Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 2: “Angelina McCaster (Teach A Dog To Fish)”

RACHEL: Welcome to out of the Woofworks, here with me Rachel Forday, on a podcast where we'll be talking about dogs, training, and, more importantly, human social issues, both in the dog industry and in the world.

Today, we have dog trainer, Angelina McCaster from Teach A Dog to Fish with us, and we will learn about her experience as a Black person in the animal rescue world and in the dog training industry.

We have so much to learn today, so let's get right into it.

[intro music]

Hey, Angelina. Thank you so much for being here with us today. How are you doing?

ANGELINA: I am good. I'm so excited to be here today. Thank you so much for having me.

RACHEL: I'm so excited to chat with you as well. Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

ANGELINA: Absolutely. So my name is Angelina McCaster. My pronouns are she and they. I am based out of Phoenix, Arizona.

I'm a certified Family Dog Mediator, a CPDT-KA, all those fun things, and the owner and head trainer of Teach a Dog To Fish: dog training and behavior consulting. I am also someone who really enjoys a soft pretzel and self-identifies as the somewhat rare and elusive dog person who's also a people person.

RACHEL: I love that. That's brilliant. So I'm just curious, how did you decide on becoming a dog trainer? Was it something that you always thought of doing?

ANGELINA: Yeah. So actually I feel like if anyone had asked me this question a few years ago, funnily enough, I would have

adamantly told them that becoming a dog trainer was never the plan.

However, I am very lucky to have grown up with teachers who purposely or not created a lot of incredible memories and keepsakes and stuff for me that I found just in the last few years that I've hoarded away. And those keepsakes for me have pointed out to me that maybe it was always the plan on some like universal subconscious level, because we found this cute little book that my third grade teacher had us write and illustrate about ourselves.

And in it, there's this page that's labeled “My Future,” and very clearly on this page, I outlined like as a nine-year-old or however old people are when they're in third grade, that my future career options, in this order, were: dog walker, dog groomer, artist, or horse trainer.

RACHEL: Wow.

ANGELINA: And then last on that list, I wrote that if those things didn't pan out, that I would settle for being a software engineer, like my mom. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: That's a very different one from the rest that you listed, but you were like, “That's fine as well.”

ANGELINA: I think even as a nine-year-old I like really wanted to make my mom proud, but yeah. And then also like, thanks to my mother's reminders, like my first word was "Doggie." I used to like sit and stare through our sliding glass back door at our German Shepherd obsessively as a baby.

I just feel like reminders like that, I look at the trajectory of my life and I consider that like, I originally went to school with the intention of like getting a degree in social work or like graphic design and had no knowledge of the study of animal behavior until like my early twenties.

But how I decided to become a dog trainer intentionally whether it was like the universe’s plan for me or whatever. In 2018, I quit my

very well-paying bank job in corporate America, working in quality assurance.

And at that time I spent like all of my spare free time, in addition to volunteering, um, like studying dog training and apprenticing with local trainers and I'd sought out several dog training mentors, gotten lucky enough to make some friends while volunteering who worked in partnership with the local universities, Canine Science Collaboratory, and that opened up the worm hole that is canine research to me.

RACHEL: Yeah. Wow.

ANGELINA: And I started to realize while I was working in corporate America and spending all my free time researching these things that were much more interesting than quality assurance for a bank, that I couldn't have a full-time job working 60 hour weeks, and also focus on the continuing education in dog training that I needed as much as I wanted.

And I think anyone who's ever left a more traditional path at any point in their life in any industry will tell you that it's sometimes painful and very terrifying to leave a company that can offer you a pension and pay for continuing education...

But for me, as like the youngest Black person in my department on my floor, as like—I just, I saw a very clear, somewhat bumpy path laid out for me that—it was pointed out to me over and over again—very few people my age had the opportunity to experience. So I think I felt a real obligation to run the course of that life, but it wasn't anything that excited me. So I figured, if I didn't leave then in my early twenties, it would only get harder to leave.

