

**Candice Schutter:** The formula thus far, which I'm challenging, has been I wanna get out from under the thumb of the leader, so I need to therefore become a leader myself.

And I need to, I need to do it differently. I'm gonna lead differently. And what if leadership isn't the answer?

**Nikki G:** Whew.

And it's innate in us. Physiologically, we just gravitate into a space, into a organization, into a group. Our nervous system. Who's in charge? Who's in charge? Who's in charge? Come up under.

And we don't realize, come up under their thinking, their perspectives, their ideology.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** Their beliefs.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** And then I figure out a way, and especially if you're a woman. Then you figure out a way to come up under.

Well, I'm not even talking about let's flip the whole table over. I'm just saying, what does it look like to coincide?

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Power to the people.

Power to the people. Like we hear that in a revolutionary context. But it's true.

**Candice Schutter:** Welcome back to the Deeper Pulse. I recently took a much longer than anticipated break and it's really great to be back here on the main feed with you. I wanna take a moment to give a shout out to patrons of the podcast who keep this media content editorially independent and completely ad free. You can learn more at [patreon.com/thedeeperpulse](https://patreon.com/thedeeperpulse).

So we are going to dive right in this week because I have a longtime friend of the pod and regular contributor, Nikki G, back with us, and she and I sat down for a very lengthy conversation that's just jam packed with all kinds of goodness, and I'm eager to share it with you.

Nikki G is a certified trauma recovery coach, evangelical cult survivor, and someone who has an intimate and up close and personal understanding of narcissistic abuse. And as I mentioned, she's been on the podcast a few times. Most recently, prior to the US presidential

election, where she really pulled back the curtain on Christian nationalism, the Heritage Foundation and the NAR movement.

And she's back today for a conversation where we go a whole hell of a lot of places, touching base post-election, talking about how to find balance during these challenging times, and deconstructing ideals of leadership, how they get in the way of the collectivism that is so desperately needed right now. This is a longer than usual episode, so I have inserted some chapter markers if you wanna listen in more than one sitting. And just a quick heads up. We had some connectivity issues at the beginning of this conversation, so the audio's a little bit compromised in the beginning of this interview, just keep in mind that it does clear up as the conversation progresses. Here it is, my recent conversation with good friend of the pod Nikki G.

It's so good to see you, my friend.

**Nikki G:** You too.

**Candice Schutter:** I was looking back in preparation for this, and I realized that we recorded our last two episodes together. So you've been on three times. Just for the listeners out there, Nikki's been on three times, episode 77, which we did on Spiritual & religious Abuse. And then we did episodes 81 and 82, which we'll flash back to that in a moment. But it was a year ago, Nikki.

**Nikki G:** To the date?

**Candice Schutter:** Almost exactly a year ago. We're like a week later than when we recorded or something. So it has been one year and my oh my has a lot happened.

**Nikki G:** Yes, it has. Feels like five years in between, but who's counting.

**Candice Schutter:** It it does. every day. Feels like five years. You know what I mean?

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** It's lot. It's a lot right now. And I just, I'm so grateful for the friendship that we've developed. And i'm so grateful that we've stayed in touch and

Real grateful that we have each other to lean into during all this craziness.

**Nikki G:** We need each other. Not just you and I, but collectively.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** We are not gonna be able to manage what we're in, what we're under, what is unfolding on our own mountains. So we'll get into that later as far as things we can do.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** I wanna just take a minute to reflect back on a year ago when we were connecting around the possibility of a second Trump administration And you had shared with us what to me was just profoundly eye-opening, in terms of Project 2025 and what was kind of behind it, the history, the evangelical long game, if you will, around it all. And how you'd been in many of those rooms and had stepped away. And your cult was kind of coming for the country. And

**Nikki G:** I love how you put that, but it's true.

**Candice Schutter:** It is.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** It is. And now here we are.

When you look back on that conversation, does it feel as prescient as it's been. I mean, the things that you shared with us are coming to pass and at a, a, pace that's a little bit mind boggling to me at times. There's some websites where they're actually tracking in real time the Project 2025 game plan and, and how it's coming to fruition.

What are your thoughts on everything that we talked about and how things are playing out?

**Nikki G:** Yeah, that project 2025 Tracker. I'm pretty sure you'll put the link up for people.

**Candice Schutter:** I will.

**Nikki G:** To check out.

I've never been the type to say, oh, I told you so. I don't think that energy is productive.

Honestly, a lot of times when I can kind of see where things may be heading, I often hope that I'm seeing wrong. And maybe I'm just being pessimistic and maybe paranoid or something like that.

But to see a lot of it unfold. And to be honest, it's worse than I thought.

But you mentioned a tracker and there is such a thing. I don't know who's running it, so I'm not trying to endorse the person. But how the Project 2025 agenda is progressing, you can track it.

And we can definitely tell that a big part of the heartbeat and the core of Project 2025 is are not gonna deliberate. We're not asking for permission, we're not going to legislate. We are going to just bulldoze and be very authoritative in what we want. And we will do that by the stroke of a pen, by executive order only, which is what they had in their playbook. I don't think we really believed that this was going to happen, because I don't think our country has seen anything like this before.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And it is not just the Trump agenda, to be honest. It is not even Trump's agenda. This agenda is a conglomerate of different organizations, different groups that have been coming together for decades. The NAR movement, the NAR culture.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** You know, the oligarchs, which I did not foresee.

Um, obviously, you know, the white supremacists and their agenda. But all of these are fusing together and they are what is behind the Trump agenda. He, as I mentioned before, is just the avatar.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

Yeah. Well, and you said in episode 81, you know we titled it Trojan Horse, cause that was the language that you used. Trump is just a Trojan horse that they're using to get all of this through the door. And the reason it's able to move so expediently is that they've been laying the foundation for this for so long and now they have their guy. And they're just gonna try to push it through.

Now I should say, you know that we have glimmers of hope here and there. The judicial system is checking quite a lot of things. So far there's been some great rulings. And so, we know there's some checks and balances that are still working. There's some that aren't working at all. And they have achieved a lot because of everything you told us about the, the 7 Mountain mandate, the different of areas of culture that they wanted to impact and influence. They are doing a really expedient job at touching each of those.

And it's been fascinating seeing you and your process of cult recovery as we've been walking this path together. And like I said, your cult knock, knock, knocking on the White House door. And the strength that you possess in the face of the fact that the worst thing that could have happened in regards to your cult impacting your life more directly again, has happened.

From where I sit, you seem to be in a really strong place. You seem to be handling this quite well. Is that true?

How are you, Nikki? Because I.

And, and I wanna say this too before you answer that, because one of the things that is fascinating about us sitting down having this conversation is we came from two really different environments. And there's a lot of overlap because cult dynamics are cult dynamics, but the ideologies that we came from are very different. And one of the things that's fascinating to me and why the timing of this conversation is interesting to me is.

So we've talked about how the evangelical movement and Christian nationalism, that sort of coalescing of forces has infiltrated Washington. And simultaneously the MAHA movement.

**Nikki G:** Mm.

**Candice Schutter:** Which is the Make America Healthy Again movement led by RFK Jr. is really a subset of the environments that I was in, the wellness environments. And most recently, Trump has selected Casey Means as his surgeon general pick. Casey Means comes from the wellness grift world that I know well. And somehow, Nikki, these two worlds have found each other. And there's like a marriage that's happening between kind of the new age spirituality movement and the Christian evangelical movement. They're, they're sort of in bed together now. And it's, I have a lot of feelings around that.

So I guess I'm asking as somebody who can relate in a way.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** How the hell are you?

**Nikki G:** Interesting. I don't know. I, I, I will, I attempt to answer that question. A lot of my personal journey and the dysfunction that I've experienced in different family settings, relationship cults. You know, for those who haven't listened to any of the episodes prior to that, I have been a part of five different cults. And been a part of a lot of the NAR, Christian nationalists, new Apostolic Reformation movement, all of that stuff.

Because I've been around it, it doesn't feel foreign. It feels threatening. Absolutely. I can feel my anxiety exacerbated and feeling like, whoa.

But there's a part of me that says, okay, what can I focus on in my personal life and really clinging to that? What can I do? What do I have control over? I say that word loosely, you know?

My value systems, my, my joy. My peace, my ability to love others. I have really tried to focus on the micro while I am aware of what is going on, the macro and the bigger scale of things.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Because, especially one of the cults I was a part of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, it was very, very end time. So we were always in the future. Always

keeping up with what's coming versus what is. And I've spent so much time in the future, I know what that feels like. My body knows what it feels like. And I don't want that for myself anymore. I'm still in a

**Candice Schutter:** Nice.

**Nikki G:** reclamative season in my life. And that is so important to me to continue to re, reclaim. So it may not be satisfactory to me to feel like, oh, I should be engaging in this and doing this and doing that and doing that, or whatever. And I'll get into that later as far as what we can do based off of what our nervous system says.

How am I doing? I do not feed myself everything Trump is doing.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** I cannot.

My peace, my joy is important to me. And if I want to help do the work that I'm doing for the long term, especially parallel to what we're in, I cannot fire hydrant and just ingest everything.

There is sometimes this notion that the more we know, the more we can protect ourselves, the more we know the safer we are. I lived that life. That is not true. Because, just 'cause I may know he did 151 executive orders, what does that do for me personally? Okay, I know this information. But on a personal, in my house all the way down to the seat I'm sitting in right now consuming all this information, how is it helping me to live my life?

