

SMFA Summit Interview with Tamika Simpkins, premiering 22 May 2021, 3pm PDT

Bonnie Gillespie

Everyone, so excited to bring back to you one of my very favorite people on the planet, for all time forever and ever, and not just on the planet, in all the universes that exist. It's Tamika Simpkins. Hi, Meekers.

Tamika Simpkins

Hello. Hey, madam Bonnie. I've missed you so much. So excited to be here!

Bonnie Gillespie

I love you. Thank you for coming back.

Tamika Simpkins

Thank you for inviting me. Last year was so awesome.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah.

Tamika Simpkins

So awesome.

Bonnie Gillespie

I'm like, the summit taught us last year like what a summit can be, and then this year we're like, let's raise the bar. Here we go.

Tamika Simpkins

Exactly. Progress, progress. Let's get in it.

Bonnie Gillespie

Let's get in it. All right, so the world has changed quite a bit, awareness of all that's happening in the world has changed quite a bit since...

Tamika Simpkins

Whoa, honey. Every day, a new day.

Bonnie Gillespie

Let's talk about... where do I want to begin? How do we handle the every day... somebody else waking up, somebody else becoming aware, something else happening to make us so aware of how much needs fixing, like, yes showbiz but in, in life, as storytellers, what's the self-care around just that level of intensity with things being so turned up right now?

Tamika Simpkins

You know, it's just as we were talking about before. If you surround yourself with people that understand how self-care is important because sometimes, like me as a workaholic, I'll just work work work until my body's like, "Stop. I am, you get no more, because you haven't taken care of me. You haven't done the maintenance that is required for me to have the upkeep." And it's kind of the thing that I talk about with computers when people say, "Oh, my computer's running sluggish," and always the first question I ask, and I already know the answer. First question I ask, "When was the last time you've run maintenance?" "What? On my computer? What are you talking about? You don't need maintenance." Yes, everything that runs, that has intricate pieces and parts; your car, your house, your computer, and your body all need maintenance.

And so, for me, I am back on the self-care plan -- because it was a little bit busy the past couple of months in my personal life -- to focus on meditation. So, I have Siri set to open my Headspace app every morning, and now they have this little thing where they give you a little timeline, little to do. So, I start off with my five morning breaths, and then they have a little short video just sharing something about life. The other, the other day I saw about one guy who was a bike enthusiast, and he worked on wheels and how wheels are important, not only on bikes. And they're very intricate and they need to spin but you have to maintain them. And then you go into the meditation and I'm like, "Whoa."

So, I'm relaxing my mind. I'm opening my mind to learning new things, and I'm also resetting my mind for the beginning of the day. And then I also use their sleepcast to help me wind down and and fall asleep as well. So, all of that is important, especially as every day is a new day, you don't know what's going to come. We watch the news, blah blah blah, our minds explode. We're doing all the back and forth, back and forth, and it's, your body's like, "And when are you going to take care of me, because I'm helping you do all of these things. I need some help; I need some maintenance." So, it is really important and I think you learn this as you get older, because when you're in your 20s you're like, "I could do anything. I could take on the world and be nonstop and wake and stay up until 5am," like you and I used to do.

Bonnie Gillespie

Drinkin' the whole time.

Tamika Simpkins

Exactly. Like, "Why am I so tired?" Okay, I don't know, I'll be fine. I'll be fine. But, yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

I'd like to say that there are a few things in life that change, or have the potential to change our brand, shift our brand a little bit, and you know one of them is becoming a parent. Another is losing a parent. There's the Saturn return/age 28 epiphany/that moment -- 27, 28, 29 -- when you're just like, "Well, whose life? Mine or the one that the family wanted for me?" There's,

there's also that that moment in midlife-ish, where you have your first big health scare or thing that makes you know *this* is temporary. There's just a time when the body goes, "Bitch, sit down," or at least mine did. "This is not okay. This cannot continue." I wonder as creatives, I don't know if we can get out ahead of some of those things, but can we make them gentler and not quite so so abrupt? Those those wake-up calls, maybe?

