

# The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations presents the 2019 Summit on Diversity & Inclusion in Public Relations

## Session 1: Setting the Stage with Research on Diversity & Inclusion

Dean Mundy: Good morning. Let me start by saying I feel like I'm ... Like I want to hear from y'all rather than me talking to you because there're so many experts in the audience and so I hope that there is one or two things that maybe I can contribute to the conversation but I know a lot of what I'm going to talk about a lot of us in the room have dealt with, have researched ourselves. So let me get started.

Dean Mundy: So, my whole premise is that I feel like this is a really important moment and we all know that we're at this important moment right now, especially with D&I in the country, and we're at a moment where I feel like ... I guess you would call it like an inflection point where we can pivot to a new generation of D&I, and I'm going to talk a bit about why I see that and the challenges of moving forward into this new generation. I think it's a really, really exciting time in terms of how do we shape ... How does everyone in this room and beyond shape the next generation of diversity and inclusion and we'll actually talk about those terms a little bit.

Dean Mundy: So, as most of us know, I would argue that right now, we are still in this generation of the business case for diversity and that's the current narrative and that's been the narrative, I would say, for probably 10 years at least and the business case for diversity, we know, really states that the more diverse your organization, the more different points of view, different experiences you're bringing to the table, the more creative your solutions are going to be which in turn creates a more nimble organization and then makes you more competitive in the marketplace and we can see this over and over again in terms of the power of the business case of this narrative, in terms of the importance of having a diverse leadership board, of having diverse employees, of having an organization resemble the communities in which it serves, and I would argue that's really been where we have been and that's where we are in terms of how do we position D&I for our organizations. So that's sort of the premise and there are benefits to that argument that we all know.

Dean Mundy: So, the benefits, number one, is that it's a proven argument. Over and over again, study after study has shown that yes, this contributes to competitiveness, and we can see it. We can see the crash and burns. We can see the really ... The big success in terms of those organizations that are more diverse, are able to compete a lot more effectively in the marketplace across industries and business study after business study has shown that. That's one of the strings.

Dean Mundy: Another is that it creates buy in across the organization. It helps everybody sort of see, okay, this is why this is important that as a company we can succeed. We

can grow. We can compete and prior arguments in terms of diversity ... Well, I would argue would probably be better, more substantive arguments in terms of just it's right, did not receive the same kind of buy in that this business case has had. That's been proven as well.

Dean Mundy: Third is that it enhances recruiting. It helps sort of focus recruiting of sort of starting with the premise of okay, if we need to have a more diverse leadership and more diverse organization, then we need to have our recruiting efforts sort of mimic that to parallel that, to be able to enhance our recruiting to have a more diverse employee base, diverse leadership and so those are all the good things in terms of this business case for diversity but here's where I see us at this opportunity to move beyond the business case.

Dean Mundy: I think we're ready to do that because there is some real risk that I've seen emerge in my own research and other's research, especially like in the last two or three years and the first, and this is probably my biggest soapbox is that I feel and I've seen this in participant research that I've done is that it's commodified diversity. That if somebody's identity is tied to the bottom line, then that doesn't value the identity, it values the bottom line and the business case I think is good to a point but it can't be the only point, and we're starting to see this more and more because ...

Dean Mundy: And I've talked to a lot of different employees in my studies who have said, yes, this is great. I've had this great opportunity but every time I see myself represented in company literature or company communication, it's tied to the bottom line and we need to figure out a way to value identity beyond just the money that it brings into an organization. And so my number one sort of big soapbox point is that this business case, while it works, it also commodifies diversity and that's not really I would say the end goal hopefully.

Dean Mundy: Number two is that the other risk is that it stops inside the door and what I mean is that yes, it's enhanced recruiting and there are numbers out there, there're reports out there that show that organizations have done a better job recruiting diverse talent and having a more diverse employee base but what happens once you're inside the door? How are people treated once you're in the organization? How are you valued and how does the organization convey those values?

Dean Mundy: I always talk, in fact, I was talking to my public relations students last week about how public relations needs to be the ethical conscience of the broader organization. We have to be the ethical conscience of the organization's operations and then I defined ethics, one of the pieces I define it as an organization's values and action. And so how are we translating our values and action when it comes to truly valuing diversity? If it stops inside the door, if we have rested on the business case, we've recruited a diverse employee base and they're here, what then? Because that's just the first step, and so that's another big risk.

Dean Mundy: The third is accountability. So certainly there's accountability in terms of numbers of recruiting different companies say we need to make sure that we increase these percentages but where's the true accountability in terms of creating an inclusive environment. Diversity is one hand, is the first step, inclusion is the other. What is the phrase I love? The traditional phrase that diversity is being invited to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance and so I think that's where we need to really think about in terms of the inclusion aspect and so this is where I see sort of where we've been and the risks that are associated and we see these risks sort of emerging more and more.

Dean Mundy: I wanted to bring in one of my studies and it's probably like four years old now but I still think it's really relevant in terms of showcasing these risks and action. So I did this study through PRSA. I sent it out to 5000 members. It was like a 30-question, three-part survey. I had about 356 respondents. It's only a 7% response rate but it was actually the highest response rate that PRSA had that year, which was I don't know, take or leave ... So, I was proud of it but in research, probably not the best but it still paints a picture in terms of these risks in action, these risks at play.

Dean Mundy: You can take a look, I don't know if anybody over here can see the details but here's the participant professional profile. We had a really good mix in terms of mid-level employees, mostly mid-level employees but a lot of different industries from corporation, PR, ad agency, education, nonprofit, government, other, so a good cross section of industries. Also, different profiles. It was mostly white, which represents the industry, I guess, with 76% white, 61% mid-range that reflects the mid-level, 76% female, 10% LGBTQ and I had one section, I'm not going to talk about it now but one section that was specific to the LGBTQ questions because PRSA traditionally had not included LGBTQ+ questions in their surveys in anything related to diversity but I won't be able to touch on that today.

Dean Mundy: That's sort of the background. I asked them some really basic questions, basically. I just wanted to get sort of a benchmark and so, one of the questions was how important are D&I programs, how important are diversity policies and programs important to an organization? Eight-five percent of respondents said it's somewhat or extremely important to the organization. It's like that's fantastic but I'm, by nature, a qualitative researcher, so I asked, at the end of each of these questions, why? Why is this important? And the top three responses were it's competitive, makes us competitive, makes us a stronger workforce and PR has to understand and reflect today's diverse culture and communities, certainly directly reflective of the business case for diversity but it's also introducing PR's role in reinforcing that we have a responsibility in communicating diversity because we are public relations. We are the ethical conscience of our organization. That was encouraging.

Dean Mundy: Then I asked how important is it for organizations and the public relations role specifically to communicate D&I and this was also encouraging. Seventy-four percent said it was either somewhat or extremely important to actually

communicate organizational diversity values externally. I was like that's fantastic and so then I did a followup to that and I said okay, so in your job, how do you do this on a daily basis? The number one response was employee recruitment materials, more than half, 53%. Number two was the organizational website. I'm thinking that that's probably tied to the employee recruitment. The number three top response from this national study was not applicable and that was really surprising and depressing to me where everybody was all in in terms of employee recruitment and organization website, in terms of anything beyond that, not applicable.

Dean Mundy: The next highest was social media at like 14%. And so I think this sort of reflected and I'm making a lot of assumptions but if we go with the business case, if we go with the research that shows there is this risk that it stops inside the door, I would say that this research sort of reflects that, right? That it is limited to the employee recruitment, that that's where organizations are putting their money and it's good as a start but it's certainly not anywhere near what we need to do.

Dean Mundy: How am I on time? All right? Two minutes, perfect. Okay.

Dean Mundy: So, we need to actually truly ask ourselves how do we build value in D&I beyond its contribution to the bottom line. How do we do this? And part of Angela's research that Kenn was talking about mentions this. It has to start with leadership. Leadership has to set the stage. They have to be accountable. They're the ones who set the culture in the company and they're the ones who have to have their success tied to D&I's success. There has to be structural change in terms of different networking opportunities, different affinity groups that we heard about earlier, those are powerful and then we have to think about population-specific needs.

Dean Mundy: Equity is not the same thing as equality and I think we've focused on equality where everything's the same but we have to look at individual populations and where they're coming from and meet them where they are because everybody is coming from a different perspective and equality doesn't get to it, equity does. So we have to think about how can we make this situation equitable?

Dean Mundy: And then the final thing that I'll leave you with and this is a soapbox and I don't want to open up Pandora's box but I've actually become really frustrated with the term D&I itself. I feel like when I look at different websites, corporation sites, it's now the D&I business practice and I went to the Institute for PR's bridge conference a couple of years ago and I was trying to find the speaker's name because she was an amazing speaker and she was actually arguing that we move beyond D&I. We call it equity and empowerment. How can we have a process within an organization that really builds equity and empowerment because D&I has become this sort of really powerful acronym but right now we're stuck in this business case for it.

Dean Mundy: So, I'm not saying that no, let's just abandon D&I but how can we support D&I, supplement D&I, compliment it so that we can get to this equity piece, to this empowerment piece so that we're not stopping inside the door, that we're moving beyond the door and we're truly, truly valuing D&I in our organizations. And that's all I have. Thank you. Thanks.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Well, first of all, I just wanted to say thank you for being here this morning. It's just great to see such a great group here who are interested and engaged in this conversation. Is it? Okay. Thank you, Kenn. Thank you, Dean, for starting us off with some very good points, important points related to the diversity and inclusion or maybe something else conversation that we are here to have this morning. The topics of inclusion, is D&I even a term that we should be ... Maybe we should be moving to something else, accountability. Important things, topics and issues connected to the overall conversation here and now what I will do is I'm going to share a story with you and this is the story of the Plank Center's engagement with diversity and inclusion, specifically diversity and inclusion research.

Nilanjana Bardhan: In our line of work, we believe in the power of stories. Stories help us make sense of reality. Well known communication scholar, Walter Fisher, who popularized the narrative paradigm back in the 1980s made a very powerful case for the communicative power of stories. He said that human beings are homo narans or storytelling creatures and that we make sense of our lives and what's going on around us in the form of narrative. In fact, stories are so natural to how we communicate at an everyday level as we go about our day that we don't even realize we're telling or listening to stories most of the time. So, here's our D&I story of research from the Plank Center.

Nilanjana Bardhan: About six years ago, the Plank Center board decided that the center needed to take up the D&I charge in a more robust way and position itself as a leader and catalyst in this effort but we knew that we first needed to get a better grasp on the D&I reality on the ground. So we undertook a meta review. This was a broad investigation of the academic research and the trade press discourse and coverage over the last three decades and our goal was to first understand how people have been discussing D&I, what are they emphasizing and what's getting left out because we know that a lot of ... Oftentimes what gets left out is as important as what is included.

Nilanjana Bardhan: So, this review revealed some of the following themes you could say and some of the things that have already been mentioned will pop up here. Here are some of the themes that emerged from this meta review. The industry is a very poor reflection of the diversity in society. Inclusion is crucial for diversity to succeed but it's not getting the attention that it needs. There is a better understanding now of the urgency of D&I but not enough understanding of how to address it or perform it such as setting goals, measurement and so on. Men constitute about 30% of the industry but hold about 70% of the senior, especially the senior leadership positions. Race and ethnicity need more attention as a

diversity category. Diversity is defined mainly in terms of race, ethnicity and gender and this definition needs to be broadened.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Diversity needs to be an organic part of work culture, not an add on. Not like a book and then you have a chapter on diversity or here's the diversity add-on. It needs to be ... Heide Gardner, last year at the summit that we had, had a very nice phrase. She said diversity needs to be the lens through which we view everything. It doesn't need to be this sort of added component. D&I needs to be perceived as a moral in business matter. It doesn't have to be an either/or case, something that Dean touched on and that ... We tend to think it has to be one or the other. There can be a balance between the two. It doesn't have to be one or the other.

