

Julia Winston:

Take a look around, you'll notice them everywhere. Facilitators, people who guide other people, create connection, and make tough things easier. This is Facilitator Forum, where we meet a magical mix of people who offer us insights and inspiration through the stories of their work in the world. I'm your host, Julia Winston. Welcome.

Julia Winston:

Hey everyone. Just to give you a sense of what we are in for right now, allow me to introduce Eduardo Placer, through his answer to the first question I asked him.

Julia Winston:

So let's just start with the punchline. If you had to boil it down, what are you here to facilitate?

Eduardo Placer:

It's such a great question, and the flash, the impulse of what emerged was the truth.

Julia Winston:

Whoa.

Eduardo Placer:

That's it. It was like, that's it. I'm here to facilitate the truth.

Julia Winston:

Buckle up. I went into this conversation with Eduardo thinking we were going to talk about public speaking facilitation, but we went so much deeper. Eduardo Placer is a story doula, international public speaking coach, and founder and CEO of Fearless Communicators. Eduardo was a professional actor for 15 years, performing in musicals and plays all over the country, and he brings a lot of his expertise from the theater into his work.

Julia Winston:

When I met Eduardo, I watched him lead a group of international leaders spontaneously turn a hotel ballroom into a Disney sing-along, and I fell in facilitator love. Eduardo makes me laugh, he makes me cry, and in this conversation, he straight up blew my mind. So back to the truth.

Eduardo Placer:

So I'm called to facilitate the truth because that is what I have been healing my entire life. I've just had a long time of struggle with it. So, because I struggle with it, I can be present to other people who are struggling with it, and help to ease their struggle.

Julia Winston:

What is the truth you've struggled with the most?

Eduardo Placer:

The true of who I am. So I wish that it doesn't come in like 1970s story of a gay boy growing up in Miami, Florida, but that's it.

Julia Winston:

Oh, we want to hear that story.

Eduardo Placer:

We want to hear that story.

Julia Winston:

Tell us that story, please?

Eduardo Placer:

So I am the proud child of Cuban immigrants in Miami, Florida, and there was something about little Eddie that was not like the other little boys around. So I have an identical twin brother whose name is Javier, and when he played with his G.I. Joes, he played war and I played war the musical.

Eduardo Placer:

And I didn't want to be in some superhero movie. I desperately wanted there to be an Annie sequel, because Annie desperately needed a little brother, and I just couldn't understand that. And at night, it's not like I was wishing for a new G.I. Joe. It was not like I was wishing for tickets to the World Series or for some type of football, the Super Bowl.

Eduardo Placer:

I was wishing and praying for sound of music action figures, and I couldn't believe that I could go to a Toys "R" Us or like a Lionel's Playworld in Miami, Florida, and nowhere could I find action figures to the sound of music. How could people not want a little Friedrich or a little Fritz, or a little Louisa, or a little [inaudible 00:03:46], or a Mother Superior of all action figures to sing Climb Every Mountain?

Eduardo Placer:

And there was a moment where that truth existed just as an expression, until the environment around me told me that, that was wrong, and what I had to do was hide it. And it's interesting that now, as I find myself as a public speaking coach, as a story doula, as a founder of my business, is that really, what I'm doing is unpacking all the ways in which people have been told that the truth of who they are is wrong, or the truth of their experience is something that is shameful, or the truth is something that nobody wants to hear. And there is no greater medicine than the truth.

Julia Winston:

What does that medicine heal for us?

Eduardo Placer:

I think it's trauma. It's interesting that we are taught, "Do not tell a lie," and yet every coating that we get is, "Lie. Don't tell the truth."

Julia Winston:

"Perform, be someone you're not. Be something you're not."

Eduardo Placer:

[crosstalk 00:05:04] "Don't tell anyone you did that. Don't tell anyone you said that."

Julia Winston:

"Don't show them who you are."

Eduardo Placer:

"Don't show them who you are." The truth is healing and the truth is liberating. And I think the question is where do you tell it, and where do you share it?

Julia Winston:

And I know that your work in the world is all about helping people speak their truth publicly. Tell us a little bit about Fearless Communicators?

