

# So, Here's the Thing Episode 32

## Laylee Emadi

Welcome to so here's the thing, the podcast for small business owners, entrepreneurs and creative educators who are ready to take their business to the next level, through candid conversations, tactical approaches and a few unpopular opinions. We're lifting the veil on what it takes to build both a life and a business that you love. I'm your host, Laylee Emadi, a coach for creatives and founder of the creative educator Academy, where I help entrepreneurs step into the role of industry leaders and educators. I'm so glad that you're here. Now let's jump into today's episode. Hello, friends, welcome to so here's the thing, today's episode is like very spontaneous based off of something that happened in the event industry this past weekend, and I invited two of my extremely wonderful friends and peers Akua Konadu. And Ty Wilson, they are you guys have seen them on the show before.

They're incredible speakers, educators, leaders in our industry and beyond that they and similarly myself, we are all really big advocates for inclusivity, for diversity for inclusion in our industry. And so we're gonna have a really open conversation about not just this one particular event, but about inclusivity. And just being cognizant of making everyone feel welcome when you are in a position of leadership inside any industry, but in particular, the creative industry and education industry as a whole right now. So to give you guys a little bit of context, there was an event called emergence events, they had released their event that was booked to be on the grounds of former plantations, it was actually I think, a collective of something like 21 plantations that have since been turned into a luxury resort. And so they released this location. And obviously, it did not go well for them, everybody kind of came out. And the comments on Instagram were a lot. And there was a lot of really good things shared in that and a lot of rightfully so anger and disappointment and conversations that I think we can all learn from. And whether you're an event host a speaker, and educator, and attendee, a sponsor, or whatever, whether you're involved in any kind of event in any way, I think you can learn something from this conversation. So we're going to kind of dissect this a little bit, and talk about ways that we can move forward. So. So a couple of other points I wanted to make before we move forward in this conversation. One is, I do not know the host of this event.

Personally, I've never actually heard of this event, until the statement was released that I'm going to share with you guys and we'll link it as well in the show notes. If you're interested, you can go check out their actual statement, it's still on Instagram, and the comments are all still there. And you can read through those as well. But we do not know these hosts. Personally, we none of us have any affiliation with our emergence event in any way, shape, or form. And I also want to be really, really clear that we are not doing this as a way to like attack these people or make them feel bad or worse about a terrible situation. But we really want to talk about the way that it was handled and the mistakes that were made so that people in the future can move forward, feeling confident, and not making those mistakes, and not making those same missteps and handling a situation that was a mistake, because we are all human beings. We all make mistakes. And I believe that the way that you handle those and the way that you show up and the way that you respond to them. That's what matters more than the mistake that was made initially. Unfortunately, in this situation, it kind of felt like mistake on mistake on mistake. And that's where we see a real opportunity to help people kind of switch the way that they handle things and really think thoroughly about what they're doing before they do it. So first off, let's go ahead and kick off with welcoming Akua. And Ty, if you guys want to just kind of introduce yourselves and why you

are passionate about this topic. I'd love to hear a little bit more about you and what you're bringing to this conversation on a personal note. Yeah.

### **Akua Konadu**

Number one, it's oh, so good to be back on the so here's the thing, podcast. So thank you again for having me. I am Akua konadu. I am a storytelling strategist. And I love working with small business owners and Sass companies, helping them share their story in an impactful way to sustainably grow their business. And this conversation. I think it kind of as a continuation from our conversation back in 2020. Honestly, and I'm really excited to be back just to again, continue this conversation forward because it's very clear in our industry that we'll just the event space in general that some changes still need to be made. And so I'm really looking forward to this conversation and really just sharing our honest thoughts and also to some tangible ways that we can really help people to critically think about some of the choices they are making before doing it. So I'm looking forward to this this conversation.

### **Ty Wilson**

I'm Ty Wilson, I'm a wedding photographer out of the Pacific Northwest, also based in New York City. And I'm really passionate about this topic, because I think there's a lot of crossover between leadership and just creating safe and equal spaces for a lot of different marginalized groups. And so I think, having these conversations and keeping them at the forefront and finding ways of like, hey, this could have been done better. And here's kind of where it overlaps. And all these different ways, can bring up the entire industry, but also our society, because a lot of these things are also just like, underlying in the American society. And I think addressing them at an industry level is a really great way to be leaders in our space. Make the country a better place.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm so excited to like talk about this with you guys. So the first thing I want to kind of just chat about is this specific event and the the situation, the statement, and then what happened as a result, and then we can kind of get into more actionable things that if you're listening to this, and you are like, what would I do in that situation, if I was contracted to speak here, or if I am thinking about hosting an event, and I'm wondering about, like, the venue I choose or the people I choose to work with, we're going to talk about a lot of things that hopefully, are really tangible and tactical that you can take with you. But let's first kind of dissect this and see where missteps were made. And just remember you guys, we're taking this as a learning lesson. So I hope that like everything that we pull apart on this is something that you can apply to any future, any future like issues that arise in the same realm, which I mean, we would hope that less issues would arise in this realm after this conversation. But apparently, we're still dealing with this in 2023. So let's move forward.

