

Liz Wiltsie: Becoming Sustainably Human At Work isn't a small undertaking. It often means letting go of systems and behaviors that don't serve us individually or collectively. So what do we do as individuals, as groups of folks, as leaders? How do we carve out space for our humanity while making sure we're not the only ones? How do we thrive in the workplace while not imagining we have to be superhuman? How do we cultivate spaces that are generative and healing, creative and extraordinary? I don't have the answers to those questions, and to be fair, I don't believe one human can ever have all the answers to those questions. I'm working through them every day.

This podcast is an invitation, an invitation for you to join me on my quest. I've asked my teachers to share their wisdom with you, and here we are. This is *Sustainably Human At Work*, and I'm Liz Wiltsie.

I'm so excited to welcome Toi Marie as she's been a teacher of mine for a long time, so thank you for being here!

Toi Marie Smith: Aww, that means a lot, Liz. Thank you. Thank you for asking me and having me.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah, so Toi, you run a community called Business For The People. I'd love to talk about what it means to be sustainable in a capitalist universe, and what you've seen, kind of, in your travels trying to both run your business and support others doing the same.

Toi Marie Smith: I want to say, I don't know if we're able to be sustainable in capitalism, right? So they sell us this notion that we can. It's sustainable for us, it's sustainable for the environment, it's sustainable for all parties, and it's really not, and we see that now. Through the pandemic, for those who had maybe not been studying any of this or really looking or choosing to look at this, the pandemic has opened the eyes of so many people to be like wait, what have we been participating in? What have we been sold as sustainable but really is eroding us, our world, our connections, our relationships, and all the things. So I don't think, you know, capitalism is sustainable, but I think what we can do is once we have our eyes open now so we see the things, we can't unsee them, right? So we have to grapple with what that means.

For me, in my work, it means that we tell the truth and then we try to move a different way. So it, essentially, means being curious, and it means being open to not having the answers and trying to remember a different kind of way of existing in our bodies, with the land, with relationships, and, of course, at work. I think one of the things is, you know, right now, if you look online, on social media, even in a lot of our conversations, business and capitalism and wealth, these conversations are just everywhere. It is the conversation. That's all people really talk about. How do you build a business? Are you an entrepreneur? Do you need to make millions? Capitalism has, essentially, infiltrated our language. And so, if it's in our language so much, then it becomes the norm because we're talking — we talk like business even when it's not. Like in our relationships we talk like business.

And so, in my work, even in Business For The People and in that space, what we try to do is bring the humanity back to everything. Like, what is at the root of us desiring to have this kind of offering or have this kind of work or this kind of business? What is it really trying to sustain or build? Are we building something because we financially need to be taken care of, or is it, in comparison, to what we've been sold as what we need to do, right? So have we been marketed to so much that we think we desire millions when we really don't? And so, we uncover and look at these questions and then look at what that intersection is and then how do we create and become that point?

Liz Wiltsie: Mm-hmm. Yes! [Laughs]

Toi Marie Smith: [Laughs]

Liz Wiltsie: So one of the things that I try to make sure we talk about is if someone comes to you and says, "Toi, capitalism just feels so big. It all feels so big." What are the first — and I know you said, you know, we tell the truth, try to move, get curious. If someone were in just their regular life in their workplace, what would you say to them in terms of here's a little thing you can do or start doing that's just a little bit different?

Toi Marie Smith: That's such an amazing question, and I've actually been, like, thinking about this a lot because when you think about or hear "capitalism," people are like what does that word even mean? Especially now, because so many people are talking about it, but if you really are, like, an average person who isn't teaching about this or needing to learn about it, you just are trying to live, you're like what does that — it means nothing to me. But what I like to say is capitalism is more than an economics system, right? People just think that they don't need to know about it because it's something you learn in college and maybe you read a book about it, but essentially, capitalism is a practice. We practice capitalism every day, everywhere, in our bodies, in our relationships, in all of the things.

So I like to remind people that it's beyond an economics system, and so if you stop looking at it that way and start to look at it as a spell the we're under — and I want to credit my friend, [Jen Lemen](#), for always going back to reminding me that capitalism is a spell that we've been indoctrinated, assimilated, conditioned to believe is a way of being. So I always suggest people to just be curious around what are your capitalist practices right now that maybe are in your world right now? How do we navigate relationships? Are we only dating someone because they have money, right? Are we only taking jobs because they're gonna give us a level of success and then get us a class status? That falls into capitalism, right? How are we showing up in our families and our relationships. All of these things play into capitalism.

Liz Wiltsie: It feels like so often we're told that if we don't have the answer there's something wrong with us.

Toi Marie Smith: Mm-hmm.

Liz Wiltsie: And so, like, that curiosity is something that we have to build access to, right?

Toi Marie Smith: Yes.

Liz Wiltsie: What helps you — I mean, because when you teach, you're like I am a perpetual learner. I am constantly learning these things. How do you, kind of, stay in that mind space?