Nilanjana Bardhan: The pipeline to senior leadership positions when it comes to D&I is especially low. Millennials are more open to diversity than previous generations and leadership involvement, top leadership involvement is key but there is a gap of ... An interesting gap. Leaders think they're doing a much better job on the D&I front than do employees, that is employees' perception. So, this meta review brought up something interesting things and gave us a sense of where things are at. So since leadership lies at the heart of the Plank Center's mission, it made sense for us to specifically focus on the relationship between leadership and D&I.

Nilanjana Bardhan: So, we decided to investigate this gap that is the last point over here about perceptions between how leaders think they're performing on the D&I front and how employees see them as performing because this is a gap that needs bridging if it does indeed exist. So we conducted a mix mash of qualitative and quantitative survey through Qualtrics and our respondents were US-based PR practitioners and we had a panel of ... We had 102 usable responses and I'm going to give you a quick sense of the breakdown here of how this played out.

Nilanjana Bardhan: We had about roughly 60% of our respondents were, I say, practitioners and what we mean by that is employees not in formal leadership positions and the rest of the 40% were those who were in formal leadership positions. As you can see, most of our responses were in the corporate setting and then there was sort of an even breakdown of other PR settings, such as [inaudible 00:18:32] firm, nonprofit, education, government and so on. Most of the people that we ... Most of the respondents had between one and 20 years of experience. A few had less than a year and a good number had 20 to more than 30 years. That was our breakdown.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Now, the interesting ... There were several interesting findings from the study but the one that I wanted to share with you today is this discrepancy in perception that we talked about and I want to be able to ... I don't have time to get really too much into this but what this will sort of ... If you just kind of glance at it and take a look, what this is saying is we asked employees and leaders questions about perception and we asked leaders these questions. As a leader in my PR agency or unit, I am ... And those were the questions, supportive of

D&I efforts, personally involved in initiatives, able to create a shared vision within the organization, able to challenge the status quo if necessary and able to bring about positive change within the organization. We asked leaders that.

Nilanjana Bardhan: We asked employees that, are your leaders able to do all these things and if you can see, the blue lines, this is the first one is employees, the second one bar is the leaders and leaders for the most part have a better impression of how they're performing on these factors or issues than the employees. So if you have more questions about this chart, I will go to it again later but ... Or talk about it during Q&A but there was some other interesting findings from the qualitative part and that was that gender and we're talking about women, are making some advances on the leadership front but other areas still need attention.

Nilanjana Bardhan: There's a need to advance new ways of thinking about D&I that shake up old repetitive scripts that have not been very effective. Maybe so far in bringing about the change we desire, we need to tell a better story because as I started out by saying story is reality. There's a need for a more expansive conception of diversity and inclusion needs to be definitely talked about more and I hope we can do that today, during our conversation.

Nilanjana Bardhan: How much time do I have now? Three minutes? Okay, I can do that. All right.

Nilanjana Bardhan: So, in addition to this research that has sort of been more stage by stage research, Dr. Kenon Brown, who's here, our colleague from the University of Alabama, he and Dr. Damion Waymer, who's also, I think, here, who's the new chair at the UA Ad/PR department. They've been doing some ... And Dr. Kenon Brown is a Plank Scholar, they've been doing some very informative studies on diversity in the educational setting and specifically focusing on race and gender and I hope, at some point, you can connect with them today and maybe learn more about that. The Plank Center has also supported other D&I research projects and initiatives of sister organizations such as IPR, Page and PRSA because as I mentioned earlier when I started, we see ourselves as playing the role of a catalyst and working with other organizations to really move this conversation forward.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Since last year, we have been looking closely at the pipeline into the industry. A lot of you are here today, future leaders. That is students and educators are also part of that. There's a lot of work on industry in D&I but hardly any on the pipeline and as Dr. Brown and Waymer and Sue said in a very recent 2019 article, "Diversity must start in the classroom level in order for emerging practitioners to embrace diversity at the professional level." This is very well stated and so on point. So, we started investigating how educators and student leaders who are really engaged in D&I are perceiving this issue in the industry and in education, and we did 20 in-depth interviews, 10 with students and 10 with educators and here are some of the themes that emerged from the student interviews.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Overall, they feel there's a need to, again, you see some themes are emerging over and over again here, a need to widen the radar for what we include in the definition of diversity. Inclusive cultures are a must for diversity to flourish and for retention, otherwise we keep spinning our wheels because as you said, Dean, what happens once you come inside the door. Students understand that the state of D&I in the industry is not where it needs to be, so they have a good sense of that but they also state that some advances have been made. Students see leaders as most responsible for change and for encouraging inclusive cultures. So they are looking at leaders and see them as being in an important role here for change to happen.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Students feel that educators need to diversify the PR curriculum more, that is weave diversity and inclusion and equity related content throughout the curriculum, offer special topics courses, bring in diverse guest speakers and recruit and retain more diverse faculty and how educators teach about D&I makes a difference and this, Dean, might interest you as well is they feel both the moral and business cases are important. It shouldn't be one or the other. They are both important as far as they are concerned.

Nilanjana Bardhan: And finally, this is not just about talking about it in the courses or in the content, how educators actually perform D&I as educators is important too, so educators need to pay special attention to the learning environment such as the classroom, such as PRSA environment and so on and see if their students are feeling included and if they're diverse.

Nilanjana Bardhan: So these were sort of the main themes that emerged. We are still working on coding the educator responses but some of the things that [inaudible 00:24:16] has shown us that educators are willing and wanting to include more content. Dr. Brown and Dr. Waymer's research has shown this, some other research has shown this but they feel there is a lack of let's say content or good material to include in curriculum as well as they feel maybe not prepared enough to do it too and maybe they need some help with that. So that is still in the works and we'll have more for you in future conferences and summits but so what does this all tell us? There is no end to this story actually.

Nilanjana Bardhan: D&I is an ongoing story. In fact, there shouldn't be an end to it. Yeah, and the work is never ... Because the work is never done and new plots and issues emerge with changing themes and times. Right now, we're talking about certain key issues within D&I. So those are the key things right now, inclusion, accountability, education, these are sort of standing out. So we at the Plank Center see it as part of our mission to be a central part of this D&I effort and story in industry and in education and I hope you found this helpful. Thank you.

Kenn Gaither: We would like to open the floor as quickly as possible to take your questions. Before we do that, very briefly, some observations and some comments from our speakers and I think one of the things we might take from the presentation is perhaps the need to fracture the semantics of D&I. When you couple them together, it suggests that they are equal terms and I think the research from



both Dean and Nilanjana suggests that they are not being treated equally. There is a gap between those two.

Kenn Gaither: Secondly, while we're talking about gaps, I think all of this research shows that there are gaps between PR leaders and their employees in terms of understanding D&I and observing D&I and there are also gaps in the classroom between what students want and they need and what they're receiving, and a final observation is the importance of how D&I is positioned at the organizational level. That seems to be a crucial point and as I think it was Muhammad Ali who said it ain't bragging if you can back it up. There's a lot of talking and there's a lot of information on websites and through social media but what is the climate inside the organization and how can that be improved.

Kenn Gaither: So those are a couple very brief observations. I'd now like to open up the floor to your questions. So let's get started. Do we have questions and if you could just identify who is for and what we don't get through in the short amount of time we have now, we hope you will continue the conversations and bring those points back to other panels. Yes, you? Yes? Yeah, you first.

Speaker 4: Can you speak to [inaudible 00:27:33] is storytelling and lived experiences when they're talking about diversity and inclusion? Can you talk about academia and you [inaudible 00:27:40] like your research is great and we're getting a lot of great things for it but a lot of the information that educators and students are not getting is kind of coming from community, from people who experience the things [inaudible 00:27:55] and the writing about these things but academia kind of has a hold on what information should be shared in public and what information is not. So can you speak to that role that academia has?

Dean Mundy: I can start.

Nilanjana Bardhan: Yeah.

Dean Mundy: I will probably be rambling a little bit. And this is another soapbox, I've got a lot of soapboxes but I think that it starts a lot with the literature that we introduce into the classroom. I've become really frustrated with the public relations texts that we have of not including diverse voices and in fact, this is the first term where for my principles class, I'm not including a text because the chapter on history is only about white men really. Ofield Dukes is not in there. Doris Fleischman is not in a lot of them and I'd rather supplement that in my own classroom rather than have to rely on a canned thing within a textbook, which takes a little bit more work but I think that it's ... The onus is on us as academics to be able to see that, to be able to see like even in just basic text what's not there and then to take a step back and go how could I fix that if I can't go around.

Dean Mundy: The other is in the curriculum. I've tried ... I mean in different capacities you try to have the argument of like okay, so how do we incorporate this and then

inevitably it comes back well, hands are tied, we're already doing everything we can in terms of curriculum too, so it's what can you do individually within the classroom and again, the onus is on the professor, her or himself to be able to say, okay, well I'm going to change this one class within this set course. If we're not able to change courses or add courses, then we need to, within those courses, have individual classes and a unit level, one of the things that our dean, Juan-Carlos Molleda, is doing is he actually started a dean's advisory council comprising underrepresented groups and students within our school and meets with them probably twice a month to say okay, what are you not seeing? What are you hearing in the classroom, not hearing and what would you like to see? Just to make sure that that's on the radar as well.

Dean Mundy: I'm not sure if that gets to the question or ... Does that help? Okay, good.

Kenn Gaither: Nilanjana, would you like to add anything to that?

Nilanjana Bardhan: I think that's an excellent question. Thank you, Dean, for starting us off on that. I completely agree. We do have some ability as ... If the system isn't producing enough content or the curriculum is not giving us what we need for our classrooms, we can definitely go beyond. As you said, pull from other materials which may not be strictly academic so to speak or a textbook. I know that my colleague, Ron Culp is starting a course, offering a course. He's using the book, Diverse Voices, that PRSA just put together and this is the kind of thing we need to be doing. We just have to start pulling from other areas and just to say that there's not enough content, yes, point noted but we can do something about it and we can pull from stories and blogs and have guest speakers come in and supplement what's missing in that sort of way, so I fully agree with Dean on that. There are ways we can do it. The educator has to be willing to do that and students can also ask for it.

Kenn Gaither: Thank you. We had a question in the back here. Yes, ma'am.

Speaker 5: Hi, I'm [inaudible 00:31:30]. Thanks a lot too for the shout out about Diverse Voices, I'm actually in the book. [inaudible 00:31:35]. My question is very simple. Are you guys going to make the slides in your presentations available to the group?

Dean Mundy: Sure, I'd be happy to.

Speaker 5: That'll be very helpful, thank you.

Kenn Gaither: Yes, sir?

David Brown: David Brown, [inaudible 00:31:49], University. Three quick points. About the academic, one thing I would like to see if we could put more pressure on publishers to change the texts because what we're doing now, a kind of one off, which is good but it's limited, so we want to look at that. Second thing is about

how we might be able to share different resources, a lot of approaching in different ways. This could be a way to share that.

David Brown: My last point though, is that how we might be able to share research both industry and academic, we just finished the research looking at all of the 66 entries [inaudible 00:32:23] which looked at diverse voices and a PRSA foundation, looking at what students think about diversity and how they approached it and since PRSSA just established their diversity and inclusion officer position and that's just one year in, we might want to take a look at how are they also doing it to include that as part of our [inaudible 00:32:42] since they are the future of what we're trying to do, so I would encourage us to try to find ways to my question how might we be able to do that? I guess be more open source in terms of great ideas, don't care where they come from if they just want to make a difference in what's going to happen.

