



Episode 982: Ordinary Libertarian Fired After Antifa Tweets “Nazi!” at Employer

Guest: Brandon Navom

WOODS: All right, something really horrifying just happened to you personally.

NAVOM: Yes.

WOODS: And in order to understand it, we've got to understand what this whole free speech rally in Boston was all about. Everybody's under the impression that this was some kind of a neo-Nazi rally or something like that, because, after all, there was just a rally in Charlottesville, so therefore rallies must be suspect. And you took part in this and didn't really think you were doing anything particularly subversive. So what's the background of the event?

NAVOM: Yeah, so it really all started when a friend of mine casually mentioned that there was going to be a rally on the topic of free speech. He brought it up to me because one of the keynote speakers, Shiva Ayyadurai, an Indian-American who is running for U.S. Senate, is a bit of a role model of mine. He invented email, and he's now running for the Senate. And so little did I know that my attempt to actually try to have an Indian-American in the U.S. Senate would cause me to be branded as a white supremacist.

WOODS: All right, that is highly unusual. Now, on the other hand, at any time, weren't there any controversial speakers scheduled to speak at the event? I'm not saying they were necessarily neo-Nazi people, but was there any controversy embedded in this thing at all? I want to just get that out on the table.

NAVOM: Yeah, so there was a little bit of controversy, but I think the thing that people aren't understanding is that these were periodic events that had occurred before on the general topic of freedom of speech, and just about any speaker who wanted to speak, so long as they did not advocate for violence, would be allowed to speak. So there was a previous event that had occurred a few months before. There were some controversial speakers, supposedly, but I actually attended this event. I didn't remember very many of the speeches, and there was no violence. So it was just a small event that most people did not take notice of.

WOODS: So what wound up happening in Boston was you had a huge, huge turnout of people protesting the event. Absolutely enormous. In the tens of thousands. And what exactly were they protesting? Were there any Nazis involved in this?

NAVOM: No. There were no Nazis involved. And what actually happened was — there's a lot of irony here. Directly after the tragedies in Charlottesville, Virginia, CNN falsely reported that the same organizers and the same organization that were behind that rally were also behind this rally. And to be clear, I think it was a man named Kessler or something and a group called American Vanguard, and none of the organizers, anybody had even heard of any of those, that person or that organization. And what I think the link was was that there was a report that our other keynote speaker besides Shiva was Gavin McInnes, and Gavin McInnes and the Proud Boys were also reportedly at Charlottesville, but that report turned out to be false.

WOODS: Yeah, that would be very surprising to me, actually. All right, so it seems almost impossible to believe given the hysteria, given that the president got involved — it seems impossible to believe that what you're telling us is the full truth of the matter, and yet, as far as I can tell, that is the full truth of the matter.

NAVOM: Yeah, and you know, I do want to be totally honest here. There is one point of controversy. There was one person who did ask to be a speaker at the Boston event who apparently was also at the Charlottesville, Virginia rally, and we had no idea that he was going to be attending that rally, and the moment that we found out that he was there, he was banned from the Boston rally and we said that he would not be able to attend.

WOODS: Okay, so that ought to clear that up. So then what happened to you? You somehow got fired from your job by people on Twitter gleefully celebrating — attacking your employer, then getting told you didn't work there anymore, and then tweeting that at you. Wow, that's sick.

NAVOM: Yeah. So I was actually away the weekend of Charlottesville. I was out so I hadn't heard the reports, and that Sunday, I was actually out clothes shopping with my daughter. And a *Boston Herald* reporter called me about the rally, said, "Oh, you're speaking at a rally next weekend." And I didn't fully — I had seen news about something, but I didn't fully understand. And then I started getting all of these calls, and one of them was from my employer calling me up on a Sunday afternoon. And they asked me; they said, "We've become aware that you are listed as a speaker on the free speech event," and they wanted to know if it was me or if there was another Brandon Navom and it was just mistaken identity. I said, "Well, yes, it's me. I heard there's some controversy happened at a rally yesterday. I didn't know anything about and the two events were completely separate." And he just basically turned it over to the HR person, and they said that I was terminated, that that Monday would be my last day, don't come in. I would receive no severance, and I was fired.

