

# Episode 53: How to build a racially inclusive business with Annie Gichuru

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Welcome to the Rachel Kurzyp show. I'm Rachel Kurzyp. And my mission is to help you build a business that supports your multi passionate lifestyle, create content with confidence and clarity, and launch profitable signature services and products. It is possible to blend who you are with what you do, and gain financial freedom while still making a positive contribution to the world. I have helped over 3000 people across my workshops and programs become respected and successful leaders and creators in their community. I know you have big dreams for your business in life. So are you ready to be seen and heard? In today's episode, I'll show you how to make it happen.

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In today's episode, I'm speaking with my good friend and mentor, Annie Gichuru and he is a founder of uplifting studios, a platform dedicated to supporting online business owners to build culturally and racially diverse, inclusive and equitable businesses. Annie has become a leading Diversity Equity and Inclusion coach and consultant for online entrepreneurs, most notable of which is her partnership with the beautiful you coaching academy where she supports trainees and coaches. She is deeply passionate about representation through a racial justice lens and combines her experience as an internationally certified life coach. Her love of storytelling and her extensive career as a human resource specialist to deliver represented a transformational online program, which has been described as a must for all business owners who are ready to build a culturally and racially diverse, inclusive and equitable business. And his grace, gentle spirit and passion for a racially equitable world is setting her apart in the coaching and personal development industry as a compassionate educator with an incredible space holding ability. And he has called Australia home for more than 20 years having relocated from Kenya. As an international student, she now lives in New South Wales with her husband and her two young children. Today, we are chatting about how you can create a racially inclusive business. And I just know that you're going to get so much from this conversation with Annie. So let's dive in. So Annie, I am so grateful to have you on the show today, because I just know my listeners and community are going to get so much from what you have to share. So to start us off, you know, we're obviously talking on the topic of having a racially inclusive business. But I would love to know in your words, because you always explained everything so eloquently. What does having a racially inclusive business mean to you? Like what how do you define it?

02:59

First of all, thank you so much for having me, Rach, I love you and love what you do. So just such a privilege to be here today. Thank you. When it comes to racial equity, and you know having a racially inclusive business, it means being able to serve people who are black, brown, indigenous and people of color. So as somebody who is potentially a white person, you in the West, and the women, the predominantly the women entrepreneurs that I support, they come to me because they are on the attracting and serving people who look like them and who sound like them. And wanting to do better

wanting to serve a collective of people from different backgrounds, but just do not know how to do that. And so when it comes to racial equity, you know, is really been able to serve people from all walks of life, all backgrounds, really, from a race perspective, they come from, you know, they're black, they're brown, they're indigenous, they're people of color, and being intentionally inclusive. And in many ways, it really does work to your advantage as a business owner because you're able to tap into other networks that you may not have known about. And this could be ideal clients who are ready to pay you for your services so that they can get better in whatever area that they are hoping to improve. So it is such a missed opportunity. I often find a love

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that you bring up the missed opportunity because it's something that I've definitely noticed in my own experience, and with my community because I think a lot of us which we'll get into later, trying to be more inclusive and not knowing how to do it. And we know that there's an opportunity there but not knowing how to navigate it and I think for a while there when we heard you know DDI it was very token me stake, like we've heard a lot in the corporate world. But now I think we're realising it's it shouldn't be tokenistic. And it's actually makes sense from a business perspective. And one thing that I love that you said was this term equity. So something that I loved about your program represented is that, obviously, it helped me define and put to words, so many of the topics, thoughts and feelings that I was having. But one that really stood out to me and I love the way that you express that is that we should actually be working towards equity, not equality. So would you mind defining for us the difference between equality and equity and why in your definition as well, you use the word equity?

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I'd absolutely love to do that. So the difference between equity and equality is equity is addressing people's needs from where they're at. So what opportunities are they missing? Or what access do they need, and it's based on their individual circumstances. And it's all about leveling the playing field based on individual circumstances, whereas equality is really trying to treat everyone the same. When you think about, you know, gender equality, women wanting to be treated the same as men, which is a great thing we want people to have equal or the same access. But the thing is, when you bring equality into the picture, we are not all the same. We have different needs, we have different setbacks and challenges. And when those things are not addressed, and we try and treat everybody the same, it just doesn't work. And this is where equity comes into play equity really tries to level the playing field for everyone so that we can get a fair access. So for when you think of perhaps a woman who is trying to climb up the corporate ladder, but she is potentially a mum, or she care, you know, she's a primary caregiver, maybe she's caring for aging parents, or somebody who is unwell. The time she spends in the office, the time she has to dedicate to her work might be quite different to her male counterpart, who's potentially able to be, you know, dedicate those 810 hours at work, whereas she's got to split her time, given the different the different circumstances that she has to face. And so when you bring equity into play, is saying, okay, what can we do to ensure that she is well supported? What child care support might she need? And might we need to take that into account? What kind of flexible working hours can we give her so that she's a best able to attend to that, and she's able to show up in in a different way, but still contribute in an impactful way? That's equity. And I think that's really what we need if we're going to move the dial forward.

