



## Rants and Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi

Be Authentic (with Dr. Yaba Blay) - Episode 44

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My PEOPLE! Welcome to Rants and Randomness. I'm Luvvie, and I'm your host and side-eye sorceress. Shout out to the team at Chicago Recording Company for helping me bring y'all the radio voice, even though we are not in studio yet.

So, I've done a few Chat and Chills, where I put on my robe and do a gathering with the dope people of LuvvNation on Friday nights. I have guests on who join me, and we have conversations that are so good! We talk about self-care, play games, we build skin care routines, we just have great conversations.

So this is one of those amazing conversations. On this episode, I bring you my chat with **Dr. Yaba Blay**. Dr. Yaba Blay, y'all! If you don't know her, you need to know her. You've got to get the full experience of Yaba. I love her. She is brilliant, she's hilarious, she's one of my favorite people. She's a scholar, a Professional Black Girl, and just overall dope person. So, in this conversation, which was so good, I was like – we've got to share this with the Rants fam - we're talking about exploiting our privileges for the greater good, sisterhood as a verb, and giving ourselves permission to succeed.

So, enjoy this Chat & Chill edition of Rants and Randomness featuring Dr. Yaba Blay.

### Interview with Dr. Yaba Blay

[00:01:14]

- LUVVIE: So for those who don't know, Dr. Yaba Blay, also has an account on Instagram called @professionalblackgirl. And you started Professional Black Girl, like what? Three years ago?
- YABA: I started the Instagram page in 2017 but the project started in 2016.
- LUVVIE: All right, so talk more about Professional Black Girl.
- YABA: So Professional Black Girl became a thing, started out as a web series and some t-shirts and kind of just grew into this beautiful community. So it started as just wanting to honestly think about the things that make us black girls. I was teaching at an HBCU and what I was experiencing was a lot of those students, the women students were drawn to me. And what I noticed, just juxtaposing myself is that a lot of my women counterparts

were of a different energy. And an energy that didn't necessarily affirm the students where they were at, they almost seemed aspirational.

So for them, what it meant to be professional was to be something outside of themselves so that they had to train themselves up to that point that they might have to straighten their hair, that they might have to change their name. So that if you're Keisha Danielle, now you're K. Danielle, now you got to pull on your whatever voice. I don't even know what you would call it. I was about to say your white people voice, but that may not... I don't even know that, that's accurate anymore. It is a particular professional voice that we put on and you got to dress in particular clothing in certain industries and so on and so on.

And so for me, just wanting to flip it and use professional in a way that subversive to say, no professional is the level to which you are committed to yourself, the level to which to which you are committed to the things that make you a Black girl, so that we over there with a whole pack of barrettes in her hair swinging her head fashion. Bamboo earrings, name rings, gold teeth, every hairstyle from the '90s.

LUVVIE: 90's was the most professional, freaking decade. Okay.

YABA: The decade. So just to give us a way to honor ourselves, name ourselves just as we are in our authentic selves, without apologizing. So it started as a web series in 2016, when that ended and I didn't have the money to do another season because again I didn't plan for it and I didn't think it was going to be a thing.

I started the Instagram page to kind of hold people over and the Instagram page is kind of just where we've landed in terms of where the most engagement is and where folks connect to the project. So that's where we are right now. I did do a season two of the web series last year in New Orleans where I grew up, and so again now this year I was hoping to focus on doing more live events and so we'll see what happens after the Rona goes away.

LUVVIE: I've worn my Professional Black Girl t-shirt.

YABA: Thank you for that.

LUVVIE: Girl, I wear it in the moments when, I want people when I walk in the room for them to really understand, that I'm coming extra Black. I've worn that t-shirt to speaking engagements where I knew I was going to be one of two people in the room who Black. On someone like, "Hey you all doing? Yes, I'm wearing a t-shirt that said Professional Black Girl."

YABA: You want to say something about it?

LUVVIE: And I'm holding down the stage. I'm the one with the mic wearing this t-shirt, so you got to stare at this phrase for the next 60 minutes, you're welcome. But it is such a move. And I remember when you first started it and me being, "Yo, this is necessary." Like

people... That's why it took off because it was so... Everybody saw themselves in it. It was an affirmation of the things that we were told, it's typically not okay and now it's celebrated by us.

I don't care whoever's not celebrating, we going to celebrate it. I love that project. I love it and then, recently I was going through your Instagram, so on Instagram, she's F-I-Y-A-W-A-T-A, Yaba's Instagram account recently, I guess because you've had more time too. So Yaba does a weekly series on her [Instastories called Judgment Free Zone](#), where she curates the funniest, most chill deficient parts of the web and brings it to our forefront so we can just partake in the tomfoolery of us.

Like the capitals, the humor involved and [Judgment Free Zone](#) has been 30 slides recently because the Rona. Which is a blessing for us because we've been able to partake in it. And when I tell you there are times when I'm just, "Yo." I end up sharing eight posts from [Judgment Free Zone](#) with somebody. So one day I finally was like, "Are you following Yaba because if you're not, you're missing out on the good stuff. You're missing out on the goodies." And so many people who follow me, weren't following you in the moment. They went and followed you and literally came back to me DM me to be like, "Yep, best Instagram account I follow recently."

YABA:

Thank you. But let me say also, let me just take this opportunity to thank you publicly Luvvie, because you really have since we connected, since we met, you really have the word I want to is say shepherd, but that's not the word, that sounds like it's for another conversation, but it feels you will kind of be like, "Hey, come here, come here, let me hold at you real quick what are doing? Do this, go see this, talk to this person. Do you know this person? What are you doing?" And I'm like, "Okay, yes." That's why every time you send me something I'm like, "Put me in the game coach, I'm ready."

And I have to say that because as much as we would like to believe that that isn't normal, response and engagement in this moment, and I'm sorry I'm a Gemini rising, so my thoughts do this, but you'll connect them. Have you noticed in this moment on social media, does it seem a lot of people are itching? A lot of people want to create, want to put something out, whether it's good or not.