WOODS: Okay, so I'm quite sure you didn't expect it to turn out this way. Now, did you think to yourself, though, that after what happened in Charlottesville that — I'm trying to think of what the connection would be that people would think you're giving a free speech rally, this has to mean neo-Nazis. Maybe I'm naive here or I'm just not informed enough about the situation. I'm not sure what the connection is, but was there anything about the Charlottesville thing that made you think, *Maybe I'd better not do this?*

NAVOM: Well, I mean, once Charlottesville happened, there was no way I could know that those tragic events would occur when I casually agreed to speak, and I didn't know that my name would be put on the flier until I saw it the first time. But it was just such a lightning hate mob of the false CNN report; Mayor Marty Walsh reiterating it saying, "Hate groups are not welcome here"; and there was just a hate mob of people that tracked everyone down. They were going not only to my employer, tweeting at them to have me fired, but when the tweets – when they got a response saying that I no longer worked there, they tweeted that back to me as kind of like a "Ha, ha, I got you fired." In fact, they even went – they found some information on some of my former employers, some old information, and they tweeted them thinking that I still worked there, and when they got a response back and posted it back on my wall, my first thought was, *Well, the joke's on that guy. I got myself fired from that job years ago.*

WOODS: Oh, good grief. All right, does this make you toxic for the future, or does it – do you think people will realize it was dumb for them to get rid of you in the first place given that you obviously didn't do anything and this is just crazy hysteria?

NAVOM: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. My hope is that – In a lot of ways, I understand kind of the emotional backlash, and I do understand that, in the wave of the hatred, my employer really had no option, and so that's why I've had a lot of people who have asked me to – reporters have asked me to divulge my former employer. There are some people on my side who want to do a campaign against them, and I've said no, I absolutely will not divulge their name. There's just been so much hatred and so much back-and-forth that I simply just am not going to add to it.

WOODS: So what do you walk away from this with? How do you keep your head on straight when something like this happens?

NAVOM: Well, you know, if there's anything, it's been my sense of humor, it's been my ability to just laugh at some of the most absolute crazy things that, just one right after another. For example, after the wave of getting me fired, the next wave was doxing me, putting out my personal information, and then people actually calling me up to personally tell me how my life is destroyed. And something really kind of crazy happened. Maybe I said, *Well, hey, I'm the free speech guy here.*

So what happened when people called me enraged, I actually decided to talk to them. And this one person, this woman, a left, gay rights activist blogger, very progressive, called me up and started screaming and enumerating all of the ways that she was going to destroy my life. And I just waited for her to pause and take a breath, and I said to her, "I'm not your enemy." And something strange happened. We began talking. And she said, "Well, if you're not my enemy, why are you doing this?" And I told her the situation I was in. And what happened was we had a really great, productive conversation, and I decided that I was going to pull out of the event because I thought it was the right and respectful thing to do, and I was going to actually work with her to try to get the event postponed.

I worked with her and – her name's Bethany – and this guy Doug. And Doug was like Mr. Lead Nastygram, who was like writing all this stuff all over my Facebook, and then Bethany was like, *Oh, there's this guy who's going to help*, and puts me into a chat

with him. And it's this guy who had been making my life miserable for the last day. And I just laughed, and I'm like, "Oh, are you done terrorizing me now? Yeah, let's work together." And actually, we had a voice chat and that night, he apologized to me. And he was kind of embarrassed because we've become really good friends over the last four days.

WOODS: Well, that's very sweet and everything, but he's part of the same group that got you fired.

NAVOM: Uh, yeah.

WOODS: Is he having any second thoughts about being associated with people like that?

NAVOM: Do I? No —

WOODS: No, I mean this guy, your new friend. Is he saying, *Boy, I'm really friends with some real lousy people who just victimized an innocent person?* Is he having any second thoughts, or — ?