Nilanjana Bardhan: I just wanted to add, the Plank Center does have a link off of its website for resources and we do have a pretty extensive sort of diversity and inclusion resources academic as well as nonacademic sort of [inaudible 00:33:15] and books and so on that if you are interested or if you're an educator, you want to include in your class, you can look there too. So we've sort of started that work in a way and we need more.

Kenn Gaither: Thank you and thank you for your comments. Yes, ma'am, over here?

Speaker 7: [inaudible 00:33:33] I was curious [inaudible 00:33:35] difficult because it's definitely [inaudible 00:33:43] and I remember that [inaudible 00:33:46] experience [inaudible 00:33:50] to their new environment. So I was curious, just from the academic side [inaudible 00:33:56] research looking at what specifically ad companies ... What [inaudible 00:34:02] and as far as things that are just standardized [inaudible 00:34:07] across the issues about there is a better chance of changing [inaudible 00:34:21]

Nilanjana Bardhan: Well, actually, our second panel gets exactly into that and I don't want to steal their thunder but the one thing I will say is that inclusion is something that has not been talked about enough and so you are right on point over here, we need to be looking more at ... We've talked a lot about recruitment and diversity in terms of recruiting diverse people into organizations but how to keep them is the inclusion part and what is successful. Now the complicated thing about diversity and inclusion is it's hard to have something standard because diversity means different things in different contexts too and what aspects of diversity need to be sort of prioritized or focused on also can change according to context and time and environment and so on.

Nilanjana Bardhan: So, I think while it's hard to have any kind of blanket suggestions for what do to, the important thing is figure out what will help that particular organization and their employees feel like they belong and can bring all of themselves to work and if something's not working, what are those things and try and find that out but panel two is going to get into that more.

Dean Mundy: And I would add to that, I think it's at the organizational level to be able to define for them what does this mean. I also think and this is like I think we're at another inflection point with this exact question because when I was at Coke, there was like the beginning of ... It was a long time ago but it was at the beginning of this affinity groups. So you had the African American group. You had the LGBTQ+ group and now I think that we need to really focus on the intersectionality of identity and I think that needs to update and so if you're a queer woman of color, what affinity group do you fall into and so you can't have those silos anymore and I think that the organizations need to update that.

Dean Mundy: From an academic perspective, I did a study looking at ... Where I was interviewing the heads of 17 of the largest LGBTQ campus student groups asking what they're seeing and they said, we're trying to catch up with the terminology and catch up with the identities of our students because used to it was like here are the resources that we have for the gay male, for the lesbian, for bisexual, for transgender and all of them said that they had ... They always do these different research reports of incoming classes and half of the schools that I interviewed, they said well, we always ask this question, do you identify as LGBTQ?

Dean Mundy: Of those people who identify, then we say how do you identify and suddenly, in the last five years, most who are identifying as LGBTQ identify as queer. They do not want to be in a certain bucket and so these leaders and campuses were saying but we have all of this literature and the resources for helping somebody if you're trying to come out as a gay man, if you're trying to come out as a lesbian, if you're transgender. We have those but we don't have the other resources to keep up with these intersections of identity. So I think that it's ... I think it's a conversation we need to have.

Kenn Gaither: We are very short on time so we have maybe one more question we can take before we have to wrap it up to stay on schedule. I saw this hand up over here first, I'm sorry. Please, go ahead.

Speaker 8: Hi, [inaudible 00:37:37]. My name is [inaudible 00:37:37] and I'm a fourth year public relations major at the University of Florida. My question for you, Dr. Bardhan is I really appreciated your insights on the discrepancy in leadership in PR. I think it was about 70% of us are women whereas we only assume 30% of the leadership roles. So how do you suggest that we start to rectify that? So, as women, should we position ourselves in a different way or is it more so [inaudible 00:38:00] how do we even approach that?

Nilanjana Bardhan: I think as I mentioned, one of the things that ... That's a really good question and I can only talk about what we can do and what the outcome will be is we can only hope it will be ... The needle will move more but I think as women, we're seeing some changes that have begun to happen, which is a good sign, which means we're moving in that direction but I think what's really important is that there needs to be a top down and bottom up effort over here. Both need to happen. Leaders are responsible and have the power to make certain changes. So decisions that they make, things that they do, who they ... How much

attention they give to this matter is going to be important but at the same time, I think the more and more we talk about this and in venues like this, the more we sort of position ourselves and try to break these stereotypes that women only belong in certain kinds of roles and cannot be in ...

Nilanjana Bardhan: We have to sort of try and break those stereotypes in whatever ways we can and hopefully the top down and the ground up will work to bring about that change but the good news is it's beginning to happen.

Speaker 8: Thank you.

Kenn Gaither: Okay, with that, we will wrap up this session and I would like to thank both Dean and Nilanjana for their insights, their observations. Thank you very much. And again, we certainly encourage you to carry on the conversation and for those we were unable to get, please ask your questions of other panels. Thank you.

## **Session 2: Difference Makers and Positive Initiatives**

Jeff Winton: So again, you can take a look in your program at the bios. And I won't read those, but I would like to first introduce our colleague Adrienne Bolden who is a member of the PRSSA national board and VP of diversity and inclusion for PRSSA, and is a student at Florida International University where she's completing her master's degree. We were in touch the other day and she told me that she will be receiving very soon the highest honor at graduation, the Worlds Ahead Award. So congratulations.

Adrienne Bolden: Thank you.

Jeff Winton: We're thrilled to have you here. The next panelist is LaKesha Brown. Lakisha is a corporate communications and public affairs manager at American Airlines, the world's largest airline, which I didn't realize until I researched you. And it serves over 200 million customers each year with 6,700 flights to 250 destinations. Right. So welcome Lakisha.

LaKesha Brown: Thank you.

Jeff Winton: And last but not least is our new addition. And this is why you don't have her bio in the program, but many of you probably know her because she has served on the Plank board for a number of years. This is Alicia Thompson who most recently was the VP of communications at Edible Arrangements in the Atlanta area. Prior to that, she had worked in a number of both corporate and agency roles, including the agency roles she told me were Edelman and Porter Novelli. So welcome Alicia, and thank you for stepping in.

Jeff Winton: So with that, I want to start with a series of questions. And we want to keep this as fluid as possible. So we will save enough time at the end for questions. But if you have something burning while we're having our chat that you'd like to ask in the moment, please do that. So why don't we start with, how did you first get involved in diversity and inclusion? Was this something that's always been a passion of yours or is it something that was part of a job. How did you first get involved in that? And we'll start with you.

Adrienne Bolden: Okay. So again, I'm Adrienne Bolden. I'm originally from Memphis, Tennessee, but I am in Miami, Florida. This weather is too cold. So I just naturally was involved in DNI. I've always taken up for people who maybe can't take up for themselves. Being an African American woman and a native American, I've always just advocated for being fair across the board. So specifically, how did I get into this role? I've worked for a number of programs, some of you may be familiar with AmeriCorps. That's a program that's about engaging the community, things like that. And so when this role came about, I asked two presidents of HBCU who are also a part of PRSSA to apply, and they were like, "No, I don't feel comfortable. I don't want to do it." And I'm like, "All you have to do is just fill out the application, throw it in." I said, "Watch me, I'm going to do it." I threw it in.

Adrienne Bolden: I didn't expect to get the role I was just trying to tell them to do it. But obviously, I've had eight years of business management experience. And so I'm happy to be here, happy to create that pathway for others to follow.

Jeff Winton: Great. Thank you.

LaKesha Brown: All right. I'll try to make this a little quick. So for me, DNI started in my collegic career. I was one of the writers for the college newspaper, realized that the African Americans on campus didn't have a voice. We were about 5% on campus. So I started the first publication on campus geared towards the African American students until the provost told me to stop. So that's where that started. But in my 18 plus year career in corporate America, I've always done DNI. It started with Blockbuster years ago, years ago. And Blockbuster promoted their first openly gay female executive who then became the chief of diversity. And so she wanted me to be her advisor where we advise the C-suite on diversity initiatives. That's when diversity was really hot. Fast forward, now I'm at American. We had a discussion very early that if I'm on a panel, I'm going to keep it real.

LaKesha Brown: So I didn't start at American to do DNI work, I started to just do the public relations, the public affairs piece of it. And then we had a public incident in October of 2017 that some of you may be aware of that thrust us in the spotlight about a passenger who had an unfortunate situation that occurred on one of our flights. And then I was asked to jump in and and be a part of our DNI efforts at American.

Alicia Thomson: So like many of you in this room, I've always been the first, the only or one of a few. So when you have a history like that, DNI is always in your life. And it became more so as I actually started to move into leadership roles in organizations because I had to be the voice for everybody else. And so I come at DNI slightly differently because I was thrust into it in the roles that I had. So mine actually came through because of jobs.

Jeff Winton: Okay, thank you. It's interesting when we had the prep call, and again we'd like to thank [inaudible 00:05:57] for pulling us all together remotely since we're all located all over the country to prepare for today. It was very interesting when LaKesha shared some of what American had gone through. All too often, it seems like companies get serious about this area when they're under fire, when they have an issue. Has that been the experience of people in the audience, especially those of you who work in corporate environments perhaps? Maybe you talk about it but nobody really does anything until such time that you're pushed up against the wall and you need to start doing something. That's been something that hopefully companies are getting past.

Jeff Winton: But I think there have been examples in the news even the last couple of weeks where companies have had some missteps and have needed to get much more serious about this. I would like the panel to share with us now some of the success stories you have. Obviously, you all have success stories. Hopefully, many of the people in the audience have success stories. But when DNI is done right and done well, what has been your experience? And maybe give us a little background as to what that was and what the end result of that initiative was. Alicia, why don't we start with you.

Alicia Thomson: So I have to admit when I got the questions and this one popped up, I was like, "Oh wow." Nothing immediately came to mind, which is unfortunate, it's very unfortunate. I've had a 27-year career in PR and nothing immediately came to mind in that nanosecond. But I did come to the conclusion, I did work for Edelman for a period of time. I ran the Atlanta office, and Edelman has a very unique employee network. They have six different groups, African American, Latino, veterans, LGBT, women, and Asian. Did I get all six? Every organization has employee networks today, but I think it was interesting when Dean was talking about the intersectionality, one of the unique things about Edelman's program is that each of the networks actually do interact and engage. And they're not just to create a sense of community for those individuals within the organization, they actually are groups that help to educate across the network about those individual groups.

Alicia Thomson: And where it worked really well, oddly enough, this'll tell you when I was in Edelman was when the Pulse shooting happened in Orlando, our LGBTQ group, Edelman Equal actually was an amazing resource for educating across the network about why this was so important not just to the LGBTQ community but to all communities. And they were a voice within the organization. And they led discussions in various offices. And so it was really interesting to see how what had been initially maybe created as a subset group just to create a sense of

community for a group of employees actually had a significant impact. Same thing with Edelman Griot, which is the African American group. When all the shootings, the police shootings of African Americans started to happen, they led the voice.

Alicia Thomson: They had conversations with leadership about creating safe rooms where people could go and just have a moment to grieve or to be angry or whatever needed to happen. And so I think it's a very interesting approach to how you actually leverage employee networks more extensively than just creating a mini subset of employees that gives them a space to feel comfortable with people like them.

Jeff Winton: Yeah, thank you. My experience at one company, not where I'm at right now because we're just starting this work, but was that when the groups were formed initially, they were almost competitive against each other because they were doing Martin Luther King Day celebration or they were doing gay pride. And it got to a point where we finally got all the groups together, and I think we had eight or nine groups. I was the executive sponsor of people living with disabilities. I thought when I got there they would put me in charge of the LGBTQ group, but they purposely put the members of the management committee with a group that they weren't part of, which I thought was brilliant because it taught us a lot about people that were different than we were. But what we started to do towards the end of my time there before I left to take the job I have now was to bring these groups together on a very frequent basis because to the point that was made by the earlier panel, how do you know if you should belong to the African American group, the women's group, the LGBT?