So the key operative word is balance. Does that mean I don't know anything? Absolutely not. Does that mean I don't keep up with certain things? Absolutely not. I am aware, but I have to curtail some of that. I have to make sure I balance it.

Because I fought to get out of all those cults. And next year will represent 10 years that I've been out of my last one. I fought to recover and to work through things and to help my was teenage daughter at the time, who's now in her mid twenties. I fought to see that she was okay.

I'm not giving that up just because Trump is president. I'm not giving that up because the new apostolic reformation seems to have a good foothold in our government right now. I'm not giving that up, because the oligarchs are coming in and doing all the things. That is important to me. I fought for that. And that is precious.

And so, I still need to understand what I'm in. I need to be aware of the umbrella that I'm under, you know, which is the United States of the cult of Trump. That's my little, little funny phrase that I say. It's not funny, but that, you know, that's what it feels like.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** To me and to my body. And so.

Now when I see certain things happening, like you just mentioned, the MAHA and, and what's going on with that. I get mad. I allow space for rage. I'm even, not even gonna say anger. I'm just gonna say rage. 'cause

**Candice Schutter:** that's right.

**Nikki G:** that is appropriate right now with what we're dealing with, you know.

I allow myself, space for rage. I allow myself to feel. I allow myself to cry if my body remembers. It's remembering what it felt like when I was in these cults, that it was very similar. And so I allow myself to feel. And I, I then I go to the step two, okay, what can I do about this? What do I have the bandwidth to do about this? You know, where is my lane, right?

I know for me personally, my big lane is in the work that I do. The one-to-one, the one to many, the podcast, the groups, that is my lane. I pour into that. I pour into myself. I pour into my healing. I pour into my family. And then I pour into those around me.

Is it satisfying as far as making sure all of this stops? It's not. And I have to accept that, that as things are changing, I am fighting for certain things not to change in my life.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I am fighting for reality. Because when you've been under narcissistic abuse, gaslighting, manipulation, indoctrination, you don't even know what reality is. That's another thing I fought for, is the sky is blue. It's not brown. I don't care who says it. Out of the administration, out of the NAR movement, what particular prophet or guru says is brown. It's blue. And I'm going to fight to make sure I don't give in to anybody, whoever they are, that would try to lead me astray to think otherwise.

I fight for humanity, my humanity first, and then those who are around me to honor. At the end of the day, and I mentioned this to you in our conversations, you know. We look at the president administration and we see they're disdain, I'll, I'll go light. They're disdain for diversity. They're disdain for people of other sexual orientations or different people groups. We can see their disdain for unity. They're disdain for humanity.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** That is them. That's not reflective of me and my heart.

Now, you know how they say, you know, you're supposed to follow the leader. But we can choose. It may seem like a lot of choices are being taken from us right now, and we could talk about that later, what it looks like practically to fight back in that area.

But personally, I can choose to say, that is not me. I do not reflect those values. You can act like that's what you wanna do. But I fight to make sure I love people on a human level.

Now I am a Black woman, so I do feel wholeheartedly connected to my people and are personal struggles. But I'm also a human being. And it's important to me to look on a human level. So I do things to remind myself, 'cause that is what they're coming after.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** It's not just our 401Ks, our governmental jobs, our wombs. They're coming after all these things, full stop.

But they're also coming for our ability to connect with each other. Our ability to unify. Our ability to pull in that collective power. Our ability to be human. We have to see what's going on beyond what's on the surface. And say, not on my watch.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Not on my watch. I'm going to learn to love. I'm going to find joy, even though it's chaos all around me.

And you know, that chaos is a big part of narcissistic abuse. They're always keeping something stirred up. You know, and we see how Trump, for lack of better word, pump fakes a lot of time. Oh, I'm gonna do this. And then everybody's going crazy. The stock market's going crazy. Oh, you know what, nevermind.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** So we're all like about to have a heart attack. And then it's like, you know. So that up and down, I'm like, you are not gonna have that type of power over me.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** No, you don't get to control my emotions. I've been through that in the cult dynamic.

Not now. Not now.

And so certain things I choose to say, if I can't physically do anything about it, then I choose to pull my emotions out of it.

Now that may not fly for people that are hardcore activists. And there's a lot of people that I connect with and I pour into financially, if I can't do it and you can do it, then I'm backing you up.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.



**Nikki G:** And that's what it's gonna take. It's understanding and knowing our capacity. Like I said earlier, some people say, I don't want anything to do with politics, but I know so and so down the road that's really involved in it. Okay, so I'm gonna go knock on so-and-so's door and say, how can I support you? What do you need? Do you need signs? Do you need money for blah, blah, blah. Here you go. You do that. And over on this side, i'm gonna do this. Or I may babysit your kids while you go out and do it. Is going to take a village in order for us to mobilize, strategize, survive for the long haul. And to push back this wave of restructuring, not just politically, but on a human level.

And I refuse. You know, it may seem like I'm not fighting, but I am. But I'm fighting for me first. I'm fighting for my heart, my value system. What I teach my daughter, the example I lead in front of her. And then I fight for my people group, the people that are around me, and then my country. And sometimes doing that is making sure I'm okay.

I put my oxygen mask on first.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Before I give it to the person next to me. I find that very important. Because I've been in those groups and those ministries and those circles where I forgot about me.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And all I did was I was about the fight. Where's the cause? Let me roll up my sleeves. I'm not thinking anything about me or my family. It's all about the cause. Whoever said what the cause was. I didn't even vet if that was a legitimate cause. It was just, this was the leadership and they said God cared about it, so that's why I ran after.

Now I have choice.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Now I get to decide what I put my emotions in, what I put my money to, what I put my time to, what I put my mind and my psyche to. We have to be strategic right now. It's very easy to run in a fire fast. He's only been in office since January.

**Candice Schutter:** I know.

**Nikki G:** It's only May.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And they're moving pretty fast. But we have to be smart so we can have sustaining power to resist.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** I'll pause right there.

**Candice Schutter:** Well, thank you for all that. There's so many things you said that landed and resonated for me. I want us to come back to this staying in our lane. It's something that Susan McCulley and I talked about when we did a recording about everyday activism. And, and how important it's to come to know what our gifts are, where our strengths are, and participate in that way.

And so much of what you're saying feels to me complex. Because you mentioned, you know, being a Black woman. And you mentioned community and the way in which you respond to crisis. And I think that it needs to be named the legacy of Black women in this country and the ground that y'all laid for us.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** To march on.

And that, for you to do what feels good to you and what feels right to you in a way that feels good and right to you.

Black women have earned

**Nikki G:** mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** the right to do this however the hell they want.

I don't know if you wanna speak to, because I think there's, there's two things that are true. Well, there's many things that are true. But the thing that's really jumping out at me is there's everything you're saying in terms of like, us knowing our wheelhouse, our bandwidth, what we can do according to our nervous systems and all that.

And the reality of what that means for a Black woman. And the reality of what that means for a white woman like me, I feel like are in fact different, because of the history, the legacy. And it's our time to step the fuck up.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And to get uncomfortable.

**Nikki G:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And that, that that the call isn't the same for every population, group, community, social class, all that. There's a little different advice based on all of that. And also our nervous systems and our mental health matters.

I'm curious to hear from you on that.

**Nikki G:** Yeah. Yeah.

And, and I have even more of a complexity with that as well too, because yes, I'm a Black woman and a lot of my friends do have the mentality right now of, I'm checking out. They're gonna do what they're gonna do. There's nothing I can presently do about it, so I'm just going to live my life and enjoy my life.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And I honor that.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** But my, my additional complexity is, I'm also a trauma survivor, a cult survivor.

So there's a part of me that just can't sit back and not be active in some way. Like I said, I'm still fighting. I have to fight different. I have to fight more strategic, be smarter, wiser how I do it.

But I agree. The history of this country, you know, the foundation, you know, the Black community has been sometimes feeling like screaming and talking to the void.

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**Nikki G:** As far as, you know, what freedom looks like, what tyranny looks like, you know, like a, a government coming from within trying to overthrow its own people.

**Candice Schutter:** Speaking of, I told you so. I mean, hello.

**Nikki G:** Right, right.

Again, like I said, and I honor those who are in my community, that that's all they do right now.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Like, you know, again, coming out of what I came out of and healing means I make my own choices, but I respect the free will of somebody else's choice to say, Hey, as you're, it is not imposing on me, then I get it.

But understanding the nuances, and there's so many different lanes that fuse through me. I have to stand on works for Nikki, right. And like I said, just in how I'm wired, I'm not a, I told you so person.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** I'm just not, it's just like, 'cause and, and the way I see it personally Nikki, yes, I'm a Black woman, but as Nikki is, I could say that, but gonna take a lot of energy. That's gonna take a lot of time away from the fact that, yes, I told you so, but we're all here right now.

**Candice Schutter:** Exactly.

**Nikki G:** Under the same umbrella. Unless I move to France or somewhere else. And guess what? Unless I move to Pluto, let's, let's, let's be even more realistic.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** the whole world is feeling the effects of what's going on over here.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** So it still is happening on my watch, on all of our watches.

And it's so unfortunate that people didn't hear, but I understand the power of indoctrination and conditioning. I understand, you know, the power of coercive control and being brainwashed and, and connecting with a charismatic leader who you think is going to save you and help you and give you financial gain and all these promises. And you believe. And you're caught in the euphoria.

