

Mike Domitrz: Welcome to the Respect podcast, I'm your host Mike Domitrz from mikespeaks.com where we help organizations of all sizes, educational institutions, and the US military create a culture of respect. Respect is exactly what we discuss on this show, so let's get started.

Mike Domitrz: This week, we have Cyndie Spiegel with us a TEDx speaker, community builder, small business coach, and author as of December 18th, woo hoo. She's also founder of two online communities for women: The Collective of Us, a small business accelerator for women, and The Community of Us, an online hub for conversation and change making community amongst women. Thank you Cyndie so much for joining us.

Cyndie Spiegel: Thank you. It's my pleasure, and I love that you added in the woo hoo, so thanks for that Mike.

Mike Domitrz: It's exciting to have a book out. Every time one of my books has come out I'm woo hoo, so we should woo hoo each other's absolutely.

Cyndie Spiegel: Thank you.

Mike Domitrz: Definitely. Diving right into this you do focus on women and community. With that focus, what role does civility have in regards to community building, and respect? I guess that's an odd question for me to ask because people go, "What does that have to do with women and community? Isn't that all community?" Yes, absolutely, but you specifically work with women in community, and this is a topic you actually said, "Hey Mike, let's talk about it, that civility." How does that play a role in community building and respect?

Cyndie Spiegel: I think particularly amongst women, and this was partially what my TEDx was about, but I think we have a certain dynamic that we don't talk about, and there's a lot of shame amongst the relationships that women have with other women that is really debilitating when it comes to our own success, when it comes to empowering one another, and when it really comes to helping each other thrive. When it comes to civility, I think, we as women in particular, really have to ... we're incredibly polite by nature, we've been socialized to be polite, but I think civility goes beyond that, and it really asks of us that we are listening to one another, and not necessarily needing to agree, are able to have powerful conversations and empower conversations with one another regardless of whether or not we're coming from the same belief. I think in so doing really listening and hearing one another challenges our own beliefs, and allows us to grow, and thrive.

Cyndie Spiegel: I think without that sense of civility there's just always a continuing of arguing with one another, feeling we need to disagree, feeling we need to stand our ground, and collectively as women the more we can come together in a place of hearing one another, listening to one another, and really pushing up rather

against our own boundaries there's only a benefit in that for all of us collectively.

Mike Domitrz: What do you think has gotten to that place where our society has pitted women against women so frequently?

Cyndie Spiegel: I think a lot of it is how we as women are raised in this country. I think we're just socialized differently. If we think about how we raise young girls versus young boys everything from sportsmanship that is taught to a lot of boys, but not necessarily to girls from the way we dress. The example I like to give is how little boys go out in just Speedos to a beach, but even as a little girl at the age of six months old there's a certain shame in having to cover up, cover up everything that you own, but your little brother doesn't have to. There's a lot of body shame, and a lot of shame that we've taught our children from a young age, especially girls, and I can go on for a long time, so I'll stop there.

Cyndie Spiegel: There's also certain unconscious gender bias that we have. Even as women we expect other women to behave in certain ways, and when they don't ... for example, we expect women to be nice. We expect women to really have these communal qualities, and so when a woman doesn't demonstrate that we don't like her. We're judging her, and we're judging her harshly, so even though these unconscious gender biases that we see often come from men they also come from women. As much as we don't want them to exist we are also pushing those biases on each other when we expect women to be nice almost before anything else.

Cyndie Spiegel: Now, I should clarify I'm certainly not suggesting that women shouldn't be nice, but that shouldn't be the expectation. We don't meet a man and expect a man to be nice before anything else. It's nice, it's a benefit, it's a lovely thing, but it shouldn't be the fallt to expectation. I think right now it tends to be.

Cyndie Spiegel: Another reason that we really pit one another against each other, and society has taught us this, is there's something called the tall poppy syndrome. We view strong, authoritative women as bitchy, we view them as aggressive or overly aggressive. When you think about that unconscious gender bias, that I just talked about, that falls into it. We want women to behave a certain way, and so when we see authoritative women oftentimes we want to cut them down. If you think about how tall poppies grow ... and this is a term we talk a lot more about in Australia or they I should say, I am not Australian. It's heard a lot more about there than here, but it's how we as women really cut one another down if we don't stay in our own lanes. By that, we mean not getting too successful.

