

EEP EP148 - May Hot Take Words Matter AND Words Can Divide

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SPEAKERS

Maria Ross

Maria Ross 00:04

Welcome to the empathy edge podcast the show that proves why cash flow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. I'm your host Maria Ross. I'm a speaker, author, mom, facilitator and empathy advocate. And here you'll meet trailblazing leaders and executives, authors and experts who embrace empathy to achieve radical success. We discuss all facets of empathy from trends and research to the future of work to how to heal societal divisions and collaborate more effectively. Our goal is to redefine success and prove that empathy isn't just good for society. It's great for business.

Maria Ross 00:48

Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to this month's hot take on the empathy edge. I'm your host, Maria Ross. And this week, it's just me no guest just unfiltered and raw perspective and insights about all things empathy. But before I get started with this month's hot take, which is about how words matter, and how they can divide us, I have a few announcements for everyone. If you're a business owner, marketer or entrepreneur, please sign up for the waitlist of my next cohort of brands story breakthrough. This is my five week coaching course to help you connect with your ideal clients and customers through the power of empathy. I'm running a cohort right now and it's going great. And I would love to welcome you into the cohort in the fall. And I also just like saying the word cohort, you can check out details at [red dash lice.com](https://red-dash-lice.com) forward slash brand dash breakthrough dash course or I will have that link in the show notes for you. Number two is my new book on empathy is coming in fall 2024. Yes, I am gathering data and stories for this book that's in the works about the shadow side of empathetic leadership, and how to avoid its pitfalls, and I need your help. If you are a leader of one to 10,000 people and can spare five to 10 minutes, please fill out this short survey to share your experiences with the challenges and demands of trying to be an empathetic leader in today's modern world of work. The more responses the more valid the data, the survey link is [surveymonkey.com/are/empathy trap](https://surveymonkey.com/are/empathy-trap), or again, I will have that in the show notes. And finally, did you know that you can sponsor the empathy edge podcast, associate your brand with the power of empathy, and get your message in front of sea level leaders, ambitious professionals and changemakers in more than 110 countries. Plus enjoy extra promotion and social

media and email? Check out the empathy edge.com Click on sponsorship for all the details. So on to this month's topic of words. I gave a talk recently with my partner from my other podcast Johnny Ressler, we co host Johnny and Maria go there. It's a Lifestyle podcast for progressive women who have a voice and want to use it. We were at an event talking about the dark side of ally ship sharing our stories as women in tech. And we're ally ship, however well intentioned, can go wrong, how we need to have empathy and ensure we build connections and relationships first, before going full steam into performative acts of what we called aggressive ally ship. Now, side note, this event was at the wit regatta women in tech regatta in Seattle. It is the brainchild of my good friend, Melody Behringer. She does these events in Seattle, Vancouver, Amsterdam, and smaller events in other areas of the world. And it's a wonderful event if you want to connect with women or their allies in the world of technology. I'll put a link to wit regatta in the show notes for you had to give her that plug. But we were honored to be asked to come speak at the event. Now back to the topic at hand, the dark side of ally ship, sometimes your best intention to support somebody can do more harm than good. And that's why we have to be careful when we decide to just go guns blazing into being an ally in the middle of a meeting or in the middle of an event or in front of important people. So our message was to build one on one relationships first, to better understand what ally ship looks like to and for the individual because you never know what's going on behind the scenes for people. As many of you know I have interviewed and learned from many D E IB or diversity, equity inclusion and belonging experts on this very podcast. And I had just had coffee with one prior to that talk. Daniel John or DJ as he's known, who works with soul focused group where he shared that the word allyship was now in some circles frowned upon. DJ explained that the notion of ally ship could imply a hierarchical or Savior role. He is much more about building connections and bridges. So he preferred the phrase building relationships rather than ally ship. But we both agreed the words may change, but the mission of connection still needs to be at the heart of it. I brought this up as a reference in our talk at the wit Regatta, and we got attacked for it. There is nothing worse than being misunderstood than when others take a whole other meaning from what you said then you actually meant to convey. We were told we were teaching other women to despise ally ship, and who did we think we were as privileged white women to be talking about this? Words matter? They do. As a brand storyteller. I have emphasized this in my work with clients. They can be used to provoke or unite us to inspire or anger us. They can be used as peacemakers or weapons. You can just turn on the news or listen to political talking points to see this in action. A few years ago, I had to defend the words diversity, equity and inclusion, which seems crazy to me, diversity is about celebrating and appreciating difference. Equity is about giving people what they need to access opportunity. Inclusion is about helping people belong. What could be so bad about these words? Apparently plenty. In today's world. These words have been politicized and falsely equated to concepts to which they do not equate that in just saying these words or wanting to start a dei group, I was guilty of nefarious schemes and hidden agendas. When did we get so lost? What's next saying the words freedom, love or patience or political, but also true? People have used words to dehumanize and offend, and those words are not okay. We have ample proof that words can lead to oppression and violence. My interview with Dr. Suzanne Wirth, I'm on this podcast about inclusive language was an eye opener, how language defines a culture and how it can and must evolve? How some cultures are erased when their language dies out. How groups impacted by certain words have the right to change the way in which they are referred. And yes, things will change. And yes, we have to keep up. The group impacted gets to decide what is offensive to them, not others describing them. It's not about political correctness. It's about respect for humans. Throughout history, language has never stayed

static. So we should be okay with changing terminology. If it leads to the greater good, and to more inclusivity check out that episode when you can. I'll link to it in the show notes as well as to DJs episode. So I can't have it both ways can I? Can I expect others to forgive me for words when I hold words against others? guess it depends on your perspective, and which quote unquote, side you're on? How about this? Both things can be true. We should strive to honor others and use the right words that don't demean or oppress if words are being used to do that, even without our intention. Of course, we should adjust. And we also should not let words stand in the way or distract us from the real work either. Discernment is required. When is it worth US attacking each other over word usage? Instead of focusing on the cause? The word represents? I don't know the right answer. But I'm going to keep exploring the question. And I invite you to as well. Where are you using a word to demean and dehumanize? And when is it okay to let words slide and agree to various acceptable descriptions in order to focus on the work at hand. Thanks for listening. Remember to tune in to the next episode of empathy edge podcast when you can. rate review, share and above all, remember that cashflow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care, and be kind.

Maria Ross 09:26

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