

Dignity and Joy - Season 2, Episode 2

Change is possible: The importance of values-forward leadership with Paul Taylor

S2E2 keywords: leadership, advancing change, social justice, Black leaders, personal journey, Vancouver, food justice.

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S2E2 transcript:

00;00;00;00 – 00;00;27;06

Paul Taylor

It's such an important part of the way that we've got to think about leadership, the way that we've got to think about social change that really needs to be rooted in relational organizing. You know, I think so much of the way that we interact with each other is largely transactional, right? You know, it's something that we've seen in the last century, huge, huge growth in, you know, these kind of transactional interactions where we we forget, we talk to actually connect and build community.

00;00;27;06 – 00;00;47;22

Paul Taylor

We actually don't you know, we lose how to do that. And instead we're focused on consumerism and a whole bunch of other things, and we're made dizzy with a whole bunch of other things. But I think one thing that's really important and that I take away from any organizing that I've been involved in is how important it is to make sure we're making time to slow down and build meaningful relationships.

00;00;48;03 – 00;00;49;13

Sheldomar Elliott

MM. Yes.

00;00;50;20 – 00;01;14;16

Renée D'Souza

You're listening to Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. On the Pod, we confront the systems of oppression that impact who has access to food and the land it's grown on and who doesn't. Achieving something better will take hard work from all of us and can only be done if we listen closely to the people who are already leading change in the way we think about food.

00;01;14;16 – 00;01;36;12

Renée D'Souza



FoodShare's Sheldomar Elliott delves into the connections between food and justice with folks who have their fingers on the pulse and their hands in the soil. Together they dream and colour and consider what it would take to build a just and hopeful city, a city where everyone can be themselves, their loved ones and their community with dignity and with joy.

00;01;40;19 – 00;02;06;08

Sheldomar Elliott

Hi, I'm Sheldomar Elliott and welcome to this episode of Dignity and Joy, a podcast from FoodShare. Today, our guest is Paul Taylor. Paul Taylor is a lifelong anti-poverty activist who has committed his life to doing what he can to dismantle the systems and organizing principles that both cause and uphold poverty, food insecurity and wealth inequality, including racism, white supremacy and neoliberalism.

00;02;06;24 – 00;02;28;00

Sheldomar Elliott

In 2020, Paul was named one of Canada's Top 40, Under 41 of Toronto Life's 50 most influential Torontonians and voted as best activist by the readers of Now magazine. He's also the outgoing executive director here at FoodShare Toronto. And before he heads out, I didn't want to miss the chance to sit down and talk with him. So welcome, Paul.

00;02;28;16 – 00;02;32;03

Paul Taylor

Hey, it's great to be here, Sheldomar. Thanks so much for having me and for that lovely introduction.

00;02;32;12 – 00;02;39;24

Sheldomar Elliott

Of course. Thanks for being here. How you feeling on this super foggy Toronto Thursday morning?

00;02;40;07 – 00;02;59;14

Paul Taylor

You know, it's all it's all a bit bittersweet. You know, it feels good that it's not snowing. I'll have to admit. But yeah, now I'm missing those those summer days. And also bittersweet because I'm in a moment of transition as I think about, you know, leaving an organization that I've loved to what comes next. So it's all very bittersweet.

00;03;00;07 – 00;03;18;28

Sheldomar Elliott

Definitely. I mean, I'm really happy for us to be able to just sit here and chop it up, to say the least. And I'm sure we'll have some time to talk about food share. But there's a lot that I love to explore in this conversation and really happy to have you here. And before we get into it, of course, I want to start by acknowledging that I'm here in Toronto and so are you, Paul.

00;03;19;10 – 00;03;39;13

Sheldomar Elliott

Sacred Land, that is the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, the Anishnabeg and the Mississauga's of the credit, and that this territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenants. At FoodShare, we think it's important to start any conversation on this land by recognizing the many nations of indigenous peoples who presently live on this lands.

00;03;39;21 – 00;04;04;26

Sheldomar Elliott

Those who have spent time here and the ancestors who have hunted and gathered on this lands. I also want to acknowledge the many people of African descent who are not settlers, but whose ancestors were forcibly displaced as part of the transatlantic slave trade brought against their will and made to work on these lands. At FoodShare, we believe that advancing indigenous sovereignty is deeply and inextricably linked to black liberation, and we remain committed to advancing both.

00;04;05;07 – 00;04;25;29

Sheldomar Elliott

So often how these things go, Paul, is I jump into an icebreaker to sort of get us into the flow of conversation. But I don't feel like you really need much of that because people know you. So I will save those kind of questions for the end of the conversation. But of course, this wouldn't be a future podcast if I didn't start off by asking you about food.

00;04;26;13 – 00;04;45;12

Sheldomar Elliott

So of course, doing food work can mean we spend a lot of time only thinking about food as survival, sustenance. But of course, we know it's way more than that. And I'm really curious about the role that food plays in your life, Paul, particularly comfort. And when you do think about that, what foods do you usually choose to prepare and why?

00;04;45;20 – 00;05;05;29

Paul Taylor

Well, very good question. And I really get asked questions about what I like to eat. So I appreciate the question. And okay, So the first thing I'd say is even before I dive into food is, you know, I was listening to to the land acknowledgment that you were giving, and I was just also myself feel like I would like to acknowledge, you know, someone that's been really important to me on my journey over the last several years.

00;05;05;29 – 00;05;22;21

Paul Taylor

And it's Crystal Sinclair, who's the board chair at FoodShare. And I was saying to her a couple of nights ago that I'm just so grateful for the, you know, the opportunity to have learned from her.

And I feel like no shame to all the other board chairs I've had. But I've learned the most, the most from her and I've learned differently from her.

00;05;22;21 – 00;05;47;27

Paul Taylor

So I'm so deeply indebted to her and to FoodShare for that for this experience. So just wanted to acknowledge that. But food, what do I think of when I think about comfort food? I like things that are I'm not a really finicky cook. I like to be able to kind of throw something together really quickly. And I learned that if you like to throw something together really quickly to get it to taste delicious, it probably not a bad idea to have it roast slowly.