Mike Domitrz: I used to coach high school sports, and I coached men's and women's, and they were separate seasons, so you coached them separately. It was interesting what you would see happen, much what you're describing. Which is, let's say, a guy was better than another guy, and I had coached swimming in the pool, it was, "I'm gonna beat him. I'm gonna get as good as him and I'm gonna beat him."

Culturally, the women many of them had been taught if so-and-so's excelling we have to just rip on her, we have to trash her for being excellent. This is about the social experience not about excellence, so you would knock the person of excellence. Now, it doesn't mean that all women did this by any means, but you could see this difference in how genders were taught.

Cyndie Spiegel: Yeah, that's such a great example, and you have that very specific experience with working with students with working with students, and coaching them in that way. Yeah, that's exactly what we do. I think-

Mike Domitrz: Now, to be fair, there were problems with what men were socialized to do in that environment, so we're not making sound like oh, but you could see how that how women were taught that unhealthy belief system.

Cyndie Spiegel: Absolutely. From a very young age, and I think a lot of that, Mike, really stems from shame. A lot of shame that we have about a lot of things. Oftentimes our own insecurities. I talk a lot about the imposter syndrome, and it comes from that, and we don't recognize that term maybe when we're 14 years old, we don't know that term, but it's that feeling of we don't expect to succeed. We don't really understand how to be in our best self, we don't understand how to win and be okay with winning, and so we constantly feel like we're failures no matter how successful we become. I think that all comes back to really how we pit against other women, and so much of it stems from ourselves not just from the way we were socialized.

Mike Domitrz: You build these communities, these online communities what is key to moving forward with those struggles for women and bringing them together at the same time?

Cyndie Spiegel: I think the very first thing that's key, especially in building these communities is, first and foremost, I ask women to be very clear about how they feel, to recognize their own thoughts and feelings about other women. Meaning don't pretend that it's all roses and rainbows, and butterflies all the time. Sometimes we are jealous, sometimes we are insecure, sometimes there is a sense of distrust, and until we actually acknowledge that we can't get beyond it. The second we get beyond it we can start to do something about it, and really shift the dynamic that we have with one another.

Mike Domitrz: That's powerful. How do you create that in a community?

Cyndie Spiegel: I do it from the stage often enough, but also I think it's about a certain rather vulnerability, and when I approach any new community that I'm building the very first thing I will do is admit how I have felt, and to set the ground rules, and the groundwork for building a community that trusts one another. Without that trust no one's going to be authentic about how they feel. One of the things I always start off with, "This is my experience with women, I work in this space, and I still feel insecurity pop-up when a beautiful woman walks into the room,

or a successful woman walks into the room." I don't pretend that that doesn't exist. In so doing, I am giving the other women permission to acknowledge that as well.

Cyndie Spiegel: Now, let me be clear, by acknowledging it, it doesn't mean that it's something we want to perpetuate. It simply means that we are acknowledging what is. The next step to that is really redirecting those feelings, and understanding that those insecurities are never about the other woman, it's always about us. First, we're recognizing what is, and then we're redirecting those feelings and taking responsibility for the thoughts that we have because we can change our thoughts.

Mike Domitrz: It's having that mindfulness in that moment of why am I projecting this? Why am I getting so angry right now? All of these concepts, but it's self-awareness because it doesn't feel nice to have a partner go, "Why are you so angry right now," that's not exactly helpful, but if I can have self-awareness and go, "Why am I doing this," that puts us, and this is true for all genders, that puts us in a very different mindset of how dare you tell me I'm angry right now versus why am I angry right now? Why am I feeling this right now?

Cyndie Spiegel: Absolutely. It's so much of the work that I do, it's based in self-awareness. To me, again, you said it perfectly, nobody wants to hear somebody say, "Why are you so angry," but if I can come to that myself then I'm much more likely to do something with it.

Mike Domitrz: You're great at being able to do this with community, so why does it matter that we feel empowered to build community?

