find yourself othering something maybe student news or you saying things that are not nice to a group of people I would encourage you to then pause, reflect on why you hold that view and then do more research on that because that's the first step because many people have a lot of those views whether they come out with it in public or not and so starting with that and that there are books, there are ways to expose yourself to different world views and then there are ways for you to invite a form of listening, podcast, we can travel, go to different events. So,

yeah, just really reflecting your lived experiences and exposure and then you find that your world view can expand.

Layla: And would you say it's really important not to or to learn how to also as you're listening and being there and being present also learn how to de-center yourself as well?

Tayo: Yeah. You need to ask open ended questions as opposed to leading questions. So, you can't do the—yeah, but you've really sleep with monkeys, right? No, you will be like, what was it like for you growing up? What was your relationship with this theme? How did you and your mother, you know, have fun in this? You know, when you start doing that the reason why it's point to ask open ended questions is you start to get glimpses of important things to them, you know, sometimes you might say, oh yeah, I love spending time with my family this way especially around October 1st because it was November, because it was our independence Day then you have, oh, it's Independence Day and then on Independence Day we used to go a parade to go to grandparents and we had this river, oh, you got this geography they had a river and then you know, this is important for families, you start getting all these piece of information as opposed to you trying to, you know, oh, but I went to Kenya one time or I did this one time. Is it true that this happened and then you're like you're missing out, they can't tell you something because it's like you're trying to match them.

Layla: Right.

Tayo: I'm just speaking to it.

Layla: And that sense of curiosity is really, really important and I think any time that you belong to a dominant group you have to be really aware that you do belong to that dominant group, right?

Tayo: Yes.

Layla: And be aware that the way that you're seeing things is gonna be through that dominant lens and try and consciously take it off and be like what if I just don't know anything about anything and just listen?

Tayo: Command yourself.

Layla: Yeah. Yeah. So, Tayo as we sort of draw to an end with this conversation one of the things that I've been personally thinking about and I think because we are coming to the end of this year and so anyway as we come to the end of any year so I'm thinking about next year, you start thinking about what is my focus gonna be? Where am I directing my energies? How do I wanna show up? We are in pull of this together building connection, using your difference to make a difference, being a global citizen, a global leader while honoring your anger and all of those really valid emotions like what are you tapping into for yourself that you're seeing yourself focusing on or directing your energy to over the next year plus as a way to continue to use your difference to make a difference?

Tayo: It's such a great question because I feel like I'm always in that reflective moments but to that point my whole thing is this systems of oppression and building the next set of global years and so for me I feel like I have been building good momentum on the workplace front especially with my consultancy. What I have been focusing on a lot is on education, so that's the thing and it's on retelling history the right way it should be and also trying to get into the field just why I became professor this year and see what I can learn from the systems so that I can learn how to potentially help in fixing it so I have been focusing on storytelling and then educational format that invites more dialogue. That's been a big focus of me and I'm sure it's gonna be more in the next year or so.

Layla: Well, congratulations on becoming a professor this year. That's amazing.

Tayo: Thank you.

Layla: That is incredible.

Tayo: I appreciate that.

Layla: As a professor with a professor platform and this vision that you have, you know, what is your dream in 5 years from now that you can look back and say this is what has happened as a result of the work that I put in and the work that I'm doing with other people. Now we see this, what is that thing?

Tayo: I love to be in expanded study on African and black history like a whole wing of it where it's first multiple textbooks and different interpretations of that because now when I think about the history it's almost separate from history itself. It's like a boutique type of thing but it doesn't get the respect that I feel like it deserve and my hope is that out of that I'm able to tell and produce more stories. I wanna write and show run and be like Shonda Rhimes for example or you know, Ryan Coogler.

Layla: I see that.

Tayo: Yeah. Ryan Coogler doing all these years I wondered like to have this platform that springs all these types of things, stories from literature to fiction nonfiction and promotes those things that it becomes such a normal celebration of heritage. That is hoping and then I went out topic.

Layla: Yes. I would tune in to that. I would tune in to that. For our listeners who are asking themselves that same question around how am I going to be directing my energies? This has been a tough year. It's been a really, really hard year and it's the time when people can either sink into despair or they can rise up to meet the times that we are in and so what are your words of advice for people who are looking for how do I rise up?

Tayo: Ten years ago I was really from having 85 plus job rejections in college and now I'm fortunate enough to be able to have a book out and be able to tell the stories that I was getting rejected for and I say this that we overestimate what we can achieve in one year and underestimate what we can achieve in ten years. So, if you're looking and searching for hope one of the best ways to do that is to have a plan for that next best step and with the bigger picture in mind. So, what is it that you feel like you want to do and what is an area of growth that you feel like you can work on in service of being that person and the more committed you are to do that the more in line you're going to find yourself with that mission because there is no way I could have predicted the Trump election or COVID or any of these things and as horrific as those have been ironically I feel like God has put me in a position to be a voice in those things because of the tough times that I had to get to be in that position. So, honor your skills, develop your skills, stay committed to those things and stay vigilant and if you have aspirations of the social justice field I would encourage you to continuously read from different talk leaders in the field, embed yourself in the work of the people that you admire and find ways you can add your own frameworks to that because you're going to be received differently than even the people you admire but yeah that would be what I would tell people would be focusing on for now.

Layla: That's amazing. Thank you. Thank you. Tayo, before my very final question I just wanna take the moment to honor you and to thank you for your presence in the world. You're just this beam of energy. You described as I have a boisterous personality but I just see it as just pure joy bouncing off of the walls and it's really infectious.

Tayo: Thank you.

Layla: So, it's been a real pleasure to be in conversation with you and I also really appreciate the depth that you do your work with and I know that you connect with so many people across so many spheres. I got to watch some of your TED Talks. I've gotten to watch your talk at the UN and that you speak with the youth. I know that you speak with companies. You have this great way of connecting with people and you're a great testament to this idea that if you just really be yourself, learn who you are, get clear in who you are and show up in that way unapologetically in all spheres, it has a ripple effect on everyone so I just wanna reflect that back to you and acknowledge you and thank you.

Tayo: Thank you Layla. Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Layla: All right, our final, final question, what does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Tayo: Well, in order for me to be a good ancestor, I have to honor myself and my values and the way I do that is by adding value to the world. The way that Nelson Mandela was someone that added value to the idea of racial equality and education feel like being a good ancestor on my end would be bridging to the vice that currently exist and this system of oppression and education media and workplace, so those three things are a ways that I feel like I can be a good ancestors because I feel like the people coming after me will be in those field. So, yeah.

Layla: Incredible. And you're doing it. You're doing it.

Tayo: Thank you. I hope so. I hope so. Thank you so much.

Layla: Thank you, Tayo. Thank you.

This is Layla Saad and you've been listening to Good Ancestor podcast. I hope this episode has helped you find deeper answers on what being a good ancestor

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