Eduardo Placer:

So Fearless Communicators, we are a diverse, inclusive, public speaking coaching business, and we work with emergent and accomplished thought leaders on and what they say and how they say it. So we work on content creation and delivery, and there're several things to unpack. One, I believe that the way we teach leadership and the way we teach speaking is as performance of straight White male, cisgender power.

Eduardo Placer:

So there are all these ways in which we have been macro and micro forced into performance, and performance of power, performance of success, performance of professional, performance of learned, intelligent, smart, and the ways that we locate it ourselves in that model, and how close do I look, sound, feel into that, and what moves mountains always is the truth.

Eduardo Placer:

And there's a program that I've been running. We've now done it 22 times all over the world. It's called Fearless Force Public Speaking For Visionary Women Leaders. And in that program, we had over 120 women participate. 46% of them are diverse, and what's fascinating is when they arrive, there's what I want to say, and there's what my heart wants to say. There's what my brain wants to say, what my mind wants to say, what my pocketbook wants to say, and then there's the truth. And inevitably, the truth always emerges.

Julia Winston:

And what are some of the truths that you see emerging through this work?

Eduardo Placer:

The idea was like I want to work with women and I want to work with them on their storytelling, and I'm looking at platforms and it's very male dominated, and we need more women's stories, et cetera. What I

noticed in the healing work with women, one, is that I believe that male homophobia is misogyny, meaning we don't have issues with gayness. There are issues with gayness, but the big issue is with femininity.

Eduardo Placer:

It is boys who perform feminine, or anyone who performs feminine. In patriarchal structures, that is like the death knell. It is silly, not to be taken serious, and think about how we think about high pitch voices or sounding like a girl in a professional context, for women and for men. That all of that is like, it's unprofessional, it's diminished, it's young, it's apologetic. There are all these ways in which we are looking to take the feminine out of the spaces to perform masculine or male power.

Eduardo Placer:

The truth is we're all at war with a feminine. We are all sexist. The world is sexist. Let's acknowledge that those structures exist and men, women, non-binary, trans, everyone, because that is the water that we're swimming in, are in some navigation of that, just like I am in relationship to my own internalized homophobia.

Eduardo Placer:

That is the truth of my existence. The world is homophobic. I was raised in a homophobic home. My homophobia manifests itself, even the word manifests itself, as misogyny.

Julia Winston:

Yeah.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah, right? So it is the self-loathing that I have is around my performed femininity. That was what was edited, the pitch of my voice, the quality of sound, what my interests were. I was called girl before I was called sissy, before I was called fag. It's like before they had the words for that, the weapon was girl, because there was nothing worse for me to be than a girl.

Julia Winston:

I'm profoundly struck by so many things that you're saying right now, and it is also connecting me to my own journey of my own internalized misogyny.

Eduardo Placer:

Great.

Julia Winston:

Because I worked in finance for a handful of years, and my hope and my intention when I started that work was to be my true self in this space of White dominant sort of patriarchal norms. And I noticed over the years, I noticed these layers growing over my femininity, this shell that I needed to preserve and strengthen, and fortify, and thicken in order to succeed in that world.

Julia Winston:

And for the last few years, I've been unwinding from that. And you as a facilitator of that truth of who we are, you make it impossible not to see it.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

I know that because I've participated in your programs. It's like you hold up a mirror just by being you, and yet you hold up a mirror that people love what they see when they look inside.

Eduardo Placer:

And ideally, it allows the space for them to step into them. I don't need anyone to perform me. I've got it handled, and I'm always in the continued uncovering and allowance of the truth, my own truth to emerge.

Julia Winston:

Eduardo, so we're talking about something that pretty much everyone on the planet struggles with, which is becoming who we really are.

Eduardo Placer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Julia Winston:

That requires a level of courage. It requires a level of self-acceptance and self love that is very difficult to obtain, to access. How have you found that? Give us a little bit of a sense of your journey of self-acceptance and of self love? Because you can only hold this container for us if you yourself have experienced that, or allow yourself to experience that. What does that mean for you?

Eduardo Placer:

Well, I think one, is you can't do it alone. This isn't a private journey. I think that you need support, and I think that there were things that were mirrored to me or shared with me, or programs, or workshops, facilitators, that created the space that allowed me to be with that truth.