And I was really lucky that one of the rescue organizations—at the time, I didn't work with them—but would grow to work with them over time, very closely: They pointed me in the direction of the positive reinforcement training facility that was also a combo doggy daycare.

And I reached out to them and essentially said, "Hey, this is all the stuff I know. I currently work at a bank, but I have this training

experience and I've recently realized that I have a lot more to learn. I would love to learn more from, and with, you. Can I come work with you?" And they said, "Hello, tiny twenty-two, twenty-three year old girl. We cannot pay you what a Fortune 500 company is paying you. You know that, right?”

And I said, "Yep. I know that. And, uh, my mother is gonna hate this." *[laughing]* Um, but I took the jump and the last four or five years now has just been all dog training all the time, 24/7. And I have never, ever looked back at any of those quality assurance, listening to calls days, and regretted, any moment of it.

RACHEL: That's amazing. That's an amazing story. That's like such a big transition to what you were doing and kind of giving up something that was kind of stable, you know.

ANGELINA: Oh, yeah. I also, like, it's not something I think, or really talk about very often, but I realized pretty immediately, like taking a big pay cut, like that was something that I did really intentionally.
And I was like, "Okay, I'm doing this now because if I do it later in my life, it'll be harder." But there was no precedent for like how big of a pay cut it was acceptable to take in a situation like that. I didn't like have anybody I was following or like who I had telling me what I should or shouldn't be doing.

So I was just kind of flying by the seat of my pants and for a chronic planner that felt very uncomfortable.

Rachel: Right, yeah. I can imagine that. I mean, I had a similar transition as well, because I volunteered at a rescue. I started looking into more about training and, you know, working with dogs and all I was doing is kind of thinking about dogs while I was in my sound engineering job.

So I was like,"Okay, I think I need to switch." I mean, sound engineering isn't as typical already by itself. It's like, wow, that’s a passion job already. So to switch with one passion job to another, I felt really bad again to my mom. *[laughing]* So, you
know, your mom's supporting all your education, helps you pay for

like some of the school fees, and it's just, "Oh, sorry, mom I'm going to switch now and start all over again."

Angelina: I feel like that is maybe not universal, but like a pretty regular thing that I hear from other trainers who didn't have this life plan from like a young age or anything. But like at some point having conversations with their parental figures—whatever that looked like in their lives—that they were like, "Okay, so I'm doing this thing now."

And at some point somebody just had to be, "So—so your job is dogs now. That's, that's what we're doing?"

Rachel: Yeah, right! I mean, I'm always interested to know about what other people are doing on their side of rescue work, having that shelter volunteer background myself. So when did you get started working with the local rescues and can you tell us more about what it is you do with them?

Angelina: Oh yeah, absolutely. So I was volunteering with a few different local shelters and rescues before my interest in training started, and a lot of those relationships carried over and expanded when I jumped into my training career. So my rescue connections have been not only like a common thread, but really a driving force and reason behind my move into this career in the first place.

Right now, most of my partnerships with the rescue community here in Arizona have consisted of anything from offering consults directly to dogs while they're in rescue, to dogs that the rescues adopted out that the rescue wants to continue offering training opportunities to their new families.

RACHEL: Yeah.

ANGELINA: I've also taught classes to the public for free that are sponsored by organizations that are dedicated to a broader type of community outreach.

So classes that are like group style, dog training classes that are offered to the public, that potentially wouldn't be able to afford them if they were held in a traditional manner that have been incredibly

rewarding and also kind of a learning opportunity for me and having to let go of a certain amount of control. *[laughing]*

But for a few years, I also worked with a local rescue who had one of the first and most successful temporary care programs in our country. So temporary care is essentially meant to work as a transitional program for folks currently experiencing hardships, so one of the main focuses that drew me directly to this rescue in particular, was their focus on supporting and transitioning those in need of housing accommodation due to domestic violence-related displacement with housing and care for their animals while they tried to get back on their feet.

