

TRANSCRIPT: EPISODE 218

TITLE:

Guest: Karith Foster

EPISODE OPEN

Laura Cox Kaplan:

[\(00:07\)](#):

Building influence is something anyone can learn. It's an investment you can make in yourself, and it can hold the keys to achieving your dreams and having the life and impact you want to have. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've learned a lot over three decades about building and sustaining influence and how using it and using it effectively can make a big, big difference in your life and career. Here on She Said, She said podcast, we're digging into the different dimensions that help us build and sustain influence. If you thought being an influencer was just for social media, think again. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, negotiating a promotion, running your household, or trying to connect with those who don't share your views, understanding and using the different dimensions of influence will increase your chances of success. Whatever your goals may be, listening to She Said, She Said Podcast is a smart, efficient investment you can make in you. I'm really glad you're here and I'm excited we're on this journey together.

SHOW OPEN:

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(01:21\)](#):

Hey friend, welcome to She Said, She Said podcast. I have been looking so forward to sharing this week's episode with you because I think you're really going to love it. If you've ever struggled with perfection or maybe questioned how to use humor effectively in presentations or pitches or maybe thought there must be a different way to have conversations about diversity and inclusion, you are gonna love this multifaceted conversation with this week's guest. We cover a lot of territory, but it's really a great conversation. Karith Foster is a recovering standup comedian who found her passion by thinking about a different way to use humor. We don't always think about comedy as a transferable skill, but Karith found a way to do just that, and the story that led her to that point is one you will not wanna miss. I met Karith Foster at a recent gathering of the policy circle.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(02:31\)](#):

Now, if you don't know about the Policy Circle, I've included a link in the show notes where you can learn a bit more. But suffice it to say, it brings together an incredible group of women who are engaging and leading in their communities and who are committed to always learning this approach to lifelong learning and of seeking inspiration is an important component needed to not only build influence but sustain it. So I hope you'll check that out. I have split this week's

episode with Karith into two parts. Part one is episode 218. That's this one, the one that you're listening to now. And in part one, Karith and I talk about her journey, how she made the pivot from aspiring journalist to standup comedian to the work that she's doing. Now, there are a number of important takeaways in this conversation, but the one that I wanna highlight relates to the importance of saying yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(03:35\)](#):

But what happens when Yes leads you down a pretty dark road. This is actually my favorite part of the conversation. It is very powerful and it's really thought-provoking. So I'll be interested in your feedback, friend.

I do want to be very transparent about something. I really struggled with one aspect of this episode. In this conversation, Karith tells us the story about how she came to work for the late Don Imus. In the story she quotes both Don Imus and his then executive producer, a guy named Bernard McGirk, both of whom shared a series of particularly offensive racial slurs that were aimed at the Rutgers women's basketball team back in 2007. That exchange put both men in hot water, especially Don Imus and for good reason, but it also led to Karith's hiring on the show. Now, I'll be honest, I edited this particular segment of the conversation several times.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(04:41\)](#):

At one point I took the offensive comments out, even though Karith was quoting someone else (Don Imus and Bernard McGirk). When I reached out to her to discuss this and my concern, her response prompted me to change my mind. She said, It's okay to be uncomfortable. It's healthy because it's a decency gauge. And the reality is life isn't always comfortable and pretty. How right she is about that. By telling me -- and you -- this story and quoting the offensive language, Karith is illustrating this point really clearly. And given that she spends her time these days having these tough conversations and also encouraging a greater degree of understanding and empathy, I ultimately agreed with her and I decided to leave the comments in. But I want to be very clear: that language is offensive and I hate it. By leaving it in as I ultimately did, I'm not condoning it, nor is Karith, but instead using it as an opportunity to really illustrate her broader point. She explains that in our exchange.

Now, friend, I know that you will have opinions on this and on whether I made the right call here and I'd be interested in hearing your views, whatever they may be. Please do know that I did carefully consider this before sharing this episode with you, and I wanted to be fully transparent about the process that I went through to ultimately reach this conclusion. So with that, here is part one of my two part conversation with the fabulous Karith Foster.

Karith, welcome to, She Said /She Said!

Karith Foster [\(06:34\)](#):

Hello, Laura. Thank you for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(06:37\)](#):

Well, I'm thrilled to have you. When you and I met a few weeks back at the Policy Circles annual summit, I told you on the spot, you gotta come on the podcast. My audience will really, really love you and love your story. So I'm thrilled that you're here today.

Karith Foster [\(06:57\)](#):

Well, it's a treat to be here. Thank you for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(06:59\)](#):

Well, it's my pleasure. So let's jump in. As you and I talked about, there's a lot of dimensions of your story and so many things that people are gonna be fascinated by and that will really resonate with them. But maybe let's start by talking about your current work. What do you do? Maybe tell us a little bit about what you're working on these days.