Toi Marie Smith: Hmm, I think because I have seen the benefits of what learning and excavation have done for me, not just in my mind, but tangibly in my relationships. Like my relationship with myself, with my body, with how I mother, so I'm curious to interrogate, really, what I've been taught to believe as true. I think, if we think about critical thinkers of, like, not just taking things for face value, but really being like do I believe that thing? Does that really resonate, and is that true for me?

I think a lot of times, you know, we grow up a certain kind of way in a family in a location. So family, religion, our culture, really, has us believe one thing, and if you start to interrogate that, sometimes you can feel like oh, damn, I'm gonna lose everything because my world view is gonna shift. That can be scary. I will say that there's a level of severance that has to happen when you start unlearning so much of these things, right? You just start doing life differently. You start believing things differently. And so, for me, the learning has really helped me to be more in body and to withstand when there are certain severances that have to or have had to happen. It's not easy, and there is grief there. I think that some things that we don't see (like if you're scrolling on social media) around, like, you need to change your thoughts and believe these things, and that's hard, right? If that means you're gonna lose family, if that means you're gonna lose friends, you can't go to that place anymore. That is a whole identity shift.

And so, because I've been doing this for so long, like, just really unpacking what it means to be me, what it means to be in my intersection in this world, I have a capacity for it. But, honestly, you have to build up a capacity, and that's what the learning has been for me, to, like, read these books and then be in conversation with my beloveds and be like okay, all right, this is a new thought for me, are you still gonna love me and be with me? I think being able to find people who say yes to that, who are maybe on the same journey, has been helpful.

Liz Wiltsie: Mm-hmm. I have said to people that it really only takes one person to reflect back to you that they'll still love you if you go in a space. We think it's, like, 15, and it's not.

Toi Marie Smith: No. No, because who has time to have 15 deep relationships?

Liz Wiltsie: Oh, no. [Laughs]

Toi Marie Smith: No, we're talking too much. Can't do it. [Laughs]

Liz Wiltsie: Well, and you and I were talking a little bit about the liberatory imagination. Do you want to say more about how that factors in for you?

Toi Marie Smith: Yeah, I want to credit [Sonya Renee Taylor](#) because I heard her say this on an IG live that she did a couple of weeks ago around things like, specifically, capitalism. We think it doesn't have a root or a beginning. We think that it's just existed, and this is the way it's always been. This is why history becomes hella important, because we can look back and track when things pivoted and when things shifted into this mode of being. And so, if we don't have the root, we're like there's no other way. We can't see another way, but if we can look back and be like what were they doing, how did they exist before this — now, was it perfect? No, and I think that's the tricky part, not romanticizing how it was before, but looking back and being like okay, this was the journey. What here can we pull and take with us on this journey of, like, liberatory imagination, and when I'm speaking about that, I mean, how do we really get free? We're really in a war for our minds and our imagination and our consciousness. What we believe is really important, so being able to imagine and be curious is how we birth new worlds, then having people be like do you want to try this thing with me? Do you want to see if we can do it and collaborate? Then okay, this can be a small space of where we're seeing it possible. Then, we can move out and maybe invite more people in.

Essentially, that is what Business For The People is. It's a space for me to welcome in people who are questioning and being like all right, what's here, what's possible? Let's explore. So it's all about exploration, and kids — I have four boys — my sons are still really curious, and because they're not so much indoctrinated into capitalism, they're not working, they're not doing any of those things, we lose that. And so, I think it's a reclamation that we have to get to, to be curious and imagine.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah, so my last question for you is what are you grappling with?

Toi Marie Smith: Oh, so many things. I think one of the real big things that I've been speaking to beloveds about is love inside of these systems and what it looks like when you have certain values, when you have certain perspectives, what does that mean in our love relationships, in our intimacy, and how much do we hold to our values when someone has different values than us and they're completely different from the perspectives that we have? Are we able to still be in love with them and love them deeply and have intimacy, or are we being hypocritical, and how much of that do we need to hold and navigate? I think, because there's such binary thinking. I'm pushing against that and trying to be like what does it look like to be in love and in relationships with my eyes wide open and knowing so much of what's possible with these systems.

Liz Wiltsie: Yeah.

Toi Marie Smith: Yeah.

Liz Wiltsie: Toi, thank you so much for being with me. I appreciate it so much.

Toi Marie Smith: Thank you for having me. That was amazing! [Laughs]

Liz Wiltsie: Full show notes for this and every episode are available at www.futureproofskillslab.com/podcast. You'll find a transcript there, as well as links to everything we talked about, plus links to all the ways to connect with Toi Marie.

In this episode, you heard Toi talk about the idea of this spell of capitalism. You can find information about the year-long container she holds with Jen Lemen at www.spellofcapitalism.com. I've mentioned it before, and I'll mention it again, Toi's regular newsletter is one of the few emails I make sure to read. You can find that link in the show notes. Thanks for listening!