Eduardo Placer:

And I would say that there was a lot of suffering before that. I would say it really wasn't until my mid-30s that I participated in a program, it's a transformational program called Landmark Worldwide. And I did this form, and what I got in that program was that I had this belief system, this core belief system that shaped my life, which told me that I made up, that I decided, that I was a failure. And that, that failure was not anything that I did. It was who I was.

Eduardo Placer:

So the failure, the very existence of my homosexuality, my being gay was a failure. And that the very nature, there's nothing I could do about it. There was no A that I could get. There was no athletic medal

that I could get. Even though I tried, none of that achieving, none of those external validations could cover the truth that who I was in essence was wrong.

Eduardo Placer:

And I think that, that truth exists in many stories. That could be someone who has a differing ability, someone who may be dyslexic, or someone who may be obese. And then they're the things that we see and the things that we don't see, that have people in some relationship, that the very essence of who I am is failure.

Eduardo Placer:

And for me, what I had to get responsible for was that nobody told me that. That is a belief that I created for myself, and that I could create a new meaning, and so I gave it up. And it's not like I gave it up and it's poof, gone. It's like, I am constantly giving it up and the bigger the work gets, the bigger the opportunities get, the bigger the fear, the bigger the relationship to who I am as a failure, people are going to see the truth because my whole healing is that once people see the truth, no one's going to love me.

Eduardo Placer:

My parents, my community, my family, my siblings, initially in that nuclear context, but then if you expand, it's like the world, my friends, my colleagues, that the truth, the closer I keep it, the more control I have. And the truth is that you can't control it. The truth is always there, and odds are people know it, because we can feel it. We know when someone's lying.

Julia Winston:

So you lead with the truth now?

Eduardo Placer:

Always, everywhere, and it's hard. And I travel in places and I do facilitate in places in the world where I fear that the truth is unsafe, and what's so powerful is that I'm proven wrong, that the truth is held, and it's actually liberating. And I think other people see and feel into their own truth.

Julia Winston:

Eduardo, you continue to travel the world, work with groups, and be your true self, truly, truly. And with each time you do that, you give permission to everyone else around you to be themselves.

Eduardo Placer:

Thank you. I receive that. That didn't feel like a question that felt like [crosstalk 00:15:33]

Julia Winston:

It wasn't. It was very observation. It was just like, "Damn, this person's really doing that," because I think that's what a good facilitator does. And I think it's a very bold and courageous position to be in, to put yourself in because you're on stage being yourself. And that's the difference between being an actor and being a facilitator.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah. And I feel like the... I think part of facilitation is also modeling and allowing. So I think that there's facilitation and then there's force.

Julia Winston:

Oh, oh yeah. Yeah.

Eduardo Placer:

And it's not the force. I think in some ways, what I see my role as a facilitator is there're some ingredients that I mix into a pot, a container. And then you have to dance with what emerges, and then you move, shift, morph. You are in response to what emerges, and then allow for people to make sense of, or draw conclusion from, or sit with more questions. It doesn't all have to have an answer.

Eduardo Placer:

I think that's part of the delusion of our... There are no answers, just like there are no rules. It's all made up, is it?

Julia Winston:

It's all made up.

Eduardo Placer:

It's all made up, is it? I don't know. Maybe.

Julia Winston:

I'd love to demystify that a little bit because what you just said was that we can't force, and so in order for us to dance with the ingredients that are there inside this container, that I feel is the holy grail. That's the Secret Elixir of facilitators.

Julia Winston:

What are some of those special ingredients for you? What are some of the practices that you engage in, in order to dance with what's true?

Eduardo Placer:

I think the first thing is a spirit of play. I think that play is inherently yes, and. I think play is possibility filled. It is childlike and I wish adults played more. I think there's a way in which #adulting means I forget to play or I don't know how to play anymore.

Eduardo Placer:

So I think the invitation of play and silliness, and joy creates fibers of trust that then allow for truth to emerge. And it's not just mental play, but it's also physical play, and imagination, and all of that stuff. I think you ask permission, so you don't assume permission, but you ask permission, you invite, and you offer.