Tamika Simpkins

I think we can, but we have to be disciplined to do it. We can't expect society to do it because society, and the culture that we live in now, wants everything faster, quicker, cheaper. And no, we are still humans, you know? I work in the technology field and sometimes I have to remind myself, as well as other people, I'm not a machine, I work on a machine, but I'm not a machine. I still have blood running in these veins, and these eyes need sleep. And so, we have to, as you have taught me, we have to teach and educate people how to communicate and work with us, because if we don't, they will dictate how we move through our lives. And so, with someone else kind of driving our life bus. And it's like, "No, this is not your bus. Go drive your own damn bus. This is my bus." And it's up to us to be disciplined and say, "Okay, that's great. Here's what I'm going to do. If you like it, great. If you don't, great."

Bonnie Gillespie

Okay, so you talked about the culture, you talked about them driving our buses. There is a certain population, cis/het/straight/white male, sorry patriarchy, but it's true, that believes driving all the buses is their job, and dictating how things are going to be. Got it. We have a lot of unlearning to do, we have a lot of re-parenting ourselves about what we're allowed to not just ask for but require in life. Our NO line, constantly, re, re, re- recalibrated, I guess is the word I want to use. I want to know how we balance saying, "You don't get to drive my bus," with, "I'm an artist at the beginning of my career, and I'm supposed to say yes to everything because beggars can't be choosers. I'm trying to get that. I'm trying to get that first job. I'm trying to get the... I'm at copy-credit-meals. I have to say yes to everything because I need to prove I can work," which of course feeds right into what the patriarchy wants of us, especially as creatives.

Tamika Simpkins

I think that's the machine that has been in the system, in our culture for so long, that there has to be this certain timeline, you know? You go to school, you go to college or not, you get a job or you intern, and blah blah blah you climb up the ladder and you do all of these things, and you have to do all the grunt work in the beginning. That's one path. That doesn't necessarily mean that has to be your path. We all get to choose what path we go down, and regardless of what path you're going to take, it's going to be a struggle. It's going to be challenges. It's going to be journeys. You're going to learn regardless. But we have to be able to be confident enough to say, "I'm okay with saying no to this and saying no to this is going to open up so many more doors."

And I, I feel like the younger generation is shifting away from the mindset that we grew up with, where you have to do it in this order. That's the only way to be successful. And they're taking a step back and saying, "No, I could work from home. I could create my own brand and my own business and my own content and do what I want." And I feel like also because of the pandemic that has forced the entire planet to change the way we think, we do, we work, we live, then it's opening people's minds. I remember there was a time I was working at a corporate a Fortune-500 job. S corporate job. And I asked, "Is it possible to work from home at least one day of the week? Do I have to schlep to the other side of the city to sit in a cubicle, blah blah blah?" And I did it very professionally. I'm speaking about it blasé right now, and of course the answer is, "Well, no, we kind of need you in meetings and blah blah blah," and like saying Monday morning meetings or whatever meetings that came came about. And we weren't doing heart surgery or anything like that in this in this business. And so now, when quarantine hit, I laughed at the whole idea of, "Oh yeah, we couldn't do things without you being in-office," and no one's in-office.

I, I wish I had somebody to do that face to 'cause it's like, yeah, it's possible if you would have opened your mind to it. Granted, it was years ago, but we had laptops then. We had the internet then. Google Hangouts and and other things were available to us then that it was possible but sometimes we get stuck in our ways, because we're creatures of habit. But in order to grow, we have to get out of those habits and be open to being uncomfortable. And that's what I learned from, as I say, "Surround yourself with the people that you want to be like, or you want to be." Like why I'm surrounded by you is because we're talking about being uncomfortable. And that's important for growth. You're not going to grow if you're staying in the same box.

