

**Audio Title: Trudi Lebron**  
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### Transcript

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hey, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot and I'm here to help you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's where you will find the stoop.

Our host Amanda Lytle will be there to welcome you to the conversation. *The Book Stoop* is the place for the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, our favorite kinds of people.

I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is season two of our podcast. Thank you for listening.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thanks Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second to welcome you to our spot, *The Book Stoop*. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful you're here.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with Trudi Lebron. Trudi is a business coach who helps entrepreneurs build businesses that change lives without compromising their values, their money or their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

She stands behind this practice of equity-centered coaching and leadership that focuses on frameworks that support social impact business models.

In this conversation, Trudi shares her own journey with coaching and a back story and a brief history of the coaching industry. She offers insights on the differences between a businessperson, an entrepreneur, and a coach and where sales and marketing impact intentionality and overall coaching practices.

She tells us how coaches and mentors change the trajectory of her life, what culturally responsive teaching looks like, how equity is about far more than just racism and how important a true commitment to learning is.

Before we jump in, I want to invite you to share *The Book Stoop* with your community. If you're loving this episode, grab a screenshot and tag us on Instagram, @rowhousepub. Every share, five-star rating and written review helps us find more listeners and climb the charts. So we're

super grateful for your help. We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question. So what are you reading these days?

**Trudi Lebron:** Oh man. What am I not reading? I have so many books coaching. I mean getting read. Most of them are actually on coaching right now because I am preparing to teach a sequence of courses in our certification program which we will talk about and so I am reading a whole bunch about the history of coaching and personal development. A lot of it is academic.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right. Well, I have so many questions to ask you about coaching and the work that you're doing. So maybe let's use this as a segue into you telling me about that, the coaching style stuff that you're starting to create too.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah. So we are working on a practice called "equity-centered coaching" and we have – that we teach through the Institute for Equity Centered Coaching and we certify people in a coaching methodology and a leadership methodology that really centers equity and focuses on this framework that includes social impact business model, liberatory leadership, culturally-responsive practice and values and it really – having people use values not just as these like theoretical concepts but like how do we use our values to make decisions and, you know, impact the way that we show up in our day-to-day work and life.

So people who come through our coaching program and learn to be equity-centered coaches, the goal is to really help them serve their clients in a way that really prioritizes the client and the container experience, so that they can serve anyone who shows up in their container no matter what their identity is, no matter what their age or socioeconomic background is or anything like that and really provide high quality coaching experiences for people that are safe and trauma-informed and just help increase the likelihood that people are going to be able to walk away feeling seen and like they are the drivers of their own life instead of having the kind of coaching where the coach is really centering themselves and that they're dictating what people should want or should do.

**Amanda Lytle:** Super interesting. It sounds more of a holistic, like a holistic style coaching where you're actually meeting someone as they are, as they show up in that moment.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah, absolutely, and doing it with an understanding of cultural responsiveness, which means that you are – even if you don't understand all of the details about someone's ethnicity or race or cultural background, that you have tools that you can use to help people solve the things that they need to solve and that you're not going to gaslight them. You're not going to micro-aggress.

You're not going to fall into these stereotypes or tropes or spiritually bypass or, you know, all of the problems that have become so well-known in the industry, the coaching industry because when we coach with a standard around whiteness, around – you know, like kind of mainstream identities, straight, white, you know, like middle upper class people, like when you coach and you center that kind of identity, you just make a lot of mistakes.

**Amanda Lytle:** I want to ask about some of the stuff that you've been reading. So you say that you've got mountains of books, you know, coaching books and about the history and the academics behind it. I'm curious about kind of a basic timeline of coaching and where this has come from and then to pivot into how you've turned it into what you want and think it should be.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah. Oh, man. So it's really interesting because some accounts of what I'm reading really identify the bible as the first personal development book, which is fascinating, and I can see it. I'm not a religious person. I didn't grow up going to church. I know very little about the bible.