NAVOM: You know, it was funny because that night, we went from being enemies and him calling for my firing, saying some horrible things, and we spoke and we actually came up with a really good plan that was feasible to get the free speech rally postponed to the fall. And after we did that, when we had a real plan in place, Bethany started crying a little bit and then Doug kind of said — he was like, *Hey man, I'm really sorry for terrorizing you.* And I was like, *Hey, no apologies necessary.* But it was amazing how we went from being enemies to working towards a common goal together.

And one thing that gave me pause is, once Bethany stopped seeing each other as enemies and started working together for a common goal — we were communicating back and forth, we were all laughing, we were making jokes. And at one point, I was trying to get ahold of media, and she's very connected to a lot of media, so she messaged me on Facebook and says, "Oh, I have a *Boston Globe* reporter. Give me your information and I'll pass it along to her." And I without hesitation sent her my phone number and my email address. And as soon as I hit "send," I just stopped, and I was like, *I just gave out my personal information to someone who literally a day earlier had been calling for the destruction of my life.* And yet I fully trusted her.

WOODS: I guess you and I are just different people. I guess I would say, *You want to destroy people's lives and then realize,* "Oh, wait a minute. I might have been destroying the life of someone who was innocent. Oh well. My bad." I would say that's just not a good person. I'm sorry. I don't want to be friends with you. That's not a good person. You're going to behave that recklessly? You're so self-righteous that you feel like you don't even really need to investigate the situation; you can just be nasty, nasty, nasty, try to ruin the person's life, and then say, "Oh, sorry, my bad." I mean, you're going to raise your kids to be that way?

NAVOM: Oh, well, I certainly won't, and I think this event has certainly caused both Bethany and Doug to maybe look at things differently.

WOODS: That'd be nice.

NAVOM: But I wonder how many people in how many conflicts, if they merely said those same words, they said, "I'm not your enemy," I wonder how many issues we could resolve.

WOODS: All right, what other parts of the story am I leaving out? Because I'm basically letting you tell it, because you were there, you know the circumstances, and we got very, very vague information about what happened in Boston. It's mostly about what the protestors did. That's 90% of the coverage.

NAVOM: Yeah, so the CliffsNotes version of this is I dropped out of my speaking spot, called for the postponement, and tried to get all of the organizers and speakers to delay the event as well. And the interesting thing is that the people who still felt they had to do it did so because they were being so badly slandered and maligned that the only way they could prove they were not Nazis was to go forward with the event. So in a strange way, all of the hatred that was being thrown at them was just strengthening their resolve. And so when I begged and pleaded and did everything I could to try to get everyone to delay the event and I failed in that regard, I did the one thing that I could do, and that's as an individual. I said I was going to join the counter-protest. And this was at the invite of my newfound friends, Bethany and Doug, and even though I felt with all the things that I saw that there could quite possibly be a very big danger to my personal safety, I felt it was the right thing to do.

WOODS: Now, Brandon, I very much sympathize with what happened to you and I'm very sorry that you've had your life upended by this situation when it seems obvious to a normal person that you were blameless. So I mean, I'm not rendering judgment on you because I can't imagine what it would be like to be in your shoes. However, as an outside observer, it seems nonsensical to join the counter-protesters. Unless you thought your own event was toxic or you thought there was something wrong with it, why would you protest it?

NAVOM: Yeah. I felt I had to, you know? I saw this powder keg ready to explode, and I saw the great potential for actual violence. And part of the ironic part was, after Marty Walsh said this, *Don't come to Boston. You're not welcome*, to these hate groups, that was what caused this event to get on their radar. And so now some actual hate groups said they were going to actually show up, and I thought that the chance for violence was too great. I saw everything bubbling over and I felt I needed to do something to at least try to calm nerves and to try to create unity and peace rather than hatred and derision. And so that's what I had to do.

WOODS: So let me make sure I'm understanding this correctly. On the day of the event, where exactly were you to be found?