They want to seize this moment and do a lot of things in that space in general across social media for folks who create content, me Yaba I feel, I don't want to say competition, but I feel something in the sense that people see you and it's nobody's responsibility to shout you out or give you credit, but you know, they see you and I feel there's a certain way that people move. For you it's been really welcoming, opening, supportive, and just I rock with you. Let me put you on. And so I'm just saying that to say, I appreciate that publicly. So even with wearing the [Professional Black Girl shirt](#) or sending folks over to [Judgment Free Zone](#), that's love.

LUVVIE:

I believe in good people who are doing good things and I don't see why there should be competition, why we're not bringing each other along and why we're not making sure that we're on the right path. If we have that. I think it's necessary. I feel obligated to do it. If somebody is dope, other people should know about this person. It just is, because the more dope people they know about, their lives are getting dope before it. Look,

shouting names on rooftops. I enjoy doing it. I think it's dope to have other people know other dope people.

It just comes down to that and you're dope. It is that simple. And folks are like, "Oh, my God so Black." And honestly it makes me happy when people are like, "I'm so glad I know this person now," because I've already gotten so much from them, that they didn't realize they were giving and sharing with me. And to your point, social media right now is frustrating to me a little bit, because all of a sudden Rona happened, everybody became a content creator in a way that felt desperate, not authentic, not how can I serve other people.

YABA: Yeah. It feels like it's a fear though. It's fear based. It's fear motivated. It's this fear that if I don't do it then I will no longer be relevant and just across the board I feel I keep telling people, we have to give ourselves permission to just be in this moment. There's a global pandemic happening and they're kind of a lot of people dying. And every time you go outside, if you go outside, people are wearing masks and gloves. So it's kind of a big deal. And it's okay for your body, your being, your psyche, your spirit to feel that. So for me it's challenging because I'm like, "This isn't a creative space for me."

"I can't create in this space, when it comes I'll write it, but I can't." So then I think about the children who have to learn in this space and the professors who have to teach in this space and the people who continue to work in this space, it's too much. And so I think a lot of us are motivated by fear of the unknown. We don't know what's on the other side of this. So if I'm a content creator and I put three things out this year already, now we're at this unknown stretch of time. Let me hurry up and put some stuff out so people don't forget who I am. Because when it's over, I got to get back to work. And it's just not serving us. Because now you're getting on everybody's nerves.

LUVVIE: Everybody's nerves. I'm even like, "Yoh, this... The Instagram lives, whenever I try to scroll to get to an actual, Instastory and I got to scroll past all the lives. I'm like, "Why are there 30 lives going on right now, what are you all actually saying?" And what's funny is sometimes I will see people will recap the live that they were on and I'll see the number and there'll be like 30 people were on it. Meanwhile, you have 600,000 followers, but why were there only 30 people? Because, they're tired.

YABA: Yeah. What else do you have to give?

LUVVIE: What else do you have to give? And I think this moment, there's a meme that would come in, people being... They're the folks who were like, "You have to create something right now." And then there were the folks who were like, "No, no, no. If you got to sleep your way through it, sleep your way through it." And I was like, neither one of them is necessarily.

There was the middle ground here. You can't just sleep your way through a fricking pandemic. That's not healthy. Who'll wake up one night, and not know what hit you, and then you also can't bury yourself under work. There's a middle ground here you're

supposed to actually hate where you are dealing with your shit, but you're also getting some rest. You seem to have gotten the middle ground right.

YABA: I'm leaning towards that rest side, but again it's more because I feel something has to ground me in this moment for me to be able to do something.

LUVVIE: So you actually did a very smart thing. I'm so glad you did, which was asked people to drop some tips in the collection jar, go ahead and drop some love offering in the collection plates because anybody who does, you added them to a special group. The close friends group where we get extra [Judgment Free Zone](#). For you all who are in here, who love [Judgment Free Zone](#), put some money in the love offering jar. Okay. So, Venmo, Cash App all that. What made you finally do that?

YABA: Okay, another interesting. Again, I didn't plan for it. So what happened was a couple of weeks ago, mind you, I started doing [Judgment Free Zone](#) in 2018. But I wasn't doing it every week. I was doing it when I felt it and so then at some point I started getting more consistent and folks will be asking me, "What is it? You're doing it tonight? What's up?" And I'm like, "Oh, okay, cool, cool." I started doing it more frequently, but then it started getting on my nerves and people where it'd be 10 o'clock, "Where is that?" And I'm like, "It's going to come. Do I have a contract with you?"

So couple of weeks ago, I had already... I think I posted about it and said, "Don't be checking for me when I give it to you it's a gift." Jester comes in my inbox like, "We're having [Judgment Free Zone](#) tonight, you running late." And I'm like, "I'm going to start charging on the girls for this." And she's, "What's your Cash App?" And I'm like, "Oh. Well." So I didn't know she was being funny. So when I put the stories up, I put a slide in there that said, this is labor, this is work. It takes me hour and a half, two hours to do it most times. Here's my Cash App. Yo, folks showed up. And so that weekend, that was the week before April 1st when the rent is due, they almost pay my rent.

And I wasn't mad about that at all, I was actually quite thankful. So foot in my mouth, but thank God for my smart attitude. That's what made me do it. But it's even still now, it's not something that... I don't want it to be transactional. I don't want it to be pay per view. It's not something that I'm trying to get paid for in that way.

So that's why I wanted to come up with a way that it felt more like still community. And not transactional because then I don't want you to come into my inbox and talk, "I paid \$5 where's my stuff?" That's not the vibe, it's not transactional. I'm in that way. So I'm thinking I'll probably pass it once a month now, folks are free to share whenever, they feel moved to.

LUVVIE: Can I offer a...

YABA: Please do.

LUVVIE: I think you should post a slide in your main timeline. That says if you love Judgment Free Zone, feel free to drop-

YABA: On the page on the page.

LUVVIE: On the page. That's if you've loved, not just listen, you're not paying for what you expecting, you're paying for what you got. If you have loved Judgment Free Zone, drop a love offering. Here's my Cash App, here's my Venmo. Just let it live there. Whoever stumbles upon it at any given time, can you be like, "Oh snap, I didn't even know she... Bet, let me go ahead and run that." And each time you do a Judgment Free Zone, drop that slide, each time, each time. It don't matter if people see it four times, each time you do an episode.

