

Compassionate Activism

Session 1 Transcription

Sandra Kim: What I want you to talk about - I'm going to put you out in break rooms again. We'll see if you do it better the second time around if the technology will be generous with us and I want you to be thinking about a situation. A situation that is often somewhat emotionally charged for you that is related to everyday justice.

Replication. I could give you a bunch of readings and you could just read them and that doesn't necessarily help you bring it into your everyday life.

Instead, what we really need to do is a combination of me sharing these concepts and these practices with folks. But really the idea is thinking about "what does it look like to apply them to a real life situation that you're struggling with".

For this entire session, I want you to have a certain situation in mind. Maybe microaggression, maybe some sort of street harassment, maybe it's a dynamic with a family member or a coworker or whatnot. Just something. With something that is emotionally charged for you, you react to it in a way that's like, "Aaaah!" I would request that you do one that is not huge. Not one that is really overwhelming and you have a lot of built-up trauma around it.

Something that is - not teeny, teeny, tiny like you can always just brush it off; it doesn't matter - but something that can be tweaked. Something in between. Then talk about why it's emotionally charged for you and a little bit of the background history, as much as you're comfortable sharing, of course. It's always up to you how much you want to share.

Then: What is your typical reaction to it? Some people go quiet, some people check out, some people laugh it off - it all depends. We all have different ways that we react to things.

Those are the three things that I want people to be discussing in the breakout rooms. I'm going to show you this once more. And then just leave you with those questions in it - the chat box will be really helpful.

Please pause video while completing this exercise.

The Compassionate Activism Model

Given that it's 6:30 and we had conversations about this, I'm going to jump ahead and talk about the model now.

Everybody pretty much has their own situation that they're going to be talking about and thinking about as we're doing the rest of this.

I want to talk about the model itself. There are two components to this: the practices that I've already talked about - the five practices of compassionate activism - but those practices are really about how do we get to the place where we can engage in this model.

This model has three components: As you can see, 100% committed to a vision, 100% acknowledging of current reality, and then doing this work in community, in every moment.

What does this mean?

Oftentimes, where we are is being 100% committed to a vision. We have vision of a more just, fair, loving, intersectional world. It's because of that vision of the world that we want to see and want to create, that's what compels us to do this activist work. Some of us do it in our personal lives. Some will do it as a side thing. Some will do it professional, full time. There are a wide range of ways that we are trying to create a better, more just, more fair world.

What happens is that we often are stuck only there - in our commitment to that different world which actually gets in the way of us looking at, "how can we be 100% acknowledging of current reality?" What do I mean by that, by acknowledging current reality? Some folks have heard of talking about acceptance of reality where - and I use the term acknowledging the reality, but I'm actually talking about the same thing.

What it means is that when we're in a situation, say a microaggression happens. Somebody made a sexist joke, for example. Oftentimes we get caught up in the fact that we want that joke to never have happened. We wish that they knew better or that they cared about the impact or that they never said that. What happens is that when we get stuck in resisting what actually happened as opposed to acknowledging, "That's what happened. It is what it is," in accepting that that's reality, we are unable to actually work with what happened.

If instead, we just said, "That's what they said," and we don't get caught up in us trying to make it different - where it's just, "That's what they said," - and we just acknowledge that, then we're like, "Oh, ok". What can we do differently to create then the world where people were empathetic, where people did know sexism, sexist jokes weren't appropriate?

What we normally end up doing instead is when we get attached to that vision we just become resistant to the situation. When we're resistant to the situation we can't dance in the moment with it, we can't do anything with it most of the time because it becomes so emotionally charged for us.

The third component of doing this work is in community and in every moment. A lot of times we think about - it's not just that we want to create a different way - the world being a better place, being more just, being more fair, more loving. But it has to be all at once. It has to be all the time, everywhere. That's when we'll be done. That's when we can stop. That's when we can relax.

I think that's a really difficult way of framing it, of relating to this work, because obviously that's not going to happen in our lifetime, maybe never ever. Instead I would state: let's think about it every moment. In this moment, in this relationship, in this conversation that I'm having between me and you, how can I? I want to create a more loving, more just world. How can I be more loving and just in this current moment, in community with you?

Sometimes we get caught up and it happened to happen every single time and when we do that, it becomes - if it happens nine out of every ten times, and that one time it doesn't happen, we get thrown. Everything's terrible now. It makes it a lot harder to actually be in

that situation and to be able to dance with it. Where we can go from “here’s reality” to “here’s what we want to create”.

To give you an example of this, when I’m at work - obviously I run Everyday Feminism - I’ve worked in a lot of different places where the workplace environment was unfortunately very patronizing or very neglectful. It would vacillate between micromanagement to absentee supervisor. It wasn’t the type of environment that I wanted to be with. I wanted to have a relationship with my manager where I felt supported, where they felt that I was contributing a lot and I was growing, and I had what I needed in order to do all these things.

A lot of people just get stuck in being upset with their manager. The manager’s not helping them, not using their responsibilities or powers in order to help them grow. Oftentimes there are a lot of communication issues or a mismatch in perceptions. There are various things that happen, emotionally charged stuff.

