

The Future of DEI: A Humanity-, Freedom-, and Dreams-Based Approach

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Diane discusses Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) with Antonio Saunders, co-founder of Kriseles, a DEI and Business Innovation services provider. The two consider the growing opposition to DEI in American politics and media, Antonio's innovative and unapologetically hopeful model for DEI, and their collaboration to leverage that model to drive change at Summit Schools.

Diane Tavenner:

For the first time in five seasons, I'm not going to start today's show with "Hey, Michael" because Michael isn't here with us today. We are both, like so many people we know, in this sandwich generation where we have children who depend on us and aging parents and family members who need us. And today, Michael is where he needs to be, which is with his family, and my heart is there with him. We really wanted to have this conversation together, and we're also really clear about our priorities. And so we are going to miss him today. And for me, even in these circumstances, there is real beauty because the guest that we have today on Class Disrupted is someone who I began having weekly conversations with, like I did with Michael, during the pandemic. They continue to this day, as I am in close relationship and work with our guest, who is Antonio Sanders. And Antonio has been in education for many, many years, holding many roles and working with many organizations. Well, we'll get into this, but I would characterize his primary work around diversity, equity and inclusion. And that is certainly where we came together and met and began our work together. And it's the conversation that we want to have today. Michael and I seek to do two things on the

podcast. One is to make sure that we're really talking about what's impacting education today and how we take it into the future. And two, to engage in dialogue that is nuanced and that really doesn't succumb to this polarized view of the world, but really takes a nuanced third way approach. And this is a topic that we think needs that type of conversation now. And I don't know anyone better to have that conversation with than you, Antonio. And it's a conversation we have regularly today that will be public. And so here we are. Welcome to **Class Disrupted**.

Antonio Saunders:

Thank you, Diane and Michael, for having me today. I wanted to send lots of love and support to Michael and his family right now. And I wanted to say thank you for having a conversation with me today on a topic that is near and dear in our heart but also in our work and in our relationship together.

Diane Tavenner:

It indeed is. I like to always start with just some basic definitions, because when we talk about some of these hot topics, what are we actually talking about? And so let's just start at the very basic level. DEI has sort of become a word in and of itself, but it actually has an acronym. And so let's pull it apart. What do the D, E and the I stand for?

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah, let's talk about diversity. And I think about this...These are the things that make us special and unique. It is our background, our race, our age, our characteristics, our ability, our differences. When we think about inclusion, it's thinking about, "My gosh, I'm experiencing those things, and I don't have those things in the way that you have them. And I want those things to be included. I want them to be welcome, I want to respect them, and I want to cultivate them." That's the act of inclusion. Equity says this is that based off my background and my experiences, we didn't all get the same, so it's going to take us being intentional about providing what someone needs versus ensuring that everyone gets the same thing.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah. And that's the contrast of equity to equality in some ways. The reality is, as you just described, that DEI is being ascribed a lot of other definitions right now. And as I read headline after headline after headline and story after story, DEI is becoming this dirty word, if you will, and quite frankly, there's an effort to kind of cancel it, if you will, and we'll get into that in a moment. But I'm looking at a couple of headlines here, and it has become one of those terms that is being used to weaponize things. That's partly why we're having this conversation today, because we've moved into a moment where something that you just

described like, we're all diverse humans. We want everyone to be included. "We want people to have what they need in order to be included and to be successful" becomes something that is viewed as not positive or is negative or something even worse than that. And so the first question I want us to sort of tackle is, how did we get here to this moment where something like diversity, equity, and inclusion becomes something that is viewed as negative or counterproductive?