Alright, so first off, we already talked about kind of the context, they chose the venue, the venue was absolutely inappropriate for any kind of event where you are inviting an entire industry worth of people to come and pay you to attend and sit and socialize and learn and feel comfortable in that venue. Right. So like, first and foremost, like, how did you guys feel about seeing that venue choice, and then seeing the statement that was made and by the way, I'm going to read you guys a clip of this, just like one little bit about from the statement that was released. There, it was a very vague and very, I mean, I'm just gonna say it, it was it was kind of like a half assed apologies, the apology that was shared was we'd like to apologize for our shortcomings, the disappointment we have caused and the lack of transparency. Now, that being the thing that they apologize for, I feel like that was mistake number one was that the apology was extremely vague. In the end, the stance that they took with the statement was, We're sorry

that we disappointed you. However, we are aware of the history of the venue that we chose, and we are moving forward. Anyway, that was their first statement was, we understand this, this venue was fully transparent with us about the history of the land and the work they have done. But we're moving forward anyway. And then they made kind of a half assed attempt at, we are going to donate a portion of our proceeds to a nonprofit organization committed to addressing the historic and justices of slavery. And we take this donation seriously, we look forward to making an official announcement once that is selected, which to me reads that they hadn't even chosen somebody to donate to it was just kind of like thrown in there as another way to make things quote, unquote, right, or better or more palatable. But to me, the thing that really stood out was, We're sorry, but they were transparent with us, aka we knew, but we're doing it anyway. Like, sorry, we knew but Sorry, we don't really care is how that reads. Now, whether that's the intention, I don't know, these women, I don't know these people, I don't know, these hosts, I don't know, their team, was that their intention? We have no way of knowing what we do have a way of knowing is we can read their statement, and we can infer that that was what they meant. So that to me was mistake number one. What do you guys think?

### **Akua Konadu**

Yeah, I think you know, there's a difference between intent and impact. And that it was very clear, maybe that wasn't their intention was to be harmful, but the impact was harmful. So at that point, it doesn't even matter what their intent was. There were people that were harmed specific people that look like me. And so here was the problem. And I really, when we talked about it, I literally said I really want to know what the process of thinking was. Because yes, the venue was honest with them about the history, and they said, Okay, we're still gonna move forward with it. And that lets me know that DEI is not one of the top got things that they value in terms of putting together an event for me now, especially after 2020. Like, if I do not know who is in the lineup if I am personally having to speak, I will also do my research. And I told you guys as well, like, I wasn't surprised by the response, because I actually went back and looked at their Instagram, looked at their website, and there was nobody that looked like me anyways, you know, so again, it just let me know that DEI isn't a top priority for them. So I think for them, they were like, Okay, we may get some pushback, but all they cared about was having an event instead of actually thinking about people's humanity, because I think I don't want to have a lot of time. So you know, I definitely want to hear Ty's thoughts as well. But people forget that slavery was not that long ago, the civil rights movement was not that long ago. Okay, I just want to I really want to reiterate that because I think sometimes when we are talking about these very pivotal moments in history, people make it sound like it's like hundreds of years ago, you more than likely have grandparents, that you literally if you are white, I'm gonna call it out or you make more than likely no, somebody will be related to somebody that was alive during that time. And more than likely thought what the majority thought, such as segregation is okay. And I'm not saying it to shame you. I'm just here to put the context to let you know that this is like it's not years ago, we're it's still very close. And so the fact that people just brushed it off as if like, oh, yeah, it's not a big deal. The atrocities atrocities that happen on that land, when you know that, and then the people that are making money from it are white, it's very problematic. And so for me, personally, it was just extremely disappointing. And all that just to say, like, DEI clearly isn't at the forefront for them. And you can tell that in hosts and venues, even before something big happens, where DEI lands for them in terms of priority for putting together an event.

### **Laylee Emadi**

I absolutely agree. I mean, I think that there's so much obviously that your experience is going to be completely different than anybody else who is not black, not a black event. Professional. And we're seeing that we see that in as we're using this as an example. We're seeing that in the comments of, of

wedding professionals who are black in the comments being like, I would never, in a million years, attend this event, and go and attend, you know, this educational event. But like, also, it's supposed to be a positive and fun and great like experience as an event host myself, you want everybody to feel at ease and comfortable and joyful and open to receiving education. Like that's the heart that should be the heart behind any event. And, you know, when you see a statement like this that says, you know, we'd like to apologize for the shortcomings. And in the apology itself, it says that it says that we recognize that the intention of the programming and work disclosed along with our knowledge of the history of the property, when we first launched our investor event that it should have been disclosed. So you're apologizing that you didn't disclose the venue, but you're not apologizing for asking people to come and be uncomfortable and, and give you 1000s of dollars to do so. Hey, you 1000s of dollars to go where harm was done to people who are in their ancestry? This is I mean, this is an insane ask to do with people. So

