

Corey Andrew Powell (00:02):

I am joined today by Rheon Gibson, the owner and creator of the Dizz Wizz series, which is a motivational children's book series geared towards minorities and changing the mainstream perspective of minorities. Rheon, welcome to Motivational Mondays.

Rheon Gibson (00:17):

Oh, thank you for having me, sir.

Corey Andrew Powell (00:18):

Well, it's my pleasure to have you here today, where we began that part about changing the mainstream perspective of minorities. I realized in preparing for this interview that doesn't really pertain to just the perception of the, the public. It's also the perception of who we are, right? The perception of who we are based on what we've seen represented in the public media and entertainment. So I, I felt on that to be interesting, but in any event, let's begin by talking about your Dizz Wizz book series. First, who is Dizz Wizz and why'd you create the book series and what sets it apart from other children's books?

Rheon Gibson (00:53):

The Dizz Wizz that's actually my son's nickname. So that's where I got the name for the book series from, and the characters. I actually, based on my relationship, uh, me and my son's relationship. So a father and son perspective. What brought about the creation that it is the Dizz Wizz series is just me figuring out how to utilize my social, emotional background and, uh, Master's Degree in school counseling, as a means to, uh, positively impact a lot of the clientele I was seeing. I had an experience with my son that just, you know, kind of form the, the, the premise of the first book. So after I did that and had a social emotional focus with that, and a great moral concept, uh, embedded in the book, and then I got a lot of great feedback from it, and then it just turned into a series. So that's kinda how it happened

Corey Andrew Powell (01:35):

That's excellent. And I know you're on your third book now, but I believe there's going to be, it's a series of eight books total, correct?

Rheon Gibson (01:41):

Yes, sir. Tim and, uh, school counseling, the group curriculum, uh, runs six to eight weeks. So I figured, Hey, if I create a eight book series, you know, school counselors could be able to purchase those materials and create their own curriculum for groups, uh, six to eight weeks.

Corey Andrew Powell (01:54):

Oh, wow. That's wonderful. I didn't realize you actually created it as a, as part of a, a school curriculum. I thought they were just sort of more entertainment books for kids, but that's a really bigger function for the work, to make it a curriculum.

Rheon Gibson (02:05):

Yes, sir. And, um, like I said, they're not, uh, aligned with the common core standards, but they could definitely be utilized in a social, emotional context. Each book is, uh, has a different social, emotional lesson embedded inside.

Corey Andrew Powell (02:17):

Yes. So I'm glad you brought that up because I know you're on your third book now, which we'll get to, but I do want to go back and maybe just talk a little bit about the two so we can bring it to where we are currently. So the first one was called, "Speak it into existence." So tell me about that book, why you wrote it and, and what it's about.

Rheon Gibson (02:32):

Well, really, I think, uh, the foundation of being successful with anybody is learning to believe in yourself, learning how to, uh, shut off that negative self-talk and, uh, transform that to positive self-talk. So that's what that Dizz Wizz speaking into existence is about. The first one is about, you know, um, believing in yourself, even in tumultuous circumstances, or even if you in the face of failure, instead of internalizing that failure, use that failure as a teaching moment and, uh, modify your approach so you can have a more fruitful outcome. So that's how that first book came about. The second book is Dizz Wizz, Hungry, Charlie. That's about making connections with others that are different from ourselves. And that could be a difference in racial background. That could be a difference in, uh, sexuality. That could be a difference in religion, whatever it

may be instead of ostracizing and isolating, we should be embracing and understanding. And, uh, so that's what that book is about.

Corey Andrew Powell (03:24):

Yes, well, you know, I commend you on both of those because it has to start with children because their minds are so open and not what I would say contaminated yet to bias and prejudice. They're so loving and open.

Rheon Gibson (03:37):

I love the way you put that —contaminated. You know, um, because I, as a school principal of, uh, elementary building, you get to see just how different kids and adults are. Like, I could see two students who are second, third grade, go fist to cuffs with their best friend. And then in the next 30 minutes, everything is behind them. They're working together, they're collaborating. And I think about adults, some of us are still holding on the grudges and negative situations from years ago, and we still have not let go of that. And sometimes that prevents us from, you know, reaching our maximum potential. So I, I take a lot of little characteristics from my student populations because they do have a lot of, uh, resilience and a lot of just excellent components that I don't think are highlighted. So I try my best to spotlight those key characteristics are.

Corey Andrew Powell (04:22):

Yeah. That's wonderful because I know for me, I've had a lot of conversations in the past week or so about new year's resolutions on different podcast conversations. And one of the main things that has come up would be, you know, before you can move forward, you have to let go of a lot of stuff, like, you know, make room for the new stuff by letting go of grudges of the past. And you're right. That's something that I think a lot of adults struggle with kids just move on and they're like, you wanna go play? And it's like, yeah, it's fine. You know, in five minutes. So, so tell me about, uh, Officer Tennessee, which is the third book. I'm, I'm very curious. I, I love that title. What's that one about?

