

What Scholar's Voice Means to Me with Gina Robinson [Episode...

Thu, Feb 16, 2023 4:55PM 19:33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

voice, academia, clients, podcast, scholars, people, writing, retreats, coaches, faculty, non binary, world, amplify, company, important, feel, institution, find, programs, mindset

SPEAKERS

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Gina Robinson 00:02

Welcome to the academic writing amplified podcast. On this podcast, we believe that the culture of academia needs to change radically. Women and non binary people are revolutionising academia within institutions that were not built for us. If you're ready to reject the culture of overwork, kick, guilt and overwhelm to the curb, and amplify your voice to make a real impact on your field, without breaking down, or burning out, you're in the right place. With our team of experienced writing coaches, as CO hosts will share insights and talk to inspiring guests to bring you the practical strategies, systems and mindset shifts. You need to find time to write, publish work you love, and design your career on your terms. And it all starts with writing. Let's go. Hi, and welcome to another episode of academic writing amplified. My name is Gina. And I'm one of the coaches that scholars voice. I work with women and non binary scholars inside our high touch coaching programs like amplify and elevate and our signature program navigate. And simply put my job is to help clients get their writing published in a healthy and sustainable way. And today's episode is really about this name, this new names caller's voice, and what it means to me as a coach and someone who's been with the company for quite a while now. So I really want to start. Before even telling this story, I want to note that this change really represents years and years of growth, and iterations behind the scenes. And so first, I want to thank all of the clients who have been with us from the beginning as we tried out new things and made mistakes and changes and ultimately learned really important lessons. And I also really would like you to sort of reflect back on yourself for a moment and use this change this name change to highlight the fact that change takes time. So change needs to brew or simmer or cure, cook, whatever your your metaphor is. And that process is rarely visible to those around us. And honestly, we might not see it ourselves. And so I hope that this name reveal reminds you that you may also have big things coming that you don't know about yet. So these exciting changes take time, they take patience, and most importantly, they take self trust. So after this podcast is over, you might want to take a minute and ask yourself, what do I have brewing within myself. And you might be surprised at what you find. So on to the main topic of this episode, which is really my absolute excitement about this need and change. I love this new name. And I'm going to start with the word scholar, of course. And this word really resonates with me, because we conceived of it as a really inclusive

term that maybe could like cut through some of the hierarchy and separation and isolation that academia promotes. And now to get into a little bit of history. When Kathy started the company. And when I came on board, we were really centering the American tenure track system because that was more or less what we knew about. But as the company grew, and we got more and more clients, they became more diverse. We realized we had people working outside of the US we had people working in institutions that either didn't have tenure, or didn't call it tenure, people in non university research positions. We've even had people in libraries and government agencies. And really like if we were to resist change, which is something that you know, sometimes we want to do, it's a little bit scary. But we saw that if we didn't change if we continued to view, success and progress using the traditional American terms, that we would continue to perpetuate this academic mindset that we are actually trying to change. And so I want you to think about it like this. There will always be programs and coaches that tell you that you need to get tenure, and they will help you get it. And there will always be programs that tell you what you need, and promise to get you there. And we intentionally really consciously decided that we didn't want to be that. We want to be a company where we find out where you really want to go. We help you think about where you want to be And then we help you get there. And on a more personal note, this sense of inclusion is really important. You know, as coaches, we bring our own experience and background to the work. And so my story of feeling like I didn't fit in, in academia has definitely influenced all of the coaching that I've done. And as a woman of color, I'm also a first generation college student, I come from a working class background. So, you know, when I was thinking about going into academia, I didn't see a lot of role models. And, you know, when I was in graduate school, and as a professor, I never really felt like I belong, even with all of my credentials, no matter what, outside support, or, or approval that I got it, I just really was never going to feel like I was part of this culture. And that, like that sense of outsider pneus, and that need to quickly learn the rules that everybody else already seemed to know. That was a tension that really followed me through my whole career and always felt kind of unresolved as a professor. And then, of course, when I left academia, titles became this even more stressful, you know, do I put PhD on my email signature, even if I'm not a professor, and therefore not using it, I'm not going to share all of the anxieties that I went through, because that would be a very long podcast. But, you know, it's really, really important for us to be thinking about all of the weight that these titles carry with them. And so in my coaching, I often get, actually, I get the Who am I question all the time, who am I to write a book, who am I to receive an NIH grant, or become a research chair, we are not trained in any way to look at our past efforts and milestones, and celebrate them as successes. So within this mindset, this kind of never enough mindset, no matter how much amazing work we do. And no matter how amazing the work is, we will always feel like imposters and fakes. And as a side note, our clients have actually done all of these things that I just mentioned, and other really amazing things. And I coached them through the process each time. And without fail, these clients started out sure that they did not measure up. And what they did was they put their feelings first, because we've really been conditioned to do that in some kind of like misguided attempt at self improvement. And they also they forgot about all of their hard work. And they zeroed in on every mistake that they've ever made. And this is great in like wilderness life or death survival situations. But really, that kind of mindset doesn't belong in your head when you're writing an application letter. So to bring it all together, the word scholars really unites us as a community separate from titles and awards and all the baggage that they carry. And we get to build a real community that is both safe and supportive. And we get to use this sense of outsider Ness, this sense of otherness, this sense of who am I, to actually connect to each other. And this, what's our clients become very authentic and vulnerable with each other. And honestly, if there is any kind of potion, any kind of silver bullet to emotional and professional growth, that would be it, sharing their fears, concerns, needs, and wants, not just with me, but with each other. So we're all really aware of how