00;05;47;27 – 00;05;48;13

Paul Taylor

So really, pretty much anything that roasts slowly or that I can figure out to cook at a slow roast is my jam. When it comes to comfort food, anything from a roasted chicken to confit chicken wings cooking in their own in some oil. Yeah, pretty much anything slow and slow and low.

00;06;08;11 – 00;06;17;19

Sheldomar Elliott

Hmm. And is that something that you grew up enjoying, like roasted food or is it something that you kind of came to enjoy in your adulthood?

00;06;18;01 – 00;06;45;26

Paul Taylor

You know, I think it has to do with the way that I think, you know, I, I like food, but I want to I want to make sure that I'm efficient in its preparation, but I want it to be really delicious. So I think one day I just stumbled upon this, you know, this approach to cooking and wasn't one that I really grew up with, I would say per se, but I just started, you know, trying a bunch of things and discovered, oh, especially when it comes to, you know, working at home in the context of a pandemic.

00;06;45;26 – 00;06;57;00

Paul Taylor

For me, you know, being able to start something in the oven before the workday starts and have it time it so that it's ready for the end of the day is it's like magical. Mm hmm.

00;06;57;14 – 00;07;09;03

Sheldomar Elliott

I love that. And I obviously want to keep going on foods. Like if you were to open up your seasoning cabinet right now, what are your go to, like, seasonings that you're just going to throw on whatever you're roasting like right now?

00;07;09;03 – 00;07;32;02

Paul Taylor

Or you want me to share that on air? You want me to go right up in my cabinets, in my private business for virtual cribs? Yeah, I don't know about that. So I'll tell you, there is I'll tell you a few, but I'll probably keep a few in my in my back pocket. But definitely, definitely some human hole and ground cumin. Definitely some smoked paprika. I also grew peppers last year, and I.

00;07;32;06 – 00;07;32;18

Sheldomar Elliott

Mmm.

00;07;32;29 – 00;07;44;27

Paul Taylor

Some chili peppers, actually, and a couple and some Scotch bonnets. So I dried them last year. So I've got some dried peppers and a few other secrets that I have and things that I've collected along my travels.

00;07;45;03 – 00;07;56;07

Sheldomar Elliott

There's nothing like Pepper, I swear. Like having pepper in food is too delicious, and I'm biased. Like Scotch Bonnet is my all time favourite, so I deeply appreciate you growing that and enjoy that yourself.

00;07;56;15 – 00;08;10;02

Paul Taylor

Oh, for sure. That is something that, you know, is a major part of food that I had growing up and food that my mother and her friends made that I got to enjoy. So it feels pretty special to be able to grow such balance myself and then to be able to cook with them.

00;08;10;06 – 00;08;21;22

Sheldomar Elliott

And also being a resident in the part two area, I know you're surrounded by incredible food. I keep hearing about these Tibetan momos and I've yet to try them myself, but I know that's something that needs to needs to happen.

00;08;22;20 – 00;08;35;17

Paul Taylor

Everybody needs to just eat as many momos as they possibly can and almost are fantastical. You know, I'm glad you're not asking me which which Tibetan restaurant in Parkdale or which momo is the best, because I would certainly get into a lot of trouble.

00;08;36;00 – 00;08;37;21

Sheldomar Elliott

But yeah, I can't put you on blast like that.

00;08;37;28 – 00;08;43;13

Paul Taylor

No, no. You already tried to get into my spice cupboard, so I got to be. But I've got to be careful here.

00;08;43;26 – 00;08;46;16

Sheldomar Elliott

This is just the beginning. So hold on to your chair, Paul.

00;08;46;17 – 00;08;48;27

Paul Taylor

Okay. Okay. Okay. Yeah, right on.

00;08;48;28 – 00;09;12;29

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, well, maybe we'll shift into a little bit about food share. And of course, in the time that you've been the executive director, at FoodShare, there's been a real change from people understanding it to be a food security organization to more of a food justice organization and leadership team that you've headed has made up to do a lot of different things to essentially not accept the nonprofit status quo.

00;09;13;06 – 00;09;18;05

Sheldomar Elliott

So I really would love to hear you talk to some things that you're most proud about achieving at FoodShare.

00;09;18;11 – 00;09;33;04

Paul Taylor

You know, that really is a tough a tough question to answer, because I really am the kind of person who, you know, I like to get some things happening and then keep it moving, you know, and I move on to the next to the next, the next project or the next focus. So I don't often spend a lot of time.

00;09;33;04 – 00;09;53;07

Paul Taylor

I should spend more time sitting and reflecting. And the things that I'm the most proud of. But I would say, you know, certainly working with the team, in fact I would say the entire organization, because I think everyone plays a role in this, you know, being able to collectively say that \$12 an hour is not enough for our colleagues to live on.

00;09;53;07 – 00;10;15;02

Paul Taylor

It's not enough for our colleagues to be able to access our vision for the organization. So it's unacceptable. So, you know, the work that we've done to increase salaries, especially for those

at the bottom of the pay grid being a, you know, a living wage employer and beyond. You know, I think about that kind of tangible impact that has on people's lives and the stories that I've heard.

00;10;15;17 – 00;10;42;14

Paul Taylor

And for me, that's what this work is about. That's what, you know, in essence, life is about, you know, doing what we can and using the power and the resources available to us to, you know, make life better for people, especially those that are struggling the most. So I think, you know, that's an intervention that I'm proud of us collectively for having had done and and having had made it, made it happen, and to have inspired, you know, lots of other people to challenge the status quo in a similar way.

00;10;43;08 – 00;11;06;27

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, I think that's huge, too. And of course, being a beneficiary of these policies and like really appreciating the fact that I work for an organization that has a living wage and its mandate and its policy like it is huge. And considering the the cost of living in Toronto only increasing and the cost of food and gas and all of these things, it's so important that folks are being paid properly in an equitable rates.

00;11;07;08 – 00;11;27;01

Sheldomar Elliott

And I think in many ways FoodShare is sort of leading that and there's a lot of other organizations that are looking at food and being like, Wow, this is really a model for maybe how we should take care of our employees or pay our employees or whatever the case is. I really want to kind of jump into something that you mentioned, though, about you don't get the chance to reflect too much.

00;11;27;01 – 00;11;31;07

Sheldomar Elliott

And I'm curious like, why is that? Is it is it a matter of time or?