But thinking about it as a tool for personal development is fascinating to me because so much of what a lot of religious institutions do is really help people live – you know, try to help people live up to a certain standard. When you look at it like that, it's really interesting. It's just like a really interesting kind of like thought experiment to think about religion as a personal development practice.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right.

**Trudi Lebron:** And I don't think a lot of people think of it that way, but it certainly is. It has a lot of the qualities of a personal development practice.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right.

**Trudi Lebron:** So that is as far as – if you buy into that idea that the bible is the first personal development book, this practice is quite old obviously. But, you know, in our kind of more contemporary history, some of the first books that people talk about as a kind of key – you know, key works in this area are for example *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right, OK.

**Trudi Lebron:** Right. So that's one of them. There's another one, Napoleon Hill. The name is not coming to me but it's a – something about like building wealth, right?

**Amanda Lytle:** OK.

**Trudi Lebron:** And what's fascinating – and this is kind of directly what got me to kind of – the relationship with coaching that I have right now and is deeply inspiring our work is that when you – if you just did a Google search for “personal development books,” what you get is a lot of this like *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, right? And books that are related to business and wealth and I had a problem with that.

You know, I have a big problem with that because I was like, “Well, why is that the case? Like why is it that when you go on this journey to understand, to like improve your life, so many of the ends come to, well, you have to make money. You should be an entrepreneur. You need to like influence people and have all this power.”

Like what is that about? And I think that that drives a lot of the problems that we have in the industry right now. One of them being that we have a lot of people who are coaches who are really underinvested, and I don't mean invested in terms of like monetarily. Certainly that's part of it. But underinvested energetically, with their time. You know, like just kind of like all around.

That they're underinvested in the practice of coaching and way more invested – in fact overinvested in the business of coaching. So what we have is a lot of people who call themselves coaches and maybe they do a little coaching. But their dominant identity and practice is in sales or marketing or entrepreneurship and so they are actually – when we think of hours in a day and in terms of proficiency and expertise with our time, they are much more of a businessperson than they are of a coach, and I think that's a missed opportunity.

So what we decided to do, what I noticed is – because I was teaching a mastermind that was about social impact business, like helping people grow businesses that could make money but also do good in the world. What I noticed is that a lot of people were coming into the program, and they were coaches, but they didn't have a lot of skill. Like they didn't have a lot of training in how to be a coach.

They had expertise in their content like maybe from their past career or maybe they went to college and, you know, majored in something or they have all this like life experience and that's great. I'm not discounting that.

But they didn't actually learn a lot about how to be an effective coach and there's a lot of science in that. There's a lot of art in that. So when we evolved the former mastermind, which is called “Amplified Impact Mastermind” into what is now the Institute for Equity Centered Coaching, I decided to pull these tracks apart.

So now we teach people to be coaches in a coach training program and we also teach people to be good leaders and entrepreneurs in our leadership track because it was just really important for us to separate those two things and help people who wanted to be a high-quality coach, really get training on how to do that well.

**Amanda Lytle:** If we back up a bit, I'm really curious on where the interest in coaching – I'm going to ask you about business too. But in coaching in particular had come from.

**Trudi Lebron:** So my interest in coaching, so it's – I have always been interested in coaching and the reason is because I feel like I am where I am in my life because of coaches. So my – like the short and, you know, quick and dirty story of my life is that I grew up in a lower income community. I had my first child when I was 15 years old, and I had a second child when I was 16 years old and that kind of set my life up in a very particular set of circumstances.

At that time, the outcomes from my life generally were nowhere near like the actual – like the life that I'm living right now. The reason that my life has taken the course that it has in addition

to – in addition to more things related to my identity around certain privileges that I had and, you know, I always tell people like I was a teen mom, but I didn't get kicked out of my house.

If I got kicked out of my house, my outcomes would have been different. You know, I had two parents, even though they were separated, that were very involved and supportive. I didn't have any learning disabilities. I didn't have anything kind of impacting my ability to kind of get an education even though I dropped out of school. Like I self-studied through school. I had a lot of things in my favor.

