

## We Outside Podcast Transcript

### Episode 5: Weaving Worlds with guest, Vanessa Hatakeyama

**[Opening Quote]** [00:00:00] **Vanessa Hatakeyama:** So often I see amazing people who, their expectations for themselves are not what they could be in terms of what they feel worthy of. And I think part of that love is just seeing that and expressing to them that I want better for you than maybe even you want for yourself. Or then maybe that you think you deserve or maybe you think that this is as good as it gets.

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[00:00:31] **Ain B.:** Welcome to the [We Outside Podcast](#), where we explore leadership through the lens of spirit restoration and transformation. I'm your host, Ain B., a restoration practitioner and founder of New Seneca Village.



Today's guest is Vanessa Hatakeyama. She is a committed cultural and community leader and a beautiful hula dancer.

In this episode, we discuss the power of internal energy, the motivating influence of love and how leaders tend to the present to create the future we want to see. You can find Vanessa's full bio in the show notes and in the end credits for this episode.

In each We Outside episode, we engage in generative conversations with guests who are redefining what it means to live and work outside of the dominant imagination.

Join us as we move beyond the confines of conventional thinking and into other realms of possibility. Now let's dive into today's conversation.

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**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:02:24] Well, thank you so much, Ain. I'm just so honored to be here and delighted. My pronouns are she / her. Right now I am in San Jose, Japantown in California, one of the last three remaining Japantowns in the country.

And I am in my special corner of my room. I have two kids and a partner, and we're in an apartment, and so every space is pretty much shared space, but this is my specific corner. This is my chair that no one else gets to sit in, in my little corner where nobody gets to touch anything.

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So it's kind of like the one little space in my apartment that I've carved out that it's like just me, like no one else is allowed.

**Ain B.:** Yes, I love it.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** My internal weather, I would say it's kind of muggy. It feels a bit heavy, like it needs to rain, sort of.

Like it looks cool outside, but you step outside and it's actually just overcast and a little bit like the air is a little bit heavy. It's ready for some sort of release. And looking forward to that time after it rains, when everything is just crystal clear and sharp and all the colors seem brighter. But yeah, right now it is a little bit like, it feels a little bit full, I think.

**Ain B.:** Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you for inviting us into your special private corner. We love a boundaried space. And thank you for sharing your weather. You know, I started to recognize maybe five or six years ago, like all weather is good weather. There is no such thing as bad weather, and I really love and relish this feeling of pregnancy and fullness and that a release is coming and it will be so great. So thank you.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ain B.:** So my name is Ain. I'm on ancestral unseated land of the Muskogee people in Alabama. My pronouns are she/they, and my internal weather today is windy. I love the wind. I truly love the wind. I talk to it all the time. I think it's a blessing. And today I feel a little bit like it's pushing me around.

And so the sky is blue, there's clouds, it's clear, it feels good, and the wind is being a little pushy today. And so I'm just trying to be in my love of the wind and not in my desire to not be pushed around. So thank you.

So this is how we begin. I love it. Muggy and windy.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah, let's forecast today.

**Ain B.:** That's it. I would just love to know, how do you define spirit or what is spirit to you and how do you embody it?

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**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:05:16] Yeah, I mean, I think for me, I think there's always been this sense of this undefinable sort of energy, this feeling of energy, I think, and you know, in Japanese culture, I think we would call it like chi.

It's kind of like your life force. And I'm not native Hawaiian, but I do practice hula. In Hawaiian, you would call it mana. And again, it's more like your energy, your life force. And that's very much connected to all things. And I think there's something there. I mean, clearly I am still evolving my concept of what spirit is, but I think it's that vital energy that is inside each person that it, you know, it powers you, but it also is your connection to everything else.

And so for me, I think that's where I'm landing right now on kind of what spirit is. It's that energy that connects you to yourself, to the people and to the life forces around you, but also to your ancestors as well.

**Ain B.:** Hmm. Yeah. Thank you so much. I feel similarly. I mean, there's, I think, a million definitions for spirit, and I do appreciate and recognize the sort of animating life force of it all.