I understand what it's like to be hoodwink, bamboozled. And so, it is harder for me to sit there and just say, I told you so.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know, there, there's a lot of things going on in pop culture. And this is kind of like another topic, seeing, you know, so many women celebrities who have come forward and talked about being sexually abused and physically abused. And people's responses of, oh, they wanted it, you know, they, that was what, you know, all this stuff. And I'm just like, you don't even, you don't understand. You don't understand.

And that's one of the things as far as what do we do? Our country better get an education about cult dynamics, abuse dynamics and cycles.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Because whether that was your personal situation or not, we are under that right now. I don't think anybody in this country can no longer say, oh, I've never been in a cult. We're in one now.

**Candice Schutter:** It's being imposed.

**Nikki G:** We're all in one now.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**Nikki G:** You know? And so it's easy to tell other people, oh, they wanted, they wanted to be in that cult. Why didn't they just leave that abusive relationship? Why didn't they just leave that cult?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Well why don't you leave this cult that we're under?

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

I think that's, that's a really great point. Because that's one of the misconceptions about people who are in cults, that they're all punch drunk on the Kool-Aid and that they all wanna be there. And that they love everything about it. And, and there's absolutely those people. They're just the Marjorie Taylor Greens of the world.

But then there's a lot of people, I mean, you hear from behind closed doors, like the Republican Congress people who are afraid to speak up. And their eyes are open to a lot of what's happening. And there, you know, I hear a lot of different things in terms of people that don't feel sorry for them at all, and other people who have empathy for them. That's another discussion. But

**Nikki G:** mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** point being, is I find, having talked with a lot of cult survivors, people are pretty lucid at a certain point to what, what they're in. And they're in that bounded choice framework that Janja Lalich talks about, right.

Where it's like, right now, okay, you don't like living in America under the Trump regime. Okay, leave.

And the complexity of that, like a person being like, well, I can't just sell my house and leave. And my, my kids and my family and the school they go to and the.

Welcome to what it's like.

**Nikki G:** Come on.

**Candice Schutter:** When you're faced with the choice of leaving any cult.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** You don't have to be all in to be stuck in it. So, I love that you said that, 'cause I think that's a really important reminder. And I invite everyone listening who struggles to find empathy. Empathy, even for MAGA enthusiasts.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Because there's a continuum, there's a spectrum there.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And a large majority of people often would leave if it was easy to do so.

**Nikki G:** Absolutely.

Or even abusive relationships.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** Narcissistic relationships, you know, domestic violence relationships.

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**Nikki G:** Money, if money wasn't an issue.

**Candice Schutter:** yep.

**Nikki G:** If, you know, uh,

**Candice Schutter:** safety wasn't an issue,

**Nikki G:** If safety wasn't an issue, people would, would leave.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** No one in their right mind would stay in these relationships if they had a way of escape and they knew that they were gonna be safe.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I mean there's the trauma bond dynamic.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Or what we know as Stockholm syndrome that has to be worked through. But this whole notion that people remain in these relationships and they remain in this thinking because they want to. Many of them, once they come into the truth, don't know what to do.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** With that truth.

I was on a previous podcast and, and they asked me about Trump supporters, those who voted for him even a second time, and having buyer's remorse. Because they really didn't think it was gonna hit their home.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** It was gonna hit their farm. It was gonna hit their 401k, their cushion governmental job that they've had. You know, it was gonna hit their grandparents who, you know, needs medication and they're slashing it. You know, it, it was gonna hit their child that has disabilities, with a lot of things that they're pulling back with Medicaid and all.

So and this is the thing. And, and in the cult, I didn't realize it then, but I got understanding. The both and the and, the cognitive dissonance is going to be a major factor.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I'm out of it, but it's still a major factor. But I found beauty in that two things can be right and true at the same time.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** We're always looking for one or the other. When it comes to these type of dynamics, sometimes two things can be right at the same time. You can be mad as hell that your neighbor voted for Trump a second time. I'm not asking you to suspend that. That emotion is real and you can hold that part in your side pocket if you want to.

But what happens when that neighbor knocks on your door one day and say, can we talk?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, exactly.

**Nikki G:** You're, you're pissed as hell at them. Like, what do you want from me? You got me in you. There's space for that. You're not wrong, right? You bring 'em in your house, you sit down, get a cup of coffee and they start crying. And they say, always knew there was something that wasn't right, but I was so caught up in the euphoria. I was so caught up in what he promised. I was so caught up in my own racism that I didn't really make, really make sense of until just now.

Guess what? The neighbor that let them in is probably a Black woman. Let's just call it what it is. And they're crying. What are you gonna do?

It can be the both and. You can say, you know what, ma'am, sir, I hear you. Thanks for sharing that, but respectfully, I cannot, I can't hold this. I hope you find space and place for something like that and you can ask them to leave.

You're not wrong.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** If you do that. You're not.

But we're gonna get a lot of that type of scenario happening. And it's not a matter of black, white, whatever. I just threw that in there.

**Candice Schutter:** sure.

**Nikki G:** you know, for context. We're gonna get a lot of that. We're gonna get the phone calls, we're gonna get the texts, we're gonna get the, the messenger. If you're still on Facebook. Um, hey, can we talk, you know.

Then what do we do? Because if we think we're gonna try to resist on the long term scale beyond protests, financially, strategically, we gonna need more than just half of the country that did not vote for him. And I believe the protest that happened was in April there were a lot of buyer remorse people that were in.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** those crowds.

And so, I know everybody cannot do this.

So if you feel like Nikki, I'm sorry. I can't do that. I understand. There's nothing wrong with that.

**Candice Schutter:** Well, that's where I think that being in our lane and understanding kind of what works for us and what doesn't is so important. Which is shaped by our personal history.

Like, I'm the person that that neighbor could come sit down and talk with. Because similar to you, I know what it's like to look back and say what the hell was I thinking?

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And to feel regret around things. And to feel like I wanna make repair. Like I've been, I've walked that path. I'm available for that conversation. And that's something that I know that I can do. There's other things though, Nikki.

**Nikki G:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** That I'm not built for.



Like I can't make phone calls every day.

**Nikki G:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** I just, I can't do it. I'll make a phone call every now and then send an email. But like, I'm not that person. But I know people who, that's their action. It's the thing that that gives them a sense of traction. And I'm so grateful for the people who are doing that.

And I'm not gonna force myself to do something that is going to impact me in a way that's gonna make me ineffective in the ways that I am effective.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And I think that that's one of the things you're kind of highlighting here. It's like we're gonna have to have those conversations. But not everybody's gonna have to have those conversations.

The people who need to have those conversations are the people who that's within their capacity and that's the thing that they wanna do. People who don't wanna do that can be doing something else. But.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** I think it is important to, when we're facing a regime that is systematically dismantling empathy.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** That we lead with empathy.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Maybe we don't wanna have that conversation. But we don't become the dehumanizing force that kicks somebody out of our house screaming at them, telling them that they're the worst of the worst and actually sort of does the same thing, but in reverse.

We can, we can draw boundaries if we need to.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And like you said, I hope you find the person that can have this conversation with you. We can still express our empathy and our boundaries at the same time. But we can't lose sight of the humanity of people who are complicit in the heinous harm.

That doesn't mean we need to, um, I don't waste empathy on,

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** I'm just gonna be honest. I don't waste my empathy on Trump. I don't waste my empathy on JD Vance, or,

**Nikki G:** Yep.

**Candice Schutter:** Or any authoritarian lead. Just like.

Oh, something that, got me so fired up, especially when I first started doing the culture series and working with folks coming out of the Org.

There's this impulse and this connects to the leadership piece that we wanted to talk about.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Because we're so used to centering leaders

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** There's this impulse to spend our emotional energy and our emotional labor on the leader.

**Nikki G:** Yep.

**Candice Schutter:** It's everyone else that needs our empathy and attention, right?

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. And I'm interested to hear from you as a trauma coach and what you know about narcissistic abuse and healing from it.

Thoughts on how we express our empathy constructively during this time.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And that we don't get pulled into sort of reliving that dynamic where we're empathizing with somebody who's abusing us instead of with the people that need to stand next to us strong.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

I mean, I think you're hitting a great point when we look at leadership, corrupt leadership, authoritative leadership. But then we look at the people.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And what I'm about to say does not mean that every cult survivor like, this is your lane. Like none of us are wearing capes. We're just doing what we can in our lane. Right?

I kind of see cult survivors, narcissist abuse, abuse survivors, kind of like in between this corrupt leadership and then the people.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And I'm the type of person, this is me personally, I don't like to waste my empathy either. I don't like to waste my energy. I kind of look beyond the, the micro and the macro. And I'm like, does this make sense here? Will this be beneficial here? If not, where will it be?

And so if I can talk to someone who's ready and open and they want to learn how they can come out of this cultic thinking that they were in and now they're ready to turn and be apologetic and take accountability. That makes sense to me. Taking time online and arguing people who are still in this thinking, that doesn't make sense to me, you know?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Not that it doesn't make sense, but it would be a waste of my empathy at that point. And so I say all that to say, everybody has to get in their lanes.

There are some people that have to focus their empathy, their wisdom, the fight, the resistance on the leadership. There are some who are gonna be facing the leadership, the ACLU and these organizations that are, you know, the lawyers. They're facing the leadership. That is where the fight is.