Rheon Gibson (04:57):

Yes, sir. Uh, that that's about Dizz Wizz officer Tennessee is all about breaking down misperceptions, misunderstandings, and, you know, bridging our perspectives to understand and come together as a community. And I utilize two touchy topics. Um, I utilize police and I utilize pit bulls and, you know, oftentimes the stigma attached to both of those could be negative. And the storyline in that book is just really great. And it just does a great job of just bridging, you know, from often times, like you said, a little earlier, sometimes our, uh, the perceptual lens that we look through can be tainted from past experiences. So sometimes we don't, we, we go into situations with pre-dispositional beliefs, and this is a book that's just kind of designed for you to set those aside and just really experience the fullness of someone, without those prepositional beliefs, tarnishing that interaction.

Corey Andrew Powell (05:46):

Yeah. It's so wonderful. You're doing this, getting to them at a young age and you're an elementary school principal, correct? At little John. Yes. Yes, sir. And so, yeah, that's like the really early stages of development. So the idea is if you can get in those minds early, right? And kind of help them sort of navigate through a lot of those emotions and, and how to judge and build character within themselves. I think I, I just commend you on that. It's really, really important work you're doing. And I'll just give a little bit of your background from what I understand. Of course we've mentioned you're a principal, which at first did give me a little flashback because I spent a lot of my time in a principal's office as a kid <laugh> but I did turn out. Okay. <laugh> uh, thank goodness. But yes.

So you're an author, you're a principal at the, at an elementary school you're community leader. And you have obtained your bachelor's of science in sociology, a master's degree in social counseling and a master's degree in educational administration. So it's clear here to me that you have a passion for understanding human behavior. It's not just, you're not just, you didn't go to school just to be a teacher. There's a really specific interest. It seems you have human behavior, where does that come from for you?

Rheon Gibson (06:54):

Honestly, it comes from when I first got into role of educator, you know, I was started off as an instructional assistant and in my course of, uh, being an instructional assistant, I was working with a client and, uh, I was trying to deescalate the student who was, uh, really escalated. And in the process of doing so he just looked at me right in the eyes. And he said, I just wish I had someone that understood me the way I understood myself. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And I just really touched me. And I is kind of ignited, you know, my fire, my desire to understand others just as they understand ourselves, which I think is a basic, uh, human need. I think we all wanna be understood.

Corey Andrew Powell (07:27):

So when you speak of the idea of hoping that, or as I mentioned earlier about your book series, hoping that the books change the mainstream perspective of minorities, what are some of the specific perspectives that you hope to dispel in these books when it comes to that.

Rheon Gibson (07:42):

Oh man, that's a phenomenal question. The first thing is it's based on an African American father and an African American son. I mean, you don't see too many positive appearances of that nature in the mainstream media. And I know a lot of great African American fathers. So because I know so many, I wanna see the world seeing the same thing that I see. When it's not, and it's absent in mainstream media, then that can formulate a perception without intentionally trying to formulate a perception mm-hmm <affirmative>. So I think by taking a conscientious effort to show the world that, hey, you can have great moral lessons embedded than a children's book series based on an African American father and son, which you don't see. And I think that's what sets my series apart from maybe other book series and maybe other initiatives that are going to the same goal.

Rheon Gibson (08:30):

I think that when you embed these lessons, and like I said, these lessons, although the characters are diverse, these lessons apply to all individuals of all walks of life. We all need to learn how to believe than ourselves and challenge that negative self talk. We all need to learn how to build bridges and connect with others who are different from us. And we all need to learn how to break down misperceptions and so on and so forth. So the lessons apply to all, but I utilize diversity and a means to change perceptions, because like I said, there's not a lot of venues that, uh, show positive African American fathers and son interactions.

Corey Andrew Powell (09:04):

That is so true. Just a few days ago, with the passing of SI Puy, I had a conversation with someone and I re I, I shared with them an experience when I was a young actor, I was about 18. And I was auditioning for, for a role of like a, a troubled black teenager in the hood or something. And I was auditioning and the agent said to me, after I read the part, she goes, I need more black. And I said, I don't know what you mean. And she said, and she literally verbatim said, I need more killer pimp drug dealer black. And I remember like, not even knowing how to respond to, I didn't get the part, but years later I realized why I was so confused was because at that point in my life, more black meant excellence. More black in my house meant I wanted to speak like my mother, who was an educator or who, who worked in education for 37 years or my neighborhood politicians of which one now is a Congress member, uh, you know, or, or even to speak the articulation of Sidney Portier who we watched in our home, like that was black excellence to me, but that was not reflected at the time on television.