00;11;31;12 – 00;11;58;25

Paul Taylor

That's a good question. I'm not sure it might just be the way that I'm wired, because I think it's it's that I haven't prioritized it. Hmm. Maybe that's a part of being an unlikely leader, you know, in this society, you know, perhaps that, you know, the underpinning of much of my work is, is an urgency, because it's almost sometimes hard to believe that I'm in the positions that I'm in and able to influence the kind of change that that I've been involved in.

00;11;59;07 – 00;12;15;17

Paul Taylor

It could be that, you know, but I'm not certain I haven't picked it enough time to reflect on why

that is. But I think that's a question, and I think we should all be asking questions like that of ourselves and making sure that we are prioritizing time to celebrate the things that we've accomplished, especially with the people that we've accomplished them with.

00;12;16;02 – 00;12;42;27

Sheldomar Elliott

Mm hmm. Absolutely. I mean, I. I hope you do get some time to celebrate because you have accomplished so much. And I know, of course, you talk about all the time and about how you wouldn't be able to do the things that you've done without a strong team backing you. And like bringing folks along the way. So I definitely applaud you for that, but also want encourage you to, yeah, celebrate yourself and hopefully, you know, you get your flowers along the way and all of that because you've definitely done a lot.

00;12;42;27 – 00;13;00;21

Sheldomar Elliott

And I know your you play a huge role in community and in Toronto, so but I don't want to get to that too into that now. But it does lead me into my next question and forgive me if I'm coming across Oprah, but to put you on the spot as a leader who is championed so much. Like, how does that feel?

00;13;00;21 – 00;13;06;00

Sheldomar Elliott

And I, I know that you don't get too much time to reflect on that, but how do you view yourself as a leader?

00;13;06;09 – 00;13;09;03

Paul Taylor

Hmm, That's a good question. You're asking tough questions.

00;13;10;18 – 00;13;11;26

Sheldomar Elliott

(Laughs) It's not the typical interview, huh?

00;13;13;13 – 00;13;33;14

Paul Taylor

No, I appreciate it. How do I view myself as a leader? You know, I view myself as someone who has been fortunate enough to have been inspired by the leadership of others in ways that have really helped me understand what leadership looks like to me and the type of leadership that I value and how I want to show up as a leader.

00;13;33;14 – 00;13;58;03

Paul Taylor

You know, And I think it's it's the kind of leadership that I often talk about because it's not

celebrated, it's not recognized and certainly not resourced enough. And I think it's the leadership of Black women.

Sheldomar Elliott
Mm hmmm.

Paul Taylor

You know, I think I think the fact that we've been able to resist so much violence is largely in part due to, you know, the the power, the determination, the strength and the love of black women for for community.

00;13;58;14 – 00;14;24;10

Paul Taylor

And I feel like I've been a huge recipient of that. And it's really inspired the way that I think about leadership, which is not I think the way that we're taught to think about leadership in a very colonial and a very capitalist in a very patriarchal, white supremacist kind of society that tells us leadership is something that exists in ourselves and in ourselves alone.

00;14;24;10 – 00;14;46;03

Paul Taylor

And leadership is about our personal, you know, stuff. And I think its leadership is really about how we work together and how we use our resources together to advance change. So when I think about myself as a leader, I think about I think about myself in that context. And I evaluate, you know, my, my, my work as a leader through that, through that lens.

00;14;46;03 – 00;14;58;23

Paul Taylor

And that that I find is really a helpful compass. And tells me, oop, I got I got to pivot a little bit more, I've got to lean into this or that a little bit more. And you know, that's what I use as a bit of my North Star for, for leadership.

00;15;00;04 – 00;15;19;22

Sheldomar Elliott

Thank you for that honesty. And also shout out black women and indigenous women. And I know you mentioned Crystal earlier and it's it's been an interesting journey I've been on also. And just to share a bit about myself, like I've been involved in a few programs and fellowships over the past few years, sort of exploring leadership and what it looks like.

00;15;20;03 – 00;15;44;03

Sheldomar Elliott

And I've definitely come to an understanding sort of along the lines of what you've been saying is a real like great leader, someone who trusts in their team and leads with qualities like empathy and compassion and kindness, inclusivity, etc.. And it's really breaking down the

hierarchal sort of structure that I used to think leadership was about and like command, not commanding people.

00;15;44;03 – 00;16;16;04

Sheldomar Elliott

But yeah, just taking less of that power away and distributing it amongst the group because you trust in the group. And I think that definitely is wonderful traits to have in the leader and it's interesting and I know I'm going to touch on this later on in the conversation because I'm so curious to know, but I'm sure a lot of folks may be involved in movements or work at organizations that want to do the same kind of things, but don't have the visibility or don't have the high level support or buy in that is often needed to get things done.

00;16;16;17 – 00;16;27;06

Sheldomar Elliott

So as someone who's accomplished as much as you have to this point, what advice do you have for others who want to make an impact or difference but sort of don't know where to start?

00;16;27;15 – 00;17;07;19

Paul Taylor

You know, I think not paying attention to a lot of that noise. You know, some there are so many ways that change happens and who society recognizes whose labor gets recognized is also influenced by patriarchy and all kinds of things, you know, classism. So I think it's important to try our best not to pay attention to that noise, because I think about, you know, where I started along this journey, and I felt like, you know, I was certainly not a lone voice, but not one that was treated with with I don't know what what word to use.

00;17;07;19 – 00;17;33;18

Paul Taylor

But, you know, I was invited on two radio stations. I remember in some of the early days of sharing some of my thoughts about, you know, right space arguments around access to food and the inadequacy of food banks. And I remember that kind of vitriol and the anger that I would receive from either people calling in or just hostile hosts or hosts who didn't even realize that they were, I think, had been.

00;17;33;18 – 00;17;54;20

Paul Taylor

So they're thinking about what was possible and how we support one another had been so co-opted and so limited. So I just kept going and continued to do that alongside you know, looking out for, you know, people who are like minded, people who had similar values, people who were in other parts of the country. I remember folks like Karen Secord at the Parkdale Food Center there.

00;17;54;20 – 00;18;17;01

Paul Taylor

I remember her talking about how Kraft dinner was inadequate for folks accessing their food bank. And I remember the same kind of vitriol that she faced. So I reached out to her and I said, Hey, friend, how can we support one another? You know? And I think that's been an important part of my journey and an important part of advocating for things is not no change can happen on our own.