That's not me. But I can financially support them. I can pass off information to hold up their arms while they're fighting, But I'm towards the people. That may not be their lane. How can they support, not necessarily me, but the podcasters, the media people, the people that are writing the book, the people that are doing, are in the arts, that are trying to help bring healing to the masses from corrupt leadership, authoritative leadership.

Harriet Tubman had a light to help the slaves get out, right?

You can still use light. I call it smelling salt to help wake people up who've been under cultic spell, if you will. All this is metaphorical, y'all. This is not, for real.

**Candice Schutter:** The link will be in the show notes to Nikki's smelling salts.

**Nikki G:** Before she like, Ooh, she's talking woo woo. I'm, I'm very visual. So I use a lot of analogies. But you face the people. And go up to those that are starting to blink a little bit, and help you to just whew, to totally open your eyes. You go to those ones, those twos. You sow a seed, you put something in their pocket and you keep it moving. You, you don't camp there.

But there may be a time in the future they may come around and knock on that door or reach out to you and say, Hey, can you help? And so, over the history of time, and not just in this country, globally, there have been corrupt leaders that have brought devastating destruction to societies. And people are still trying to put the pieces together from that. I mean, look at the Black community and what we've been through even in this nation. But

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** my heart are the people. How do we bring healing? do we bring support? How do we bring restoration? How do we give them the tools to continue to do it for themselves? To not enable them, but to empower them to continue to do it for themselves?

And then maybe they'll go in that group of people and they'll start helping somebody else. And that person starts helping somebody else while the others are fighting the corrupt leadership.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And then there's somebody else that says, Hey, I don't have the bandwidth for the corrupt leadership. I don't have the bandwidth for the people that been slimed, or, that's been corrupted by the corrupt leadership. But I have a heart for the next generation. I have a heart for the young people who haven't been tainted with this yet.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Let me work with them and try to instill values of love and empathy and honoring other people and diversity so that as they get older, I'm shielding them from the corrupt leadership that tries to sow seeds into them to become like the leadership.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Some people, their lane is, I'm not gonna do any of that. I'm an introvert. I'm quiet. But I'm gonna go in my computer and I'm gonna write. I'm gonna write from the heart. I'm gonna write a book that's gonna help somebody when they open that book. It's going to help bring healing, bring restoration, whatever.

Somebody else, I don't write, but I sing. I. I get on the piano and I, we are gonna need the arts in this season.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh yeah. Hell yeah.

**Nikki G:** Big time. And every time of crisis, we had the arts simultaneously.

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**Nikki G:** So people that sing, that write, that dance. People that screen write and want movies that's going to be impactful. We're gonna need all the artistic people, the neurodivergent community, the, you know, all of that coming together.

Our government, and not just this present one, has done a number to make us look at each other like, we have no value. It's going to take us to fight, to say, wait a minute.

I've looked at the Neurodivergent community. Oh my gosh. You know that show that's on Netflix? What is it called? Uh,

**Candice Schutter:** Love On The Spectrum.

**Nikki G:** Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh, I love that show so much.

**Nikki G:** I, I just watch it and I cry.

**Candice Schutter:** Me too.

**Nikki G:** Not just for them to find love and everything. I said, this is a show showcasing humanity. Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes. It's so beautiful.

**Nikki G:** If you can't feel when you're watching something like that, then I would ask you to check your heart for the jadedness for the brokenness or whatever you've been through, because that is the key. That's what they want to steal from us.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. There's a reason why they come after DEI like

**Nikki G:** Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** Guns blazing. And it's not just racism or ableism or, you know, transphobia or whatever. It's because they know that that diversity.

That inclusivity, that complexity is a threat to their simple formulas.

**Nikki G:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Which is like white is right. And men on top, and women in the home, and the whole nine yards.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** It's a threat. And especially trans folks who.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Talk about trailblazers in terms of like, you do you. You express the way you wanna express, you live the way you wanna live. That is a threat to fascism, that level of freedom. And they know that, and they're trying to shut it down.

And I think there's something else. One of the things that I'm so struck by is neurotypical. There's a part of me that really wonders how much of that is conditioned.

**Nikki G:** Mm.

**Candice Schutter:** And, and like, what is typical? Just like what is gender? Like, what is man? What is woman?

**Nikki G:** All these constructs.

**Candice Schutter:** Like, yeah. It's like, it's all these indoctrinating influences that we've accepted as self-evident and we've got these generations coming in that are like, yeah, no, I don't think so.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Um, I'm just gonna challenge it. And when I watch Love On The Spectrum, part of why I'm crying is I just feel there's a transparency

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** of humanity present.

Like the, the facade, the performance isn't there. And it's incredibly refreshing and it's liberating. Soul liberating. And I'm crying because I'm like, wow. To be able to live that free, that transparently and to create a world where it's safe to be that way.

And I appreciate what you were saying about offering all the different examples of the ways people can contribute.

I think one of the opportunities in all this for us is to really start to value, like you were saying, they've taught us we've devalued so many things. To value the contribution of just

simply showing up for our friend when she's having a hard day, the contribution of making a meal for our neighbor, my neighbor voted for Trump, and I occasionally drop food off at his door.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Like the, the simple actions that, that we can take that aren't Okay. I'm gonna kind of go on a tangent here.

**Nikki G:** Go for it.

**Candice Schutter:** I've been thinking a lot about how one of the places we've been conditioned to put value is in the idea of leadership. And that if we want to succeed, quote unquote, in this capitalistic world and in this economy and in this culture, we need to become a leader.

And there's a real devaluing of anything that isn't that. Right. Of like, well, if you're not at the top of the promotional hierarchy, right? If you're not, you don't have this many followers. Or if you're not, you don't have this novel concept that you're delivering to the masses.

I mean, I know that's why I became a coach in many ways because I was desperate for autonomy.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** This life coaching gig where I need to create this curriculum and this ideology and this, I need to regurgitate all this new age yada yada, because the only way for me to prove that I have worth is to become a figurehead of some sort.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And I'm, I'm, I'm laying this out there because it feels relevant to this because I think a lot of the time people don't think they can have an impact unless they are a leader.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** They think, well, I'm not an activist. I'm not an organizer. I'm not a fill in the blank. I'm just an everyday citizen.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** But that's where the juice is now.

**Nikki G:** Come on.

**Candice Schutter:** Right? It's like, what can you do not to lead your community, but to become a part of it and to participate in it? What are you already doing that you can do more of? I don't know. I just think.

**Nikki G:** No, I love this.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, I'm interested in what you think, because I think there's something that's happening in terms of inertia where people aren't moving because they think they need to be in some sort of positionality. Which is part of the indoctrination of what it means to matter.

And it's like, you don't have to have a foothold on any rung of the ladder to make a difference right now. You can just make a difference right now.

Thoughts.

**Nikki G:** I love this. I'm sitting here like, Ooh. Because it's going in the opposite vein of what we're dealing with right now with this administration. It's going in the opposite vein, what you're suggesting, from NAR. The whole very foundation of NAR is, God has divinely appointed certain leaders who are going to receive downloads from God, get visions of what God wants to do with government, with education, with family, with arts and entertainment, with religion, with media, and business.

And so, the people don't know. We know.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**Nikki G:** Cause we know we're gonna control and manipulate, but it's not gonna look like that. It's gonna look like we have the wisdom and the power.

But you're right, the power is with the people.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** It always has been. The reason why we've not always moved out on that power collectively, it's because we've been conditioned that we have to be a leader.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** In order to move out in power.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** And that's the furthest from the truth.



**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** When I was in all these cult spaces, I was involved in a whole lot of leadership stuff.

But I love what I do right now. I love to sit with someone one-on-one, hear their story, see their value. And I don't have to search far. I don't have to

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**Nikki G:** go deep in the crevices, one conversation. Because I choose to see their humanity. I'm not looking for, and maybe that's a plus when you're a coach. I don't diagnose. I'm looking for the value and the gold that's there. And together we work to help pull those life debris planks off of them, so we can get to the gold, so that they can see it. And they can connect and integrate with that, and then they can walk in it.

But because we've been conditioned that, unless I'm at the top, unless I have 200,000 followers, unless I'm speaking the same language, rubbing shoulders with the same people, I have no value.

You talked about worth equals being a leader. That is not the truth.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Nikki G:** You know. And so busting through that ideology that religion has conditioned us, the spiritual communities have conditioned us to think this.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And so we've had an invisible muzzle over our mouths, over our hands,

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**Nikki G:** our minds to believe what I do doesn't count, because I'm not a president of this organization. I'm not leading out on a public collective front, so it doesn't matter.

What I do, I believe it matters. No one ever has to tell me. I believe it matters, because it is one life at a time.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And I would throw away everything else I did in the church as far as leadership. And it was, you know, more people. And I don't care about all of that. It's the one.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And that's what I think in these times. That is what the government is not banking that we touch, that

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**Nikki G:** operate in. They are banking that we be just as inhumane as they are. They're banking that we will fall in love with white patriarchal men leading. They're not banking on us opening the door for our neighbor when they're crying, 'cause they

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** have buyer's remorse. They're not banking on us sitting down at a restaurant and seeing an autistic child and not knowing anything about the neurodivergent community and learning about it. They're not banking on us being heartfelt and empathic and showing love and value for people that don't look like us or sound like. They're banking that we're gonna be reflectors of what we're under. And that's where our fight is.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes. Because the model that's been handed down for centuries is *follow the leader*.