Jeff Winton: I knew one woman that belonged to six different groups. And I said to her, I said, "Do you have time to do your job?" Because all she was doing was going to these employee resource groups. But I think that this kind of consortium, if you will, of these groups that we put together really started the dialogue and started to show that these groups were all pulling in the same direction. That same company, and then I'll have the panel share some other examples with you. At this same company, we had a situation where we were owned by a Japanese company. We were based in Tokyo, but I worked out of the headquarters just North of here. And I know Sandy here who works for a Japanese company. If you work for a multinational company like that, especially one that is not based in the US, diversity and inclusion means something completely different.

Jeff Winton: So in Japan, for example, our big effort in Tokyo was mainly on women because even in this day and age for those of you who haven't worked for a Japanese company before, many women when they're growing up make a decision between going to school and having a career or having a family. Even in this day and age, even in the year 2019, you don't find a lot of working women especially at senior levels in Japan. So that's where we started. That was one of my learnings, not only with the affinity groups, but with just this area in particular. One size does not fit all. What worked for us in the suburbs of Chicago would



have bombed and would have probably been more disruptive than helpful if we had tried to do the same things in Tokyo.

Jeff Winton: I now work for an Irish space company. It's interesting that in many ways Ireland is way ahead of the United States, especially now. We're kind of taking some steps back, and I won't go into my thoughts about that. But it's very interesting to see in the Irish headquarters how progressive a lot of the things have become. And that's only been in the last few years. So LaKesha, I'd love to hear. I know you've got all kinds of examples.

LaKesha Brown: I'll try to keep it short. DNI is a journey, it's not a destination. It's lifelong commitment. What I will say from my experience at American is that after we had some public incidents, it really made ... The corporate communications department, media relations department at American is about 100 people. And what it made us do was come together as a team and actually have really frank discussions about why we failed in certain areas of public relations as it related to diversity and inclusion. To the point, we've done a good job on diversity but we're not doing a really good job at inclusion. And we realized that within our own department because everybody didn't feel like they belonged. Everybody didn't feel like they had a seat at the table.

LaKesha Brown: And so within our team, it just now, what I would say is a journey. I wouldn't give us an A plus because I just think there's always room for improvement, is that now we're more purposeful in our interactions with each other and when there are things that are coming up. DNI being top of mind, being a part of the culture, being a part of the lens in which you look at your work. And the story telling is where we run, because I think it was Dean's presentation where he talked about a lot of the literature is the website, it's the recruitment aspects of it. And what we had to take is look at our own communications, our press releases, our routine stories and realize they weren't as diverse as they needed to be. And so I would say that is something that I'm proud that our department has really been intentional in our DNI efforts. And because we're the moral compass of American, that has spread out to the organization.

LaKesha Brown: And another plug that I like to say is that our leadership now is very much more self-aware, and they're holding themselves very much accountable. There's a book I recommend that's called Hard Landing. It talks about the aviation industry and just the origin of it. If you read that, it really tells you that the aviation industry as a whole had a DNI issue at the very beginning because of how it came to be. It was mainly white males with major egos. And when you think about flying in the air, it takes a huge ego to think that you can do that. It's a journey we're invigorated by, we're hopeful. And we want the public to hold us accountable when we don't do right.

Jeff Winton: That's great. I'd love to hear how you got your leadership, your management. Not only more aware of what needed to be done but engaged and involved.

LaKesha Brown: When you have a board of directors that will hold you accountable, that's where it started. When we had our issue, Doug Parker has been very open and honest about not really at first accepting the fact that perhaps American had an issue as it related to diversity and inclusion. And when your board is diverse, it helps. And he had a member of the board that pulled him to the side and said, "This is an opportunity to learn. Don't be defensive and listen." Because while you may think that you're one way as the leadership and the research has shown, leaders don't really have a real clue. And he listened, and that was him becoming aware of his own bias and his own blind spots. And that has helped him. And he has grown as a man, and he has grown as a leader. And it's been really nice to see because there's a vulnerability that I see as really his strength as a leader.

Jeff Winton: And Adrienne?

Adrienne Bolden: So for me, I'm very thankful for my role. And because I had the opportunity, what I decided to do was create the subcommittee because I didn't just want it to be one person out here championing DNI. So I have seven members on my subcommittee. And one of my members are here, it's Deanna, she's actually one of the award recipients. And then I do have another member that will be joining us. She is the vice president of the ... You're the ... Oh, excuse me, the president of HBPRSA joining me. So thank you. So what I've done in my role is just keep expanding, keep extending those opportunities to other students. So in total, we'll have about 10 people sitting on the subcommittee. I do have international students as well. So we're representing Peru, Argentina. Help me Nick. Nick is here, he's our president, Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Adrienne Bolden: My goal has been to just extend that opportunity to make sure I'm not the only person at the table. I do not have six groups that I can be a part of, I can only do two. So it's really important that you build on more people and that you just keep extending those opportunities. One thing that does work, and I want to say this, I graduated from Howard University for my undergrad. And as you know, they had a partnership with Google. They did a residency, and now they had an expanded to HBCUs and ACUs. So I would encourage companies to maybe create residencies for students where they are able to come, and more than an internship to really get immersed in that work and be able to take that back. And you get to see diverse talent, but they also get to see your company and how you actually do have that retention and that onboarding for diverse candidates.

Jeff Winton: That's great. Thank you. So we've kind of touched on the employee resource groups, affinity groups, whatever the name is at any given company. And I would like to spend a little more time with the panel about their experiences and some things that may have worked, things that may not have worked. But to kick it off, I'll share with you a very real story, a very concrete story of where they made a huge difference not only within the company but within the state that we were located in. This is when I was heading up global communications at Eli Lilly and Company. And for those of you who don't know Eli Lilly's headquarters is in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Jeff Winton: And when I was there, our Vice President Pence was the governor. And some of you may remember what was going on in the state with marriage equality. And when Jim, my partner who's here and I first moved to Indianapolis, we literally had people pull us aside and tell us not to go more than a half hour outside of Indianapolis or we were going to be targets of hate crimes, which coming from the East coast we were just shocked. But fortunately we didn't have any incidences. But that was the kind of environment that was happening. And it's sad to say we still have states, and probably Indiana still has some of that going on right now. But marriage equality was up for a vote. And because of the opposition, especially the governor, it wasn't looking really great about getting this passed in the state of Indiana.

Jeff Winton: And so the LGBTQ group at Lilly, which was a couple hundred people, Lilly is a big company as Ron knows because he used to work there too, really galvanized and became extremely active, extremely vocal. We went and testified before the lawmakers in Indianapolis. We also worked very closely with a lot of the other LGBTQ groups at other big companies in Indiana, like Cummins and Anthem and some of the other groups. And ultimately, and we heard this from a number of the representatives that we were working with that they honestly believe that by hearing the real life stories that each of us told, it made a difference, and it eventually was passed.

Jeff Winton: Again, it's something that there's still a lot of work to do. But when you see a person standing up in front of a law making body telling their very painful story about their journey and what they've encountered throughout their life and throughout their career, it gets people's attention. We're basically as communications people, we're storytellers. We're responsible for developing the narrative of our companies. But one thing I haven't seen us do as well yet, and I think it's starting to change is developing our own narrative because our own individual narratives will always be much stronger and much more convincing than the narrative of any given company or organization.

Jeff Winton: So it's a matter of being vulnerable, it's a matter of being comfortable in your own skin. And I know, it took me many years to get to the point where I'm now am, and I still have work to do. But we have a responsibility to make sure that people know who we are above and beyond just what our job is in any given company. So I'd love to hear more. Alicia, you mentioned what the Edelman LGBT groups had done during the Pulse shootings. Are there any other examples of how any of your employers had tapped into the employee resource groups, whether it was for internal or external benefit?

Alicia Thomson: Yes. So I actually worked for Popeyes, not chicken and biscuits, Louisiana kitchen for about almost 10 years. And oddly enough, it's an interesting culture because they're based in Atlanta, it was founded in New Orleans. And about 75% of our employees were from New Orleans, they had relocated to Atlanta. Now, any of you that have been to New Orleans, you know it's a very special culture, it's a very unique place. And the people that are born and bred in New Orleans are very special group of people. So to relocate them to Atlanta was

quite a challenge. And to actually get them to embrace the new culture of Popeyes was even more difficult. So we actually, oddly enough, started a resource group just for the Louisiana natives, which is odd if you consider the company background and how most resource groups form. But it was really to start to transition how they thought about the business and thought about living in Atlanta.

Alicia Thomson: We did Atlanta outings to show them that it was as amazing a city as New Orleans. I don't know that we really, truly ever convinced them of that, but we made every effort. And oddly enough, when RBI, which owns Burger King and Tim Horton's acquired Popeyes two years ago, I think it was, maybe two years ago, only 3%, 3% of the original employees returned to New Orleans. So we considered that a success, I wasn't with the company at that time, but I talked to the CEO. And she was like, "Only 3% of the people went back to New Orleans." And we consider that a success that we had actually persuaded them that Atlanta was a great place to reset roots, re-establish family, et cetera.

Alicia Thomson: So it's not a normal kind of diversity and inclusion story, but it actually proves out the point that those types of groups, when you bring people together to create a new sense of community, how you can have an impact broadly and goes back to inclusion, which we really gave them a sense of inclusion in a new area. And also went back to retention because we didn't have a lot of people leave. A lot of people moved, they moved because they needed a job, I get it, but they stayed. And so we felt really good that we had given them a new sense of community in Atlanta.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. LaKesha?

LaKesha Brown: Our employee business resource groups really have a voice. I would say our longest serving 25 years this year is our pride EBRG, our LGBTQ. And they were instrumental in actually American Airlines being the first airline to come out about LGBTQ rights. We were the first airline to provide same sex partner benefits and such. And so very proud of the work that our leaders and our pride employees have done to really be the voice and be the consciousness of American. When the bathroom bill was being considered in the state of Texas and I know was considered in North Carolina, we're held accountable to making sure that we don't align ourselves with policies that are discriminatory because if we do, we have to answer to over 130,000 team members. And so we were like, "This bathroom bill is not good for the country, is not good for people, it is not good for American Airlines."

LaKesha Brown: And so we talked to the local government officials and signed letters along with other corporations. So that's where our pride EBRG. On the business front, I'm happy to say that as the world's largest airline that flies over 61 countries, in order to do that and to do that well and be authentic when we come into a new place to do business is making sure we tap into our employee business resource groups. So when we're expanding in Asia ... And huge plug, please go on [aa.com/fort/newsroom](http://aa.com/fort/newsroom) and see all the new destinations that'll be starting.

Shameless plug, not so shameless. But our employee resource groups are the ones that are working with our finance team to decide when is the right time to enter a new market, what the custom should be.

LaKeshia Brown: When you're entering to a new country, you have to be very aware and mindful of the customs so you do not offend anyone. And so having multiple speakers on board, the food that we provide. Our Muslim EBRG had a lot of input into the new uniforms that we'll be rolling out next year. So our EBRGs are our consciousness, they are our partners. They collaborate with us because without them we are not who we are. And we can't serve millions and millions of customers each and every day if we don't hear from them first.

Jeff Winton: Okay. Thank you.

Adrienne Bolden: For me on the PRSSA national board, our board is actually very diverse this year. I think it was a little diverse last year, but it's super diverse this year. And so that's been really beneficial because when I've had an initiative that I wanted to push or I wanted to make sure everyone was doing a specific idea, they were right on target with that. So for LGBTQ, we changed our logo to the rainbow for PRSSA national, and that was a big deal. And so I think PRSA ended up tagging along with us to change theirs as well. So we have different things that happen because we are so diverse.

