

Nisha Anand Transcript

Mila Atmos: [00:00:00] This episode is sponsored by the Jordan Harbinger Show, a podcast you should definitely check out. I enjoy the show and I think you will as well. Search for the Jordan Harbinger Show. That's Jordan H A R BINGE R on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you're listening now. Thank you also to Shopify for supporting Future Hindsight. Shopify is a platform designed for anyone to sell anywhere, giving entrepreneurs like myself the resources once reserved for big business. For a free 14 day trial and full access to Shopify's entire suite of features, go to Shopify.com/hopeful.

Mila Atmos: [00:00:38] And another thing before we get stuck into the show. This month, Future Hindsight is featured in the AAPI Voices category on Stitcher. So I wanted to say a quick thank you to Stitcher and to urge you all to check out some of the other amazing podcasts in this section this month, like Asian Not Asian and Hidden Brain.

Mila Atmos: [00:01:04] Welcome to Future Hindsight, a podcast that takes big ideas about civic life and democracy and turns them into action items for you and me. I'm Mila Atmos. In our polarized times, in many ways, the most radical act is cooperation. When everything is pointing us toward more conflict, more discord, building bridges and working with people who don't agree with you is becoming perhaps a lost art. And so I wanted to talk to someone who's really thought about how to build bridges and follow through with action. Our guest today went from radical activist to common ground champion. And as you'll hear, the distance between those two things is shorter than you think. Nisha Anand is an Indian-American activist, mom of two teenagers, and leader for racial justice. Nisha's extensive organizing experience and work with mentors like Van Jones has solidified her belief in the power of working with unlikely partners to find real solutions. She's CEO of Dream Corps, where she and her diverse team are learning the value of unconventional relationships as they tackle criminal justice reform, building a green economy, and creating equity in tech. And I started by asking Nisha about a family story she shared in a TED talk that really moved me when I first saw it, and it moved me again when she shared it on this podcast.

Nisha Anand: [00:02:35] That story for me is a big part of who I am today. It informs my work a lot because I grew up with this. It's almost a mythical story and our family, everybody on my father's side tells the story. He was a baby during the partition. He was just born before the partition. And when the British left, when colonialism ended and India got their independence, as they walked out the door, they saw the infighting between different groups in India and they just decided they would draw a line, pretty arbitrarily drew a line and said, "okay, this is now this country, this is now this territory. See you later." And they left. And that line between India and Pakistan, which we refer to as the partition, ushered in the largest forced migration in human history. People were crossing the borders both ways. My family happened to be a Hindu family that had lived their whole lives on that Pakistan side of the border, what was now Pakistan. And in India, you had Muslim families crossing to get into Pakistan and vice versa. With the announcement of the partition, my family went into hiding and they went into hiding until they could safely make it out of Pakistan. And the story that we were told growing up was about how there was this one moment when one of these armed militias was searching the area, looking for any Hindus that might still be in the neighborhood.

Nisha Anand: [00:04:02] And they came into the house and my father started crying where they were in hiding, and they were six kids at that point. And he started crying, risking the lives of everybody. And my grandfather made a choice in that moment that no parent ever wants to make, but he decided that he would sacrifice my father in order to save the whole family. And my grandmother shook him and shook him, trying to get him to stop in time. And miraculously he stopped. And the way the whole family tells at that moment is a is a complete miracle. And they lived. But the other part of the story that I didn't hear growing up that I heard later and it's obvious now, was that the family they were hiding with was a Muslim family. It was their neighbors. It was people that they grew up with, obviously. And so at this moment in time, when everyone is at worst killing or kidnapping or hurting people of different faiths or seen as different people, that's at worst. At best, most people were just turning a blind eye. They didn't want any part of it and wouldn't partake in it. But they weren't actively helping people. This family chose their shared humanity. They chose to reach out across the divide and remember that this is a family that they know and love, and they were going to protect them when the whole world was telling them there's no reason to protect them.

