

Anna: *You're listening to Changing Minds: Transformative Talks for Healthcare Improvement. Grab a coffee or tea and join our team as we chat with leaders in the academic detailing space. For more information on academic detailing, visit us at narcad.org.*

Anna: Welcome back to our *Changing Minds* podcast. I'm your host, Anna Morgan-Barsamian, and today I'm joined by two of our wonderful academic detailing colleagues from RxFiles in Canada, Tahirih McAleer and Loren Regier. Welcome, both!

Tahirih: Hello!

Loren: Great to be on the podcast.

Anna: Great to have you. So, Tahirih, you hosted a workshop at our last NaRCAD conference called, "Leaning into Not Knowing: Preventing Panic and Practicing Presence."

Can you share more about what inspired you to host this workshop?

Tahirih: Absolutely. I cannot talk about this workshop without giving a shout out to my RxFiles colleague, Debbie Bunker. We were discussing one day how in our academic detailing training, we are taught that it is okay to say, "I don't know", and absolutely that's correct.

And it's really important to acknowledge pieces that we don't know and to create that credibility and trust. And through this conversation, we kind of came to this realization that sometimes maybe we jump too quickly to, "I don't know", we throw it out there as a safety net. And without kind of probing a bit further or leaning into that uncomfortable uncertainty of the conversation, we sometimes end conversations without really meaning to.

Sometimes physicians are throwing out questions, acknowledging that there isn't really an answer, and they just want to discuss it more. And here we are saying, "I don't know, I'll get back to you" and kind of closing the door on that conversation. So this workshop came out of that discussion as we were trying to think of ways that we can lean into that discomfort of not knowing and that uncertainty, and maybe create more connection and perhaps delve into the conversation a bit further than we would have otherwise.

Anna: Thanks for sharing that Tahirih. Is there, and this is for you too Loren, is there a time that you can think of specifically in your academic detailing career where you faced uncertainty during a detailing visit?

Tahirih: I can think of too many times. It's really hard for me to pinpoint. I can't necessarily think of a very specific example, but I can thoroughly describe the reaction that I have every single time. And even just thinking about it, I can kind of feel my body freezing in that panic state and thinking, "I don't know, I'll get back to you."

And oof, once I said that, now I'm moving on to something else. I'm trying to change the subject sometimes. And so, I just kind of recall the state of immediate panic. And now on this academic detailing journey, I'm trying to work through that more. Loren, did you have any specific examples?

Loren: Yeah, well, you know, a couple things come to mind. Certainly in that first year or even first six months of academic detailing, you know, I always kind of felt like, oh boy, you know, am I ready for this? Who knows what's coming my way? And it was probably a good thing, you know, overall, because it made me work hard.

It made me prepare hard. It made me talk to a lot of people ahead of time and it eventually gave me confidence to go into situations where you could feel that way and you didn't have to worry about it.

And, you know, I think if you start off, you know, saying, "I don't know", right off the top, it's like you skip the journey and you just go to the destination. I think it is worthwhile to think through, yeah, what is this journey, you know, on the way to not knowing everything, but having something to offer.

Tahirih: I really like that journey analogy there, Loren. I was thinking too on a personal level as well, Anna, outside of academic detailing. Now that I've become more aware of it, I'm throwing out my cop-out, "I don't know", response in my personal life as well too, especially when it comes to things like parenting, for example, or working in community pharmacy or in my personal relationships. I've become a lot more aware of how I'm using these reactions outside of work life too.

Anna: Oh yeah, definitely. And I can think of those examples too. Tahirih, when you were talking about the feeling you get when you don't know the answer, I can feel that too. I can feel the anxiety boiling up and the sweating and the blank brain and everything.

Now I know that a lot of academic detailers do a lot of preparation before they get out into the field. So how can detailers balance preparation with the reality that they will probably encounter the unknown during a visit or the "I don't know"?

Loren, I know that you are one of our NaRCAD facilitators, and I'm sure this comes up in trainings as well. What do you tell detailers when they're thinking about objections from clinicians?

Loren: Yeah, well, there's a few things probably, and we'll try to just land on a few that come to mind and are priorities. But I think for one thing, you do want to make sure that you are prepared for what you should be prepared for. And you always realize that even if you prepare as well as you possibly could, that you're never going to know everything.

In fact, even the evidence itself isn't perfect, and those who understand it thoroughly, you'll find there's different points of view, and they disagree with each other, and nobody remembers everything. I think once you get comfortable enough to expect uncertainty, to expect questions to be out there, to expect different points of view, then you're on the road to being able to understand those things and turn them into a discussion and an opportunity to learn and sift through, yeah, what do we have more confidence with? And what might we have less confidence with?

Anna: I love that, Loren. Tahirih, do you have anything to add about detailers balancing preparing with the reality that they are going to enter into not knowing at some point?