Right? Like the thing that in addition to whatever biological function forms when we are in utero, there's a spark of life that happens that is undefinable to me, who is not a scientist. I'm sure someone out there can define it, but I believe that spirit is what makes us alive, and has us be alive. So similar to you. So I just wonder how does Spirit move through you?

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:06:52] Yeah. You know, I feel like there's something that I'm becoming more aware of in terms of how much I actually need physical motion in some ways to sort of connect with that. Because I do find, when I get, I tend to get stuck in my head a lot. And I associate that, being stuck in my head sometimes with stillness or like, you know, maybe a lack of movement because you're just kind of frozen, you know, thinking about things.

And then it kind of prevents you from taking that first step to do anything. And I think for me it's like that sometimes the motion creates the emotion and that feeling and connection. And so moving has become increasingly a bigger part of it, of being in your body and not like in your head, which for me is very hard. I'm very much in my head all the time.

**Ain B.:** You're not alone there.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah. And you know, it's just with what we're going through in the world where you can be having like this huge mishmash of

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thoughts, you know. Some of them are work related. Like driving the kids to school this morning, it was like, oh my gosh, I'm late to this one thing and the radio is on and there's just horrible things happening in Palestine.

And do I need to go to Trader Joe's after school today to pick up snacks? And, you know, it's this whole mix of these really heavy things and then these kind of normal things that just swirl around in my head.

And so I think having my practice of hula. Has been really, really helpful for grounding me and having the experience that's very physical and in my body versus in my brain. And I'm getting better at actually learning to sort of shut off my head a little bit more to connect with that spirit, to connect with sort of the meaning of each chant or the song.

Because I think probably my first 10 years of doing hula, I think I overthought it as well and was like, is my arm like at the perfect 45 degree? And I didn't actually connect with the words because I was just so much in my head and trying to do choreography.

But I think now having a greater appreciation of just enjoying the feeling of being in your body or not enjoying it. 'cause sometimes it's awful. That's important for me to just feel like a human, I think, and to feel connected.

**Ain B.:** Lovely. Thank you. Can you share a bit about how you came to hula?

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:09:12] Yeah. So again, I am not Kānaka Maoli.

I'm not native Hawaiian. I'm ethnically Japanese and my mom's family, they settled in Hawaii, from Japan. My grandfather, my mom's dad, my grandfather, he grew up in Hawaii and his whole family grew up in Hawaii and a lot of them are still there. I remember at a family wedding I saw my aunt, Keilani, I think I must have been like nine or something. I saw her dance at a cousin's wedding. I was just like, wow, what's that? That's so amazing. And my mom's like, that's the hula. So I always had this curiosity about it. Then I just never did it until I was like in my twenties,

And then when I came back from living in Japan, by chance I was walking by, in Japan town, there was a hula studio and I had just been walking by it and it was open, so I just stopped in.

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At that time I was feeling really homesick for Japan, and the lady at the front desk is Japanese and I was like, wow, this is crazy that I was just walking by and I ran into this Japanese person and she was like, oh, you should just try to take a class. I was like, oh, maybe this is...I've been wanting to do this my whole life. So that was the start of it. That was in 2011.

**Ain B.:** Wow.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Been a while.

**Ain B.:** Yeah. And can you share more about this shift into sort of perfection mode and technical prowess, it sounds like, to actually allowing the words and music and potentially movement to penetrate or impact you.

These are my words, but how would you describe it and how would you describe that transition?

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:10:54] You know, I think part of it was just my learning more about really what hula is. As a child, I saw it, I was like, oh, it's so beautiful. And then I think being with this Hālau, this hula school, that really does focus a lot on Hawaiian culture. Learning more about the deeply embedded cultural practices that are really part of Hula and more about Hawaiian spiritual practice and philosophy really helped me connect with it in a different way and deepen my appreciation that it's not just a pretty dance, you know?