Cyndie Spiegel: It matters because the more we can get women together the more we break down this sense of needing to pit each other against each other, or against one another. The more we can do this together the more we empower one another, and the more we are permission givers for one another. It's one thing for me to behave in a certain way, and there's certainly a lot to be said for seeing this work in action. It's another thing to be doing this in community with other women, and all of us acknowledging our truth, all of us acknowledge where we are insecure, and growing from that place together will happen a lot more quickly.

Mike Domitrz: You create separate communities, so is it more of that like-minded goals? You have the small business accelerator for women then you have the online help of conversation, and change making community for women is that so we can come together based on common goals?

Cyndie Spiegel: Yeah. I think a certain commonality, certainly allows that conversation to be easier. The first community I built was The Collective of Us, and that was really built based on my working as a small business coach with women. It was really about collectively bringing them together to have these conversations, and

learn from one another. The Community of Us, however, is a little bit different because of The community of Us was really build in response to President Trump, and this I built a year ago when I felt as though women were not ... we wanted to have important conversations, we didn't know where to go, we didn't even know how to have these conversations.

Cyndie Spiegel: The Community of Us is really built on a foundation of women regardless of whether or not you have common interests. You don't have to have a business, you can have a business, but this is really saying, "I want to surround myself in a diverse community of women who don't necessarily see and think like me because I know that what's happening in the world right now isn't serving me, and right now everything I'm doing is siloed, so I need to really explore outside of that," and this is where they come for that.

Mike Domitrz: Curious, do you find in that community does it draw both people who are supporters? Is it mainly people who, "No, I cannot stand you, Trump"? Do you try a little bit from all, or is it mainly draw, "No, this is our audience"?

Cyndie Spiegel: Interestingly enough, no. I do not draw Trump supporters. I am a black-white Jew with a gay brother. I do not draw in Trump supporters naturally, but we don't talk about politics within the community. That's essentially how it started, that's where I got the idea to start this community, but there are women within the community that have very different beliefs. They're different colors, they speak different languages, they're from all parts of the country. These are women that would never cross paths with one another in their regular lives. The idea is bringing these, or building this diverse community, but the foundation is not who you voted for.

Cyndie Spiegel: In fact, I don't care because who we are beyond who we voted for are human beings, and that's the core of where I want to start from in order for us to really change the outlook that we have on our beliefs, the outlook that we have on this country, and what is possible, and really in the greater world. We need to do that regardless of what we believe in, who we voted for, or what color our skin is.

Mike Domitrz: We talk often about the show, that every human being deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, and no one vote they make should eliminate that, or one supportive should eliminate that, if they're a human being they deserve that.

Mike Domitrz: Speaking of dignity and respect you create these safe spaces specifically for women, and they're women only spaces. Now, in my line of work we talk about having spaces where somebody can feel community. For some listeners who are going, "Why do women need their own spaces," how do you answer that?

Cyndie Spiegel: It is a question that I've gotten a lot. The reason we meet our own spaces is because we live in a patriarchy, we live in a patriarchal society where we are not

given a place to just be. We feel like we are constantly scrutinized by everyone, and we need to be able to be with other folks that understand where we're coming from. Quite frankly, I don't think it's just women that need their own spaces. I think it's any group that feels like they are on the outside of society for whatever reason that is, that's not for us to decide. We all need those safe spaces to go, to be honest, to be authentic, and to be intentional, and to really come up with a game plan that only folks like us can understand.

Mike Domitrz: Ironically, there were men only spaces forever, they were called golf clubs.

Cyndie Spiegel: That's exactly right.

Mike Domitrz: A lot of private golf clubs were men only. I believe there are still a few that exist. Until the last 5, 10 years many didn't switch. While some people would say, that's not right people didn't throw a fit about it, they still used both places. People were not embarrassed to be members of those places.

Mike Domitrz: Now, we recognize what was wrong about that because those were places of massive community and influence, and they were saying, "You're not allowed," versus creating a safe space for people to have conversation. There's a big difference in those two. How do you explain that if somebody says that, "Well, wait a second, if I don't let you into a business because you're a woman, I want an all men's business that gonna be ridiculed. Why is that ridiculed, but this space is safe?"