00;18;17;10 – 00;18;33;25

Paul Taylor

So I think making sure that we're consistently looking out for the people that are either doing this work before we even showed up on the scene or the people that are doing this work parallel to us and thinking about how we can we can collaborate, we can support each other or even just, you know, be there to listen.

00;18;33;26 – 00;18;35;17

Paul Taylor

I think that's been super helpful for me.

00;18;36;00 – 00;18;58;00

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, Thank you for sharing that. I'm caught up on this where they use noise and I feel like there is so much noise nowadays, especially in this era of social media, It's so easy to get lost in everything, to say the least. And to this work, especially like burnouts real. And I think it's so important that we take care of ourselves.

00;18;58;00 – 00;19;18;13

Sheldomar Elliott

And that's sort of why I started this conversation off with understanding what food speaks to you, what food brings you comfort, because, yeah, this work isn't easy all the time. And I feel like you're someone who comes to things with such a sense of possibility, but like to just kind of shift a little bit and to get a little vulnerable and personal.

00;19;19;11 – 00;19;35;02

Sheldomar Elliott

Like, do stuff ever get you down honestly and like it must be right. Like as people, as humans and as someone who's so connected and aware of what's going on, I think folks would love to know, like, what do you do when that happens? If that happens?

00;19;36;05 – 00;19;40;11

Paul Taylor

You know, that's a really good question for a Thursday morning Sheldomar, thank you very much.

00;19;43;03 – 00;19;44;09

Sheldomar Elliott

Got you in the feels already, huh?

00;19;44;09 – 00;20;09;16

Paul Taylor

And I look forward to when I get to interview you next. And I do have a pen and paper handy here writing my questions as we speak. But okay, so what do I do? You know, I lean into humour a lot. I recognize, you know, my frame often is that it could be a lot worse. And I sometimes think, you know, that I've had the good fortune of experiencing much worse.

00;20;09;16 – 00;20;29;12

Paul Taylor

And when I say good fortune, I mean, you know, I learned about what it was like to keep warm in Toronto and it was very, very cold outside without heat and electricity. You know, that was a real struggle. But actually, you know, because it was our daily experience for large portions of my childhood, it was it became normal.

00;20;29;22 – 00;21;02;18

Paul Taylor

So even that became, you know, probably as I was experiencing it, I'm sure there were days where I was reminded of how how awful it is. But it became normal. It became the every day. So a lot of things. I think I've had the good fortune of having had that experience, because when a lot of things pop up that that sometimes people feel is, you know, the end of the world or in possibly difficult to navigate or overcome, you know, I think about, you know, being a child and navigating those experiences and how difficult that was.

00;21;02;18 – 00;21;23;28

Paul Taylor

And, you know, often the things that pop up really pale in comparison, like to try my best to put them into context. So, you know, I, I think the thing when I do get down, I find that it's a it's because of, I think, how much our thinking has been co-opted and how much people really think that big change isn't possible.

00;21;23;28 – 00;21;36;20

Paul Taylor

And I've bought into like little tinkering is all we can. We can fight for and conversations around policy windows and all of that. You know, noise, again, you know, is what should guide us. And I'm just I'm just not sure that's the case.

00;21;36;23 – 00;22;02;12

Sheldomar Elliott

I hear that and I definitely don't want to dive too deep into your childhood, because I know that might be hard to talk about, but I'm I'm going to jump into something momentarily. But I do want

to kind of stand on this point about humour. And again, not to generalize all black folks, but I feel like there is a tendency amongst the black folks I'm around at least in my family, to laugh about things when things get hard.

00;22;02;12 – 00;22;28;20

Sheldomar Elliott

And I think that might be, you know, a part of our resiliency and and finding light and really hard times and space. And I guess on that point of humour, like, do you have any go to like ways of like laughing or is it just like in the moment kind of jokes or, you know, is there media that you consume that kind of helps you take your mind off things?

00;22;28;20 – 00;22;29;25

Sheldomar Elliott

Like what does that look like for you?

00;22;30;11 – 00;22;56;20

Paul Taylor

You know, what you said it in response was so really resonated with me. You know, I think about, you know, of course we turn to humour because the shift that we've been forced to experience, you know, the only way sometimes to to, like, move through this, I think, is sometimes just to laugh, you know, and having to navigate white supremacy and sometimes even white folks, you know, and the things white folks can do, particularly in this sector, you know, you just have to laugh sometimes, you know.

00;22;58;19 – 00;23;11;21

Paul Taylor

Because it is so befuddling. What do I what are some of the things that I go to? Oh, I feel like sometimes my life presents a whole bunch of opportunities to laugh, you know.

00;23;11;29 – 00;23;13;03

Sheldomar Elliott

Those are the most genuine moments.

00;23;13;03 – 00;23;39;11

Paul Taylor

Yeah, just in (laughs) showing up the way that I do, I think. Yeah, I don't necessarily need a particularly a particular TV show. I think sometimes it's just the look on someone's face when I've asked a particular question is enough to humour me for a while, you know? Yeah. So, you know, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if I have a particular know. I don't really have a particular, like, comedy show or comedy podcast or comedian.

00;23;40;23 – 00;23;53;05

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, no, that's okay. I was just curious and I feel like if anything, for people to take away from

this conversation at this point is that laughing is medicine. So please laugh as much as you can because it helps.

00;23;54;25 – 00;24;15;05

Sheldomar Elliott

To take things back and you kind of just start touching on things. I've heard a lot of interviews with you where you've been really open about your childhood experiences, especially around poverty and food insecurity and connecting those with systems of oppression and government in action that caused both. But I haven't heard you talk too much about your studies and your early career.

00;24;15;13 – 00;24;39;14

Sheldomar Elliott

And I know I've talked to a lot of folks who are curious about young Paul. So who was this young Paul, and what were some of your interests? It's interesting because, you know, I'm really curious about what led you to this trajectory of being ED at FoodShare and also running for office. Being a community activist, can you share maybe what those early sort of adulthood years looked like for you?

00;24;39;20 – 00;24;41;27

Paul Taylor

Early adulthood years? Hmm.