Antonio Saunders:

Yes, I want to say this is the difference between where the work starts versus where the work is. Now, let's talk about the original intent of the work in a way that we can probably all understand it and appreciate it. All men are created equal, and in that is the promise of this country, to rectify something that had been done in the past and put us all in plain sight of what it means to be an American citizen. We, as people living in this country, deserve and have equal access. But that was a value, that was something we were espousing to. It wasn't our reality. What the work became was, how do we begin to implement this in organizations? So some of that work became about compliance-based, mandatory work. You know how we feel about things being mandatory. So here is when you get into what happens when we do work that doesn't require us to change, we don't see the full value of it. So, Diane, let me give you an example. So you can say...A corporation can say DEI is about me being required to hire a diversity of people. Or DEI can be about, I understand personally, have done the work, and benefit from running a diverse organization because I see the impact on people, community, in upholding this original state. I believe that most people are experiencing the mandatory version of this work that leaves them unchanged versus the real personal and work impact of saying, I've got to show up every single day doing the work, living the work, to experience the fullness of it.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah, you started at the place that matters the most, which is, like, the biggest place. Our country, our values as a country and a nation. And DEI is throughout every aspect of our society, in our country, the diversity. We are an incredibly diverse country. We have this promise across corporations and business and industry. And DEI is very prevalent in education right now. And so a lot of these headlines that we're seeing, these sort of polarizing headlines are happening and occurring in education, and that's clearly where we work and in higher ed as well as K-12. And I think we've all seen these. But some of these high profile incidents are the first black female president of Harvard ultimately resigning from the position after a long campaign or an intense campaign for that to happen. We're seeing this in the efforts to ban books across the country in school libraries and school classrooms. We're seeing this around transgender bathrooms, the Supreme Court striking down the use

of race in higher education admissions. I could go on and on and on. There are a number of specific incidents that are happening in K-12 and higher ed. I know you, Antonio, and you personally have lived a life where many of the incidents that you've been a part of were these headlines. And this is one of the things that we talk about. What is it like to be someone who's had these experiences? Put us in your shoes.

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah. I think there is this way of looking at the world and it reflecting back what has happened in your own personal life. So I'll take you back to my 9th grade year in Gardendale, Alabama, living in Birmingham, and as a part of a consent decree by the courts, black kids from this county were now being bussed in to a predominantly white, suburban, conservative town. I love Gardendale. I love the people of Gardendale. And the thing that was very present there was there was more white kids in a class than there was black kids. So you ended up with the white kids always deciding what the black kids got. I decided to run for class president, and it had never been done. This is where you begin to actually start making these connections to this, when you're the first and the only one, and you have to raise your consciousness around, like, wait, what kind of system would only make one type of person possible for leadership? But that's what was happening. And so I won. And not only did I win, I won all four years. So now, Diane, I'm not only Antonio Saunders, a student, I'm Antonio Saunders, who's navigating a space, a space with parents who are trying to understand what I'm doing to make things even. Teachers who disagree or agree with what I'm doing, who still have to give me grades. An administration who's saying, how do we let you lead but also hold on to some of that power? It's a very risky situation to be in. It had gotten to a point where I really understood this in a way. When I was a junior, I was walking from one building to the next building, and one of my science favorite science teachers comes up to me. She's light, she's jovial, but she walks up to me in a more serious tone. She says, "Antonio, promise me something before I tell you what it is. I'm like, you cannot be serious. But her eyes were glossy and full of emotion. I said, okay, I promise. She says, promise me you'll never be the first black president because they will kill you. Now, taking that in as a black student with a white teacher, telling you, you've got to lower your potential to fit in the context of how people will react to your progress.

Diane Tavenner:

And I think she was doing it from a place of care and love, too, which is the really complicated part, right?

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah. Because care and love could be...One way is: Antonio be mindful of this. The other way, - which had not been sort of...She was not equipped to do. It was not at this moment...We had

not gotten there - was to create the condition where that could no longer be a possibility for my life or people who look like me.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah, that unintended consequence. And the interesting thing about that, Antonio, is that like all humans, you have multiple dimensions to your identity. We're starting to talk about one predominantly right now that contributes to how you see the world, how you experience the world, and then how you are able to process other people's experience in the world. And some of those aspects of your identity are particularly relevant to conversations about DEI, obviously the visible ones. But there's a whole bunch about your experience, too, that you bring to this conversation that I think shapes your view. And so tell us a little bit more about those pieces.