But I have more things not in my favor, right? Because I had good coaches who would not have identified themselves as coaches. They would have identified themselves as like mentors or teachers or social workers in some cases.

But they were all for all intents and purposes functioning as coaches. Because I had those people, they were able to amplify the qualities of my life that I did have going for me. You know, the things that were working in my favor and really amplify those things and help me find other things that I could grab on to, to take intentional action and not give up when I wanted to, the many times that I wanted to, you know, and not make decisions that would have made my life harder in certain ways.

So I have always been really fascinated with basically like why my life ended up where it did and so many other people didn't even though we started in similar places. In my graduate work, before I got into coaching and the online space, I was working in nonprofits and studying my graduate program, Adolescent Youth Development, and I was actually studying my – I wrote my master's degree thesis and kind of put together my PhD dissertation.

Looking at the relationships between students and – well, we would call it like high-risk students, like urban, you know, black and brown students in urban areas and teachers and looking at the relationships between teachers and looking at like how teachers showed up in their practice as a teacher or mentor and looking at things like race and bias and their own bias about youth and starting to understand what made effective relationships and what made it – you know, what were some of the qualities that made it more likely that some students were going to do – were going to fare better and the answer to a lot of the questions I had was that the teachers that were effective operated as a coach.

Like they were doing a lot of things that we think of coaches doing. So even before I was working in the industry training coaches, I've been kind of studying this in other contexts physically my whole – you know, kind of almost in some ways my whole like career. It just now happens to be in this online context.

**Amanda Lytle:** Hey friend. We are coming straight back to *The Book Stoop* after a quick break.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK. So now my second part of that question was into business because there's a real highlight on business here and even – we will get to the podcast as well. So tell me about the

connecting between coaching, because there are so many different kinds of coaching. But in particular around business because there's such a pull into that.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah. So the business piece came in really out of necessity. So the – whereas the coaching was very natural and kind of organic to my identity and my life experience, the business was very foreign to me. I grew up – you know, my father was in the military. My mom was an executive director of a nonprofit. I did not grow up in a home where people were like engaged in the corporate environment and very driven by like business success.

I think that's not what I grew up in and then my whole – the first half of my career was in nonprofit institutions and what happened was – and I realized that if I kept working in nonprofits, I was going to be broke forever. Like it just was really – it became this really functional requirement of my life. Like I could not see a scenario where I was going to be able to ever get out of debt, like school debt for example.

I couldn't see a scenario where I would ever be able to buy a house because I just – even though I was – I had a successful career and I was making good money, I was making more than the national average – I think my last salary was probably \$65,000 a year. But I had over six figures in school debt. You know what I mean? And it's like on – and I had – I started so far behind that I could not see a way for the math to work so that I could like – and then my – that time, me, and my partner, we had a third – well, I birthed a third child and then between the three of us or between the two of us, we had six altogether.

So I was like I got to figure out how to make some real money, you know. So I started consulting. I started because I was – I had built this body of expertise and people in my community knew that I was an excellent trainer and facilitator on issues related to adolescent development and diversity and bias and these kinds of things. People started asking me to come in and train their teams.

I started building programs and writing curriculum. So I had an in-person consulting practice while I was working fulltime just because I needed to supplement my income and that work was so fun and so – I, you know, kind of took some courses and listened to podcasts about like how to grow my consulting practice and just like how to do this, how to build a side hustle and then eventually I was like, “I am a much better student to work for myself. Like how can I make that happen?”

Then I just started to learn about business and what I realized on that front was that there was a lot of toxicity in business, like a lot of things that I fundamentally didn't believe in. So I was able to take the experience that I had in the nonprofit world because I had done really well and I was like in leadership in nonprofits, running teams, managing millions of dollars in grants, in some cases federal grants.