00;24;42;07 – 00;24;44;23

Sheldomar Elliott

Mm hmm.

00;24;45;06 – 00;25;14;01

Paul Taylor

You know, I think those years were inspired by some of my time in high school navigating all kinds of things, including, you know, the low expectations that I think are bestowed upon black folks, Black men in particular, in formal, formal academic settings. So, yeah, I think I spent a lot of time recognizing that and recognizing that people that look like me were not succeeding in the way that I saw paler folks succeeding in the classroom.

00;25;14;01 – 00;25;40;17

Paul Taylor

So I started to host like after school class for kids in especially in advance of exams, I would find an empty classroom and predominantly black folks, predominantly, you know, black boys on the basketball team and some of some of their friends and some of my friends. We would all study together and I would stand at the front of the class and review the material and I think what folks didn't realize is, you know, reviewing in that way was the way that I reviewed that.

00;25;40;18 – 00;26;12;18

Paul Taylor

It was really helpful for me. But I also recognized it was really helpful to folks to have somebody look at them as if they could succeed and that they were intelligent and that they deserved being taught to, and that education was something that truly was a right. So I think those things inspired pretty much how I looked at that life and work and recognizing that there are these systems, these systems that we don't talk about enough that affect, you know, who is able to access success, who isn't, or who struggles to access success.

00;26;12;27 – 00;26;38;17

Paul Taylor

So, yeah, all of those things affected. I think who I was in my early twenties, as you know, I started off as a teacher. I remember my first day teaching actually, I was an emergency supply teacher and I taught at the school and I was like senior kindergarten kids. Oh my goodness. I developed so much reverence for people who that work because they are they are saints or whatever they are.

00;26;38;17 – 00;27;18;26

Paul Taylor

They are just unicorns. I don't know. But I quickly learned that that work is not necessarily for me. And I really enjoyed, you know, being able to have conversations with young people as they were shaping their their kind of thinking, their political awareness, their soaking in the world and how systems work. And I think that was a place where we lost folks, you know, that so much time teaching people how to add and subtract along division and all this shit that you can do on a calculator where, you know, really we haven't taught the important lessons, you know, global citizenry and how to really think about our responsibility to community and to one another and to this planet.

00;27;18;26 – 00;27;36;02

Paul Taylor

So, you know, I was a passionate teacher for for several years. So that was, that was really Paul enjoying being in my early twenties as a teacher in Toronto, you know, enjoying my weekends almost as much as I enjoyed my time in the classroom or maybe, yeah.

00;27;36;12 – 00;27;55;12

Sheldomar Elliott

See that, that I need the T on that because I want to pick back up on this education stuff. But I find it funny how you went from education, like high school talking about school to like being a teacher. But yeah, what, what were you up to outside of the classroom? Like, what were those weekends like? Please share.

00;27;57;11 – 00;28;00;26

Paul Taylor

Oh. you know. I was at home catching up on my readings, my knitting.

00;28;01;05 – 00;28;04;11

Sheldomar Elliott

And I don't believe it.

00;28;04;11 – 00;28;42;22

Paul Taylor

You know, my weekends, probably in my early twenties, were I learned to roll a joint really, really well., a really tight joint. You know, I. I won't even tell you stories about trying to roll a joint before that. And the way I did, my friends laugh on the weekends. What else did I learn to do on the weekends? I learned that it was, you know, inappropriate to dance on tables at at establishments and that people remember that you if you do that once, they remember the next weekend, if you if you attempt to do that again, you know, memories are long and they'll try and prevent you from getting in.

00;28;42;22 – 00;28;51;01

Paul Taylor

So, you know, I had to learn how to be creative both in the classroom and certainly on my weekends.

00;28;51;01 – 00;28;58;10

Sheldomar Elliott

I love that. I don't know why. And visiting you like stumbling into class on Monday and the best way and like the biggest smile on your face.

00;28;58;11 – 00;29;00;07

Paul Taylor

Also, word developed an appreciation for.

00;29;00;25 – 00;29;02;02

Sheldomar Elliott

Oh, yeah, of course.

00;29;02;02 – 00;29;11;03

Paul Taylor

Yeah. That that's working with people with big, big almost gallons of coffee. I learned very quickly why that was helpful.

00;29;11;12 – 00;29;30;06

Sheldomar Elliott

And I think that leads me to my next question here. And you started to touch on what you did talk about experience teaching and how you found out eventually that it wasn't for you. And that's completely okay. But what were some of those takeaways that you feel like you brought into your thinking now or maybe in the ways that you're doing things now?

00;29;30;06 – 00;29;49;24

Paul Taylor

I learned so much as a teacher, and I was given this position as the person who stood in the front of the class. So I realized that, you know, regardless of the positions that people put us in, I think we always have lots to learn and we all have lots to teach. So I think for me, I've always been curious to seize opportunities to learn from others.

00;29;49;24 – 00;29;58;26

Paul Taylor

And if I felt like I've had something to share that might be useful to a group or to an individual, I've also seized opportunities to help in those ways.

00;29;59;06 – 00;30;10;25

Sheldomar Elliott

I think that's so important. I also know that you spent some time out in Vancouver and those were sort of your early days of the nonprofit sector. Can you share a bit about like what took you there, of all places?

00;30;11;17 – 00;30;33;08

Paul Taylor

I had never been there. You know, I saw people I saw I would watch the news sometimes and I would see people talk about Vancouver or think it looks nice. It's pretty. And I had also been really interested in a community in Vancouver community called the Downtown Eastside. Hmm. You know, I had heard lots about the community, so I was really curious and many people are.

00;30;33;08 – 00;30;55;14

Paul Taylor

But I think what I was most curious about was an organization within the community called the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House that, you know, an organization situated amongst a lot of charitable organizations, several of which are operating from really traditional frameworks, long lineups for salty soup and stale bread and leftover Starbucks, whatever. You know, not all organizations doing that, certainly.

00;30;55;14 – 00;31;16;27

Paul Taylor

But, you know, a lot of groups still operating out of that model, certainly lacking in dignity and joy. So I was really inspired by the work of the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood house that really centered rights, and that was really interested in collaborating with low income people to dream about something better and something centered on, you know, fundamental human rights.

