

Ep #244: Marketing and intersectionality

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With Your Host

Simone Grace Seol

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Hey, I'm Simone Seol and I'm Your Korean Mom. And this is my show, the Simone show. Let's go.

Hey, friends, today I want to talk about one of the biggest blind spots that I had as a marketing teacher, up until now. I'm kind of honestly horrified at the fact that it took me so long to be able to see this. And I honestly don't think that it's because I didn't have the opportunity to learn about it. I think that I had plenty of opportunities, but I just didn't see it. It was in front of me the whole time. And yet, for some reason, I just wasn't seeing it until I saw it. And then I couldn't unsee it.

So, what the hell am I talking about? I'm talking about the fact that for many years I have been teaching on visibility, authenticity, the ability to show up imperfectly, and take up space, as though you are worthy of commanding trust and authority. All of these things on which successful marketing hinges. You cannot have successful marketing, unless you are showing up and taking up space powerfully, unapologetically, authentically, fearlessly. Being yourself, right?

My book is called *The Fearless Marketing Bible*, I'm like, whatever it is, however imperfect you are, however you're feeling, you are good enough. Just show up. Just be yourself. I've been saying all of these messages, ad nauseam, for years. And I really, really believe in them. I still do, but there was one giant, honking, blind spot that made my message pretty irrelevant for lots of people.

And that blind spot is that visibility, authenticity, and the ability to command authority and trust, these are not applied the same. Or these do not apply the same way to all people. They are intersectional. For example, it's always been way easier and way safer for white bodies to take up space and be seen. We don't need to look too hard, look too far, in order to see absolutely infuriating, heartbreaking examples of how it's literally unsafe for so many Black and Brown bodies. And recently, lighter skinned Asian bodies too, to just take up space.

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These bodies of color have been threatened, harassed, murdered, just for taking up space. Literally, just for existing in public. Again, and again. And again, and again. And again, and again, and again, and again. And again. And again. It's just another day on the news, another piece of news, of another body of color having been assaulted, murdered, because they committed the crime of existing. And in a very, very tiny percentage of cases, is there accountability and justice when stuff like this happens.

So, when I have said so far, as I have said so many countless times, just take up space, just be visible, that shit don't apply equally to all people. Some bodies can afford to, and for other bodies, just "showing up" incurs a far higher cost. And it takes a lot more work, a lot more risk, a lot more energy, a lot more everything to "just show up and be seen". And I didn't see that. I deeply regret it.

Authenticity too, is intersectional. I think it's one of those things, it's one of those words, that people associate with me. "Simone, you're so authentic. You teach people how to be authentic. You've helped me become more authentic," all of that. I've been singing about authenticity forever, probably about authenticity more than any other thing. And once again, authenticity is intersectional.

It's easy to be authentic, if who you are isn't that threatening to the status quo, to the existing power structures. If you're white, if your hair is blonde, if you're able-bodied, if the way you talk is deemed "professional", "standard", then it's so much less risky to be authentic. For many people of color, especially Black and Brown people, their authenticity, the way they just naturally are has been feared, maligned, legislated against, policed, murdered, punished, for centuries and centuries.

And for many people of color, masking who you really are, masking your authenticity, and having to perform a different way of being, wasn't a choice. It was a survival mechanism. It was a way to maximize the chances and no one would hurt you. And to say that you and I could, everybody could, just be authentic and it's the same for all of us, just be authentic, just

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be yourself. As if that doesn't have the same cost to everyone, was an egregious failure of mine as a marketing coach.

The ability to gain trust and authority, the ability to command trust and authority, is also intersectional. When whiteness is the standard, and of course, this goes beyond race. And there's a lot of factors. It's intersectional, right? A lot of different factors intersecting. But I really want to focus on race here, because it really needs to be said. We need to pause and take enough time to really look at this and ponder it and grapple with it. Before we move on to “Oh, what about that issue and that issue and...” We want to stay here for a bit.

White supremacy has constructed a clear hierarchy and clear strata for what kind of names, what kind of mannerisms of speaking, what kind of cultural references, what kind of hair, what kind of skin, what kind of demeanor, what kind of way of dressing, our automatic unconscious markers for what constitutes high quality, trustworthy, intelligent, professional.

So, two people could both show up and talk about whatever they do, talk about their work, and one person could automatically, just by the virtue of being who they are, looking the way they do, speaking the way they do, be considered, “Oh, that person is very trustworthy and professional.” And another person could say the exact same things, and just because of the way they look, they speak, whatever, when filtered through the biases of white supremacy can be considered, and won't be considered “professional” or “trustworthy”.