It really is very much tied to lineage and history and storytelling, and a lot of that storytelling is connecting you to your ancestors or to the people who came before you. I think really learning more about it, especially for the ancient style of hula, that, you know, it's all based on chants. So originally hula was really just about the chanting and very simple hand motions. And now when we say hula, we probably think of the dancing. But originally it was really about the chanting. And a lot of these chants are again, about the ancient rulers or great chiefs, or about the gods and goddesses and about your lineage as a hula dancer.

**Ain B.:** Mm-hmm.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** So I think that gave me a lot bigger appreciation that there was definitely something more there. And I think I just really lucked out and I found this hula school that was really about that and very welcoming even

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if you're not a native Hawaiian person. They're very much committed to spreading Hawaiian culture.

**Ain B.:** Beautiful. Thank you. As you think about Spirit and this, I'm really hearing this embodied way of being present to spirit, and I wonder how that shows up in your leadership in both life and work.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Ah. Gosh, big sigh.

**Ain B.:** Let's take a moment for the big sigh.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Ah. You know, I think I'm so protective of my practice of hula that I do try to keep them separate in a lot of ways. I don't actually even like sharing my practice of hula with my work life.

I think because again, I just like to have that separate space where I'm not an executive director and I'm not a mom and I'm not a partner. I'm just somebody who gets to participate in this fully, without having those other mantles.

But I think about how I try to approach people with love, right? Like aloha is a big concept for hula, which is, you know, in the tourist culture it's like, oh, aloha means hi and bye. But it really is a greeting that can be quite profound.

And it is attached to your breath, that breath, that life force that you're sharing with other people. There's an acceptance and recognition of just our shared humanity that even if we feel separate, we're all breathing the same air. We're all alive and living beings. And you know, we need this breath. We all have this life force.

And so I do think that it has helped me deal with difficult people, there's a lot of me who sometimes just wants to dismiss them and be like, oh my God, that person's just out of control and I can't stand them. But also reminding me that, you know, they're all people, they're all humans.

They all have this life force.

**Ain B.:** Mm-hmm.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** We are all, whether we like it or not, we're all connected. And then to be able to try to find that connection. And I think in a lot of ways my practice of hula has intermixed and melded with my upbringing as a

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Buddhist. I was raised, you know, going to Buddhist temple and I think that it has a big culture and philosophy of compassion, interconnectedness.

And so I think it's all, it's mashed into this one thing for me that I think, again, it helps me approach people with more compassion, with more love and like intentionality. Even if you're driving me crazy, I'm really trying to love you. You know, and it's work.

Like you're lovable. And there's things that I love and appreciate in each person as a human, even if that's challenging. I think that it has helped me soften for people. I think in that way, my hula practice has on one hand given me balance to have this restorative external space from where I find most of my challenges, which is work.

But then to be able to bring some of that into my workplace through like how I show up. For people or how do I try to intentionally approach people? Even if I don't want to and I just really wanna sulk about it. But again, just remembering to breathe and remembering that, you know, you sometimes have to really intentionally try to love people and I think it can really change them.

**Ain B.:** [00:16:25] Yeah. Well this is such a beautiful practice. I love and appreciate your acknowledgement of how hard it can be sometimes to be fully present to other folks' humanity, especially as you began with the world being so chaotic and we're just really in a particular moment of a lot of fear and hatred and to meet that with love is definitely hard work. Right.

The things that we don't necessarily talk about; of practice, of being in alignment with your values is hard work. It's just, it's not a, you know? A rollercoaster ride through a field of unicorns and, I don't know, free food, so

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** nachos and unicorns.

**Ain B.:** Okay. Right. Which I would love to be on that planet, but we're on this planet and...I'm just struck by what you're naming as a heart commitment, can you share a bit more about how your heart commitment shows up in your work or life. So leadership, you know, we talk about leadership and really as a way of being that's writ large, right? Yes, many of us are leaders in our work, but we're also leaders in our lives.