Karith Foster [\(07:22\)](#):

Absolutely. So I am the creator of Inversity and my company is Inversity Solutions. And I came up with that word because when I took a really good, hard look at what was happening in the world of diversity and inclusion or diversity, equity, inclusion now, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, I'm sure we'll add another letter eventually, <laugh> I saw there was a deficit and there was a gap, and there was a serious problem with all these efforts, all this money, I mean billions and billions of dollars being poured into diversity efforts. And yet the results there, we were more divided, we're more polarized. What was missing? What was happening that wasn't right? And to borrow a term from our friend, Ian Rowe, I wanted to give people an empowered alternative to still have thoughtful conversations around diversity and celebrate everything that we are and what we bring to the table.

Karith Foster [\(08:30\)](#):

But the idea is instead of focusing just on the lot of attraction where you focus on, you get more of, and we focus on our differences and what separates us, that's what we're gonna get more of. So within Inversity, the idea is to acknowledge and honor who we are, our identity, what we bring to the table, but shift the focus from what separates and divides us to what do we have in common? How can we be truly inclusive of one another, but most importantly and powerfully, how can we be introspective? Meaning, understanding your value, your worth, your connection to humanity. So instead of working from the outside in, we've been doing for decades, now it's time to work from the inside out and have real results. And so from that perspective, I've created a series of keynotes, workshops, and online curriculum that right now is about seven modules. I speak at corporations organizations across the country. I just got to join you all at the policy circle. I was just with the philanthropy roundtable. I speak to Fortune 100 companies and small businesses, anyone who's interested in having a conversation, a thoughtful and intentional conversation around diversity and inclusion in a healthy, responsible way.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(09:43\)](#):

<affirmative>, can you give us an example of maybe the biggest difference or biggest differences between how you're approaching this topic and maybe how other consultants are approaching the topic?

Karith Foster [\(09:54\)](#):

Sure. And for the record, I do want to say that I believe most people who are in this arena of diversity and inclusion, I believe their hearts are in the right place. I just think that there's only been one way to go about this for so long that the idea of maybe there being a different way, a different approach, one that is a little more thoughtful, one that's a little more considerate, one that doesn't have the polarizing effects of excluding people from conversations based on their ethnicity or their gender like that. Because to me, it's almost like reversing the effects of what you're wanting to do. I think of safe spaces as segregation 2.0. I mean, I understand why they exist. I understand why people want a place to commune, but how about let's have brave spaces where everyone can show up as who they are in their authentic selves as their authentic selves.

Karith Foster [\(10:51\)](#):

But we're also brave enough to have conversations to include the people who need to be enrolled in the conversations and understand your experience and position. So I certainly use language a little differently than people in traditional D and I don't really care for the term privilege quite honestly. Anytime I speak to an audience, regardless of their ethnicity if they're working at a company and they have access to the internet, they have privilege. Most of us have a roof over our heads. If we're literate, we have privilege. If we have clean water, we have privilege. I prefer the term advantage. And there's certainly advantages that we cannot deny. If you happen to be a certain gender, if you happen to come from a certain ethnicity, if you happen to be from a certain socioeconomic status, if you're attractive, you have an advantage over the people who do not have those things.

Karith Foster [\(11:46\)](#):

And with that comes understanding that not beating yourself up about it, not no self ululation, but understanding that because you have this advantage, you are in a position to be an advocate now for the people who don't. And lastly, I use humor. I do have comedy in my background. I went to school for broadcast journalism. That's what I got my degree in. I worked at a local ABC affiliate years ago, actually with Savannah Guthrie from the Today Show. And then I moved to New York City because I got a job at The View, and I thought, who better than Barbara Walters to have as a boss? And I got there and it was a tremendous experience. I mean, I learned so much about writing, producing, booking but also there was this kind of tang of wanting to be on the other side of the camera too. And so I got bit by the bug and I started doing standup comedy.

Karith Foster [\(12:39\)](#):

I found it while I was there, or it found me. And I, I've had a very full life in this short time that I've been on this planet, and I'm so grateful. But when you were saying, How do we unpack all of this? Because I have been in different spaces. I've worked in human resources for Estee Lauder, a Fortune 100 cosmetics company, while pursuing standup comedy. I got to have those incredible experiences too. But all of the things that I've done have really culminated to I think, where I am right now. And I'm so grateful again.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(13:12\)](#):

Yeah, okay. So fascinating. And I wanna unpack so much of this. So the work that you did in standup comedy, had you always been that kid or that person that people said, Oh my God, you're so funny. You've gotta pursue standup comedy. How did you find it? Or it find you?