So there was a focus on domestic violence, but their rescue actually started in the midst of like the housing crisis in 2007, 2008, so there wasn't always a huge focus on domestic violence, but by the time I started working with them, they had partnered with local shelters, um, local women's shelters in order to be able to provide, like I said, some that housing and temporary care to animals while these families worked to get back to a more sustainable place for themselves.

And it's not something that's widely talked about, but the conversation is growing and statistics make it clear to us now that there's a large percentage of domestic violence survivors who stay within their environment of abuse for a prolonged amount of time, not only because of their human children, obviously—but because of their pets as well, and an overwhelming number of those pets being dogs.

So I worked directly with most of the pets that came through those programs, as well as their guardians offering different training opportunities, depending on the situation, because they were all often in differing states of recovery from their own trauma as a result of living in households with widely varying forms of domestic abuse.

RACHEL: Absolutely.

ANGELINA: And I'm really, really honored to have worked with those programs, and many of them shed a pretty, uh, unique light

for me on how the most honorable good intentions in a lot of our rescue leadership unfortunately can be a poor substitute for education, because I came into that particular partnership and others with the assumption that due to their focus on domestic violence and welfare, that a lot of their staff would be really trauma-informed, because of all the different people and the animals that they work with on a daily basis.

Since they came to me seeking out a certified trainer, I also made the silly assumption that there would already be kind of a culture of encouraging continued education around animal behavior, but the more rescues I came to work with the clearer it was to me the most common thread between them all, regardless of the size of the rescue or the rescue's mission or anything, was a pretty pervasive lack of knowledge in regard, not only to training methods and levels of behavior experience, but also a lack of education and awareness in regard to inclusivity and anti-racism—the first of which isn't surprising considering that the dog training industry is entirely unregulated, at least in my state and country, right?

RACHEL: Yeah.

ANGELINA: But the latter of which isn't surprising simply because of the culture and history of rescue, so in the last year, since I've branched out and built upon my own business, I've started to shift a lot of my rescue partnerships toward more educational relationships, meaning I'm building out programs with a direct focus on offering continuing education opportunities for rescue leadership, their staff, their volunteers, as well as offering consulting or in some cases auditing for like clearer staff and volunteer training programs and trying to slide some inclusivity education into what I would consider a much more straightforward conversation about, uh, about training education, wherever I can. Because there is a lot of crossover, but when somebody hires you or reaches out to you with the intention of asking for training help, they rarely think that they're going to be having an inclusivity conversation.

So slipping that in wherever it makes sense, wherever we can, is really important to me.

Rachel: It sounds like the work that you do is both really rewarding, but also really challenging at the same time, isn't it.

ANGELINA: It is, yeah.

RACHEL: Have you found that sometimes it is hard to change somebody's old mindset, so to speak in terms of both the training methods, but also inclusivity and anti-racism in the rescue world?

ANGELINA: Yeah, I've learned that approaching much of anything in the world of rescue with the outright intention or expectation of changing someone's mindset is fraught with opportunity for disappointment. So I've been really grateful for the self-awareness and for the reminders from good friends and colleagues that I didn't change my own mindset because of anyone overtly or directly trying to change it.

My mindset changed as I became more educated, and as I surrounded myself with people who were invested, not only in continuing education, but in being involved in and people who are securing grants for shelter specific behavior research. I feel so lucky sometimes to just like be living in—obviously there are a lot of times that I would really not like to live in—so I feel really lucky to live in a time where that's even a conversation that's being had, let alone like research that's starting to be funded.

Because the only difference between me six years ago, and the people that I work with today who I'm seeing this lack of education or this gap of information, is that I was driven to seek this information out because of my life experiences that led me there.

And what I'm hoping is that these programs, whether it's something that they would seek out whether these programs existed or not, I'm hoping that these programs can offer opportunities for people to learn and come to their own conclusions with all of the information simply more accessible to them and easier to find than it was for me.

RACHEL: Yeah. I think that once people get the information and the education they'll realize that actually it benefits them and the animals—

ANGELINA: Exactly.

