Dr. Bobbi Conner:

Hi there and thanks for joining us for another Vet Talk. For this show we're going to be doing something a little different. We're having a different conversation. Dr. Carl Southern is going to talk about what it has been like for him being a Black veterinarian. And not just being a Black veterinarian, but some of his experiences in light of what's going on in society right now related to police brutality and protests. And so, we get to have a frank discussion about his experiences and I think it will be helpful for people to hear his perspective, and hopefully we can continue the conversation.

Conner:

Hi everyone and welcome to Vet Talk. I'm excited to welcome back Dr. Carl Southern. He's been on the show before; we're going to do something different today though. So, the world right now is talking about race and race relations differently, so I approached Carl to say “hey, would you be up for this?” and thankfully he said yes.

Dr. Carl Southern:

Of course.

Conner:

Thank you so much for being here.

Southern:

Of course.

Conner:

We like to have an educational bend on this [show] and I think this falls very nicely into an educational bend. But it is going to be a little different. We're not going to have any sort of timeline on this and the conversation's going to go where it's going to go. Carl and I have established that this is going to be a safe space for us to talk freely, ask questions, but also be able to call each other out. So, if I say something stupid, Carl's going to call me on it and we're going to talk about it like adults and as friends. We're hoping that we can we can address some issues that are a little heavier than what we're usually talking about on this show, so thank you again for agreeing to be here.

Southern:

No problem at all, thanks for doing it.

Conner:

When I first started thinking about this show and what we were gonna do, I started thinking about my experiences. I had all these stories that I was going to bring up and then I stopped and I realized this isn't my story. This show isn't about my story. So, what I'm going to do is something that is not easy for me: I'm going to shut up for a bit.

Southern:

Oh, man. [laughter]

Conner:

[laughing] Yeah, I know. Anybody who knows me at all is going to know that that's a challenge. So, what I want to start with is – maybe if you just want to share with everybody how are you feeling right now? Are you feeling differently right now, just given the moment we are in in society, or is it like ‘now this is kind of normal for me?’ So, you take it away for a bit.

Southern:

Not that it's normal but it's not like anything has changed, you know?

Conner:

Right.

Southern:

This is what we've been seeing, what we've been living, and what we've been a part of for forever. And, it's like now that the spotlight is on it – like literally the spotlight is on it –there's nothing going on right now because the world's on quarantine, so [we’re] even more focused on this topic and this subject. But it's more like, okay, now you all are willing to say what we've been trying to preach and talk about and just ask for - to be treated the same this entire time? So, it's a little bit frustrating to be honest and at times it's angering and you just want to get angry, but, for me at least, I try and just remember: if I do get really completely upset and angry, it's not going to change what I want to change. I think it's okay to be angry, 100% we should be angry, there's nothing wrong with being angry, but I think that we just have to remember: let's be angry but still be controlled. This is something that's not going to go away, even now. Even though this spotlight is on it, it's not just gonna disappear. It's really not. Because there's decades and decades and hundreds of years of this same thing [going on]. But I will say that I am encouraged by what I'm seeing. There's some things that are changing, some of it’s genuine and some of it's not genuine. You can sniff out the non-genuine ones as soon as you see them you're like ‘yeah right.’ But I mean some of it is genuine and just to see the number of white people and different races that have actually said, okay, I'm gonna go to the peaceful protest. Some of them might not turn out peaceful at the end, but it's not just us as Black people in the protest now. There's plenty of other people and I'm like wow. For me, that's big.

Conner:

So, you're seeing something's a little bit different this time?

Southern:

Yeah, for sure, like 100%. At first, I was like, it's going to die off in 10 minutes. But we're weeks in now! It's still going. And then when I saw it was not just in the U.S., it was [in] London [too], I was like, wow, this is this definitely different.

Conner:

Yeah, it’s catching on.

Southern:

Yeah, it's not just in the city. Because normally it's in that one city where the event happened and it's like a riot or a peaceful protest that turns non-peaceful and then it'll die off, [but], this went from city to city to state to state.

Conner:

And it's sustained. If anything, in some places its growing.

Southern:

Yeah, it's growing. So, I’m like, okay, this is excellent, and that's what gives me hope and encouragement. This is great and then at the same time, I hope that we can just get somebody to understand – and that's never going to be everybody, it's never going to be everyone in the world, it's not going to be a complete overnight change, but just [getting] some people to say, man, I didn't even think about it that way. I didn't realize that I was even saying things that way. I didn't realize that I was doing things unintentionally that way. And that's what the biggest thing for me is, to just give people that that avenue to say, man, I can do that differently. I can say that differently. I can think differently. I can probably support someone differently. I can support a Black business. I can do things differently now to help change the culture of the norm. Like it's just been embedded that way. This is the way things were dealt with and we went along with it.

Conner:

Yeah and everybody did, right?

Southern:

Everybody did. It was just the way it was.

Conner:

Sweep it under the rug. Like we kind of know it's there and it comes up once in a while and then we go, ‘all right, well it's not affecting me personally and so I’m just going to move on because it's hard.’

Southern:

It's hard, it's difficult. It's really something that's kind of edgy, and you're like ‘I don't want to bring that up. I don't want to talk about it. Yeah, it’s in the news, but it'll be gone next week’ –

Conner:

It’s uncomfortable.

Southern:

Yeah, it's really uncomfortable to talk about. It's really like, I don't want to say the wrong thing, I don't want to be that person that speaks and I say the wrong word. That's why I think conversations like this are major. They're huge because, like you laid out, this is a safe place. If I say a wrong word, it's not intentional. I'm telling you up front –

Conner:

I'm trying.

Southern:

Exactly. It's not intentional and I just want you to call me out on it so I can know. This is not an easy thing to do.

Conner:

Right.

Southern:

And then, for me as a Black male, I want to have that conversation with my white colleagues, my white friends, but I don't want to make them uncomfortable.

Conner:

Yeah, you're talking about this and I’m like, it's the same thing, right? You're like, I don't want to say the wrong things. Well, I don't want to say the wrong thing [either] and so we just we avoid it –

Southern:

We just avoid it.

Conner:
And we got to stop that.

Southern:

That's exactly right. If we stop just avoiding it, then it will be addressed and [we know], okay we can talk about it. We can discuss it. We can say, you know what? I agree. This shouldn't happen that way, it was wrong. We've been wrong. And you look even in the sports world, the NFL [saying], “We were wrong.” That's major!

Conner:

People saying they were wrong – that's one of the things that I’ve been impressed with and to me, that's different.

Southern:

Yes.

Conner:

They're not making excuses and saying, “Well, it was a different time and blah blah blah," they're just saying, “We were wrong, we should have done more.”

Southern:

Yeah, and that's major!

Conner:

Yeah!

Southern:

That is major to me. When I saw the NFL players’ posts, I was like, the NFL is never going to come out and say, “we were wrong.” I said, they're not going to say. They're just going to donate some money to some charity and say, this is what we did. But not even a week later, they were like, “We were wrong.” And I was like, whoa wait a minute . . . like the NFL said that? This is different. And it's good.

Conner:

Yeah.

Southern:

It's good.

Conner:

I feel like those are really powerful words, right? “I was wrong.”

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

That's powerful stuff to [apologize] and not qualify it.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

That was it.

Southern:

“We were wrong.”

Conner:

“I’m gonna keep making mistakes but I recognize that [my behavior] was wrong, so we can do better moving forward.” Well, in the spirit of that, I have thought about us having a conversation like this many months ago. It occurred to me and I thought, you know what, we don't have a lot of Black veterinarians that I've worked with over the years. Maybe a handful. I can count them on one hand. And I said, god, you know what? Carl's got a different perspective and I should ask him if we could do a show like this.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

And I was scared!

Southern:

[laughter]

Conner:

Even when I called you for this one, I didn’t want you to feel like, all right you gotta be The Black Veterinarian who tells the story [of Black veterinarians]. But I was like, I gotta get over that.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

But, I was wrong. We could have had this conversation months ago and I'm a little bit ashamed to admit that I thought it and then didn’t follow through.

Southern:

[laughter]

It's tough, though. It's not an easy conversation, and honestly you have to be comfortable with that person to even try and say, hey let's talk about this. It's not [a conversation] that you can just pick up like, hey, did you watch that game last night?

Conner:

[laughter] Yeah.