For me, you could easily go there. You could see I’m resistant to what was currently happening. What I did instead, though, is go, “Ok, so this is how my supervisor is. This is how she talks. This is how she communicates”. Let me work with that, from that standpoint. I had another conversation with her about her communication style with me and how it was impacting me and asked her where she was coming from.

I did that in a way that was vulnerable for me, that shared my feelings and needs, and invited her to also do that. And she did. Then we couldn’t actually change our relationship because of where she was in various ways. I was like, “Okay. That’s what happened.” I was, once again, acknowledging the reality. I still wanted to have a supervisor who did their job properly in the ways I really needed it. I moved on in the organization to get a new supervisor who was somebody that could give that to me.

I was able to do all of this without breaking any relationships along the way because I was being the type of person that I wanted to be. I was being very loving, being very compassionate, I was being very open and vulnerable about where I was coming from and what I needed, and powerfully asking for it over and over again. As opposed to being stuck. Stuck in my resistance being like, “Oh, why can’t you be different? You really need to be. But you never listen to me,” and I spend all this time focused on what is not happening, what is not reality.

This is what becomes possible when in this model. You learn how to both keep a vision of who you want to be in relationships that you want to have and you create it in every single moment. In one moment, in another moment, in another moment.

What you’re going for is not that we’re going to be perfect all the time because we can never be perfect. That’s unrealistic. That’s a setup for failure.

But what we can do is increase the number of moments that we do this. We increase the length of time that the moments exist for until it becomes a new norm for us.

That’s the model in a nutshell. It’s really about how the practices I mentioned before and how to get to the point where we can do this easily because there are a whole lot of barriers along

the way. We haven't been taught how to do these things. This is the goal; this is a skill set you will have after taking this program.

I'm going to take questions. Folks who have a question - if you want to - just type it in the group chat that you have a question. Let's go in order.

Looks like... A student has a question? You want to unmute yourself and ask?

Student 1: Yeah. I do. I want to ask about the second part of the model. How is one able to acknowledge the current reality without remaining silent? What I'm figuring out, when I have a sexist friend, he keeps on making sexist jokes, my immediate reaction is that I make that sure I try to convey it to them at that moment. But from acknowledging the current realities as a man I listen to why they say this is perhaps set to unfold because of their backgrounds.

Sandra: Yeah, so thank you for that excellent question. The reason why I use the word acknowledging versus accepting is because there's some confusion. I can hear that coming up in your question. There's some confusion around the way that we use the word accept. Accepting of reality.

Oh, you want to repeat the question. I'm going to paraphrase it and make sure that this is what you're trying to say. When something happens - say, perhaps a sexist joke comes up - how can we be acknowledging and accepting of reality in a way that's not just silencing ourselves and not just let them off the hook, more or less? What was the practice to get to the point where that's not how we experience it, that's not how we act upon accepting it.

The acceptance - there's a distinction between what is acceptable and what we accept/acknowledge. Oftentimes when we talk about acceptance, it's really what is acceptable to us. What do we approve of? What will we let go, suffer through, not try to disagree with? Things we approve. That definition of what's acceptable is not what we're talking about.

Student 1: Okay.

Sandra: It's not acceptable to us to say sexist things. We don't want to live in the type of world where that's normal. Instead, what it means to be acknowledging/accepting, it means that it is what it is. What was said was said. What was done was done.

We don't get caught up in, "It should have been different." We would have liked it to have been different but if we get stuck on it, if we just focus on, "Oh, you should know better. It shouldn't happen," or "Why don't you know better?" or "Why did everybody say?"

These are good questions to have but when we get stuck in this, we're not dealing with reality. We want it to be different than what it was. It was said. It was said. Literally, that's it. That's all that happened. Just be like, "That was said. Let's focus on that fact," versus you could want them to be different, you could want them to think differently a bazillion times.

That doesn't change the fact that it's not true. But if you spend all your time and energy focused on that, you're not able to actually deal with the reality of what was said because you're focusing literally on make-believe.

Does that make sense?

Student 1: Thank you.

Sandra: So we haven't been taught how to acknowledge something that's been harmful to us. We've been taught to think our two choices are to remain quiet or to lash out. So we often choose to push that pain down because we don't want to harm others.

But acknowledging reality for what it is does not mean that we're silencing ourselves or coddling them. What happens is that we can see something for what it is and because we're not pouring all our time and energy into what it's not, we can have a choice about how to respond. Because we're actually dealing with reality.

There are a lot of options that we haven't been taught. But how can we speak truth in a way that's compassionate, both to ourselves - to relieve our own suffering - as well as how to speak truth to and inquire to the other person why they did that thing in a way that's compassionate enough.

Because ignorance causes suffering. We are all hurt by that. The thing is, systemic oppression has taught us that we aren't being hurt by it. They tell people who are marginalized, "No, the way that you're being oppressed is not real!" They also tell people with privilege that what they're doing isn't real. Privilege means that you don't know what you don't know.

That means that we go walking around the world unintentionally harming folks, because that's what we've been taught. To actually speak truth, to actually inform them, "Hey, that joke, that was sexist. That was the impact on me." That is speaking to their selves, the person who doesn't want to be doing this but has been raised in a society where this is all normalized and they don't know any better.