Nisha Anand: [00:05:32] This Muslim family took my family in and that's why we're alive today. And it informs my work because right now, in this moment in the United States, there's so much division and we're told that we can't heal these divides. And we are often shamed or ridiculed when we try to reach across the aisle or try to find common ground. And I have to laugh at that because I know it's deep. It is in my bloods. It is in my history that people have reached across much harder divides. They have risked their lives. They have risked their family's lives. They have risked everything. Another part of the story that my parents tell me is when the house was being searched, this family at one point swore on the Koran that they were not hiding any Hindus. They swore on their holy book. That's how serious they took the mission to love your neighbor, to take care of people, and to not let these arbitrary things like lines or political parties or any political issue of the day to divide you. But instead, they chose to stay united.

Mila Atmos: [00:06:43] That's an amazing story. I can see what people would shake when they tell the story. It's making me a little emotional myself because I'm Muslim and so many times Muslims are vilified and they're made out to be these terrible people. And they're just like you and me. So well, this is clearly informing your work. And so tell us about how radical common ground is, not the weak position. That it's hard and it hurts, but it can save lives.

Nisha Anand: [00:07:12] Absolutely. I mean, I think in this instance, you can see that it's not an easy choice to protect someone's family because you see there's something you have shared. It was a shared neighborhood, a shared community. You see that you have that I mean, really just humanity in common. That is not a weak position. It is putting your life on the line. But I also think that it's a very strong position in which to build a future from that. If you choose a set of solutions that only speaks to your worldview and only works for people who have similar experiences to you. So therefore the opposite of common ground. If you're trying to push through a solution that really is just one that's only informed by your worldview, it's not going to last. It's not going to work for everybody. And if it does not make a broad group of people happy, well those unhappy people will come back and change it. So strategically it's the wrong strategic move to not seek that common ground and not seek the biggest table possible to find a solution. But I also think it's a strong position because philosophically it's the most consistent one for me, that when I think about the easy way to solve something, you get

a lot of points these days on Twitter or social media, if you'll just come out and attack other people. You get a lot of points. That's easy. But I don't think that's right. You find studies all over corporations and academia that talk about diversity and equity and inclusion. Those are the buzzwords of the moment. But diversity, equity, inclusion as being a necessity. Companies understand that it's necessary that you have people in the room who can see your blind spots to build a product. If everyone looks the same, you're not going to be able to see those blind spots. You're only going to work from your worldview. But it's also in academia. You can see it everywhere. But for some reason, when I get involved in movement politics and I come very much from the social justice left, that's who I am. We forget that. We think diversity is something that we need corporations to learn how to diversify or we need government offices to diversify. But we don't usually turn it inward and look at ourselves. But I think it's just as important in ourselves that that table of diverse thought and diverse life experiences is absolutely critical to having the best solution and the most durable solution, the one that will last for the longest time.

Mila Atmos: [00:09:40] Yes, we definitely do. So we have spoken about this in other episodes that the messaging so often is that believing in shared community is somehow naive, right? Or Pollyannaish. But as you say, it's not, it's not naive. In fact, it can offer a moral compass for us. So how do you define our shared community today and what do we have in common right now? Because we we can have a blind spot for that too.

Nisha Anand: [00:10:06] Absolutely. I think that there is a lot more we have in common than we're actually willing to admit and acknowledge. Right now, we don't have the permission to get up and say what we have in common, but there is a lot there. I was recently reading a study about the war in Ukraine, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. And across America, and that's where the study was conducted, it was something close to 90% of Americans were upset about the Russian aggression and believed it was wrong and of varying degrees of wrongs, but still 90% wrong. That is a lot of unity. But in the same poll, the question was asked, does this issue have an ability to bring Americans together? And the answer was no. And to me, that speaks about our loss of hope, not our loss of unity, because we're almost scared to see the things we have in common. But they are there. Poll after poll after poll says we want less division. We want to be more unified. Everyone is yearning to heal these divisions that have been created and work together. But unfortunately, people just have lost hope and don't think it's possible.

