Marki Lemons Rhyal:

There are numerous reasons for you to take fair housing training, even if you know your legal and ethical responsibilities under the law.

Sabrina Brown:

It is more than just the law. It's how you treat people. It's how you practice your business on a daily basis.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

Why does [Fair housing](https://www.nar.realtor/fair-housing) still matter 56 years after the law was written? You should be able to answer that, which means you need to know more.

Greg Kiely:

If we all work to understand what the unintentional implicit bias inside of us might feel like, then it's actually a really easy conversation to get comfortable with.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

You are listening to [Drive with NAR](https://www.nar.realtor/magazine/drive), the Realtor to Realtor series powered by Realtor Magazine. Listen, as real estate pros talk tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration, get ready to step up your business. I'm Marki Lemons Rhyal, and you have to go deeper in your Fair Housing education; it's not enough to only pay attention to how it affects you and your business.

Today, I'm joined by two pros who are helping to take Fair Housing to the next level. Sabrina Brown is the broker-owner of Pinky Real Estate in Fresno, California and is an instructor of NAR's Bias Override Course. Welcome, Sabrina.

Sabrina Brown:

Thank you, Marki. Excited to be here to have this important discussion with you today.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

Thank you. Greg Kiely is the regional sales manager at Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, Robert Paul Properties in Marion, Massachusetts. He played a role in establishing NAR's Fair Housing Training Requirement, which takes effect in 2025. Hi, Greg.

Greg Kiely:

Hello. Thank you, Marki and Sabrina. It's an honor to be able to talk about these topics.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

Greg, let me start with you. Explain to our listeners what to expect when the Fair Housing Training Requirement kicks in, and why is NAR making this move now?

Greg Kiely:

I think for the average real estate professional, depending on which state or licensing body you're a part of, mandatory education has always been mixed in With elective education. There were a certain number of hours we all need to renew licenses, and at times we could take hours that were through the Realtor Association Continuing Education offerings, and sometimes there were state mandated classes. The one we're most familiar with is the ongoing [Code of Ethics](https://www.nar.realtor/about-nar/governing-documents/the-code-of-ethics) Requirement that we have to always go back and make sure that the Code of Ethics is the foundation through which all of our real estate practice feeds through and flows through.

The leadership of the National Association Realtors felt about four years ago that there was an ongoing, even an emerging need to attach as much weight and importance to Fair Housing education as there is and always has been to our Code of Ethics education. That's a little bit how we've gotten here and how it will impact us is very similarly to the code of ethics piece. Every time you go to re-up your Code of Ethics training, you're going to have to partner a Fair Housing anti-bias training component into that as well.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

I think that's an excellent idea, especially when you serve in leadership, whether that's on a local level, state level, or a national level, that not only are you ethical, but you are abiding by the rules and regulations of Fair Housing. Sabrina, some members complain that they don't need Fair Housing messaging from NAR because they understand the law. As a Fair Housing trainer, what goes through your mind when you hear that?

Sabrina Brown:

It scares me. Things are always changing. It is up to us as professionals, it's our responsibility to really know the law, promote the laws, and understand that they're constantly changing and we need to stay on top of those things. There's a risk of being non-compliant because you really truly don't understand what may have changed in the marketplace. And then also the biggest piece of it is the implicit bias. You think that you know the law, but it is more than just the law. It's how you treat people. It's how you practice your business on a daily basis. When you think that you already know the law, you put yourself and our industry in jeopardy by not really honing your skills and understanding the clients and the communities that you're serving.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

I'll be the first to admit that I am not always on the right side. We bring in our own prejudice, our own bias based on how we were raised, the communities we live in, the churches we may attend. So to me, every time NAR addresses a different subject, I'm actually learning something new because I didn't always look at it that way. We often look at the one side that we're on and my father used to say, "Nothing in life is sliced so thin there aren't two sides to it." NAR is always going to give us another side to look at it, and it is going to adhere to license law and the Realtors Code of Ethics.

So I encourage everyone to challenge yourself by going to nar.realtor/fairhousing and exploring the resources and education there. I mentioned going deeper in Fair Housing training. What does that mean? Why does it matter? And what can real estate professionals do to get in the right head space for them to go deeper? And one thing that comes to mind is Ezekiel Morris when he states that we have to become uncomfortable. We have to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, which means we do have to go deeper. I would like to get both of your opinions on that

Sabrina Brown:

I think really is self-reflection. And I think if you want to go deeper, you have to not look on the outside, but look on the inside. And I can give you a little short story on this Marki, and I'll make it really short. I was out and I was getting ready to show a property, and when I met the person for the first time, I didn't want to get out of my car, and that was a bias on my part. I looked at him and he looked scary. He was with his wife and two kids, but they still look scary to me. It had nothing to do with race, it just had to do with the way he was dressed. In our area, there are gang members and he looked like a gang member, so I didn't want to get out of my car.