00;31;17;08 – 00;31;53;24

Paul Taylor

The right to eat, the right to housing. You know, so really learned a lot about organizing

alongside not just other low income folks or people with experiences of of having low incomes, but also people who were street involved, who were homeless, who were houseless, really learning about also at the same time, how to build organizations that spoke to the the lived experience of people that were houseless or people that were street involved was a huge, huge learning for me that I feel so grateful to have experienced because it's something that I, I take with me and is a part of my, you know, organizing to build, I suppose, and just those memories and those stories

00;31;53;24 – 00;32;01;03

Paul Taylor

and those friendships and some of those those successes together, even just those laughs together, you know, are things that will always stay with me. You know.

00;32;01;03 – 00;32;08;23

Sheldomar Elliott

I love that I've never heard about this community, so I might have to just take a look into what they're up to now. How long were you out there for?

00;32;09;01 – 00;32;34;01

Paul Taylor

I lived in Vancouver for almost six years, and the Downtown Eastside is a is a really interesting community. You know, it's often referred to as Canada's poorest postal code. I think it's one of those communities that is often mischaracterized. It's certainly a community that has had to navigate chronic underinvestment. But you now I feel like it is a community that's rich in a lot of things, rich in spirit, rich in sense of community and kindness.

00;32;34;02 – 00;32;46;18

Paul Taylor

It was just you know, I was yeah, I'm just I've had so many wonderful experiences interacting with folks in the Downtown Eastside and being a recipient or a benefactor of some of the incredible kindness that people display each and every day.

00;32;46;23 – 00;33;16;14

Sheldomar Elliott

Mm hmm. And I love Rich in Spirit that, yeah, that really resonates with me and some of the the tremendous folks I've met even in my journey. So, yeah, that that's real. And it's interesting. Folks say, you know, hindsight is 20/20. So I guess after all that you've done, you know, in Vancouver and coming back and applying what you learned there, here, what are some things that you wish you had known as you were starting out and figuring stuff out like back in those teacher days?

00;33;16;24 – 00;33;34;14

Paul Taylor

I wish I knew that imposter syndrome was, you know, a nice way of saying white supremacy and

a whole bunch of other things – ableism, hetero-normativity. You know, I wish I wish I knew that because I feel like it would have saved me a lot of time and would allow me to focus my energy a little bit more.

00;33;34;14 – 00;34;06;17

Paul Taylor

And also in the way when I reflect on, you know, supporting people to think through what I then thought was imposter syndrome and what they thought was imposter syndrome, you know, I think instead, you know, placing blame and responsibility where it belongs, I think is really important and recognizing how we need to focus our energies to make spaces more inclusive is more, I think, more impactful in my in my opinion, than, you know, focusing in on a conversation surrounded around imposter syndrome.

00;34;06;20 – 00;34;13;16

Paul Taylor

I'm not an imposter, actually. And I belong in the spaces that I belong. And all the spaces we all belong in. All the spaces.

00;34;13;16 – 00;34;14;14

Sheldomar Elliott

Exactly.

00;34;14;14 – 00;34;29;20

Paul Taylor

The fact that other people try and tell me that I'm an imposter is not necessarily a me problem. You know, that's. That's maybe them or society problem that you know, I'm going to try my hardest not to let stop me or hold me back from from doing the things that I think need to get done.

00;34;29;27 – 00;34;51;20

Sheldomar Elliott

Mm hmm. I couldn't agree with you more. And I know it's something that a lot of folks that I'm speaking to are still trying to navigate is like, not feeling like they're good enough to be in the spaces and places they want to be. But I think just knowing that it's root in a white supremacy. And if once we start to understand that and sort of unravel those layers, then yeah, to your point, we can understand that we do belong in all these spaces.

00;34;51;20 – 00;34;55;16

Sheldomar Elliott

As long as we're showing up, of course, authentically and in our most genuine selves.

00;34;55;24 – 00;35;10;14

Paul Taylor

We do belong. We absolutely belong. In fact, we're we're late. We got lost. But we're here now

and we're showing up and we're changing in the way the way this works and changing the ways the invitations get issued in the first place.

00;35;10;19 – 00;35;11;04

Sheldomar Elliott

Yes.

00;35;11;21 – 00;35;13;10

Paul Taylor

Yeah, We definitely belong here.

00;35;13;17 – 00;35;40;04

Sheldomar Elliott

Yes, definitely. Definitely. Since coming home to Toronto, like after Vancouver and again, just kind of saying on that point there, I know that you must have stayed plugged in to things that are still happening over there on the West Coast and also know that you've visited lots of spots across so-called Canada. What differences and similarities have you picked up on and sort of how can we learn from these other spaces and places to sort of advance social justice in Toronto?

00;35;40;07 – 00;35;41;20

Sheldomar Elliott

Like what are some of those best learnings?

00;35;41;20 – 00;36;04;29

Paul Taylor

I guess I'm not sure, but I yeah, I guess my answer to that is I'm not sure, but I might. What I would offer is that, you know, I saw an image that I thought was really powerful recently and it was the image, you know, during the CUPE strike, the recent CUPE strike, it was the image of various union leaders on the stage together in solidarity with CUPE.

00;36;04;29 – 00;36;40;19

Paul Taylor

You know, I don't remember ever having seen something like that before. And then I think about how quickly things started to move and change after that happened. And for me it's a reminder of solidarity and the incredible power that we have collectively when we do spend that time. You know, if we're inspired by an issue or if we want to see change in some way, spending that time to really think about and explore who's doing work on this issue already, I think is so important and being able to collaborate and add capacity, add our experience and support one another is so key.

00;36;40;19 – 00;37;01;16

Paul Taylor

It's been a huge part of how I've been able to be a part of advancing meaningful change. And I

just think it's such an important part of the way that we've got to think about leadership, the way that we've got to think about social change that really needs to be rooted in relational organizing. You know, I think so much of the way that we interact with each other is largely transactional, right?

00;37;02;04 – 00;37;23;13

Paul Taylor

You know, it's something that we've seen in the last century, huge, huge growth in, you know, these kind of transactional interactions where we we forget to actually connect and build community. We actually don't, you know, we lose how to do that. And instead we're focused on consumerism and a whole bunch of other things, and we're made dizzy with a whole bunch of other things.