### **Akua Konadu**

to your point, yeah, it is an insane thing. But again, it's just I'm not trying to shame anybody, I just want to highlight if you're not doing the work, that process or that type of critical thinking is not at you're not thinking that at all, you have other priorities in the forefront. So if that's on the lower of your list, you're not gonna be thinking about the insane ask.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, absolutely. And it's, but it's something that like, this is why I wanted to have this conversation, because it's such a learning lesson of anybody who is I talk about this all the time with any type of education, where I'm like, it is a huge responsibility to ask somebody to invest their hard earned money and time and livelihood with you. And you can't take that lightly. So you have to be aware of these things that you're asking people to, to show up in spite of, because it's not a it's not going to happen and be it shouldn't be something you ask them to do. Point blank, like that should not be something that they have to grapple with.

### **Ty Wilson**

Yeah, and I think that's one of the really interesting things about the event space, specifically with weddings to is a lot of people and I mean, this this event, specifically choosing the location that they did and having it be an event that was kind of celebrating and romanticizing the history of the location. I think that is a very, very in like disingenuous approach if you're wanting to recognize the past of that place, like you don't turn it into a romanticized you know, remembrance of what that was. And if, if the, you know, people who are hosting the event and the people who own the venue, were really honest with each other about the history of the event, what does that honestly even look like? What does that conversation look like? Because even in, you know, if people want to believe that they're doing the work and trying to acknowledge the pain of the past of our country, how honest are they trying to be, you know, if you if you look at some of the websites of I mean, Palmetto bluff, the montage specifically, if you look at their website, they do have a conservation page that talks about the past are talks about their history, and it's done. So in a very, very light, washed way, it's a very much pulled back view of what happened. And so we hear people who believe they're doing the work or believe that they're, you know, acknowledging the sins of our past using phrases of like, people were in oppressive physical and are faced physical, oppressive physical and mental abuse. Or they you know, in addition to forced labor, enslaved people endured all of these different things, but the thing is, like, what they're not recognizing is saying, oppressive physical abuse or psychological abuse. That's a very sanitized way of saying, people were bred like cattle for profit, people were bred like cattle so that they could literally use

young girls as veal. Like to cook them into delicacies to use their skin to make leather furniture. Like that's horrifying. And to choose to try to host an event that romanticizes an antebellum era, where all of this was happening is is not okay. And so what really needs to be done is a lot of these leaders need to do a better job of one, really looking into the past of, you know, the places that they're choosing to host events at, but then also look at, does the type of event that they're wanting to host align with the recognition that they say that they're trying to bring of that place is history. If you're trying to pay homage to that place, it's extremely, extremely tumultuous past, you don't do so with a celebration, not in you know, a romanticized way. And I think that's really where a lot of people fail, is they just don't have kind of they don't they don't let the place hold the weight that it holds. And we saw that in a lot of the comments, people are like, there is absolutely no way I can step foot on these grounds in any type of mood, except for like the most solemn of cases, especially not for a celebration. So I think that that needs to be part of the conversation when one specifically choosing venues, but then also choosing how to what what type of event to host at that venue.

### **Akua Konadu**

Yeah, no, I think to your point tie with what you said just being honest. And I think also when, because they had ample opportunity to correct this on more than one occasion. And so they knew, of course, but people are ready, we're warning them and saying to them that I would highly encourage you to choose a different venue before the even the official announcement was made. And so again, it's like, Where was their mindset I also to, I feel like ego plays a huge role in it, sometimes it's really hard for us to accept that we are wrong. And I'm guilty of that, too. And so for me, I view now honesty as a gift. And so really, when people are being honest with you, no matter sometimes it can be a little harsh. Sometimes it can be nice, whatever, whatever range that can be, it is truly a gift that you were being given. And I feel like people are constantly giving them grace and gifts of honesty, and they still chose to move forward. And so I think it's again, also adding to Ty's point of just removing your ego, because I guess the event you were hosting, but it's not about you, right? Like you're doing this for our community and you want to make sure that you're inclusive, there's a difference between diversity and inclusion. There's a huge difference between the two. But they no shade, but they struggle with both and so but again, you have to when people are being honest with you take that take heed and listen, because I feel like a lot of it would have never gotten to that point if they would have just stopped and had those hard conversations early on. But even after you saw the first or second comment, because people were already warning them and they still decided to push forward.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, absolutely. And I feel like I we see that all the time, not just at this event. But I've personally seen that. As you know, diversity has always been extremely important to me. Well to all three of us. All three of us have kind of been, you know, on the frontlines in different capacities over the years. And I myself have sent many an email to many and event hosts in the past decade of being in this industry. And the number of responses I've gotten have been slim to none. And the responses I get are always He's pretty standard form responses that thank you so much for this information, we'll make sure to consider it next time, which is just absolute bullshit. Like it's not happening, they're not considering it. And in fact, after 2020, I've been invited back to some of those events to either consult or to speak. And it's just been really interesting. Because you want to have the benefit of doubt for all these event hosts. Right? But like, when there are people out here, encouraging you to, like, Who is that think critically, and encouraging you to make a different decision. Don't just write them off, you know. And so I think that's a huge learning lesson in this is that there are people in the comments being like, Yo, I emailed you about this a long time ago, and you just never responded. That speaks volumes, like, we know, behind closed