Southern:

Like, let's talk about how you've been living for your whole life. It’s totally different.

Conner:

Yeah it's deep stuff. . . So, we could quote statistics but what I really think impacts people is stories.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

So, what I would like to hear from you is – if you're comfortable sharing – is if you have stories about how [being Black] has impacted you, that you want to share. We don't have to limit it to your experiences in vet med, but I feel like, again, telling stories is helpful for people.

Southern:

We've all got stories. When I say we, I mean everybody that's African-American, has stories. I can date them back to middle school up to practicing veterinary medicine in Houston, Texas. We could talk about that for hours, just practicing [medicine], but there's always three stories that stand out in my mind.

Conner:

Okay.

Southern:

So, we're in high school. I have five really close friends, all of us are males. We were in the dollar store. [We] went to get some candy and – you've heard this story time and time again, I'm sure – we go down one aisle and here comes the guy working. [He] follows us down this aisle, we turn another aisle, he comes right behind us again in the other aisle. Then we turn another aisle, and one of my friends is fed up, he's like “can I help you?!” and the guy's like, oh shoot! Like [my friend] caught him off guard and he was like “oh no I uh,” mumbling, stumbling over his words and then he went back to the to the register. And we're like, let’s just forget it, let’s just go, and we didn’t even buy anything.

Conner:

But, he knew he was wrong.

Southern:

Yeah! Like, clearly. And we weren't even doing anything. We had just come from the gym, we were in basketball shorts and t-shirts, and we just wanted to get some candy and some drink [phrasing in original].

Conner:

Yeah! You're a teenager! Normal stuff.

Southern:

Yeah! That’s it. Just candy and drink. The dollar store is cheap, we got like 10 bucks, five of us, let's get some bags of candy and some juice and go back to the gym. And we were like, just forget it. For us, that's just what happens.

Conner:

Yeah, it's an annoyance but that's part of it and-

Southern:

Yup, but why? Again, that's just the way it was.

Conner:
But nothing escalated from there-

Southern:

Nope.

Conner:

And yet that story still sticks in your mind?

Southern:

I remember the aisle we turned down, I remember what the guy looked like, I remember everything about that day and I probably was maybe 14-15, something like that.

This next one is pretty much scary. So, I’m in vet school and one of my buddies came down, one of these same five friends, and me and him, we're coming down where we're coming from – we're driving back from Walmart. Coming from Walmart, [down] back roads of Auburn. We gotta get from Auburn to Tuskegee because that’s where the Walmart was, and we turned down the street and here comes a police car behind us. Followed us for about 10 minutes, maybe, we weren't speeding, our headlights were on, tags are registered, everything's in place, and –

Conner:

Because you think about that all the time.

Southern:

Yeah, always. I mean, that's the first thing you think about when you when you see them pull behind you. Was I speeding? Nope. My tag registered? Yep. Headlights on? Yep. You go through all your little checklists, like, what did I do wrong now? And she follows us for a few miles, flicks the [police] lights on, pull over, and this lady comes – it's a lady; a white, female lady – and she comes up and she sees my friend is driving – driving my truck, and I'm in the passenger side – and she looks in with her flashlight, looks in the back seat, sees something on the ground – it's just on the floor of my truck – and she immediately draws her weapon and says “put your hands on the on the dashboard and hands on the steering wheel.” And I'm like, what in the world is going on!? And my friend's like frozen, he didn't even know what to move. And she was like, “I said hands on the steering wheel!” And he's like frozen; she literally had the gun in his face because he rolled the window down. And I'm saying, “officer what's the problem?”

“Don't speak!”

I'm like, all right, this is it. So, I just put my hands there, and this is when you can't say anything else now like, just leave it alone. And she was like “where's the gun?!” She thought she had seen a gun holster on the floor and there was no weapon in there. I did have a pistol, which I had a concealed carry license, but it was in the glove box where it's supposed to be, ammunition separated from the weapons. And this is in Alabama – you didn't even have to do that, but that's the way I did it. And she's like yelling at my friend and he's like. . . he don't even speak –

Conner:

He doesn't even know anything, yeah.

Southern:

And I'm like “ma'am, yes there's a weapon in here but it's concealed in the glove box.” And she's like “get out of the truck now!” so she gets out and we're like, what in the world is about to happen, you know?

Conner:

[quietly] That’s scary.

Southern:

Yep. My heart's racing, his heart is racing, and it's freezing cold.

Both: [nervous laughter]

Southern:

And we're like on the hood of the truck, shaking, shivering, cause, one, we're scared, two, we’re cold. And she's like searching through the truck and I say exactly where [the gun is]. I said, “it’s in the glove box. . . and the magazine is in the in the other glove box.” – I have one the armrest and then the glove box –

Conner:

Okay, yeah.

Southern:

So, she pulls it out and then another car comes. She calls for somebody to come back, and it's a Black guy. He comes–

Conner:

Does that impact you at all?

Southern:

It does! We're like, man, we're good.

And he said “y'all cold?”

“Man, we're freezing.”

“Y'all can get back in the truck.”

And I told him, I said, “look, I have a concealed carry permit. It's in my wallet.” I said, “she never asked me for it.” And I said, “I tried to talk but I just stopped talking,” and he was like, “let me have it real quick.” I gave it to him; he went back and showed her. She comes back – and like of course it takes forever – she comes back and hands me my whip and it's like completely dismantled; [she took] all my rounds out one by one and dropped them in my hand and the guy was like, “y'all are fine. You can go ahead and go.”

Like, hang on, what did we get pulled over for? And he was like “I don't know.” And of course, she never came so I was like–

Conner:

Yeah, she sent him to talk to you guys at that point.

Southern:

Yeah, I was like, “what did we get pulled over for?”

He's like, “I'm not sure. I'm gonna talk to her, but you all are free to go.”

So, I was like let's just go; let's get out of here. But I think about this all the time: Did she have to draw her weapon? Because when she came, yes, she might have saw something that she thought was a gun holster in the back seat, which, that's fine, it's nighttime, but she had her light and she clearly could see into the back of the truck.

This is what I think – could be wrong, I can't speak for her – but when she saw that both of us were Black, we were driving a truck, and it's a nice truck, she saw something in the back seat that she didn't know what it was, and she's like, all right, they either stole this truck or they're doing something they're not supposed to be doing. Let me just go ahead and handle this the way I think is best. She could have just asked us like, hey where you guys going? She didn't have a reason to stop us. There was no ticket. We didn't even get a warning for anything; there was nothing wrong. It's not like she said, hey, you got a busted tail light, or, I ran your tags and they're not up to date; it was nothing. When she came, you know, normally they say “You know why I pulled you over? You know why I stopped you?” –

Conner:

And you're like nope. [laughter]

Southern:

She didn't even ask that. She just immediately was like, “put your hands on the steering wheel. Where's the gun? Put your hand on your. . .“ like what in the world?!

Conner:

Did you sense that she was scared?

Southern

I think she was scared.

Conner:

Yeah, okay.

Southern:

I really do. I think she was scared but she didn't have to be! Jerrod rolled the window down, and immediately she’s like, where's the gun?! And we're like, whoa! What? How did it just escalate that quick? And we think about it, and he talks all the time like, we literally could not be here today depending on what moves he made and what moves I made. There's no one else out there with us; it would have been her story versus ours. And that one still like sticks out in my mind as one of the scariest times with police I've had. I haven't had many police run-ins. I've got speeding tickets and things like that, but I haven't been arrested or anything. . . nothing like that, but that was probably the closest I’ve come to –

Conner:

But the thing is, you weren't even worried about getting arrested, you were worried about getting killed-

Southern:

Killed! Yeah, literally.

Conner:

Yeah, like not knowing, what can I do to not upset you.

Southern:

Yep.

Conner:

And I've been pulled over and interacted with the cops and that's never been my worry. It's not. If I'm being honest, I’m always like, damn. When they’re like, you know why I pulled you over? Probably cause I was going too fast!

Both: [laughter]

Conner:

There have been times I didn't know, but sometimes I know exactly. Actually, my favorite time he didn't ask me. He's like, we all know. He's like, you were going this fast, this is your ticket.

Southern: [laughter]

Conner:

I was like, fair, you know? But I've never been in a situation where I was worried the *cop* was a danger to me. Like, the scene you're describing sounds – did you see the movie queen and slim when it came out?

