

Hello & Welcome to Real Talk!

I am Dr. Karen Johnson I go by Dr. J. K.J. Karen. Over 40 melanin rich queen of African, Blackfoot, Cherokee, Japanese, Jewish Seminole descent dad figured that out before ancestry.com was thing and coming to you live today from the lands of the Cowlitz the Nisqually people now known as Thurston County and we're going to do Real Talk.

Joining me today are Megan Matthews and Kendrick Stewart rock stars who will be your co-hosts joined by others but today we want to let you know a little bit about why are doing Real Talk what is Real Talk and why is important to you. As you know the vision of the Office of Equity is that everyone each and every person that Washington has full access to the opportunities power resources they need to flourish and achieve their full potential in other words one size does not fit all and we're really going to transform state government to work for everyone that events equity and justice into everything that we do each and every day until it's just the Washington state way that's going to take some Real Talk.

Now before we begin, I must give honor where honor is due and invite you to join me in giving a huge shout out to Kendrick Stewart Deputy Director of Department of Commerce.

Now in a minute you're going to hear how will trump came into existence, but this is his idea this is his brainchild and Megan and I just had the pleasure of kicking it with him to talk about some real serious issues.

This is a voluntary interactive space that center's themes around racial equity justice belonging, so no topic or theme is off limit and we do encourage honest and courageous conversation. Each series will have them monthly you will we expose the norms for having courageous conversations some of you might know them as community agreements or just some of you may know them as rules of engagement, but we want everybody to stay engaged, speak your own truth experience discomfort expected except matter closure in one hour a month we're not going to be able to solve all the issues that you want to get to in that day. We are going to try.

Listen for understanding, no fixing and take risks now what does no fixing mean well I know Kendrick and Megan and I guess you're going to be co-hosting are going to really talk about those things that might cause some people to go ouch. If that is you then we want you to and you say oh my gosh I didn't realize that I am feeling the blame this would not be the time to say "oh you're good person" we already know you're a good person but it's the truth telling that in this series prompts you to see yourself for who you really are and you want to share that with the group then we do ask that the others in the group just let you have that space to do you and go through your own processing.

Now with that ...

Just one more move here, I do call Doctor J Karen because we are friends' dear friend of mine so it's in no way a disrespect to your educational achievement it's just we are friends and it would feel weird calling my close friend Dr. J.

So, I want to introduce that you may recall when you were growing up and whether this was your mom taking you into the store or the mall or this was your dad or this was your grandma grandpa uncle whoever your care giver was I guarantee we are all in common having this experience before you get out of the car off the bus out the taxi whatever it is going into that store that caregiver turned around and looked at you as a child and said don't act a fool in this store.

So, another rule I want to propose is don't act fool in this space. This is for state employees that's right we want to have these real conversations within some sideboards we're going to make sure that we're doing so and not a place and space that's going to be a distraction where we're all about growth so that's the don't act fool rule. I'm going to add in there too.

Thank you, Megan do you have any you want to add? I want to add just be brave. Be brave and come with an open mind open heart willing to learn and in all the stories or in all the truth you're hearing from people stay connected to each other in our humanity.

Exactly and that is so important for the office of equity as we're going to be seeking to be helpful and supportive to central voice. Voice of people who have not been heard for whatever reason and also in state government employees feel well "If I say something that the boss doesn't like then we're going to get in trouble" no this is a space to build muscle memory to find your voice speak your voice understand it may be different.

You may have heard also let's agree to disagree without being disagreeable another way of saying don't have to fool however it's not saying sensor necessarily what you have to say keep it real keep it honest because as we know when we're talking about racial equity social justice access belonging that can be tough and again if you are triggered or don't like what someone has said develop the muscle memory to bring that in real time in that space because that's been so critical if we're going to have a workplace that centers equity and belonging. No one is a mind reader and have no idea what you're thinking or how what you said lands on them unless you tell them. So, this way we're having this space for Real Talk.

Kendrick, Megan how did this idea even begin? Tell the people the story of how this started.

So, I'll start it off and then ya'll jump in I know there are pieces or if I am misstating or misrepresenting from your recollection how this actually kicked off up so I'm saying it's probably about three years ago when I was at the department of enterprise services, I came up with the idea for Real Talk itself.

The thought was that the why for me is that we scan around, and we have more access as a society to information to people around the world etc. but it seems like the art of conversation itself is one that is dying. There are of actually being able to hold a discussion with someone who has a different opinion and Just like here it said you know you can disagree without being disagreeable but really leaning in wanting to be curious learn more about the person going beyond the things on the headline going beyond the things that are on the news and really trying to identify like Megan said each other for who we are as far as our humanity.

Some would say and I know that there are there are those think this that you know just talking about these things is talking that's not really transforming anything it's just talking and I will say this I believe that there's no problem bigger or smaller than the history of mankind that has been solved without some level of conversation without some amount of dialogue without some amount of connecting and sharing and I wanted to provide a space for us to be able to get beyond just the whatever our specific actions or strategies our agencies are developing and saying what does this mean to me as a person.