doors conversations was a lot different than the conversations on a mic or on Instagram. And so I can, I can imagine how that conversation went for them, when they received these emails was probably something along the lines of, hey, do you think this is actually going to be a problem? And then the people on their team probably saying, and not really, it doesn't affect that much of our population? I'm gonna be real. That's what those conversations look like. Like, we're not going to sugarcoat that that's 100%. I mean, I'm imagining, obviously, we don't know these people. But in every room I've been in that have had these conversations, where I've had to advocate for, like, doesn't matter if it's 1% 10% or 50% of the population that you're harming. Like, what, what percent makes it worth it to you? So I think it is something to really think about is like, if people are bringing these things to your attention that weren't at your attention in the beginning. That's when you do the learning, not when you're being in the process of people trying to cancel you. So after this whole thing happened. This came out on I think, a Saturday which in itself, people are in the comments. It's a wedding pro event, you guys so like for those who who are not in the wedding industry, to put something out on a Saturday, a statement of apology on a weekend in the wedding industry, in itself is a red flag. Because you know, we're not there, you're at wedding working. Things get buried, right. So that's Red flag number one that was in the comments that I wanted to address. Red flag number two was, I mean, just oh my gosh, you guys, the comments are insane. I really hope you'll go read them. We'll link them for you. But there's so many learning lessons in the in these comments and so many people unafraid now, to speak up and to be advocates for one another in a beautiful way in some in a very ugly way. So there's still a lot of back and forth happening. So that was on a Saturday. On Sunday. This went so wild that on Sunday, they canceled their event after doubling down in the statement that we are aware of this. We apologize we weren't transparent about it, but we were aware of it. And we're okay with it. They decided to cancel their event on a Sunday. So what happened there and how can we learn from?

### **Akua Konadu**

I think again, I think people are tired. This is three years and I know there has been conversations. I've seen it on Twitter. I've seen it on Tik Tok. I've seen it on Instagram among black creators that I got that support in 2020. And here we are in 2023. And that support is nowhere to be found. And so I think again, it just speaks to that point. And people are just pissed. Now we've gone from tired to pissed. There were people in the comments saying like, count your days. Not that in that way. But you know, people who were participating in the event speakers, they took no, and were like, I will never work with this person like they, they literally had to untag, all of the speakers on the post so that we would know who they were because people right now are taken numbers, because we have transitioned to just straight up piste. And because we are tired. And so again, they just didn't prepare. And I think again, it's like people are just over it. People are being brutally honest now, because we want change if you didn't listen to us when we were quiet, when we were you know, doing it the way that you wanted to right being nice about it and kind about it. We're past that point, people are like, Okay, say less, I got you. We're taking numbers, we're taking names, and best believe that this will come back to you. Because I'm not messing with you after that. Like and I'm personally, I there's there's no shame for me with that, because I'm the type of person person I will not apply to speak. If I have any hint that di is not in your top three priorities or values in it for an event I will not attend. And I certainly won't apply to speak at it. Because I'm tired too. I don't have the time. So anyways, there's that.

### **Ty Wilson**

Well, let me I think that speaks really good. To your point too about like, are your question of, at what point is a percentage high enough for you to care about these people? Is it 10%? Is it 20%? Is it 50%? Because really, if we're saying that we're dedicated to being inclusive, that we're dedicated to, you

know, doing the work that people say now, we have to do that before it becomes too painful not to. So there's like a whole phrase around the fact that like, people won't make a change until the pain of not making that change outweighs the pain of making the change. So like, in this case, specifically, there's an event, there's probably a lot of contracts that are in this lot of money, money tied up into it. And so they, it probably would have been very, very painful for them to move or cancel the event. And so the conversation that they probably had behind doors is, do we need to make this change? Or is it not that big of a deal. And so, when that happens, it's really, really unfortunate, because your opportunity to show that you are leader and that you are at the forefront, and that it is something that you're dedicated to listening to that 5% That 10% and saying, Hey, we messed up and making those changes, then that shows leadership, that's what other people aren't doing. That's what needs to be done, not when it becomes so loud and so painful that you don't have any other option. Because at that point, doing the right thing, or making the right call, doesn't look like you made the right call, because you're only doing it because you got forced into that position. And that's not showing leadership