Southern:

Unh uh, I did not.

Conner:

So, it came out not that long ago, and that's how that movie started. Eerily similar to what you just described, except it was one Black man and one Black woman. They're coming back from a date and she pulls them over and they don't know why – and I don't even remember if we ever figure out why in the movie, but she's a lawyer –

[Inaudible dialogue from the crew]

Conner:

What was it?

Topher (Crew Member): He changed lanes without signaling.

Conner:

Oh! He changed lanes without signing, something egregious like that. Topher was there, we saw that together. [sarcastically] Anyway, so, really really bad stuff you know changing lanes-

Southern:

[laughter]

Yeah.

Conner:

But, there was a reason. Okay. [The cop] asked them to get out of the car and, same kind of thing. She's a lawyer so she jumps out she's like, why are you asking us to get out of the car? And it just escalates and escalates and at one point he says, hey, can we speed this up? because he's cold and like that resonated with me too. But you guys were like, we're not gonna say anything, we’re not gonna say anything. So, was there a time – I’m gonna ask you this and you have your third story-

Southern:

I do.

Conner:

But, was there a time like when you were growing up - like was that a discussion that you had, with either your friends, your family, where somebody says, “if you're in an interaction with the police, this is what you do?” Were those conversations that you've had?

Southern:

We didn't have that exact conversation, but it was discussed. Don't talk back to the police. Don't run. Even if you did something wrong, just go ahead and go to jail. Like, you just go. You're not going to win trying to resist. We didn't have that laid out like, this is what you should do-

Conner:

Right, but you did-

Southern:

We discussed it, yeah.

Conner:

But I didn't have that discussion with my family. There was never a sense that you have to be careful or afraid of the police. It was just understood that that's who you call if you need help. Not, that’s who you have to kind of watch out for. And that’s scary, that-

Southern:

Yeah or act a certain way around, like-

Conner:

Yeah!

Southern:

And what you just said is – I have a son and a daughter now so that topic has to be discussed. And it has to be discussed multiple times at different age groups. I have to have it with them several times throughout their [lives]. They have that conversation over and over and over until they understand, like, this is the way it is and hopefully it'll change by then! Hopefully, you know, they're six months and three years old now but we still have to have that conversation.

Conner:

Yeah because you're not gonna feel safe sending them out without preparing them for that.

Southern:

I had somebody tell me – it was on tv actually – they were a Black man and he saw his white colleague say his children are just watching PBS and Nickelodeon now and he is trying to shield them from all this stuff. And the Black guy was like, unfortunately, I don't have that luxury. I have to sit down and let them see it and explain to them what's going on. Like, I have to-

Conner:

For their safety.

Southern:

Yeah, for their safety. I can't shelter them because they're going to be a part of it; they’re gonna be involved with it and that's another unfortunate thing, you know? And again, that's just the way it's been; the way it is. It's not right. It's not the way to do it, but that's the way we've been living.

Conner:

Yeah to survive. You're trying to survive and so you say, until we can get the change, this is what we have to do.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

So, I'm gonna get to your third story but I have one­ – so I’ve had to call the police a handful of times in my life, always the non-emergency line. I've called on people who I’m like, that person might be drunk driving, like somebody's driving erratically, I call the non-emergency line to let [the police] know about that. I've had a few things – just like weird situations – and I called them because I'm like, hey I would like you to look into this, and it makes me feel safer, right? Well, last week or whenever it was – Saturday, just a few days ago – driving to Ocala for my shift in the morning – I'm working the 7:00-4:00 shift so it's like 6:30 in the morning, still a little bit dark out but sun's starting to come up, there's a little bit of light – I'm driving, it's rainy and kind of crummy, and I see just off the shoulder on the left side of the road, there's a car. No hazards on, but there's just a car. Not the most unusual thing, but then as I'm driving – I'm on the highway, so I'm going exactly the speed limit, of course –

Both: [laughter]

Conner:

But so, I'm driving and then I see a man come out, a Black man, and as I'm passing he kind of waves his arms over his head, like trying to flag somebody down. Well, I'm not going to stop for anybody, for a variety of reasons, but I was like, oh, but I can call. So, I'm driving – I know we're not really supposed to do that – but I quickly look up the non-emergency line for Ocala, because that's probably closest, and I call the number to just say, hey, somebody can go help him. And for the first time ever – I called and I said, I'm between my work, or that's where the car was, got my information, and she said, I'll put this through to highway patrol because that's who would handle this, but she was gonna deal with that. And then I started thinking, I hope I did the right thing.

Southern:

Yeah

Conner:

And I've never thought that before. All the times that I've called the police, I'd never thought like, could me calling and sending somebody to help him potentially make that situation worse? Maybe it's the proximity to everything that’s going on right now but also, right now like tensions are high-

Southern:

Yeah, he might not want to see the police.

Conner:

I know!

Southern:

Of all people-

Conner:

And I was like, god, did I do the right thing? But I've always taken for granted that the police are there to help.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

And later that day, we're at the clinic and this this old man is on the phone, and we have no idea, but this old man calls like, no joke, like eight or nine times. He's trying to get ahold of his son; he's calling the clinic, he doesn't have the right number and we're like trying to help him but he's not really giving us good information. He, at one point, sounded like he was in like a home, an assisted living facility, and he said where it was and we look it up online, called that place, and they're like we don't have anybody there by that name. So again, I was like let's call the non-emergency line, maybe they can do a reverse lookup. So [the police] have these resources and that's who I call, but I’m just like, with all these discussions now about defunding the police, why does that have to be the police?

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

We could have somebody who doesn't have a weapon-

Southern:

Yup!

Conner:

Go check on the guy on the side of the road-

Southern:

Exactly! Exactly.

Conner:

We can have somebody who doesn't have a weapon go do a wellness check on this old guy and find him-

Southern:

Exactly!

Conner:

Guns freak me, out I'll be honest, I don't like them at all. Because, I think when you have a weapon like that and you're scared that's a dangerous mix.

Southern:

It is. You're 100% right.

Conner:

And we assume that the police are trained and they know what they're doing and they know how to de-escalate but they're people!

Southern:

They're humans.

Conner:

They're people and if they're scared, scared people do dumb things.

Southern:

Exactly. That's exactly right.

Conner:

And then you put them into positions that are scary and then we get surprised when they do dumb things.

Southern:

Just imagine, like, we pin animals down and what they do? They bite their way out.

Conner:

Yeah! That's a normal reaction!

Southern:

[laughter] So a human's gonna fight its way out! They're gonna be scared-

Conner:

Yeah! Your adrenaline's pumping-

Southern:

Exactly. And you expect them to be controlled and calm in a tense, strange situation – if you have a weapon, what are you gonna do? I'm gonna use my weapon to-

Conner:

But I think a lot of that – they're trained that way.

Southern:

They're trained that way.

Conner:

How many of us have heard the phrase, shoot first, ask questions later?

Southern:

Exactly.

Conner:

That is messed up.

Southern:

That's dumb!

Conner:

That is messed up.

Southern:

And they shoot to kill!

Conner:

Yeah and they're trained, like center of mass or something like that.

Southern:

Yup. Center of mass. Exactly.

Conner:

That's messed up!

Southern:

Yup.

Conner:

I don't know-

Southern:

Let’s go back real quick.

Conner:

Yeah.

Southern:

I think you definitely made the right decision-

Conner:

Thanks

Southern:

To call, because you don't know the situation. You're not there, you don't know. And he flagged you down, it wasn't like he was just out of his car like cleaning, he was flagging, so-

Conner:

Yeah, usually I assume people have cell phones but, right.

Southern:

Right. He flags you down: right decision. If you're just driving by and you see him like maybe emptying something out of his trunk, [and you’re] like, yeah I'm going to call somebody, like, what?! No!

Conner:

No, I wouldn't. Because, again, I kind of just assume everybody has a cell phone nowadays-

Southern:

A cell phone, exactly.

Conner:

But he was waving his arms and I was like I'm not gonna stop-

Southern:

Yeah, he needs some help.

Conner:

So, that was my thought. I was like, you need help, we have people who are supposed to do that, but I did…

Southern:

It crossed your mind?