YABA: But see this is the confession though. This is the confession, my discomfort again, it's I don't want the vibe to feel, "Hey, I don't like begging." And it could be my extreme perception and releasing it. I don't like begging and I don't want it to feel transactional.

LUVVIE: So here's the thing, what you're doing is not necessarily transactional. You're not saying if you spend \$5, I'll give you all more. You're saying I'm going to do this whether you're giving me or not. However, if you appreciated the labor that went into it, drop some on it.

That's not begging one, because it's you saying, "I put in work here, I did this work for free, for the love for the culture." But honestly your time is worth money. And I think culturally, we also have that blockage and asking for money for our time. And I think people have used it to take advantage of us.

And I think because we are so service minded and so giving, we've been told that somehow asking for money makes it seem like we're being greedy, when really it's compensation for your good work. We live in a society that prioritizes frivolous shit. And devalues the essentials and we're seeing that right now.

We're getting a masterclass in how upside-down society is, we're all watching "The Last Dance" and hearing that Scottie Pippin got paid \$2 million for the year and we were all appalled. We were like two mi... That's all Scottie got was \$2 million for that season of the Bulls. This man was throwing the ball in the freaking hoop."

And we're appalled that he made \$2 million. Meanwhile, if we heard a doctor made \$2 million, we'd be like, "Oh, she crazy." One of the things that I'm realizing is I'm hoping that we, somehow get permission to make good money. I feel we don't get permission to make money.

YABA: Who gives this permission though?

LUVVIE: Nobody gives, we have to start giving ourselves the permission and honestly it starts with people who are making money, being able to say, "Listen, I'm not making money just because I'm smarter than you." Because that's not it at all. I'm not smarter than you. I just asked for more money. I just thought I should get more money.

So, the wealth and wage gap, a lot of it, of course, it's the system that's set up to wall us into these moments of poverty and the system is set up for us to think our work is not worth that much. There's that piece, other pieces, it's worked so well that now we believe it even in the moments when we shouldn't. Even in the moments where there was money there, we'll be, "We're not going to ask for that." Yes, you can only, the only difference between you and that white boy right now is cause that white boy had somebody tell him, he has to ask for more money.

YABA: But this is what I'm saying Luvvie, where's our Black connected-- back to what I said earlier, where's our Black women's network that says, "Look here sis. This is how much these people pay me. How much they pay you? This is how much you should be paid." Where is our summit and our conference says, "What industry are you in? Here's what you should be making instead."

LUVVIE: I'm building that. A group for professional women, who want to transform to become unstoppable powerhouses. Right? Living audaciously and learn that yes, you're doing well, you can do better. Here's some of the cheat codes. I realized that especially Black women, we don't have the spaces that honestly tell us how do we do better? What is the actual tangible thing?

Oh, I should be asking for more money. Oh I want to start a side hustle. Where should I start so it can actually make me money. So that's why I launched it because I was like, this doesn't exist. All the stuff I learned, I learned in trial by fire over the years. There was nobody pulling me to the side being like, "This is how much you tell this person you want these speaking engagements." Nobody did that.

I learned because I ended up in these rooms, I'll be hearing conversations or I'd hear somebody would be like, "Yo this is what you should look for." But it was always accidental. What happens when we have access to the cheat code all the time? And I'm excited about it because I'm like "Yo this is the group that I needed in my '20s." I realized that my journey is a testimony of the rooms that I'm in and the conversations I've had. It ain't that I'm smarter and got this platform because I happen to be extraordinary in this glitter. No.

I ended up in these rooms and surrounded by communities of women who would like, "Yo, I'm going to push you forward and I'm going to tell you the stuff that nobody else told you. I'm going to tell you wait, how much they want pay for that? No G ask for this." Me being like, "Oh." And instantly the moment I asked for that number, I got it. And I was like, "Wait a minute, so had I asked for the lower number, I would have gotten that." But because I just found out this one piece of information. It changed the game for me. We asked, but here's the thing white boys have it. It's the golf club.

YABA: That's what I'm saying. There's enough room for all of us, which is what I'm saying in terms of that energy and that vibe that I've experienced in a lot of creative spaces for Black women is that there isn't that. And that's why I thanked you. Because you gave me that off top. Normally like that and be like, "No, you should be asking for this because they'll play if you don't and if you don't have the people to set the standard and let you know even what's possible. The other thing is also being okay with walking away.

LUVVIE: That part.

YABA: Right. Because then your mind is like, "Okay, I'm going to ask for 2,500 but they're going to come back with a 1000, a 1000 is better than zero." You should be paying me 10.

LUVVIE: So part of the reason why I found it important to be very transparent about my journey and just stuff that I find out is, me keeping it to myself doesn't do me any favors. Because let's say my fee is \$5,000 and your fee is \$500 for the same thing. When I walk in the room and I drop my \$5,000 and you walk in later and drop the 500 they'll be like, "Hmm, you know what? Let's go with the 500, but we had 10,000."

So even if... And the point there is not that they didn't choose me, that's not what matters, but I would want you to at least get paid well. So then they also don't get sticker shock again when they hear my other price. We're all operating from different frames of references. Some of us will be here, some of us will be here and they will never get used to this part.

Those people all just like discount and expect that. So I said, I need people and I need businesses, and I need white men. And I need white women and powerful people to get used to seeing Black women be unapologetic about being expensive. And it's not even that we're expensive, is that I'm unapologetic about asking for what I'm worth, without any type of discount, probably without justifying it to you over and over again.

So we have to do the work with each other to build that power. That collective confidence where you can go in a room and say, "My fee is 10,000." And just sit there look at them, and it's up to them to say yes or no. The worst they can say is, no. And no won't kill you. So that's why it's been important for that. And I think it's something that we all have to learn, and it's one thing that I really want to use my platform for.

YABA: Yeah, it's necessary.