### **Laylee Emadi**

100% I could not agree more. And as somebody who knows, firsthand, you do put a lot of money into these events. And these hosts, I mean, I'm I again, I had never heard of this event before. And when I did like my little deep dive on them. I mean, they would be like any of us, right? Entrepreneurs, doing the best they can, they've probably invested money that they don't have right now into this, like hoping to make the return. I understand all of that. But at the end of the day, my life's philosophy, and what should be everyone's life philosophy is that it's people over profit. And sometimes you have to take an L, like, sometimes you have to take the loss, you just have to. And I think when you if you can acknowledge that you've truly made a mistake, the hope is that you would recoup that loss through transparency and through goodwill and through saying out loud, like, hey, we messed up, we're going to take the L, I'm going to cut this contract with this venue. And I'm going to find a new venue. And hopefully our ticket sales will break even and we can do better next year. Like that's what I think a responsible leader entrepreneur would do. And if they have to go in the red, they have to go in the red.

### **Akua Konadu**

Yes, like that. But that's that's the thing, though, right? That's the problem, because everybody wants to be an ally until it's time to be an ally. And everything at like, everything in life, good or bad comes at a cost. And the reason where a lot of people get slipped up, especially in ally ship, when it's time to finally backup what you've been saying you are going to lose. And the truth is, are you willing to lose in order to help somebody else gain? And like, you know what I mean? And that's, that's where people get tripped up. That's the issue. And that's where you have to really do a heart check if especially if you are an ally, what are you willing to lose? It's a hard conversation. But when you're not willing to have these conversations yourself, that's how you end up in these types of positions. Because there are people right now, because you're in a position of power, you're also in a position of privilege. And so you have to really look at yourself and ask these tough questions because everything comes at a cost and so does ally ship, I'm not saying it in a negative way. Because the return of that, when you are literally taking that L is going to propel you so much more forward and people like that's what I'm you know, you guys summed it up beautiful, beautifully, like that is the point of like, what are you willing to lose. And now if you still lost anyway, they still lost regardless, they lost

### **Laylee Emadi**

more, they lost more like if you if they would have made that shift in the first. And that's why I think it's so important not to be vague and talk about this particular instance, because we saw so many

opportunities that were missed by them to regain a strong reputation to come forward. Like I said, with that goodwill of like, hey, this was a genuine mistake, versus I'm going to double down and then get cancelled. And now my reputation is currently in the dream. And I have to work 50 times harder to regain that reputation. And we saw in the comments too, like, who knows who was Was it their social media manager? That person was called out a lot was it their team? Was it them themselves? We'll never know. But all of them have the same reputation in my mind right now, which is like I will not be taking any of my speaker students to apply to their conference and I will not be you know, I would never feel comfortable. Unless who knows you know what the future holds hopefully for them, they can recoup and learn and be better but like, as of right now, they've damaged their reputation 20 times worse than if they would have just taken the ill at the beginning at the beginning. So I want to talk really quickly about like as speakers because All of us in this conversation, the three of us we are, we are speakers, and we take the stage and we get invited to be parts of events. And something that I've seen a lot of a lot of my peers who are speakers in the creative industry, this is something I teach to my coaching clients, and to my students who are speakers, is you cannot just get so excited to get invited when you are starting out that you don't do your due diligence, and you don't do your research in advance. So like, do you guys have anything to say about that? I mean, for me, it's like, you've got you've got to know your priorities, like you said, Akua. You know, your priorities, and you know, you wouldn't even apply, you would check them out first. But some people are out there like sending 20 pitches a week. And so maybe they're not betting it. But when you get the offer, like what are some things you do to make sure that it's aligned with you as a speaker and something that you want to move forward with? And what would you do? I'm like asking you so many questions now. But what would you do if this happened to you? Because I've been involved? And I know what I would do, and I'm happy to share that. But like, what would you do if, if you saw this go down? And you were a speaker on that roster?

### **Ty Wilson**

I think that's a really, really good. Yeah, I think that's a really good question. And I think a lot of people don't want to have that conversation. Because it's very, it can be very intricate. And they, there's a lot that goes into it. And I say this as CIO, not not necessarily as a speaker, but I've had, I've been in a position where I've screwed up in this sense before, where I had the opportunity to work with a wedding professional that I was so excited to work with. And I said yes. And I did not find out until the day of the wedding we arrived at that I was photographing on a plantation. And at that point, this was extremely, extremely painful. I was like, I've done fucked up, excuse my language, but I've done fucked up. And the reason being is because I did not do my due diligence, I didn't think to ask, you know, what event this was going to be held at, I didn't ask any of that stuff. I just thought this is a great wedding professional, I want to work with them. And in that sense, the way I managed that, it was the day of that I found out so there wasn't a whole lot I could do other than either do the event or leave the person high and dry. And I had to make a judgment call. You mentioned people over profit lately. I had to make a judgment call of okay, do I kind of you know, make this person's business I'm working for look worse by not showing up for them, and make the people who they're putting on this event for have a worse experience? Because now they're short staffed? Or do I continue it? In that instance, because I was the one who messed up, I went through I completed the day, but being not the person hired to be the forefront of it, I knew that I would never have to show my work from that day. And so that's one thing that I did to, I mean, some people might not agree with it. Some people might say I shouldn't have done the event. But one of the things that I did to make myself feel personally better, is I will not show any images from that event, I will not blog about that event or that venue. And I'll talk about the fact that I felt that, and I went there. And I think if we since then, I have learned to vet every single place before I