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah. I think the thing that has shaped me most is a group of black women in Birmingham, Alabama, who raised me, and they raised me with a particular value system that, at the time, I couldn't understand. I just obliged to. And it was because my grandmother, my mother, and my aunt, they were really setting me up to be the patriarch of my family. At an early age, my grandmother told me [that] when you meet people, you don't meet them. You meet their spirit. She was tapping me into the human condition. And then she would say, because we lived where we live, and there would be a lot of things that I would have to navigate, "Be careful how you treat people, especially when they do you wrong" because she believed even the people who were intentionally or unintentionally trying to do you harm, they still carried a light. And so you really had to be careful your reaction to them, how you maintained or fell out of community with them. And a final one came from my mom. She, as a single parent, had to navigate life. And in most cases, Diane. She could have protected my sister Nikki and I from the circumstances that beared down on us, but instead, she invited us in. In that before my mom made me a man, before she made me black, she really made me a human being. And it was in the humanity of my existence that I had to show up with my family first, not in all of these politicized identities that can be ascribed to me. Who are you as not a reactor to the condition of humanity, but as the shape of it. That is what these women held me responsible for.

Diane Tavenner:

As you're describing those values of these incredible women who I have come to know a little bit and love and appreciate, it feels like it's hard to live by them in this moment in time, or maybe not hard for you, although I know there are challenges, but a lot of people aren't living

by them. A lot of people don't meet people's spirits first. They don't lead with their humanity. How are you navigating that? How do you hold true to those values?

Antonio Saunders:

I think we just have to let ourselves live in the human experience, that two things are showing up at the same time, That I deeply want this country to change, and in many cases, and in many times, it doesn't. When I was going through the moment of 2020, a lot of things were happening in my life. There was the external forces of Ahmaud Aubrey, Brianna Taylor, George Floyd that was sending a signal like, you can't be free. You'll never be free. Why have hope? The second thing was I lost my younger brother at the age of 30. And carrying your family through the darkest valley after they'd lived a life of suffering was almost too much for me. It was the thing in life that would say, you might as well pack it up and believe that there is no way that your role of moving your family from generational curses to generational blessings would be able to play out. It was a moment to succumb. And then I was changing careers to become an entrepreneur. Everything was bearing down. And then I sat there and I said, "But wait a minute, Antonio, because let's have conversations with ourselves about what we truly want and what we're going to truly live by. My grandmother told me all things were possible. You can do anything, and that's what I expect of you." So what the confrontation of my life and my personal values was is, am I going to be the person who sits on the side as the bystander and says, this is what's wrong with society and it's never going to change? Or was I going to become the person who said, I get to decide what happens? So, Diane, I was beginning to flex between am I the bystander to what I don't want, or am I the builder of the possibility that I want to exist? I was vacillating between these two, and I chose the latter without losing sight of the former. I could be the builder of the world but understand why the world puts so many people into a state where we can feel hopeless, like this world is never going to change for us. My job was to build something that could get people from the sidelines of life into the highest possibility of life. That is my work now as an entrepreneur, but most importantly, first as a human being.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah. I'm thinking back on and reflecting on those moments and those conversations and the dialogue and the work that we were doing as you were navigating all of those really challenging moments and experiences and then getting really excited about what was coming, the creative force that was coming from you during that time, which ultimately led to a model that we're going to talk about and a way of doing DEI work, if you will, which feels important because I named all those kind of headlines that are happening in education. There's a policy response that is following those. And we see this often where over half the

states in the US have introduced and/or approved bills that are targeting DEI in the traditional sense. And you were clear, like, look, one of the places we've gone wrong with DEI is this mandatory, compliance based orientation versus a true experience that helps us be human. But some of those bills and those pieces of legislation are essentially prohibiting programming that is related to DEI or called DEI, or prohibiting the funding of any sort of DEI officers or offices, and prohibiting any preferential treatment in hiring. I could go on and on and on. There's a divisive subjects ban. Given your decision to not be a bystander and to really focus on building a world that makes sense with this legislation as context, what do you make of that? Where do we go?

