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First of all, thank y'all for listening to me. I come to y'all because most Black women don't go to Klu Klux Klan rallies on purpose.

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(Laughter)

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I did because it was my job; I monitored hate groups. But I really wanted to find out how people could hate strangers so much. Mostly, I wanted to work for peace and justice. But fortunately for me, my mentor at the time was the legendary civil rights leader Reverend C.T. Vivian, who'd been an aide to Dr. Martin Luther King. And C.T. used to say, "When you ask people to give up hate, then you need to be there for them when they do."

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Now, at the time C.T. said those words, I started muttering under my breath, because you can't curse out a preacher, you know? But his words didn't make any sense to me, because if the Klan hated Black folks, I was all right with hating them back. Sounded OK to me. But then something happened. It became my job to help people who were leaving hate groups, and then once I got to know them, I couldn't hate them anymore. And then I got confused. I'm a survivor of racial violence, rape and incest, and I needed to find another moral compass for my life's work. And that compass had to shift from hate to love. And so that improbable journey is why I'm here to talk to y'all today. You know, because I really, really want to build a culture and a world that invites people in instead of pushing them out. It's called a "calling-in culture."

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Now, some people really do believe that the only way to do human rights work is the way they want -- you know, my way or the highway. But the problem is, when many different people think many different thoughts and they move in the same direction, that's a movement. But when many different people think one thought, and they move in the same direction, that's a cult.

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(Laughter)

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And when you treat potential allies like enemies, you're behaving like a cult, not the human rights movement. My friend Dázon Dixon Diallo, who's a very smart woman, says that she believes that calling in will be to this digital age human rights movement of the 21st century what nonviolence was to the civil rights movement in the 20th century: a new way to understand how to truly achieve justice. It's not a matter of what we do, but how we do it.

03:19

Now, all of us know what calling out is -- our "cancel culture," as it's called -- you think somebody has done something wrong, you think they should be held accountable for it, and you think they should be punished for it. So one of those calling-out examples is, "I can't believe you just said that. You're racist, sexist, toxic, manipulative." With this approach, you've guaranteed one thing: with this blaming and shaming, you just invited them to a fight, not a conversation, because you're publicly humiliating them. Now, some people actually think call-outs should be used to hold powerful people accountable, and there's a lot to that. I mean, that's what the human rights movement has always done. But most people are calling others out out of fear. Or they're feeling that they need to belong to something. And some people think that they'll feel better about themselves if they put somebody else down. And then there's too many people, in my opinion, who think that they can become famous by defaming somebody else. Most of us want all of this violence to stop, but we don't know where to begin. And most of us stay silent because we're afraid that we'll become the next target. So even if something feels unfair, we're silent. And if you're unlucky enough to have something that you regretted captured on cell phone or in a tweet, you're walking around with an unexploded gotcha bomb just waiting to blow up your life or your career or your reputation. I guess I need to ask: How many of us here have done something in our past that could come back to haunt us?

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One of my students once said, "A call-out is not an invitation for growth. It's the expectation that you've already grown." This is the culture we're trapped in now. On the other hand, there is calling in. "Calling in" is a phrase invented by Loan Tran, and basically, a call-in is a call-out done with love. So when you think somebody has done something wrong and you want to hold them accountable, you don't react with anger or hate. You just remain calm and look at them and say -- and you can do this online and in person, too -- but you just look at them calmly, and you tell them, "That's an interesting viewpoint. Tell me more." With that, you've invited them into a conversation instead of a fight. And you don't have to agree with somebody to offer them loving attention. All you're admitting at that moment is that there's a possibility that they're as complicated as you are. And everybody deserves to be heard and to be respected.

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And if you use this call-in practice like I'm teaching, what you'll do is several things. First of all, you'll lead with love instead of anger and allow somebody else to grow. Secondly, it'll affirm your own inner empathy and your compassion, and you'll feel so good about yourself when you learn that you can grow, too, in embracing and inviting more people into the world. And then the third thing is that you can call in your friends, your families, your neighbors, your coworkers, all the people you might have given up on in the past because of how they've hurt you.