go every person before I say yes to them. And especially when it comes to places like the southeast, you know, there's there's a lot of history there. And a lot of it is not pleasant. And so we have, we have to be willing to go out of our way to uncover what that is. And if we make a mistake, we have to do everything that we can to correct it. If we make that mistake, and there's enough time for us to bow out we need to do so if we make that mistake, and we can't bow out, we do it but we take the L afterwards, whatever that looks like. And we make sure that we don't get in that position again, and that we speak about it and educate other people to make sure that they never get into that position to begin with.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, I mean, I feel like there's so much we can unpack there. But the one thing I wanted to touch on was as you're telling the story and I'm putting myself in that situation, it is honestly so much more work and so much harder and so uncomfortable to have these conversations, but they're all necessary to prevent what Ty experienced on the day of when he shows up unaware you know what I mean? Because then you do you put yourself in a corner and you're like I can make the best choice in this situation. But like if I did the harder stuff in the beginning I wouldn't have ever been in that situation. But I'm glad that you shared that because sometimes you are I have personally spoken at things where and I guys I actually do the work now like I really tried to I have templates I give to all my speaker students that say like to send to event hosts. If you get offered something you haven't pitched for and you cannot see the lineup in advance I asked now, every single speaking opportunity. And like I say, in the email, diversity and inclusivity are extremely important to me and my company, I need to know if I could please have the lineup in advance before I commit and sign a contract to show up. Right? Like, but I've even then been blindsided. And so there are things that you could do afterward to even if you're in that bad situation, but like, it's so it's just so much more beneficial if you can get ahead of them, you know, if you can, like, do stuff in advance.

### **Akua Konadu**

1,000% I'm late, I learned that from you. Right, like, so just, you know, because I love you. I mean, you just always give such great advice. But truly like, honestly, I think when I first started speaking, I had my very first big event with you. And then after that, I started getting speaking opportunities, and I did and you just, you just get so excited, because you just want to get your name out there. You're super stoked. So just know that it is okay, if this don't feel guilty. Like truly, we have all done this, obviously, like, so. Once I that conference I spoke at it definitely had a problem with Dei. But I learned that tip from you where I was able to have that honest conversation with that person. And then we actually had a conversation, which was great. And I think again, don't be afraid to make the ask, don't be afraid. If they tell you well, we don't want you to speak any more than they definitely were not the right one for you. Like, you know what I mean? Like, deuces, why would you want to speak there anyways, your values just don't align. And so I think we also have to come from really an abundance mindset of like, okay, if this one doesn't reach out, like work out, for me, especially, we're just starting out and we want these opportunities, the right ones are gonna come along, and I'm gonna find the right people, because I feel like a lot of times as people of color, and also it's coming from marginalized communities, we a lot of times end up being tokenized quite easily. And so like, it's very, it's a very interesting way to shift because I'm all about okay, I'm gonna get my bag period, or do I want to be tokenized? Like, No, for real? Like, yeah, there's a balance. It's a balance, because let's I'm gonna tell y'all right now, if you guys are unknowingly tokenizing people we know when we're being tokenized. So if we're saying yes, despite the fact that we see that line, that is because we want the bag period, to be real about it. Like it's a very, like intricate kind of dance that a lot of us are trying to navigate for marginalized communities. And so like, I think, as event hosts, like, you guys also have to really work hard at being

transparent because that you are true, people have been blindsided where there aren't as honest because they really want you. And they're very afraid of what you're gonna say. And people are more inclined to say yes, if you're honest about where you are with your di efforts, hey, I'm not there yet. I'm honestly not really sure what to do. Do you have any resources like HOST Just be honest about where you're at. So you can avoid the backlash, please? Because there's nothing worse than coming to an event and be completely blindsided as a speaker, because I'll be pissed.