RACHEL: —that they care about as well. And if they work on teaching the adopters, or with people like you teaching the adopters, how to interact well the dogs and the dogs are comfortable, they stay there with the owners for the rest of their lives, you know—

ANGELINA: Oh, definitely.

RACHEL: —and rather than just kind of be shut down or ended up getting returned. I think that is so important is being able to find a right home for the dogs and people that are really committed as well. So I think that is incredible and really important as well.

So with the rescue community and with any dog community for that matter, there's always people involved in it. We can't get away from people. Oh, so I just wanted to—

ANGELINA: No, we can't— *[laughing]*

RACHEL: *[laughing]* We can't, we can't, it's all part of everything that we do and that's why it's so important to kind of talk about it with, like you saying, you bring in the inclusivity, the anti-racism side of things into the rescue world, just kind of slipping that in, I think that's really important as well. *[both laughing]*

So of course, you know, as people of color or people of the global majority, we all have especially unique experiences in this area. So when you first came into the dog training world, what did you think of and how did you feel about it?

Angelina: You know, I've actually been having this conversation a lot lately, um, not only just within like my own social circle in regard to, no matter how much we know, we rarely realize how much information we're missing. And when I started coming into the dog training industry, I felt kind of overwhelmed by the number of people sharing conflicting information.

But the thing right now that's becoming really clear to me, the more I learn and the more I really just like immerse myself in these communities of people that are dedicated to further education and furthering their own understanding of the different social environments that we all live in, is just that I oftentimes, like I had an understanding of what I was feeling and where that conflict was coming from, but I didn't have the language or like the history to feel confident enough to have conversations about it.

So what's been really, really cool for me in the last—really just in the last year—if I'm being honest, is doing the opposite of what I've spent most of my life doing, which is like no longer avoiding the social media aspect of this job. *[laughing]* I have always been really terrified of that.

And in exploring where some of that came from, I really do think that it started early on when the dog training circles that I wound up in in the very beginning were more of a balanced old-school style, a set of people that were marketing a lot of their training methods in a way that like would make my skin crawl today.

But because my first introduction to like what social media-related dog training look like, there was a lot of direct conflict and I am very conflict averse naturally. Um, there was a lot of conflict between all of these different, you know, quote unquote "schools of thought" that at the time, I really thought were just another set of like petty people, all arguing about things that in the long-term like—we're all just trying to help dogs, so like, why can't we all just get along? Like we can do things differently and still be friends.

And until I had the opportunity, I mean, of years of opportunities to invest in education and be invested in by educators, I didn't really realize that a lot of the pervasive problems that were coming up that existed, that all of these arguments on the internet that seemed so petty and loud and angry to me—that they all stemmed from either a lack of education or a lack of understanding of the cultures and histories that different people came from.

RACHEL: Yeah.

ANGELINA: Right. When I first went to seek out somebody who knew more about dog training, 'cause I'd been volunteering for a while and I had heard a bunch of different people's names. The first people that I went to seek out or like the ones that I thought were most qualified based on how many reviews they had, or like how many, how loud they were on the internet…

I didn't know for like the first couple years that I was assisting or like interning with different trainers, that there was such a thing as a certification. And like, and that's, you know, that's like the beginning of an entirely larger conversation that I feel like I'm constantly having.

But, um, at that time I became great friends with all of these people who were in retrospect, like very under-qualified to be doing a lot of the work that they were doing and all that I saw from that perspective, for a few years, really, was that there were these angry people on the internet who seemed to just want to like yell at them and shame them for choices that they were making. And when all that you know, is that, you know, your friend, the first person who invested in you, who offered you an apprenticeship is like the one that's being attacked on the internet.

There's like obviously always a part of you in the back of your head, that's like, "What are they talking about?" And until you have the opportunity to learn and invest in more education, it's hard to, like I said before, have the language to even understand why it feels so conflicting, um, or to understand where other people are coming from and how they got to the point of feeling so frustrated and so angry with something that they had to start shouting on the internet about it.