**Nikki G:** Follow the leader.

**Candice Schutter:** Follow the leader. And you started this conversation by pointing at this. They may be the leaders right now, but I refuse to follow that lead. That's not a lead that I will follow.

And that is why I'm gonna spend a bunch of episodes unpacking leadership and followership. Because I don't think people realize, especially as I'm studying leadership now, the number of assumptions that we're operating under that if we spent time questioning, we'd be like, oh, dear God.

**Nikki G:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** I have been surrendering my own agency and power to these ideas for as long as I've been alive. 'Cause I mean, we're taught it from the family structure. It's like an instinct in us, too. It's epigenetic.

**Nikki G:** Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** To fall in line. I.

So I was raised in like a military family. My stepdad was a Marine. And so I was really taught to respect authority. And I was conditioned in that way. And then my partner Chris, his dad was the opposite, was like cussing out cops and just. And he was raised to question authority, and to push back against it.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And we've both had to find our own middle ground, because each of those extremes is letting authority control us.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Right? It's like we're giving them, and in some cases they're taking the power. I don't mean to imply that the power isn't real, because the power structures are real. But it's all, it's all socially constructed.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** So it can be socially reconstructed.

**Nikki G:** Absolutely.

**Candice Schutter:** And so we have to think about like, am I overly deferential when it comes to an authority figure? Am I constantly challenging authority just for the sake of itself?

Basically taking that middle path of like, what if we stopped centering the leaders for better and for worse?

And we see this, oh, Nikki, you and I have talked about this in the cult recovery community, where people who've left cults and they move into cult recovery and then they then become cult recovery influencers and they're just

**Nikki G:** Let's talk about that for a minute.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. I mean, they're creating a following around it.

And it, it just, it gives me like a brain bleed, I swear. Because they're just like, what, what is happening? And I get it. Because it's that, that's how embedded it is in our psyches.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** That this is the way, this is the path forward.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** I guess what I'm trying to say is the formula thus far, which I'm challenging, has been I wanna get out from under the thumb of the leader, so I need to therefore become a leader myself.

And I need to, I need to do it differently. I'm gonna lead differently. And it's like, what if leadership isn't the answer?

**Nikki G:** Whew.

Power to the people.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** Power to the people. Like we hear that in a lot of, you know, revolutionary context. But it's true.

And again, I think I can speak for you and I and myself. I'm not endorsing well, sometimes you gotta rebel, especially with, you know, what we're dealing with.

**Candice Schutter:** For sure.

**Nikki G:** I'm not saying, you know, go to your job on Monday and flip off your boss or, you know what I mean? I'm, we're not talking about flat out disrespect.

**Candice Schutter:** No.

**Nikki G:** We understand how the world works. There are gonna be people, that's it's their company that, you know.

And it's innate in us. Physiologically, we just gravitate into a space, into a organization, into a group. Okay. Our nervous system. Who's in charge? Who's in charge? Who's in charge? Come up under.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. That's right. That's right.

**Nikki G:** We don't even have to say anything. Who's in charge? Come up under. And we don't realize, come up under their thinking, their perspectives, their ideology.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** Their beliefs.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** And then I figure out a way, and especially if you're a woman.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Nikki G:** You know, especially if you're a woman, then you figure out a way to come up under.

Well, I'm not even talking about let's flip the whole table over. I'm just saying, what does it look like to coincide?

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** As a starting place.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** What does it look like to coincide? What does it look like to be peers. Rather than, they have all the wisdom I need. And this is how people get drawn into cults. You know, at least one of the susceptibilities is, they know more than I do, therefore I know nothing.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** My little 20% that I came into this space with, I'm throwing that out the window, 'cause they know 200%.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Why? Your 20% could be what the rest of the people in the room or the space may need to hear. But we've been so conditioned, especially if you've been in a spiritual cult, a religious cult, the leader always set themselves up as having the actual wisdom.

And even if for a second you push back, you will eventually succumb to what they say, because you've been taught, they know more.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** They've seen more. They've experienced more.

So what is your wisdom?

And I think collectively in this country, it's time for us as people, as humanity, no matter what our color, creed, whatever, to start coming into understanding and connecting with our own personal worth. Our value.

Now, as people groups, as Black people coming into our value. You know, as Native Americans coming into them, as white people coming into our value. Knowing our lane and what do you bring that I don't have? And then we come together.

But this whole notion, that because this is a leader, they know everything, I pushed back on. That's why I said, they can set the stage. They can set the vibe that they want to for this country. I resist it.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I've lived in it. So I I know it. It's familiar.

And this is not coming from Oh, I'm bitter, what I've been through, 'cause I know somebody may hear it that way. Oh, you're bitter. So you're, you're resisting leadership.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Nikki G:** No. If the leaders that are leading are anti humanity, are disdaining different people groups and children and, and you know, different people who have different sexual orientation.

If you are doing that, yes, I resist you.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** I am not coming up under you.

This is about autonomy. What do I think, what do I value?

**Candice Schutter:** Well, and that's the piece that I've really been thinking a lot about is what is this leadership in service to?

Leadership as a construct, there's a history. You can trace it back all the way back to Aristotle.

**Nikki G:** Mm.

**Candice Schutter:** Of how our ideas of leadership have evolved. And the newest iteration that came out of the industrial age and capitalism and why we needed to define leadership the way that we do. Well, first it was about efficiency and productivity.

**Nikki G:** Yep.

**Candice Schutter:** And then they realized people were onto them.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And so the theories evolved. And it became about a slow and steady colonization of the psyche.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** One of my favorite explanations of this comes out of Foucault's work around like two different kinds of power. There's repressive power that's power-over and coercive. And it's really obvious and overt. Repressive power basically says to us, i'm gonna make you do what you don't wanna do.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** This other kind of power that has since morphed and evolved the way leadership functions now. And it becomes transformational and authentic and all this stuff.

I am going to make you want to do the thing you have to do.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And I'm going to indoctrinate you into thinking that the only way you can find traction in this world is to become a follower of the kind of thinking that I'm teaching you. And I'm gonna teach it to you in such a way that you actually, and this is where the cult dynamics come in, that you internalize it. It becomes a part of your identity. And you don't feel like you are doing anything you don't want to do. You don't feel like you been convince of anything.

And I think this is relevant right now under a regime where they are actively trying to colonize our psychology.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Colonize the way we think.

And whether they take us down by convincing us that diversity doesn't matter and, and convince us to dehumanize people. Or they take us down just simply through apathy and exhaustion.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** There's a a lot of ways they can do it.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** But are they going to succeed?

And I feel like this kind of circles back to what we're saying about staying connected to our communities. The way we're gonna survive them coming for our psyches is by reminding each other what we know is true.

And by doing the things that we know are right. And by standing in our values and claiming them over and over and over and over again, day after day after day, actualizing our values.

**Nikki G:** Actualizing, yes.

**Candice Schutter:** And defying orders.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** I mean, it's, there's no question that we're all gonna be impacted.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** I don't have control over that.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** But you can't have my psyche.

**Nikki G:** That's right.

**Candice Schutter:** You can't have my joy, like you said.

And you can't have my psyche. I'm not gonna let you break in to that.

And I think if anything that could be actually transformational, could come out of this, it would be for folks to realize that there isn't a savior coming.

**Nikki G:** Mm.

**Candice Schutter:** It's not about like, who's it gonna be? Is it gonna be Pete Buttigieg? Is it gonna be AOC? Is it gonna be Bernie? Is it gonna be? Like, who's it gonna be?

No.

**Nikki G:** The power is with the people.

**Candice Schutter:** Right. And how do we not wait for somebody to give us our marching orders?

**Nikki G:** There you go. There you go.

And that frees us from the cycle of the democratic side, the republican side.



**Candice Schutter:** That's true.

**Nikki G:** One minute it's this. Another minute it's that. I'm, you know, and again, I'm not coming against the, the political system and how things work in this country. But we presently have leadership that is eroding all of this.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. It's broken all around.

**Nikki G:** So who know what it'll look like in less than four years now, if that will even be an option. We have to start thinking on a collective front.

And I know that there's been so much that has happened in this country to keep us in our own corners and not come together. And this is before Trump. Religion has contributed to it. You know, some of the spiritual communities have contributed to it.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Nikki G:** You know, socioeconomic stuff has con. You know, race, and all of these things that people don't want to talk about that are so taboo. We are in a season we have to talk about it.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Talk about it afraid. Talk about it shaking. But we have to talk about it.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Not just the survivors of these communities, these systems, these leaders. But just on a whole. We can no longer just say, oh, that's too controversial.

But I think part of the reason why people put their head in the sand. Or you know, they don't get involved. Or they just turn off. It's because we don't know what to do.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. Yeah.

**Nikki G:** We don't know what to do. And I, and I get it. And I'm not saying I have the answers. And you're not saying you have the answers. But.

**Candice Schutter:** That's for sure.

**Nikki G:** We're just conversing and just saying, what can we do here first?

A lot of it also has to do with knowing ourselves.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** What you just shared before as far as being able to do this, is gonna take us, knowing ourselves and being honest with ourselves. Being honest if we feel that we're slipping. Sometimes the abundance of misinformation, the abundance of people that you know and love are saying this. And they're arguing this points. And you get weary. And over time you're like, oh, well maybe the sky is brown.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** If I ever get like that, I know I can call you. Right?

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**Nikki G:** And you like, Nikki, let's get on Zoom, or let's do whatever.