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah, I think we have to be very savvy, sophisticated observers of the world. I think that we have to really understand that we are in a moment where we're deciding if we're going to be in conflict or connection with each other. I think it's unfortunate. A key role of some of our leaders is to lead us as a society into conflict instead of connection, that when we are in conflict, we begin to stoke a core fear of human existence. If I exist, you can't. You think about it this way. When we talk more about the work of humanity giving us a competitive edge versus the real purpose of it. The real purpose of this is, as humans, we all need to be included and accepted for who we are and given space to be each other's neighbors and to show up for each other. So if we directly answer the question, this legislation is really about what happens when we become unaware of each other, when we can actually seemingly practice disregard. And I say this, Diane, knowing that we have to really create a distinction between people who are invested at a political or other levels to make these things public, versus the experiences I have been having with people who are not down with this. I would say that the people that I have been talking to, the group of CEOs, down to my friends, down to my high school friends from Gardendale, down to my college friends, there's learning that needs to take place. There's change and progress that we can shape, but there's an intentionality and an investment from institutions and structures that stoke this fear, that create these barriers that say, why would someone be more invested in me hating white people or white people hating certain demographics and beginning to proliferate that right. What is the investment in us being a divided country instead of us being a country that can actually come together? And we have to say that the investment to conflict cannot be greater than the investment and the conversation around our shared humanity and community.

Diane Tavenner:

That certainly resonates with me. I suspect it resonates with a lot of people who are exhausted, quite frankly, by being in conflict. They don't want to be in conflict, but I think they feel pulled into it, and there's no choice. Everything around them feels like you have to

**pick a side and you're pulled apart. And so how do we move from conflict to connection?
How does anyone who doesn't want to participate in that and isn't benefiting from conflict?
How do we move to the connective space?**

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah, it's something that I've been thinking about for three years now and talking to many people about. And one of the things is really having the conversation and seeing the system say, who puts us at odds with each other? And how are they using race to hijack, co-op this moment such that it feels like we're going backwards in a moment where we should be propelling forward. I think we need to actually see that system and not ignore it and not just react to it. We should actually understand there are players that are actually in charge of this. I think the next thing is we need a human value system that says this: we believe in each other, we will be at peace with each other, and we believe in our differences. This means that there's one way our history and differences and disagreements can put us at odds with each other. But in this paradigm, those same elements of history, differences and disagreements, can bring us together to do the work that we need to do. And so what I have done since 2020 is really begin to work with organizations, in particular, CEOs. Groups of them. I have a white group of CEOs, a black and brown cohort of CEOs, and then they span from the private to the social sector. And what we have been talking about is, what does it mean for us to say leaders don't have to know the way. They're given space to experiment. And instead of holding you as the people in charge of your organization, responsible for creating change, how do you equip everyone so they can hold themselves responsible for creating change that works for all? What we are talking about is a new approach to the work that gets us to a meaningful, valuable way of operating with each other that is not just, no longer compliance or mandatory, but it's the work that we were always committed to doing in the first place. This is the work of us coexisting.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah. As you're talking, first of all, what you say really resonates with me. And then I'm guessing that some people are a little bit, having some cognitive dissonance. They're like, wait a minute. What you're talking about is not what I've experienced in DEI, and you and I both know this. We've had lots of conversations that a lot of DEI experiences that are mandatory, compliance based, oriented, or otherwise. They are experiences where white people are told to feel bad and feel guilty and sort of taken through a whole history of all the things that they have done wrong. We've talked about white people feeling like that means you should step aside. There's all these messages and not bringing together people and not having sort of a shared human experience and instead really pulling people apart. So what

you're saying is probably foreign to a lot of people who are listening to this, and they're like, wait, what are you saying? That sounds really different. And I think it is. And I think it is one of the things Michael and I talk about all the time on this podcast. It's why we created this podcast was, we have an outdated model of education in America that at one point served us. Look, it was created for a reason. It wasn't irrational. It actually did a lot of important, good work. It's just no longer relevant, given the moment of time we're living in, the progress we've made, where we are, the number of students we have. We need new models of education to meet the moment that we are in and who we are. And I think that is what I experienced from you. You acknowledge the importance of the DEI model of the past and how it came into being and what it intended to do. And you also recognize it's not where we need to be today. We need a new model. You have created a new model and are working on a new model.