I think most people, if they were able to truly get it and were in a place to sit with the pain of having hurt others unintentionally, then they can make a choice about not doing that again.

This program was talked about in a way that was obviously for people and their marginalization but it's actually a very powerful way to deal with your privilege and power. I think a lot of the backlash and defensiveness we get with people with privilege in different ways when we talk about it is because they can't sit with the fact that they caused some harm. And the pain that that's caused them to know that they've done that to someone that they know and care about.

Or maybe even to themselves. We internalize a lot of our own oppression. That's just kind of a bigger picture answer because it's all kind of complex. I'm going to break it down but that's kind of the bigger picture.

One thing I want to talk about is that this model is very focused on healing yourself. It's focus on healing yourself because I believe personally that we are all naturally whole. We are born naturally whole and systemic oppression and, every day, other types of trauma tears us away from that fact. So we have these wounds. These wounds that we carry when we were too little. We didn't know how to deal with them. Then our family members, our caretakers didn't help us process this pain and this fear that we have. Oftentimes they were the ones who were doing it to us, even.

What happens is that as we grow up we have things that remind us of that same pain. We're afraid it's going to happen. It's like salt being thrown on an open wound. We can't even let just words - we can't be with it.

I read somewhere that unless there's a physical imminent threat then fear is not appropriate. I think about that. Most of the violations that occur are emotional. Obviously there are physical violations that do occur, unfortunately. But the majority that we experience on a regular basis are actually emotional violations.

That actually gives us tremendous power because it's how we relate to them that can impact how resilient we are to those toxic messages. If we actually heal around that original pain, we're no longer afraid to be hurt in those ways then we can be with them and sit with them and respond to them how we choose. If we choose to do so.

Another thing I want to really emphasize is that our responsibility is to ourselves, to heal ourselves, our own well-being. We're the only people who can do that. We're the most important people to ourselves. If we choose to educate somebody else, if we choose to engage ourselves in conversation with somebody else in the ways that they are being harmful in the world - that's not something that I want people to misinterpret that I'm saying it's a responsibility that you have to do. You don't.

They have a responsibility for themselves to learn and to heal. What I want you to get from this program is how you have a choice around responding. Because right now for most people, when they're in a situation it's so emotionally charged they don't have a choice about how they respond. They just react. However they react is how they do.

This program, this model, is giving you an option should you choose to take it. I don't want people to misinterpret that as having the responsibility to educate. You only have a responsibility to heal yourself and educate yourself.

I want to pause for that. I'm scrolling through the comments and I know a lot of folks are mentioning there's a lot of Buddhism in this. If you have read the part of the description where I talked about how it came about to create this program, it is very much grounded in Zen Buddhism. What I've done is to bring these practices in a way that's applied to the concept of social justice. So if you folks are already engaged in Zen Buddhism, excellent! You're going to see a lot of stuff that you already know but applied to your everyday work.

Anybody else have a question? There's a lot of great conversation happening in chat. I think there were a couple of questions that went by; they're just a little buried now.

I'm going to move on to the next one, then, because I think as we continue to do it, obviously the practices, go through them, questions will be more naturally answered.

Josette: Sandra, I sent you, as people were asking questions, I took them out and sent them to you in a private chat. I've been collecting them that way if you want to, in the future, use that or whatever.

Sandra: Okay.

Josette: I can also do a View 2 chat if you prefer since it's a moving chat. We can try and teach that, too.

Sandra: Yeah. Do that once we figure out this technology. Doing this in person is so much easier! I have to say. I think I'm going to let... Josette, can you handle the questions and then as I stop answering them you queue the next person to talk? That would be easiest.

Josette: I'm not quite getting what you're referring to. A lot of the questions are about the method, which I can't answer.

Sandra: No, just be like, "Can you talk?" to person A who asked the question. "Now you can ask the question."

Josette: Yeah, I can do that. Got it.

Sandra: Okay. Great. Thank you.

The Five Practices of Compassionate Activism

I'm going to briefly run through the five practices. Just note that we're going to be going deep into each of them. This is just for you to have a general big picture of what I'm talking about.

1. The Practice of Humility and Curiosity

The first practice is of "Humility and Curiosity". What most people do is they come into these situations based on their past and are very strong anti-oppression now so they assume they know what's going on. We assume we know why the other person's doing what they're doing. It flares up both our individual trauma as well as our collective trauma of what we experience related to the situation.

Could be a microaggression, could be sexism, could be a communication dynamic. It could be street harassment, it could be songs, even. It could be anything that reminds us of pain, honestly, that we find difficult to be with.

Because it's so loaded and big for us we feel like we know everything that's going on and it's possible what you think is true. It's possible what you think is true about the other person and what's happening in that situation. It's also possible that it's not true. When we assume that we already know there's no place to learn. There's no place to actually deal with it when it's so emotionally charged for us.