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I love that definition. And thank you so much for using that example, because I think it's one that we can all relate to. And do you think perhaps we also, as small business owners, that's predominantly who's listening to this episode, need to also be thinking about how we can create more equity in our small businesses? Because I think some of the conversation, you know, why are you brought up rightly sorry, like, it's a missed opportunity. And I said, it's been quite tokenistic, do you think it is, because we're focusing on equality and not equity, and therefore not thinking about how we can be more supportive? Like you said, understanding someone's circumstances, hearing and seeing them, then putting things in place? Like, do you think we also need to be doing that in small business? And perhaps how can we do that

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100% We need to be doing this in our small businesses, for example, when I think of group programs, masterminds, where we bring everybody together, and everybody is potentially treated equally. But if you have black, Indigenous and People of Color in that cohort, in that group, they may have unique circumstances, unique barriers and challenges that they're facing, that are not helping them perhaps show up in their businesses the same way as their white peers. Are they having to deal with many, many other barriers that get in the way due to the color of their skin due to the kind of world that we live in where for them, theirs is a very different story. And so if we come into this containers, treating everybody the same and not giving them the individual We'll support equity here, the individual supports that they need to really rise up, then it becomes, it becomes really difficult. And you don't quite see those results, even when it comes to scholarship programs. You know, there's they've been so generously put out there but not really understanding what does it take to create a number one are a safe space or a brave space? And how can that be a successful program not just for you, as a person who has created that in a bid to provide some form of equality, but how can it be successful for scholarship recipient in terms of equity, I love that.

10:41

And as someone who has been trying to and will continue to do so, with scholarships, it's something that I've been thinking a lot about to where I do have people you know, who are neuro diverse, I have people with mental, who I work with who are experiencing or have mental illness, I work with people who are experiencing poverty, and I have worked with some clients who are more racially diverse. However, even with my own background, I'm realising there is so much more work that I need to do, as you said, to create equity and to create those brave spaces. And I think, understanding that it is something that really needs to be thought about and to learn and to get, say, expert help such as yourself that, you know, it's a lot to try and do on your own. I think it's great that we're all starting in the small business world to take these steps to be more inclusive. But I love that you bring up there that it's not about, you know, your intentions are great, but we still actually need to put that into practice. And so I would love to know, your thoughts on how perhaps to do you know, firstly to work through like the fear of getting it wrong, because I think a lot of us are wanting to do it, right. And it's something that I think about all of the time, and I know a lot of us are wanting to do these things, then perhaps realising we may have caused more harm or discomfort. And so I'd love to know what you your thoughts around this? Is it better for us to start and make mistakes and to try? Or is it better for us to wait and try and get everything right?

12:15

Oh, gosh, never wait and try and get everything right? Because you're never going to get everything right, I'm going to make mistakes as well as a DI coach, as a D AI educator, they're things that I'm going to get wrong as well. So this is not something where it's about 100% getting it right, I think it's being brave enough to want to be part of the conversation and want to be part of the change where you've reached a point where you feel this doesn't sit well with me, with the kind of human being I am with the values that I have in with the kind of business that I am running, that is steeped in integrity, it doesn't sit well with me. And I want to be part of this conversation and drawing your strength from that within yourself. And a good place to begin, I often say is consuming information in a way that feels natural for you. If you are a reader of books, then start there. For me, it's podcasts, I love podcasts just because of how accessible they are, and easily ready for me to consume them. And I can do it while I'm driving. While I'm doing you know, different tasks around the home whilst I'm doing my daily walk. It's so easy for me to fit that in. And so it's finding one of my already consuming and how can I include this aspect that is important to me. And that I can begin dipping my toe and having a little bit of understanding. Because even before we can begin to make changes within our business reach, it's really got to start from a personal perspective, you've really got to do that inner work. And what I often you know, refer to in my program represented is all about doing that personal audit. Where are you at, in this journey of DNI the unconscious bias that we all have, what has shaped the beliefs and the attitudes that we have perhaps around certain people, when we were growing up what we told about this group of people that has made us into the people that we are now but knowing better now and going like hang on that wasn't a truth. That was that was a dominant narrative that was told to us for some reason, and now I am getting a little bit more awareness and I want to do better and want to do things differently. Instead It starts in the safety of your home, dipping your toe into resources that you can consume easily. And then as you begin to do that, and you begin to do that inner work for yourself, by consuming that information, it gets to a point where you now want to get a little bit deeper into the work. And you want to ask questions your, you want to get more understanding, you want a guided path. And that's when I see a lot of business owners coming in and wanting to work and also wanting to be in a container in a space with other like minded business owners who want to have that transformation in their business who want to be intentionally inclusive. It's not a matter of performative activism, you know, where you're just doing it, because majority are the kind of posting of a black square and it ends there, and we never hear anything about it. But it is really working towards how do I embed this into my business? How do I as I have my business goals for 2021? Or 2022? How am I going to incorporate D AI as part of my business practice? And what I'm now seeing slowly emerging rage is business owners saying, How do I do this, we're coming to the end of the year, I want my 2022 to be markedly different from 2021, we're still in that growth phase or that kind of awareness phase. But how do I make sure that I am taking off some of the things that are important to me from a DI perspective, and just really having that plan that is very much tied to your small business goals as well.