So the question today, what do we have in common? I think there is a lot there. If you listen and talk and start working to understand someone on the other side of any divide, political party being quite a big one. But there are divides we have right now over around religion, race, education, income, all of the divisions that feel like they can't be healed. They actually can reach across the aisle and listen and start talking. And I've been surprised by what I found in common with people across the aisle.

Mila Atmos: [00:11:53] I've heard you talk about something like a kind of common ground X-ray vision, a super power for spotting opportunities or places where we share common ground. I love that idea, but how do we get the super power?

Nisha Anand: [00:12:06] I think we are all built with a common ground super power. When I just look back on my history and I think about who I have been growing up, I'm a mix of so many different things. I think we all carry a lot of identities within us. I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. It's a Black and white South, and I came from Indian immigrant parents. I didn't fit in anywhere. There was a bit of this misfit energy that's always followed me around, but the misfit energy also gave me this other thing, the chameleon energy. I literally have been the bridge for my parents between the old world and the new. I mean, literally translating for them the differences between the old world and the new and figuratively, you know, trying to explain and understand and put two worlds together. I think first generation kids have a unique ability to do that and immigrants have a unique ability to do that translation. But all of us, even if that's not your experience, I, in high school, I was both captain of the debate team, straight A's. I had to get straight A's, very big expectation of my family. But I was also a punk rock kid who would sneak out to concerts. I had piercings that I would hide from my parents, all sorts of things. And I can be that person. I can have all of that inside me, and I'm able to balance that.

Nisha Anand: [00:13:24] And like you said, we can go out and hang out with our neighbors and have these discussions where we know we don't agree. But you always find something you do agree on. We have that superpower. We just have to tap into it and want it. And, you know, I know that this is possible because I did it in the middle of the pandemic during the election season with not just a set of conservative people who might have conservative values, but far to the right, Trump supporters, even someone who identifies himself as a conspiracy theorist. And I was put in this situation because

during the pandemic, my son could no longer play baseball here in Berkeley, California. There was absolutely no baseball teams, and he's a pitcher, and we needed his arm to stay warm and stay in shape. So we joined this team, like I said, people very different than us. And we traveled to Arizona and to Texas and to Vegas and to all these different places with this team. And I had a choice to make. I could tap into that superpower that I mentioned that I grew up with, that I know how to balance these identity identities. Or in the first trip I took with them was the day after the election. So or I could have just ignored everybody and acted better than and thought we had nothing in common and left it that way.

Nisha Anand: [00:14:45] But this was my now chosen community, and I was able to connect and start having conversations and showing up and really listening because no matter how they voted, no matter what the beliefs were, what kind of things they latched on to during this election time, we had a deep love for our children. They were willing to travel, and sometimes at great expense, across the country so that their kids could play the game they love and have a chance at playing it in the future. And that was a way we could connect. We were out there late at night driving all over for the love of our children. We could bond from that. We have common ground. And now I consider these folks great friends, really great friends who got us through a very hard time. And I've got to say, that's a big piece of it, too. Common pain is a great way to find common purpose and find that common ground, because we were also all grieving. And in fact, right now you do not have to look far. Find somebody grieving something similar to you. We have lost a great deal during this pandemic time and that bond, the love for the children, the pain that we're having from the loss that we've experienced, that's enough to find common ground.

Mila Atmos: [00:16:05] We've talked a lot, in fact, about love as a political force on the show and about love as a force for change. So I'm totally here for it. And I totally also hear you on the grieving part, because my son is a wrestler and there was no wrestling season last year and it was devastating, very devastating for all the boys on the team. So let's go through some more examples of how this works in practice. Tell me about the concrete steps you're taking and how they are informed by this idea.