### **Ty Wilson**

That's so true. Because I say very similar things to photographers, when they're wanting to see, you know, more same sex couples in their work. And they're like, Well, I just don't have that yet. How do I go about it? And I'm like, listen, and you have to be very honest with people, like, we know that you're marginalizing, or that you're tokenizing us if that's the case, but like, if, if that's where you're at, in your journey on that, be honest with that, and let them know, Hey, this is something that's important with me. I haven't I haven't done that in the past. And that's, that's why I'm trying to turn this around. Are you okay? If I, you know, photograph you, you're not asking them to pay you. You're not asking them to, you know, invest in you. You're saying I want to invest this part of me and you? And this is why, and then you have to leave it at that it's up to them to say yes or no. And if they want to take it, they can If not, you have to be humble and take that. But the thing is, you have to be honest about where you're at. And if you're going to say, hey, diversity is something that's important to me, and you do not have the facts to back it up. You have to be honest about that as well and say, we have not done this historically. And we are trying and we want you to be part of that conversation. And we know we're gonna mess up. And we want you to call us on it because we want to actually get better and do better.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, I absolutely agree. I think just a quick note on like, let's say you do end up in a situation where you're a speaker, who is then contractually obligated to show up. And is something like this scenario where it's, it's not just like a small issue that you have. It's like the full venue. It's like, it's like a big one, right? This is not like a little thing where they're affiliated with one person who's problematic. It's like the whole thing is problematic. So if you are contractually obligated to speak or to sponsor or to show up. Now, I am not a lawyer. This is not legal advice whatsoever. I'm like disclaimer out here. But I will say that the chances of somebody holding you to that contract and taking you to court over that are very slim to none. And I would incur encourage you to reach out to the person who you signed the contract with and say, Hey, I was unaware of xy and z, because you didn't make that transparent to me, I'd like to nullify this contract. And I'd like to exit the contract. And if you have an issue with that, then we can talk about revising the contract. But I'm not down for this. And I think that so often, we get scared as entrepreneurs who don't have like the legal background, or, you know, we're afraid that we've already signed on to something and now we can't speak out against it. That's not true. Contracts are just conversations that are written basically, like you can, you can talk to people about the contract that you've signed, and you are 100%, you have the right to express your discomfort at a situation that you're not down with. And so I just want to encourage you, if you're an up and coming speaker, or you're prospectively wanting to speak, don't let this scare you that you're going to get yourself into a situation that's going to negatively impact your reputation without any type of comeback for the situation, you can absolutely advocate for yourself and for others, even if you've signed something,

### **Akua Konadu**

I think that's such a good reminder to like you don't have to take what's being offered to you just in general. Yeah. You know what I mean? Read fine print. Yeah, I think I think that's so true. I'm really

interested, you know, because especially their PR, which was not good, obviously, the statement, all of that, but I feel like PR is really needed and entrepreneurship. And I feel like maybe that's a whole nother layer. But like, because that whole, the whole thing was awful. And so even from a PR standpoint for both of you guys, like, especially in terms of being more inclusive, and being more diverse, I feel like I feel like having Do you guys see that there's value in having a PR team, especially for events?

### **Ty Wilson**

Absolutely. I think I think that's important, regardless of who you are. And if you know, diplomacy is not one of your strong suits, you need to hire people for that. Because there there are ways to have conversations, even really, really crappy conversations that don't have to be negative or and in negative light, like with this event, specifically going through some of the comments in their feed. There were there were people who were pissed, and rightfully slept. So also some of those past comments, I personally probably would have phrased them a little bit differently, I think you can be even even in being super pointed. I think that's what people miss about PR is that PR does not mean just painting a beautiful face on something. It's having a respectful dialogue. And that can still be extremely, extremely pointed. But you're you're making it in a way where it's you're just you're bringing it to a different class level, right? Like you're up leveling it, you're making it so that you're not tearing someone down. But you're saying, Hey, this is not okay, this is a problem. This is what needs to be changed. And here's how we get through it, rather than

### **Akua Konadu**

deleting comments. And yes, that was just my that was my Yes, I love that. Because I think that's the misconception maybe that some people have about PR is that you're just glossing over stuff. And it's no I think if they had PR it could have led especially people that were equipped in di to really have some good fundamental conversations within the comments, to where like it wouldn't you know, where I could be like, okay, like I could really like where it could really propel forward change. That's just my thought.

### **Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, I would agree with that. And I think I'm somebody who has like, I don't know, I have like, two very opposing feelings on PR. I feel like they probably had some kind of PR that helps them craft that statement. But it was not the right PR, you know what I mean? Like, whoever helped them that would that did not do them any favors, as in when I read that I was like, do they not have friends that they could like ask to read this before they post it, it was a good tear, it was just a terrible statement. And again, this is not, I hope that if for some reason this gets back to these hosts, and they're listening to this, y'all, we're not attacking you here that I'm hopeful that this is a helpful conversation. But because we're not attacking you, because the three of us, I think, exactly like Ty said, we don't agree with what was done. But I also don't really agree with some of the statements that were made in the comments. Now, I can't fault them for that because people get angry. And they're passionate about it. And this is something that's very personal to some of the people who are in the comments. Would we have made the same comments on a public forum? Likely not because we are experienced in that PR of like, everything you put on the internet is your reputation now it has your name and face on it. And that's there forever. Best of luck to you, you know what I mean? Like we've all got screenshots of every single thing that was in there. But that being said, like it would be so beneficial. I do think a coup I think you're right, like I think it would be beneficial if they were if they had approached somebody who was experienced in dei to be able to kind of guide them in the correct direction versus the direction they took At