Jeff Winton: That's great. Thank you. One last question, then we'll open it up to the floor for a bit. But I'm curious what your experience has been, the three of you in the various settings you've worked in and in the university in Adrienne's case about goal setting, the importance of goal setting, the importance of having a strategy before you start building ERGs and you start doing all the things we've been talking about? What role that up front work has played, and any advice you might have for people in the audience?

Adrienne Bolden: So ...

Jeff Winton: Yeah, go ahead. We'll walk back that way.

Adrienne Bolden: So when it comes to my role as the VP, the inaugural VP, I have to set a platform. So I had three initiative or three main goals. And from those goals, I've actually implemented everything that you read in the booklet of the book club, which is a national book club. So when you're talking to people in public, sometimes people can get offended or they can feel a little shy when you maybe touch on something that hits their core. So the book club allows you to read stories of other individuals and kind of do that at home and then come back with a better face when you've discussed that topic. I've also, as I mentioned, created the subcommittee. And then we have one other initiative that was really important to me, and that was creating opportunities for tons of students.

Adrienne Bolden: We have 60 students, multicultural students who will get to participate in the 101 mentorship with a multicultural member of PRSA or someone in the profession. And so that will launch, well, it's already launched, and there'll be paired by the end of the week. I'm here right now, but when we finish those pairs for you. So that was really important for me, I had a lot of mentors who helped me build my platform, mentors who are actually in the building are, I mean, in the profession to create my platform and help me make sure we achieve those goals.

Jeff Winton: That's great. Thank you.

LaKesha Brown: When you're talking about goal setting, first of all, you have to start from a basic understanding of where you're starting from, where you're at. Because every organization, whether it's education or corporate America, you're starting in different places. So be mindful of that and then set goals that are realistic based on where you are and where you want to be. But make sure that when you're setting those goals you have a diverse group of people at the table and discussing those things. The importance of goals though is really about accountability at the end if you don't meet those goals. And I think a lot of people in organizations set goals. That's all great and check the box, check the spreadsheet, whatever, wherever you keep it. But the accountability is what's important because that's where if you have accountability and measure against that, you know when you're failing or not, what you need to change.

LaKesha Brown: And so just start from where you are, look at that, be honest about it, and then where you want to be and make sure that you're talking about, and just those touch points along the way. And know that goals can be changed. Don't be so stagnant, know that it evolves. DNI is a journey. So that would be my advice.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. Alicia?

Alicia Thomson: So I once worked for a chief operating officer, and he would say every day, "You move what you measure." You aren't going to have any impact or make any significant progress if you are not measuring and tracking exactly what you're doing. So move what you measure. And to the accountability perspective, I think it's important that you not only set goals but you communicate them throughout the organization to that accountability because your internal audiences should be just as important accountability partner as any external sources, the board, et cetera. So employees should also know the destination, and they should be expected to hold you accountable as well.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. Why don't we open it up to the floor now, any questions that any of you have for the panel please? I think there's a microphone over there.

Speaker 5: My question specifically is for American Airlines, the company itself. When you're entering different factors like doing international PR and you're doing these policies and redoing all these internal works of the agency, how do you

enter into some of these countries that might not be as progressive or as there yet, but still staying true to how we're moving?

LaKesha Brown: That's a good question. So that's where you have to ... We're not going to enter any country that it would be of detriment to customers. We've pulled out of countries where there's political unrest. But when you're talking about maybe some moral issues, our EBRGs will ring the bell for us. But at the end of the day, we are a for-profit company. And so sometimes you have to make those hard decisions about going into a place that violence is an issue because we wouldn't do any of that. At the end of the day, we are in business to serve all customers. And here's always going to be a need. And so we're aware of that, we'll discuss it. From a PR perspective if we know we're going into to a place that may be questionable, we'll have those discussions and really align with our EBRG to help us educate team members inside the building and all around our airports and stations. And then we'll deal with the public as needed. And that's where we leverage our government affairs team as well.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. To that point, I just wanted to mention that, I think Dean mentioned during his talk about how there's a potential to commoditize diversity. But where the tension comes in if you're working for a for-profit company is that the management of any given company and certainly every company I've been at, whether it's DNI, whether it's social impact, whether it's corporate social responsibility, the first question they ask is, what is it going to do to drive the bottom line? And so that's something that I think we still have a lot of work on, and I completely agree with you. But the board and the management of any for-profit company is basically responsible to the shareholders of the company. And as long as you can at least initially show that some of these programs, whether it's DNI or some of the other things I've mentioned will eventually return a profit, that will open the door to allow you to do other things that may not be as transactional in nature. There was a question over here, I think.

Kevin: Part anecdote ... Can you hear me? Okay, part anecdote, part question. I'm Kevin at Ohio State, and we do diversity inclusion trainings. And Jeff, something you said reminded me of something that I thought would be worth sharing with the group about bringing your full self to work and being proud of who you are and serving as a leader in that space. And what the group that did a training at Ohio, which is a swing state and maybe not as progressive a market as Chicago is used to was really enlightening. They got quotes from people in these employee advocacy groups, and they printed them out on little pieces of paper. And then you sit in a room full of people that look more like me and have them read these quotes.

Kevin: And it was really eye-opening to see people read a quote from someone that says like, "I'm a director, I'm a black man. People are still afraid of me when I walk in the store in a hoodie." One was a [inaudible 00:37:17] who said, "People encourage me all the time that there's still time to find my husband and start a family, I'm a lesbian." And some quotes were long, some were short. But what happened, you go around the room and you kept reading these stories, and it

struck everyone like ... I mean, it hit us like a ton of bricks. And I watch people who maybe hadn't considered or hadn't put themselves in the place of diverse audiences, it hit them hard. So I wanted to share that story as a long way to ask a question as well.

Jeff Winton: Thank you for sharing it. It's a very good point.

Kevin: What other things have you seen that really help shift that culture? Like the employee trainings, I've been in some really bad ones too. And I'm just curious to hear your perspectives on things that you've seen work well in corporate cultures and then things that haven't worked well.

Jeff Winton: LaKesha, do you want to-

LaKesha Brown: So we were kind of running parallel American Airlines and Starbucks after our public incidences. We can't shut down the airline for 24 hours to do implicit bias training. But after what happened in October 2017, we did roll out implicit bias training. And what I will say is that with 130,000 team members, everyone has their biases in there. And you have to be aware of that. There are some people's hearts and minds you're not going to change. And so when you understand that, that's the first step to just ... Training is to teach, and there's that accountability. It's more about HR and policies and did we provide that training? We've had those discussions, we're hearing from our team members. Some are happy about taking the training, others are not because implicit bias training particularly is a personal thing. And some people think they're not biased, some people think they have a black friend, an Asian friend, a lesbian friends, they don't think they have these biases. So it's really getting at the heart of people, and that can be challenging and that takes time.

LaKesha Brown: But at the end of the day for us at American is that ... You are required to do implicit bias training annually in person and online because at the end of the day when you guys step on board our planes, we are to care for you. The minute you purchase your ticket to the time you get your bag and meet your family, your loved one, whomever, we are to take care of you on your journey with us. And so that is a responsibility we don't take lightly because we have to validate the trust that you're putting at us to fly you to places where you want to go. And when we start with that ... We're in service of you and everyone else in this room and outside this room. And so that's how we've approached our team member training.

Jeff Winton: Great. Thanks.

Alicia Thomson: Kevin, I would say that in addition to that, leadership is a critical point. Leaders have to model exactly what the organization is going to be as it relates to DNI. If they're not modeling, how in the heck do you expect all of your employees and team members to get on board? So I think it's a bottom up, it's a top down. And sometimes top down becomes more of a requirement. So leaders truly have to



believe it, they have to teach middle managers to believe it, and then you have to live and breathe it on every single team in the organization for it to truly have impact.

LaKesha Brown: And at American, our leaders had to go through the implicit bias training first. Now, they shut them down for a good 48 hours, because like you said, it starts at the top.

Jeff Winton: And you have to know where you're starting from. I think LaKesha you mentioned that. In a couple of companies I've been at, we did some extensive research with the members of the management committee and other levels of employees to see what the reality is because what we thought was the case turned out to be something different because we all have unintentional biases. We're human beings, so we all have that. But until those are uncovered, you don't know where you're beginning from. The thing you also mentioned that's critical is a lot of this training because of the nature of it really needs to be in a room of people, a diverse room of people. It seems like when I started my career many years ago to where we are now, everything shifted from in-person training to online now.

Jeff Winton: And there's some topics, and I would dare to argue that DNI is one of those where there's certain things you can do online. But until you have that conversation, until you do what you mentioned with those pieces of paper, you really don't get to the heart of what the issue is. And so any of you who have control over training at any of your organizations, I would just say let's try to get people together in a room. It's not all about doing this online.

Speaker 7: I meant to give credit to those people who shared those stories, back to your point, Jeff, because it can't be easy to tell those stories sometimes, but the people that were bold enough to do that really helped move the organization as a whole forward. So I think anyone in those seats that can share those stories really does make a difference.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. Other questions? Let's go over here.

Speaker 8: Hi. Thanks so much for the ... Right behind me. Thanks for the conversation, I really appreciate it. We've heard a lot of great examples from really large corporations. I'm the VP of communications and engagement with a small nonprofit. We have a staff of 25, so I can't diverse employees with a big affinity group or any of those kinds of things. So I'm curious if you have any thoughts on how to really move the needle on inclusion in a small organization? We're trying, trying hard.

Adrienne Bolden: I would say collaboration with an organization that is diverse, so collaboration with a black professionals network or whatever represents your diversity in your team. And also again, those universities, there are diverse students there who

would love to work for a nonprofit after school. So making those residencies, as I mentioned before would be my-

LaKesha Brown: And I would say if you have a really good HR professional, again, and bringing your authentic self to work each and every day. When you walk into your building, you're not leaving behind what you heard on the news. Adela, she's not here, but what I like about what PwC did with both [inaudible 00:44:12] and Dallas was that they brought those team members at PwC in and have frank conversations because those team members were coming in after someone was shot dead in their home. And bringing them in and having that real conversation really started the dialogue for people to feel safe and secure that I can have these conversations in a small setting and be supported. So I would start there because, again, a lot has happened in this world. And we're all fooling ourselves if we think that when we walk across that threshold into work that we're leaving that behind. And I think with all the stuff that's happening, start there and let them know it's a safe space to have those conversations. And then naturally, organically other conversations and topics will come up and you just take it from there.

Jeff Winton: Alicia, do you have anything?

Alicia Thomson: I was going to say safety and trust because when you're with a small group, there's a sense of family, but yet there is a little bit of angst about what I say in a small group. So I think safety and trust is really important as well.

Jeff Winton: I would also say that maybe partnering with other nonprofits that might be smaller, that are on the same journey as you are rather than just doing it on your own. Even at bigger companies, I've seen the employee resource groups, for example, get together on a monthly basis or every other month or something with that same group at other neighboring companies to share stories and best practices. But certainly in the nonprofit world, there are a number of small nonprofits that probably are having the same conversations you are.

Alicia Thomson: I think that's a great idea. Georgia has a Georgia nonprofit coalition. They meet monthly, they have resources available to nonprofits, so maybe there's something like that in your community.

Jeff Winton: Other questions? Over here. Does somebody have a microphone?

Nisa Horwitz: Hi, I'm Nisa Horwitz, I'm with Zeno Group. Jeff, earlier you made a joke about how can you do your job if you're a part of like six different employee resource groups, which was funny because it's true. So to the panel, do you have any experiences or insights or suggestions on how to approach those conversations about properly budgeting your time, time allocation, and also an actual budget for these employee resource groups?