That means that nonwhite bodies have always had to work multiple times harder to mask, to perform, and to prove themselves. To work many, many times harder, in order to just get to the same footing as where many white people start out. That's not even all.

There's another idea that I talk about all the time, which I still believe in, but it's not complete as an idea. It's not fair for me to go spouting it all over the place, until I've considered what was, once again my blind spot, which is

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the idea of just fuck around and find out. I've always been a teacher against perfectionism for so long. That's been my rallying cry for the longest time. It's one of the things I'm best known for; fuck perfectionism. Be messy.

And so, I wrote an email one time, I think that it was titled “Fuck Around and Find Out” or something, about how nothing in business is that precious. Nothing is that important. You can manage to break anything and just start over. It's okay. Don't be so scared to treat your business as your creative canvas. Don't be so concerned about expert opinion, on what's the best way to do this and that. Don't be so precious about it. Just feel free to mess around. Just feel free to fuck around and find out. We can all figure this out. This is all creative play.

Once again, sounds nice in theory, but here's what one reader emailed me back to say. She was actually quoting the comedian Trevor Noah, who said Black women are the one group of people who can't afford to fuck around and find out. Because anytime anything goes wrong... I'm totally mangling the words. I'm totally misquoting it, but I'm going to try to get it right.

It's like, anytime, anything can go wrong, it's Black women who bear the brunt of it. People who have a lot of privilege, they can afford to be okay, to come out on top, to be unscathed, when you fuck around, something explodes. And they're like, “Oh, well, somebody else can clean up the mess. I can keep going.” But Black women haven't been able to afford that luxury.

I watched that segment of Trevor Noah's, I think on The Daily Show, a while ago, and I forgot about it. I remembered it because this person reminded me of it and said please... and she was writing with so much respect and love. But she said, I just want you to know that, as a Black woman, we can't afford to fuck around and find out.

And in that moment, I had to kind of stop everything and think about it for a long, long time. I was so embarrassed. I grieved for my own ignorance. I realized that for what I teach, and what I preach to be meaningful, and for it to be relevant to so many of the people that I want to be of service to, I

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have to have a more informed perspective. And that includes not pretending that fucking around and find out is a luxury that everyone can equally afford.

And it's not just me. People of color have been trying to tell us this stuff for a long time. It's not like a brand new, newly discovered truth. People have been telling us, and I know that I didn't listen until recently. I know that I failed them. And if you're listening, I failed you. And I failed myself.

I'm not saying this in a way of beating up on myself. I am saying this in a way where I am grieving for all the times when I could have done better and didn't. And from a place of taking that responsibility really, really seriously. To do my best, to do better, now that I see what I didn't see.

Marketing, selling, all these things that involve putting yourself in public perception has never, ever been the same for all bodies. It hasn't. The ability to "just do it", just show up, just make the offer, just do this, just fuck around and find out. The ability to do that, and to get the results, has always been 10 times, 100 times, more costly for bodies of color.

And for having been an influential voice of marketing and business that had this blind spot and preached otherwise, I am so sorry. I'm learning to do better. This is actually one of the reasons that I'm revamping my existing flagship program, *Joyful Marketing*. As of the 23rd of this month, which is May 2023, I will be opening a completely updated program under a new name.

Because I realized that for all that has been wonderful and beautiful about *Joyful Marketing*, which has been my beloved program for almost three years, it didn't have an explicit intersectional focus. Which means that it wasn't entirely a safe space, useful space, for many people of color.

And I am telling you that I woke up to this recently, but also, it's not like I woke up with this awareness for the first time yesterday. I've been working on so many layers of it for a long time, actually under the radar, and I've been wanting to make change. And as of later this month, I'm going to be

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able to bring you a brand-new program. Something less harmful, something more useful to you, than what I've had before. Something that actually speaks to the experiences of everyone that I want to be useful to. Be on the lookout for that.

Thank you for continuing to follow me on my journey. It means a lot to me, to be able to continue to share about what I am learning in real time. I'll talk to you next week.

Hey, if you're looking for a one-stop shop where you can find the best of my teaching, all organized into a beautiful and actionable sequence, guess what? I got you. I took the best of my podcast episodes and created a whole damn workbook around them. It's called *The Simone Starter Pack* and it's the ultimate marketing cheat sheet. I got countless emails from folks who downloaded it, saying, "This free resource is worth more than all these courses I paid thousands of dollars for." So, what are you waiting for? Go grab *The Simone Starter Pack*. The link is in the show notes. I can't wait to see what amazing results you'll get from it.