And I will tell you, I did get out of my car and I did go and I helped him and his family did buy a house, and I found out later that he had been homeless. He had been on drugs. He had in fact been a gang member, but he had turned his life around and he was looking for a home for his family. And he said I was the sixth agent that he had spoken with and that nobody wanted to help him. I was the only one that wanted to help him. So with that, I attended his wedding. He's referred other clients to me. He's referred other agents to my office and all because I had to look a little bit deeper at him and look at how I would feel if someone didn't even want to get out of the car to help me when I was looking to purchase a home.

Greg Kiely:

I think all of us have those moments that if we are truly reflective of our experience in this industry, mirror what Sabrina's experienced. From my real estate background, I cover a lot of different geographies. Some are islands, some are peninsulas that are separated by water from a bigger urban metropolitan area. And what I see a lot in my practice is this, even in the agent to agent, the practitioner to practitioner conversation and communication, "They're not from here. They don't understand this. I'm going to have to do more work or I'm going to have to..." This hesitancy to trust that the person on the other side has as much right to be there as you need to be there.

When you break down some of that, and I've moved from municipality to municipality in my career, I sit there and I think, okay, if this is something that's happening within the practitioner field, then I can only imagine what we might be missing about ourselves as we deal with clients who are coming from... Most of the areas that I serve are places that people move from far away to live in. So if this is how we're treating peers, how are we treating the customers and do we even know how we're treating customer? So when you say, "How do we get in the right headspace for a deeper dive," I think it's really understanding how a customer or a colleague even presents to you. Just as Sabrina found in her journey, and I think that's an incredibly powerful example, but it applies at so many different levels.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

I agree. I remember prior to coming into real estate, my younger cousin lived with me. He had graduated summa cum laude. He became an attorney at the age of 25. So one day he came home with a friend and his friend had his pants sagging. And I'm thinking to myself, "Why is my cousin hanging out with this guy with his pants sagging?" Well, just so happens that young gentleman also graduated summa cum laude. He was also 25 years old and an attorney and was working for one of the top firms here in the City of Chicago. And instantly I realized, "Marki, you passed judgment because he came in with his pants sagging." And it could be something very simple as a person's pants sagging or how they wear their hair or the car in which they drive that we are casting judgment. So we definitely have to take a deeper look at all of the little things that we look at and cast our own personal judgments as you cannot judge a book by its cover.

Greg Kiely:

I had the fortune of being a Local Association and Local MLS President, the COVID year 2020, and we started that year coming right out of the incredible investigative journalism work that was done on Long Island. And coming in as a new leader, I said, "Okay. What are the threats to our Association." As we look at everything that's transpired since then, our Associations need to make sure they're doing everything at an incredibly elite level, and that comes from all of the membership. And one area we had to look in the mirror on was could this piece of journalism been written about us too? So as a leader looking at what might be a danger to us, we decided to start having conversations about where it was going right and where it was going wrong and happened to be introduced to incredible NAR staffers. Bryan Greene had just joined the association at that point and had the chance to interview him.

And because of COVID, we were needing to communicate more and we were needing to bring value to our members every single week. So we just had a standing meeting in which we brought Bryan Greene in and talked about maybe the uncomfortable history of Fair Housing. But then what's transpired since is the ability to succeed in this business has become harder and harder as the number of transactions has dropped, as the number of available homes has dropped from the marketplace. So we all have to look at the economic reality around us and say, "How can we represent our communities better?" And too often we look at the communities that are closest to us and say, "Well, I've done the best I can with the community that's available to me." And I sit here and I say, "If we truly were open-minded and really pushing to be the best representative of the communities we serve, we would make sure we serve the entirety of the communities that we live in."