Karith Foster [\(13:34\)](#):

I was the dork and cool kids clothing. I did a little kind of cheerleading stuff, but I was also vice president of the Latin Club <laugh>. And I never had a click. I just, I was the social butterfly. And again, things when you're so much younger, you think, Oh, I don't have a clique. I don't have a sub group of friends. And now I realize, again, what a gift that was because I could matriculate in and out with different people. And that's worked so wonderfully now as an adult. But I always appreciated standup. I always thought standup comedians were some of the funniest, smartest people on the planet, and they are some of the most intelligent people that are walking the face of this earth. And I'm not just saying that because I am one and I've done it, but the way that comedians think to be able to take something that's very simple and extrapolate on it and take it to a whole of the level and take something that's very complex and break it down, there's a genius to that.

Karith Foster [\(14:34\)](#):

And there's a genius in being able to touch on topics that are very taboo, to speak on topics that are very personal. I mean, there's the old age, old adage and equation of tragedy plus time equals comedy. And so if you look at who some of the stellar comedians are from right now and from our past, it's people who traditionally come from groups that have had a lot of trauma, a lot of black comedians, a lot of Jewish comedians and women who are now coming into the ranks of being household names. And so it's such a wonderful way to bring people together. And again, I never thought I was gonna be a standup comedian cuz it wasn't the class clown. I wasn't super outgoing in that way. I wasn't on all the time, but I was quirky and I had a twisted kind of way of seeing things and a little bit of sense of humor and twisted sense of humor. And so I think when I got the introduction to be able to actually learn how to do it, I just went with it.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(15:42\)](#):

Yeah. You talk about in a lot of your materials and a lot of your speeches, and even in your fabulous book, which we're gonna get to in a second but you talk about the importance of using humor and how it can, there's scientific evidence that backs up the fact that it makes what

you're saying more memorable. You make a bigger impression that teachers have a bigger impact on their students when they use humor. But what about for the person you are gifted, you have that natural gene, but what about for people who really don't always -- I've heard the advice, and I'm sure that my audience listening has too, that if you're not funny, don't try to be funny <laugh>. So how do we take humor if it doesn't come as naturally to us? Is there something we can do to help find that?

Karith Foster ([16:33](#)):

Well, I believe everybody has the ability to be funny and has humor because we will laugh at certain things. That doesn't mean you're gonna be a professional right off the gate and you're gonna go hit the stage, but you just having the ability to laugh at yourself. So it'll laugh at being human and being fallible and making mistakes. That's a great place to start. It doesn't, humor doesn't have to be you know, don't have to take anything away from someone else. You don't have to attack anyone else. You don't have to insult anyone else. And you certainly don't have to, again, go into this place where you're beating yourself up. But just looking at something and being like, Oh, that was so silly. I can't believe I did that. And things that tickle you will usually tickle someone else.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([17:19](#)):

Yeah, I mean you're, what you're getting at is this whole notion of being self-deprecating with your humor, not taking yourself too seriously. How do you balance that? What can sometimes be a fine line for women where in the interest of being, we can sometimes run the risk of undercutting our credibility. And I know I think you touch on this in the book, but I'd love to get your advice on how do you strike the right balance. So you are being self-deprecating in the interest of adding humor to what you're saying, but you're not hurting your credibility with your

Karith Foster ([17:57](#)):

Audience to a degree. And that's when you have to use your judgment and your intuition. And of course, boundaries. Boundaries, I'm sure is something you talk about all the time on this amazing podcast. And the idea is to not let yourself be necessarily the butt of the jokes, but again, appreciating the humanity that you're bringing to the table. It's just apologizing, right? <affirmative> women tend to say, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry for things they have no control over it. The weather, the traffic, those types of things. It's the same with finding that self deprecating humor and finding that balance, right? So that you're not overcorrecting for something and you're not apologizing for who you are through your humor.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([18:42](#)):

That often, often comes as a desire to be liked, that we wanna connect with our audience and that we sometimes in what can sometimes be a misdirected way, can over apologize in the interest of trying to make that connection.

Karith Foster ([18:58](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And again, we're all figuring this out, this whole life thing. So again, if you realize, Oh, you know what I, I'm gonna reel it back in. That's what you can do. You have the opportunity to do that. Nothing's in stone, nothing's permanent. Just catch yourself the next time so you don't go there.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([19:18](#)):

Yeah. I'd love for you, Karith, to take us back again. You talked a bit about your story and a couple of your interesting adventures, but maybe when you made that career pivot we talk a lot on this podcast about career pivots, how challenging that can be, knowing when the right moment is to ultimately say, Okay, this is it. <laugh>

Karith Foster ([19:43](#)):

A comedian. That was fun conversation with my parents, <laugh>.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([19:51](#)):

So tell us about that experience, both the experience of deciding this is the path you wanted to pursue, and then when you decided enough of this, I'm gonna do something different.