Nisha Anand: [00:16:32] Our beliefs around common ground and making sure to build the most inclusive set of solutions possible and have ideas that really include

everybody. We perfected that a few years before when we passed a piece of legislation called the First Step Act in the US Congress. It was a giant piece of criminal justice reform, one of the biggest pieces of legislation on that issue in generations. This was a big aha moment for me and this is where I think, yeah, on a small scale I can talk about talking with parents on a baseball team, that's one thing. But on a large scale, being able to pass a giant piece of legislation because you came to the table together because you could talk across difference, that's different. We started this bill during the Obama administration and we had to figure out how to pass it during the Trump administration, because one thing that we could not allow was we couldn't allow the people who were inside, the people who we know this reform is most important for. We couldn't stop fighting just because of who was in office or because it might have been a harder path or because the optics wouldn't look good if we passed it. So we kept going. And this bipartisan coalition we formed around criminal justice and what we discovered, it was actually nine years ago almost when I interviewed for this job with Van Jones at Dream Corps, and he told me, he said, we're going to pass bipartisan criminal justice reform.

Nisha Anand: [00:17:58] And I laughed at him because I thought that was an oxymoron. Part of my multiple identities, which maybe we'll get into a bit, I was also a bit of a hell raiser as a young kid. I got arrested for any cause that I found just, as part of a lot of different civil disobedience actions. And I was always very active on criminal justice reform. And I had remembered at a Republican National Convention in 2000, all of us getting arrested outside, fighting for criminal justice reform. And there wasn't a single Republican on the street with us. And that's what I told Van in that interview. I said, Hey, sounds like an oxymoron. I've never met a Republican who wants this. And he did the really nice thing that he does as a good mentor: He walked me through it. He might have said, All right, you need to grow up, but let me walk you through it or something like that. He's great at the tough love, but he said, Nisha, you and I come to this because of justice, because of fairness.

Nisha Anand: [00:18:53] Our value, our deep seated belief is that it's an unjust system that treats people of color, Black people, especially unfairly. It's been that way since the beginning. It's still having that impact. Now we have this feeling of justice. But on the right, if you look across the aisle, the conservative coalition, they're coming to it for different reasons. You have fiscal conservatives who want to see this change because

it's a ton of taxpayer dollars at a system that's just eating up more and more money and not getting any good results. They don't want to keep raising taxes for it. You have libertarians who are already upset at the far reach of the state. They think we need smaller government and the drug laws are one of the worst examples of government overreach. They want to see a change. And you have the religious right who believes in second chances, who really has a strong value around redemption, and they're anti-death penalty. They also want to see some changes in there. Those are three big parts of the Republican Party who want to come to the table, not for the same reasons as us, but they want to see something done. Surely we can work with that. And we actually could.

Nisha Anand: [00:20:04] During the Trump administration and a Republican controlled Congress, we had 87 votes in the Senate to pass this piece of legislation. And the amazing thing is, three years later, I can tell you every single hard thing we did was worth it. 20,000 people are home. But I believe that's exactly what's in front of us on so many issues, climate being the big one. And so we started just like we did with criminal justice reform, building a table of people who are coming to us for different reasons, having really hard conversations, really getting to know each other and why the why and understanding and listening. And we've slowly built a bipartisan coalition. You have farmers who are traditionally conservative, who understand the impacts of climate change. You have military officials who also have been traditionally conservative. But if you've been stationed anywhere in the world, you see the impacts of climate change. And so they're not coming for the same reasons, but absolutely coming because something needs to be done. And so that coalition I'm pretty proud of, I hope you'll see something like the First Step Act in the next year. I know that our Earth needs it and I do think that this methodology can be applied across a lot of different issues.

Mila Atmos: [00:21:23] We're going to take a quick break to thank our sponsors. And when we come back, I'll be asking Nisha about how to work to find common ground even when you think what the other person believes in, or stands for, is, well, nuts. That's after the break.