So I had all this like real experience and then I was learning about building an online business and I was like, well, there's an opportunity to kind of blend these because there's a lot of toxic stuff happening in the online business world. I don't have to take that. I can bring these two paths

together and start teaching a business approach that is much more centered around social impact and equity because I know that there are other people out there like me who are like, “I need to make money but I’m not willing to do it by exploiting people or by like using shady marketing techniques or manipulation or running ...” You know, like kind of having this like toxic relationship to power.

So yeah, and then, you know, I – it worked and so like I started just building kind of the hybrid business and eventually I was able to leave my fulltime nonprofit career.

**Amanda Lytle:** That’s incredible.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah, it is.

**Amanda Lytle:** Congratulations.

**Trudi Lebron:** Thank you.

**Amanda Lytle:** And it’s so interesting to find something or to just kind of weave in and out of things that are of interest to you, that you’re super passionate of and then blend it into something that really works for you. So I love that. I love that you’re able to do this.

**Trudi Lebron:** Thank you.

**Amanda Lytle:** I want to come back to the cultural responsiveness too because I know that even within the coaching industry, there’s a lot to speak to about that and about the importance of it. Can you elaborate a little bit more on that?

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah. So that really comes from – a lot of what we teach in our coaching practice comes from the world of adolescent youth development and teaching where there has been a lot of work done on how to do that work by – in center equity and have a lens of race and to do those things. So culturally responsive teaching is a big field in the education world and positive youth development in the youth development world.

But because coaching is like kind of a little bit rogue, like it’s a rogue industry whether it’s just like a lot of entrepreneurs and a lot of people doing it a lot of different ways, there hasn’t been a lot of research and intention and writing put in to how to do coaching with this lens and because I’m an academic and I had – that was my previous work. I was – you know, I draw a lot on those concepts.

So basically the idea of culturally responsive coaching is that we do our coaching work in a way that responds to the cultural and ethnic context that our clients come from. It doesn’t mean that we have to be experts in those things, and it doesn’t mean that we change the way or in some ways, it means we do change the way that we coach. But it’s something that we learn how to do that improves the experience for everyone. So it’s not that you just coach like black and brown folks differently or Asian folks differently.

It's that you have a way of coaching that honors the identities, all of the intersectional identities of your clients and lets you kind of do your practice in a way that's a little more humble and a little more light and gentle so that you can build a relationship and that you have the skills to, you know, pivot if a client brings something up that is specifically related to their cultural context, that you as a coach don't identify with.

But now you have these other tools that you can say, well, let the client lead and like, well, tell me more about this, you know, and you don't have to feel – so many people feel like they just don't know what to say if a client says – I will give you an example.

If someone grows up in a collectivist culture, like a culture that centers the community over the individual, they might struggle with centering themselves, with being seen, with like amplifying their voice as an individual and really like stepping up and taking up space, right?

And if that person goes to a coach and says, "I really struggle with this because in my culture this is what we believe," if the coach just dismisses that and this happens – we hear from clients who have experienced this. If you are not culturally responsive, you might make a mistake and just kind of say, "Well, let's just change your mindset about that."

**Amanda Lytle:** Right.

**Trudi Lebron:** The belief system is central to the identity of the person. You're asking them to do something that is completely not only countercultural but might actually be offensive to their values set and also might be – it might cause other psychological harm because now there's a – now there's like this cognitive dissonance. Like you're asking someone to believe something different or to behave differently than what they actually believe, right?

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**Trudi Lebron:** So – and that happens all the time. So that's just one example but things like that happen all the time. A culturally-responsive coach is going to handle that – those scenarios completely differently. They're going to ask the clients to really talk through their belief system and really identify what components of it are really central, to them that really serve them and where there might be space to not reject the old way of being but incorporate a new concept into what they believe so that they can hold both.

And that's really skillful coaching that if you don't practice and get feedback on and like think through, it's not something that people just do naturally because there is advice – you know, we're hanging out with our friends. We just say, "Oh girl, like, you know, just forget that. Like just do you." You know what I mean? And it's different. There is a lot of harm that can happen when we ask people to reject things that are central to their cultural beliefs.