Bonnie Gillespie

I know, I know the patriarchal role in the NO that you got for just one day a week at home, because once -- again, the guy driving the bus -- allows for "maybe there can be more kindness around the schedule or more openness to work from home days," that gives largely women an opportunity to have a more balanced life, be a parent plus, or take care of parents plus, be in the office and be an executive. And that's something they're not open to because it, it runs the risk of them feeling that they lose some of their power.

Tamika Simpkins

Always. Of course.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, so, let's let's talk about the role of power and the role of women and BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people. Anyone who's underrepresented, anyone who is typically never invited to be a part of the conversation, much less lead the conversation, getting into roles of leadership. Let's let's talk about that shift, and how we can do business with more people, like, more female-owned businesses, more Black-owned businesses, more queer-owned businesses. Like how, how can

we start working with people who are leading from a place of more representation and kindness to the schedule and just a nonpatriarchal model?

Tamika Simpkins

Right, it's all about choice. It's choice like like your tattoo says, "I belong here." That goes for everyone. We belong here. And there's no other human on this planet, that should dictate who has the right to tell stories, who's has the right to be open and be represented. We all belong here, we're all here for a purpose. And so, it's all about choice. You choose to work with these communities and these small businesses, female-owned, owned by people of color, you know, to, to say, "I want to uplift the community. I want to support and help these people who are doing great things," as opposed to doing things that are convenient. And don't get me wrong, sometimes I succumb to convenience because, okay, it's convenient right now so this is what I'm going to do, but sometimes I do consciously say, "You know what, let's take a step back and let's look at some other opportunities where I can support someone who isn't getting as much love as the, the whole patriarchy and people in power."

So, so it is about choice and I don't understand that some, sometimes I don't understand why women, people of color, the LBGTQ community, why they are so suppressed. We are all human beings. We all came out of the birth canal like anyone else. Who is more powerful than others? Because you have money? That money could go away just as quick as you got it. So, I really think it's about making conscious choices, because we want to be treated that way. We want someone to help and support us. We want someone -- if I if I was a cis Caucasian male -- you want people to support you because I say constantly, we cannot do this life journey alone. It's not, it's not designed or built this way; it takes a village. It takes a community, regardless of your background, your class, your gender, you know, whatever encompasses, that makes the whole of you. We cannot do this alone. No one on the planet can live a life in solitude. Even, even monks do it together.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's right.

Tamika Simpkins

So, it's really all about choice and reminding us, well, how do we want to be treated? And not think about you know, I know people have certain limitations when it comes to beliefs, or religion, or you know, background or things of that nature but just, just take all that away, human to human. How do I want to be treated? Let me treat this other human the same way.

Bonnie Gillespie

It sounds so simple when you say it, and yet I look at the state of the world, and I go, there, there's a whole lot of people that refuse to look human to human. And I think it's because they're, they're scared.

Tamika Simpkins

They are scared. People are drunk with power, people are drunk with, you know, having control and doing what they want to do and they, they like the idea of feeling put on a pedestal and suppressing others. But I've learned at the same time that those people are just as miserable.

Bonnie Gillespie

And for me, I don't think everyone uses positions of power, that way. And one of the big fear settings of the, the cis/het/straight/white male -- and of course, I use that just because it is the most common thread but obviously there are going to be variations here -- is a need to hold position of power, with a real deathgrip of fear that if anyone else were to have power, it would be used to lord against them in the way they have used their power.

And I'm like, could it be possible that a woman would never use her power, that way, that having power would just mean she's got power? It doesn't mean she's got power so she can smash the man down. And why is it that we're not even open to the idea of power looking differently in different people's hands. And I think that that singular worldview of "When you have power, the only thing you can do is crush all your opponents and put everybody else out of business and, you know, Bezos and Musk and Gates it up" like those are the only options, I think that that is incredibly narcissistic and I think that's a big part of the problem with where we are now is this inability to just see one another and know that we all start the same we all end the same.

Tamika Simpkins

Exactly, exactly. And I, I have to take in what you just said because I was about to say something and then my mind was like wait, "Let's process that." Um, wow.