NAVOM: So I went on the subway – we call it the T, the MBTA – and went down to Tremont Street to join the counter-protest. I don't think I would have been able to do it without my newfound friends, Doug and Bethany, there with me –

WOODS: Let me make sure I have the timeline correct then. At what point were you fired? What was the day of the week?

NAVOM: It was Sunday, the day after Charlottesville.

WOODS: I see. Okay. And then so by the time the next event came around, it was –

NAVOM: Yeah.

WOODS: I just want to make sure – okay. So it was that early – I get it. I get the timeline.

NAVOM: Yeah.

WOODS: All right, so go ahead. So you're on the T, which I've been on the T many times.

NAVOM: And it was crazy, because I was thinking, *Are people going to notice me? Are people going to be upset with me?* And I was nervous until Bethany and Doug were there, and when I finally did meet them, Bethany gave me a gift, a small American flag, a cloth one, probably a little over a foot long. And I have to say that that American flag became kind of my security blanket as I delved into some territory that I was very, very unfamiliar with and I feared could quite possibly be hostile.

WOODS: What did you observe there? What were your firsthand observations?

NAVOM: Well, let me say this. I think there were a lot of people there who had love in their heart, and I think there were a lot of people there who, you know, in a lot of ways were just like us who maybe were a little bit misguided in the cause of why they thought they had to be there, but they were more like us than I could have possibly imagined. And maybe – I can only speak about my firsthand experiences, but I saw actually very few masked people. Most of them were just normal people carrying signs, and I saw no actual firsthand violence. So from my perspective, everything turned out as well as it possibly could from a lack-of-violence perspective.

WOODS: All right, what would be your final words or anything else that is central to the story that you'd like to have your say with?

NAVOM: Yeah, so I've spoken with the organizers, and ironically, one of the event organizers who was a Bernie Sanders-supporting, progressive socialist, free speech lawyer says that he was barred from speaking. They set up this 250-foot perimeter around the area and only let speakers in with no media and no people to be able to view it. And in his opinion as a free speech lawyer, he says that if there is not a lawsuit to combat this, this will be the biggest erosion of free speech in our time.

WOODS: But I'm not getting that you were among the counter-protesters who were there clearly trying to intimidate these people into not speaking. I mean, are you not seeing the cognitive dissonance at work there? What am I missing about this?

NAVOM: Yeah, I mean, I guess when I originally started to try to get the free speech event moved, I felt that we could still have a free speech event in the fall. Bethany was going to bring liberal and progressive groups to cosponsor the event and to kind of give us cover from this calling us Nazis, and I felt it was a good, workable plan that still allowed us to assert our free speech rights while at the same time generating a whole bunch of good will with the people of Boston. And so I would hope, if anything, that people would understand that, right or wrong – and I am now getting a whole bunch of hate from my side. They're all calling me horrible, nasty things. I've lost my job, and at this point, I wonder if I have any friends left, quite frankly. And a friend of mine did set up a GoFundMe account for me, which I thank him so much, because I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know if I'm going to be branded a Nazi or if the Nazis are going to want to kill me for marching with the counter-protesters.

All I can say is that I have learned a lot. I've experienced more new experiences in this past week than I really have in my life. I have a documentarian who is following me around, and part of the crazy twist is he actually got added to the list of speakers for the event, and so now my documentarian is being called a Nazi and receiving death threats from Nazis. And he as a professional documentarian says this is – looked at my situation and said it's the craziest thing he's ever seen. So I mean, I hope there are people out there who are just supportive of what I'm trying to do and think I did the right thing, because at the end of the day, that's all you can really do.

WOODS: Well, indeed. All right, well, I'm sorry you had to endure something like this, but at the same time, we'll see what we can draw out of it that's good. You're obviously drawing attention to a major, major problem, which is everybody's a Nazi all of a sudden and we will shoot first and ask questions later. And you got shot first, I'm sorry to say.

NAVOM: Yeah.

WOODS: Well, listen, I hope things turn around and I appreciate you sharing your story with us today. Thanks a lot.

NAVOM: All right, thank you so much.