Cyndie Spiegel: We live in a patriarchal society that is already driven by men, so we're not trying to add to that. The idea is that we have to find a space that is outside of what currently exists as the norm. What currently exists in the norm in our society is a male driven society no matter what anybody says, it's just the truth. We designed for men, so much of our businesses are built with the men in mind. We really have to be able to work outside of that space. Having a safe space for women, or having a safe space for African-Americans, or having a safe space for anyone, for that matter, has to be separate from that. It has to be separate because we don't live in a society that sees women as equal, and as such women have to have their own spaces.

Mike Domitrz: Yes, to be without fear, to be without those consequences, absolutely. Now, we have these communities where, in your case, it's communities for women where women are able to come forward. How do you build mutual respect within that community? How do you weave that in?

Cyndie Spiegel: That's a great question. I think first and foremost anyone who is building a community of any type you have to demonstrate that, and that sense of mutual respect starts with mindful listening. I'm not going to cut you off, I'm going to listen to what you have to say, whether I agree or disagree I'm going to listen. I'm not going to multitask while you're having a conversation with me because a lot of our conversations are on video so, quite frankly, people could be doing a

lot of things, but they don't. I think building that in really has to do with we respect and ... how I, as the leader of these groups and founder of these groups, how I treat the women that are within these groups. I think that sets an example, but more so than that these are women that have consciously chosen to be a part of this community for a reason, and they are incredibly respectful of one another.

Mike Domitrz: You specifically use the language that women must bridge the relationships they have with other women in order to thrive collectively. What does that mean?

Cyndie Spiegel: Again, if I go back to the shame that I think we feel about ourselves as women, the tall poppy syndrome, the imposter syndrome all of these beliefs that we have that don't make us feel great about ourselves we're ashamed of. We're ashamed that we want to see other women fail, we are ashamed that we don't feel good enough, and until we can acknowledge that we can't ever get beyond it. By bridging this relationship partially that starts with us, that starts with us acknowledging how we feel, and being able to admit that in a group of other women.

Cyndie Spiegel: Here's something I do at the start of a lot of my talks, I will ask one question, and I say, "How many women in the room have ever wanted to see another woman fail?" Now, oftentimes, what I'll do is I won't put my hand up, no one will raise their hand. The second I put my hand up, I kid you not, every single woman in the room raises her hand because we've all wanted to see another woman fail, and we are so ashamed of that, that we'd rather not admit that out loud, but the second we do it empowers us to take a certain level of control back over how we see other women. When we can laugh at ourselves, and at the things that we've been ashamed of in the past it certainly changes the way we perceive ourselves, and perceive one another. That will slowly build that bridge to say, "I don't only not want to think about you, I want to help you thrive," but we first have to get over our own stuff, and our own shame.

Mike Domitrz: Let's say someone's listening and going, "All right, Mike, I don't identify as a woman, how can I be of support to this journey?"

Cyndie Spiegel: First, listen. You don't as identify as a woman, so when a woman says she feels a certain way believe her. I cannot stress that enough. Do not get defensive, do not argue, or try to make excuses as to why she feels a certain way, or why a behavior has taken place, simply listen.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, because we want to make it personal, don't we? We want to make it like, "Are you saying I did that? Or, how did I do that," instead of just realizing this person's having emotions and feelings that are natural. It might not be about you at all. Now, it might be, but it might not be about you at all. We tend to want to think that it's about us, or that we can solve it, so instead of listening we're solving it.

Cyndie Spiegel: I think that is more likely the case. When we're talking to somebody who identifies differently than us they want to fix it. First, there's a certain defensiveness, as in I have to defend myself, whether or not I'm talking about you or not, there's the sense of having to defend, but there oftentimes comes in I want to fix. We as women, we can handle a lot of things on our own, sometimes we just need to be able to speak or truth, and not be judged for it. That is incredibly powerful.

Mike Domitrz: How did you get to where you are today? What was your journey to here?

Cyndie Spiegel: Interestingly enough, I worked in fashion for 15 years, and that was my career. I loved what I was doing, and what I realized, or I saw very early on in my own career was that women would step on each other. We weren't trying to help each other succeed. We would step on each other because, essentially, it was like the last man standing is the one who will be the most successful.