I feel like it's changing, like we have the Stacey Abrams, of the world, who... we have the Kamala Harris of the world. Not just them, there are so many more just like them. We just haven't met them yet. And I feel like for women, we know the power that we have. I mean, just, again, I have been so on a kick of, "Let's just get down to the humanistic side of life." And women. We give life, create life. Granted, men are required but majority of the power in the work comes from women. That is an innate power that I think women can sustain such an experience. Men can't do that. Not not mentally, not spiritually, not fit... not physically, of course, yeah. But it's because we know the power that we have.

And I feel like the other gender feels like well, they don't have that power so "What power can we uphold?" Now they have physical strength, muscles, but they don't have the power to push out life in this world. And so, I feel like because women have that connection, human to human, women who carry another human in their body, there is a humanistic connection to nurture and build and grow that some men, I'm not going to say all, some men do not have. And they feel threatened by that. And so, they feel like, "Oh, well, I'm gonna have this power and that will be my connection." Women don't need to do that. We have connections to other human beings

regardless of what they look like until society or cultures, or religion comes and kind of changes your way of thinking. No one is born racist. No one is born to hate other people. We are taught those things, and I feel like that's not the innate structure makeup of females.

Bonnie Gillespie

And I'm sitting with the same sort of moment that you just had... have... let me take that in, because I'm having a realization that there are seven times as many females pursuing a career in show business as there are males. And that's been true my whole career working with actors, that there's... it's always 7:1. And there have been at least double if not triple the number of roles for men as there have been for females throughout all of that, that disproportion there. But I look at that stat and go, "Is one of the reasons women are so attracted to show business is because storytelling is -- I'm gonna get emotional, Cancers, here, having this conversation -- because storytelling is connection?"

Tamika Simpkins

Mm-hmm. It is connection. Storytelling regardless of what way you tell the story, it allows someone to see a different point of view, a different perspective that sometimes we might not consider otherwise. I have been changed by storytelling, whether it's in books, whether it's documentaries, whether it's fictional narratives, because fiction, yeah, music, theatre, dance, everything. You see you see stories and all of those things and stories that you might not have thought about or even considered that. "Oh, wow, I didn't... I never realized that. That's very interesting... and some people like me... I want to research further, well, why is that the case, and how come I never knew about this?" And there's so many things. Like, I have a degree in African American studies. There are so many things about Black history that I don't know and I'm like, "Wait a minute. Why don't I know about this? I have a degree." And granted, your degree is not going to teach you everything, but it's like, I should know about that.

Bonnie Gillespie

But you don't, you don't get surprised, and then feel that that is a thing that takes down your power. You know, you feel surprised and get curious and go, "What... what else?" Yeah, please.

Tamika Simpkins

But that comes from my mother. And I feel like this is when she was going through her... if she watches this, she might get mad at me, but it was a time in like the '80s where everybody African American was reclaiming their Blackness, you know, I think the Black Panthers had started to die down because they were getting too political. And so, individuals will say, "Well, no, we still have Black power." And so, there was a time there was Black power throughout the house all the time, and she would... I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought.

Bonnie Gillespie

This curiosity is what I had said.

Tamika Simpkins

Okay. Thank you. She talked about how education was so key, she always was keen on saying, "You know what, people can take things from you but they will never take education from you." And she would say that constantly. And even when we were on summer breaks during schooling, she would make me read a book a week and give a book report and I'm like, "But, I'm on vacation." She's like, "Uh-huh. That's real nice. You on vacation... after you read this book and tell me about." And so that was that was always... I'm serious.

Bonnie Gillespie

It's just like, "Sit outside with an umbrella while you read, there's your vacation."

Tamika Simpkins

I mean. In the East Coast hot sun, she's like, "I'll buy you a water-ice." Just like, "I'll buy you a 25-cent water-ice while you read your book. You gonna go outside? Great. Take the book with you." So, I feel like I've always had a curious mind, because she planted that seed, that, you know, people can take things away, physical things, away from us, but they will never take your learning... what you learn. Go ahead. Before you lose it.