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah.

Diane Tavenner:

And I think let's get into that. What is at the heart and the essence of that.

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah. I think the first thing for us to come to and actually say is, the values of DEI are my existence. They are not things that are about a program or initiative or things. These are the things that allow me to stand up in life and say, I have duty to my family, myself, and my community, and I have duty to fulfill not the struggle of my grandmother, but my grandmother's dream. This is preserving the original intent of the work and translating it into something that I believe all of us want and need. And so what, Diane, you are alluding to is what my founder, Tracy Session, and I call the humanity, freedom, and dreams model. And if you were looking at this model, you would see three sets of work being laid out and describe culture and belonging, leadership and team. And when you go and you read the model on the left side, it narrates what this work can become when we become at odds with each other, frustrated and or the natural dispositions we have versus the right side is about where we move into. And it's important for us to recognize when we are making progress, we are in between these spaces of where we are and where we are next. So I'll just read some of them that we have talked about, and then I think, Diane, we can get into some of the things that we have done together. So, on the left side, it says, we inherit our ancestors struggles. We are fighters. Fighting injustice creates racial progress. The world is against black and brown people. Now, if the world is against black and brown people, you know what's got to happen. I've got to spend my life confronting and establishing expertise on how to disrupt systemic racism and white

supremacy. What is my relationship with white people? Is what you were getting at in this current society? Well, we got to decenter whiteness, and we got to interrogate it. But no one sometimes talks about the cost of that on people of color. I've got to spend my life convincing people to see my pain, not my potential. And while fighting this fight is so exhausting, it's the only way this country will hear us. Now, for white people, it's sort of like you got to feel bad about the past, and you got to withstand being deeply associated with being called the labeled racism white supremacy. I call this side unintentionally becoming an expert in a world we don't want. I believe this is what Toni Morrison was talking about. With racism and white supremacy, Diane, it becomes the distraction. The road that we were on. Struggle is on the way to freedom, not the place that we sit down and say, this is it. So the counter to this is, we inherited our ancestors struggles. No, we inherited our ancestors dreams.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah. The shift from struggle to dream.

Antonio Saunders:

The shift from struggle to dream. I'm not a fighter. My grandmother made me a waymaker because against all odds, what's in front of me reveals what's inside of me, which means at every point, I'm going to redefine myself as bigger. I am going to take on the challenge. And there are different tools in fighting and way making the next thing. Fighting injustice creates racial progress versus building our dreams creates racial progress. You were talking about what it meant as a white person to be in DEI spaces where you feel like your identity is under siege. Well, that's for everybody in the room, in some cases, of mandatory trainings, right where you're going in, and you're saying, we are redefining our life by the past relationship of oppressed, sir, and the oppressed, which means I've got to show you my pain, hold you responsible for my pain, and I've got to make you the one who takes that. And you're responsible for doing something about it, but you ain't been equipped to do that. There's a certain equipping you need to be able to do that. So to finish that is like, we need to hold an understanding of the past, but we need to equip you to create the future. And what this means is simply, is this: the power that we have in this model, especially for people of color, is... Black people, this is my love letter to them. And my hope for society is that I have been in DEI sessions, and I have facilitated DEI sessions for years, and none of them have been about my dreams. And I lament that reducing the value of this work from my ancestors to about sparring and fighting and destroying and removing humanity when their lives were about situating us speaking the truth that we are all humans. Yes, I am black, and I don't need to destroy you to exhibit my value. But unintentionally, the work can be about me versus you, me confronting you, me calling you this, me not doing this, instead of about its true intent, which is, I am here