Corey Andrew Powell (10:03):

So, you know, during that time, mostly we were being cast on TV as drug dealers, murderers pimps it. So you're right. It's all about the perception and what kids see to believe they can be if they see positive enforcements, right?.

Rheon Gibson (10:17):

Exactly. And that's why my publications are, you know, geared towards getting students and, uh, children to develop those skills. However, I do offer professional development because I am a certified social justice educator. And those are my ways of getting adults to see different perspectives. Things is that nature. So I'm trying to, uh, duality of sorts educating the students, but also pushing into different organizations, companies, and things like that. And educating the adults as well, because it's not just, you know, if we educate the students, then those who already have those mentalities or those perspectives, those continue to fester. So if I, you know, address it from both areas, I think I have a more effective outcome and that's what I've been doing. So people can always book me to come in and talk to students, talk to their staff members,

do all those things. They just have to go to the Dizz Wizz series.com and, you know, we can make that happen for adults as well. And it's not just, you know, the messages that are in the publications ingrained for kids.

Corey Andrew Powell (11:13):

Oh, that's great. Because, and I'll make sure we share that information of course, with our, our listeners, but that's great because now in the, the current landscape, there's this big, big controversy of certain Americans wanting to sort of exclude certain teachings <laugh> from school curriculums. And in many cases, the argument can be made that if you teach the truth of the past, then you are more likely not to repeat it. And you're likely to understand how it impacts you now in the current day. And I think that's really what the benefit would be to honestly, having the conversations about this country's history with slavery and social economics of post-slavery America. And so I think it's really important work that you're doing where it's not just about speaking within the African American community. It's going beyond that. So you're talking about, you're talking to not just black people, you're talking to everyone.

Rheon Gibson (12:06):

Yes. Yes. Most definitely, because I think this is a, uh, just racial consciousness and just social justice overall and equity, overall, is a all hands on deck type of approach. You know, and I think the one thing that I would like to dispel, because I think that, you know, in the course of having these conversations with people of different backgrounds and cultures and things of that nature, one thing that I want them to feel comfortable about is understanding that we all have biases. No one is excluded from biases and I have quick, you know, little, uh, interactive activities that, uh, I do with my audience and these professional developments, just to show 'em that, Hey, we all have biases. I'll give you a quick little 15, second, uh, example of how I can show you that we may all have biases. And if I were to do that, I would say, Hey, you know, close your eyes.

Rheon Gibson (12:52):

All right, I'm gonna tell you a story. All right. There's four people. They're outside of a restaurant. There's a doctor, there's a police officer. There's a Ex-con and there's a drug dealer. They go in, they eat lunch and then they leave, end the story. Now, when I typically ask the audience, you know, what color, or what gender did you make that doctor? What color, or what gender did you make that lawyer know? Same thing for the drug dealer and the Ex-con. I didn't give you any of that information. So how did that information get colored in? And that's a great way just to see that, Hey, we may have biases that we don't know. And identifying that isn't a negative thing is actually something that's gonna be strong and it's gonna help you be more effective. And then we're able to filter out our biases before they negatively impact others. So to me, it's just really important, you know, that we all understand ourselves, and that's what this whole series is about. It's developing a deeper understanding of yourself. So you can holistically understand yourself and reach your maximum potential. And you're just taking these little gems and these publications to build on, to be a bigger, stronger, you know, more holistic well-rounded individual.

Corey Andrew Powell (13:56):

Because you are a father of a young African American child. How do you, or have you had those conversations with him about George Floyd and Ahmaud Aubrey that are really tangible so that he understands a full comprehension of what's going on? Or do you feed that to a younger mind in a much more, a sort of compressed way without all the gory details? I mean, you know, how do you have that conversation with someone who's young?

Rheon Gibson (14:23):

Well, you know, my son is a, is a little younger, uh, I think to cognitively understand some of those concepts, but so in my approach in regards to teaching him about it is like you said, uh, breaking it down to his level kind of understanding. And, uh, in kids' terms, you know, and not as in, uh, adult terms. So a lot of the, like the explicit and things like that may be left out until he is cognitively ready to receive that. So it's really just, you know, trying to gauge when, you know, the person that you're gonna have that conversation with, what level they are, what level of understanding they're at, and then pairing that with your approach and your, uh, your methodology.

Corey Andrew Powell (15:00):

Yeah. That's important because you don't want to scare a child about the world they live in, but you do want to make sure they're aware of the world they live in. Right? And that has to happen sort of like at whatever level their, uh, their mental capacity can handle.

Corey Andrew Powell (15:16):

Thank you for listening to motivational Mondays presented by the national society of leadership and success and available wherever you listen to your favorite podcast. I'm Corey Andrew Powell, and I'll see you again here next week.