Conner:

It did! And that's the first time it ever has. So, that makes me feel bad that it crossed my mind, that I had that thought, but in a way it's a good thing, I think, that this is coming to the forefront. Like as a white person, I'm also thinking, like, ugh, just a little bit in his shoes. Because, I think being a woman is also a little bit different, like we have a different perspective. Like walking somewhere by myself at night, I'm probably gonna feel differently regardless of the situation than a man might. There's different perspectives there and so there's a little bit of that understanding of, I should feel safe in this scenario but I don't.

Southern:

But I don’t, right.

Conner:

And I think that’s different scenarios, but I think that's a little bit of what Black people have been feeling for so long. Okay, question for you since this just came up, and then we're going to get to your third story because I keep asking questions. Do you prefer Black or African American? Or do you care?

Southern:

So, me personally?

Conner:

Yeah.

Southern:

That's all I can answer for. It depends on what you're describing it as. When you say – the thing I don't like is “Blacks.”

Conner:

Oh, ok

Southern:

When you add that ‘s’… When you say “Blacks” like to mean multiple people like – I'm fine for someone to say, he's a Black man. You don't have to say African American. I think African American is politically correct, nothing's wrong to use it, but if you were saying, “the Blacks” or you're adding the ‘s’ to put all of us in a group and you add that ‘s’ and make it plural, that's what drives us [crazy]: when we're “Blacks.”

Conner:

That makes sense to me. That's actually a good explanation.

Southern:

You know, a Black man, that's exactly what I am and that's how I see myself, as a Black man. You can, if you want to be politically correct, say African American, nothing wrong there either, but when you had that ‘s’ on the end that just makes it like. . .

Conner:

That makes sense.

Southern:

It makes you want to grit your teeth when it’s like “the Blacks.”

Conner:

No, that makes a lot of sense. So, if I say, you're a Black veterinarian?

Southern:

Yup, that's perfectly fine.

Conner:

Or you’re an African American veterinarian, you're fine with that?

Southern:

Yup.

Conner:

I just. . . I don't know because you hear people use it differently. . . But like you said, some people might have preferences and, certainly if you said, hey I would prefer like – and most of the time I don't need to [say Black or African American]. It's not like, oh, by the way, every time I refer to Carl, like obviously you're a veterinarian, but like when we're having conversations like this and talking about it, Black Lives Matter certainly rolls off the tongue a little easier than

Both, in unison:

African American Lives Matter. [laughter]

Southern:

For sure. I don't think anybody has a problem with just Black Lives Matter or, you're a Black boy, or a Black man, or we're in the Black community, it's just when you make it plural it's just. . . it doesn't. . .

Conner:

Yeah, I mean it would be the same thing as like, “this is a white man” versus “there's a bunch of whites,” like the connotation is different. No, I think that makes perfect sense. Okay, thank you for that explanation.

Southern:

For sure.

Conner:

Okay. Third story?

Southern:

So, the third was actually recent. So last year, during my internship, I was driving back and forth from North Carolina to Gainesville cause my family was still in Durham. One night – it's a Sunday night and it's late – I left home at like 4:00 p.m or something like that and it's a seven-hour drive. So, I'm driving back and, yep, I was speeding, so there. I’m in the wrong there.

Conner:

[laughter] You’re gonna own that.

Southern:

I'll take that 100%. I'm speeding and I come off a ramp and I stop to get something, like a drink or something, come off the ramp, get back on the highway, and the police comes and I'm like, crap, cause I knew I was speeding.

Conner:

Yeah, but you were speeding before? So, you now got off the highway and get back on the highway. . .?

Southern:

Yeah, I got off and back on but I was speeding when I got back on too. I was-

Conner:

You were hustling.

Southern:

Yup I was like I need to get there. I had to work in the morning-

Conner:

You're tired, yeah.

Southern:

Yeah! Yep, so I'm speeding; he pulls me over and he says, you know why pulled over? I said, yes, sir, I was speeding. And he said, all right, do you have your license and registration? And he came to my passenger window – I pulled off on the ramp and there were still cars coming on the left side so he came to the passenger window-

Conner:

Yeah that sort of makes sense, I guess, then he's away from traffic.

Southern:

And the thing that makes this one different is, when he came, I already had my hands up. [laughter] Like I was literally like this: both hands in the air.

Conner:

Oh, geez.

Southern:

And he said, do you know why I pulled you over? And I was like, yes, sir, I was speeding. And he said, all right, and then he said, you're okay. Like he was like, you're fine-

Conner:

He's a white officer?

Southern:

He's a white officer. He said, you're fine, and I still didn't move.

Conner:

Yeah.

Southern:

I was like, yes, sir I was speeding, he was like, all right let me see your license and your your registration. And I was like, it's in here, and I point down to my armrest, like, it's in here. I said, I'm gonna get my wallet out of here – like I had to predict for him everything that I was about to do. And the thing that's different about this time is, every other time I've been pulled over, I've never done it that way. The only reason that I did it that way now is because I'm thinking about Brittany and I'm thinking about Israel. I'm like, okay, something happens to me, then I'm no longer going to be with them, they're not going to have me to have me to help take care of them, and that's why-

Conner:

So, it wasn't anything different about the situation, it was your life situation was different?

Southern:

Yep and I was-

Conner:

Thinking about different responsibilities now.

Southern:

Like, I'm thinking about different things now. So, I'm like, I have my hands up, I point down to him and say, it's in here. And he's like, again, like you're fine, sir. It's okay. And I'm like, no no no, we're gonna do this-

Conner:

“You say that now but…”

Southern:

Exactly. If I make a wrong move, something drops, like I don't want any problems. And I had a ton of stuff with me: I had like luggage in the back seat, I had laundry that I had done in trash bags, so, there's a lot of stuff in my truck. And I'm like, look, he might be looking around and thinking where is this guy coming from-

Conner:

Like, I've been here before and when I wasn't doing anything, I wasn't even speeding then so-

Southern:

Yup, and then he said, you're fine, so, I opened up the armrest, I pulled it out – like you know how you do with two fingers-

Both: [laughter]

Conner:

Ah geez. Like, I'm like not doing anything else you can see everything-

Southern:

I have to literally pull it out of here and he's like, sir, you're fine, go ahead and pull it out. So, I pull my license out hand to him and I tell him my insurance and registration is in the glove box. He's like, you're fine, go ahead and get it. So, I reach out, hand it to him slow and then he says, where are you coming from? And I said, North Carolina. He was like, where are you going? I said, Gainesville. He said, that's a long drive. I was like, yes sir, it is. And I always say “yes sir,” “yes ma'am,” that's just the way I was taught and raised. And he's like, well, why are you going so fast? And I said, I'm just trying to get back, like I just want to get back, and he was like, okay, hang on a second. So, he leaves and comes back and he says, I caught you doing – whatever the speed was – I caught you doing such and such speed, and you were going 13 over. And I'm like, no problem. Like I'm not [saying] anything, I'm like, no problem, I'm willing. Go ahead and hand me my ticket, I will pay it, no problems. And he says, I'm going to give you a warning. And I'm like what?!

Conner:

Seriously?

Southern:

I'm like, whaaatt, wait a minute. . . and he was like, just slow down and [I] hope you make it back safely. And then I'm thinking like, okay, did he give me a warning because he knows the way I was acting? Did he give me a warning because he was just being generous? Did he give me a warning because he was white and I'm Black? I don't know.

Conner:

From my perspective, when you're telling that story, I'm thinking, this guy feels bad.

Southern:

That's what I think too.

Conner:

I think he feels bad. The fact that he legitimately pulled you over-

Southern:

Yeah

Conner:

And he knows that [he pulled you over for a valid reason], you know that, we all know that. Despite that, he's just like, dang, this guy is scared just because – like that was probably really powerful for him. Maybe he's had that happen before, maybe not, but he's probably like, I feel bad. And like, he looks in, checks everything out, checks that everything you said is legit, he probably runs things to be like, all right, this guy's fine, and he probably felt bad because, you know, everybody speeds.

Southern:

Exactly.

Conner:

Especially when you're like, I'm tired, I just want to get home-

Southern:

[laughter]

Conner:

But I guarantee like – I feel bad with you telling that story! That you feel like when you get pulled over for a very legitimate reason . . . And again, you're like, yep I'll take my lumps – when I speed I'm usually the same way like, yep, I speed all the time and you only caught me this one time, so really, I'm doing all right [laughter]

Southern:

[laughter] Right, like I'm against-

Conner:

But I've never felt that fear, so I guarantee this guy was just like, man, that's messed up. It's messed up because [the officer] hadn't done anything wrong. He hadn't done anything to make you feel that way and so he knew – which is kind of like. . . there's a little glimmer of hope there, right?