Karith Foster ([20:03](#)):

I wish I could say it was just that it was this clarity moment, this aha. It was, it wasn't. In fact, when I was at The View, as I said, I, I'm very grateful for that experience. But the first year was a whirlwind, it was a startup show. The second year I was really unhappy. I wasn't like, it wasn't sitting well with my soul. I wasn't where I was supposed to be. And I knew this. And I often, I make the reference, Do you remember the film The Devil Wears Prada?

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([20:32](#)):

Oh yeah, of course.

Karith Foster ([20:34](#)):

And Anne had one of my favorite, brilliant, brilliant film from the fashion to Meryl Streep and Ann Hathaway... everything and everything was great in that movie. Everything, it's a hundred Rotten Tomatoes. But there's a line that Anne Hathaway's character says, and she's like, A million girls would kill for this job. Why am I miserable? And that was me that at the View, and I was terrified to leave because who leaves working for Proper Walters? You know what I mean? Who leaves a job where you can have the opportunity to climb the ladder? I mean, this is what I got my degree in. I set my sights. I was gonna be this beacon of light and truth and figure out how to get into this industry one way or another. But it wasn't sitting right. I actually physically got so ill, my blood pressure dropped to 90 over 50.

Karith Foster ([21:24](#)):

There was nothing wrong with me, I just wasn't happy. And as my friend who became my big brother, he was the announcer for The View for so long. He's like, You know what? The universe is gonna push you one way or another. And I actually did, ended up getting kind of kicked out. I found out later why it was very, it's a wild story. I was confiding in someone who I thought was a confidant. A confidant who I was supporting and saying, I think I wanna move to England. I think I wanna write a book. All these dreams and aspirations I'm sharing with her. And she's like, I don't think Karith is gonna be able to help me do what I wanna do. So she basically got me fired <laugh>,

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(22:04\)](#):

Oh my. Wow.

Karith Foster [\(22:06\)](#):

Which I'm so grateful for. Now at the time, it's like, and I talk about this in my book, Why did this happen to me versus Why did this happen for me? And it happened for me, It happened for me. I didn't see it at the time, I didn't see it for a couple years, but it happened for me so that I could deep dive and to stand up comedy and hang out with some of the greats like Neal and Lisa Lampinelli and really get my feet wet and see if this was something I wanted to do. And it was. But after about, I don't know, three or four months of my living that life, my mother was like, Please get health insurance,

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(22:40\)](#):

<laugh> <laugh>. So

Karith Foster [\(22:42\)](#):

I started temping at Estee Lauder basically became a second assistant to the senior VP of Global hr. That became a, ended up becoming a full-time job. And I worked with the Lauders and the senior VPs and all of the big wigs. And it was a wonderful experience because I got this HR background and there was a time when I was here, I was like, God, really? This is not what I wanna do. Why do you have me doing this? Corporate America is not my jam. Well now I know why I was there, why it happened for me versus to me because now I speak at corporations across the country and the world. And most of the people I work with are in HR and I know where they're coming from and I know what they're trying to do and I can speak to them where they are.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(23:33\)](#):

You've hit on several things, including the theme or the topic from our last episode, Episode 217, which was focused on fear, but specifically the stories that we tell ourselves and how those stories oftentimes are the reason why we're afraid of various things. And I'm not talking about

being chased by a bear or legitimate things to be afraid of. I'm talking about the things that we do in our own heads. And so there were several examples in what you just said about taking the experience and turning it into a positive by telling yourself a different story. Maybe give the audience listening, a little bit of advice around how you did that and how you came to terms with betrayal and with jobs that weren't working, but finding value in what you were learning. Maybe talk a little bit about that.

Karith Foster ([24:27](#)):

Sure. So I mean, there is the adage, again, everything happens for a reason, <affirmative>. And I've always believed that. I really have. Of course, there's this new meme out there that's really funny that says, Yeah, everything happens for a reason. Sometimes that reason is you're <laugh> stupid and you make bad choices,

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([24:44](#)):

<laugh> <laugh>.

Karith Foster ([24:46](#)):

And that can be applied to some people

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([24:48](#)):

Too, <laugh>.

Karith Foster ([24:50](#)):

But as far as everything happening for a reason, I always just have this inner faith. I have this inner belief that God, the universe source, however you wish to call that power, that we're connected to our higher power always has my best interest at heart. And that I will never stray too far from the path I'm supposed to be on. I mean, yes, I have free will, of course everybody does. But the idea is to try to be as connected to that power as possible so that you are guided and not making as many errors as you might be if you weren't connected. And in my book I say, it's not a mistake if you got something out of it, it's not a mistake. If you learned from it, maybe I had to go down that path to know that wasn't really what I wanted to do in the first place.

