Victim...to Survivor

Stephen Fletcher: I'm Stephen...

Sondra Phelps: ...and I'm Sondra. This is "Victim...to Survivor." On today's episode, we will focus on self-awareness and how understanding our implicit biases and cultural conditioning could re-traumatize a victim.

Before we get started, the following could be triggering for some individuals. Please take care of yourself and listen to our podcast in a safe space. If you or someone you know needs help, contact your local mental health or victim advocacy organization.

Stephen: Sondra, have you ever had a personal bias interfere with your positive interaction with a client?

Sondra: Oh, definitely. Sometimes I struggle to believe a victim when they show no emotion during a disclosure. This is also known as emotional victim bias and is a common struggle for folks who work in the field.

Stephen: How do you overcome this?

Sondra: Well, I had to educate myself on why a victim may not show emotion during a disclosure. Now I work to stay aware of my personal biases, to help keep them from coloring my personal interaction from victims. I also continue to educate myself and expose myself to different people and situations, to broaden my world view. How about you? Is this a struggle for you as well?

Stephen: Oh, absolutely. I think due to my own perception of how things should be, this is something I always have to keep in check. Like you, I try to expose myself to as many different situations as possible; what I may perceive as right and wrong is certainly not the way it is for everyone. I think one of my biggest challenges when working with victims is my non-verbal communication. My own world views of right and wrong sometimes sneak up on me when hearing the victim's disclosure, and then my face suddenly speaks for itself. Thankfully, wearing a mask helps some.

Sondra: (laughs) I can certainly relate. This is a tough one, because we have all grown up with what is considered right and wrong. The way we think, the way we act...

Stephen: What we eat, and how we dress.

Sondra: What have you done to overcome this?

Stephen: I had to educate myself on different cultures. I had to stop and also consider that everyone is different in how we handle situations. Just because I might handle something one way doesn't mean that the person in front of me would do the same. It took a lot of self-awareness, which sometimes meant that the way I think isn't always accurate.
**Sondra:** That is so true. Increasing our own self-awareness is so important. It is a foundation that is definitely needed, because otherwise we could unknowingly re-traumatize the victim and make their recovery even more difficult.

**Stephen:** In addition to some of the ways that we have overcome our own implicit biases and cultural conditioning, Sondra and I are constantly looking to further our education. We role play with our colleagues and offer time through group staffings to get feedback from our team.

**Sondra:** We realize we are human, and the individual sitting in front of us needs our help. They come to us for the support they need to facilitate their recovery.

**Stephen:** So, we want to thank you today for listening, and we look forward to having you join us next week.

**Sondra:** I'm Sondra.

**Stephen:** And I'm Stephen.

**Sondra:** And this is "Victim..."

**Stephen:** "...to Survivor."