It's actually from a place of coming from humility where we think "Well, maybe our gut reaction is not necessarily wrong but a little bit incomplete." Normally, we experience things that are very tip of the iceberg, even for our own selves. We are the experts of our own lives and most of us are not in touch with our feelings and needs. Most of us really repress quite a bit. We live in a society that wants us to be work drones, wants us to be robots, wants us to sacrifice for other people, wants us to not say that we exist and here are our feelings and here's what we need from the world. It's not how we've been encouraged to be.

We've been encouraged to be exploitable. That's what the system has been set up to be for us. Even with ourselves, where we are the only people who are experts in our own lives, our own understanding is often quite limited because we're often not in touch with ourselves. We've also internalized a lot of oppression, which is not to make us right or wrong, not to make us a good or bad person but I think that's just reality.

We have the most connection to ourselves so to connect to somebody else, we don't know. They don't even know consciously. There's a lot of unconscious conditioning, unconscious privilege, unconscious oppression happening. Knowing that we don't necessarily know everything.

I gave a presentation recently about addressing sexual assault on campuses a more intersectional life and that's really the grounding of being intersectional is that you don't necessarily know. You probably don't know, particularly with people of different identities. Just being in that place of humility and then curiosity.

2. The Practice of Distinguishing Realities and Acknowledging External Reality

Number two is "Distinguishing Realities and Acknowledging External Reality", which is more what I talked about in the model bit. Distinguishing realities, I want to briefly run through, means that we often think there's an objective reality and that we're all supposed to be on the same page. But that's really not true if you think about it.

There's my internal reality. We're all in the same webinar right now but I'm experiencing something very different than what you're experiencing. The thing that connects us is that I'm saying some stuff, you're saying some stuff. I do some stuff that you see and that's about it. Everything else gets filtered through our own reality, through our own personalities, our past, our filters. We have all these filters.

When we think that we have the actual shared reality where it means the meaning that I'm giving to the situation is the same meaning that you're giving the situation, that's when we get into conflict. It's when people of privilege look at a situation and they're like, "Well, I didn't mean to hurt you when I did that. So I didn't hurt you. You should get over it." That often happens.

It's because they think that somehow we have the same experience when it's completely not true. Even when we share the same physical space, we have two different experiences and that's okay. Then we can start to think about what's actually going on here in my reality and your reality. It's where curiosity comes to mind. When we get curious about where we're coming from, what's going on for us in this moment that is so emotionally charged.

3. The Practice of Gentle Mindfulness and Compassionate Self-Accountability

Once we get curious about what's going on with ourselves then we can bring gentle mindfulness. I imagine many people have heard about mindfulness before. When we talk about the practice itself of mindfulness, I'll go more into it because I think that there's some problematic ways that it's happening in our society. But mindfulness is an incredibly powerful tool, way of being in the world, and for healing.

When we can bring mindfulness, which is really just gentle attention - it's not trying to change what's going on; it's not trying to judge, shame, critique - it's just noticing. Noticing what is going on in the present moment for me. When we get present we get in touch with our feelings and needs in that moment, of that really emotionally charged situation, we can do something about it. For ourselves.

And that's where compassion and self-accountability comes into play. Most of the times we have where our fears and our pain and our trauma are triggered, we do a lot of things to avoid being in touch with that pain. Because obviously it's overwhelming for us. It's also overwhelming for us because it comes from a time when we're younger; we didn't really know how to deal with it. Even as adults, we don't even know how to deal with it but we are more capable.

That's what you're here to learn in this course is how can we sit with those once or still overwhelming feelings. They're overwhelming when we resist them. They're overwhelming when we run away from them. If we actually brought mindfulness to them, unless we're dealing with more raw trauma - that's a different situation, more raw trauma: panic attacks and PTSD and stuff like that are happening - I'm not talking about that so much. This more day to day baggage, emotionally charged and triggering situations for us.

Those situations where we bring mindfulness to what's going on with us, we get present to our feelings and needs that's underneath that stress, frustration, and anger. We can choose what to do about it. This is once again where we're talking about, where we put all our energy once again into make-believe or resisting reality instead of dealing with what's inside of us. If we deal with what's inside of us we can heal it, take care of ourselves in that moment.

4. The Practice of Compassionate Truth-Telling and Consciousness-Raising Inquiry

Once we're reconnected with ourselves, we know where we're coming from, we can then move on to the fourth practice, which is "Compassionate Truth-Telling". Compassionate truth-telling, like I've said before, is really compassion. It first starts with compassion towards us to live our truth, to tell our truth. We minimally, I think, it's important that we do it for ourselves. Should we choose to make that public, to do that with somebody else, that's a choice. I won't say that's a responsibility but that's a choice that we can make.

How can we tell truth in a way that is to relieve our own suffering? We can talk about compassion. And maybe also to relieve their own suffering, their own ignorance. This can happen, not just in kind, gentle, sweet little words, which is how most people think about this.

You could also say it in really fierce, even angry, ways because you know they could be better. You know they want to be better. You can see that. You can believe in that. And you can do it.

You say the truth in service of relieving their suffering in this. That, energetically, that is very, very different. That's very, very different than how often you tell truth. In our society we usually tell truth in a way to punish and police people, which is why people are so scared of doing it and receiving the truth.