to build the dream. I am here to live the dream that all of us can coexist without destroying each other.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah. So many things coming up for me right now. One of them, and we've had this conversation. One of the ways I can relate to what you're describing is I've spent 20 years in the charter school movement, and I started in that movement because I wanted to build a school that served kids in a way that I didn't see. The schools that I was in was serving them. It was this beautiful, amazing dream. And if I look back over the 20 years, I spent a lot more time, a lot more energy, and developed a lot more skill in fighting to just have a school and keep it open and get a building, and fighting, fighting, fighting just to try to, I guess, have that dream and so little time actually dreaming, in reality, in proportion. And so this idea that I had become an expert fighter versus an expert dreamer. And when you describe that to me, those are the skills that you have been sort of equipped with, and you're like, no, I actually am going to turn to being a dreamer. I'm going to turn to creating the world with all people that will serve all of us, and in doing so, will really serve the people, my people who haven't been served. That was a powerful experience and lesson for me that grounded me in work that we ended up doing. You know, I will say that we came into each other's lives around the time of George Floyd's murder. And as you know, at that time, I was the leader of Summit. And there were a lot of people who said, you shouldn't be the leader of this organization. You're a white woman. The majority of the children in this organization are people of color. You should step down and you should step aside. And you had a different vision for what should happen in that moment.

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah, we didn't know each other. We had met maybe months previously, and now we were contending with the situation where there was sort of a playbook for this moment, which means oust the perception you had done something, made a mistake, and with that, you were no longer capable of doing this. And you needed to go. And someone that replaced you, we needed to look like me. And I think that we need to just sit with the consciousness of that, that we have made or could make this work about swapping seats instead of understanding what it means for different people to lead systems when they are not prepared for all that comes with it. First, going back to the core values of this, I don't need you to learn from your mistakes by removing your humanity, that actually holding your humanity and saying the mistakes that you've made, let me equip you to go back and empower you to rectify these things and become the person you said you were going to be. It was the equipping of you, of saying, "Hey, usually DEI work goes around the C suite." It's on the periphery. It's not in your goals, it's not your everyday life. It's an initiative. You say, here's a speaker, Antonio, come speak for us, rile us up,

then go get your donuts, and then go back to your desk and pretend like things change. Well, there's nothing in that. There's no substance in that. This work needed to be about white leaders who...What we want them to do is build the world for people that don't operate like them, not just stand by my side when there's a brother lying on the street. Can you do the ultimate work of building systems that get black and brown people to their future, not build a system that harms us? I saw that as an opportunity to take you and our partnership in a way of saying, isn't it about time you step into this moment and not away from it? And you said yes to that challenge. What was it for you that allowed you to say, and I was very upfront, like, we're going to have to actually develop this as we go, and there's going to be heat for all of us, and I don't need any sort of white betrayal in the process.

Diane Tavenner:

Yeah, well, we both took a leap of faith and trust. I think we come back to what your grandmother said. We met each other's spirits. But the thing that allowed me to do that was you were offering to me, I don't believe in the donut version, if you will, the non-substantive version. And as you know, I'm like a deep nerd around institutional design and structures and education and learning. And I was like, I don't want to do the things that everyone's calling for. I don't want to just keep writing statements about bad things that have happened that doesn't make sense to me. I don't think that that feels real or meaningful or impactful. I want to actually do real work that changes things, and I need to know what that work is. I need a partner in that work. I need new tools and strategies because the old DEI workshops, they're not changing anything. They're not moving the needle. They're not creating the institution that we want that will serve everyone, that bring us together. And so what we were able to do together was figure out what those real things were, and not just the two of us, obviously, a whole amazing group of people doing that work together. That was the offering. And that is, in my view, what you are bringing and offering to the field of DEI. And so I want to ask you, we could talk for days here, but I want to ask you, what are your hopes? Given where we are, what are your hopes? What do you want everyone to understand or to do as we move forward?

Antonio Saunders:

Yeah, I think that I answered that in many ways. I think that the thing that I have to practice in my own life is...I called my dad and I told him, I said I had always been taught to narrate my story as a black man in this country. I grew up in a single parent household, and my dad walked away from me. And that is not the full story. The full story is my dad was in a situation, his home, where him staying, he would have caused more harm than him leaving. So that conversation with my father went something like this. I want to thank you, dad. I called him dad and not Desmond. I said, I want to thank you, dad, that you walked away and you didn't stay.