Southern:

Exactly, yeah! Like he shocked me. I was like, okay, I'm getting my ticket-

Conner:

You're like, yeah, I earned it.

Southern:

Yeah, I’ll take it. I had no problems and I was like, whoa what just happened? When I woke Brittany up and I told her what happened, she was like, whaaattt? Like even she was like, whaaaaat? I called my friends and they were like, whaaaatttt? They were like, you got a warning?!

Conner:

Especially for 13 over!

Southern:

Yeah! Like I don't even get warnings. Like my mom – females get warnings!

Conner:

I've never gotten a freaking warning, I always get the ticket.

Southern:

[laughter] Do you?

Conner:

Yeah, you know why? Because I don't cry.

[Inaudible dialogue from crew.]

Conner:

Oh, well yeah, there's was that. That was awkward. We don't have to get into that story. That could be a story for another show-

Southern:

[laughter] Oh, man.

Conner:

But yes, I did get pulled over – I was driving on a suspended license for a year!

Southern:

A year?! Wooaaahhhh.

Conner:

I didn't know! I didn't know. There was an issue with my insurance, like it had lapsed, and I thought it had gotten sorted, so I was paying my insurance for a year, driving along, thinking everything's fine. I had gone to the DMV to re-register our vehicles, nobody said anything during that time. Like during that year I had no reason to think I wasn’t fine.

Both: [laughter]

Conner:

Of course, I’m like an hour and a half from home, on the highway and I get pulled over, no idea why. Luckily it was near a rest stop, so I pulled into the rest stop and the guy was like, do you know why [I pulled you over]? And I was like, no idea, and he was like, uh your license is suspended, I’m like, what?! I’ve been driving back and forth to Ocala in a university vehicle, I was like, I’m sorry what? That was like the most shocked I’ve ever been and luckily the guy said there's two forms [of driving with a suspended license]. If you knowingly are driving on a suspended license – like I don't understand the charges in it but it's bad – but this was like a misdemeanor, this is like a traffic violation if you don't know [your license is suspended]. I guess it's their judgment if you know? Like obviously after he pulled me over, if I started driving, then I’m knowingly driving [with a suspended license], so I had to sit there. [Topher] had been working overnights and was sleeping. I called him several times, he never answered. I ended up having to call – because I needed two people to come out because somebody's got to drive my vehicle back, so I ended up calling Travis and Sarah and they drove out. I’m sitting in a freaking rest area for like two hours just waiting for somebody because, I’m driving on a [suspended license] so then I gotta go sort that out. . .

Southern:

Shoot.

Conner:

But I’m pretty sure he was just running people's licenses and saw that and was like, oh, pull this one over. I was like, I haven't done anything! This is one of the few times I’m not actually speeding.

Southern:

What in the world. . .

Conner:

But I was never scared. He didn’t let me off with a warning, though.

[laughter]

Southern:

I would have been terrified. If my license was suspended. . . I'd be done.

Conner:

Right? Yeah, for a year I was driving like that.

Southern:

I'd be done.

Conner:

That means I was driving very safely for a year; I didn't get pulled over in that time. I'd like to point that out.

Southern:

[laughter]

Conner:

[Topher] makes fun of me for it. He doesn't let me forget that one.

Southern:

I wouldn’t either, that’s a good one.

Conner:

So, we've had different experiences with the police.

Southern:

100%, yes.

Conner:

No doubt, and. . .

Southern:

And all mine aren't bad, like I have-

Conner:

Ehhhhhh, that second one's pretty bad. Having a gun pulled on you?

Southern:

No, like, all my experiences, like in general. I’ve had some positive [experiences with police], they're all not negative. But, 100%, I’ve had negative experiences with the police plenty of times.

Conner:

Yeah. Just because you're black.

Southern:

Just because I’m black. We say all the time, driving while black, or doing anything while black. You're just. . . being black. It's just is what it is. But I think you're right about that that last scenario, I think he just felt bad.

Conner:

Yeah, and that's something, you know?

Southern:

It's a positive to me.

Conner:

I would say that too. I would say that's a positive. And that's one of the things, like, women will be like, if you cry, you'll get out of the ticket because they feel bad.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

I was like, I can't do it. Can you imagine me just like working out the tears to get out of a ticket?

Southern:

[laughter] Nope!

Conner:

I was like, give me the damn ticket! But I think [the police] are human and if they feel bad they're like, all right, I’m gonna give this guy a break.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

Feels like this guy needs a break, so that's kind of cool.

Southern:

I'll take it.

Conner:

Yeah! Heck yeah.

Both: [laughter]

Conner:

So, what about your experiences in veterinary medicine?

Southern:

Probably the worst one ever was when I was in Houston. It was in a private practice and we get all kind of complaints just for practicing; like clients are angry, disgruntled, whatever. I don't even know, to this day, what she was angry about, but I came up to the front desk because she was letting the receptionist have it. And I come up and she's talking to him about me. And she's like just laying it out and I say, ma’am, let me help you like, I said, what is the issue? Because it's about me, let me help you. I love getting my complaint out, I love talking about and hearing it right then and there-

Conner:

[laughter] Yeah, yeah.

Southern:

And she's like yelling and screaming and I do like always do, like, ma’am, can you just calm down? Let's just talk about it. I asked her, do you want to come back into the room and talk? And she says a string of words – and I don't know what they were before, all I remember is the last two words – she said, in the last two words were, she called me the n word and then she followed it up “your n-word a-s-s.” So, I just stopped and I was like, did she really? I’m like okay. . .

Conner:

[Sigh] It’s the 21st century.

Southern:

Right! This is 2012. And she turned around and walked away, you know? She said it and she walked out the store [phrasing in original]. And I’m like, [sigh] so what do I do now? And everybody's looking at me like. . .

Conner:

Were there any other Black people in the facility or?

Southern:

[scoff] No.

Conner:

Yeah, okay so it's just you.

Southern:

It’s just me.

Conner:

And so, they're all stunned?

Southern:

So, I follow her out, I walk out behind her, and she's at the door like about to walk out and I say, “Ma’am, I don't know why you think that's okay to say that or why it's appropriate for you to say that, but I would appreciate it if you wouldn't come back.” And I said, “you're more than fine to take your care elsewhere, but I would appreciate it if you wouldn't come back.” Then, like always happens, here comes the apology. She's like, “oh, I’m so sorry, I didn't mean to say, that I was just frustrated,” and she stuck out her hand to shake my hand,

Conner:

[shocked laughter]

Southern:

And I just turned around and walked away. Like, I just left it. I was like, I’m going back – and I never saw her again, she didn't come back, of course, but she blew me away twice. The fact that she tried to shake my hand, one, after saying what she said, and she knew it was wrong cause she's going to apologize. I think she wanted me to blow up on her-

Conner:

Yeah so then she could feel justified.

Southern:

Yeah, exactly. She wanted me to like go back on her, call her out on her name, go off on her, and it's hard, like, I had to compose myself. That's why I took a second, I was just like. . . because I wanna-

Conner:

I'm impressed how you handled that!

Southern:

I wanted to blow up! Trust me, I did!

Conner:

But you still called her out!

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

You did call her out, it’s just that-

Southern:

Yeah, I didn’t let her get away with it. I stopped letting people get away with things; I have to say something. I can't just eat it and let it go. I had to say something to her, and when I told her, I would appreciate if you don't come back, that's enough for me. I don't want to see you again. I don’t want to deal with you again.

Conner:

Yeah, we're done.

Southern:

Don't come back. And I called the practice manager and told them, and they came and we had a whole conversation about it, and they were remorseful. I’m like, look, this is nothing new. This is just the way it is.

Conner:

But they were supportive?

Southern:

They were supportive, yeah.

Conner:

They were like, she's fired? She's done? Good.

Southern:

Yeah, 100%, they were on board with it.

Conner:

That's important.

Southern:

It is, it is. That’s major that they weren't like trying to justify [her behavior].

Conner:

[mockingly] “Oh, well, she spends this much money.”

No! I don't even want to hear about that!