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You're a mama, you're a partner, but also, even if you were none of those things and sitting in a cave meditating, you'd still be the leader of your own life, right? This is a space and opportunity to really talk about and lean into the challenges and the beauty of leadership. So, you started to allude to some of it, so I would love to have you share more about that and how you hold it.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:18:07] Yeah, absolutely. I work at the [Japanese American Museum of San Jose](#), which is located in the historic San Jose Japantown. You know, it's our mission to collect, preserve and share Japanese American history, art and culture. And as the Executive Director, I am steward of this institution, which really holds the memories and stories of our community focused and centered around the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, which includes my grandparents.

And so, you know, we do a lot through partnership with other organizations. But you know, of course all the things that museums do, like exhibits, tours, things like that. But as a grassroots founded museum that again, was all volunteer, founded and run, we really feel a strong call and then certainly myself as the Executive Director, to really create connections and strengthen the vitality of the community that we exist in.

So for us, that's very much deeply rooted in San Jose Japantown and seeing ourselves as an anchor organization. How do we serve as the hub for the collective community memory? And that's not just the story of Japanese Americans. That's the Chinese Americans who first settled in the area, and then also the Filipino Americans who really found safety here when there was just redlining everywhere else in San Jose and there was no other safe place to be.

So, you know, that's what I do.

**Ain B.:** And I just would add, and have done for a long time as also a volunteer for many years. Is that right? Yes. So just also acknowledging your journey with the museum as well as you talk about the passion that you bring. So thank you for the space that you're holding and what you're creating. And I hear very clearly the memory and the safety for so many groups, which...that's the only way we're getting through this thing. So thank you.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** A hundred percent. I hope that more people realize that the way forward is by creating collaborations and partnerships together.

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**Ain B.:** Yep.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Because there's no funding and so-

**Ain B.:** Hello.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Exactly. So how do we create those strong relationships and partnerships so that we can all perpetuate the work that we're doing?

**Ain B.:** Yeah. Thank you. Shout out or plus one to your shout out to people power.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** You know, I think going to the New [Seneca Village](#) residency really helped me realize that the world that I exist in most of the time, like for work, 'cause we spend so much time at work, is not really the world that I want to be in.

**Ain B.:** Mm-hmm.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** You know, because you, you guys, you've, you've ruined us.

You've taken us to this wonderful place where our needs are met and we're cared for as humans and we got to wake up when we want. And then coming back to my workplace, I just realized feeling like I feel changed, like how I see the world and what I really can imagine for it is so different.

But realizing that even if you have all that inside you, if the external world that you're in doesn't also transform, then your own transformation might not have any place to take hold. And as a leader, what is my role in really creating that reality in the ways that I can?

I shared with you that we have a small staff, but it's an all female staff, nonprofit, and they're, you know, mostly young, young-ish, amazing women who really work hard. And I see how easily that passion can be exploited by just the grind, you know?

And especially in nonprofit, when people are expected to do so much for so little because you're passionate. Because it's mission driven and how harmful that can really be for people who really believe in the cause. And so in my role

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as a leader, how do I actually change that entire concept of what nonprofit work is? In our museum, in our workspace for our all female staff. And even if there was males, I still would've done it, you know?

**Ain B.:** Mm-hmm. Yes, certainly.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Like love to the males too.

**Ain B.:** Yes. We love them.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:22:45] Yeah, and I mean, there's some really practical aspects to it, like increasing people's pay scales, increasing our access to meaningful benefits that our museum just really hadn't yet had the culture of embracing, because it was an all volunteer run organization for like 30 years. Even the idea of paying people was just a really big leap. The idea of paying people well was like, you know, causing people anxiety.

But really making sure that I was helping transform our workspace into some place that I felt good about. And cultivate a different sort of culture because nothing can take root when the soil is barren and it's just dry and dead.

And so how can I create that fertile ground at work so that my people can flourish? Yes. That it's not just the sturdiest, heartiest ones that can grow and survive, that it can really be a place that nurtures people. And that helps that reality that I do want to live in.

And then also setting boundaries on myself that I can't transform and change every aspect of everything. Again, I think that's how the restorative practices residency was so impactful. Just having that really stark contrast and then also realizing that in some ways that hula is like that for me too.