00;37;23;13 – 00;37;48;06

Paul Taylor

But I think one thing that's really important and that I take away from any organizing that I've been involved in is how important it is to make sure we're making time to slow down and build meaningful relationships with one another outside of the issues that we might be collectively advocating against or for relational organizing is is pretty critical to building solidarity is pretty, I think, critical to effective movement work.

00;37;48;21 – 00;38;09;23

Sheldomar Elliott

Definitely. And on the point of relationality, that's something that I've been so at least trying to be super mindful of, just in the ways that I move throughout the world. And of course, in some cases it's just hard to be relational with some people and a lot of folks their default is transactional because again, of just how we've been conditioned.

00;38;10;06 – 00;38;34;16

Sheldomar Elliott

But I agree with you that there's so much power in relating with one another and, you know, joining forces for a bigger cause. That's how a lot gets done. So, of course, with your time of future wrapping up, I have no doubt that everyone has been out here asking you what's next? What's next? And I don't want to put that kind of pressure on you, but I really would like to know what is something that you're excited for.

00;38;34;23 – 00;38;43;23

Sheldomar Elliott

And I will say I've never put rules or anything on anybody on this podcast, but you cannot say anything about FoodShare.

00;38;45;12 – 00;39;15;17

Paul Taylor

I'm excited to get a bit of my evenings and weekends back, so I'm excited to spend more time in

the kitchen. I'm excited about spending more time with loved ones and I'm excited about taking in my city differently. You know, I'm excited to be curious in different ways and to be inspired in different ways and to slow down and to focus on, you know, I think the nonprofit industrial complex, you know, certainly conditions many of us do to be transactional.

00;39;16;19 – 00;39;27;29

Paul Taylor

And it yeah, so I'm looking forward to being really intentional about the relationships in my life and the learning that I think I still have yet to do.

00;39;28;18 – 00;39;45;01

Sheldomar Elliott

MM Oh, I love that. And thank you for sharing all that. Well, you know, I think we're nearing the end of the conversation here. And as I mentioned, I often ask like icebreaker questions at the beginning of a conversation and but I thought it might be fun to end it off with a bit of a lightning round today.

00;39;45;07 – 00;39;46;20

Sheldomar Elliott

So how are you feeling about that?

00;39;50;20 – 00;39;52;01

Paul Taylor

Hmm. We can give it a try.

00;39;52;01 – 00;39;57;01

Sheldomar Elliott

Let's give it a try. It won't be too wild. I think you've already said enough, so I will dive to.

00;39;57;01 – 00;39;58;05

Paul Taylor

How many passes do I get?

00;39;58;16 – 00;40;00;26

Sheldomar Elliott

Zero!

00;40;01;13 – 00;40;02;12

Paul Taylor

Zero Phone-A-Friend? No, nothing?

00;40;02;28 – 00;40;04;05

Sheldomar Elliott

You could phone a friend. Yeah.

00;40;05;24 – 00;40;11;04

Sheldomar Elliott

But you may not need it. So let's. Let's see how you feel about this first one. What is your most unpopular opinion.

00;40;11;09 – 00;40;11;21

Paul Taylor

Woo...

00;40;13;20 – 00;40;14;16

Sheldomar Elliott

Now in the thick of it, huh?

00;40;16;17 – 00;40;39;16

Paul Taylor

Hmm. My most unpopular opinion. You know, I think I've got some opinions marinating about some of the political leadership in this country, and they may or may not. They may be popular, they may be unpopular. Ah, I'm not sure I have have I haven't tested them out. But yeah, I'm certainly sitting in some, some thinking about some of the ways that change gets impeded.

00;40;39;16 – 00;40;49;08

Sheldomar Elliott

That's real. That's super real. Next one. What are you watching? Or maybe what do you feel like you need to catch up on or binge now that you're getting all this time?

00;40;49;15 – 00;41;10;10

Paul Taylor

I said, watch the news a lot more often. But I find these days, you know, I'm working into the evenings and a few different projects and I find that by the end of the night I am ready to sleep like my eyes are closing. So I look forward to even just watching the news to see what's happening in the world and spending a little bit more time and seeing what's on TV like.

00;41;10;10 – 00;41;22;22

Paul Taylor

I don't even know what's on TV because I feel like I haven't had a lot of time. I haven't prioritized necessarily, you know, watching as much as as I could. So that's another thing I look forward to catching up on some some television.

00;41;22;23 – 00;41;26;25

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, you deserve it. I mean, if I can give you a recommendation, if you don't mind, please.

00;41;27;11 – 00;41;28;23

Paul Taylor

All the recommendations.

00;41;28;26 – 00;41;41;16

Sheldomar Elliott

Abbott Elementary is such a good one. It might pull on your teaching days, but I think in the best way and I think you really enjoy that over the next whatever time you get to dive into stuff.

00;41;41;25 – 00;41;48;24

Paul Taylor

All right, I wrote it down. If I don't like it, I'll look back and if I do like it I'll also look back for another recommendation.

00;41;48;24 – 00;41;57;22

Sheldomar Elliott

Good. That sounds great. Next one. And you sort of touched on this, but what's an issue you think needs attention? And you wish folks were talking more about?

00;41;57;22 – 00;42;41;28

Paul Taylor

You know, I think about you know, I think about the the way you know, the way that people go from being in community to politicians. And I think clearly there there's something wrong there, you know, because we have been turning out in large part the same types of politicians. And, you know, certainly there are some some great politicians, you know, and I don't want to paint them all with this kind of brush, but arrogantly, when we look at, you know, dials moving on the issues that are really important to me, you know, issues like poverty and issues like food insecurity, issues challenging anti-black racism, issues like indigenous sovereignty, access to clean drinking water.

00;42;41;28 – 00;43;09;09

Paul Taylor

You know, the the these things. I think when we elect people who don't understand or haven't lived the the urgency of the issues that require urgent attention, they respond with the kind of ho hum, lackluster incrementalism that we've been accustomed to. And I, I think we need to be talking more about that. I think we need to be talking about, you know, what we are entitled to.