**Amanda Lytle:** Two things that keep coming to mind right now. One of them is that active listening isn't for everyone. Not everyone can do it. Well, they don't do it easily, right? It takes practice and you have to learn it and you have to make a lot of mistakes I guess to get into there.

But the other thing that I kept coming back to was how racism laces in and out through the coaching industry, especially within the white community, often without intention of course. But I really wanted to highlight the importance of antiracist coaching in this practice as well.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah, and let me – I will just say this because it's really important to me. Like this is not just about racism. This is about supremacy culture as a whole because we default to those norms when we're talking about like through patriarchy, through misogyny, through heteronormativity, through the income and socioeconomic bias, right?

Like we default to these norms all the time and we like to tell people, "Oh, don't believe that. Believe this," or "That's the wrong way to do it. This is the right way to do it." So it's not just about racism. It is about racism often and we are in a kind of cultural zeitgeist door. Like we are all kind of like paying attention to that right now but ...

**Amanda Lytle:** There's so much more.

**Trudi Lebron:** But there's so much more and that's why we call the institute and the practice equity-centered coaching and not just antiracism because it's about this bigger practice of like how do we not center mainstream identity all the time just because that's what we've normed.

**Amanda Lytle:** Of course. Yeah, no. I could listen to you go on and on and on about that and actually I'm going to ask you to talk a little bit more. If you elaborate a bit more on the importance of – I will take you back to the antiracist coaching for a moment.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yes.

**Amanda Lytle:** But then I do want to bring it back. So can you elaborate a bit there? And then I have another part B to that.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah, yeah. So antiracist coaching and antiracist practice is about not just like not being racist. But about being intentionally or behaving and believing in intentional ways that dismantle racism. So having the ability to check a client on something that they say that is misogynistic or that is racist or micro aggressive, right? That you – that in an antiracist context and practice, you're even changing the way that your contracts are designed and changing the ways that your policies are built inside of your business.

So not just with your clients but like inside of your business the way that you manage your team, that you're willing to call people out or make decisions about who belongs in the container and who doesn't belong in the container based on their values around antiracism or racism, right? That you don't have space. If you have an antiracist coaching practice, that means that when you build containers, you need to make sure that those containers are also free of racism and, you

know, all of the other – and bias and prejudice and that you’re really like kind of keeping a tight space and you’re not defaulting to the whole like, “Well, we don’t manage the Facebook group,” or “That was a staff person who did that,” and like – you know, and this space is for everyone. No, it can’t be for everyone. It has to be for people who value the same things that you value.

**Amanda Lytle:** You totally just answered my part B in that beautiful answer too because I was going to be asking about the structures also, like naming and calling out things and making sure that there is value alignment in the practice.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yeah, absolutely, 100 percent.

**Amanda Lytle:** And as a business grows too, I mean like if you’re a coach that has coaches working alongside you or under the same name or umbrella, that the value alignment matters there. But I think that there’s only going to be progress with a client as well is if there is that dynamic value alignment.

**Trudi Lebron:** Yes, 100 percent.

**Amanda Lytle:** Anyone who is interested or anyone listening who’s interested in coaching or has maybe seen themselves as a coach, what are some personal practices that they can start jumping into before they actually take a deep dive into whether they’re going to jump into equity-centered coaching with you or whether they’re going to try and find certification elsewhere. What are some things to be extra mindful of in the initial stages?

**Trudi Lebron:** I think in the initial stages, the goal is really to be in a personal – like to commit to the personal journey. So many people want to throw up a statement on their website. Like, you know, we’re committed to this and that.

We really ask clients to consider like slowing down and just kind of assessing like what have you learned about diversity, about bias. Like have you explored your own identity? How comfortable are you in these conversations and containers? Look at your bookshelf. Look at your podcast list. How many authors of color are you reading, and you know, creators, content creators of color are you following?