isolating academia can be. And especially so for anyone who doesn't fit into any kind of traditional mold. So, you know, if you've tried to connect with colleagues at your own institution, those relationships might feel inherently unsafe and competitive. And really, it's your job to take a look outside of those spaces, to find places where you can really feel safe and supported. as kind of an aside, and maybe a little personal note, I'm a big fan of science fiction. And I really love the whole concept of world building. And I'm going to take that term and I'm going to use it because I feel like it's really appropriate here. We're building a world that we get to shape intentionally. And my favorite part of this world is that we will never shut down an idea because I'm really using quotations here. That's not how we've done it in the past. I've heard that phrase so many times. And it really has felt like the hallmark of academia. This common sense belief, oh, again, I'm using my quotation marks common sense belief that there is only one way to do something, and that the well being of faculty, and maybe even students is not as important as maintaining structure, and tradition. So the concept of world building also means that as a coach, as an employee of the company, I get to take care of myself, I took some time off when I was sick, we take a sabbatical in the summer, to really give ourselves a break and rest and do that restoration work. And also, I get to stay true to my mission and values and choose work and follow work that is really aligned with those things. And I am here to say, this is very, very important. This is how work should be. This isn't an ideal, this is really something that we should be working for all the time. I want my work life to be a model for my clients, because we really kind of deserve to be seen as human beings, and not part of the machinery. And so I know, it sometimes feels like a small thing. But it really does start with one person speaking up and saying, I need more than this, this idea of speaking up and asking for what you need, that's what we're going to move into the voice part of scholars voice. So this community of outsiders and non traditional scholars, is really the start. So we've got this inclusive, authentic space, that will be the clients jumping off point, it's going to be your jumping off point to have your voice heard. So again, personal story, I have to admit that I was terrified to do podcast D stuff, I have never really liked my voice all that much. And the first few times we tried to do podcast, when we would start recording, I would get so anxious, maybe even getting anxious telling you the story. But the thing is, the world actually needs my like vocal fry, and my arms and likes. They don't need those things necessarily. But those things come as part of the package. And that's fine. I've gotten a little bit more comfortable with podcasting. But really, I had to push through the first few episodes by reminding myself that my voice, and more importantly, my message is worth hearing. And that's where scholars voice and way back when we were Kathy Mays ack, the company was founded on the idea that we need a more diversity of voices, we need more marginalized voices, we need more female and non binary voices. Because those are the ones that are going to transform academia into something that actually represents the people in it. And I don't know that anyone will argue with me that we've been inundated with male voices, they're our authority is they're the people we listen to on, you know, we watch on TV, and we listen to on the radio, there are chairs, and our Dean's and our presidents. And they are the ones making the rules. They're the ones who established institutional culture. And I can tell you that they are all scrambling to keep the status quo. And up to this point, they've really never had the experience of someone questioning them, or refuting their arguments. As I was putting together this podcast, I had a one on one with a client who was dealing with this issue. But in terms of teaching, and I thought it would be really interesting to think about that for a moment. Because teaching is when all of our marginalized identities seemed to light up like neon. And we can get very nervous about this idea of being the expert, or the authority in front of a group of people. And this is exactly where we need to find our voices and use them. And I say it like it's not difficult to know. But it is and it's gonna take a while, right? So the voice part of scholars voice is really about learning to embrace those identities. And knowing that for a lot of us, our very existence within academia isn't inspiring to a lot of other people. So in the company, and