Mila Atmos: [00:21:40] Oh, that sound makes me smile. That's the sound of another sale on Shopify. Shopify believes in liberating commerce for all because entrepreneurship has the power to drive communities forward, and commerce can be a

force for good. Supercharge Your Knowledge, your sales, and your success. For a free 14 day trial, go to shopify.com/hopeful all lowercase. Making your idea real opens endless possibilities. Shopify is a platform designed for anyone to sell anywhere, giving you the resources once reserved for big business, customized for you with a great looking online store that brings your idea to life and tools to manage and drive sales. Shopify powers millions of entrepreneurs from first sale to full scale, and every 28 seconds, a small business owner makes their first sale on Shopify. Get started by building and customizing your online store with no coding or design experience. Access powerful tools to help you find customers, drive sales, and manage your day to day. Gain knowledge and confidence with resources to help you succeed. Plus, with 24/7 support, you're never alone. I love how Shopify makes it easy for anyone to successfully run your own business. More than a store Shopify grows with you. This is possibility powered by Shopify. Go to shopify.com/hopeful all lowercase, for a free 14 day trial and get full access to Shopify's entire suite of features. Start selling on Shopify today. Go to shopify.com/hopeful right now.

Mila Atmos: [00:23:22] Thanks also to the Jordan Harbinger Show, which features in-depth interviews with some of the world's most fascinating people like Barbara Boxer and Charles Koch. In the spirit of finding common ground, it might be worth checking out that interview with Charles Koch, who tells Jordan that he believes in generating bottom up solutions through the empowerment of others and in collaborating with people from the other side of the political spectrum in order to solve the world's biggest problems. And Jordan also makes time to respond to listener questions about everything from conventional conundrums, like asking for a raise at work to doozies, like helping a family member escape a cult on his "Feedback Friday" episodes. And that's just the beginning. Whether Jordan is conducting an interview or giving advice to a listener, you'll find something useful that you can apply to your own life. Whether that's learning how to ask for advice the right way, or simply discovering a slight mindset tweak that changes how you see the world. Search for the Jordan Harbinger Show -- that's Jordan H A R BINGE R in Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you're listening now.

Mila Atmos: [00:24:30] So tell me about how you overcome the discomfort of getting the work done, because sometimes you sit there and you know your values are so different and you come to the table, of course, for different reasons. But, you know,

when you're sitting there and you're like, Oh, that person believes this crazy thing or this, you know, thing I don't believe in. How do you actually sit down and look at them face to face and work?

Nisha Anand: [00:24:51] That's a great question. And I have to tell you that like anything, it's training. It's really training how to have these hard conversations. Like I said, we know how to do it. It's in us. We do it with our parents or, you know, that crazy uncle at Thanksgiving or whatever the issue is. We have these hard conversations so we know how to do it. But I think the most important thing first is remember who you are. Remember your values. I do not go into the room and ever be anything but myself, because that's another part of the question I get is like, isn't compromise ... Aren't you, you know, doing just what they want? Aren't they just like using their agenda? And I can confidently say no because I go into the room knowing exactly who I am and they know who I am. They can count on me to be me. I can give you an example that I bring into the room when we have these conversations around climate is my conservative partners can count on me to bring an equity lens and a justice lens. There are certain people at front line communities that for too long have been hurt first and worse from climate change. And they are often the last people to be included in climate solutions or get the benefits from innovation like electric cars and the electric grid and things like that. What you can count on me when I come in that room is I'm going to always see that equity lens and I'm going to be able to help figure out how to make sure that those things are consistent, that we make sure that people hurt first and worst are also the people who benefit from new climate policy.