LUVVIE: It's necessary. Do you think the Dr. in front of your name changes anything about your access into the rooms?

YABA: Oh, absolutely. I don't know if Professional Black Girl would be a success, if I wasn't Dr. Yaba Blay.

LUVVIE: Mm.

YABA: Dr. Blay can say it's cool to wear bamboo earrings. Dr. Blay can say that's working as an art form. And, I'm not saying that to brag, I'm saying that actually to be critical.

LUVVIE: Yeah. Yeah. The respectability of it all.

YABA: Right. So, you'll listen to me challenge it, but if it were the average sister repping for her culture, her Black Girl culture, her Black Woman culture, would you pay her the same a bit of mind.



LUVVIE: Hm.

YABA: I don't know. I think Dr. Blay, again, because of whatever people think Dr. means, I think people, it does give me more access in some particular ways. But, again, because my politics aren't hidden, because people know my energy and my vibe, I think people, special people want to work with me. And, I'm thankful for those special people, but not everybody wants to do that work.

LUVVIE: It's interesting to be in a space where you can see... Well, I think it's really important, if you're any type of public anything, to be as clear about all your privileges as possible.

YABA: Absolutely.

LUVVIE: All your privileges. My whole thing is, I need us to exploit our privileges. I need us to exploit our privileges-

YABA: Say more.

LUVVIE: For the greater good. So, I'm clear about my privileges. I was able to rise through the ranks of... Let me see, my privileges, being Nigerian is a privilege, now, all of a sudden.

YABA: How so?

LUVVIE: After *Black Panther*, it really became a privilege that was very loud, right, because being African, especially West African now looks like a badge of honor.

YABA: You didn't have that view before?

LUVVIE: Kind of, but not as much. It was an interesting shift after *Black Panther*. One of those instant cultural shifts where all of a sudden, kids who were African, now, wanted to say, "You know what, I'm African," in a way they didn't necessarily want to before. *Black Panther* did something.

YABA: That's interesting because I'm a generation, I don't know if I'm a whole generation, but I'm older than you-

LUVVIE: Yes.

YABA: And the '90s were my heyday. And, I will say that it was real fly to be Ghanaian in the '90s when brothers were Five Percenters, when brothers was going Rasta, when sisters were getting into headwraps and skirts. I'm like, "Oh, this came from Ghana."

LUVVIE: So, that was in your college space.

YABA: Yes.

LUVVIE: Being in elementary school, in high school, and African in the '90s, not cool.

YABA: Really?

LUVVIE: Not cool, at all. So, I came to the U.S. when I was nine. We moved here when I was nine, had the full accent. My name is Ifeoluwa, that's my first name. That is what my family calls me. I walked into my fifth-grade classroom on the first day and, instantly, knew I couldn't be that girl.

Instantly, was like, "Oh, yeah, no that thing you've been doing, like the voice, the accent, that's not going to work. The food that you bring in, the jollof rice that you bring in, not going to work." Fifth grade me, instantly, was like, "Fix that."

So, I learned to lose my accent by listening to the other kids talk, and being like, "All right, I can talk like that." And, they would make fun of me for being African.

YABA: Of course.

LUVVIE: So, it wasn't cool. And, until in the '90s, college, it might've been cool.

YABA: Maybe, it's an age thing because I, definitely, got it in elementary too. I definitely got it in elementary.

LUVVIE: Yeah. But, even when we finally got to college, at that point, I honestly think it was a time thing. But, I remember even back then it still wasn't like, "Oh, I'm going to understand what your name means." I'm going to be like, "Naw, naw." I just, "Do you have a different name you can go by?"

So, it's interesting because I remember... And, of course, because I have the West African Voltron, we also, all-

YABA: Right.

LUVVIE: Exchange notes on like, "How was it?" Boz was the one who's oldest of all of us, and she was like, "Oh, no, no, no." I constantly got that because she was in Colorado too. So, we vividly remember when we wanted to bury who we were.

YABA: Hm.

LUVVIE: And, I remember parents, a few parents even sent me notes after *Black Panther* came out because we all went, of course, in our regalia because I've been wearing Kaftans for speaking engagements since 2004.

YABA: Nice.

LUVVIE: I was like, "This is just who I am, at this point. I reclaimed my Africanness in college." But, people were being like, "Yo, my kid is finally like, I actually do want to go by my African name," after *Black Panther* happened.

So, Nigerian became a very prominent privilege, at that point, for sure. But, even before then, a bunch of my privileges, I'm skinny. I don't look intimidating at all, or nobody can take my presence as a threat. And also, there's something about, I'm also kind of accentless.

YABA: What do you mean?

LUVVIE: A lot of people can't detect where I'm from until I get excited.

YABA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LUVVIE: So, my voice and my accent is also more "palatable" in the way that feels very mainstream. I don't sound like I come from the hood. I don't sound like I, necessarily,-

YABA: Only have white friends.

LUVVIE: Yeah. So, it's one of those middle ground. So, my privilege is, I can walk in a room and be ignored, but not really. I also won't ruffle feathers, if I choose not to. Some people's very physical presence, people take it as a threat.

YABA: Sure. Sure, sure, sure.

LUVVIE: And, I realized that, and I was like, "Okay." So, when my career started going higher and higher, and I started getting all these opportunities, I felt convicted because, if I'm in the room and I'm the only one who looks like this, that's not a point of pride.

I should not be like, "Man, so I finally made it." My job when I'm in the room is to exploit what I came in with to bring more people into it.

YABA: Okay.

LUVVIE: So, my voice, when I'm, when the white people are listening to me, it's not to make them feel better about themselves, it's to make sure that, that privilege that I have where I have their ear, that they can listen to somebody who they don't, necessarily, find as palatable as me. That's what I mean by exploiting our privilege.

YABA: Okay.

LUVVIE: As we get more power and walk into these rooms that feel locked out of everybody else,-

YABA: Right. Right.

LUVVIE: How do we use the power that we walked in, how do we spread that to somebody who looks like us more?