Karith Foster ([25:39](#)):

That wasn't a mistake. I got something out of it. It wasn't a waste of time. And I think a driving factor for me isn't so much that I don't get scared cuz oh I do, but I take the risks anyway. And I think so much of that has to do with the what ifs I cannot live with. What if I didn't do this? What if I didn't try that? And that came from a very huge opportunity that I had that I did not take. I had been doing standup about, I don't know, five years or so, and I had become friends with Larry, the cable guy from the Blue Collar Comedy tour, The Voice of Mader the tow truck in the Disney movies. And we became very close. He's still a dear friend to this day, Dan Whitney. But he had just blown up and Comedy Central was roasting him on their network.

Karith Foster ([26:35](#)):

And my manager at the time who unfortunately was a little wet behind the ears said, Hey Karith, Comedy Central wants to see if you wanna sit on the dais for Larry. The cable guys roast. And my immediate heart went into palpitations. My immediate thought was, Am I gonna be able to do this? They say, it takes seven years to find your voice as a comedian. I've only been doing this like the fear creeping in. I'm not enough. I've reached out to other comics who were more senior than myself and said, Well what would you do? And they all said, Well, you only get one chance to make a first impression. You don't wanna blow it. Looking back, of course, hindsight is always 2020. Some of them might have been jealous that I was getting this opportunity and they'd been in the game three times as long as I had, some of them might have been projecting their fear onto me, cuz that's what they would've said and done.

Karith Foster ([27:26](#)):

And I ended up turning it down saying no, and I didn't want to, but I just thought, I can't risk failing miserably in front of all these network executives on national television. And it didn't feel good, but I did it anyway. I said, No, my manager let me say no. And a few years later, I'm in LA I, I'd been in New York for some time, I went out to LA for a brief hiatus after another job I'm sure we'll talk about. And I saw a friend post on social media that he got a job writing for Comedy Central. Now the comedy business entertainment is not for the weak of spirit or faint of heart. So anytime I see somebody get something, like I celebrate them. And so I reached out, I'm like, Congratulations, that's so cool. What show are you writing for Comedy Central? He goes, Well, it's not really a show.

Karith Foster ([28:16](#)):

I go, Well, what do you mean? He goes, I'm writing for the roasts. I go, I'm sorry, you're, you're what? You're writing for the what? And it was like a gut punch, right Laura? It was like all of just a ton of bricks fell on me. And I realized if I had said yes, I wouldn't have been alone. If I had said yes, I would've had support. I would've had to write all my stuff. I mean, it still would've been me and I would've gotten to craft things, but I would've had a team around me. And that's probably one of the biggest lessons that I take when I speak especially to young women, is when something scares the hell outta you, but you want it, you say yes. And that yes is the golden key to the city of opportunity because somehow some way, the right material, the right tools, the right people will come into place. Now you can't just sit back passively and be like, Okay, world, bring it on

Karith Foster ([29:11](#)):

<laugh>. Right? You have to actively do something. You have to. But just that saying, yes, it's the magic word.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([29:21](#)):

Yeah. Karith, let's talk for a second about, okay, the person who says yes, she's absolutely terrified. What next? Maybe give advice for how you channel that fear. Once you've said yes, you're going to do it, you're doing it, you're gonna challenge yourself. How do you come to terms with the fear? How do you take that next step once you've said, Okay, fine, I'm gonna do it. Talk about how to manage the, what comes next?

Karith Foster ([29:52](#)):

Well, it's like eating an elephant, right? You don't eat it all at once, is one bite at a time. And so you can have the end goal in mind, and that's very important. You have to have goals, you have to have dreams, you have to have your sight set on something. But understand that everything is a process and there is nothing that is overnight. I jokingly say I'm a 22 and a half year overnight success.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([30:12](#)):

<laugh> <laugh>.

Karith Foster ([30:14](#)):

This started a while ago.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([30:17](#)):

So in addition to the interesting career experiences that we've already talked about, you also had an experience working with Don Imus at imus in the morning. And he is remembered to be someone who was, let's say, very challenging to work for <laugh>.

Karith Foster ([30:35](#)):

Very diplomatic, extremely

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([30:37](#)):

Polite and diplomatic. Yes, exactly. <laugh> <laugh>. Tell us that story and how that experience maybe led you to the work that you're pursuing now.