And that means when you look at your clients, do they only have the same background as you, or are they going to open your mind to backgrounds you've never experienced? Are you learning from people who have a different experience than you have had? Are you stretching your knowledge and are you exposing yourself to the best that could be out there? Or are you staying in your safe space? If we all work to understand what the unintentional, maybe unfelt, unknown implicit bias inside of us might feel like or might contain, and we really do some good self-work, then it's actually a really easy conversation to get comfortable with really, really quickly. And it's a conversation that... I live in an area where people say families with children shouldn't live next to me. I live in an area where they say the people who work at the local shops and restaurants shouldn't live next to me. It doesn't have to be the traditional triggers. There are a lot of ways that bias and [housing discrimination](https://www.nar.realtor/links/report-housing-discrimination) can happen even in big, small, diverse, not diverse communities.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

I agree. Last year we had the opportunity to interview Jamie Zapata, a transgender woman, and it really started with the fact that I wanted to honor a transgender woman at our Titans of the Industry event in the City of Chicago. We talk about race a lot. And for me as the Chair at the time, I'm like, "Well, I want to talk about more than just race. I want to talk about people who have handicaps. I want to talk about the LGBTQ+ community." And it took work to find someone who would publicly discuss being a transgender woman in this industry. I had to email and text people to find that person. And then I realized, "Guess what? Not only do we have Jamie, we have her best friend Cassandra," and it's opened up a new world of opportunities, but now it's also going to expand housing.

And one thing, when talking to them, we talked about, "Do we always have to talk about race as a Black woman or do they always have to talk about the LGBTQ+?" And we've identified that we all have other greatness that exists that we can discuss. For me, it's technology, and I just happen to be a Black woman who loves technology. They just happen to be LGBTQ who love whatever it is that they love. But leaders have to open up the conversation. And it's okay if you're the first person to do it, and it's okay if everyone does not agree. Our country is in a unique moment when it comes to addressing discrimination in all its forms. Can you put into context where you think we are with Fair Housing at this moment in our history, Sabrina?

Sabrina Brown:

I think we're at important crossroads. I think that there has been a lot of light shown onto our implicit biases, and now we are in a place where we have the opportunity to really make a difference for our industry and our community. But it's going to take all of us having these conversations, and it needs to be more than just because everybody looks at it as race. Fair Housing is always a race issue, and it's not. It's a people issue, and we need everybody on board having the conversation.

So that's why I really appreciate Greg saying he's not afraid to open up the conversation, because a lot of times the conversation needs to be opened up by somebody in that particular community in order for it to resonate. If I'm the only one talking about it as a Black woman, then they see it as race. If Greg is talking about it, then it opens up eyes of other people because they see it as more than just race. They see it as an opportunity to grow and to learn. So I think right now we have the opportunity for all of us to start having these conversations and make a true impact on Fair Housing and the availability for housing for all.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

Greg.

Greg Kiely:

It's a time in society where everyone is much more comfortable placing a label upon themselves. We've been to national conferences and heard just eye-opening presentations about how the next generation of children, when you talk about their gender identity, the percentages that might identify in a different way than my generation born in the eighties would are 60, 70, 80% more likely to go on a journey about gender identity or go on a journey about sexual or relational orientation, or go on a journey about... So we're in a point in society where society's starting to talk more and more and more about those things. But then you sit there and we have to look at our client base and say, "Okay. Does my client base represent those emerging conversations? Or it still in my comfortable spot?"

When I look at data... I'm a managing broker, so I always look at data and say, "Where are we? What do our numbers show us?" And the data from the National Association Realtors Annual Survey of Home Buyers and Home Sellers says that most people work with someone because they had a personal relationship first. And I sit there and say, "Okay. Do our personal relationships reflect safety or do our personal relationships reflect the expanding opportunities for conversation connection around us?" I think too often, if we were going to be introspective and critical of ourselves, which is where I think all growth has to happen, you don't grow in anything without doing hard work yourself.

So if we're going to grow in our ability to better represent what Fair Housing would look like in a community, then we have to sit there and say, "What is my client population look like? What does my friend population look like? And then how do those of us who are, no matter what our labels or our background or our status is, how do those of us who are inside the industry build a bridge of trust and connection so that people who might feel outwardly that they're not like us, can learn how to trust us, learn with us, and teach us at the same time, so that we can have those bridges into communities that broaden our knowledge and broaden our ability to serve?" But it's on us who are who are "on the inside" to show to those who might feel like they're on the outside, that we want their opinion, we want their interaction, and we want to be able to represent them.

Marki Lemons Rhyal:

Build bridges with intentional inclusion is what comes to mind. I am elated that NAR is leading with education, implementing the Fair Housing Training Mandate that will go into effect in 2025. Now is the time for us to go deeper, but look inside of ourselves first. Thank you for tuning in.

Thank you for joining us at Drive with NAR, the Realtor to Realtor series. Tune in every month to magazine.realtor/drive or subscribe wherever you listen to your podcast. Find more tips to boost your business at magazine.realtor.