But there's a way that we can give truth with compassion. Committed to them being their highest selves. What happens is when we can hold this spaciousness for our own feelings and needs, our internal reality, there's oftentimes the opportunity to hold space for their feelings and needs, for their internal reality. That's when you can engage in a type of inquiry. At that time you bring the anti-oppression knowledge. You guide them; help unpack why they think what they think.

5. The Practice of Shared Envisioning and Non-Cooperation

Once you get to the point of: I can understand what I experienced, I understand what you experienced, we're on the same page now. We can now create something together. Because that pink elephant that was in the room, that emotional charge, we've dealt with that now. Now we're just two people who have a shared goal.

Usually when you relate to each other on a level of compassion and understanding, you've taken the time to do this and you're emotionally in a place where that's happening. You can figure out where you have some shared goals together and that's when you can decide how you want to create this vision of the world that you want that's more loving and more just.

Sometimes it doesn't work out. Then you can practice non-cooperation. But we don't cooperate in not passive aggressive ways but not cooperate in ways that still can grieve for the lost hope, the lost opportunity. Hope that things will heal in the future, where you will be able to create something together. You're not making them wrong for it as a human being, you're not making yourself wrong for it as a human being not being able to do that together. We're just choosing not to cooperate together.

That's kind of the gist of it in a nutshell. I'm going to give you an example to help make it a little more concrete because some of these ideas make more sense to folks, other people not as much.

I'm going to give an example and this is when we had an independent contractor working for Everyday Feminism whose position we no longer needed to be separate.

We were going to absorb it into a full-time role, full-time staff. I let her know that and I tried to do that in as human a way as possible. Really acknowledging that she had been with us for a year, she had been very committed, she had done so much. And just structurally it didn't make sense for her to continue her role. I asked her if she had any feelings around it and she said no. She understood; it made total sense why we were doing what we were doing. She understood the position was being laid off.

She came back a little bit later and said, "You know what? I actually feel like I got played."

I'm like, "Oh. Why's that?"

And she said because she had joined us very early on. We still weren't making revenue and so we were all working for free, me included. And then later we hired her on, she was an intern. Then when she became a contractor we paid her at a lower rate than what we both knew she deserved to be paid. When we were making more money we gave her a raise. But with more money, we're going to hire full-time staff to do that role.

She said that because she felt that she had joined us and still wanted to do the work despite the lower pay but now that we had more money we were letting her go. That made sense. But in that moment for me it was like, “Oh!” I got stuck in the fact that I have a self-concept of me being a really good manager, a really good leader. I try to do things humanely and I put a lot of thought into how I was going to lay her off and now she’s upset.

I was resistant to the reality of her feelings. Just, she has these feelings; she feels like she got played. I got stuck there because I was really attached to this idea that I’m a good manager. I’m really caring. I’m not like those other managers and bosses who don’t care. And I was there for a couple of minutes, where I was blaming her and saying she was ungrateful. Gratefully, I have a practice. I was like, “Wait. Let me listen.” And I got humble.

I was, “Okay. Maybe what I’m experiencing at this moment is not the entire thing of it. What else?” And I got curious. Where was my reaction coming from? Where was my reaction coming from? Because I could see the legitimacy of what she was saying. I could see that the emotionally-charged meaning to what was being said was separate from what she was saying. So distinguishing reality.

What she said made a lot of sense. The emotional meaning I was bringing to the situation - that charge, all of that - that was me. I got clear on that. So I engaged in practice number three, mindfulness. I sat with it, paid attention to my body, and it was the pain of knowing that despite my best efforts I still hurt her. And that hurt me. My gut reaction to that was to say that, “I didn’t do anything to hurt you.” I did. It is true.

So with mindfulness I was able to get in touch with that pain that was causing that pushback, that defensiveness and resentment that I was feeling. I was like, “Okay. So what do I want to do about this now?” To myself, the compassion stuff meant that I was going to just acknowledge that I tried and it didn’t work out this time. I did cause some hurt. I’m not a terrible person; I just messed up. I messed up this time. And now I’ve got an opportunity to fix it.

Then compassionate truth-telling and consciousness-raising inquiry, this will usually be... I actually didn’t do that much in this situation but if I wanted to, it could have been me... Well, I did inquire more into where she was coming from and to make sure that she felt that she was being hurt, that she felt that she was being acknowledged. The compassionate truth-telling was a little bit more toward me but I also told it to her and acknowledged where I was coming from and how right she was. I acknowledged her emotional reality.

Once we cleared the air with all of that we get engaged in some shared envisioning. What we came up with is doing back wages. That is how I righted that wrong. We gave her a back wage. Even though she was an independent contractor that was not technically required legally but it was coming from a point of values. We also decided to do that for another staff, not staff, an independent contractor who was also leaving who wouldn’t have; who I knew wouldn’t ask for this. But we did it anyway out of principle.

Now we have this practice. Now we have this policy also to make sure that we make people whole financially for folks who were with us in the very beginning. We didn’t have money to pay them proper wages.

This is just one quick small example of how we can apply this to an everyday situation. I know there are probably a lot of questions so I'm going to take a couple. I'm going to take two questions because I think most of the time it's going to be, as we unpack each practice, we're going to do it. But I'm going to do the questions.