Cyndie Spiegel: Probably two or three years ago before I had left my career, at that point, which I left five years ago I really started to do a lot of self work, a lot of trainings, and yoga teacher training, for example. Not to become a yoga teacher, but really just understand the philosophy. I started to really get into exploring what I believed, my own belief system. As I did, I realized that it wasn't in alignment with the work that I was doing in the world. The way I built my first community was literally by going out on social media and saying, "I think we, as women, really need to come together to talk about how we're running our small businesses. Is anyone interested in this?" That was how The Collective of Us started. That was, I believe, it was 3 1/2 years ago, and it just has exploded since then, and I've been asked to speak about this topic. Obviously, speaking is a big part of what I do, but it really started from a social media post that was inclusive in wanting to have this conversation with women.

Mike Domitrz: As a social media post you put out, does anybody want to have this conversation, a bunch of people said, "I'd love to have this conversation," but from there you actually have to build a community, you have to create a space. How did you get them to actually go and join the community? That's a whole different ... It's like when people said, "Oh, if you put a podcast out I listen to every episode," and everybody knows that's not going to happen typically. Or, "Oh, if you make that one piece of clothing I'm going to buy it," and they don't buy it. What happened that you got them to take action?

Cyndie Spiegel: The very first thing to understand is that The Collective is different, and so The Collective is what I'm talking about is it started on social media, and that was several years ago. By the time The Community of Us started I had already built a social media following, and I had already had the credibility, so folks knew that this is work that I do every day, and it's the way that I live every day, so there was a certain credibility. When it comes to starting any community, community starts with one other person, so I didn't think about this and say, "How can I get 900 people to sign up?" I thought, "How could I get one other person to join this

conversation with a perfect stranger," and I put that out on social media, I sent that out to my newsletter, and slowly people started to join. Then, it was the word of mouth from there.

Mike Domitrz: I love that because we do get caught up when you have a podcast, or you have an online community you easily can get caught up in how do I get 100 listeners? How do I get 1000 members? How do I ...? What I love about what you said is that all you need is the one other, that it needs to be two for us to have a conversation. What I think we often forget about is if that one other enjoys the conversation you can ask them who would you like to invite in? Then they ask, "Who do you want?" Now, we're multiplying. I love that, so brilliant.

Cyndie Spiegel: When I first started The Collective of Us, actually, that was part of what I asked of women when we went through the first round of it. I said, "You know, if you love this I would ask that you write a blog post, and you talk about it. If you don't love it then I just ask that you give me your honest feedback." I asked for that up front, and that's actually what led to the success of The Collective of Us several years ago was the women in The Collective of Us. It me, I didn't have a following at the time, I just had an idea, and I was able to facilitate a really powerful conversation. It was via the word that these women, these initial 20 women spread.

Mike Domitrz: It did start with those 20. How many are you at now?

Cyndie Spiegel: It's 120, and that's only because I only allow in 20 at a time, and I only launch it once a year, that's The Collective of Us. The Community of Us is bigger, and we'll continue to grow, but the format will be changing in the new year.

Mike Domitrz: That's exciting. Every year you fill, that's fantastic, so congratulations.

Cyndie Spiegel: Thank you. No, it's a powerful group, and I really had to consciously decide the goal with The Collective of Us is not to grow it to a substantial number. It's to keep it in an intimate group of women who really build solid community.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, that's awesome. The books you recommend people to read, two of them I'm very familiar with, one not as much. Braving the Wilderness by Brené Brown, Tribes by Seth Godin, very familiar with both of those. When Things Fall Apart, I've always known of Pema Chödrön, but not this book. Could you explain what about this book?

Cyndie Spiegel: When Things Fall Apart. Tribes, obviously, it's more in the sphere of business. Braving the Wilderness, self-help. Pema Chödrön is I want to say she's a Buddhist monk, I could be wrong about that, but I think she's a Buddhist monk. I had gifted this book more times than I can count, and I hadn't read it, actually, in a very long time, but I have to tell you it's one of those books that make us realize, this going to sound negative so bear with me, how small we are in the world. Meaning in relationship to everything that's happening around us how

we fit into the greater world. When Things Fall Apart really teaches the message that we are always going to be able to get back up, we're always going to be able to figure it out, and she does it from a very philosophical way that is incredibly understandable for folks whether you consider yourself spiritual, religious, or not.