Jeff Winton: Who'd like to tackle that?

Adrienne Bolden: I'd like to hear about the budget too, so I'm-

LaKesha Brown: Do you want to talk about that?

Alicia Thomson: So clearly at Edelman, I had nothing to do with the budget. I had some input on the resource groups in the Atlanta office. Again, it comes down to revenue and et cetera, and you have to figure that out. But in terms of participation and time allocation, it was stated but unstated that you would be given time to be an active participant and member of these resource peer networks because the company saw, the agency saw so much value from them. And the more they took off and the more engagement the firms saw from them, the more approval you had to be active engaged members. So I think it's just a matter of the leadership making a commitment to them and then giving employees the time. And again, starts at the top, it starts at the top.

LaKesha Brown: You definitely need a budget. You can't do the work without a budget. And that's showing real commitment to the work by making it a line item. So at American, our EBRGs do, we have 22 EBRGs, they all have a budget to support the events and the community outreach that they do. One of the things that I've really enjoyed over the last two years in support of the EBRGs is really amplify their work within the company because it has been a really good recruitment tool. People are signing up to join EBRGs. But as a team member, as an individual, part of what your company owes you as an employee to retain you, to foster a very good work environment and culture for you is to give you that time and support you in joining an EBRG. And so that's your birthright as an employee of that organization is to be involved.

LaKesha Brown: And if there is no budget, some real frank conversations needed to happen. And that is maybe going to your manager first and that person having a conversation with, if it's a lot of work is done out of HR. But at American, one thing I'm very proud of is they really have a seat. We cannot make a lot of our decisions without their partnership. Again, we are a global airline, we need them. One of the things that over the past two years that we discovered is that African American women are the number one group in travel. A lot of people did not know that. And knowing that, and our black professionals network, which is our African American EBRG has really been instrumental in helping us identify future talent. We need more diversity in the front of the plane

LaKesha Brown: When an EBRG is tapped in to real business objectives, it somehow becomes a part of your job every single day. You don't have to step outside and take a 30 minute lunch break to go do EBRG work if your boss is helping you naturally find the way to do that within everything that you're doing at work each and every day.

Jeff Winton: Thank you. Was it [inaudible 00:50:27]? No, I guess not. Okay, please?

Cecilia Wong: I am Cecilia Wong I'm with Weber Shandwick. So Jeff, when you started speaking, you had mentioned that DNI is being discussed a lot in boardrooms, but then companies are very afraid to make a misstep. So you keep saying that [inaudible 00:50:47] several points that it comes from the top down. In your experiences, what is the tipping point that gets companies over that fear and starting to do something about?

Jeff Winton: Well, I'll start and then I'd love to hear the viewpoint of our other panel members. In our case, again goes back to the research that I mentioned before that until we did, and it was very in depth one-on-one interviews with each member of the management committee. And it was an outside firm because we were asking them to make themselves vulnerable and to talk about things that they weren't comfortable with. So it wouldn't have been right to have somebody within the company do this research. But the findings, and I know I was one of the people interviewed. I tend to think I'm fairly open-minded and unbiased, but it pointed out all kinds of things that I have to work on. And so I think, again, just helping people realize where they are at personally and then that obviously all ladders up to where the company is because we're a composite of all of those individual experiences. But you have to, again, and I think LaKesha put it very well, you have to know where you're starting from. What would the rest of you-

Alicia Thomson: Courage. Leaders can have data for days. But if you don't have a leader that has the courage to put a stake in the ground and say, "We're committed to this, and we're going to do it. And this is my expectation for the organization," I think it becomes a challenge. And then the second situation that often is the leverage is a negative incident that just makes it have to happen, like you don't have a choice. It's a reputational opportunity to turn things around or to get yourself out of the hole I think is sometimes the fulcrum that pushes everybody.

LaKesha Brown: I think a couple of things everyone owns DNI. It's not the DNI department, it's not your chief diversity officer, it is not your EBRGs. It is everyone in that company should have a role and responsibility when it comes to DNI. I like to tell people that I talk to is that, the men in the room, and I'm going to take a minute, the white men in the room, when you step into a meeting and all you see are people that look like you, I encourage you to step out, grab someone that doesn't look like you, give them a seat at table with you in that meeting. Be an ally. Don't just talk about it, act it, act it each and every day because we all have an opportunity.

LaKesha Brown: If you walk into a room and there's not a lot of diversity in that room, being ally of someone that's outside that room and give them a seat at the table. So it's everyone's responsibility, it's not just the leaders is very important, but it's everyone's responsibility. And when they accept that and are held accountable to making sure they are doing the work, that's how real change happens.

Jeff Winton: To that point, I was at one company who every year, every single employee including the management had a management objective that was DNI related.

So at the end of the year when you had your year end review or mid year depending on the company's cycle, that that was right there with business objectives, compliance objectives, all the other things that were judged on and evaluated on. DNI was actually part of that. So by design, that forced people. And I remember there was quite a discussion when that first started because people were very uncomfortable about having their year end bonus and their raise tied into this. But then it became accepted and just became the way we did business from that point on.

Adrienne Bolden: So the same thing is happening with PRSSA. So a lot of our district conferences and our events all have to have that DNI component where we're able to share the message and move this forward.

Jeff Winton: That's great. I think we probably have time for one more question. Does anybody have a ... I see a hand over here.

Speaker 11: So my question was kind of on corporations who aren't acting on this yet and are waiting for a crisis to happen. How do we push to have it before the crisis actually happens?

LaKesha Brown: So like my mom used to say, sometimes you just have to learn the hard way. Fortunately, some revolutionary change happens because something really big had to happen. Sometimes you just have to hit rock bottom with something major. And that's unfortunate because we're just focused on increasing the bottom line, giving return back to our shareholders, and DNI is usually the last thing. Sometimes it's not even in the equation. And you see that more now than ever over the last four or five years that a lot of companies that are hiring these chief diversity officers is because a major incident had to happen. And what I will say to that is we're all consumers in this room. You all have a voice, use it, don't spend your money there. If you have a bad experience, put it on Twitter. Sometimes you have to shake the tree in order to get the fruit to fall.

Alicia Thomson: That's true.

Adrienne Bolden: I would say you do have those experiences, but then you do have things where like I had the DNI initiative for our students, and I was short a couple of mentors. So 60 students signed up, only about 24 mentors actually came through. And I had a meeting with Tyler, in the back, [inaudible 00:57:04] been partners. And she said, "Send me what you're missing. You're missing about 40 people, let us work with our network, and we'll find the other 40 for you." Sometimes you have those opportunities where they haven't had an incident, they don't have anything necessarily going in terms of ERBG or anything like that. But they're willing to step up for an initiative to really get involved in the DNI space. So you do have those opportunities. So like we said before, speak up, be the voice in the room.

Jeff Winton: My experience is that any company or organization is at a competitive disadvantage if they don't have something in place. And the employees will vote with their feet as they say, and will leave and go to another company where they do have something much more progressive and much more inclusive. So while that kind of moves into you don't do anything until there's an issue, I've seen that prompt a lot of activity. But never forget the collective power of the grassroots within any employee base because it's the employees' need to demand this. If it's not being done, then the employees at work for any given company need to be very vocal and very active and go to whoever their representative is that ultimately is on the management committee because those voices are heard. And I've again been in enough boardrooms to know that sometimes that's all it takes is that the employee saying, we want this, we need this. And that's what prompts some of this.

Speaker 11: Thank you.

Jeff Winton: Okay. And we'll be around except for LaKesha who's-

LaKesha Brown: I'm sorry, I have the head to San Francisco.

Jeff Winton: Airplane to catch, imagine that. She wouldn't tell me which airline though.

LaKesha Brown: It's an easy one.

Jeff Winton: So thank you, panel. It was a great conversation, and I [inaudible 00:59:02].

### **Session 3: Lessons from Lived Experiences**

Kenon Brown: ... Good morning. He just reminded me to say it. My name is Kenon Brown. I'm an associate professor in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Alabama. Unfortunately, our moderator Lisa Rowles couldn't be here. She had an emergency. So I'm standing in for her to moderate this panel with three esteemed professionals. We are going to focus on discussing lessons from lived experience. But we're really going to have a focus on retention. Because we do realize that retention is one of the biggest challenges facing diversity, inclusion the equation in the public relations industry. There is a lot of research devoted to recruitment.

Kenon Brown: There are a lot of initiatives that are focused on recruiting diverse professionals. But there has been a lot of attention recently paid to retaining those professionals, and really making them feel a part of the organization, a part of the agency, or the corporation they work at. We can safely say the retention is really closely connected to inclusion. It is about giving unique voices a seat at the table, making them feel empowered, and making them feel like they are an integral part, and they do belong in that equation. So this panel is going to focus

on inclusion. And we are going to focus on what makes some diverse practitioners and leaders stay on and also succeed in the public relations profession.

Kenon Brown: So, our panelists for today, and I'm just going to read their bios, Helen Shelton is a communications strategist at Finn Partners, with particular expertise in creating impactful programs that address the needs and interests of diverse audiences. She oversees the agency's award winning diversity inclusion program Actions Speak Louder, while developing engaging campaigns in health and wellness, lifestyle, entertainment, and media sectors. Helen works tirelessly to advance important causes, ranging from adult education and housing, arts and culture, voter registration, disparate unemployment and disease awareness initiatives. She was named one of the 25 most influential black women in business by the network journal magazine. So thank you, Helen, for doing this.

Helen Shelton: Thank you for having me.

Kenon Brown: Michael Lynch is a Chicago-based publicist known for fusing culture and communication. He currently works in the digital healthcare practice for Goen. Most recently, Michael served as a media relations and influencer engagement fellow at Fleishman Hillard, where he worked on the Gatorade account, and assisted in developing media relations and multicultural strategies for the brand's premier campaigns and programs. Michael previously worked with DePaul University, the Chicago Whitesocks, Hunter Boot, and Topman on their corporate communications, media, public affairs, and community engagement efforts. So, Michael, thank you for joining us.

Michael Lynch: Thank you.

Kenon Brown: All right. And Andy Checo is the president of the Hispanic Public Relations Association, and Associate Vice President at Havas [Formulaton 00:03:03]?

Andy Checo: Formulatin.

Kenon Brown: Formulatin. He has over 18 years of public relations and marketing communications experience, specializing in the US Hispanic market. Andy has worked in industry setting, and in house through his work for publicly listed and privately held companies. His thought leadership pieces have been published in PR Week, Hispanicad.com and Hispanic PR Blogs. So, Andy, thank you for joining us as well.

Andy Checo: Glad to be here.

Kenon Brown: Helen, I want to start with you, and want to ask, what are your thoughts on the state of retention of diverse practitioners in the public relations industry?

Helen Shelton: Well, I think the state of retention in the PR industry, it's pretty dire. Particularly when you look at the statistics in terms of how many minority in particular, people are graduating out of programs specializing in communications and PR journalism. And when you see that the numbers at the agencies, particularly general market agencies are that they don't reflect that. So that's an issue. Obviously at Finn Partners where I am a senior partner, unfortunately I'm the only senior partner, for now. It's an issue for us. So, I'm very pleased that we committed to this issue, and our numbers, I'm happy to share them. Our numbers, we are about 22 percent at a rate of diversity, which is nearly double the industry average.

Helen Shelton: But that's still not enough. So retention is dire, but before I go on, because I'm going to be talking to Ron after this, and I'm going to give him my whole speech on this. The reality is that it's as much on the employer as it is on people. [Neranjana 00:04:47] had a quote from Rosa Parks up on her slide. And what would have happened if she would have decided not to sit in that seat? So, I say yeah, it's tough. It's hard. Maybe people are not always going to be inclusive to you, or treat you the way that you want to be treated.