Bonnie Gillespie

This is why the patriarchy is scared because all they've amassed are physical things, and so they know that the way they operate is to take things from others, and they know all they have, if all their shit gets taken away, is nothing. And that's terrifying to them. Obviously, some are educated, obviously, some have good hearts, obviously, some of them are artistic. I'm painting with a very broad brush.

Tamika Simpkins

Yes.

Bonnie Gillespie

But in general, the system that is in play comes from a place of just being terrified of what it would mean to lose position; of what it would mean to lose that power instead of curiosity of, "What would it feel like if I walk into rooms and everyone doesn't look like me? What... maybe I'm the only man and everyone's female or even other gender identifiers that I don't understand and instead of that feeling threatening to me, it makes me feel curious. What would that feel like?" And I think we're just starting to get to the beginnings of some people cracking open to allowing a little more curiosity.

Tamika Simpkins

Exactly, exactly. I feel like, I feel like lately in the past few years, crisis management firms have been making a lot of money. I swear every time I go on IMDb-Pro, the little app, I see somebody... I see the word "backlash" at least once a day. I'm just like, "Wow." And so people have been dealing with -- usually white, cis men have been dealing with -- their power trips in

the past coming back to... that they need to confront. And it's like, "No, we're not going to deal with this anymore." And, you know, it's, I find it disheartening but at the same time I find it empowering that women are finally saying, "Well, why do I have to put up with your sexual harassment? With your abuse?"

I've had a few friends recently who've come to me to talk about issues of sexual harassment, and I've never had to deal with that, but I feel like it's, it feels like my responsibility as another woman to be supportive. Because again, we can't do this alone, and it's such a scary feeling. Because we are brainwashed to think, "If I say something, I will be punished. Not only am I being punished by someone who's treating me like crap, but now if I say something and say I don't like it I'm going to be punished even further, because you don't get to do what you want to do."

Bonnie Gillespie

And if we look at a history of people who were blacklisted from Hollywood, people who didn't get to have a career because they spoke up about how they were treated with the casting couch and all sorts of things where.... When I think back to the beginnings of "Self-Management for Actors," I got so much pushback for pulling back the curtain from people who had always been doing things the way things have always been done. And I now see part of the reason people didn't want me pulling back the curtain on how casting is done and what kind of conversations they're having and, "Yeah, they did say you're too fat and here's what that means and here's what," like decoding things instead of going, "Well, then I must have a problem I need to solve." "I heard a stopper." "I need to lose the weight. I need," or whatever you know whatever they get in your head about or, "I need to cut up my face or get Botox or," use everything that's ever been used as a stopper.

And me pulling back the curtain to say, "Well what's the real reason? It's that they don't see money when they look at you and that's got nothing to do with your face. It's got nothing to do with your race. It's got nothing to do with your age, nothing, nothing, nothing." That pulling back the curtain, potentially, gets us to a point where we can't have a world in which there's a casting couch. We can't have a world in which #MeToo couldn't exist, because we're of course going to talk about it. We're, of course, going to share. And the more vocal we are, the less those power structures can stay in place.

And the more people go, "You, you were a whistleblower," and instead of that turning you into, "No one will cast you," it actually turned you into someone that now there's a whole slew of micro studios and small production companies that can't wait to cast you because of what you stand for. That willingness to be... to risk "I may not get to work anymore if I speak up." What do we do with that part of the brain that goes, "Oh, but I really want this job. Maybe maybe just don't, don't talk about it, it'll be okay," versus the one that goes, "No. This isn't right, and I have a right to say this isn't okay and trust I'm still going to work"?

Tamika Simpkins

Right, you have to know that you don't have to be dependent on others to make a career and to live a good life. We now have tools and resources, and so many people have so many stories and knowledge to write and tell their own stories, authentically if they want to. We don't have to be so dependent on: "I need someone to give me a job." Do you know how many young people are creating their own jobs in their own businesses and their own studios, who are half my age, making so much more? Doing the... doing it the way they want to do it and saying, "You know what, eff your system. That doesn't work for me and I am going to create what I want to create and live the life I want to live. Screw you." And that's why people are feeling afraid.