Josette: I have them lined up, actually, so that's a perfect little thing. I'm trying to figure out where it ends. There we go. We had a question about how to do this work and not be resentful and I paired that with a question about how to use compassion when a person's hurting you and who has more privilege than you in that situation.

Sandra: I'm going to answer more the second question than the first just because I'll get to that more when we actually talk about the actual practices. I want to emphasize that this work is really for ourselves. Obviously we're more oriented towards having other people get it and change and be less problematic and oppressive in the world.

The most that we can do is invite them to do it. It's also not our responsibility nor is it necessarily a good thing for us to control other people to make them do it, either. See that correlation? We have a responsibility to ourselves. The compassion really starts with compassion toward ourselves.

If we were able to do that - because we all have a mixture of privilege and marginalization. No one is 100%. Even the ways we're marginalized, we also have internalized oppression where we perpetuate that. We're complicit and support it. If we all took care of our own house, have all of the tools and support and took care of our own house that will transform the world.

The best thing we can do for other people is to serve as a model for that. That's the most powerful way of helping other people learn how to do the same. How to take responsibility for their privileges and the ways that they harm people is when we do it. It's about how do we treat ourselves first and foremost. What's the healing and compassion that we bring to ourselves first and foremost.

This is why when I give these presentations I always put myself in the conversation, I always give examples. Because we've been taught that we cannot be human. If we make a mistake, we are a mistake. Where do we get those messages from? From systemic oppression. We weren't born thinking this. Babies don't think like this. We learn that. That's why we need to start first and foremost with ourselves. Then we can be a model for other people and inspire other people versus coercing other people because we don't want to perpetuate that same dynamic either.

It's actually a fundamentally different way of being in the world than we've been taught by systematic oppression. But we've been taught by systematic oppression so that makes sense.

The First Practice of Humility and Curiosity

I'm going to leave it there and I'm going to move on to the first practice: "The Practice of Humility and Curiosity". The practice of humility and curiosity is super important. It's the most basic foundation. If you don't have that to begin with when coming to a situation it's unworkable. Because you come to a situation, and I want you to be thinking of that situation

you already chose earlier on in the session and I want you think about how you normally are coming at it.

It's normally going to be like you know what's going on. You know what the other person's about. You know what they should and shouldn't be doing. Maybe you're also blaming yourself, sometimes that happens. We judge and critique ourselves like how can we stay silent, how come we didn't do anything, why are we so blank? We spend a lot of time assuming the worst. Whatever gut reaction, whatever toxic thinking that's running in the back of our head around a situation, is all the truth and that's the only way it is.

It's like if you have a cup. You have a cup that is full and you try to pour some water into it, it's going to spill out. That's our mind, too. We can't receive anything unless we create the space for it and we create in being "Well, maybe we don't know". We don't know everything.

I'm not saying that what you think what might be happening is not happening. It might be. I mean, the status quo is systemic oppressions, these dominant norms. That's probably why we understand why people react the way they do. It's because they normalize these dominant myths and toxic messages out there. At the same time, you don't know for sure that that's what actually going on, including for yourself or the other person.

Coming at it with humility is critical. What we first need to do is understand how and why that doesn't happen. Because we don't normally come to situations being humble. Being like, "Hey, I'm what I think. That's not everything, though. Or maybe that's incomplete. Or maybe this is some stuff that's off about it."

We don't normally come at it like that. Instead, we come at it like we know everything, especially when it's about our own trauma. Which comes from a place of self-protection, to be honest.

I'm going to put everybody into breakout rooms again.

Keeping in mind the situation that you thought about before, I want you to ask yourself, "What really gets in the way of you acknowledging that you might not know everything about the situation already?"

And then breaking that down a little bit more, "What gets in the way of you being curious about the other person, just asking?"

And then, "What gets in the way of you being curious about your own reality and digging deeper?"

Please pause the video while completing this section.

Student 2: We're all here now.

Sandra: Josette, if you want to open up the whiteboard now. Great.

So I just wanted people to share what came up for them when they were having this conversation. What do they realize is really getting in the way of them acknowledging that

they don't know everything about the situation already and getting in the way of them being curious? Both about themselves and about the other person.

People can unmute themselves or type in the thing.

Student 3: How do you use this? That's so cool. Oh, wait, wait.

Sandra: Some people are saying, "How do you even do that?"

"Being impatient with myself."

"Busy attending to other people before attending to my own feelings."

Boundaries of impaired relationship.

Student 3: Even though we have assumptions...

Sandra: Okay. I muted everybody. I'm going to read out some of the stuff that is in chat so people can read through that as well.

"The idea of conflict itself, dealing with that, emotions."

"We think being part of marginalized groups means that we can't oppress others."

"Anger."

"Anger."

"Ego."

"That visceral reaction."

"Having assumptions about the other person."

"Anxiety."

"Fear."

"Upset."

"Anger."

"Ego."

"Fear of betraying self."

"Past experiences that are very similar."

"You're afraid it's going to repeat."

"Self betrayal."

"Acknowledging the other person's humanity."

“Being good at guessing.” Sometimes you are, maybe a lot of times you were right.