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I love that, thank you so much for sharing that. And what I'm hearing is, it's about being intentional, and starts off with yourself, your values, and then you can apply it to your business and to actually seek support from experts in different fields and areas to enable that transformation and to support that transformation. I know for a lot of us in the past, maybe we haven't done that or not known how to do

that. And although, like you said, there has been a lot of performative conversations the last couple of years, I know that I'm definitely grateful for, you know, business owners and experts such as yourself to, you know, who have been sharing all the ways that we can do better for creating programs, such as yourself. And while I know, it's my responsibility to seek out those business owners, I'm just so grateful that you have all made yourself known because it's no longer an excuse now to say I can't find a leader, which a lot of us have in the past. And I have to admit myself, you know, I've looked around and I just haven't looked hard enough. And I feel like now there is definitely a space, particularly online business space where there are so many amazing business owners in all walks of life that you can be sharing, learning from, you know, in their spaces where they've given permission, obviously, to ask those questions, like you said, what I do want to share is because I get this question a lot specifically say if you do something and it becomes offensive or someone that's, you know, that it has, you know, upset them or isn't quite right, how, how should we best respond? And I'm talking here specifically, as a white woman, and for my white female listeners, how, how can we respond? So we're not doing what some of the celebrity entrepreneurs have so kindly showed us not to do? How can we make sure we're not causing any more harm? How can we admit our biases? How can we take ownership of our mistakes and then obviously, seek support to do better?

18:50

That's a good one, because it gets into the territory of calling in versus calling out. And I it all obviously, depends on the circumstance and what potentially has been said to cause the harm. But I have often found that those people who are less defensive and go like, I should have known better, I should have known better. I appreciate you calling me out or calling me in and this is an area for me to look deeper into. And I apologise, I apologise and thank you for bringing this to my attention and I will do better, I will do better I will educate myself and once you do that, once you come from a place of you know, retreating and not going back, you know, being defensive and being fragile should I say and bring in all sorts of things to be defensive people back down, because if somebody has already apologised and owned their mistake, you can't push them further down. And if you do, then that's just crossing another line. But once you sincerely apologised, and you know, said that you will do better, and you will take the steps to do better, I think that says a lot, that really, truly says a lot. And so if you're ever, you know, find yourself in that situation, that's a good first step to take the next step to take, find a DIY educator, who can talk you through what happened, who can help you get out of that potential judgment zone, that shame zone, where you're in, and you're like, I am never posting anything, again on social media, find somebody who can help you walk out of that. And I have been, you know, I have known a couple of women who I have supported like that. And right now, they are such activists in this work, and they don't even see it as such, but they are so front and center with what they are running in their spheres of influence where this work is such a priority and goes hand in hand with their business. But that's because they have owned their mistake, first and foremost, and made a public apology, and then sought, you know, help in education from a DIY educator, and being able to come on the other side, a lot, lot stronger.

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Thank you so much for sharing that. And as someone who's like, made my own share of mistakes, I've always come from that, that place, too. You know, he's saying that I'm going to do better to actually follow through with that action, which I think is so important. The second step you share, because I feel



like a lot of us are seeing celebrity entrepreneurs. And those bigger people make that public apology, but then not actually do the work and then make the same mistake. And I think we're all afraid we're going to do that. But the fact that we're having this conversation that everyone's listening to this podcast shows that we actually are being intentional, we're being conscious in our decisions that we truly care about this. And so I love everything that you share that because it shows that, you know, we don't often set out to be intentionally, you know, like disadvantaging people or making people feel upset, like not including them, we don't set out to do that. But because of the world in which we live in, and like you said, before the frameworks, how we've been brought up, we often see the world in our own color. And it's not until we start having these conversations. So I always say to my clients, you know, you often see things in like blue, and then you start to have conversations with people, and they come to you, and they're only seeing the world in yellow. And it's not until you have these conversations and really share those learnings and like you said, and create a brave space to have these conversations that you start seeing the world in, you know, green now. And you can only see the world in green, and he start to realise where you came from and where other people were coming. And I think, like you said, it takes a while to do that. But we have to be vulnerable sell ourselves, so to stay afraid. And like I said, I've been in those situations before and I know a lot of you listening want to take action but are afraid if you stay afraid you only stay seeing the world in blue. And that's just not where you want to be. So any Would you mind sharing? I know you've touched on so many amazing examples here today. But for say someone who doesn't know a DI specialist or is not able to say work with you, right in this immediate moment. And I hope that everyone checks out your program represented but what a three to five actions that my community, after listening to this episode can actually go and do like right now without needing someone or a program if that if they feel like that is a barrier right now.