Julia Winston:

Eduardo what is possible for the world if we have more truth-telling, people being who they really are?

Eduardo Placer:

The truth makes room. I think sometimes we're afraid of the truth, so we move away or we shut down in the face of it. But what happens if we lean into it, and approach it together, make sense of it together, honor it together, allow it together in really personal ways?

Eduardo Placer:

Even me acknowledging my own internalized homophobia. I think me acknowledging misogyny, me acknowledging racism, me acknowledging... there are all these things that are true in how we were formed and raised, that we have to wrestle with and be in relationship with-

Julia Winston:

To heal.

Eduardo Placer:

To heal. Things that family members said, things that you think, thoughts that you had. And we feel like we actually need to hide all of that in a performance of something, which actually, really isn't the truth. And that I think if we make room for the truth, the darkness, we bring it to the light, then it stops festering, and then it allows itself to heal.

Eduardo Placer:

And I think that there's so many people who are so wounded, that I think is maybe a reason why there's so much hurt because we are hurting and we hurt people. And it's like this active, hurting and attacking. And I think that we can create more spaces to love in presence of truth.

Julia Winston:

I'm just taking that in, because I think that's just kind of the punchline of what you're doing. You're creating spaces where we can love, be more loving.

Eduardo Placer:

In relationship to the truth.

Julia Winston:

In relationship to the truth.

Eduardo Placer:

In relationship to the truth. I remember there was a woman in one of my programs, one woman spoke about addiction in relationship to her love of an addict, the addiction to an addict. Another woman spoke about abandonment, being abandoned by her mother and then having to care for her mother in old age. And then another woman spoke about abortion.

Eduardo Placer:

So the ability for people to wrestle with the truth in front of us allows us to be in relationship to the places where we're so wounded or unable to be with, how we are in relationship to that truth. And it is ritual, it is spiritual, it is transformative, and it is a blessing.

Eduardo Placer:

And with that, I say A them. I no longer say amen.

Julia Winston:

Yes, amen is out.

Eduardo Placer:

Amen is out.

Julia Winston:

A them.

Eduardo Placer:

A them is in.

Julia Winston:

A them to you, Eduardo.

Eduardo Placer:

A them, A them.

Julia Winston:

So we just dove into some really deep waters and I want to swim there forever. And I also would love... Because you have so many amazing tools in your tool kit as a facilitator when it comes to public speaking. And I would love to share with our listeners, what are some of the best tools that you've got for us when it comes to either overcoming our fear of public speaking, of telling our true stories, or of just being in our bodies while we're up there in front of people?

Eduardo Placer:

The first one that I would say is know your story, not as a plot summary, but I think really do the work of unpacking and knowing why you are committed to doing the work that you do? And oftentimes there's a truth. There's a kernel of a truth, a fundamental life truth, or some learning or healing that you're after.

Eduardo Placer:

And I think understanding that and being able to communicate that powerfully is an amazing gift that you have in your toolbox, because again, Maya Angelou famously said, "People don't remember what you say or do, they remember how you made them feel." So knowing the story, knowing your story, locating your stuff in relationship to the work that you do, I think is unbelievably valuable and a very powerful resource.

Eduardo Placer:

So that's the first thing. The second thing I would say is it's not an exercise of perfection, it's an exercise of connection. So I think that your role is to be a connector of ideas, connector of people, connector of

moments, connector of experiences, but it's not to be perfect, because that's about you. Connecting is about others. Perfectionism is about you. It's not about you, it's through you.

Eduardo Placer:

And the last piece that I would do is I would invite joy and play. So one of the things that you know that we do, we've done together is this thing that I call the big gay sing-along and looking at ritual. I think everything is a ritual, so understanding ritual. But I think where can we add music? Where can you add music? Where can you add movement? Where can you add moments of reflection and pause?

Eduardo Placer:

As a facilitator, what you're also thinking about is how am I constantly shifting so that I am touching people in different ways? Because not everyone learns the same. So how am I getting people on their feet? And then having people listen to music. So I'm impacting their senses? How am I impacting their sense of touch, their sense of sight, their sense of sound, their sense of smell?