This is unlike any other initiative where we're focused on something that's maybe outward facing it's not something that has to do with who we are as human creatures this does have to do with everything, we hold true how we define ourselves our value all of that, so I wanted to have that space.

At the time I was transitioning away from DES we weren't able to set it up there, but I took it over to the Department of Commerce where I am at now as a deputy and we started launching you know I got there in February a couple years back and then of course what happened a couple years back was COVID.

So, a month later when we lost real talk the initial focus was going to be exactly what this focuses and has to have a place to have brave discussions where we're respecting one another but we're getting curious and leaning in.

We had one of those conversations and I believe that this was after George Floyd was murdered and then after that we use the platform to be an emergency platform because all of our folk are virtual like many of are right now.

So Joanne Lee reached out to me from DES and Pat is her I believe her supervisor in that capacity reached out to Karen this was probably about you know upwards of a year and a half maybe close to or to go and as if she would be willing to give presentation or engage in one of their pilot training that they were rolling out I'm not sure if it was leading teams leading others or leading organizations it was one of those so at the time Karen said absolutely not because this was if we kind of think back this was after Mike Brown was murdered and we had those string of murders those before George Floyd I kind of just want to submit to you and give you that you that context.

So, there was a lot for us as black folks to be upset about right so Karen her immediate response was no absolutely not is something she said you thought about it and then said OK I might be willing to do that if you get Kendrick.

So that's when Pat talked to Joanne who pulled me in, and I said I don't think so I'm not sure if I want to really do that necessarily. I was upset so Karen and I were having conversations and she says is there anyway; I'm not sure how many conversations with her but it was a few no it's not like I do that thank you very much appreciate it you got.

That so I thought it might have more and in the meantime Megan this is how Meghan kind of got brought into the so Megan she at the time was the president of being BUILD BRG chair I'm sorry I get that wrong every time I think going to director the chair the president was born and she had just given a presentation that was a great presentation I think it was for Black History Month I could be wrong Meghan correct me if I am.

This is through the statewide cabinet deputies meeting we meet monthly so she came there now just for folks if you don't know that there's not a ton of diversity racial diversity on that team so when Megan was there I'm just all into it so I'm watching the presentation I'm in the chat comments like yep tell him girl yep and then what happened? Yep, when was that? What year was that? They didn't know about that either.

So, I reached out to her and said can you please bring this to this to Commerce and I think a couple of weeks later she came out to Commerce and gave the same presentation.

So, I thought ok, and Karen I think kept reaching like you know I'm like you got to do this. I was the one brought into this.

So, ok I will do it if we bring Meagan and if we are able to actually center this around Megan's presentation and then I started thinking back to the Real Talk that I introduced over at DES and I said this might be a good avenue for us if we show this presentation and then just show the group and this was executive leaders you know around the state showed the group us having conversation real discussion about the topics.

It went really well good feedback and so at the time Karen with this is a long story all you know I'm sorry. This is the origin story so anyways

so we pull together at the time Karen was at the Department of Corrections so this before the office of equity before any of this and he said we have got to remain connected so again I told you Karen and I were already friends we already talk all the time bringing in the three of us we started meeting I think it was once a month we got together, kept in touch how's it going and I'll just say for me that was so meaningful because having that place to be able to just unpack stuff and I'm sure we all have that too be with other state professionals black folk with you know the same skin coating as I have and community to just be a community yeah to build community thank you Meagan. It's so amazing and Karen said at that time and time again I've got to take when we have the opportunity to do so we're going to do that.

So, at times sounds good sounds good but I'm thinking it's just that fast forward Office of Equity our very own Dr. J. Karen gets the job she reaches out to Megan and I said OK I want to plan for that Real Time and I'm like oh so ok we're really doing that? Oh, so you weren't just talking? OK, OK and so Megan reached out and I'll tell you this we would not have this platform or this plan if not for Megan coming up with the details of exactly what it would look.

So, Dr. J. reached out to me and said I want to plan by this date we got to get this plan going. I'm like yeah I know, I know I'm super busy and then we got the plan going we got that caught up so thank you so much Megan that you for the plan here we are today we're about to launch that's the origin story of why we are here and why we're bringing this to the state as far as through the office of equity to give us a place to be able to actually have conversations and hopefully strengthen that muscle of all of us seeing each other more as ourselves.

Because if I can see you not as whatever our differences are which are differences are valid but if I can see you more as myself and then I tested reality then we will likely be able to approach our challenges and issues together then not so that was a long origin story.

That was wonderful. So, Megan what are some of the topics that we could expect to talk about during Real Talk to help transform State government?

I did not have my thing up. You caught me off guard. What I will say is that the only thing I want to say is this just about normalizing these conversations the thing that I appreciate most about this space is that we're exchanging ideas. We don't all agree on everything and that's OK then I learn every time I'm in the space with these two because they're giving me their perspective as they see it and then I can add mine and we're building something Better Together and I think that if we just all do that, we will find a way out of these problems that seem unsolvable.