Tahirih: Yeah, absolutely. It kind of had me reflecting on how I prepare myself for a topic. And without a doubt, there is this big heavy, heavy portion that is knowledge based, where I'm trying to prepare well for the topic itself and the evidence itself. And then at some point in time, and this comes closer to my first visit, I shift from preparing material to preparing mindset, acknowledging that I have done the best that I can to become an expert in this field and in this knowledge.

And now I'm going to prepare my mind for the conversation, prepare mentally for more challenging conversations, whether that's through readjusting my expectations for myself, preparing mentally for how I'm going to connect with people, and maybe practicing presence

as well to prepare for those conversations as well. And I kind of think that it shifts from changing, I don't want to say quantity over quality, because we're focusing on quality the whole time. But I'm shifting maybe more from data, facts, evidence, to maybe phrasing practices, for example, or phrasing on how to open up a conversation.

Loren: Yeah, a lot of times it is about the words, you know, you have an idea where you want to go or get to with something, but how do you actually put that into words comfortably and, and without having to think or dig. So I think that's important.

One other thing I'd like to add before we move on is just that I find one technique that's really helped me through the years, and I've often passed it on to all the other detailers is, we just need to compare notes a lot of times before we go out for that first visit.

So, you know, have a lot of first visits before you get to the first visit is another way to say that. And, you know, compare notes with in our case, with pharmacists, with family physicians, with specialists, with nurse practitioners, with people who are specialists in the area, people who aren't specialists in the area. And, and as you just, you know, compare notes and talk through things and ask questions, you start to get a good feel for not everything, but for a lot of things.

And then there's less surprises. You know there will be things where there'll be gaps, but you're also able to go into those with a little bit of insight and familiarity that, hey these are gaps that are out there, or I shouldn't be surprised if there's this question. In some cases, if I do get the question, I know maybe where to go for a possible answer.

Anna: I love these key strategies that people can use. These examples are so helpful, not only in detailing, but also as you mentioned Tahirih, in your personal life or in other professional settings as well.

There's something that you brought up, Tahirih, that I really want to get into. You talked about practicing presence. What does this mean and what does it look like?

Tahirih: That's a huge question because it's something that I don't feel like I'm an expert in at all, but I'm continually reminded to try to work on it in the professional field and personal as well. When I think about preparing for a visit with somebody, it shows up in many different ways.

I travel a lot in my area for detailing. So that presence might start on the drive, or it might start in the parking lot before I even enter the building, trying to take a few breaths, center myself. When I'm driving and I come in, I'm a little bit late, I can appear as though I'm really excited. So maybe I'll take a few minutes to bring that anxious energy down a little bit and focus into presence energy. It might show up while I'm waiting for a doctor, and maybe I'm feeling my feet on the ground in the waiting room. Maybe I'm focusing on my breath, just trying to stay present while waiting for the physician.

And then it also will show up in the visit itself, where I'm trying to tune in to the healthcare provider that I'm speaking to. Whether that's tuning into their physical language, exactly what they're saying, ensuring that my physical language as well is open for them too. Really trying to hone in on exactly what's going in the present mind so that I'm not running away with 500 thoughts in my brain as they're talking and trying to plan out what I'm going to say as they're talking. So in all, I think it's really just shifting from having reactions and creating space to have thoughtful responses.

Does that make sense?

Anna: It certainly does. And Loren, I would love to hear your take on that as well, and if you've practiced presence and how that's important to your detailing work and the trainees that you train.

Loren: You know, I'm not going to add too much because I think Tahirih is what I consider the expert on this. She's the one who works at it so well, and I love that.

Tahirih: She works at it because she's not the expert, Loren.

Loren: But, you know, one of the parallel things that goes to play here is that often when we go out as academic detailers the topic area can be huge, but the practice gaps and key messages that we're addressing are much narrower in scope.

To just remember that before you go into a visit or if you're driving somewhere. I know somebody who used to tape their three or four key messages to the dashboard of their car so that they could remember what was most important to focus on. And you major on majors and you minor on the minors, and that also helps you to concentrate where your research efforts and your preparation has been most valuable.

In the end, you take something that's complex and you focus on, if I was to simplify this down so I could explain it to my kid, what would it look like? And I have done that, and that's often helped me to clarify what's really important and how to get that across in a way that's more likely to make sense.

Tahirih: As you're saying that, Loren, it's kind of making me think of those little tidbits that we have in our minds before we get to a detail, whether it's how would I simplify this? Or what are my key messages? And I'd just be kind of curious if we were to poll the detailing universe, what are people's little tidbits or even mantras that they have before getting out of their vehicles and heading into people's offices?

As you were saying that, I was just thinking of some things I repeat in my head like, "I'm here to create a connection" and trying to focus on that part, or "I know more than I think I know, if I can just relax and unleash that."

I don't know, Anna, do you have any mantras? I'm kind of curious what everybody thinks about before they come into big conversations.