Karith Foster ([30:48](#)):

Absolutely. I mean, it really goes back to the day that the "what" hit the fan with his comment about the Rutgers women's basketball team. It was my uncle's funeral. I remember this day very, very clearly because it was my uncle's funeral. I was in New Jersey on my grandmother's bed watching the news and watching just everything blow up. And it was the perfect combination of an old, rich, white guy trying to be hip and cool, say something funny, a completely slow news day. And it caught like wildfire.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([31:20](#)):

What was your role at the show? Were you a writer for the show?

Karith Foster ([31:23](#)):

Sure. No, no. I was an on-air personality. So I'm watching this, this is April, 2007. I'm watching this explode on the news thinking I should have been there. Six months later I get a phone call from a booker saying, Hey Karith, are you interested in a radio television opportunity? Wow. And I said Yeah, sure, of course. By the way is with Don Imus. Oh my. And I remember going "nappy headed hoe," Don Imus? like the same one I saw on the news? She's like, Yeah, that would be the one. Wow. And I was headlining I was doing standup comedy, performing at a club in Kansas City. I was supposed to go home to Dallas to visit family. And he's like, You need to get back to New York as soon as possible cuz Imus wants to meet with you. And I just remember, again, this heart palpitations in my head, What is happening?

Karith Foster ([32:10](#)):

The world is spinning. And I met with him. And the thing was, and I really like to offer this clarification to you, because for those who do not remember, he was doing a broadcast, they were covering sports. His producer, Bernard McGirk, who unfortunately just passed away recently said....well, it was Rutgers University playing against Tennessee. And Rutgers had a very distinctly African American lineup of players and Tennessee did not. And Bernie, Imus' producer goes, "Wow, those are some hardcore hoes." And Imus, parroting him, says, "Yeah, them are some nappy headed hoes," which if you go back and watch a tape, that's exactly how it went down. Now people only heard when Imus said, Cuz he was the star of the show. What I saw, I saw it from multiple viewpoints. I saw it as a comedian, when you're riffing, you're trying to be funny, you're saying something off the cuff, it's not always gonna go over perfectly.

Karith Foster ([33:09](#)):

And that is one of the challenges of comedy, right? You're not gonna hit it all the time. It's not always gonna be good material. And unfortunately what he said, it wasn't funny. He also was a significantly older man who I think had three friends total in the world, none of whom were Black. He didn't even know the vernacular he was using. You know what I mean? He thought he was being hip and cool using the vernacular of the day, not really izing what any of that meant. Not that I'm absolving him of his responsibility in it, but we have to think about intention here and context.

Karith Foster ([33:49](#)):

I also saw it as a Black woman. I'm like, Oh wow, you shouldn't have gone there. That was really inconsiderate. And to use that language for young women who and I, and the biggest issue was these were young women who didn't ask to be thrust into the spotlight. And that is where they say there's honor among thieves, as curmudgeonly as Imus was. And he was, I mean, his slogan was, "We're not happy until you're not happy." That's just how he was known. But he did have a value point of, you know, don't talk about anybody's children. He didn't talk about politicians', children, celebrity's children. And in his mind, these young women at Rutgers, they were children. They weren't full fledged adults. Yes, they were in school and maybe could vote, but

they weren't. You know what I mean? So when he realized the after effect of what his comment had, because people can be cruel and people can be awful sometimes.

Karith Foster ([34:42](#)):

And people would show up at their away games with t-shirts and signs. It was horrible. That's horrible. And of course it was a media frenzy and the spotlight was put on them. They didn't ask for that <affirmative>, they were just trying to become national champions. So when he did make his apology, he was contrite. And I sincerely believe this, I will till the day I die. It was an unfortunate circumstance and he did apologize and he did try to do what he could to make up for it. Now, in that making up for it, what happened, and the reason I got the call is when he had, because he did get fired from MSNBC and from WABC that's why we have Morning Joe and Mika now on msnbc, cuz that was his time slot. But when he was given the opportunity to come back on WABC and what was, initially it was RFD TV that it became Fox Business News.

Karith Foster ([35:36](#)):

He went on to Fox Business News. The idea, I don't know if it was his or someone, but the idea was to diversify his staff. And so that's why I got the call. And another gentleman by the name of Tony Powell, who was also a Black comedian, got the call. I got more of the focus because I was a woman. And of course the target of his comment had been Black women. And I remember going back to that Larry, the Cable guy incident. I wanna do this. I want to be this beacon of light and truth. I wanna be able to have this conversation about race and racism on a national platform. And I wanna do it responsibly. And I remember thinking, if I don't do this, somebody else will take this position and they may not do it in a responsible way. But I was also terrified because I was putting my reputation on the line.