Southern:

Yeah anytime they say “oh well,” I’m like, all right, I’m done. When the ‘oh wells’ come out, you're like unh uh, we’re done. But that one right there. . . like I had I finished [vet school] in 2011; that was early in my career-

Conner:

Yeah! You were a baby doctor.

Southern:

A baby! And I’m like, what in the world? And I told my dad about it and he was like he was like-

Conner:

[jokingly] “Oh well”?

Both: [laughter]

Southern:

Welcome!

Conner:

Yeah, welcome to your life!

Southern:

You're in Texas. You're a *young* person – I look even younger than I look now at that point – he's like, you're a young, Black man, you're gonna get that [response]. He's like, this is what's gonna happen to you for a long time.

Conner:

But you handled it! Even at that stage, you handled it so well.

Southern:

I credit it to them, to my parents, because, yeah, literally, I wanted to snap, I wanted to blow up, I wanted to do that, but it wouldn't have made anything but the situation worse. Like you said, she would have felt justified. She was like, see that's why I called him that, because he's acting like that. And that's what always happens. So, that's one of the problems-

Conner:

Even though you would have been justified for blowing up at her, to be honest. Super justified.

Southern:

Oh, man, I really wanted to. I really, really wanted to. I told Brittany about it and she was like, that's all you said?! [laughter]

Conner:

It's funny the different reactions she had. She's like, that's it?! And I’m like, dang, that was pretty impressive! But I think that's how you handle people like that, you know? You don't give them an excuse to feel like, yeah, that's right.

Southern:

That’s what I’ve always said.

Conner:

Because then this lady walks away and says, man. Maybe she thinks about things for half a second, like maybe.

Southern:

Maybe. I don't think she did. I don’t think she did.

Conner:

Yeah, I mean that's awfully optimistic. I know.

Southern:

I think she was like, dang it, like he didn't even snap on me. And then she probably didn’t think about it anymore. Like I bet to this day she's probably – hopefully not. I hope I’m wrong and now wherever she is, she's seeing this and remembers that interaction she had with me, and was like, dang, I was wrong in that interaction. I was wrong at that standpoint. But maybe not.

Conner:

Here’s what I find incredible about scenarios like that: I’m not naive enough to think that there aren't people who think that. I know that. But that you have people in this country who feel safe enough to say it! And I know that that's not okay to be like, oh, quietly, as long as you keep your racism under wraps it's okay. Like, I’m not saying that that's okay. But, that's amazing to me that that woman felt safe. That's amazing she felt safe enough – that you're right there and she can say!

Southern:

Yep, we were this far apart.

Conner:

We're two feet away and she can say that to you and then just feel holier than thou-

Southern:

And then turn around and walk away.

Conner:

Then walk away!

Southern:

Can you imagine if it had been the reverse roles? If I would have called her out of her name or if I had been the one to initiate that, she would have been trying to get me fired, it would be my worst complaint, she would have went and gotten the news. It would have been a huge ordeal. A huge ordeal!

Conner:

And then you're just like, yeah, it's Tuesday.

Southern:

[laughter] Right.

Conner:

Like, oh, man, that's messed up. And it's not the same thing, but I do feel like there are parallels between the experiences that women have as well.

Southern:

Yeah.

Conner:

When the #MeToo movement came out – and the whole point was [to] share your stories of where it happened to me too – and I remember when I responded back – when I had Facebook at the time – and my response was like, me too, but like of course me too. Of course, I’ve had situations where I have felt harassed or been harassed or felt uncomfortable, like I don't think any woman goes through her life and doesn't have that. And you sort of start to accept it and then . . . I’ve sort of stopped doing that. I look back and I feel a little bit ashamed of all the times that I allowed things to be said-

Southern:

Me too.

Conner:

By people who I care about and I’m friends with and I just brushed it off because I’m like, they're a good person, and you excuse it-

Southern:

You just call it ignorance. They're just ignorant.

Conner:

Yeah! And sometimes you call people out and it goes well and sometimes you call people out and it changes the relationship.

Southern:

Yup.

Conner:

And I thought, good. If it changes the relationship, I want somebody who I can call them out and they can say – and maybe their initial reactions are, I’m a good person, but over time I want them to reflect and say, okay, maybe there's something to that; I need to think about things differently. And I think that's what – we're still not there.

Southern:

No.

Conner:

In society, I get it. We want to feel like we're good people.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

I get that. It's hard when somebody calls you on something that you do that's not so great. But we're gonna to have to. If we want to move forward as a society we're going to have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Southern:

Exactly, that's the best way to describe it.

Conner:

Your first reaction is what it is. You're human, you're gonna have an emotional response. But then to take the time to say, all right, what did I do and what can I learn and how can I be better? Because I am a good person! Being a good person doesn't mean you always do the right thing. Doesn't mean you can never make mistakes like-

Southern:

Exactly, we’re human!

Conner:

But, how can I learn from this and try to do better next time? And I’ve got a long way to go because, like I said, there have been times when I was like, oh, I should have brought that up, or, I should have asked that. And I try to do more of that. I’ve had some conversations [with] students [who] are people of color – in Florida we've got a lot of people with Latin backgrounds and not a lot of Black students coming through-

Southern:

Nope.

Conner:

But I have had some conversations with [students of color] and we were just kind of scratching the surface but at least that little bit, you know?

Southern:

Trust me, for them, I guarantee you that was major. They're probably like, wow, she cares; she wants to understand; she wants to know how I feel about this. I can guarantee you it wasn't just like, oh, it's just another conversation with a faculty.

Conner:

And that's kind of sad in and of itself, right? Like, that's a low bar. . . That’s a low bar, to be able to have a conversation. So, what if you were gonna say, all right, white people in veterinary medicine, let's listen – because that's the audience here – what would you want white people to do? Because that's I think what a lot of people are thinking: what can I do? We can say things and there's platitudes but what would you want us – keeping it to vet med – within vet med, what would you ask your white colleagues to do?

Southern:

Stop being so judgmental off of looks. When we walk into the room, don't think, that definitely can't be the doctor, that just can't. Because I don't have a name tag on, 10 out of 10 times, they think, he ain't the doctor. Before I open my mouth, “he aint the doctor.” I come in the room after the technician's been in there, or a student even, [and] they'll say, “that other doctor” and I’m like, oh, someone else came in before me? Who came in before me? And [they’re] like, the doctor that just left, and I’m like, oh, the technicians. Then they're like, oh. I’m like just stop being so judgmental off-

Conner:

Yeah and they’re just making assumptions.

Southern:

Yep and that's a huge-

Conner:

That implicit bias.

Southern:

Exactly. If you would just be open and willing to accept that we are just as smart, just as capable, had the same education and training, and yes, we may look different, we may have a different way of talking and speaking, but just stop being so judgmental off initial looks. Because that right there just drives us from the get-go. And what I used to always get, and I still get is: are you old enough to even be a doctor? I’m like come on. Like how many times are y’all gonna say this? Like, I said-

Conner:

Like, no, have you heard of Doogie Howser? I’m 14.

Southern:

[laughter]

Exactly. Like I used to just take stuff. And I had one guy – I was going out to my truck – left my stethoscope in the truck, I pull it out, and I’m walking back in, and guy says – it's a white man – he asked me, do you know how to use that?

Conner:

[shocked gasp]

Southern:

And my response is, yup and I’m pretty good at it too, and I keep on moving. I didn't even look back, I just heard him in the back, he was like oh, okay, okay. I didn't even look back at him. I just said and I kept moving.

Conner:

Good for you.

Southern:

I just can't take it anymore. Why even say that, though? He's just judging me off of looks like-

Conner:

[Does he] think that's funny, or?

Southern:

I wish I would have been the one he would have come to see [in the clinic]. I wish he'd been the one I come in the room to see, that would have been ideal, but it wasn't of course [phrasing in original].

Conner:

[jokingly] And you put the stethoscope on backwards.

Both:

[laughter]

Southern:

Exactly! Like why are you judging me for the way I look? And people-

Conner:

I guarantee [he’d be like], oh, I was just making a joke, blah blah blah.

Southern:

Exactly.

Conner:

It's not funny.