Anna: If I were a detailer, I would probably use something along the lines of "I'm here as an ambassador of the evidence." I really like that. That seems like something that would get me excited and going. But for a general conversation in my professional life or my personal life, usually I go in saying, "okay, I know this information. I know I know this information. So I am going to confidently share that with the group that I am talking with." And it's also important to remember that you're an expert in your own experiences. You're an expert in what you know. So sharing that with other people is so, so important. And I really try to remember that as I go into a big conversation.

Loren: Anna, it's interesting as you're talking, you're using a distinction with a simple word that I really like. I sometimes comment on it when we're training detailers. And that is, I often find people talking about talking *to* someone.

I often will reframe and say, "can we start thinking a little more and using the terminology talking *with* someone?" I noticed you used the word *with* a couple of times as you were sharing there, Anna. I think it's a key thing that once we're talking *with* people, it comes across totally different than if we're talking *to* them.

Anna: Yeah, that's true, Loren. And talking to them or talking at them even as well. *With* really invites that conversation and that relationship. So I love that.

Tahirih: I also really want to make a t-shirt now that says "Ambassadors of Evidence."

Anna: Maybe we can make some at NaRCAD and share them at our events.

As we wrap up here, I have a couple more questions for you both. Are there specific resources that people can explore to learn more about leaning into not knowing and practicing presence? I know that you shared a book during your workshop. I'd love to hear more about that or any other resources you know of.

Tahirih: Absolutely. Loren is my first and foremost resource! We did bring up the book during the workshop *Think Again* by Adam Grant. And that was one of the resources that had sparked some initial conversation between Debbie and myself.

Some ideas that he brings up there are kind of thinking of the benefits of imposter syndrome. For example, when somebody feels imposter syndrome, maybe perhaps it's something that should be celebrated because that's an opportunity to see things with a different lens and to ask different questions that you wouldn't necessarily be asking when you're totally comfortable. It's an opportunity to grow in that discomfort as well.

And so yeah, that's a great place to start if people want to learn to think differently in his book, *Think Again*. I did write down a quote that we shared in our workshop as well, too, if I can share it again, because it just has really stuck out for me from that book.

He wrote, "great thinkers don't harbor doubts because they're imposters. They maintain doubts because they know we're all partially blind, and they're committed to improving their sight. They don't boast about how much they know they marvel at how little they understand. They're aware that each answer raises new questions, and the quest for knowledge is never finished. A mark of lifelong learners is recognizing that they can learn something from everyone they meet."

Anna: That's great. I encourage people to check out that book and read more about that. I want to put that quote on my wall in my office, Tahirih. That's such a great one.

Loren, do you have anything to add to that about resources or any reflections on the quote or book that Tahirih just shared?

Loren: Not specifically for that one, but I know that people commonly will read or look at the various proverbs. And there are a lot of proverbs that are just good to make you think. And a lot of those short little proverbs can really help in terms of setting your mindset, having the right attitude, and helping you to take a little direction that you might not have thought of.

Anna: And they're helpful to even put on your dashboard instead of the key messages, right, Loren?!

I'll wrap up with one question for both of you. If there's one nugget you'd like detailers or those in the healthcare space to remember about handling uncertainty, what would it be?

Loren: Well, I was thinking of if I got asked this question, what might I say? And I came up with three things. So really quickly: seek simplicity and mistrust it. When you make it simple, you start to relax a little bit and you start to be able to communicate it better. But you do have to

remember that there's a lot of complexity and detail and specifics behind that in terms of understanding it well. And so that's the journey that we continue to be on.

I think just remembering that there's lots of perspectives out there, and that nobody knows all the answers and even the evidence that we have a lot of certainty about, we also have a confidence interval that reminds us that there's some uncertainty. And if we can remember that, that is, I think, really helpful.

And lastly, I often remember just to love my audience. Really what I mean by that is professionally respect and care for the person and persons that are in front of you that are going to be impacted by the discussion that you have. And I think that degree of care and offering of service comes across.

Anna: Loren, thanks for sharing three nuggets instead of just one, because those were terrific.

Tahirih, I'll throw it to you to wrap us up.

Tahirih: Maybe I'll throw in one big nugget then. Just to wrap this up, I'm just thinking of that initial panic response that we can have with uncertainty. I just want to remind people that we can shift that from a response to a thoughtful reaction.

Every time we feel uncertain, or maybe if we feel imposter syndrome, for example, as we talked about just before this, we carry something valuable with us. Maybe it's a different perspective, maybe it's humility, or maybe it's an opportunity to grow and connect. But at the end of the day, these uncomfortable, uncertain conversations, we can learn to become comfortable with them or more comfortable with them and create something beautiful with them.

Anna: Well, that was beautifully said. And, you know, we all have something to offer. And we need to remember that as we're either detailing or public speaking or having conversations in our personal lives. It's so, so important to remember that.

Thank you both so much for joining us on our *Changing Minds* podcast.

Loren: Well, thank you, Anna. And keep up the great work at NaRCAD.

Tahirih: Thanks for having us, Anna!