Helen Shelton: But it's just as much on you to be strong, and to do what you want to do. And don't let people run you out of your job and your focus on what your career is. And we can talk more about that. And it's very simple. People think it's me glossing over the issue, but I'm here to tell you that you can do it. And I don't know if there's people in this audience that need to hear that message, but I would like my message to be to young people that retention is as much on you as it is where you want to be.

Kenon Brown: Okay, thank you. Michael, your thoughts.

Michael Lynch: So expanding on that point, I thought that was an outstanding point. For me, it was extremely important. I came from higher education. I worked in sports and entertainment. And I was able to stay in PR for a few reasons. It's because I went to DePaul, and we have a strong network, and we have strong professors. I see my professor right there. And I also had those people who were white men who were able to call on my behalf to agencies, to recruiters. To say, "Okay, give him an interview, or give him a chance."

Michael Lynch: And I'm split on that. Because I applied with the same information without this person's stamp of approval, but now because this person who has a privileged identity says, "Okay, he's good." Then it gets an interview. But I also think that I've been able to stay in it because I've had these different experiences. Because as I everybody in PR knows, sometimes sports is hot. Sometimes corporate is hot. Sometimes healthcare is strong. So being able to respond to what is happening in PR is how I've tried to stay competitive. But it is hard, as you talked about. And I think sometimes students don't get the true feedback that they need. But expanding on your point, once again, it is possible.



Michael Lynch: It isn't the easiest job. I would say staying in PR has been an outstanding process. But it has been this constant thing of me asking, "Okay, I didn't get the feedback that I was hoping for." Or, I didn't get the opportunity. And you start asking yourself, "Is this a fit for me? Am I in the right space?" And I don't think that's always the time to say, "Oh no. I shouldn't be in PR." I think that's the time to think, "Okay, how can I move how I'm operating? What new skills can I pick up? Who can I contact so I can stay in this fantastic industry? But also stay in it and continue on this path and not get stuck in any one category or title?"

Andy Checo: I think as Ellen mentioned, it's a dire component. Not only when it comes to diversity and inclusion, but just the PR and communication industry as a whole. Coming from the agency side, you do see folk come in and go really, they stay a year, and then they switch and next think you know, the switched careers. They find out PR is not for them, because they might not have the right experiences. But I think when it comes to diversity inclusion, retention is actually the most important component that we can actually track to make sure that diversity inclusion is working. Because if we're retaining our employees that we bring in, and so let's say when it comes to diversity, it's not enough just to bring in different faces.

Andy Checo: To an agency or a company, but how do we keep them? And the way we keep them is to making sure that inclusion is working. Making sure that they feel like they're a part of something bigger. That they're contributing to the organization. And if that's happening, then those employees would most likely stay within the company. I know, we talk about retention in our industry, my professional career, I've been in and out of agencies as well. So, now four and a half years that have passed. Which is one of my longest stay at an agency. And it sticks to our industry, I guess, that we need to do a better job within the industry. Not only to retain diverse talent, but just retain talent overall.

Kenon Brown: All right. So Andy, so as we mentioned previously, you can't really have retention if you don't have inclusion. So I have a couple of questions for you. How do you define inclusion? How is that different from diversity, and how those two things are related? And how do you believe inclusive cultures help increase retention?

Andy Checo: Well, inclusion for me, again, like I said, is feeling like you belong. It's a sense of belonging to an organization. Feeling like you're contributing, feeling like you're valued. And so, that for me is inclusion. Diversity is making sure that, I feel like on an agency side, agencies have to serve a client. And the only way in the audience that we have now in the US landscape where minorities are really the new majority, especially on the Hispanic side, I feel like it is a benefit to our client to make sure that we have diverse thought leaders within the table that we can bounce back ideas. That they can contribute to a communication strategy. So, that's where diversity come.

Andy Checo: And obviously the audiences that any brand's speaking to nowadays is a diverse audience. So we have to make sure that we're being sensitive in language when

it comes to communication. We have to make sure that those audiences feel like those brands are talking to them directly. And again, I think the inclusion part is, if that's working, that's where you're going to have the retention part come in. At Havas, the way they see diversity inclusion, which I don't agree with it so much is, they feel it should be an organic thing. Right? Let's not push it, it should be organic. And I agree to the point that we all have a role to play in diversity inclusion. It should not be up to management.

Andy Checo: I think we all have, and we all need to play an active role into making sure our organizations are addressing everything diversity inclusion where we see gaps, right? Because some organizations are doing it to an extent, and they might be successful at diversity, but not in inclusion. So if we as employees feel a gap, it is up to us to voice that out to management. It doesn't have to be top management, but your manager. Because if they don't know that, if they don't know how the employees are feeling, there's no way they're going to take action to address those issues.

Kenon Brown: Thank you. Michael, your thoughts on the relationship between retention and inclusion?

Michael Lynch: I think it's an extremely big part. And when we speak on retention specifically, I want to hone in on the fact that who stays at a company is typically who gets extended those opportunities that they need to prove themselves. Who's being invited to the happy hours after work? Who's being invited to the speaker's panels? Who is being invited to the partner's home for a cocktail? Because those are where, unfortunately or fortunately, I'm not sure, that's where people start to get that human to human interaction.

Michael Lynch: And if we aren't including these diverse perspectives in those type of learning opportunities, it determines who gets promoted. Who gets the opportunity to take on that pitch, or to prove themselves. SO it is a combo of you actually have to extend the people the opportunities and resources to stay at a company. And as Andy was speaking on, if they feel like they have the sense of belonging, if they feel like they're respected, like they have an input that is heard and isn't just, "Okay, I spoke and everybody kept typing and nobody responded."

Michael Lynch: Is actually, "Okay, if I speak up it's about to have an impact." And even if it isn't incorporated into the strategy all the time, or even if it doesn't show up how exactly we hoped for it show up, it's still this thing of okay this person is able to speak, be heard, and also stick with the group.

Kenon Brown: All right. Helen?

Helen Shelton: Just adding onto what Andy and what everyone is saying, for me personally, if you look at diversity, diversity really is the reality. That's what it is. Our world is increasingly diverse, and there's no way that we can escape it or deny it. And inclusion, therefore, to me, is really accepting that reality. And that's a message

that people that are in a position to hire, who own agencies, who hire people, they need to understand that. Inclusion is really accepting the reality and making it happen.

Helen Shelton: And it is also about making people that come from diverse backgrounds and are diverse in any number of areas feel welcome and all of those things that we have been talking about. But it's also about, again, having an opportunity to engage on a human level. Having an opportunity to be in the room. All of those things make sense. But if we're not in the room to begin with, then it's a silly conversation to have in terms of inclusion. So we've got to be there, accept the opportunities as they come, and seize opportunities that you want to create for yourself.

Kenon Brown: Also, we do know that there has been a struggle with diversity, but there has been an even bigger struggle with inclusion. Helen, we'll start with you. Could you share a story about your own struggles with inclusion? Or maybe even a colleague's struggles with inclusions? And just talk to us about how was the situation navigated? Was the colleague successful? And most importantly, what lessons can we take away from that experience?

Helen Shelton: Okay, so I'm going to do a commercial here. Everyone please get the diverse voices book that was produced by the museum of PR in conjunction with PRSA Foundation. And I'm not saying the commercial because I need you to buy the book. But I want people to know that there are many voices that are diverse in our industry, that there are lots of stories about this issue. But for me personally, I don't really talk a lot about it. I talk about it in the book. We can all sit here and exchange horror stories about what happened. And it's tough.

Helen Shelton: It is very hard. But it has to do with who you are inside. So I come from a background where you either had to sink or swim. So I went to Dartmouth College at the age of 16. I grew up in Harlem. And I was taught that no matter what, what you want to do is the priority. So, I wasn't interested in people saying to me, "How could you go up there in Hanover, New Hampshire? There's not a lot black people there." Or whatever. Anyway, you create your opportunities where you are. So I did all that. And in terms of a story, I can tell you multiple stories of not feeling or being included, but making sure that I was. I was lucky enough to have mentors in my life, people like David Finn, people like Philip Apolskin, people like Peter Finn, and many others on that side that helped me and mentored me and gave me opportunities because they knew that I had something to offer and to bring to the table.

Helen Shelton: I was just telling LaVon, who's a student there, he's a senior. He's going to come see me when he graduates. I was telling him that there's a lot of blockage that happens, right? Regardless. Because success is so sweet. Specifically in our industry. I've been on corporate jets going to Switzerland to present programs, and all kinds of things. And it's wonderful. But to get there, you almost have to be a ninja to get through what people try to do to block you from enjoying that and seeing that. So, that's my story. But one thing that really inspired me, and

I'm happy that I'm able to do this work for my agency, is a young lady a few years ago came to me, we were working on an account together, and she said, "Can I talk to you?" And I said, "Sure." Because, as a black woman, I feel that I have a particular role to play for young people. Not just black, not just white, whatever.

Helen Shelton: But in particular, are young women of color. But shout out to my Finn Partners team, Latiya, Taylor, everybody, you're really neat. But the reality is that she said to me that probably twice a week she goes into the ladies room and cries. And I said to myself, "What are we doing to this young lady?" So I took it upon myself to nurture her, to mentor her, and to try to engender in her a core strength. And there are laws. Again, another thing I want to say is when Rosa Parks decided to stay in the seat, it was a different time. We now have labor lawyers, and people to deal with things if there are legal issues that you're facing. But, the reality was, that was a turning point for me. And I went to management and said, "We've got to do something about this." And we did.

Kenon Brown: Thank you. Michael?

Michael Lynch: Man. With students I always ask myself, we were just having this conversation, how honest do you be with you all? And for me, as you spoke on everybody or most of us have had that experience of being the first, or the second, or the only, or the few. So it has been countless times in my career, even going back to higher education. Where I stood out. And it was just this thing, I just got so stuck on trying to be this perfect person, and trying to respond to everything, and to show up and to do all of these things. But at some point, you just have to get to a point where you say, "Okay. I have done everything I can do. And the only thing that I can control is myself."

Michael Lynch: That you spoke on. So at that point, I don't care who has a problem if I got after corporate coms, or higher ed, or that type of stuff. But you don't have experience for that, but the person that you just hired for that position also did not have experience. So who's to say that person can do it, but I can't do it? So, it became this thing of, I just had to speak up for myself. And I had to say, "Okay, even if I don't know everything up front, I have to study up on it." And at the time it was hard. It was extremely hard. But I think the positive and the highlight of that is seeing people here, like LaVon Ackerman who she was just talking about. We went to school, so he gets two shout outs and please see her after this.

Michael Lynch: But, to see people come after you, and speak on, "Hey, I saw this person be able to do it. So I was inspired to either stay in it or figure it out." And that's what keeps me in this industry, I guess I can say. Because I have had those stairwell, bathroom moments where I'm just like, "I do not want to be in this job today. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know how I'm going to respond to this text or email." But once you come out that stall, once you come out of that stairwell, it's this thing of, okay, what has to happen, and sometimes it's a hit,

sometimes it's a miss. But you have to try. And you have to put yourself out there.

Helen Shelton: Absolutely.

Kenon Brown: All right.

Andy Checo: I'm going to take it back to the Diverse Voices book, which I'm a part of, as well. And when I was writing my piece for the book, I thought about how do I connect to that college student that might have come from the same background that I came? I came to this country when I was nine years old, in the late 80s. Raised in the Bronx. If you know New York City, Fordham Road in the Bronx is one of the main street, and my high school was right in the middle of it. And, I had the opportunity, and I feel like I'm lucky that I did, of having mentors throughout high school and college, and going away to Middlebury College in Vermont, and getting a job right after college.