YABA: Right. So then, in that space, if you have access to this room, and you have a white ear, right, and I'm thinking of myself, why I said the whole Dr. Blay, Professional Black Girl may not have worked if I wasn't Dr. Blay, I have presented, I have been invited to academic institutions to present on Professional Black Girl. You know what I mean?

So, now, we're in this space, and not in a way that's like, "Come and look at the Natives," but like, "This is who I am. This is not them. This is me."

LUVVIE: Me.

YABA: "Look at me. Me. Yes, I have a PhD and, yes, that's me bending down low." See the picture? Come on, same person, right?

LUVVIE: Same person.

YABA: You can't make assumptions about any of us, based upon any fallacy that you've learned about Black people from a distance.

LUVVIE: Yep. And, that's why I'm like, "Also, it's no fun if the homies can't have none." Not a train. But, you know what I mean? When you even in the room you're like, "I don't even want to be the only one in here."

YABA: Yeah.

LUVVIE: So, I walk into it very conscious of that my job is to make sure that something in here shifts that allows this room to not be this next time I see it. So, I understand that a lot of white folks listen to me, a lot of white folks follow me, so I'm like, "Okay."

And, I've been getting these weird opportunities where I'm speaking internally at a Fortune 20 company to their executives.

YABA: About what?

LUVVIE: So, I'm always critical of what am I doing when I show up in the room?

YABA: Look, what they want you to talk about?

LUVVIE: Oh, girl. Usually, it's about my story, about... They'll ask me the question, "What should we do because some of my employees aren't feeling?" And, I typically point, look directly at them, and I'm like, "You know why you're having these troubles is because you guys probably have racist policies."

Yeah. And, there are times when I'll be like, "You probably also have the boss who has made it really hard for them to be challenged, or when they see their Black co-worker challenge them, they take offense to it. That's why you're failing, right now, publicly. That's why this PR issue happened. That's why that campaign dropped, that did not go

well because the Black folks, the Brown people in the room, didn't feel like they could speak up in the room because you created this environment of toxic whatever this is."

YABA: So, this is my thing with the whole diversity work that I do. Right?

LUVVIE: Mm.

YABA: For a minute, I was like, "I'm not putting DNI on anything. I don't, don't look at me as that, I don't do that" because what I was finding is that these white corporations, ultimately, wait till a tragedy happens, then they want to Olivia Pope-you for you to come in and fix it.

Now, you spent 13 years creating the problem. You want me to fix it, right now, right now, and I can't do that. Right? You want a checklist on how not to be called racist, that's not how this works. Instead, you can invest the time on understanding culturally, the culture of your corporation as well as the culture of your problems, and, that takes time.

LUVVIE: Yeah, so let me say something that might not seem popular. When they want you to come in,-

YABA: Let's go.

LUVVIE: And fix their 13-year problem, take their money. Be very clear and say, "Listen,-

YABA: Luvvie, I feel like I need an exorcism or something-

LUVVIE: [inaudible 00:26:33].

YABA: And, I don't even want to be exorcised because in that moment when you say, "Take their money," I'm like, "Sis, I want to take their money, but I also want to check them."

LUVVIE: Fine. You can do both. Oh, no, no. I'm very clear when I say, "Listen, my recommendation is we do deep work, figure out why you had this problem, figure out the environment of your company, figure out what caused this thing, this major gap to happen because it's deeper than this campaign. This campaign happened to show up as a symptom of y'all's fucked up internal policies and atmosphere, all that stuff."

YABA: Sure, sure, sure.

LUVVIE: "I recommend we do a one-year comprehensive deep dive where I give recommendations on what I think you should fix." And, a lot of times they'll say, "Oh, well, we just want you to come in for a keynote."

"Okay, so you want me to come in for a keynote, talk to your whole staff, and that, great, I'm going to charge you a lot of money for this shit."

But, the thing is, if they're not paying you, they'll pay somebody else to do that same exact service, and it wouldn't be good. So, I did a talk at a major company. They had me come in for a full day. I talked to their executive staff, I talked to their...

It was one of those like, "I need y'all to get your shit together." I, basically, spent eight hours telling them, "This is why you don't have your shit together." I did not mince words. I, literally, was just like, "Listen, I've heard stories, internally, of what's happening here. It's not okay. This is why you're supposed to be a global leader in blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. This is why it did not work. This is why it's not working, right now. This is why people are jumping ship. Until you fix this, you're going to have the same problem."

So, I walk away. Did my part. Eight hours. You know what, run me my money. I'm out. So, three days later their HR person sends me an email and said, "One of their new hires"... She was only hired for three months, at that point, she was not an executive, she was, maybe, an account manager or something, sent an all company email to talk about something that happened to her in the office, or somebody said something to her, something that was mad disrespectful, and prejudice, and racist.

Sent it to the whole company, and said, "This is not okay," after she heard me speak.

YABA: I heard that.

LUVVIE: This HR person said, "That has never happened before in this company. Nobody's ever had the audacity to do that, and because you rang the alarm, they have to address it." So, when you go in the company, and when you take their money, it's not that you're taking your money and just running, you're giving them value.

YABA: Sure, sure, sure.

LUVVIE: But, in that room, I always look for the one person who starts nodding her head vigorously as I'm talking. And, I'm like, "Oh, I'm talking for you right now."

YABA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LUVVIE: Got it. My, I'm talking and I'm like, "Oh, I'm talking for you right now."

YABA: Yeah, yeah.

LUVVIE: My words are actually for you right now, because when I walk out this room, you now have currency to say, "Here's how I've been feeling and here's how it got affirmed on that stage. I didn't even talk to Luvvie."

YABA: Right.

LUVVIE: So think about it less as I need to solve their problem. You can't solve their problem because unless you can solve human beings being trash, you can't solve the problem.

YABA: You're right.

LUVVIE: Take their money, but give them the value. Because when you walk in the room, what happens when you walk out as a ripple effect. Your very presence, the things that you said, somebody in that room took it to heart. It might even be the person who was doing it. It might be the shitty boss. Because I just talked directly to you about the work that you've been doing that's been terrible. You are making an impact. Don't think that your job is to solve them.