So now after several years of being in this industry, I'm like picking and choosing very intentionally the places on the internet where I do engage in conversation or promotion as far as training goes and what I've found that's so cool is that there are these beautiful pockets of the internet that already have this thesis of inclusivity, where people are having conversations about, you know, the history of how Black folks in our country—and I mean all over the world—wound up having direct correlations to like their social justice initiatives and race science that, uh, was really pervasive in

like—oh goodness gracious, like 18th, 19th, early 20th century that kind of—unfortunately, very unfortunately—like dictated that Black people were predisposed to manual physical labor because they have special muscles, and our skin is formulated by the sun in a way that less melanated people's skin is not.

And then in the 20th century you see in like the early two thousands or late 90's you started to see that there are reports coming out that like directly tie or kind of correlate—I don't really even know the right word for this—but, directly draw comparison between, I guess, is the clearest way to say it that tell us that, you know, pit bulls have exceptional bite strength, when the science tells us that they're not exceptional in this, there are a large number of strong breeds of dogs that have strong bite strength.

And you know, they use, what's supposed to be unbiased research to justify a preexisting attitude. And like, these are conversations that like I'm seeing now being had on the internet that I didn't know were being had anywhere because I was just avoiding, I was avoiding so much of it because my first interaction in any of this was really, really conflicting.

And I didn't have the knowledge or the history to feel comfortable enough to be a part of those conversations, let alone to find these beautiful little pockets of the internet that I didn't know existed.

RACHEL: I'm so glad you found these little pockets of the internet and you're part of the conversation now, for sure, being here as well. And I have learnt so much from a lot of social media pages too, to do with pit bulls and a history of Black people and dogs. It's heartbreaking to learn about sometimes, but it's much needed first to learn about this history. And one of the books recommended in the show notes from our first episode called *Afro-Dog* talks a lot about this.

But coming back to you, I wanted to ask if you're comfortable at all with sharing: have you experienced any discomfort or uncomfortable racist interactions being a Black person in your dog training career or even in the rescue world?

ANGELINA: Yeah, I mean, I would say that I like, honestly I experience discomfort and uncomfortable interactions on a daily basis and have to ask myself how my size—I mean, obviously this is an auditory medium, so, uh, you do not know how small I am, but for reference, I'm like four foot eleven *[4'11" or 1.5 meters]*, 110 pounds *[49 kg]*. I'm a small person.

And so I have to ask myself how my size, my gender presentation, and my ethnicity factor into how I'm treated, but more than anything, the discomfort that I feel has to do with recognizing the social pressure systems at work in the rescue community that I'm a part of and recognizing others' racist thought processes that they often have yet to notice in themselves, let alone start to address.

I was reminded in conversation with a friend the other day, I was telling her how one of my day training clients has a dog who's very reactive in cars, and she lives in a part of Phoenix that has a very large homeless population. And oftentimes her reactivity stems from a history during early developmental stages of like being approached in the car by homeless people who would like wave signs at the car, and her dog has not made much progress working through this with her because she also has multiple kids.

Every time she has like the kids and the dog in the car, like there's not much management, and I told her maybe three weeks into working together that the progress that her dog has to made working with me in the car, likely wasn't translating to a lot of what they were working on because unfortunately like, I have my own safety concerns for myself in regard to what happens if I get pulled over and there's a dog in my car that like can't be approached, or there's a dog in my car who is reactive.

So all of the work that I'm doing, as soon as I commit myself to working with this dog on a daily basis is tied just as much to my own safety as it is to this client's potential success, right? And I let her know that one thing that was very obvious to me was that even if her motivation for seeking out training for this dog was like of the utmost importance in her life, and it was like her number one, driving factor in what she was doing.

It was the most important thing that car reactivity for her dog got to, you know, I don't mean to be punny by saying this, but like got to take a back seat to a lot of other things because her perception as a white woman, worst case scenario, of being pulled over and having a reactive dog in the back seat—her worst case scenario, worst nightmare looks very different than mine, if I am put in the exact same situation, right?