Southern:

It's not funny. And, nope, it's not anything that I’m gonna laugh at. It's terrible. It was just like, why, hmm? Why do you have to judge me off – and then like there's a ton of other things, but if I could get just the white audience [to stop]. Because, yeah, [at] University of Florida there's not many Black doctors. And I would say, the clients that come [are] probably not expecting to see a Black doctor. They're really not. But I guarantee you, most of them after interacting with me are like, oh, it's not so bad. Like, that wasn't as bad as I was thinking. Because I’m sure they’re like, oh man, what am I about to get into? And I know that’s what they're thinking, like I know it! And people ask me all the time, like, why do you iron your scrubs? Like, man, I can't come in here wrinkled. I can't come in here like half stepping. I just can't.

Conner:

Do you feel. . . like this extra responsibility?

Southern:

100%. You've seen the transformation in my hair a little bit [in] the last few months...That's major for me. I kept my hair short, clean cut, for most of my career and I’m like, man, why can't I change my hair? Why can't I wear it in an afro if I want? Why can't I grow dreadlocks if I want? I’m like, why can't I? And then the reason, the real reason that I’m going my hair – growing dreads – is because I want some Black boy somewhere to be able to say, oh shoot, he's a doctor and he has locks.

Conner:

He looks like me.

Southern:

He looks like me, yeah.

Conner:

And that doesn't matter.

Southern:

He can do that. It's possible and that's the-

Conner:

You break it down from the inside though, you know?

Southern:

For sure, yeah. I’m like, you don't have to just have a clean cut. Like, just stop judging me. I iron my clothes, one, because I have to, two, because I want to. I want to be. . .

Conner:

Presentable, yeah.

Southern:

Yeah but I have to be though. When I come to work, I guarantee if I come in with wrinkled clothes or if I come to an interview sloppy looking, one, I’m not gonna get anything past that interview, and two, I’m not gonna get any respect. Leave it at what it is, that's just the truth. But, like I said, the biggest thing is just stop judging. And that sounds like, oh, that's it? No that's. . .

Conner:

That's huge.

Southern:

It's huge! Just for the guy in the parking lot like, “you know how to use that thing?” I’m like, really dude? Do you know how to use one?! I’m like, yeah, and I’m pretty good at it too.

Conner:

That’s a great line.

Southern:

And then just walk away.

Conner:

All right, so, if you and I are walking together and the guy says that to you, do I call that guy out? Do I keep my mouth shut? Like, what would you want if we're in that situation? What would you want a white colleague to do?

Southern:

Mmmm, that's an excellent question and what I would say for that white colleague is if they feel compelled to speak up – because I’m going to say the same thing I said – if they feel compelled to speak up in that moment, do so. Why not? Why not? You don't have to, sure. We're not saying that we *want* you to do that, we want your respect, sure, but, if you feel compelled, we're gonna be like, heck yeah! We're gonna be like, that's what I’m talking about! We love that support. We love it.

Conner:

Okay, good! Yeah, I don't want people to worry and be like, oh, well, you don't need me to protect you, or. . . you know what I mean? Like, I imagine somebody could feel like, oh, is it my place? Or whatever. Because my thought would be, are you kidding me right now? Are you serious? Like, what?

Southern:

So, one thing that matters in this scenario is, if you catch it. Sometimes they don't even catch it. They're like, oh, this guy's making a joke. Like, that ain't a joke!

Conner:

Yeah, that's not a joke.

Southern:

It’s not a joke, and in that scenario, if you and I were walking, I imagine you probably would say something to him or you probably would say something to me like, oh, you handled that appropriately. And we're not asking you to go off on the guy or go off on a tangent, like, let me tell you how good he is, like we don't need defense. We don’t need that. But if you feel compelled then. . .

Conner:

Well, I can imagine myself saying, “that is completely inappropriate,” and just leaving it at that. Like, there was no need to say that.

Southern:

Yep and that's it. And move on.

Conner:

Like not escalate the situation, but also like, no! It's just a small thing. . .Clients are always a tricky, tricky situation in the world too, but. . . I’ve fired my fair share of clients and I don't tolerate when they're disrespectful to anybody on the team.

Southern:

Me neither.

Conner:

If you're rude to the students and then you're real nice to me? Don't matter.

Southern:

I hate that!

Conner:

Oh yeah, I know, it's the worst.

Southern:

I hate it.

Conner:

No, you have to be respectful to everybody here, otherwise you take your animal and you go wherever else you go.

Southern:

Get outta here

Conner:

Here is your records, they're right here for you.

Southern:

No matter how much money you have.

Conner:

Yeah, exactly. In fact, the more you have, the more I want you out of here. Buy somewhere else.

Southern:

Because you feel more entitlement with more money.

Conner:

Absolutely. Like, no, that doesn't earn you the right to treat people like crap. There's no amount of money you can pay here that earns you the right to treat people like that. And *because* we don't have a lot of people of color in in our profession, I haven't been in [that] situation with a client or somebody. I’ve been in plenty of situations where they're disrespectful and I'll be like, no, these are the rules. Like, [the client] doesn’t want to work with students? Cool, there's plenty of hospitals that don't have students. Go to one of those. Or just people who are being disrespectful, I’ve called them out. And I know the technicians appreciate that support when they're getting dumped on and then [the client] comes to the doctor and they're like, oh, hey, everything's great, like, yeah right. I’m not buying it. So, I’d like to think that in that same circumstance, I would behave in the same way. I think it's tough, though, for people to always know – and like you said, the first thing is probably recognizing that it wasn't okay.

Southern:

Yep

Conner:

And even just saying to you like, hey, are you cool? Are you good? But it’s tough.

Southern:

From you all’s standpoint, like from being a white faculty here – and I'll speak to this real quick, too, because I’ve had client complaints. We get them all the time. One day, Travis pulled me into the aisle and he's like, “hey,” talking about this complaint. And he told me about the complaint and before he let me speak, he said, “let me ask you this: do you feel like you got a complaint because you were Black?” And I was like, what the heck did he just ask me? [laughter] Like, I wasn't expecting him to say that. And I was like, “to be honest, that's exactly why I got this complaint.” Because he knew it was a bogus complaint; he knows who I am at this point. And he was like, “do you feel like you got it because you were Black?” And I was like 100%. And he was like, all right, we're done. I don't need to say anything else; I don't have to go and go through the whole, “let’s learn from something.” And he told me, I understand that there's plenty of people here at University of Florida who feel entitled, and they have money. And like, he knew! Because it's not [me]. And he was like, all right, you're good. You understand, I understand. There was nothing more to be said. You and I are on the same page. Done. And that to me, like – he didn't use that that instance to say, “oh, well you could have did this differently; you should have said this differently,”-

Conner:

Yeah, you did everything fine. He was like, I recognize there's nothing you could have done differently.

Southern:

Yep. There's nothing you could have said, nothing you could have done. You could have said these exact words, what they want to hear and it’s still-

Conner:

And that’s supportive, right? That recognition is important.

Southern:

That’s supportive, yes. Just him saying that and seeing that. . . I was like, man, I know you all have my back. I knew that, yeah, but it was just like, man, that was-

Conner:

But that's a subtle thing, like you said. Because you could say, okay, we get complaints sometimes and sometimes they're legitimate [and] you can do something better. And that’s a tough situation for you personally and also for supervisors to be like, is this real? It’s also trusting you to the point of saying, look, if he screwed up, he'll admit it. Like, “I probably could have handled that better.” And so just asking you point-blank like, “is this just because of your skin color? And if so, we're done here”. And so, yeah, that's a good thing. It’s just giving you the benefit of the doubt.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

And saying, look, I know you and I want to hear from you before I just assume you must have screwed something up.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

We would all like that, right? We'd all would like that to be extended to us. Like hear me out before you make a judgment. Don’t judge me.

Southern:

Don't judge me! To me, it's coming back to [that]; that's what all this is about. Even back in slavery time, we look different, so we got judged and that was it. I really think that the more this happens, just a conversation, the better it's going to be. Because I can tell you numerous stories, I can tell you numerous encounters, [but] until we just get comfortable talking about it. . . since this whole thing with George Floyd has happened, I’ve had zero conversations at work. And I wouldn't have them at work anyway, but no one's even said anything to me. I don't expect them to. I don't want them to because-

Conner:

Work's not the place.