Nisha Anand: [00:26:25] But I can count on the people across the aisle to bring issues that are in my blind spot, and I expect them to be authentically themselves. I don't usually think about individual liberties and personal rights and some personal autonomy and the need to build things in an individual way. I have to ask people on the other side to bring me that liberty sense. It's a blind spot of mine. I'm not thinking about it, but I know that if you don't address it, it's not going to be an easy way to get any change across. But I got to answer your question quite specifically. When that thought runs through my head of what do I do when I'm sitting across the table and someone says something that I think is bananas? If I really don't understand what someone's saying, I will say "I see it a little differently." That's my favorite phrase. I use it very sparingly, but when I really can't get through, I just say, Well, I see it a little differently. And that gives

me room to say how I see it and it doesn't have to be you're wrong and I'm right. Or even worse, like you're racist and I'm not. Which ends up happening in a lot of these conversations. Just I see it a little differently. It's an easy way to move the conversation on.

Nisha Anand: [00:27:40] But before you go to that. You have to ask yourself, have I listened enough? Have I been curious enough? And we get these tools. So if someone says something, my first thing to do is figure out why did I hear that correctly? What's behind it? We are all these results of all of our experiences has led us to be exactly who we are right now and who we are is interesting. I'm fascinated by humans, how we ended up being the way we are. And so that's the first thing is to be fascinated, to get curious, why do you think that? What could have been in your life that brought this to that? What experience do I not understand? And that's where I think that love piece comes in, because often there is an experience there that you can relate to, that you can see a humanity across to you, that even if you don't agree with their way of thinking, you can understand how they got there. And I really, really want people to understand me, too. So there is kind of that selfish motivation too. If I can listen deeply, if I can truly understand somebody, if I can truly help see why they get that way, and if I can explain that to my counterparts on the left, too, on their behalf. That's huge. It helps bridge those divides, but also they can see me. And really it's one of the things we all want is to be able to be seen and be understood.

Mila Atmos: [00:29:04] Now that you've been doing it for nine years, what have you learned about yourself in doing this work of building common ground?

Nisha Anand: [00:29:11] Well, I've learned a lot about my ability to find common ground and to think about love and to think about pain and grief and unique ways. Those are such common experiences that we can find each other through. But I think the other thing that I want to say I've learned about myself is I like to win. I like to win. I have been on a mission my entire life to find a more free and just world. I do believe there's nothing more urgent than freedom. And for that, I will work with anybody who shares those goals, and I think that's okay. A lot of people think, Oh, you just like compromise. That's what common ground is. It's not. I want to win. And so I'm going to take my values to the table. I'm going to do everything I possibly can and I'm going to win. So some days I'll tell you, it's more about philosophy, that I think it's philosophically important to have

an inclusive table. And I 100% agree with it. And I think, you know, we talked about it a little bit. Some days you're going to get me in the strategic mood. I think it's a perfect strategy for winning. I think it's the only way to win. And I've learned that those things, you know, it's okay if one's more dominant than the other, but then being in balance. To me, it's not just the way that I work at Dream Corps. I think it's the way we need to learn how to work. All of us in all of our organizations and all of our issues. I think companies need to have that balance to you, that holding your values and holding your strategy together is the right combination for success.

Mila Atmos: [00:30:52] Yeah, I think that's right. So what has surprised you about the people across the ideological divide? What have you learned from them?

Nisha Anand: [00:31:00] I've learned a lot about our own hypocrisy. And I guess this is my moment to talk a little bit about what I find we all need to work on. And I can only criticize myself and my community and the folks I'm from. Of course, you know, on bad days you will find me being a little bit critical about other people as well. But one of the things that I found out was I keep getting this charge of "you're on the coast, you're an east west coast, you're a coastal elite. You guys think you're so smart and better than everyone else." That's kind of one of the images that's sent back. It's either that you guys are so snooty and think you're better than everyone or something about, you know, we're all like socialist or communist or, you know, we're taking away everyone's rights. Those are the assumptions that usually get thrown on us. And, you know, I have to recognize we have our own assumptions too, our own stories we tell ourselves about the other side. That was so important for me to understand, that the myths I've made up about the other side, they have the same ones. I've learned that some of it is based in reality and we've got to own which parts are and really try to heal those parts of ourselves.