It's just like I have this other world over here, with so much joy where everybody is happy to be there, nobody feels exploited and it feels energizing.

How do I, how do I help create that in my workspace? Because there's no reason why it can't be that way, but I don't think it's gonna get there organically.

What are the things that I can do to make it a space like that? And again, part of it is that tactical side of benefits pay.

**Ain B.:** Yes. Always.

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**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah. To make people know that materially they're cared for. But beyond that, how do they feel cared for as humans? That they feel like I'm not just there to make sure that they meet their deliverables, that we're giving them opportunities, that they're getting words of affirmation, which, you know, like in many diasporic cultures is not usually a big thing, but definitely not in Japanese American culture.

Words of affirmation are like, it's not a real thing, nobody does that. But recognizing that, you know, it's powerful for people in your staff to hear exactly how great you think they are. And spelling it out even if it makes 'em uncomfortable at first because they're like, oh, why are you being nice to me?

But to help them hear those words so that they can accept them and then hopefully truly do feel cared for in a number of ways. But again, also have no question that they are valued as people and also as employees.

**Ain B.:** Yeah. What I'm struck by in what you're sharing is this call to the other worlds that are also part of this world.

So first of all, thank you for the shout out to The Village. It is a love offering similar to what you have lifted up for us, of how can we see love in everyone, and find that connection through acknowledging that we are each other, need each other, et cetera. And then you mentioned the other world of hula.

And so often, in particular, when we're in moments of deep complexity and or crisis, it's hard to recognize that we do have choice over where we spend our time, what other worlds we are not only participating in, but also creating, on our own. And again, that there are some really tactical pieces to it, but also just some energetic pieces that when you said it's not gonna happen organically, but it will happen intentionally, is what I heard that you have an intention for.

Revitalizing the soil, right? Of starting with, yes, maybe some barren, dry cracked soil, but we love the earth. The earth loves us, always provides, and what you're doing is really leaning into how can you enrich that soil such that it is able to provide life for these new employees who are, and I heard this very clearly shifted from volunteer to now employees.

Right. And then the benefits of that and the salary. And not just a salary, but a salary to be able to remain committed to what is a passion, what is a calling?

But that we don't have to be exploited or sacrificed in pursuit of what we're passionate about.

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I'd love to hear more about other worlds and how do you hold them for yourself as a reality, but also as an aspiration.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:27:53] Yeah. I think it is hard for me because usually I try to keep things separate because I like to be able to go hide different places. Like I'm totally somebody who likes to go take refuge in other places when I need an escape.

But more and more I find myself trying to pull new people into this experience of starting to recognize that we are making the world and it's not this sort of silver bullet thing, that it just goes from, you know, barren soil to lush garden overnight. And that there's so many components that you have to start cultivating and bringing in, in order to have that change and shift it over time.

You know, I did this exercise recently where they were like trying to figure out what were some of your key attributes. One that a lot of people said that I was, was a weaver. [which] Is that I'm usually seeing this network of things and how different people can be pulled into common things.

And I do think that I've been doing that more and more and, you know, kind of like, not clashing, but introducing my different worlds. And so part of that is, again, bringing in other young women who I see some of their challenges similar to mine and that they're passionate about what they do, and probably saying yes to too many things.

Just draining them. And so pulling them into spaces of connection with other people who are kind of like-minded or maybe even a little bit further along in their journey towards transformation and liberation, so that we are learning from each other and we're helping shift this story and the narrative and the culture for people at an earlier point in their careers or in their lives because, you know, I feel like I'm like solidly middle aged now. Like, there's no, there's no denying it.

**Ain B.:** Mm-hmm.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:29:49] It is hard. It's hard to make those shifts when you have kids. When you have a family and you're at a certain point in your career where you've been doing it one way and existing one way for a long time.

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So recently there are a couple people, like in my hula world, that I've been really trying to pull into specific aspects of my workspace. How do I help them be the type of leader that aligns with really what they want? And just create a bigger group of people to help us remind each other that again, we are doing the work to change the world.

We are doing the work to nurture this soil, so that we all can grow, and so that the next people have an easier time growing into this place of abundance versus, you know, burnout.