Your job is to speak to somebody, one person in that room and speak to one person in that room. If you are the person who sits in meetings who cuts off the intern all the time, I need you to stop that because if you want your productive team to do impactful work that will get positive response, you cannot create the environment where that happens. And somebody in that room heard it and was like, shit, I think I do that. I've had people come up to me after speaking engagements and say, you just made me think through some things I've been doing, I didn't even realize I was doing it.

YABA: For sure.

LUVVIE: So your job ain't to fix nothing your job has talked to and for somebody.

YABA: And just to get them to think differently.

LUVVIE: Think different. Just flip that thought real quick and then you walk out and then what happens is in the room, somebody else tells somebody else about it because somebody like you is necessary in these rooms. You are absolutely necessary. How you will basically call them to task is needed. And me knowing that in the whole speaking circuit for example, which is something that you would kill, these white folks when you find out how much they get paid for the most dull speeches for the most dull, most uninspiring speeches, you will be appalled. So I'm like, you know what, why wouldn't I? At least I walk in and give you value and challenge you and let you see something different

Think about our networks. I think we think about networks different.

YABA: Okay.

LUVVIE: I have many privileges and I am not shy about talking about it because I'm like, and it's not to brag, it's to say I recognize it. I see how fortunate I am for it and I realized that a lot of people don't have it. So what do I do with mine? I have to share what I'm learning. I'm part of a group of powerful women in business and technology and media that this white woman started. It's probably about 200 people in the group. It's changed the way I think about network. It's changed the way I think about professional community, this group exists as a Google group and any given day, people will come in there, "Hey, I'm looking for a nanny. Does anybody know somebody in New York who has a nanny?" and they're like eight people who have never talked to her before. One-on-one. We go like, Oh yeah, here's my nanny's information, here's this person information.

The first time I asked them for something was me asking for information about a conference that wanted me to come speak that didn't want to pay me and said they don't pay speakers. So I go in there. I was like, let me ask women up the this. I was like, y'all. So I just got asked to do was conference in Europe. They said they don't pay speakers. Is this true? Within 15 minutes I had 20 responses. Women being like oh no, no, no. I spoke last year. They bought my ticket. Like these are white women who a bunch of them I'd never even spoken to one on one.

YABA: Sure.

LUVVIE: And in that group they share information so freely about things that can be like, Hey, does anybody know this big star over here who can connect me because I have a project? And they'll be like, Oh yeah, hit me offline. And just being in the group and watching these women share freely and it wasn't like everybody's not best friends.

YABA: Sure.

LUVVIE: You don't have most people's phone numbers, but seeing how open they were and seeing how much it transformed the way they can do business also changed...

YABA: True.

LUVVIE: And gave me a different idea of, wow.

YABA: We ain't looking to make friends.

LUVVIE: It's not about the friends of it all.

YABA: I got you.

LUVVIE: It's understanding and having a really logical, not even a rah rah, everybody's the same. Having a really logical understanding that our access and our power is actually tied. Our access and power is tied because if you can't get into the room and I'm in the room, what if I get kicked out the room, I can get kicked out the room pretty quick. Who gets me back in it? So I shouldn't find comfort because you're not there. I shouldn't find comfort because I'm the only one there. I shouldn't find comfort that [crosstalk 01:37:49] who has this information and this group understands it. So even right now with the PPP loan thing, everyone in the group is currently sharing information. Like did you get your PPP loan? No, I didn't. Well, I got it. I got mine two days after I sent mine. So we're also now being able to, knowing that I can go to them for information, knowing that these women, will give me the answer, even if I don't know their phone number.

YABA: Sure.

LUVVIE: I'm like damn. What happens is if we kind of operate like this?

YABA: That's what I'm saying to you my sister.



LUVVIE: Yes.

YABA: They're created a culture, right? Around being comfortable talking about money with other women with whom they do not see as their opposition. We have to create a culture for us, right?

LUVVIE: Yes.

YABA: We say sis, but we got to live sis. We got to live sis. You say sis. We say your my sister differently. We have to live sis differently.

LUVVIE: Nobody. Girl That is why I'm like I want to live sis. I want my life to be the verb of sis.

YABA: This is what I'm saying to you.

LUVVIE: Every day I want to live that and every day I hope I am. We have to normalize these things. The actual verb sisterhood is a verb. Love is a verb.

YABA: It is.

LUVVIE: Friendship is a verb. So what does that verb mean? How do you put that into action? It means I have to tell you information that I know, right? Like it means-

YABA: So for me where it's interesting as a starting point, right? And maybe not a starting point and these things happen simultaneously, but it's like the work that we have to do to stop seeing each other as competition, to stop seeing the magical Negro as the goal to understanding as you say, it doesn't benefit you to be the only person in the room. Like we have to reteach that. We don't want to be exceptional Negros. It's lonely in here by myself.

LUVVIE: Lonely. It's lonely as shit. It is lonely as hell to be an exceptional negro. So to the point of the, and I just forgot my point, but it was related to what you were just saying about, what was I about to say? Damn.

YABA: About undoing the competition piece, being in the room by yourself? Yeah.

LUVVIE: So here's the thing, people got to realize people take anybody who looks like them as competition. And that's problem because the way I look at everything is I don't have competition. I don't have competition because I don't care if we are running the same race. I don't have competition because I can only go as far as I can run. What I'm worried about this person running fast, bitch, can you run fast? You figure how fast you running, stop worrying about her ass because it won't matter if you won a nine second race. If she run an 8, she going to win. It does not matter. What is your own limit? Work on your own shit.

I don't have competition because I have friends who are in my industry who are also speakers who can speak about the exact same thing I can speak about and I would

recommend them for something just as much as I recommend myself because at the end of the day they'll pick who they want. There's no other Luvvie. I remember one time there was no other Luvvie because, not because I'm like only the person doing the work that I do. No, I'm the only person who does it and says it the way I say it and that can't be replicated. People can try it. People have tried.

YABA: I'm sure.