Because I realized to move from a place of a generational curse to a generational blessing means I've got to give you the thing that I needed from you, which was unconditional love. So to first answer that question is, in my own life, I am having to go back and practice what it means to actually change the story to one in support of me, not one that is against me. The next thing is that we as a society, are moving toward the most diverse workforce, the most diverse economy ever. And one of the things I know the model can do and change is people and companies. So, at Kriseles, what we are doing is saying we want to build future ready companies that can experiment, adapt, and inspire their employees and their customers. But for what? Not just for financial gain, which is definitely needed, so that we can really do the real work. And what is the real work? What you do every day with what society needs comes into clear view. And that is where you spend your time, not a one-off event, but your daily time, getting inspired, getting into diverse conversations, and building what we need. So it's for companies to really understand they can actually shape our communities in a really powerful. The third thing that I would say, Diane, is that I alluded to this, but I did create the HFD model for society, but I created it as a love letter to the black community, to my mom, to the people around me. For this simple reason. I would get into my Lyfts and Uber, because the people that know me know that I don't have a car. Trying to lower my carbon footprint because I fly too much. And I would get in and I would ask the brothers and sisters, I was like, how do you feel about being black? And they would tell me, it's hard out here. And I wanted a way to change the response to that question that when we say, how do you feel about yourself and the world? I wanted them to say, I could do anything. I love this country. This country originally did not do right by my people, but I believe in the progress that we are making. What if the possibility could be that? But, you know, a black person just can't come with the empty words of that. That's got to be real. And so engaging in something where we could do the real work as a community. And white people no longer had to be the racist or the white supremacist to me, but they could actually be the agent of change the world needs. I believe I'm up for and invested in that future, that potentiality with the work I do every single day.

Diane Tavenner:

Well, I'm up for that with you as well, and I hope others will be. And I appreciate this different perspective and view on something that's getting talked a lot about. And I want to keep doing the work together and dialoguing about it. So thank you for joining today. Before I let you get away, Michael and I always close out the show by talking, sharing, just something we're reading, watching, or listening to. We try to have it be outside of education, but very often it's not. And so I will turn the question to you. What are some things you're reading, listening, watching to that you can share with us?

Antonio Saunders:

For sure. Right now I'm reading *How To Get Big Things Done*, which is really helping me use the challenges and the excitement of being an entrepreneur to deepen the belief that this work can be done and it will be done. Music. I'm an R&B fanatic. There's nothing like ninety's, R&B, the classic R&B afro beats and a little Phil Collins in there. We just sort of jam out to that. And then what I'm watching, and you know this from our conversations, we were having a whole, I think we're having a three-part series in our weekly Wednesday meetings about this. When I came from break, I asked you, have you seen *Leave the World Behind*? And you told me no. And I said, okay. We often have homework for each other. I said, please go watch that. And we've been having a rich discussion around where our society is headed and some of the themes brought up in that movie.

Diane Tavenner:

In fact, I shared it on the last podcast that I had watched it, and that conversation just is not ending well. Thank you for those suggestions. I'm reading, this is kind of funny, and I even know the title is interesting. It's called *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*. So just that title alone could be a little bit controversial. But as you know, my son travels. His school, his university's around the world, and he's in London this semester. And so we're going to go visit him and go to Scotland. And we're going to Scotland because it really is like the center of so much innovation. It's this teeny country with this really interesting past that I think is pretty misunderstood. And there's so many parallels to the experiences we're having now. As I read the history of Scotland, so I'm fascinated by it. I'm really interested in this trip. There's so much innovation there and so much change that happened there. And so I'm curious what lessons we can apply to our conversations and the work that we do together. And with that, I am just so grateful for you for joining us this morning. I know we both missed Michael and would have loved to have him as part of this conversation, so we will have to do it again. But with that, thanks to all the listeners who joined us, and thanks for joining us on **Class Disrupted. Until next time.**