**Ain B.:** Yeah,

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Abundance versus burnout.

**Ain B.:** Yeah. You know, we love that. That is definitely what we stand for in The Village is how do we get to interrupt the cycles and expectations. Some internal, but many external that we don't even recognize are sort of what we've been programmed to think about, how we show our value.

How we prove our worth and how we also support ourselves and in a capitalist society are able to eat and live where we would like to live. But that so much of what we are seeing out in the world is a world as it is. As opposed to the world that we want it to be and so that it takes this extra intention and care. And what I hear in what you're doing, outreach and weaving and introducing, I'll say of different worlds to be able to be more aligned with creating the world that we wanna see, all the time, in all the places, in our present and future.

And again, that takes a certain level of, I keep saying intention and it's that, but it's also purpose. So when I think back to how we began this conversation about the life force, to me that's another word or sensation for purpose to bring about states of transformation and liberation that none of us have ever seen, hopefully in what we're doing in the places that we're finding will be able to experience it so we know what we're working towards.

But I would love to hear just some of your thinking about how spirit informs some of these actions, and then also how does it help to restore you in taking these actions? Because again, it's not sitting on the couch, it's not, you know, just bearing yourself in work. It's looking up and seeing the bigger picture and being a contribution to it.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:32:28] Yeah. You're helping me synthesize these things. Thinking about really that sense of purpose, right, and that sense of spirit

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going back to that idea of aloha and that love. And I think if you cultivate that love for people, it expands your outcomes, your possibilities for everybody.

I mean, I was definitely raised in a way of thinking that, you know, there was a right outcome for people. Like we should all be doctors, dentists, and lawyers, or, you know, whatever.

But I think when you really cultivate that love for people, you know, an unconditional love. That isn't like a clinging love, and again, it goes with Buddhism too because the ultimate form of love and compassion is not an attached one.

And it's not one where you're clinging to something, it has to behave a certain way, or you expect it to be a certain way. But it's just realizing that everything has its own nature and that should be honored and cultivated. And I think with this idea of loving, truly loving people, it's like you really want the best for them and I think even the people who it's harder to love you can still really want the best for them.

**Ain B.:** Yeah.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** And maybe the best for them is not working with me.

**Ain B.:** Right. Valid.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:33:42] But you know, really, if you keep that in your focus or like kind of you're grounding yourself, and committing to coming from a place where you remember that you love this person. I think it is easier to frame yourself in that, you know, I want the best for you.

What is best for you is whatever is the best for you. It's not what I think is the best for you. It's not what the world thinks is the best for you. And that so often I see amazing people who, their expectations for themselves are not what they could be in terms of what they feel worthy of.

And I think part of that love is just seeing that and expressing to them that I want better for you than, than maybe even you want for yourself, or then maybe that you think you deserve or maybe you think that this is as good as it gets.

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You know, maybe you think like, oh. You know what? I have a good job that pays money and why should I complain? Right. Or, you know, I pay all this money in taxes and I don't really know what it goes for, but that's the way it is.

You know, but I think just saying, no, you know what? I want better for you than that. And how can I help you see that it can be better or different. Yeah. Right. Maybe better is the wrong word. It can be something that really fulfills you. This version of life that we're living, it's the one that maybe was foisted on us, and it's not the one that you have to embrace.

You can embrace something different. You know, it can be hard to see that when you're just grinding and just trying to tick all the boxes or just like survive, you know?

**Ain B.:** [00:35:27] Yeah, a hundred percent. You know, I often think of, you know, sort of the American checklist of things that we're supposed to be doing in our lives.

And you know, they always say, oh, do good in school and then go to a good college and then get a good job. And then you meet someone, then you get married, then you have kid, like there's a checklist, even if we're not thinking of it as such. And that checklist works for a lot of people, so there's no shade about it.

But how connected are we to ourselves, to our own hearts, to our own Spirit? Which for me also translates to desire, right? Like that I can look at and see the checklist as it's laid out, and many are walking that path. And also question whether that path is for me or there's another path for me and, you know, to the best and highest good of my spirit and what my spirit needs as opposed to sort of what works for society and what is more pleasing to others and what fits into others' concept of a life well lived.