Mike Domitrz: What I love about how small we are in this world is that it takes the stress off. Like, "Hey, you know, get over yourself. You don't have that much control. You don't have that much say in the world, so take it easy. You don't have to worry about everything being right 'cause if you're wrong the world's not gonna end tomorrow because of your being wrong."

Cyndie Spiegel: Yeah, but doesn't it feel that way?

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, it can feel that way, and that's why I love when writing goes into that, and says, "Hey," it's like that idea if you pull back, first of all, just your neighborhood how small you are. Then, you pull back your community and if you like to live in a large city you cannot be found in a large city.

Cyndie Spiegel: That's exactly it.

Mike Domitrz: We're just to your city line now, so it is profound to realize hey, take it easy on ourselves.

Cyndie Spiegel: Absolutely. The other important message that she talks about a lot is moving towards pain, moving towards difficult situations as opposed to running away from them, which is the message we often hear from society. She talks about really honing the ability to move towards what is challenging in an effort to open our hearts, and to really understand ourselves, and one another. Powerful stuff.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, very Buddhist that suffering is part of the process, you don't try to run away from it. You understand this is part of the process, it's part of the human experience, which is beautiful.

Mike Domitrz: You have your book coming out?

Cyndie Spiegel: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The book is actually already available on pre-order, and I just saw we were number one in sports psychology, I don't know how that happened, but ...

Mike Domitrz: Congratulations.

Cyndie Spiegel: I'll take it. It's called A Year of Positive Thinking: Daily Inspiration, Wisdom, and Courage. The thing I like folks to know about this book is I'm a very unlikely candidate to write a book on positive thinking. I don't believe in rainbows and butterflies in the sense that everything is perfect all the time, and a lot of how I

built my own reputation is being very honest about the ups and the downs of being a woman, of being a human, of being mixed race, of being a woman who runs a small business. This book is very much meant to give small doses of courage every day. You shouldn't buy the book and expect it to say, "This is how you're gonna change your life," that's not what I do. I'm not capable of that, I don't think anybody's capable of telling us that. It is almost short doses of courage and wisdom spoken from a very human language. A language of experiencing the pain of living, and also being able to come out of that.

Cyndie Spiegel: One of the things I said in the beginning of the book, or in the introduction is, again, I'm an unlikely person to write this book. I grew up in poverty in New Jersey in a single-parent household, I would never have thought that 35, 40 years later I'd be writing a book on positive thinking, but it is a skill set that I've honed, and that I've studied, and I think all of us have the capacity to change the way we think in an effort to really live our lives in a way that feels in alignment with who we want to be in the world.

Mike Domitrz: I love the cover, I'm looking at it right now. I think it brings in and can only guess, it seems by knowing you that it brings in your culture, and you.

Cyndie Spiegel: Yeah, it really does. What do you mean about that when you say it brings in my culture and me, why would you say that? I know we've, obviously, met before, but I'm curious what your thoughts are.

Mike Domitrz: As you've mentioned to our listeners several times, hey, I'm not the likely candidate. I'm this, I'm this, I'm this. It's not the mix we think of that makes up you. I think when you see your book cover the sides create this unique mix not in the same place, not in perfect alignment to each other. I like that, and the color of it, everything.

Cyndie Spiegel: Awesome. I love that you actually saw into it that quickly. Usually, it takes people to really look at it for a while, but yeah you're exactly right. It's the this and the that. It's that life is not always balanced, and what do we do with that? I love that you spotted that right away on the cover. Well done, you.

Mike Domitrz: I appreciate that, thank you. For everybody listening by the time you hear this it's out, so keep in mind you don't need to pre-order you can get it, A Year of Positive Thinking. Of course, we'll have the links for all of this in our show notes. Thank you so much Cyndie for joining us.

Cyndie Spiegel: Thank you Mike. I so appreciate you having me on.

Mike Domitrz: Thank you for joining us for this episode of The Respect podcast, which was sponsored by The Date Safe Project at datesafeproject.org. Remember, you can always find me at mikespeaks.com.