**Candice Schutter:** Uh huh.

**Nikki G:** We're gonna talk this through, 'cause I know you know the sky is not brown.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**Nikki G:** So it's gonna take having accountability partners that you respect and you allow to speak into your life. And they're gonna hold your feet to the fire. Because you're saying, listen, I refuse to succumb to the colonization of my psyche.

I don't want that to continue, so therefore these are my boundaries. I'm gonna hold the line. I want to enforce them. But if I ever get weak, can you step in and give me the smelling salt and wake me back up?

**Candice Schutter:** And this connects perfectly. One of the things that's really helping me, 'cause I've been sitting with this like, okay.

And people might be wondering, they hear me like, Okay. Candice, you keep saying like, leadership isn't the answer.

So that means there's no leaders?

Yes and no.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Because one of the best ways I've heard this framed by a critical leadership theorist was he said, we have to start thinking about leadership not as an identity, but an event.

**Nikki G:** Mm.

**Candice Schutter:** So in a moment where you're faltering, and you feel yourself falling under the spell of whatever. Somebody who's feeling the strength and the fortitude and the clarity to step forward and lead in that moment, and say, hey, hey, hey Nikki.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Look over here. Let's bring you back to reality.

And then, you know, three months later, I'm gonna be the one who's face down on my carpet.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Like, I just fucking can't, Nikki. I just, I can't. And you're gonna rush in and step forward. Like "leading," and I have, I have trouble even using the language, because it's so loaded. It's sort of like when I stepped out of the cult, there's certain words that were loaded, you know, Robert Jay Lifton calls it loaded language.

So I feel like the word leadership and leader is loaded language in our culture. So I think we're gonna have to maybe think about speaking about it differently. But if we, let's say we can strip away that indoctrination and just look at leadership as an event and say, anybody can lead.

Any, anybody can lead.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Do we need leaders? Sometimes. But not always.

Our default is always we do. We can't move forward unless we have a leader, which I'm calling bullshit on.

And, I'm also saying both and, like you said. There are times when leadership is needed.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Do we only give that liberty to certain people based on certain traits?

No, fuck that.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** That is a call that any of us can answer at any moment in time. And then we can also have the humility and self-awareness to step back.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And say, not me, not now. It's someone else's turn.

My friend Tracy, we were doing a recovery community for people who were coming outta the Org when we were in the middle of the 'cult'ure series. And we were leading a, a recovery community of about 150 people. And there was a moment when we just both were just tired, Nikki. We were just tired.

And we recorded this episode, it's on Patreon. And it's called The Tired Goose. Because during this conversation she and I were having about like, wow, we're experiencing emotional exhaustion. And the labor of the empathy is just kind of a lot right now. And she gave this image of a goose formation. And how there's a goose at the front of the V. And then they take turns. The goose flies to the back, and some other goose moves forward. And they're taking the headwinds and it's strongest. And then they know when to fall back.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** It's an event.

**Nikki G:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Now I don't know enough about geese.

Maybe there's a hierarchy. I don't know. So don't come at me with your emails saying, well actually.

**Nikki G:** I'm a geese-iologist. No, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** A, a geologist, exactly. It's just a metaphor.

But the point being is that it can be something like that when leadership is necessary.

And I think that, for me, I just keep trying to frame it that way. Because I struggled for the longest time. And you and I talked about this. And you made an excellent point when we had a conversation off the record about this. Cause I struggled with coming out of my cultic experiences with the whole idea of being a leader.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And I'm somebody that's been called "a natural leader" my whole life. And that whole thing, it's very loaded for me. And, and I, I really was just like, I don't know if I can do leadership, because I'm so afraid of replicating the things that were done to me. I'm so afraid of the role of leader.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And then you said, do you remember what you said to me during that conversation?

I was saying that I was having, you know, those feelings come up again and it's why I sort of shy away from leadership roles. And then I was talking about people in cult recovery, like stepping into influencer roles and stuff. And you were like, "Candice, it's like the ring."

**Nikki G:** Oh yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** You were saying, it's like the ring in Lord of The Rings. Like people get close to the ring and like something happens.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Right? And, I mean, I won't speak for you, but for me, I don't really buy into notions of like the invisible power of the evil ring and all that. Like I don't mean it like that, I just mean the seduction.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Of being the leader in a culture that pedestalizes leadership, where people tend to defer agency, all the things that happen. It's an intoxication.

**Nikki G:** Oh my gosh is it. Is it.

**Candice Schutter:** And it happens to a lot of people. I've seen it happen to people who I know for sure have the best of intentions. And then they end up, and I'm not talking about like hardcore narcissistic, crazy stuff. But they end up behaving in ways that I'm like, that doesn't seem in alignment with the values that I know that person possesses. What's happening there?

And I really do think it's the social construct of leadership actually lends itself to the abuse of power. Because the construct itself is just not nat, like people could argue that it's natural and that there's hierarchies in nature, but like in terms of the evolution of humanity, it's not the only option.

**Nikki G:** Right. Right.

**Candice Schutter:** We don't have to do it this way.

**Nikki G:** Right, right.

And you know that the whole, the ring, you know. You know the Lord of the Rings. Anytime somebody put that ring on.

Even if they had good intentions, it just, it brought out their darkness.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Um, and has happened over the history of time, unfortunately, all over the globe.

Men, women, on the job, in relationships where.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** There's that power struggle. And one person feeling like they're superior and then looking down at the other person, like they're inferior. And that person that's on the receiving end of this leader that's drunk with power now, their worth and their value starts to diminish. It's internalized now. It's not just they're saying it to me, it's, I believe this about myself.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know. And it's a sick to think about. Those are areas I am still recovering from, you know, as far as what corrupted leaders have done.

But, I think we think too much of ourselves sometimes. Sometimes we don't think enough.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**Nikki G:** And sometimes it's, it's super inflated, overinflated.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know, if you've been taught all this time that you're supposed to have the ring, that you're supposed to be in leadership. Once, you know, you get in that seat, you sit on the throne, like Game of Throne, you know.

**Candice Schutter:** Uhhuh.

**Nikki G:** Like, you get drunk with power.

And it's like, but why? You know, let's peel that back and really look at it. Okay, you are so drunk with power. You love this. You long for it. You'll fight whoever to get there. Because you wanna control people?

Like, I mean, in, in, in, in essence, like, you want people to bow down to you. You want to have control over people. You wanna have leverage over them. That's nasty.

Like, and again, some people, it was modeled to them and that's all they know and so they just followed their footsteps of their father or you know, their uncle or whatever. Whether that's in a church. It's a, a professor. It's someone that's running, you know, a corporation. Maybe that's all you know.

But I feel like sometimes on a societal level, we don't wanna face that darkness within ourselves. So we bypass it. You know, this is where narcissism comes in. We create this whole other personality that seems humble, that seems inviting, that seems caring, empathic.

But really we just want to use people. Because in a sadistic way, we get off, to speak.

**Candice Schutter:** I think that that happens. And I also think there's another side of the continuum where, like I'm thinking right now of, again, Republicans in Congress who are afraid to stand up and step up and push back.

The shadow side of it shows up as self-justification because of what it would cost us as a leader.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Because here's the thing. These Republican Congress people know that if they stand up to Trump.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And they follow their conscience. I'm being generous, and I'm talking about the people who maybe are losing sleep at night. 'Cause they're like, this is wrong. I know it's wrong. And I don't feel good about it.

So let's say one of those people, they stand up and they step forward. Somebody's gonna take the ring off, their finger, Nikki.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** They're gonna be like, you don't get a ring anymore.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** We're gonna primary you. And Musk is gonna put a bunch of money behind somebody else, and you're gonna lose the ring.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** So sometimes I think a lot of the harm comes from, and again, this is why I say it's a social construct, this whole idea of leadership as a social construct just perpetuates harm.

It's not always, and this is something that I have really been trying to trumpet throughout the 'cult'ure series because of the more benign examples of cult dynamics that I talk about.

It's not always a narcissist. It's not always a narcissist. It's a person who has the ring.

**Nikki G:** The enablers.

**Candice Schutter:** Who doesn't wanna lose the ring. And they're like, if I stand up, do the right thing, show up for my values, I'm gonna lose the ring.

And when I lose the ring, because of the way society's constructed, I lose an identity. I lose importance. I lose money. I lose status. And they don't wanna lose all of that. Maybe safety, in the case of of somebody pushing back against Trump.

So it's I think, really critical and like why I am so adamant about really, truly challenging the whole construct of leadership and hierarchies.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Because even if we get all the narcissists out of power. Let's just say somehow magically we could keep the ring from intoxicating somebody to that extreme.

**Nikki G:** Right, right.

**Candice Schutter:** We're gonna have the same problems. Because people who have the ring need to hold onto the ring. And in order to do that, they colonize people's psyches. They subjugate people. They justify atrocious acts because, well, it's best for the mission.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And, I think it's also important to say this 'cause just as you're saying like, people are gonna be stepping forward who voted for Trump and have regret and buyer's remorse and all that stuff. I think at some point there's gonna also be people stepping forward who supported and enabled him and 'cause he's gonna start firing people like crazy. He does it every time.

**Nikki G:** He did it in the first term.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. So, I mean, it's just a matter of time. He is gonna start firing all these people who are sycophants. And they're gonna lose the ring anyway.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And then they're gonna come forward.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.