Nisha Anand: [00:32:20] Doing that is all we can do. And so I want to show up as a better ally. I want to show up as a better person that's on the left, that's liberal or has progressive values. And I want folks on the other side to do the same thing. And one of my big revelations was, was this little idea about. Why do people vote against their own self interests? It's something that we say a lot here. But, oh, you know, the folks, you know, out there in the middle of country, they don't want to raise taxes. Don't they know raising taxes, you know, would help them, or voting for this bill, it would help raise the

minimum wage, for instance. Why are they voting against that? And then I realized if you look back at us, we are also voting against our own self interest. We vote to tax ourselves a lot that would be seen as against our own self interest. If we were actually self interested, we wouldn't do that. And so there's just these little things that have been really helpful to hold a mirror up and to ask myself, like, what is true about the way that someone sees us and really look at that and work on that because, you know, it's based a little bit in reality.

Mila Atmos: [00:33:28] I totally hear that. I have been saying for some time that, you know, we are not going to convert other people to what we believe. But I do think the work that you're doing and at least, you know, talking about the different perspectives and coming together and the things that you can agree on and keep pushing and making a dent a little bit by a little bit is going to be our best bet. I don't think we will have radical overnight change on anything truly, because we cannot convert other people and they cannot convert us, either. We're not going to change our beliefs because somebody tells us that we should. I mean, when you think about it for a few minutes, then you realize that it's it's not going to happen.

Nisha Anand: [00:34:05] Absolutely. It reminds me of this colonial mentality almost was there was this idea that colonialists who went all over the world, oh, if only the savages had our religion, then things would change. You know, these folks need to be subjugated, enslaved, like the Colonial Project was so wrong because of this idea that they were less than and that was possible. And I think sometimes I can hear that echoed in my own thoughts and in some of my colleagues thoughts like if only they read what we read, if only they knew these facts, they would think like me. It's just not true. We have to really understand and respect and try to love those things that make us different. That diversity, because it is a key value of mine as a progressive, I have to really respect that diversity around the country as well and not think I know better or I should convert. And I think that's a really important point because when I go back and look at if I look at the root cause of some of the division and violence and hatred, I have to look back at dehumanization. I have to think about what has happened. The most violent atrocities in our history and world history have been because of this kind of mentality of dehumanizing, that once you make somebody the other, once you decide that they are less than you can do horrible, evil things.

Nisha Anand: [00:35:35] And the good news is we know how to counter that dehumanization, that when you have a conversation across difference when you're really willing to listen. And like you said, when you're really not trying to convert and change, but instead understand and respect and love, that dehumanization isn't possible. You will stand up for your neighbor. Like the origin story that I shared about myself at the beginning with the Muslim family and the Hindu family. We've seen it time and time again that when you have that human connection, you can do heroic things. And right now, we don't need to do heroic things. I mean, yes, some some of us need to do heroic things, but we just need to get over the fact that our friend said something we didn't like on Twitter. So I know we can do it. And it starts with that reaching out and really making that connection and stopping dehumanization before it starts and remembering that we have a lot more in common.

Mila Atmos: [00:36:35] Yes, that's right. So for an everyday person, what are two things that we could be doing to build bridges and to widen our circle and to, you know, include these diverse and divergent voices.

