

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRESENTS AGENTS OF EQUITY**

# **DR. MARKISHA SMITH**

A Conversation with the new Director of Office  
of Equity and Human Rights



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WITH THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT I WAS  
STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF LEGACY."**

**Is there an existing equity program within the City that is effective? And why? What equity program does Portland need?**

I believe that the Office of Equity and Human Rights supports several programs that have seen and continue to see success in the City. Black Male Achievement, Equity 101, ADA/Disability Training, and the Portland Committee on Community Engaged Policing are a few programs that are making an impact around Portland. Each program has community at the center—internal and external—and is paving the way for a collective understanding and appreciation for equity. I believe increased program connected to education, our LGBTQ community, and communities of immigrants and emerging bilinguals could use additional support and resources from our office.

**Describe your tried and true technique for networking.**

In one word: Relationship. I think that without authentic, true relationship there is no networking. Surface level interactions happen all the time but true relationship takes networking to a new level---in builds capacity for trust and with trust comes the understanding and support to accomplish our professional and work goals each day.

**Describe how you support women in the work place.**

I support women in the work place by acknowledging that I am a woman who comes with a background and story that is either different or aligned with other women around me—the shared message I hope to convey is that women are creatures of strength, experience, and knowledge that should be recognized as valuable assets in any organization. I have often mentored young women who are early in their careers, offering them guidance through lived experience and encouraging them to dream big without fear.

**Is there a story or a piece of advice from a woman that had a profound impact on your life?**

My mother is, and grandmothers were an essential part of the woman I am today. Collectively they have encouraged me to never settle for the status quo; I was supported to live my biggest dreams with the acknowledgement that I was standing on the shoulders of legacy.

## **How are you or your work intersectional?**

The seminal work of Kimberle' Crenshaw on intersectionality has shaped my understanding of intersectionality in the work of equity. But, greater still it speaks to the ways in which my varied identities are acknowledged in personal and professional spaces. I am a cisgender, heterosexual, African American woman who is a mother, daughter, sister, cousin, niece, and friend. I am certain that there have been times in my professional career where I have had to choose which identity would shine the brightest based on environment around me. As I have grown and evolved, I understand that there is no part of me that should ever be negotiated to make someone else feel comfortable or willing to accept me. All of me is valuable and worthy.

## **Why does language matter when it comes to gender identity?**

Language is power and respect. The purposeful exclusion of gender is a critical way in which individuals identify and the varied language that accompanies must be addressed. We must focus on asset-based, positive expressions of gender that value an individual and their lived experience.

## **What does it mean to be a public servant?**

To give of yourself for the benefit of others; it means selfless acts of advocacy and connection with communities in a variety of contexts; it is the balance of both the personal and professional connection

## **Who is your favorite woman superhero (mythical or real) or fictional character and why?**

Maya Angelou—there has never been a Maya Angelou quote that at some point in my life hasn't been appropriate for how I was navigating my world at that particular time. For the last year, my favorite Angelou quote is "If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be." I am fully embracing my uniqueness and viewing it as a beautiful blessing.