And I was reminded by a friend of mine just yesterday, when we were having this conversation, I was telling her about how I really love this client and how it's really nice that I can have these conversations with her because there were different things going on in her neighborhood where like we were seeing like an uptick in the number of police officers doing like sweeps of like homeless people in the community.

And I let her know that during those weeks that we weren't going to be spending as much time in the car together and we would have other focuses for her reactivity because I wasn't comfortable driving her dog from her neighborhood to another one.

And I felt, you know, very uniquely comfortable in that specific relationship with that specific client being able to have that conversation. And my friend, when we were talking about this yesterday was like, "Wouldn't it be so nice if that was just, not only like, if that were just the norm? But like if, if we lived in a world where you brought up a conversation about being pulled over, and like that I didn't understand why that was stressful for you, wouldn't it be nice, wouldn't it be nice if I didn't immediately like, understand exactly where you were coming from, if it didn't paint a picture in my head of like what the potential safety concerns were for you?" Um, and I was like, "Oh yeah, that would be great."

But that's not the world that I live in.

RACHEL: I know... It's definitely paints a picture in my head as well. And it's just shitty that we have to think about these things and that you have to think about these days when you're just simply doing your thing. You're just working with your client's dog, that's it.

ANGELINA: Yeah. It would be really nice if, if it could ever be that simple. *[laughs]*

RACHEL: Right, and I think a lot of people don't understand or realize that there are all these considerations for you as a Black person, being a dog trainer in this industry. It's just different from what other people are experiencing. If they were a white dog trainer in a car with a dog that was displaying reactive behaviors, just that example shows how racism and our experiences make our work harder sometimes, and how pervasive racism is.

But I am so glad your client is understanding and you found people like that to work with.

ANGELINA: Definitely, yeah.

RACHEL: You know, in my experience, there are a lot of individuals in our industry that will say, quote unquote, that they are an ally. But as soon as we say to some of them, "Could you please rephrase that or take that down because it was insensitive or hurtful?" or, "Could you please use your position in this organization to raise this issue to the board?" They sometimes get really defensive.

ANGELINA: Oh yeah.

RACHEL: And I guess we learned the hard way at times about who is truly on the anti-racist journey and who is just being performative and actually is unsafe. I think that that's really unfortunate and a kind of a loss in this industry, but coming to more about the big picture I wanted to ask, what changes do you really want to see happen in our industry?

ANGELINA: Yeah. More than anything—if it's not clear already, I have a tendency to be really long-winded, but—

RACHEL: No, not at all!

ANGELINA: This, um—*[laughs]*—this question for me is like one of the simpler ones. Not that the solution itself is simple, but it's one of the simpler ones, and it's just that communication and

communication specifically about education, becomes a less contentious one—

RACHEL: Sure.

ANGELINA: —because right now, regardless of where you fall in the wide spectrum of dog training methods or where you fall, as far as your accessibility to that type of education... The thing that, again, I'm really grateful for is that during the perfect timing, like timing that I could not have picked any better in my life—

RACHEL: Yeah.

ANGELINA: If I did have control over that sort of thing, that with really perfect, somewhat seemingly divine timing, that people were having this conversation for me, essentially, right? They were having this conversation for me that led other people like Michael Shikashio to offer several dozens of people of color like sponsorships or, oh goodness, I can't think of the word now.

RACHEL: Do you mean scholarships.

ANGELINA: Oh my goodness. I was like, why, where I've lost the word—to offer scholarships to people of color in order to make his programs of education more accessible, and without me ever having to go out of my way to say, like, this is something that I would really like, but at this point in my life, it's not something that I can afford because I just took a pay cut, that me down to like a third of my, a third of my previous income in order to follow a passion of mine... that around that same timeframe that people were having this conversation and them having that conversation led to people like Michael offering things like these scholarships and them offering those types of scholarships led me to some of the other programs that I decided to invest in as far as my continuing education.

And that entire journey would never, never have been possible—at least not in a way that I can see—if like the first person who decided to like, bring the conversation of inclusivity into dog training, were too afraid to start it, right?