Southern:

Work is not the place, yeah. But I’ve had two text messages and you were the one phone call that reached out to me, just saying, hey, I support you if you need anything. And again, not that we need that, but that just shows me, this is different. Every other time this has happened in the world-

Conner:

Everybody lives in their own bubble and does their own thing.

Southern:

It's just like, oh, there's another major event in history, or another event that happened; but the phone call from you was major. Like huge. Huge, huge huge. And then those two text messages weren't from people who I would say are my friends. It was just a co-worker calling-

Conner:

Like hey, you good?

Southern:

Just saying, hey, I understand things are kind of weird in the world right now and do you need anything? Are you okay? Are you good? I’m like, man, that's huge. It's huge.

Conner:

It shouldn't be huge. It's a little bit sad to me that it's huge, but you take what you get sometimes and it’s progress right?

Southern:

It's progress, yes.

Conner:

It's a sign that people are recognizing – as a white person, I recognize that this moment feels different, right? And you have a lot of people who I think internally are like, yes, this is important, we agree, Black Lives Matter and this is not okay. This is not okay, but feeling sort of helpless and not knowing what to do, then also, frankly, everybody's got their own lives. Everybody has their own thing. But a switch flipped where people are like, you know what, enough is enough.

Southern:

Enough is enough, it’s not right.

Conner:

And whether it's because the pandemic is happening and everything's a little weird anyway, and also, just how awful what happened to George Floyd [was] and just watching that and seeing that. . . it's just awful.

Southern:

If you can watch that and not be disturbed by that then something's wrong. Something is wrong with you and you should seek help immediately.

Conner:

But then you have all the other stories; here in Florida, we have the Trayvon Martin - George Zimmerman situation. Imagine if that had been caught on tape, if things would be different. You have all these stories, and the fact that [what happened to George Floyd] was caught very clearly on tape, the entire thing – and again it's sad that it takes that – and since then, [at] all the protests video cameras are there and that's powerful stuff and I think that's part of it. People will probably analyze it for a long time, but this feels different. So, I appreciate that you were willing to come on and talk about this, because it's not always easy and I think that we should sort of pledge to keep doing it.

Southern:

I think so too.

Conner:

Let's keep talking about it.

Southern:

It can't just stop here. It has to keep going. And even, I think that we honestly should have – because like there's not much diversity, and by diversity, I mean like Black males or females in vet med, and when there are, we honestly stick together. We link up, we hang out because-

Conner:

You have a somewhat shared experience, right?

Southern:

Sure. Like, you and I can come and talk, but it’s not going to be the same as if I go talk to another Black doctor. We're not going to have the same conversation. Sometimes I have to change the way I talk at work; I use different words, different terminology, it's just the way it is. I really think that if we could just increase the amount of Black veterinarians we see and we get – even just students. Like how you have a hundred and some students, and maybe one or two of them are Black?

Conner:

If that.

Southern:

If that!

Conner:

Almost always not.

Southern:

Like how?

Conner:

I was in South Africa where the population is 75% Black, and in the vet school there was – I don't know the numbers – but it was 90% white.

Southern:

That's what I’m saying, like how?

Conner:

I have some thoughts on that, on why. The hard part is, I think a lot of the reasons that we don't see more Black people in veterinary medicine are issues that start when they're children, right?

Southern:

Yep, I agree.

Conner:

I think universities and vet schools and things like that-

Southern:

They’re not exposed to it.

Conner:

Exactly, but then there's also the financial implications: it's expensive to go to vet school and to have the debt for a long time. Obviously, the representation is an issue [too]. Not seeing somebody looking [like you] and being like, hey, that's a job I would consider. But there's so many other things. And we all like to say everybody's got opportunities, but everybody doesn't have the same opportunities.

Southern:

No.

Conner:

People are talking more and more about equity versus equality and I think that there needs to be more that veterinarians – whether that's vet schools, or the AVMA, or whatever – we need to start doing more, *earlier* in people's lives to make a difference.

Southern:

Exactly.

Conner:

So, maybe that's what the next show can be about.

Southern:

We should, yeah.

Conner:

We can get into specifically how can we increase [diversity]. . . Maybe, just maybe, veterinary medicine could look like America. Maybe we could get generally better representation, not just from Black Americans but, we don't have diversity.

Southern:

We don’t.

Conner:

It is a profession, right now, of rich white women.

Southern:

Yep. When I was in school, – I wish this was the one PowerPoint I would have saved – I don’t remember who it was, but they came and gave us a presentation, and they broke down the demographics of veterinarians. And it's number one, of course, white women, second is white men, and when it came to Black men way down in the little bar graph, we were less than one percent. Like how do you get less than one percent? And this was at Tuskegee, and they produce the most Black veterinarians as a whole. And my thing is, I applied to Auburn undergrad because I knew they had a vet school – and that was part of my thing, I wanted to apply where somebody had a vet school. I applied to Auburn and I got denied, and I still remember the letter to this day. I remember it said, “you don't meet the qualifications of an Auburn student.” And I was like, what in the world does that even mean? Like, I’m 17 years old, like, what does that even mean? And then – this is probably wrong – but I’ve always held a grudge against them since then.

Conner:

[Laughter]

Southern:

Since then! Like, what does that even mean? And I didn't apply to the vet school there, of course.

Conner:

Yeah, you're like, screw them.

Southern:

Exactly. I was like, what does that even mean, “you don't meet the qualifications?” Yeah, I wasn't a 4.0 student in high school-

Conner:

I wasn’t either.

Southern:

Exactly. I was going to say, most people aren’t.

Conner:

Like, you're only taking 4.0? I'd like to see the GPA of everybody else who came through.

Southern:

Exactly. Like what in the world. . . We just need to. . . in some kind of way increase the amount-

Conner:

Some of the things. . . people are making changes and they're starting to make some strides in admissions processes and things like that-

Southern:

I’ve seen that, I agree.

Conner:

To say that it's not just GPA and test scores, because that isn't equal. Somebody who can afford to take the exam four times is not the same as somebody who takes it once and that’s what they get. There's some privilege there. You're selecting for people who have additional means, right? And so, I think there's some recognition that, guess what, maybe that test score isn't really telling you everything you think it is.

Southern:

Go talk to the person.

Conner:

Exactly. And there are still schools right now who accept students without an interview. They're like, oh, your grades are amazing! You have a 4.0! And you just take them in?

Southern:

Which is ABSURD to me.

Conner:

And I’ve been on admissions committees and I’ve interviewed students, and – even just internships, residents, and just working with people over the years – somebody who's the valedictorian and had a 4.0 in their vet school class and then comes to the internship and you're like what?!

Southern:

What in the world!

Conner:

Stay away from my cat, you know? Everybody has those stories. We know that's not how things go, and yet we just go, well, we don't have anything better so we'll leave it. Well, you know what, let's try harder.

Southern:

Let's try harder! Try a little bit harder, just look a little bit deeper, and just be a little bit more inclusive. I guarantee you're skipping over a couple of great candidates.

Conner:

That's where I think veterinary medicine can do better, but we have to start so much earlier. It can't just be the people who are applying to vet schools. [First], we don't have a lot of people of color applying for vet school. But it can't just be undergrad either; I think it's got to be earlier. I think we need to get out and get more involved and take more responsibility than saying, well, the class looks pretty close to what the admissions rate. That that's a cop-out.

Southern:

Right.

Conner:

So, all right, I think maybe you'll need to come back and we'll have a more in-depth talk about that and how we can sort of change things in vet med.

Southern:

I think so. 100%

Conner:

We're going to fix it. No big deal, right?

Both:

[laughter]

Southern:

Nope! [laughter]

Conner:

Hundreds of years of problems, and we'll get them sorted in a couple podcasts. No, obviously change takes a long time-

Southern:

It takes people willing to sacrifice.

Conner:

But every step -

Southern:

It's got to be somebody willing to do it, and I say, why not? Let's start it.

Conner:

Yeah, today's a good day. Carl, thank you so much for coming and having this conversation. I really appreciate it and I think we need to continue the conversation.

Southern:

Of course. Thank you for doing it.

Conner:

Thank you.

Conner:

Thanks for listening to today's show. I'd like to thank Topher, my producer. You can follow us on Twitter or Instagram @VetJournalClub. Our website is veterinaryjournalclub.fireside.fm. Email us with questions comments or show ideas at veterinaryjournalclub@gmail.com and remember to check back weekly for new episodes. We'll catch you next time.