You know, I think the great thing about humans is that we're full of so much potential. Like anything is possible with the capabilities that we have, with the tools that we have, and I'm talking about inner tools, inner capabilities, forget, you know, all the external things the toys and tools and all that that we can play with, but just internally, the deep reserves of possibility that are inherent in our being and that we get to explore that.

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And not just follow the yellow brick road, if you will. Yeah, that does feel like a very purpose and life driven thing to be in relationship with your life force and be wondering, questioning and allowing without severe attachment, and “there's gotta be a right way.” Which [I was] also raised similarly, had to do a lot of therapy to get out of the right way of things, but to be curious about what is actually the best choice in the moment with all the possibilities in front of you.

Is there anything that I haven't thought to ask you that you would like to share? Anything top of mind?

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:37:46] What has actually floated to the top of my head is that all of this work is the hardest to do with yourself, your children, and your family. I am very comfortable with that in this space of talking about coworkers or friends or you know, people in community, where the work is hardest to do, ironically. That super accepting version of love. It's like so hard the closer it gets to yourself,

And so, I mean, I think, you know, with family of course, because like they just know how to press all the buttons.

**Ain B.:** Yes.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:38:40] And then with your kids, well at least for me, with my kids, it's hard not to have those expectations that you kind of remember of how you were raised. And so I think it actually is particularly hard for me to really check myself in like, am I again, am I hoisting these values? You know, I mean, of course I want them to be kind and compassionate and like, not punch people.

**Ain B.:** We want them to be that as well. So thank you.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:39:07] Yeah. So I mean, you know, human decency, of course, we want that to be an expectation. There's a lot of other things in terms of behavior that I catch myself being like, why am I making such a big deal about, you know, that they asked to be excused from the table?

You know, things like that where I'm like, is that really meaning? Like, what is that about? And so I think that's actually really hard for me to, I guess, let go of some of those things that I didn't even realize were there. And then of course for

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self, I think it's hardest because I'm always like, well, that's okay for other people. But, I have to do it this way. And then realizing like, oh my God, you're a hypocrite. So, you know, it takes I think a lot of intentional self-awareness and humility. Like true, true humility where you do kind of have to humble yourself in a way that is very, it's not my favorite, but I mean, I think it's been helpful.

It's the hardest for me.

**Ain B.:** [00:40:11] Yeah, I hear that so clearly. And I'm just always struck by how much practice is practice, right? And so much of it is really releasing, like that checklist I'm talking about is inside of a program that's sort of handed to all of us.

Okay, here's the American program, here's the program for you as this particular person and body and identity and culture and gender, et cetera, inside of this American program. Like follow it, you know? And so much of what we have to do in developing our own practices is unlearning, like this deep noticing, which I'm hearing from what you're sharing and then questioning like Yeah, who, who, what, whose rule is that actually, and do I even care about that?

Is that aligned with my goal to have decent human children? Or is that some leftover vestige from a thing that we can just let go, you know? And that it's just a continuous practice. There's no other word for it. But also I think what is great about practice is there's no perfection.

There's just trying. And then, oh, okay. Slipped up again. Okay. Trying again. Oh, yeah. Oh, I nailed it that time. Excellent. Okay. I'm embodying that even more and more. Okay. Oh, slipped up again. Okay. Well, tomorrow I'll practice again. Yeah. You know, I'll be back, I'll be back in alignment with my values and my intention and my purpose.

What is filling you with awe or wonder or joy or gratitude these days?

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:42:10] Yeah, I mean, again, it really is my practice of hula. I feel like my life feels very limited to a small set of things right now. But, really my practice of hula is really what does that, and, you know, our hālau is called Nā Wai Ola. I draw a lot of inspiration from the different Mele or the different songs and chants that we do that talk about the Hawaiian people and Hawaiian history.