Nisha Anand: [00:36:48] Well, I'm sure that as we were talking throughout this conversation, probably a picture for your listeners has come in to your head. Well, this is all well and good. You know, nice to talk to her baseball team. And, you know, she was able to pass a piece of legislation, but she has not met "insert formidable opponent here" or you know, it could be that one parent at school or it could be, you know, a relative that always wants to debate you. It could be any of those things. But I'm sure pictures come into your mind of somebody in your life that you have a connection to, who you avoid talking to at all costs about anything real. I would challenge you first to do that, to talk to one of those folks who, you know, there is a great divide and to find that common pain. Or that shared love. And if you want to just start with a difference like, hey, you know, I know that you showed up last night at the school board meeting and we're totally anti mask and I really I want you to know I'm not trying to convert you at all in this conversation. I just really want to understand because I think there's something about your experience that my side does not understand. So if you wouldn't mind. Look, we're close. I would love for you to walk me through, and I want you to know I'm not judging and I'm not trying to change your mind. I really want to understand. Just that. That's a very easy conversation to start and most people will want to engage,

but you have to hold up your end of the bargain and not judge and not try to convert and really just stay curious and try to understand. One conversation changes a lot.

Mila Atmos: [00:38:31] Good advice.

Nisha Anand: [00:38:32] So I would start there.

Mila Atmos: [00:38:34] Right. So what's next? What's next for a Dream Corps?

Nisha Anand: [00:38:37] Well, I mentioned that we are trying to build a common ground agenda on climate. So we've done listening tours throughout the country and different places. And if you want to get involved with that, there's a lot of local and state work you can find on our website. And we also have the largest network. It's called the Empathy Network, which I think you would be into. Our Empathy Network is the largest group, it's a bipartisan and diverse group of formerly incarcerated and directly impacted by the criminal justice system leaders. And our Empathy Network supports each other and local causes, but they also support each other in telling the stories and doing that work of humanizing the issue. Because I believe hearts and minds are changed by that, by the humanization piece of it. And so if you're interested in talking about your story and you want to get involved, definitely the Empathy Network is great. But honestly, Dream Corps, what we want to be is a home for change makers who want to change the world in this other way. You're done with the divisiveness. You are searching for a different way to solve problems. And I think together we can solve a whole lot of problems. So find us for for that ,for that hope. I told you, I think hope is missing. The yearning for unity is there, but the hope is missing. I hope that what Dream Corps can do is try to bring some of that back.

Mila Atmos: [00:40:01] Yeah, well, you have a lot of things there on your docket to do. It's very ambitious. I'm into it. So as we're closing out here, looking into the future, what makes you hopeful?

Nisha Anand: [00:40:12] Well, I think you probably already have the idea that I'm an optimist. I happily take that label. I know I am an optimist. I always have been. But the reason I'm an optimist is because of my determination. I fully believe we create the future, that the future is not set in stone. We get to create it. And I have seen enough

big things change in my lifetime to know that that's true. I look back on the fight in this country for marriage equality. In my lifetime. That was a complete sea change in how people felt. I know it's possible you just look at the pandemic overnight. The entire world changed and then changed again and then changed again. I know it's possible. And so my determination and the determination of the people around me and the determination to create this future where there's freedom and dignity for all, that gives me hope, because if I'm determined in your determined, that's the future that can be. It's the source of my optimism.

Mila Atmos: [00:41:13] Excellent. Thank you so much for joining us on Future Hindsight. It was really a pleasure to speak with you about radical common ground.

Nisha Anand: [00:41:20] Thank you again for having me.

Mila Atmos: [00:41:22] Nisha Anand is the CEO of Dream Corps.

Mila Atmos: [00:41:31] Next time on Future Hindsight, we're really excited to bring you a live taping of an event I'm moderating for Big Tent USA. I'll be speaking with Marie Yovanovitch, former ambassador to Ukraine and author of the best-selling memoir, *Lessons from the Edge*. Ambassador Yovanovitch's book offers an inside account of the events leading up to the first impeachment trial of Donald Trump. Her memoir is a deeply personal story of struggle, patriotic idealism, and a life dedicated to advancing the interests of the American people. I'm really looking forward to this conversation and sharing it with you. That's next time on Future Hindsight. This episode was produced by Zack Travis and Sara Burningham. Until next time, stay engaged.

The Democracy Group: [00:42:24] This podcast is part of the Democracy Group.