**Akua Konadu**

1,000%, I think it just speaks, again to your point. But I want to use your conference as an example. Because I know like, you have a committee and it's like a diverse group of people, you have to have people's perspective, people that are very different from you, life experiences all of that jazz at the table when you're planning these events, because things that are your blind spot, may not be for other people. And so it's very clear to me personally, just based on everything, that everybody looked the same in the room, white. You know, what I mean? Or white passing? Is that so that was kind of what I kind of thought maybe because I just was like, oh, you know, and maybe that's just my thoughts on that one was like, there's just a random room that looks very similar, and very similar experiences. And so again, like they just really couldn't see the bigger picture of what how problematic their choices were. And I think it just speaks to your point, again, of like, having a very wide variety of people at the table to when you're building these events.

**Laylee Emadi**

Yeah. I mean, I think we covered so much amazing stuff on here, I hope that this is helpful to you guys who are listening at home. And as we wrap up this episode, I know it's a longer one. But I think it was an important one. And so hopefully, you're still around. But I know normally I do like 20 minute episodes, I'm like, our listeners are like, wow, she talks a lot today. But hopefully everything was really helpful. But I do want to say I noticed online because I did do a deep dive before this into these, this event and the people around it, I noticed that some of their friends, although there were some people in the comments that were defending and being combative. A lot of their friends were calling them out gently on online. And I think that that was such a beautiful example. And I thought that was such an encouragement to see that their own peers and friends are out there saying, you know, I think it was the right call that they canceled this event I had planned to attend. But I am glad that it's not happening now. Because they weren't aware. And now they are. And so I think I just want to kind of end on like an encouraging note that we all make mistakes. We're all sometimes unaware of things, but we can check ourselves and change our minds and better ourselves. And in doing so, as leaders in our industries, better our industries that we're in.

**Ty Wilson**

Yeah, I think that's beautiful. Because I always tell people, and I have no idea who said this quote, It is not me Do not quote me. But what I always tell people is we do the best with what we know. And when we know better, we do better. There we go, there we go. But that's that's what it has to be like we have to do the best with what we know. And then as we learn, be like, yes, we now have to do better.

**Akua Konadu**

Love what you guys said yes. And just again, highlighting that there is, honestly is truly a gift. And I love that there were people that were saying that, hey, I love you. But this is wrong. Because we all need people like that in our life. Because we've run it's never too late to change. I know right now that they've taken a hit. But I really hope that they completely rebuild. Because this is an opportunity to build something new, this is an opportunity to make a difference, especially with the people that you have harmed and really show that you are going to make the change. So that's just what I have to say.

**Laylee Emadi**

Yeah, I feel like entrepreneurship, half of it is resilience, right? And so like, you have a beautiful opportunity, I think, especially when your community is mostly people who look like you and think like

you. And I think that's the opportunity that these hosts have now is can we lead by example? And do we have the resilience to try to rebuild, even though it was a rough ride for them for over the weekend, you know what I mean? And of course time helps with that. But I think surrounding yourself with the right people, bringing in some consultants talking to the right speakers, the right educators, the right, fellow event hosts who value the things that they didn't previously value would be helpful for them. And that's, again, why we wanted to have this conversation publicly. I don't think I've ever done essentially like a case study like this on the podcast before. And I did I will say in full transparency. I am not somebody who likes to generally like call people out or make people feel attacked. I want to be a positive leader. But I do think that there were so many learning lessons for so many people in this that I'm so hopeful that something positive came out of a negative experience for everybody involved in this event that again, we have no affiliation with and we don't know them so I hope that they listen to this that they know that we're truly just using this to kind of help aid not just them but everybody in their community and everybody in our communities as well.

**Akua Konadu**

This is a great, thank you for having us. Thank

**Laylee Emadi**

you guys. Thank you guys so much for being here and I'm so I'm so thankful to have a A community of people around me who I can lean on when I want to make sure that I'm making the best decision. So that's another thing I would encourage you guys to do if you're listening is surround yourself with people who are very different than you in all the ways so that you know that you're doing the best for every person out there. For show notes and resources mentioned on today's episode, head to so here's the thing [podcast.com](https://podcast.com) This show is brought to you by the creative educator Academy, where we teach creative entrepreneurs how to teach, because I believe that industries thrive when experts can share their knowledge. Well, if you're enjoying the podcast, I'd love to read your review in iTunes or see your rating on Spotify. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll catch you on the next episode.