And starting to ask not just to notice but also to ask why. Like well, why is it that it’s disproportionately white? Like why is that the case? Is it just what I’ve been exposed to? Is it what people are referring to me? And then taking steps to really start to diversify and be willing to just be – diversify your own life and I don’t mean just like calling or following and reading authors of color or content creators of color who are talking about race. That’s also a big mistake is that people are like, yeah, I have all of the books last year on – you know, like all of the antiracist things.

But what about like novelists of color? And what about people who are not talking anything about race? What about them? Like read their work, so that you can get a context for what’s different, like what people are talking about, what people are centering in their stories, right?

Like just kind of do – I think that part is just a critical step that people take before they jump into any like “I’m going to put up a diversity statement on my website,” or, you know, like whatever other things people are doing.

So I think that’s the first step and then committing to learning. Like what is a – let’s learn a little bit about the history. Let’s learn a little bit about how some of the things that have happened in our history are currently manifested in our communities, our school system, our policies around housing, right? Like we have actual evidence of the things that happened hundreds of years ago that are in our day-to-day life right now that people are not seeing. Once you start to see them, you can’t unsee them.

**Amanda Lytle:** That’s it, yeah.

**Trudi Lebron:** So like starting to kind of like build that lens for like where are the inequities in my community. Where are the inequities in my world? Like how am I contributing or not or complacent in all of this stuff, right? Really just kind of taking that personal look is like the first thing.

**Amanda Lytle:** What has been a big, huge personal takeaway from your practice as a coach and now diving into the equity-centered coaching? What has been one of your biggest lessons in the process?

**Trudi Lebron:** I think one of my biggest lessons honestly is that it is easy for people to make the mistake that equity just means race, right? That equity work – that when we talk about DEI, that people really get focused on like, oh, we’re talking about race and although it is very important that we continue to talk about race, that mistake causes problems in other places. Like it – because what happens is if people feel like if they just diversify their community, they’re good. Like they can just check the box.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right.

**Trudi Lebron:** Or if they took one course, that they can just check the box because they get it now and that it’s not as automatic for people to see how we go from this kind of conceptual idea about antiracism and what it – like what it can be to like what it translates to in people’s day to day life and how oppression exists at so many other intersections including race.

But one of – I think one of the biggest things that I’ve noticed over the last couple of years as I’m working with people is that that is not as obvious to many people as like it is to those of us who are actually very engaged in the work and it’s not even something we think about often. We just assume that everybody gets it.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**Trudi Lebron:** But it really needs to be spelled out more clearly.

**Amanda Lytle:** I'm just being mindful of time because I could sit here and chat with you for a very long time. I wanted you to take the opportunity if there is an account, a person, an organization, a disruptor, activist or change agent that you would love to give a shoutout to, who would it be?

**Trudi Lebron:** Oh my goodness. Honestly, like the – what is coming to me, right, is like all of the grassroots organizations that are like in communities doing work with people and families. Like in schools, in people's homes, like organizing rallies, giving support, giving people rides to vote or to pick up groceries. Like – and I did that work for years. I did and I never want to forget that work, right? It's really easy for us to think about all the people who have like grown big platforms around activism and that's wonderful in a lot of ways because the responsibility is to kind of shed light and to like have these conversations.

But the work doesn't happen on Instagram and like it really is happening outside your door. Like in the communities, in the cities around you, in the rural communities around you. So I want to let people know like if I had to encourage anybody to like look someone up, look up whatever like social service agencies and local nonprofits in your community. Just do a Google search and see what they're up to and follow those accounts and like volunteer with those people. Like that's where change happens like on the ground in communities.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, it totally does. Trudi, thank you so much for this chat and for being a guest on *The Book Stoop*.

**Trudi Lebron:** Thank you. I'm really happy to be here. It was really fun.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thank you so much for being with us. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you're able. Written reviews help us reach more listeners too. Be sure to check out the show notes for all the links and share *The Book Stoop* with your community. Talk soon.

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