And that is, and it's bringing, empowering more people with, "Let's make more resources to, to create more things that we want." It's very interesting how, I was saying this to a friend, we're living through an evolution. We're living... the quarantine has really pushed how humans have to evolve. How we are forced to change. I mean we've read about it in the history books, but this quarantine has been so, you know, it's been devastating. But at the same time enlightening like, look at all the things we've learned. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, people are forced to see we are not going to live like this anymore. We refuse and you're going to push back because you're used to keeping your power, and you're used to holding all of that over us, but no, no. And we will expose you because now we have cameras in our hands and in our pockets at all times. And I'm gonna do what I want.

And I am inspired by, you know, certain people like Issa Rae. I watched her Masterclass. I remember I met her right before her blow-up. Like she... "Awkward Black Girl" was great. And I think her HBO deal had just got signed, so she wasn't she wasn't in the money yet, and so she, she's still down to Earth from what I understand. I haven't seen her since way back then but you could tell it was her before money, and I have a picture with her and just now to see, to read that she has an HBO deal that's like eight figures, eight, nine figures worth. I'm like, "Yes, honey." In a matter of a decade. She she created that for herself and now she's empowering other storytellers to come in and create and she's building that empire and that platform for other storytellers who wouldn't have those opportunities to do that. And so I feel like, yes, there's going to be pushback, but there's always pushback when there's change, and an evolution, and a revolution.

Bonnie Gillespie

Revolution, Amen. And one of the things I say to my cis/het/straight/white male husband is, "Baby, ya had a good run."

Tamika Simpkins

I love that he supports you, regardless. You know he's one of those few Caucasian males that says, "I'm not intimidated by anyone else's power."

Bonnie Gillespie

No, never. He's someone that... talk about talk about having to take some heat early on in our relationship when people said, "He's sponging off you. He's living off you. You're working, paying his bills," and I'm like, "He's taking care of the house. He takes care of the errands. He buys groceries. He makes the food. I've never run the vacuum cleaner, like, what do you mean? What do you... you wouldn't say -- if I were a man -- you would not say to me, 'What are you doing taking care of him?!'"

Tamika Simpkins

Exactly.

Bonnie Gillespie

And he never once let that challenge his masculinity or anything. He's like, "I got my man card; I'm good." Like, really, I did okay, I did okay.

Tamika Simpkins

You did okay. And not to say that you couldn't have done all that you do without him, but it's great to have that support and it probably might have taken you longer had you not had that support. But the fact that you have that partner to walk this path with you, and you support, and, and help each other grow, you know, he's like your body guard. I call him your body guard. I'm like, "How dare somebody mess with Bonnie because that Marine is going to eff 'em up."

Bonnie Gillespie

Yes, yes. Talk about having a support system I do; I do come connected that's true. And of course, also you you are one of my major support system people and elements and love bugs and I just think about you all the time because of course we share the Cancer bond.

Tamika thank you for being such a big part of my life. Can you share where everyone can reach you, find out what's going on in your life, stay in touch if they feel so inspired.

Tamika Simpkins

My website is TamikaRS.com. That's T A M I K A R S. That's where all my acting pursuits are.

I also am a small group session leader at the SAG-AFTRA Foundation so if you're a SAG-AFTRA member or an AEA member -- because they're sister unions -- you can come and check out the business classes that we facilitate over there. And there's great resources there. And Bonnie has done many Casting Access sessions there as well, so, they love Bonnie over at the SAG-AFTRA Foundation. And so, I'm always on Instagram at @TamikaRS. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, all of that stuff: TamikaRS.

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Bonnie Gillespie

Thank you, Tamika. I love you so much.

Tamika Simpkins

Thank you so much, my dear. *mwah*

For 100 days of unparalleled support and a proven framework to support your next-tier life, visit bonniegillespie.com/offer now.

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