“Not wanting to waste a second of my time on such crap.” Very legit.

“If I feel that I’m not being listened to or validated or respected it’s very hard to grant those to other people.”

People, this is the emotional charge. This is the emotional charge of being in situations where, at the end of the day, I would say we don’t realize we can handle them. Like I said, I’m not talking about physical situations. I’m talking about most of the time we deal with emotional violations. Or not necessarily violations but just comments.

But they remind us of some other pain that we had and we didn’t know how to handle it. It was overwhelming to us for whatever reason, usually because we were children. We were treated in ways we didn’t have control over. Even though we’re adults right now, we have difficulty in these emotionally-charged situations in being that grown-up. It’s like we get thrown back to being that kid again where we didn’t have any options.

We feel powerless. We feel like we can’t say what we want to say. We can’t express our feelings and needs. We can’t assert our own reality, our truth. We also haven’t been taught how to do that in a way that’s not about overriding the other person.

We haven’t been taught how to feel anger and how to express it and be responsible about not hurting the other person. We know that anger is often used to lash out and hurt people. But how do we express it responsibly? Which is very possible.

So just getting clear that these are things that make it difficult for you. It’s important that you get clear on that because if you don’t know what’s stopping you you can’t make a different choice when it pops up. Otherwise it’s unconsciously driving us in the background. We have no choice at that point.

Being aware that this is going to come up for you and that gives you a moment to get present to it, which will be in the future, the future practices.

I’m going to stop there for a second and we’re going to get out of this beautiful whiteboard.

You’re going to go back into your breakout rooms and I now want you thinking about the same situation again. Now that you know what’s been stopping you from acknowledging that you don’t know everything about a situation per se, I want you to get the facts, the details of it.

What do you not know for sure about the other person in the situation? That’s really important to get because we make a lot of assumptions as if they’re truths. As if they’re 100% true, there’s no other way it could be.

I’m not saying that what you’re thinking is not true, because like I said with systemic oppression there’s a status quo, there’s a dominant narrative. There are these dominant ways that people react and respond to things and we’ll see patterns across groups, across people in the same privilege group.

At the same time, you don't know for sure. You can speculate if you like. You might be right. You probably are right; I don't know. But you're not actually sure yet. You only know after you've talked to them and asked them.

So I want you to first get clear on what are you not sure about. And then I want you to figure out what you're not sure about on your own reaction. Like I said, we can often get stuck in that immediate reaction which, as we've talked about, is that emotion: fear, anger, pain. And they don't go deeper than that.

But that's coming from somewhere. We wouldn't have that unless there was something we were trying to protect. Unless there was something sensitive, something raw that got triggered, that got hurt.

Once you get clear on what you're not really sure about specifically in that situation, about the other person and about yourself, what would you like to know? Be specific about it. Maybe, "Where did they first hear that? Why do they know it's okay? Why do I feel this way?" You can make it whatever it may be.

What do you want to know specifically about the other person and your reaction in order for you to better understand and respond to the situation? What do you need to know in order to be able to give the response that you want to give versus this emotionally charged reaction where you can't really do anything because you're like, "AAAAhhh!"

Does that make sense? If you have a question, put it in the chat. Nope, seems to make sense. We're going to try to do this breakout room thing again.

Return from the break out rooms

Student 7: Sandra?

Sandra: Yes?

Student 7: I had my breakout room all to myself.

Sandra: Again? I'm sorry.

Student 7: And I lost the argument so... No, I'm just wondering, am I doing something wrong?

Sandra: This is the first time we're all doing this.

Student 7: Okay.

Sandra: So we are not... Like I mentioned before, this is a bumpy ride.

Student 7: That's fine. I just wanted to make sure. I will fully admit to a loose nut behind the wheel.

Sandra: Right. I think just being present to that, of what's been hard about it, and get present to that. If you can't ask, then why? Get curious about that. Don't make yourself wrong for it. It is what it is.

Student 7: Alright. I just feel I'm missing out, that's all.

Sandra: My bestie said this to me once. My bestie said, "Take it easy," and I really think that's a wonderful piece of advice. As we try to do anything that's difficult, we often critique and whip ourselves along the way. We've been taught that that's actually how we'll improve and I don't think that works for most people. Or anybody, potentially.

Student 7: I'm cool.

Sandra: But that's what we've been taught. That's how we're supposed to beat them up. We do it to ourselves. What happens if we just take it easy and we still do it, though? We take it easy on ourselves as we continue to do what we want to do that is a struggle for us.

Student 7: Sure.

Sandra: That's about getting back in touch with why it's hard. Sometimes we can't do what we want to do. I get caught up with someone who's showing their unconscious privilege. Something happens and I'm like, "Ah, there's a bunch of privilege. Aah!" and I know that I could have this conversation. I could do practice number four with them. I could do consciousness-raising inquiry. I could do compassionate truth-telling and I'm like, "No, I'm so not emotionally there."

What does that mean, then? That means I'm not emotionally there. I get in touch. "Why am I not emotionally there? Am I resistant for X, Y, Z reason?" I accept the fact that I'm resistant. Ironically, by accepting that I'm resistant to having this conversation I usually, in time, ease into wanting to have that conversation. If that makes sense.