Karith Foster ([36:33](#)):

I was putting my safety on the line. I mean, at the time, he was one of the most reviled men in media. And my mother, it's so funny that my parents, God bless, they've been married, it'll be 56 years coming up. My mother's like, I don't want you to do this. I don't want you to get hurt. She's the protector. She didn't wanna, And my father, who also protects me was like, if you, you've gotta do this, you're gonna wonder what if the rest of your life. And I'm like, I am. I'm gonna wonder what if. And here's an opportunity to do something really big and really grand and really powerful and be a voice where there isn't one. And so I said yes, as scared as I was. And oh I was so scared, Laura. Oh I was so scared I didn't sleep for two days.

Karith Foster ([37:22](#)):

And I said yes. And the first year was amazing. It was my dream job. I mean, I call it my Tale of Two Cities. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times cuz it was a dream job. It was just with a very damaged person -- Imus. He was an alcoholic and a drug addict. While he wasn't drinking or taking anymore, he never sought recovery. He never went through the 12 steps. He was a dry drunk. He didn't hide that. And so you never knew who you were gonna get on a daily basis. Were you gonna get the amazing Marcony Award-winning genius or were you going to get

the abusive, horrible human being who I saw make grown men cry. He did ridiculous stuff that hr, there was no HR, I mean he brandished a loaded gun at me -- like crazy.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oh my stuff, my God.

Karith Foster ([38:14](#)):

Oh yeah. Like crazy stuff. That when Janice Dean, the Fox News meteorologist, Of course she and I bonded over that because he, he'd done similar things to her. So he had a track record. It wasn't just me, right? But after he got comfortable and because was so, his ego was so fragile he eventually kind of started taking things out on me. And it got to the point where fans of the show would write me and ask if he was being that mean to me on the air, if it was intentional. Because it wasn't funny anymore. It was past the curmudgeon personality. But what they heard on the air was only 10% of what was happening off the air. It was full on abuse. It was horrible. But I never let him see me cry. And I refused to quit. And when I was on the first of a nervous breakdown, actually you know, can't go on the air day after day after day and be told, You're fat, you're stupid, you're not funny. I have no idea how you got into Oxford just daily just being berated daily. It takes its toll on you. Sure. And so I remember thinking, I'm either going to Bellevue, <laugh> the mental hospital, or I'm going to Bali. And I'm like, if I'm spending that kind of money, I'm going someplace pretty <laugh>. So I hopped my happy brown butt on a plane to B for two

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([39:36](#)):

Weeks, <laugh>. But what was that moment, Karith? I mean, clearly to put up with an abusive situation anywhere, whether it's your home life or whether it's at work, at some point you have to say, okay, it's just not worth it. And for a lot of people it can be hard to make that decision for a host of reasons. So maybe talk about the thought process and what was it that finally, if brandishing a gun at your head was not enough, what was it that when you said, you know what enough and here's what I'm gonna do next.

Karith Foster ([40:10](#)):

It was going to Bali and realizing how it was affecting me physically, mentally, being able to step away from it. I was fortunate enough to be able to afford that. I was fortunate enough to be able to have the time to do that. And I tell you my empathy, empathy level for people who are in abusive situations, I mean rose tenfold because I got it. And because every day wasn't a bad day. Right? And you're there thinking, I can make it better.

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([40:40](#)):

It sucks you in right a certain way. If I just stay, it's gonna be better.

Karith Foster ([40:44](#)):

And the narcissism that accompanies it from the person who's the abuser, right? It was life changing. But at one point when I was in Bali, I had this really wild dream, a very prophetic dream. We were sitting across from each other, I miss and I, and he said, I don't think it's working out. I'm gonna let you go. And he kissed me. It wasn't a weird kiss, it was just peck. And I woke up and I came back and two days later after I came back, he calls me, he's like, Hey look I've been thinking about this. Things aren't really going. I think it would be better if we kind of amicably, amicably went our own ways. I'm like, absolutely. I couldn't agree more cuz I wasn't gonna quit. I was not going to let him force me out.

Karith Foster ([41:34](#)):

I couldn't, couldn't. Laura, I couldn't. And maybe that was my ego and maybe that was my weakness, but I refused to let him hurt me. That win. He was not gonna win like that. But I had to go into a place of recovery afterwards. And I was also in a romantic relationship that was not healthy. It wasn't physically abusive, but it was someone who also was very angry. And this is what happened when I was in Bali. This was a really powerful moment. I had a horrible asthma attack. My first 24 hours here I'd gone for first week was a manifestation retreat. The second week I was just gonna go on around on my own. My first 24 hours there were the beaches and how beautiful, and it is. But I was in the part where there was a rainforest <laugh>. So it was damp and humid and a little mold and the worst place for an asthmatics to go <laugh>.