So, this something we want we want to you know kind of keep it relevant to the current time best possible so you're going to see us pivot to hot topics...hot to us so as we may have friends so we may talk about things you know right now currently we're talking about the voting rights act and we're also talking about racism in our schools in the City of Olympia.

I'm having issues with racial slurs and how to move and not isolated events but patterns and how we move to create space where any of our children can go into any school and be treated as a human being.

So those are current hot topics. We also want to talk about access and accessibility are they the same? What does that mean?

I mean we want to talk about intersectionality and tensions within groups we want to talk about past inclusion towards the belonging so every time we're talking like every time we talk about Equity, diversity and inclusion first we're talking about equality, then we were talking about equity then we're talking about inclusion now we're talking about belonging right so as everything goes reiteration as we continue the learn and grow and figure out what's missing and find solutions.

We want to talk about justice for black trans and fem women. We want to talk about freedom for who July 4th we will celebrate the Independence Day freedom for who?

we want to talk about immigration and let's talk about our history of immigration, wealth inequality and are we supporting our veterans in this country or is it superficial?

So, little teasers. No, it's going to great and what I'm hoping we can actually establish with this is not an echo Chamber of Megan and Karen and I do not all agree so I know this just because we look the same you know we can assume that we all have the same beliefs and we do not. So, you see you know when we're hosting and we're kind of having conversations you'll be able to see the fact that I have a different view we'll push back and say OK I'm not quite sure I agree with that Megan and we do quite a bit of that but we want to really invite folk who we want everyone to see themselves in this space.

So, I really encourage those people who let's say "Is there a place for me, a white man in this space?"

Yes! Please come on in this space please because we want to have these conversations this is about building again not a community that is just favoring one view or another, we need to bring build community which means all of our views bring it to the central fire and then how do we reconcile that

and then answer those questions that who belongs here in this community of ours and when are we to each other right?

Those are the kinds of things that we're going to dive into because these you know if you think about it people say, why do we have to focus on this? Right does this cause more division. I stated that how can you fix something if you don't know what the problem is?

How can we identify solutions if you don't know what the issue is? So if we can have conversations about what the current state is if the lean folks right we have to identify current states to identify and get some future state and figure out what they got is looking into the future state if we have if we can't figure out what the current state is and so normalizing these conversations is important because we have to figure out for each community what those barriers are for them to have the belonging, to be able to flourish we have to be able to identify this and we have to have these conversations it's not about demonizing anybody or saying you're a bad person but we have to identify what the problem is that we can figure out the solution.

We can't fix the front door and we can't figure out that the hinges broke.

Exactly and so we're just delighted to have Megan and Kendrick as cohosts of Real Talk because fundamentally if indeed we're going to manifest that anti-racist government enterprise right what does that even mean?

if indeed we're going to transform state government to embed equity and justice into every action until it's just as natural as breathing like right now no one at the sound of my voice is thinking of I need to inhale or I'm going to die or oh my goodness I'm going to exhale. We are breathing automatically, and we want equity and justice to be automatic.

So, your voice is going to be important because I already know that in one of these sessions one of you is going to say something spectacular and then Kendrick and Megan will be like Oh Dr J. this is what we heard can we do that let's do this and we will be like alright let's make it happen.

So, we'll talk is going to be an opportunity for you to Co-create with us this transformed public service system that centers equity and belonging so that everybody knows your name and they're also glad you came to sustain workforce diversity because fundamentally we are already diverse the Office of Equity would never use the word diversity as code for race relations or any other relations we'll call we'll call it as we see it. We say what we mean, name it and we can move on as Meagan and Kendrick have been saying.

We really cannot reframe state government to work in a way for everyone, the people we serve each and every day as well as those who serve them each and every day without having Real Talk.

We're just delighted that you have joined us in this space tell a friend.

Megan, Kendrick anything for the good of the order? Yes, I'd say Karen thank you for believing in this concept that providing space for us to actually have this this this is a this is a risk for you right to have a space where we're having real live discussions, but we can tackle some of these live issues a lot and actually model that we need to do as leaders, and you know no matter what level you are in any organization your leader. So, thank you for taking that chance and for providing space for us to really in my opinion do something that's going to be critical we can't transform until we actually agree on truth and that's what Megan was saying right, and we also can't transform until we actually heal.

So, this is going to give us a space to actually do some truth telling and agree on a set of facts so it's not alternate facts no, no, no. What happened? How do we heal from what happened? How do we transform based on what happened?

And alternative facts equal lies. Let's just call it out. Misinformation disinformation and lies all lies I couldn't help it.

Join us y'all. Seriously join us with it's going to be fun we're going to laugh a part of this also it's not just going to be serious we're going to be talking about serious issues but we're going to be sharing stories right we're going to be through these you know through our connection just seeing our humanity I love how you said that earlier Megan. Sharing stories funny, not so funny we will laugh, and we will cry together we're going to do all.

Join us we once all that part of this so we can create.

Real Talk let's make it happen. We look forward you soon peace out.

Alright Ya'll.