Eduardo Placer:

What are the things that I can do to create a sensory experience that has the learning go from one dimensional to three dimensional? And I think that if you're thinking in terms of that, those elements as a facilitator, I think you're light years ahead of everybody else. And I think those are the experiences that people really remember.

Julia Winston:

There's another set of tools that you've taught me, and that has to do with before I get up to speak or before I get up to facilitate, or before I do anything really, to do a little bit of a warm-up.

Eduardo Placer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Julia Winston:

So become embodied. We even did it before we started this conversation.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

What's one little thing that you would suggest that we do before we get in front of people or guide a group?

Eduardo Placer:

The first one is to connect to your breath. We tend to false start, so we don't actually fully breathe. So I think creating the space to slow down, not launching right away, but starting from a space of stillness, not from a space of hyperactivity, I think is of greater service to you and the audience because then they're like, "What the hell just happened?" But ensuring that you're grounded, you are still, your setting off, I think is powerful.

Eduardo Placer:

The word inspire comes from the same root word as the word spirit, and it means to breathe. It is in the breath that our spirit lies, and we speak with our breath. Our voice has air. When we speak, we share spirit, and that is what lives on beyond us. The stories that people tell about us, the experiences they felt, all of that is spirit that is moving on beyond the present moment. And that is the power of being in alignment in that way.

Julia Winston:

Eduardo, you've spoken so much about being of service, and you so clearly are a facilitator who is deeply in service to the world by helping us unlock our truths and tell our stories. So I'd like to ask you as we close here, if you could have someone else facilitate something for you to make your life easier, to be of service to you, what would you want to be facilitated?

Eduardo Placer:

My death.

Julia Winston:

Tell us more?

Eduardo Placer:

I'm scared of being alone, and I think just like we have guides and facilitators in birth, doulas, in the exit, I would love the comfort of a guide who probably hadn't gone before because-

Julia Winston:

They're still here.

Eduardo Placer:

They're still alive. But just thinking about the experience of that, the stepping into that is in alignment with support and love, and guidance.

Julia Winston:

Yeah.

Eduardo Placer:

Is it's the greatest mystery.

Julia Winston:

It is the greatest mystery, and I have heard of death doulas. In fact, I know someone who is a death doula.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

So is that something you would want to talk to someone about now, or it's just something that you know that eventually [crosstalk 00:27:02]?

Eduardo Placer:

It's what emerged for me when you asked the question. I was like, "Huh, that's something for me."

Julia Winston:

Yeah. Well I hope that we have many, many, many, many decades before that happens.

Eduardo Placer:

Yeah.

Julia Winston:

Because you have so much to offer to the world. And as I sit here closing this moment with you, I just want to thank you for your spirit and for everything you bring to the world.

Eduardo Placer:

Thank you so much.

Julia Winston:

And thank you for being here with us today.

Eduardo Placer:

A them.

Julia Winston:

A them.

Julia Winston:

Ooh, so many truth bombs dropped in that conversation. It really got me reflecting. Eduardo fearlessly shared with us that until his mid-30s, he thought of himself as a failure because he's gay. Then he started owning that truth and creating a new meaning. For me, a 37-year-old woman, society has always told me that I'd be a failure if I wasn't married with kids by now. I believed that story for so long and it's caused a lot of pain for me. It's only in the last year that I've decided to write a new story and create a new meaning about what it means to be single, a more empowering story.

Julia Winston:

So I leave you with this question. What's a truth you struggle with? And what's a new, more empowering meaning you can make about that truth? I believe in you no matter who you are because you're a person just like me, and your truth is worth owning.

Julia Winston:

Head on over to facilitatorforum.com for the show notes from today's episode, to learn more about Eduardo and Fearless Communicators and to check out our latest blog post. If you're loving what you're

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hearing, please leave us a rating or a review. Thanks to Adam Rosendahl for our artwork, and Gasoline Tequila for our original music. Caleb Spaulding on percussion and Massimo Lusardi on guitar.

Julia Winston:

And thank you for tuning in. We've got a new episode every other Monday, so check us out in two weeks. And until then, be fearless, be true, and I'll catch you next time.