Karith Foster ([42:28](#)):

So I get there and my inhalers aren't working. The people I'm with, I'm I to think, go to the hospital. I need a nebulizer treatment. I need a shot of adrenaline. I've had this my whole life. I know what I need. And they're like, Well, let's take you to this woman. She runs a fertility clinic in town. And I go That's not the part of my body I'm having an issue with. But thanks, I'll keep that in mind, <laugh>. But I was like, whatever, when in Rome. So I trusted, right? I'm like, okay, God would not have me in this place if I wasn't. So I go to this woman, this bright blonde haired woman with these gorgeous, bright blue aqua eyes and she cups my back and she gives me acupuncture and she opens my lungs almost instantaneously. And then she's like, Let me see your tongue.

Karith Foster ([43:21](#)):

I show her my tongue. She's like, Oh honey, how long are you here? I go, I'm here for two weeks. She goes, You need to see me every day that you're here. And so she gave me treatments every day that I was there that she could. And about day two or three, we just started really opening up to one another. And she's like, Where are you from? How did you get here? How did you get into the state of being? I said, Well, I'm from Texas. I went to school in Missouri. She goes, What school? I go, Oh, you've never heard of it. This tiny women's college in Columbia, Missouri. She goes, What school? I go, Steven's College. She goes, I went there. Really? I said, You went to St. Stevens. We go to the same school 30 years apart and we meet each other on the other side of the world.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That's amazing.

Karith Foster ([44:00](#)):

Isn't that crazy? Yeah. So then I start telling her, Look, I physically, I don't know what happened. I just know that I haven't been eating well. I'm in a really stressful job. I said, My boss is a jerk and mean my boyfriend's a jerk and mean. And I go, I don't get it. I'm the nicest person I know. And this is when she said, what she said to me that I will never reach. She goes, Sweetie, I hate to tell you this, but you're the constant. And I was so taken aback. My first thought was, I can't believe you just dare to say that to me. And then I thought, How dare you tell me that I'm part responsible for what's happening in my life,

Laura Cox Kaplan: ([44:41](#)):

<laugh>. Wow.

Karith Foster ([44:43](#)):

And that was like, I wish I could have said it. The heavens opened up and the angels started singing. But I heard what she said. It took a while to marinate. It took a month actually. She wasn't saying I was responsible for their behavior, but I was responsible for being there. And I had to own that. And that's what I did. And I also realized that while I was accusing them of being my abusers, and they were like, not to say they weren't, but I was also abusive to myself. I wasn't honoring myself. I didn't hold myself as worthy, which allowed those doors to be opened, those windows to be opened for those people to treat me the way that they did. That was a huge aha. That was the moment. That was an epiphany of even if he hadn't called me to tell me I quit or I, we were ending our arrangement or agreement, I probably would have found the strength to leave.

Karith Foster ([45:37](#)):

But right after there was an incident involving coincidentally, another Rutgers University student, a young man by the name of Tyler Clemente. He took his life by jumping off the George Washington Bridge because he had been outed by his roommate and some classmates who secretly recorded him in an intimate situation with another young man. And I remember hearing that story and it just breaking my heart because I thought nobody should feel that alone for whatever it is that they feel differentiates them from the status quo, whatever it is, their someone's ethnicity, their sexuality, their socioeconomic status, nobody should feel like they're that alone. What can I do to help? And that was the impetus for creating what was called stereotyped 1 0 1, but is now Inversity. And so that's how we came into this place. It was this desire to let people know that they're not alone. That we really are in this together and we have more in common than we don't. So to ever think that your only recourse is to take your own life because you're not feeling like you're belonging or part of something, if I could keep that from happening ever again, that was my goal.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(46:47\)](#):

I love that. What an amazing story. Wow.

EPISODE CLOSE

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Friend, I hate to cut the conversation off, but that concludes part one of my two part conversation with Karith Foster. You'll find part two in episode 219 where we'll pick up where we left off and we'll dive right into Karith's book. "You can be perfect or you can be happy." Karith shares lots more lessons that she learned the hard way. I think you're gonna love it. So be sure to check it out. Until then, I hope you found this investment in you worthwhile. And I would love to hear your feedback on this or any of our She said/She Said podcast episodes. Be sure to check out the show notes for this episode, Episode 218. You'll find those at She Said/She Said podcast.com. And there you'll also find a link to Karith's book and to The Policy Circle where Karith and I met.

I am grateful to you friend for joining me. And if you have a minute, please share some love in the form of a review on iTunes. I would be especially grateful for that too. Those reviews help me improve our content and give you a better product week over week. And it's what friends do! So I'd be really, really grateful.

Laura Cox Kaplan: [\(48:13\)](#):

Until next week, you take care.

She said, said podcast is produced weekly by she said, she said media.