And so like, somebody has to start these conversations, and those of us who, you know, sometimes are particularly socially anxious in, uh, in social media-type environments, are those of us who are for lack of a better way of putting it, like "brave enough, invested enough, interested enough," to even just be a small part of it.

We also have to keep in mind that some of the language we use today—some of the language that I use today on this podcast, I might look at a week from now and question, right? And that self-awareness is not something that I would consider typical in most of my relationships with a lot of my colleagues, a lot of my rescue partners.

And I think that the more of us that are willing to enter conversations with a little bit of grace for ourselves and others, and to make it clear that we are all open to continuing our education and hearing each other out, when somebody points out that there is something problematic about what we're doing, the better off we all are, really.

Rachel: I think without the conversations, we don't even know the problem basically—

ANGELINA: Exactly.

RACHEL: We can't begin to change if we don't know what the problem is, and I think that's so important, but it's also about everyone being open to hearing about each other's concerns. And also just being more understanding and compassionate, I think with the dog industry in general.

By caring about different communities, we reach more people, we help more dogs in the end, which is—

ANGELINA: Oh, absolutely

RACHEL: —kind of the goal, um, and potential clients that are Black, Indigenous and people of the global majority can see that the dog training world is compassionate towards their problems that they have, you know, not just with their dogs, but also in their personal lives.

I think that it would make them more likely to reach out for help as well, because they feel safe. They're not going to be judged to, for example, if they don't feel comfortable with a certain training practice, for example, like you say, with the car, like, if they'd all feel comfortable doing that, then we understand it's not like, "Oh, you know, non-compliant client," but it's, there is a reason for that, you know, and a "non-complaint client," just a word that annoys me the most, so I just want to—

ANGELINA: It really, it really does. And that's, I mean, that's a perfect example actually of like language use, right? That like, I, if you were having this same conversation with me just a couple of years ago, I may not have the same kind of visceral reaction to like the word or phrase like, "non-compliance" that I do now, because, um, there has been so much opportunity for me personally, for like learning and growth in regard to how many personal experiences I have not had that like, I will never have, I will never experience that I just have to be open to hearing and trusting other people's experiences in order to have a clearer understanding of like, how to advocate for different pieces and people in my community that have had a different life experience than I have, right?

Because non-compliance can feel really easy to brush off in the moment as just like a client that I didn't want anyway, because they were going to make things difficult, right? In reality, like some of the most, like most important, integral to my own growth relationships that I've I've had and built with clients, friendships that I have cultivated, in the last couple of years have been with those clients who immediately rubbed me the wrong way, um, that I very fortunately approached with curiosity rather than judgment.

I mean, I don't want to make it sound like I'm always doing that, because I'm definitely not, but, but that's the aim, right? Is just in those moments where I feel a lot of internal friction to remind myself that approaching the situation with curiosity has often resulted in like making my own world a helluva lot bigger, making my own understanding of like a human experience a lot bigger so that I can be more informed about how to be the kind of advocate and person that I want to be.

Rachel: Yeah. It makes us better at working with people and better understanding people, and in the end better dog trainers.

ANGELINA: Oh, definitely.

RACHEL: We are working with people essentially in the end more than we are with just dogs by themselves. And I think it's so important that people who are Black, Indigenous and people of the global majority, see that a dog training industry is something that they can be in, you know, a career that they can pursue and know that they will be well-supported went into it and feel safe.

So I guess I was just thinking that, you know, really the industry would be missing out if there is no representation, no active steps to being anti-racist.

ANGELINA: Oh, absolutely. I think that, like, I really didn't realize how pigeon-holed I am. I was born here in Arizona. I grew up here. I have moved out very short distance from the home that I grew up in. I didn't realize until again, I did become a little bit more confident in exploring different areas of social media that I was always kind of walking on eggshells in, then how much bigger this community of people was that had even existed really—just how much bigger and more inclusive this community was than I thought it was.