07:31

Now, if you're going to embrace this calling-in practice, you need some preparation. It begins with self-assessment. First of all, you need to know your motives. Why are you choosing to call somebody in or out? Are you in a healed enough space for somebody else's feelings? If you're not, maybe you're not ready to do the calling in yet. But still, you have those options. And I've taught these tactics to eighth-graders, to college students, to C-suite executives. And as I said, they all feel better about themselves for reaffirming their optimism and their hope that they can make a difference in the world. This is so, so important.

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And so, if you're not really ready to invest in somebody else's growth with a call-in, or you don't want the inevitable fight if you call them out, there actually is a third option. You can call on them to be a better person. And this was a phrase created by Sonya Renee Taylor. My favorite calling-on response is to look the person dead in the eye, cock my head to the side, like I really care, and say, "I beg your pardon." And then I wait. Many times, they'll start walking back their words just because I'm looking at them like they lost their minds.

09:09

(Laughter)

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We can use this calling-in, calling-out, calling-on approach as part of the spectrum of responses we can make to each other, and that's so, so important.

09:23

One time -- let me put it this way -- one time, I misgendered a student in my class. And I froze in shame because I expected the student to jump down my throat, because misgendering somebody is a really big deal nowadays. And instead, this student looked at me and offered me grace by saying, "Oh, that's all right, professor. I misgender myself sometimes."

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(Laughter)

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An 18-year-old. Showing me grace. Now, I believe that one of the most effective expressions of calling-in is forgiveness. And the most powerful example of radical forgiveness I've ever seen happened after the 2015 church massacre in Charleston, South Carolina, where nine people were killed. And one of the victim's sons, Chris Singleton, offered his mother's killer -- I mean, his mother's killer -- forgiveness. And I can't get his words exactly right, but Chris basically said, "Forgiveness is more powerful than people realize, because it lifts all of this stuff off of you. It's freedom -- freedom from revenge, freedom from anger, freedom from hatred." Sadly, he was called out for saying that.

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I believe that it's very possible to use these strategies, so I'm going to tell you about my Uncle Frank. He ain't really my uncle but, you know, he's still living so I can't call him out. Anyway. He came to a family reunion and decided to talk about Mexican Americans stealing jobs. And everybody had been chatting and eating quite happily till his racism silenced the room. Most people buried their faces in their plate, because this was Uncle Frank. This is what he does. But I decided to respond, but not with anger. I kind of organized a few comments and asked him a question. "Uncle Frank, I know you. I love you. I respect you. And what I know about you is that you'd run into a burning building and save somebody if you could. And you wouldn't care what race that person is, you wouldn't care whether they were gay or an immigrant. So, Uncle Frank, that's the man I love and respect. So tell me: How can I reconcile that good Uncle Frank that I know you are with the words that just came out of your mouth?" You haven't called him in. You haven't called him out. You called on him to decide how he's going to be. And with this approach, he's less likely to become defensive, because you haven't actually attacked him. And while he's organizing what to say, you've affirmed that he has options about how he wants to be, especially in his niece's eyes and his family's eyes. But most importantly, the third thing you've achieved is that you did not let his bigotry go unchallenged, and that was witnessed by the entire family: how you stand up to bigotry at a family reunion without hate, argument and throwing over the table.

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Now, anybody can learn these tactics, as I've said, and we really need to understand that we can offer people forgiveness and a chance to redeem themselves from their mistakes. Somebody gave us a chance to grow, and we can offer that to others. So I invite you to join me in this calling-in culture, this calling-in world that we're building. I think you will have a lot of joy and satisfaction in it, like I've found. We don't actually risk anything, because all we risk losing is our pain. And then you'll learn the most powerful lesson I've learned from five decades of being a social justice activist: fighting hate should be fun.

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(Laughter)

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It's being a hater that sucks.

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Thank y'all.

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(Applause and cheers)