as a coach, I work to bring out those voices on our clients. And that could be by publishing an article or an academic book, finding a new position, going on a podcast to promote their work, or maybe just speaking up for themselves in a faculty meeting. Because we know that our voices have been ignored and criticized and censored and even self censored and We know that that has to change. So, scholars voice, to me really feels like a long term collective action. We're embracing our whole selves, acknowledging that we are humans with wants and needs, even outside of work, and then expressing those wants and needs, in an effort to make our work lives better. Oh, it's also about getting comfortable with taking up time and space. This is a really big deal to me, we start a lot of our calls with a round of weekly mittens. And I love the kind of transformation that clients go through. Because a lot of people start out not wanting to talk about themselves not being used to talking about themselves, feeling like they're taking time away from other people, or really just not even liking hearing their own voice. And I feel like it's a real mirror to how we've been taught to be in this world. So in that process, even of just giving ourselves time to talk about our wins for the week, clients learn that, yes, they can take time to express themselves fully, they don't have to say really quick anymore, they can expect that this group of people will listen patiently and respond positively. And honestly, it's a really big milestone to be able to recognize who you are, and express yourself without fear or shame. And I'm really happy to say that it's happened in every program, I've been a part of here. And one of the things we talk about in our programs and amplify and elevate and navigate. And even in our faculty retreats, we talk about aligning your work with your mission and values. And again, I think that scholars voice is really about embodying that we believe in the work we're doing. I know that the world would be better with your voice and your wisdom out there. Even if I don't know you, I believe that the world will be better with your voice and your wisdom out there. And that this work is the path to a better way to do academia. And I also feel really fortunate to do this work because it's long overdue. So the Chronicle of Higher Education just published some numbers that are kind of painful, but unsurprising. So in 2019 34%, of female faculty reported feeling stressed. And by 2020, that number was 75%, of female faculty. And we know anecdotally, and now, you know, now through these numbers, the pandemic has affected women disproportionately, yeah, there isn't a lot that universities are doing about it. And so that's actually why we've created our faculty development retreats, so you and the rest of your colleagues can work together to come up with ways to make the faculty experience better for everyone at your institution. And those retreats can be either in person, which would be really super cool, or virtual, which is still really good. But either way, we get to see your faces, and you get to work with us. So if you've been listening to the podcast, and really resonating with all of these things, and wondering how to get involved, and maybe you're not able to do navigate, or any of our high touch programs, download our university retreats brochure, it'll be in the show notes, and share with your decision makers on campus because this is a message that needs to be heard everywhere. So thank you so much for listening today. And if you enjoy the podcast, recommend it to a colleague. So let's see if we can change academia together, one scholars voice at a time. Have a wonderful day. Thank you so much for spending your valuable time supporting yourself and your writing by listening to this episode. If you like what you heard today, the best way to say thank you is to hop on over to Apple iTunes and write an honest review. The more reviews the more amazing academic women and non binary people will find this podcast so go write one now.