LUVVIE: I remember once somebody came and asked me if I could write something for them and I was like, I don't have time. Either way I declined, and they said, well, who's another Luvvie that you can point me to and I was like, I actually don't know anybody but I know somebody else who does it different, but they're still good. You don't need another Luvvie. You just need somebody else who can do this well. People got to stop worrying about who's competition or not. You don't have competition because honestly you are your own best and worst competition because if you already took yourself out the game, why I got to worry about you?

YABA: True that.

LUVVIE: Like no competition. So we are so worried about it, which I'm like, I can tell somebody that somebody else exists who does the same thing I do. If they still want me, they'll come from me. If they want both of us, they'll pick both of us.

YABA: I understand that where you are with that Luvvie, that's a journey. That's a path. Go on and write the map out sis. That's the journey. That's not an easy space to get to, to feel like you don't have competition when we live in such an energetically competitive world. You know what I'm saying? Particularly and for me, I guess what's most heavy is the idea that like in order to do work about Black women and girls, I got to compete with other Black women. I don't want to. Y'all got that. I'm not going to do it.

LUVVIE: That's the trick. You not competing with other Black women. There's a Professional Black Girl version that exists somewhere, right? It's not called Professional Black Girl. There's some platform somewhere that wants to amplify Black women in all their authenticity but it's not a professional Black girl.

YABA: No, it's true.

LUVVIE: So you really are not competing with them. It's like-

YABA: I guess when I say competing, right? We here now we're putting it on the table. We have this notion that the mainstream that corporate, that particular funders who don't look like us, right? Have their checklists and say this year we have to put funds towards doing something for the Blacks and this year the Blacks fund says they want to do something for this. They want to do something for this. They want to do something for Black women.

LUVVIE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

YABA: Now when we go to look for the person who's doing stuff on Black women, here are some options. Maybe competition isn't the word, but there's a pool and within that pool then, are we functioning in the ways that you said where it's like if I can't do it, she can do it, she can do it, she can do it, you know what I mean? Like are we a community in that or are we racing to be seen as the magical Negro as the magical brand that reps for... you see what I'm saying?

LUVVIE: So that is why funding and where we go to look for our money and our wealth building should not be based on a funding source, one funding source. Right? Because that's what creates competition. When you were told, you know what, I can only have one of you.

YABA: Right.

LUVVIE: So you're like, I got to be the best one. That's what fuels the competition, which is why I don't play that game. I actually don't play that game at all. So most of the money that I make does not come from funders.

YABA: Sure.

LUVVIE: And ambassadorships because I'm expensive. You could get another influencer, you're not going to want to pay for me if you can get this other person. But a lot of times I'll walk away and say, y'all don't have the budget for me. And they'll come back with the budget because we wanted you and only you. We came for you and you're the one that we want.

YABA: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LUVVIE: We got to stop playing that game with them because they pit us against each other.

YABA: Yes.

LUVVIE: And that's how we become the moral enemies. Like ah, she got that thing and I didn't get it. So I opt out, I opt out. I always tell people, if you are basing your decision on me competing for something against somebody else, I'm going to tap out because it's not for me. If you want me, you come directly to me and me only. I'm not in a game of play this, I can apply for an award here and there, but I'm not going through the whole, Oh man, it's either I get this money for this thing or my girl gets this money. I'm tapping out because I don't even like the optics of it.

YABA: Yeah. I don't apply for anything. You know what I mean? And I'm blessed, if we talking about privileges and what I'm thankful for. I'm absolutely blessed by all of the communities that I've ever created because my folks have taken care of me. You know? They've taken care of me and I can't not say that enough. It's when those conversations, because you know another thing that happens, right? When folks love your work, I'm sure you've experienced this, they're like, oh girl, you need to apply for this. You just need to do this. You need to talk to so and so do you know so and so. All you got to do is

this. And people create all these things, right? And there've been many times where I feel like I'm not taking full advantage of all the opportunities because of my bad attitude. But this notion of like, again, I'm healing, right?

This notion of me having to translate this very authentic, real experience in language and words and platform to appeal your understanding that there I have issue with, right? And again, I'm going to have to work through that. I know, but like the idea, I don't make my work for you ultimately. I make it for us. You know? And the fact that us has funded this work in a lot of ways is testimony to that. But I also know that that can only go so far. So it feels like I'm at a crossroads, right, of wanting to stay committed to the authenticity of our experiences, but also wanting like, we deserve to see us on larger platforms. We deserve to have this experience in a much bigger reach. Right?

So like in a lot of ways, I know I have to get over myself, and figure out a way to do that and remain authentic. But that transition, that's where I feel like that's the world of competition out there. Like who are those people to tell me this is how much I'm making, this is who you need to connect with. This is who can put you on. Matter of fact, I'm to put you on. I've not felt a lot of that energy. There've been lots of sisters who loved on me, loved the work, tried their best, opened the door, appreciative. I know them by name. I live off of the love of the followers.

LUVVIE: Yeah.

YABA: You know.

LUVVIE: And I guess that's why I'm like, it's game changing to be a part of a community that is radically transparent. The one thing that I learned when I am in rooms with white people, is how they move unburdened and how it transforms and creates this domino effect around them. I watch it and I'm like, okay, so this group that I'm a part of, I'm like, huh? That radical transparency is powerful beyond measure. It's so powerful because I know that anybody who I need to reach in this world, I'm one ask away from.

And that power, that's how they've been moving since they were two. So I'm just like, how do I, in a world where the system is not set up for us, how do we set up the system for ourselves to win? That's where I'm at. [crosstalk 01:49:33] That's where I'm at. I'm like, you know what? Even in this whole Rona thing, as we've seen that the system is not paying us, it's not giving the people that help that they need. I've been like, okay, so what can we as individuals do to help the people who look like us, who we love? Right? So like today I'm like if you have a barber, a hairstylist, nail tech, who you'd typically be going to pay them.

YABA: Sure. Tip them.