24:05

All right, well, first and foremost, find that source that speaks to you. If it's a if you're a book reader, grab a book and I will share what kind of what books are good to start with, if it's podcasts, you know, tune into that if it's more of you, you're more into movies or TED talks or videos, there is that that you can tune into but that's a good place to start. The next thing is begin to look at your social media feed, have a look and see. How does it look like other people who are coming up just reflecting who you look like because I often say you will keep attracting the same kind of people you talk to the same kind of people you're attracting and serving will be the ones that keep coming back over and over but if you Want to serve a diverse group of people in particular, you know, black, brown indigenous people of color, you've got to expand your network. So have a look at your social media feed, and begin to see who can I connect with, who are some people who may have even aligned values with me that I can begin to follow and learn from them. And we've done a lot of learning, I learned so much from you reach on social media following you on Instagram. So it's just been able to have a look through and beginning to expand your network by looking for people who don't look like you, but on topics that you're interested in. So di, you know, hashtag di have a look through that, you know, diversity and inclusion, have a look through that, see the people who are coming up, and are the people who resonate with you as well. And that's a good place to start. And then as you begin to work on yourself personally, with finding what sources resonate with you, as you begin to expand your network, a good place would be I have a free PDF guide, which is all about being a genuine ally, and advocate for people of color. And it's 10 practical steps that you can begin to take right away that speak to a whole host of different things. And that's free, and it's available, it's a good place to start.

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Thank you. And I'll definitely share a link to that in the shownotes. Because something that I've learnt through working with you and speaking to you is that we can take like you said small, simple, accessible steps like listening to a podcast, doing a book downloading your guide. And we don't have to let say things like time or money stops us from taking action, I hear that a lot. And I will pull out that as sometimes that is a bit of an excuse. And again, I've been there we all have. But you know if things such as like wanting to join a program or money, you know, is stopping you. There are so many ways that you can start to make to make these changes. And I feel like you know, I think you mentioned earlier that particularly as you know software businesses, as people who care about these things, we want to change the world. And we want to suddenly wake up one day and have learned everything to be so inclusive. And I think we need to realise that this is a lifelong journey. And it's something that you always remind us, obviously with kindness and compassion that and like you say you share often. And I thank you for that, you know that you're still unlearning. And so we were all in this journey together. And so instead of saying I need to achieve x and then becoming overwhelmed, because it's simply not possible to start off simple and to really, like you said, embed some of these changes in our business so that the sustainable we can really show up how we want to be and to call in all of these amazing other business owners and people in our community that we want to serve, as you said, you know, in our businesses and to have these conversations so we can start to see the world differently. So to wrap up, I would love to know, what do you want listeners to think feel? Or do about racial inclusivity? In their business? Like what is the one thing you want them to take away from this episode?

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That when it comes to racial equity, being inclusive, it is not somebody else's responsibility. It is actually our own individual responsibility. It's about saying that enough is enough. And it ends with me. Because a lot of times we feel this is to bigger subject. This is this is political, even, it has nothing to do with me. I'm just here over on this corner, just running my small business. I mean, this doesn't affect me, or I don't want it to affect me and my clients. But the truth is, we live in a world that caters or has people from all sorts of different backgrounds, people who are different colors and shapes. And in order for us to operate from a heart led place, we need to be able to cater to different people. And so we can't be silent about this because it's not a political issue. It's actually a human issue. And so know that within yourself, you have the power and the authority to address this and it can start with as little as simply educating yourself in the safety and confines of your home. It doesn't have to be difficult, and most importantly, is that this work can be done with grace this work can be done with kindness, and with love. It's not all about being called out. It's not all about operating with fear and making mistakes and potentially causing harm. This work can truly be done in such a mindful way that connects us as human beings, and allows us to see each other for truly who we are. This work can be done in a way that brings about love.

30:27

Thank you so much. And you're always so amazing to listen to like, I think I could listen to you for hours and hours. So thank you so much for calling us in with love and for sharing your story, insights and wisdom. I'm forever grateful for the work that you're doing and the program presented that you created. So thank you so much for coming on the show. Thanks. Great. Thanks so much for tuning into today's

episode. If you found what I've shared valuable, please leave a review and hit the subscribe button so you don't miss when a new episode drops every Wednesday.