**Candice Schutter:** And it's be really easy to just be like, well, screw that person 'cause they're just a selfish, narcissist. And in some cases maybe there's some truth there, but in a lot of cases they were a person who just didn't wanna lose the ring.

**Nikki G:** Right.

And there are different rings.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**Nikki G:** You know, and kind of looking at the whole analogy or whatever. At least in, in my world, 'cause there's the ring that the main leader wears. And then there's the enabling ring.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And they're both still very powerful.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** But for different reasons.

**Candice Schutter:** True.

**Nikki G:** Um, but what would leadership look like without rings?

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** That's a whole nother thought process. Where you're leading from the heart, not from identity or close proximity to power or money or wealth or status, you know.

So many people in politics, in the church, in spiritual communities, influencers online, everything about leadership is fused with their identity. You know, it is not, okay, this is what I do and when I'm done, I take that hat off and I'm me. That's how I feel with what I do.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** The, the minute it becomes, I have to do this, otherwise I have no value. I'm not doing this anymore. That is scary to me. I'm doing this because I want to, and I love to support people. And I feel like that is part of what I'm supposed to be doing right now in this season in my life. I'm not doing this to have some identity. You know what I mean?

Now, when I was in the church setting and all those cults, I did. But I wasn't aware of it. Because why? Because I was told, if you are a leader in this, if you're a leader in that, then there is your value.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** There is where people can see you and your validation comes. And you know, you get the, the relationships, you get all the perks or whatever. But you know, it took the breaking of me, all of that had to be broken off of me.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** In the most emotional, horrific way when I came out of the last cult. I mean that first couple years, I cried like a baby. 'Cause it just felt like somebody was pulling all my inners out. But it was necessary so that the Nikki that's before you now is definitely not the Nikki that was then.

And all of these labels and titles and acronyms behind your name and all this stuff. There's nothing wrong with being proud of what you've worked for. You know, people that have gone to school to be a doctor or an accountant or whatever, you should be proud of that. But if your whole identity is fused in that, it will be easy for the ring to come to you.

Versus, I'm leading from the heart. I enjoy this. Versus this is who I am. It is an extension of what you do. It's not who you are.

And so when you start getting into the church dynamic, you know, even some politicians, some gurus, they really believe, they have this delusion that because this is who they are, they need to lead in the way where they're drawing people to them, versus giving people their autonomy and their agency and the ability to empower through their own choices. And helping them to see their own value.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** But we don't have le, we don't have, on a collective level, it's hard to find leaders like that. And if they started off like that, at some point they got close to the ring and it tainted them.

**Candice Schutter:** Or the followers don't know how to show up to that.

**Nikki G:** Like I come up with their own power as a, as a follower.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, like I've really found that people, and I really think it's, it's a conditioned thing.

People want to follow.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Candice Schutter:** Like, I've tried out different styles of leadership since I've started to wake up to some of this. And people aren't as interested in somebody who doesn't have all the

answers. People aren't as interested in somebody who isn't going to give them advice that sounds really clear and confident and certain.

There are people who want a different kind of leadership. I'm not saying that's all people. But a lot of people, they want to be led in that traditional way. And that's why I think if we want to have this experience of leadership and followership, which again, there's so much to unpack there. That's gonna be its own episode.

But the idea that if we want to have a different experience of leadership as an event, and an umbrella that we all are able to operate and open and close as we will, that we're gonna have to grapple with the fact that if we aren't waiting for a savior, then what are we gonna do?

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** 'Cause it's scary. I think part of the reason people want leaders, and we know this from the history of fascism. Strongmen like Trump get elected when things are really uncertain.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And scary. And people just want somebody who will sweep in and be like, I know what to do. Even if it's a terrible idea.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Cause they're like, I dunno what the hell to do. Global pandemic climate change. Things are falling apart. This is overwhelming to me. People want somebody who steps forward and feels and sounds certain.

**Nikki G:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** And I think what we're being called to is to say, well, can we sit in the unknown? And can we just do the next right thing and not know how it's all gonna turn out?

And we don't really have a choice but to stare down this dragon right now.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And to do what we can in the ways that we can do it. And I think that's the only, I don't wanna say silver lining, 'cause I don't wanna brightside any of this shit. But in a way, it's true. We don't have a choice now.

We have to figure out how to do this. Like to circle all the way back to what you were saying in the beginning. Like, how do I live in this reality, maintain my sanity?

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Do you, as a trauma coach who sits with individuals who are experiencing trauma. We're all experiencing a collective trauma right now.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** What would you say to folks out there? What would you offer on a tangible level? Like how do we show up for ourselves?

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And then, you know, those ripples can happen like we've talked about.

**Nikki G:** Right.

But I, I think even the notion to show up for ourselves for many, not even just trauma survivors, is a brand new concept. The fact that I can have leadership over my own life, let's start right there.

Because when I start to really understand that and connect with that, that need and that desire for someone else to lead and guide me starts to dissipate. I can hear your suggestions, your beliefs. But ultimately, I come back to me. Because I am the leader of my own life.

So I think just the notion that I can do that for some, we're so used to somebody telling us what to do, to hear that we can tell ourselves what to do, for some, that may feel like an existential crisis. For others, it may feel empowering.

But sitting with that, you talked about sitting with the unknown, a lot of us don't like to do that. I was forced to do that when I didn't want to coming out of the cults 'cause I didn't have a choice.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** And when I started doing that, I said, wait a minute, there's power here. I don't have to have all the answers. I don't have to have it figured out. There could be chaos all around me.

You know, they always talk about a storm and the tornado or the eye of a hurricane. It's quiet right there in the middle and it's chaos all around. I feel like when we sit in the unknown, that's when the wisdom comes. That's when we're empowered. Because now it's coming from out of us out versus from somewhere else.

And I understand it's, it's a heightened time, it's a fearful time. And when our nervous system is like that, it's very easy to just believe whoever's the guru on TikTok today that comes up on the algorithm. Or you know, whoever's got a YouTube video that sounds like what they're talking about. I'm gonna follow them. Because it's easier to put that in the lap of someone else

and let them lead me than for me to sit in the unknown and wait for answers and wait for understanding.

And I don't mean wait and not being active. But I'm just saying till it comes and start to lead myself.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And for people that are trauma survivors, especially if this is a brand new concept, that's why it helps to have a coach, a therapist, that can actually walk you through the beginning phases of that. 'Cause it, it feels very foreign to the system. I was used to being told what to do, through the prophetic words, through the teachings, through the ideologies. Following a lot of these Christian nationalists saying that God said this is what the blueprint is for the nation. And it may not look like it's ever gonna come to pass now. This is what they said, but it's coming. And then to hear, we're right in it. It is like, rah, you.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** But guess what? That's that leadership.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I am my own leadership. And I have a responsibility to lead myself properly with love and care and support, you know? And that doesn't mean I don't receive it now. We're talking about the interdependence where that's for me first, but then I can call up Candice and then I can receive your wisdom, and that helps to strengthen me. But ultimately, it's always coming back home to self.

What you hear on the news, on social media, and you come back. Those critical thinking skills, those abilities to reason. You know, these things that are gonna be so necessary in the age that we're in. Because their level of control, and to piggyback off of the BITE model, they're doing that through a behavior control, information control. And they're gonna continue to double down as time goes on. So, though he is only been in office since January, and it's May going into June, I feel like this is the time. Let's hone these skills.

Let's stop running from ourselves. And I say that not in a judgmental way. I understand. For many of us, we've walked through painful things, so it feels easier to run to somebody else so they can give us tips so I don't have to go inward. But this is where the safety is. When everything else is chaotic, I can come home to myself and find peace. I've had to build my own house of safety within, so that when everything else is crazy, and I have no control over that.

And, I, I know people are like, okay, but no, Nikki, you know, like, my husband lost a job 'cause he was working for government. Like, I need some practicalities. I don't have all the practical answers. You know, there's the financial advisors that can work with that. It's a balance. 'Cause you appeal to those who do have some wisdom, but don't forget about your own. Don't forget about yourself.

Society has conditioned us to not care about ourselves. The patriarchal system has conditioned us, especially as women, to just be erased and not care about ourselves. Religion, spiritual communities, when it's toxic, has taught us to forget ourselves.

Remember yourself.

Because we are worthy, regardless of what your status is, regardless of what your value system is, and regardless of what you've been through, there is worth and beauty inside of you. And so to tap into that.

And I know it's like, well, Nikki, what does that have to do with Project 2025? It's important to establish you first so that if things do perhaps get worse, there is some type of anchor and it comes from within versus looking for it without. Because things on the outside of us may start to crumble and disintegrate.

Go sit down. Go to the movies. Eat some popcorn.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know, ride a bike, connect with your partner, experience love, and work on your internal locus of control versus your external. Work on what's here first.

**Candice Schutter:** I hear you saying reaching for what fortifies us.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And that's such a, a personal thing. And I think as we turn our attention away from looking for leaders who have the answers and toward one another and actual wisdom, which is lived, which is calling a friend you haven't talked to for a while and just having a chat without an agenda.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Not asking them for the answer to any of your queries, but to just connect.

And, and I think if wisdom is found through age, which I think it can be.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** One of the things that I'm really learning in middle age is like how often I think that I need to know something. And I reach for my people. And my agenda is I'm gonna have this conversation. By the end of it, i'm gonna know something

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** And I end up knowing less at the end of the conversation, but feeling more fortified and grounded than I did before I had the conversation. And I think that that's one of the things I hear you saying is like, it's not about we're gonna fix this. We're gonna come up with the formula, we're gonna know exactly where our place is in this fight.