LUVVIE: And we live in a world where the system is set up against us, which means our role is now to fill a lot of gaps. I want us to ask ourselves constantly where we are being failed, where can we rise up? We're being failed because Black women, we've never been told to negotiate. We've never been told we should do this thing we've never been given

permission to audaciously ask. So those of us who have these platforms, who have these mics, who were given permission along the way by somebody and took it on and was like, got it. Who else can we give permission to? Who can we give this information to? Who can we make sure does not have to go through the weeds that we had to?

YABA: Right?

LUVVIE: So that's where I'm at when I say exploiting my privilege, I have to exploit my privilege every day and be like, if there's anything I can do, if there's any one person who can see the platform and be able to be like, I learned something today. Okay, great. Or at least something that's going to make me better, something that I can use when I walk out the room. Negotiating, being able to walk into a room and say, actually, I don't want that. Being able to walk away when it doesn't serve you. So that's core. We got to do it.

LUVVIE: We got to do it because otherwise you're going to continue being on the wheel and we might keep blaming the system because the system is trash.

YABA: Right.

LUVVIE: That's a given.

YABA: It's also kind of we should blame the system, but we also have to understand our participation in the system as well, and our reliance upon the system and our addiction to the system because we really don't want to be free if we can't imagine our freedom outside of the way the system is already set up.

LUVVIE: Yep. Which is why we can't depend fully on a system to build our money and our wealth and financial wellbeing, which is why those of us, anybody who you support, who is a Black creative, Black business owner, just Black person who's doing something amazing, send them the tip jar. It's not begging. It's not, Oh, I'm just... Because this person elsewhere is not getting paid for their work in a way they should be.

YABA: No, especially not now.

LUVVIE: So even if you have \$20 that \$20 makes a world of difference because if five people send \$20 that's a hundred. If a hundred people send it, how much is that \$2000 we have to kind of take it on. Sister's keeper has to become a verb. So post that thing, unabashedly, love my labor. Tip that shit. Okay. Tip. Tip. And we have to keep sharing the stuff we have to. Because we can't afford not to.

YABA: That's what's up. We appreciate you for that sister Luvvie.

LUVVIE: I'm always cheering for you and listen again. You know I slide into your DMs. I'm like, Yaba, what you up to? You have access to me. Okay.

YABA: I've been trying to chill, but I know [crosstalk 01:54:07].

LUVVIE: Don't chill. What you need? Because I might not have it, but I might know somebody who does and even if I don't know, at least we'll put it out there and who knows. It might come across my desk, you know, like I don't want us to be afraid of just the ask.

YABA: Yeah.

LUVVIE: You have the access, the network that you have. There are people who are waiting, who just want to know what you need.

YABA: Right. I got to figure out what I need. I got to figure out what I want this to be, what's sustainable, you know? And what's best for us cause we deserve to grow. Also. I don't like platforms that stay stagnant. And Professional Black Girl has been what it is for four years almost. What's next for us. You know? Even for me not wanting to be overly branded, if that makes sense. Right.

LUVVIE: Yeah.

YABA: So it's me, Professional Black Girl is the one thing that I do. I do a lot of things, you know? And so also wanting to be clear about who it is I want to be when I grow up as well, you know? So I hope to get over this kind of numbness that I'm in now and get into a working creative space before Rona gives us free and be a little bit clear about what it's going to look like on the other side. But I'm excited. I still haven't given up on 2020. Like I talked mad shit about 2019 but I feel like, see this is the lesson. Some of us are hard headed. We're going to learn the lesson like this and when we come up out of it, it's going to be beautiful.

LUVVIE: Yep. Yep. And I think now look, I'm taking this time to be like, how can I be better? Because you know, everybody got to get their shit together. I'm absolutely trying to make sure I'm getting my shit together right now.

YABA: Okay.

LUVVIE: So I'm learning, I'm also taking like three classes myself right now, the science of wellbeing, I'm taking an accelerator, I'm taking the, oh yeah, like I'm forever learning more.

YABA: So you get up and get dressed in the morning.

LUVVIE: I don't, I still be in pajamas, don't get it twisted. I still be in pajamas and some sweats. I'm not putting on clothes in real life unless I have something to do. Like a video call. I had a video call yesterday that was like actually important so I threw on a bra and shit, but I still had on sweat pants under that. Okay.

YABA: Right, right.

LUVVIE: I'm still waking up and lollygagging for the first hour and dragging my feet, but in between I'm trying to stay on top of things and trying to get some work done and you

know, we out here everybody trying to figure out too. I have definitely not stopped learning. No matter where people think I am in my career, I still think there's so much more for me to learn personally and professionally. So I'm taking this time to be like, you know what? Taking some classes, making sure I'm spiritually. Okay. And yeah, that part. Okay.

YABA: That part, that part.

LUVVIE: So yeah, I'm working on it. But this was a gift. This was a gift. You joining me on Chat and Chill this was dope.

YABA: Thank you.

LUVVIE: This was dope.

Thanks to Dr. Yaba Blay for joining me on Rants and Randomness. If you're not following her already, you need to. She will make your Instagram life much better. She has two accounts – one is [@fiyawata](#) (which is F-I-Y-A-W-A-T-A) and also follow [@professionalblackgirl](#). And don't miss the extra edition of Judgment Free Zone that she does. You get access to when you drop money in the collection plate. So that information is in her profile at [@fiyawata](#).

And if you didn't catch it during our interview, I mentioned a group for professional women that I'm building – well, it's almost here. We're launching it soon, and you don't want to miss being part of the first group that gets in the doors. Turn on those IG notifications, because even if you're following me @Luvvie on IG, you're going to want to know right when this thing opens in the next couple of weeks. And if you haven't already, you need to join [LuvvNation](#), my online community where they get all the highly exclusives and the behind the scenes info first. Not only that, it's a space where we make each other laugh, hold each other accountable and keep each other sane in this dumpster fire of a world. Go to [LuvvNation.com](#) and get yourself signed up, or search LuvvNation (that's L-U-V-V-NATION with two V's) in the App Store or on Google Play store, and yeah, it's just a dope community to be a part of.

Much love to Chicago Recording Company, where I currently do not record this podcast, because, yeah – still quarantining. But they're such a huge help putting my recordings from home together and making it sound on point.

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