

Justin Shukuru explores belonging and everyday leadership in deeply personal memoir

The book traces a journey from a refugee camp in Rwanda to American classrooms, workplaces, leadership, and a life built through persistence.

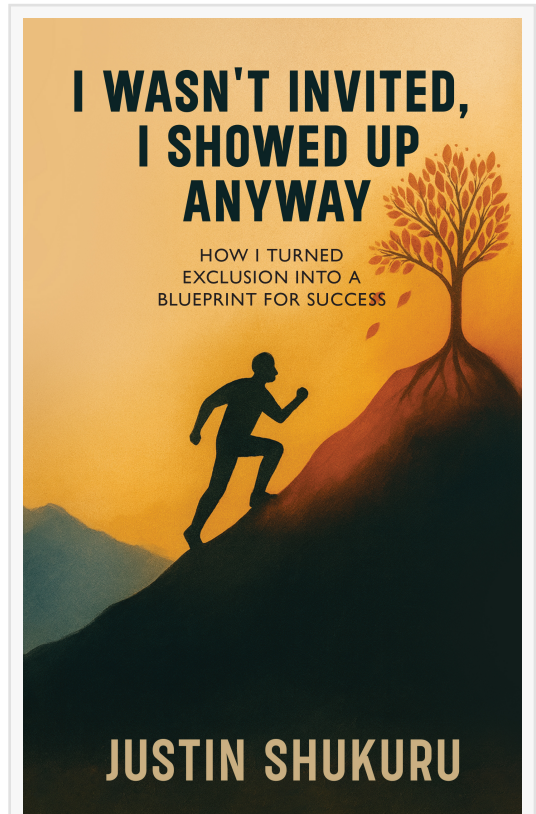
NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 9, 2026
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Before Justin Shukuru learned to lead a team, he learned to carry water for his family.

In "[I Wasn't Invited, I Showed Up Anyway](#): How I Turned Exclusion Into a Blueprint for Success," published by [Spines](#), Shukuru tells the story of growing up in Nyabiheke refugee camp in Rwanda and rebuilding his life in the United States. Through experiences of family responsibility, education, work, exclusion, and leadership, the memoir explores what it means to search for belonging while learning that sometimes belonging begins by choosing to show up anyway.

The story begins in Nyabiheke, where daily life required responsibility at an early age. Fetching water, gathering wood, sharing limited food, and helping his family were not occasional responsibilities. They were part of everyday survival. Shukuru remembers those years through the people who surrounded him, including a resourceful mother, siblings who shared the burden, and neighbors whose support helped make difficult circumstances more bearable.

Those lessons followed him when his family resettled in New Bern, North Carolina. Suddenly, Shukuru faced a different kind of challenge. He had to understand unfamiliar classrooms, new expectations, a different culture, and what it meant to rebuild a sense of identity in a country he was still learning to navigate.

His journey later brought him to Minnesota, where education, work, and personal growth became deeply connected. At Metropolitan State University, Shukuru describes learning to ask questions, seek support, become involved on campus, and create opportunities even when he



I wasn't Invited, I showed Up Anyway by Justin Shukuru

did not always feel that the space had been created for him.

The memoir also follows his development as a leader in the workplace. In fast-moving kitchens, long shifts, and demanding environments, Shukuru learned that leadership often begins before anyone gives you the title. It can mean noticing what others need, helping a tired team continue, accepting responsibility when something goes wrong, and choosing to lead through action.

Writing the book became another form of showing up. Between work, school, family responsibilities, and the demands of everyday life, Shukuru continued documenting the experiences that had shaped him. What emerged was not simply a story about overcoming hardship, but a reflection on gratitude, faith, identity, responsibility, ambition, and the people who make progress possible.

Across 18 chapters, Shukuru pairs personal storytelling with reflections on gratitude, faith, identity, responsibility, and service. Throughout the memoir, ordinary objects and moments carry larger meaning. Water containers, shared meals, winter clothing, classrooms, work shifts, and handwritten plans become reminders that transformation is often built through small decisions repeated over time.

For readers who have ever entered a room and wondered whether they belonged there, pursued education while carrying other responsibilities, started over in an unfamiliar environment, or learned to lead before feeling fully prepared, Shukuru's story offers a message rooted in lived experience.

Author insight — suggested quote for Justin Shukuru's approval: "For a long time, I thought belonging meant being invited into the room. Eventually, I learned that sometimes you have to show up anyway, contribute what you can, and create room for the people coming behind you."
— Justin Shukuru

"I Wasn't Invited, I Showed Up Anyway" is available now in print-on-demand and eBook formats.

About the author

Justin Shukuru grew up in Nyabiheke refugee camp in Rwanda before resettling with his family in the United States. His experiences in North Carolina and Minnesota, including his education at Metropolitan State University and his work in team leadership, shape his writing about responsibility, gratitude, belonging, education, and personal growth.

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