And I think that if I'd never found that that, that burnout and compassion fatigue is a conversation that is, I think the clearest crossover between like rescue and training, right, that we all constantly have to have. I don't know that my career would feel like it was possible to be something that is lifelong without experiencing the kind of community that I'm experiencing now for the first time.

RACHEL: That's really wonderful. I am so glad the community is growing as well and there's more support at the moment, but it always be more and, uh, I'm excited to see that come in the future as well. And I wanted to ask if there are any dog trainers, dog lovers that are Black, Indigenous and people of the global majority listening to this: do you have any words of kind of encouragement or advice or wisdom that you would like to share with them?

ANGELINA: Oh yeah. I think that generally I talk a lot about, I mean, in all areas of my life, both personal and professional right now about staying curious whether that's about our dogs or about each other. But something that I don't often talk about because a lot of the communities that I am facing and often educating are the communities that don't have the same life experiences as me.

So when I do have the opportunity to engage with anyone who shares the life experience of being a person of color or a person of the global majority, right, that I often get a little bit self-conscious in that I'm afraid that they will perceive me as like speaking for them or they will perceive me as like misrepresenting something.

So I think that the biggest piece of advice that I've ever gotten that has kind of quelled some of those fears is to remember that ultimately the people who maybe we don't have the most shared interaction with in regard to this... I have a lot of people in my life who are also people of this global majority, but I don't have a lot of them in this specific community.

And ultimately what it comes down to is that we all have kind of that same fear, and I often don't look at those relationships and those fears, the same way that I do these others. I don't look at them as an opportunity to practice curiosity. And so if I could give them any piece of advice or word of wisdom, it's to come into any of those conversations or those relationships with as much curiosity and, again, grace for yourself and others as possible.

Because again, so, so many of the friendships and relationships, whether they were personal or professional in the last couple of years, that I have been the most surprised by have just been the ones where I had enough self-awareness in like my first few interactions with those people to remind myself to be curious about what their life experience was like. And it has changed everything about my social anxiety, about my internet anxiety, and has really cultivated relationships that I don't know how otherwise I would have contributed to in the ways that I feel like I have, and also just had the opportunity to be apart of.

RACHEL: That's amazing. Thank you so much for sharing that. I think that is so important and you bring up such a good point about

just staying curious and being open-minded, open-hearted towards different people and their experience and seeing why they feel a certain way. I think that's really important. And finally, what's the best way for people who want to know more about you and your work, how can they get in touch with you?

ANGELINA: Oh, yeah, definitely. My business is called Teach A Dog to Fish. I had someone tell me recently that they had a really hard time remembering what my business name was and that they kept thinking that it was something like "plenty of fish" and it made me laugh so hard. *[laughing]* Um, but, uh, yeah, like, uh, you know, "teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime."

RACHEL: I thought that was why.

ANGELINA: Um, so yeah, my business is called "Teach a Dog to Fish," everything is just at "Teach a Dog to Fish," so on Instagram, my website is just teach a dog to fish.com. Email is teach a dog to fish@gmail.com. Um, you can find me there pretty much everywhere.

And I am always always, always aiming to stay curious, so no matter how big or small the question feel free to reach out.

RACHEL: Oh, that's brilliant. I'll put that in the show notes in the description. And I just want to say thank you so, so much Angelina again, for being here with us, I really appreciate your emotional labor, sharing your experiences and your thoughts.

It's not just a dog world that needs to do better for Black people, but the world as a whole. And I know your kindness and care for dogs and people is just so wonderful, and many people listening, including myself, will have learned so much from you today. So thank you so much.

ANGELINA: Not at all. Thank you so much for having me. This was really nice.

[outro music]

RACHEL: Thank you all so much for listening. As mentioned you can find links and transcriptions in our show notes. If you can't find the link in the description, you can find them on my website, dogatheart.co.uk/podcasts. If you enjoyed the podcast and would like to support us and what we're doing, you can buy us a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/dogatheart. And you can get updates about future guests and episodes on our Instagram @dog_atheart. I'll see you in the next one!