There's always a point of connection. And that reconnection needs to happen with ourselves first and foremost. Wherever we are in that current moment. There's no right or wrong to it. It's just where we are right then and there.

I want to also mention something that Akilah (another student) was talking about. She was talking about how when oftentimes we see somebody, we have this level of anti-oppression analysis. We see somebody who has privilege, we don't even know them. When they have privilege in ways that we know about we give them a uniform. We have them represent that systemic oppression.

It comes from a very legitimate place; it comes from a place of self-protection. We know the pattern, the likelihood, the statistics so we push away first so that we don't expose ourselves to risk. We also think that we're better. We're better than the other people because we're more socially conscious. What happens is that, if you think about it, thinking that we're better than somebody else because we're more socially conscious than they are, it may make sense to us because we want to be creating and believe in social justice.

But if we think about it more deeply, thinking that we're better than somebody else as a human being, like, where does that normally show up? Systemic oppression. It also doesn't allow us to have compassion for where they are.

Student 8: Can I ask a question?

Sandra: Yes.

Student 8: I'm thinking that one of the reasons sometimes why we do that, why we push back, is because of this natural thing that we have: fight or flight. From that amygdala. From that moment when I first see you, "Are you part of my group? Are you part of an out-group? Are you one of ours? Are you cool?" and that's the first that we're doing.

My thinking is always that we kind of laugh at ourselves because we don't know, because we can't make that decision by just looking at somebody. But that's what we've been taught. I've got to figure out if you're safe or you're not safe. Can I take a risk on you? If you look like, if you come in and you've got salt-and-pepper hair and it's down to your shoulders and it's in a ponytail and you're a male and you've got on leather loafers with no socks on and a pair of jeans and, like I said, salt-and-pepper hair, I'm thinking you're at Woodstock doing weed.

Now, I could be dead wrong. I could be right. It doesn't make any difference; it's not important. What is important is that I recognize that and I push it aside and give you the space to let me know. Give you the dignity to know who you truly are. Because you're safe. I don't have to give myself over to you but I owe you the opportunity to find out what's real, what your truth really is.

As opposed to thinking I'm better than you. I already know that I feel that way or I make that decision but I think it's a normal, natural thing for us to say, "I'm going to figure it out," and then stop myself, laugh, and put it aside. Does that make sense?

Sandra: Completely. That was brilliantly put.

Student 8: Thank you! Thank you.

Sandra: It's: How do we hold both as being true? There's a reason why we think somebody's unsafe because status quo, systemic oppression. At the same time, they're an individual. They have their own humanity. They've also been grown, raised, read, fed on the lies of systemic oppression just like we have. And we at some point weren't this knowledgeable. We weren't this informed. We weren't this critical.

We at some point were more so like other folks in terms of how conscious we were. We were far less conscious. I know I was far less conscious ten years ago versus five years ago versus even a month ago, I'd say.

It's holding both as being true and how do we do that? Because I think a lot of want to say, "Let's deal with you as an individual," not wanting to bring in a power analysis when that's constantly operating. What's important to do is one: Get rid of this notion that we're better because we're more socially conscious. That helps us have compassion; at least offers the possibility of having compassion.

Because if we think we're better than somebody else we don't have compassion for them; we don't care. "You're wrong as a human being for being where you are." If we can let go that we're better than somebody else and instead we say, "You're a human being whose been raised in systemic oppression and how you've dealt with that is your own way. You're different. And we don't know what level of consciousness you have."

Then we could have a different type of conversation where we could have both at the same time. That is something that will continue to be unpacked in terms of how we do in this model. But first and foremost is that you got the part about humility and curiosity.

It is now 8:00 and I want to thank everybody for their patience as we work out the tech stuff. Like I said, we had tested this before but not, obviously, with this number of people. We're still going to work out some kinks around the breakout rooms in particular.

I know that some people are asking about, "Do we want to keep the chat as a saved thing and have a buddy system?"

We're going to go through this, the group chat, and get all the feedback that you had. See if we can't make some changes for the next session or some future sessions. We're going to save the chat for sure. We're also going to make the video available later on this week.

We'll make the video available later on this week with the transcription for folks in case that's an easier way, reading it. I know that I can talk fast sometimes and some folks may have a hard time understanding me so I'm going to try harder to speak more consistently, especially with the internet for folks.

Thank you for all the really great feedback and we're going to be, not talking about number two, we're going to talking about the practice of distinguishing realities, acknowledging external reality, next session. This is actually wrong.

But it's going to happen Thursday, April 14th. I have a lot of travel that I'm doing, so unfortunately I had to make that day random. But it's Thursday, April 14th. I'll send a reminder email out to everybody the day before and it'll be at the same time.

I'm going to be turning this into a handout as well so they can actually apply it to whatever in life they have going on for them at that moment. It'll be kind of like a template for them to walk through these steps.

Alright. Thank you, everyone. We're getting a lot of thank you's in the group chat. It's really great to have all this conversation happening. It really helps with engagement and we really appreciate you being so patient and understanding as we're working out the tech kinks. I will see you next week, next Thursday, then. Thank you, everybody.