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We're doing one right now called Hana Waimea. It's memorializing this great war, and even though it's talking about war, it very much reminds me of Greek epic poems where it's war, but it's told in this sort of beautiful format. This one that we're doing now is very similar to that. Where even though it is talking about battle, it's just so beautiful and poetic and the imagery of it is quite visceral as well, so getting awe and wonder from that.

But there's, one of my favorite movies. I'm the type of person who has like comfort movies. And will watch the same thing for and over, but a film called [Whale Rider](#).

**Ain B.:** Whale Rider! I love that movie.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** I love that movie so much.

**Ain B.:** Yes. Beautiful.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah, so that's definitely something that I will go to watch when I'm just feeling a little bit low and I'm like, I just, I need to, I just need to immerse myself in that story.

**Ain B.:** [00:43:33] Yes, lovely. I'll say my sacred shout out is my beloved [Wild Geese](#) poem from Mary Oliver. I cannot get over this poem. It's been orienting me and reminding me for probably the last five years, and so I would love to read it.

Wild Geese.

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair. Yours, and I will tell you mine. Meanwhile, the world goes on. Meanwhile, the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes. Over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers. Meanwhile, the wild geese high in the clean blue air are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting, over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

So it's wild geese for me today, but always. I love it. Yeah. Thank you.

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I would love to see what question you're holding now or what call to action or practice that you might have for our listeners.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** [00:45:31] Okay, well, one question that I feel like I'm always holding is how do I go back to New Seneca Village? But

**Ain B.:** Yes. Well, there's a way and we gotta talk to the funders to give us funding so we can get a place, and then you can come back whenever you want.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. So that's definitely the top of my question. I am always just seeking, how do I bring more of that feeling into my life? Like how do I find practical applications or space, like even, 'cause actually this little, my little corner space, like I did not actually make this space until after the village.

**Ain B.:** Oh.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** And I was like, I need my, I need my little, I need a corner. Like I need a me space.

**Ain B.:** Yes.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** I would say it's those little things that make me feel closer to that experience that I think I need to do more of. And I hope that anybody listening also again, even though yes, ultimately like can I just go back, but, but don't sleep on or discount the little things that are really going to give you, like allow for the space for you to try to cultivate that sense of ease and just joy. So even if it's a little thing. Like those little things add up and it'll be there when you need it, right?

[There's definitely times when I need, I'm like, I need to go into my corner now. Like I'm putting myself in timeout in my corner. Little things like that where it seems like just such a silly thing, like I'm very territorial over my little chair. Yes. But being very firm on that, like, no, I need, I need my chair.

And accepting that and loving it and being okay with it and honoring that. Again, a little thing, but it tends to make a big difference.

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**Ain B.:** Yeah, I don't think it's a little thing. I think it's an intentional tending space with very clear boundaries, and I love that for you. So thank you so much.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Thank you.

**Ain B.:** Thank you for this conversation. Thank you for being a villager and being part of the village, and thank you for all the work you do in the world, in your community at the museum, but also we know that extends far and deep into your community in Japantown, so thank you.

**Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Well thank you so much for the opportunity. This is the perfect way to start the day.

**Ain B.:** Beautiful. Thank you, Vanessa.

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[00:48:10] **Vanessa Hatakeyama:** Bay Area, born and raised. Vanessa Hatakeyama is the Executive Director of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. A San Jose Japantown resident for over a decade, Vanessa is deeply rooted in the local community and has fostered collaborations with artists and arts organizations to showcase and celebrate the vibrant creativity, abundance, and diversity and rich cultures that thrive in the historic Japantown neighborhood.

As committed to her work and community endeavors as she is, they all come second to her beautiful, blended and extended family, and her passion for the Hawaiian Art of Hula when she has free time. She's an avid listener of podcasts reader of books, writer of poetry and prose, and enjoys throwing inconsistently shaped mugs, bowls, and plates on the pottery wheel.

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[Static Outro]**Ain B.:** The We Outside Podcast is produced and hosted by Ain B., and produced and edited by Aisha Jordan. For access to resources mentioned in the episode, check out the show notes.

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