00;43;09;09 – 00;43;33;16

Paul Taylor

We need to talk about rights and how our governments fail us in advancing the rights that we have and that that means that they need to do something about that. You know, I think that needs to be much more of a mainstream conversation, less about handing out daily bread and whatever else, you know, or, you know, three legged potatoes or, you know, leftover whatever from anywhere.

00;43;33;28 – 00;43;39;24

Paul Taylor

You know, we should be talking about why people don't have the things that they need in a in a country that's as rich as this one.

00;43;40;03 – 00;44;03;13

Sheldomar Elliott

I could not agree with you more. And I feel like we could spend an entire episode diving into that. But unfortunately, were not there. Last two episodes, you'll be our first returning guest. I was so excited already. Second last question here. What are you listening to? Like, what is your go to jams music? I'm such a music head, so this is a question I'm so, so keen on knowing your answer to.

00;44;03;13 – 00;44;13;26

Paul Taylor

What am I listening to? And listening to Beyonce's latest album? Okay. I think I'm still I'm still enjoying Beyonce's latest album.

00;44;13;26 – 00;44;15;06

Sheldomar Elliott

Yes.

00;44;15;06 – 00;44;20;12

Paul Taylor

You know, I think about release my job and I feel like you might be onto something.

00;44;22;05 – 00;44;23;09

Sheldomar Elliott

You know, I will listen.

00;44;23;09 – 00;44;49;23

Paul Taylor

To, I think a lot, maybe often. But I'm going through some transition. I listen to folks like Linton, Kwesi Johnson, dub poet, brilliant dub poets who share their wisdom with the world. So right now I've been finding myself listening to a lot of Linton, Kwesi Johnson, folks like Mutabaruka and even some old school reggae, some Beres Hammond and folks like that.

00;44;50;08 – 00;44;57;12

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah. Now that's that's dope. I'm actually not so familiar with these people, so I might have to give them a listen later. And I love dub.

00;44;57;16 – 00;45;00;06

Paul Taylor

Oh, yeah, you're good. You thank me later.

00;45;00;26 – 00;45;02;05

Sheldomar Elliott

I will. I will.

00;45;02;21 – 00;45;14;10

Paul Taylor

I recommend I do this with a lot of folks, but I recommend The People's Court One and The People's Court Two by Mutabaruka and anything by Linton Kwesi Johnson I think is really good.

00;45;14;10 – 00;45;22;25

Sheldomar Elliott

People's Courts. Got it now not I'm listening to later, sweet, and you said Muta-, how would I spell that?

00;45;23;01 – 00;45;27;02

Paul Taylor

Mutabaruka, M, U, T,A, B,

00;45;27;25 – 00;45;30;17

Paul Taylor

I think a r u k a.

00;45;30;19 – 00;45;43;26

Sheldomar Elliott

Got it. Sweet. I will check this out. Thanks Paul. Last question. Maybe the most important, but not really. If you could have dinner with three people living or dead and not related to you, who are those.

00;45;43;26 – 00;46;01;00

Paul Taylor

Folks? That's a good question and I would have to take you know, I spend a lot of time thinking about who who I want to invite into my home. So if it's a dinner inside my home, I couldn't answer that in the amount of time that we have. But, you know, someone else's home, you know, I like free food.

00;46;01;00 – 00;46;22;18

Paul Taylor

You know, it's one of my favourite flavours. So I'm accepting invitations. I especially when they have a little bit more free time. So that's, you know, I'm accepting invitations and maybe ask me

that question a year from now. And I'll tell you what food I've enjoyed the food who I'd like to go back and enjoy some more food with.

00;46;22;27 – 00;46;26;21

Sheldomar Elliott

Yeah, I like that. You said you wouldn't go for dinner with me, would Mutabaruka?

00;46;26;26 – 00;46;29;27

Paul Taylor

I don't know if he talks too much, you know, I don't know.

00;46;29;27 – 00;46;38;22

Paul Taylor

I don't know. I've never met him. I don't know. I just. I like his music, but I don't know. That's about all. So I'm not sure if it's, we're at 'dinner place' quite yet.

00;46;38;22 – 00;46;51;18

Sheldomar Elliott

I hear that. I think that sort of wraps up this conversation. And I can't thank you enough, Paul, for chatting with me today and getting into everything. This is a lot of fun. And again, thank you.

00;46;51;23 – 00;47;13;01

Paul Taylor

Oh, I had a lot of fun as well. You are an incredible interviewer. You know, I don't think I've quite done an interview like this and I think the whole time that I've been speaking with you, I've been angrily. I mean, you know, I've been awfully jotting down the questions that I have for you when I think you should invite people that you interview to come back again, but let them interview you next time.

00;47;13;01 – 00;47;23;08

Paul Taylor

You've got so much brilliance to share with the world. And I think I would love to be able to flip the flip the script and tease out some of that brilliance for first time hear listeners.

00;47;23;12 – 00;47;38;05

Sheldomar Elliott

Thank you. I would actually love that. I cannot lie. I would get so nervous because I think I definitely can overthink some things, but that would be a lot of fun. So I'm open for it and Andrea, if you're listening, let's let's get on that.

00;47;39;03 – 00;47;43;17

Paul Taylor

Oh, of course. She's listening too, our colleague Andrea Thompson!

00;47;43;20 – 00;47;48;04

Paul Taylor

Good show. It's definitely listening. So so here it's happening. Hopefully it's.

00;47;48;04 – 00;47;49;10

Sheldomar Elliott

Happening. It's happening.

00;47;49;18 – 00;47;51;23

Paul Taylor

Thank you so much, Sheldomar, I really enjoyed this.

00;47;51;23 – 00;48;15;13

Sheldomar Elliott

Of course. Thank you, Paul. That is it for this episode. If folks want to know, you can find Paul on social media, at Paul TaylorTO and Dignity and Joy is a podcast from FoodShare Toronto, we're a food justice organization advocating for the right to food and work in the challenges, systemic barriers that keep people from accessing the food they need to thrive.

00;48;15;23 – 00;48;34;11

Sheldomar Elliott

You can learn more about our work at FoodShare dot net. Support for this episode comes from Hain Celestial Canada, and if you have feedback on the pod, we'd love to hear from you. You can send us an email at info at FoodShare dot net or on our social media group FoodShareTO on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and on Instagram.

00;48;34;24 – 00;48;50;07

Sheldomar Elliott

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