We're probably not going to find any of that clarity right now. But what we can do is reach for anything.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** That brings us a sense of self fortification.

And I think I wanna emphasize this because I know The Deeper Pulse audience and a lot of folks who came from the wellness world, where we were sitting with ourselves. And many of us had the experience of, of like learning and gaining a lot of mindfulness and self-regulation from that practice. But also, continually hitting this wall of like, well, actually I don't have the answers within. Like, I didn't fucking find any answers. I've gone within a lot.

But I think what I actually hear you saying, because I know you and your work, that within is about trusting the impulse to go to the movie and eat the popcorn. Is about trusting the impulse to say, no, not the news, not now, not today, not till next Tuesday.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh wait, look at ACLU. They're really fighting for this thing that is got my blood boiling. I'm gonna send some money. It's about being in relationship with the world around us and trusting our instincts. And that it, that's enough. It's enough. It's like we are not going to single handedly topple.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** The fascist regime. The patriarchy. This is a multi-generational fight and we're just kind of in the middle of it.

So, I just really appreciate your reminder that it does start with ourselves. And ourselves are always in the context of our close to us communities. And that we can get pulled to this like macro, oh my God, what's happening in the country? And who just disappeared today? And what did that ICE agent do? And we need to stand up to those forces.

But it starts at home. And it starts in our own hearts. That's what I hear you saying.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, exactly. It starts at home. It starts in our own hearts.

And there may be some that say, you know, Nikki, that's all beautiful, but I wanna fight.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** I wanna fight. I, I feel like I hear you. I will do that. But I wanna fight. And those that are there, fight.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Go to the protest. Go call up your representatives.

Yeah.

You know, I, I'm, I'm not being remiss about, I'm not saying disengage from the political, and getting involved. Do that.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** Yes. But don't forget the anchor.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And, and you're right that, that connecting with self. More than looking for answers, it's establishing safety. And for some, you know, that's harder, because you were told to go inside and that was abused, you know.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Nikki G:** That process. And so that's when you get the therapist or the coach

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Or someone to help you safely, when your nervous system is ready to walk back in there. Because at the end of the day, it's like, that's you.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know, and those bastards took that beautiful concept of being able to be connected to yourself and they perverted it.

And you know, it may take time for some in the wellness community or those who were in the yoga community to even want to connect back with yourself. And I get it, but that's part of our superpower 'cause at the end of the day, it is us.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** You know, before it's anybody else.



And so my hat goes off to those who have to work doubly harder to create that anchor within because it was manipulated and perverted.

You know, but the balance of that is, this is also time to connect in groups.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** And those who were in cults, spiritual communities where it wasn't safe, this may be hard to do, depending on where you are on your recovery journey. Some may be like, I am healing, but I'm healing in isolation right now, because I'm not ready to touch groups. And if that's where you are, I understand.

But for those that said, okay, I've been healing in isolation for a while. My trauma recovery needs to expand now. I think I'm ready to engage in groups. It will be important in the seasons that we're in and what we're under right now.

And if you say, Hey, I can't do physical, but I can at least start online connecting with support groups. You know, I'm working on building my community, hopefully launching this summer where we can talk about these things for people coming out of these systems and being supported.

And that helps. Because in support groups, especially peer led support groups

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** The leader's not the one that has all the answer.

It's the people.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Nikki G:** So let the people talk. And let the people be strengthened from one another. And their value grows exponentially 'cause they realize, oh, I have something to say of value to, and somebody else picks that up, like, I didn't think about that. I thank you for saying that. And we start to move these muscles, so to speak. And it becomes more communal and peer-based than it is that leadership hierarchy structure.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** That only the person at the top has all the wisdom and the value.

So connect with self, but the balance is when you are able and ready, branch out into those groups. And, you know, you use your safety tips when you do that. And you don't turn off your critical thinking in order to assimilate in these spaces. But, you know, go and meet up and get some of that frustration out of your body and be able to talk and share.

So, Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Absolutely.

I really appreciate you and the work that you do. And I think even the way we talk about activism is also loaded. And it's very limited in terms of what it means. And I think that actualizing our gifts and supporting people and creating community in whatever way we do and showing up with empathy, like, I feel like it's all activist work.

**Nikki G:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And I just really love talking with you. Because I think there is a really unique vantage point, those of us who've been involved in cultic groups and have the language around understanding the dynamics and can bring that lens into looking at what we're facing right now.

And I just, thank you for being so generous with your story. Of those of you who haven't listened to the earlier episodes with Nikki, you gotta go back and hear her story.

And, I listen back to things that I recorded a year and a half ago. And I feel like even just if people listened to two of us talking when we first did the first episode together, they'll be like, wow. This is really what cult recovery looks like and how it's connected to current events. Like we don't need to paint a picture of that. We've lived it. We are living it.

**Nikki G:** Yeah, yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** And I think a lot of people are. And I appreciate you being able to speak from both of those vantage points simultaneously. And that you're making room for other people to heal.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** While in the middle of all of this.

**Nikki G:** Mm-hmm.

Everything you said is so important. And, and, and that's why I'm so glad that you're still continuing to do this podcast. I think, you know, media that is not controlled, but that is speaking. Even if some people say, you know, I'm not ready to really go straight at the regime. Talk about the values, talk to the people. Because that's where the power is. Remind the people of who they are.

These podcasts that exist, that are doing the hard work, that are talking about indoctrination and talking about cults and talking about true crime, narcissism even. These are gonna be really, really necessary in the times that we're in. Because the average person, they don't really know about abuse and, and, you know, bounded choice and all these words that we're

very familiar with. It's gonna be important for people to educate themselves to really understand what we're in, you know.

It's over us. For some, there's been an immediate impact for others it hasn't yet.

But I think this is really a crucial time for people that say, hey, I don't have time to read all the books, but let me throw on Deeper Pulse. Let me listen to some people's stories and how they're working through this practically. Let me learn about cult education and some of these terms so I can understand what I'm dealing with. So I say all that to say, the arts, like I said earlier, gonna be very

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Media is gonna be very important. Especially now, before there are laws where we may not be able to speak as freely.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Nikki G:** You know, so

**Candice Schutter:** Get it out there.

**Nikki G:** Right.

So I am doing that on the public end, you know, going on different people's podcasts. Working on my own. Surviving The Black Church season two. We're in editing post-production, so hopefully that'll come out soon.

**Candice Schutter:** Great.

**Nikki G:** But I am also working on my own community. It's a space for people to be able to be supported, educated, strengthened. Whether you've been in the NAR communities, you've come out of a lot of that different type of cults, religious trauma, and then spaces for those in the Black community, you know, specifically 'cause, you know, that looks different for us to process a lot of that.

So,

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** um, I'll be keeping you abreast as to when that's dropping. But I'm currently working on that now, because I think survivors who've been through this before, we're dealing with the regime now. We need to talk.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** Because it was hard enough to process all of that when we didn't have people who understood. So we, a lot of those experiences are still lodged in our bodies.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** So I'm creating, working on space presently, hopefully be able to drop that sometime at the end of the summer so people have a safer place than Facebook or.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

**Nikki G:** YouTube or whatever, more private.

And, we can power of the people together. And.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Nikki G:** Hear each other's wisdom. That's really, you know, this whole conversation today is really a picture of what I'm trying to create.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**Nikki G:** You know, in a community. So

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Stay tuned for that. For those who are interested, you can go to my website if you want to get on the waiting list and get information about it now at [nikkigspeaks.com](http://nikkigspeaks.com).

On the homepage you'll see information where you can sign up and hear more when I launch the community.

**Candice Schutter:** Perfect. I'll make sure that that link is in the show notes for everybody so they can stay abreast with what you're developing. And, and I, and I hope you'll come back again. And I think this is a conversation that we need to keep having. And we're just gonna have to keep showing up. And as things evolve, the one off conversation thing is super beautiful and helpful in the realm of podcasting. And also ongoing relationships and dialogues that go into more of the nuance are also really important.

**Nikki G:** And I think as things change, 'cause I really believe we're just kind of in phase one.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** With this administration. The needs may change. The tips may change.

**Candice Schutter:** That's true.

**Nikki G:** For now, I think we kind of overemphasized the point of really building that anchor and connecting with yourself, knowing yourself, valuing yourself. Especially if you are not of leadership. But understanding the power of what is in you and how you see things. That is what we, we are honing in right now, right. The ability to have choice to say, Hey, I'm going to fight to have joy. I refuse to allow this administration to keep me depressed and I'm going to remain in .The present. So that's phase one.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Nikki G:** Those are the tips for phase one. Phase two, phase three. It may change. And so we can keep this conversation going as things change, you know.

**Candice Schutter:** To be continued.

**Nikki G:** To be continued. There you go. There you go.

**Candice Schutter:** Thank you, Nikki.

**Nikki G:** Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** I appreciate you.

**Nikki G:** I appreciate you, too, hun. And all the listeners out there shout out to you.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh my gosh, yeah.

**Nikki G:** And all the heavy lifting work that you're doing and still being mom and dad and teacher and partner and all the things. And so salute especially to you.

**Candice Schutter (2):** Thanks for tuning in and just a reminder, if you'd like to reach out to Nikki directly, you can find her at [nikkigspeaks.com](https://nikkigspeaks.com).

And I'll be back here next week with another episode.