Andy Checo: So I feel like I'm the lucky one. And I am who I am because of the people who have crossed my life throughout it. But I also feel like it's up to us to tell our stories. And I actually wrote a piece about if we don't tell our stories, that is what connect with people right? Is the personal experiences that you go through life. So, I feel like those of us who are in a position that could be, I think success is viewed by the individual. There's no way to really measure, at least in my view. If you consider yourself successful, success could be accomplishing a task today, not just where you are professionally. It could be a personal, if you have a family that's success to you.

Andy Checo: So, the way people view success is different for each person. But I feel like we have to celebrate those success. And we have to communicate. That way, we can connect to people that might be at a place where they feel they don't have an in to our industry, or there's no way they can make it to a certain level in their organizations. Yes, it could happen. And so I feel like we're here in this room because we want you to create those opportunities, right? And we have to make sure that going back to last night, that we play a mentorship role with those who may not be proactively taking a step into getting to those opportunities. So I feel like the personal trajectory that you go through your life is really helpful in making sure people see that if you made it, they can also make it in the industry.

Kenon Brown: All right. Okay, so Helen, you alluded to something initially when you said that it really has to start falling on the organizations and management to really drive inclusion and retention. Specifically, what role do you believe leaders should play in emphasizing the importance of retention for diversity inclusion to be successful? And what concrete steps do you believe they should take?

Helen Shelton: Okay. So, I'm going to speak from a general market agency point of view, because that's where I am, right? And, it's so true. And I keep going back to

what other people said, but I'm so happy that we're all here in fellowship, and we are thinking along the same lines in terms of how do we address this issue. So, it was said earlier that obviously if this issue is not taken upon as a mantle by senior leadership or management, then it's not going to work. So, I happen to be a senior partner at a general market firm, and I happen to also run our diversity and inclusion effort. But let me tell you, if Peter Finn did not establish diversity and inclusion, and retention as part of his mandate when he decided to create Finn Partners back in 2011, people wouldn't take my calls from around the network, and whatever.

Helen Shelton: But I don't know if it would still necessarily have the same impact, or if we would have the support and funding to do our programming. So, it is very important that at the senior levels, particularly at general market agencies, which truly are the ones that are struggling as far as the diversity and the retention piece, it needs to come from the very top down. And I don't mean that in any way that I am downplaying my role and who I am. Because I'm very comfortable in the seat that I sit in. I'm a black woman at a general market firm, and I've done a lot of cool things, and done a lot. But it's not about me, it's about the next generations to come. So without partners like Peter, and my boss Richard Funess, who is Peter's right hand, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

Helen Shelton: So, in terms of what steps can be taken, I ask that all of our agencies establish a program. And not just where you go to every event, or you have this to say and that to say, which is all great and we talk about the definitions. At the end of the day, how do we make people feel in the places that we work? Do they have systems in place that welcome them, that embrace them, that make them a part of the culture? Do we deal with people that make people cry in the bathroom two and three times a week? So that's the thing. So we actually have a program, which I'm sure all the other agency representatives here can say that they do, too, which is wonderful. And our program is very simple. It's Actions Speak Louder, and we literally take action to address this issue. We believe in mentorship and scholarship, recruitment. But most of all, we believe in strategic partnerships that help us bring programming, and bring activities, initiatives to bear for our people.

Helen Shelton: Then at the very top, we do things where Peter is on the board of the PR council, and I am the co-lead of the diversity community there, where we are charged with bringing the agencies together around this issue. One of the actionable things we just did this summer actually, we launched a CEO book club. And we had Abraham Kennedy come and speak at the luncheon. And Peter and Gail Hyman, and other people, Brad Macafee from Porter Novelli, they all got together, talked on the phone, and decided that they were going to get behind this. And now, we've taken this book, How to be an Anti Racist, and all the agencies are sharing it with their respective employees, doing workshops, talking about it, and doing these things. So those are some steps that can be taken, and can really drill down to help this issue.

Kenon Brown: All right. Thank you. Michael, what are some steps that you believe managers can take to really drive retaining a diverse workforce?

Michael Lynch: As far as what top down can do, when you start these programs as you just spoke on, every agency at this point has a program, which I'm extremely happy for. Because it ensures that people are getting into our industry and actually having the resources to stay in the industry. But what happens after that person actually experiences that program? Goes through the program. So, start your program, but also establish metrics for them to actually ensure that they are performing how they are supposed to perform. So, compare how many people, because we all understand how PR hiring goes. It all depends on the type of client that you have, and the overall business need.

Michael Lynch: But start asking yourself, how many standard people who just come through the standard HR site are being promoted and retained, and compare that to how many people who are starting in the fellowship type programs and whatnot. How many of those other people are also being promoted. Because from my perspective and hearing from other peers, is you start at an agency, or you start in a program, but then once you get in the program, it's this thing of okay, so what happens after this? Is it any type of pathway? And some companies do so outstandingly in regards of explaining, okay, after six months, after nine months, after 12 months, it's establish a path.

Michael Lynch: In comparison to people start in the program, and notice they get typecasted into one specific box. But sometimes they do get stuck in one specific box. When they get out, they're like, "Okay, what is my next step?" So as far as these specific steps, adding metrics and also hiring these people for not just the specialty programs, but also hire them throughout the agency. So if you have a healthcare opening, or a coms opening. All of these openings that people of color, women, everybody who expressed interest in them can do. It's the conversation of who actually gets extended those opportunities. But in conclusion, have metrics, but also expand your hiring practice so people are being hired all throughout the agency and not through one core specific program.

Kenon Brown: Thank you, Michael. Andy?

Andy Checo: Yes. I think in order for the DNI to work, you do have to have the buy in of all part of your organization. So, top management absolutely have to believe in it, invest in it. Middle management, I believe, have to be invested as well. And making sure they understand what are the goals of their employees? Making sure they connect with those employees on a personal level. Making sure they understand your career track and where you see yourself in five years from now within the organization.

Andy Checo: And then on the entry level, I believe those employees also have to be active into the DNI. Again, if you think it's not working with the organization, if there's something that you feel you're not being included on, voicing all those opinions

to your managers. So, in order for it to work, I think there would have to be a buy in of the entire organization with DNI, not just upper management. But without that upper management piece, it just doesn't work, either. So, it is a all in approach to DNI.

Kenon Brown: All right, so I have one more question for the panelists, but I do want to open the floor to the audience to see if you have any questions for them. And two of our Alabama PR students are coming around with mics right now. So if you do have a question, just raise your hand, they'll give you a mic, and we'll take it from there. We have one right here.

Speaker 5: Hi. So this is a comment. And speaking to Helen's things about it must be both something coming from the actual employee, and also coming from the manager's position. So oftentimes, there's a push pull effect between marginalized identities. People who identify that way, where they want to leave the industry and start their own, whether it's a boutique company, or they want to get into the gig economy and work for themselves and be that diverse voice, but represent themselves as a part of a larger general market entity.

Speaker 5: And so, my comment is really about sticking it out, and being that diverse voice and that marginalized voice in these general market PR firms. And it's more in support of your statement. And if there is metrics of ways that people can, especially for the younger people in the office, in the room, that can speak to how can you stick it out? How can you push up? How can you make yourself be heard and valued in those spaces? So they can stay, and not leave and create their own thing.

Helen Shelton: Thank you for that. Those are a good statement and question. I really believe that the onus really is on you. We have so many, I'm looking in this room, I've been at other places, so many talented minority students that are coming through graduate programs, undergraduate programs. And so, you're not marginalized. So, I don't even claim that. People may perceive you as whatever, but you're not marginalized. You are prepared, you are talented, I sound like the lady from The Help. You deserve to sit at the table. And I'm not being glib when I say it, and I hate the fact that we see this fleeing of people. But at the same time, I encourage people to go out on their own.

Helen Shelton: But even if you do that, you still have to have a network and a foundation. Whether that's a professional development group, whether it's mentor regardless of who that person is. You still need that. But while you are trying to get a foot in the door, and a seat at the table at a firm, or a company, don't go into it feeling that way. Because invariably, maybe you will be one of. But the reality is, if you're not there, then the next person is going to feel the same way and do the same thing. So, I'm not saying that if somebody is there they're trying to kill you, or they're making it so horrible that you have to leave. Stand your ground, make your voice heard, and do the work.



Helen Shelton: It's very simple. And I'm not suggesting that it's easy. But people are coming out of these schools prepared, more so than people when I graduated from graduate school a million years ago. It's a different time. And so, I encourage people to get the support that they need. Maybe it's got to be outside of where they are. So that when you go into the door, you're girded with an understanding of who you are, what you have to offer. And resist the blockage is what I tell people. Just resist it and figure it out. Because you've got everything that you need in order to do that.

Speaker 5: Thank you. Andy, Michael, do you have any thoughts on this?

Michael Lynch: I'll actually have something. I was happy that you spoke on this concept of people coming here and reaching up. But you also brought up a great point of why you have to have that support system. But you also have to have a strong peer support system. Because having these extremely outstanding people who have been in this industry for 10 to 15 and plus years is outstanding to have as a reference and a gut check and as an advisor. But as far as the people who are at this table, all of you are probably going to see each other at other event, or that type of thing. So start reaching across and understanding the person next to you isn't your competition, I guess I can say.

Michael Lynch: Because when I started at Fleishman Hillard, it was me and about three other people who started within a month of each other, or two months of each other. And I promise you, the only way I was able to stay in that job, and keep that job, and keep going, is because I had those people who also started like me. Just trying to figure it out. Still trying to see, okay is the agency for me, is the gig economy for me? So, some of us stepped out. But you stepped out and had a plan, had a strategy. But also still staying open to the fact that strategy and plan might have to change.

Andy Checo: I think supporting both points. I think change does not happen overnight. So, you just have to become a champion or a change agent within your organization. And just keep pushing. But do not expect just because you said something that it's going to change tomorrow. Because that's just not the reality of things. I think as we look at diversity inclusion, we often see it as a racial thing. Of how many people of color at the table. I think we also have to look at DNI is also about people with disability. It's about having more woman at the table.

Andy Checo: It is about LGBT feel like they're inclusive in the organization. So, we need to be sensible to, just having people of diverse backgrounds. And that doesn't necessarily mean having a Latino, having a black person in that table. It's having representation from all groups within an organization. And the last thing, I think DNI a lot of time lives within the HR side of things. And I think DNI should also live in the communications side. We are the expert on communicating with people, on crafting story, on connecting to audiences. And I believe that we as a communications department should play a bigger role in DNI within an organization.

David Brown: David Brown, I'm from Philadelphia. Thank you. I'm a preacher, too, so I don't need a mic. Anyway, I'm curious, we just started an initiative in Philly, about getting all the agencies together, because they seem to have all the same problems. We're calling it the [inaudible 00:38:04] task force. Hopefully it will keep going forward. It's trying to do a lot of different things, but one thing that we end every meeting with is that who are you trying to hire and how? Because we're finding that one of the panelists mentioned, about trying to find the right fit might not be the right fit for one organization, but could be for somebody else. And, that to me was a big hurdle to overcome.

David Brown: Because obviously, things are proprietary and so forth. So I'm just curious as to whether or not something like that, I know Philly's not the biggest market, and our biggest agency is not one of the biggest agencies, however, looking at ways to do some networking among our talent acquisition officers so they know that if everyone is trying to be more diverse in terms of their hiring, and share some of those best practices. Are we comfortable enough as competitors who can collaborate? So I would just be curious to see if any thing like that is happening, or what you all would see in terms of the value of that?

Kenon Brown: Helen?

Helen Shelton: Absolutely. Collaborating at any level is important. Yeah, we are competitors, but at the end of the day, we are also champions of diversity. And in order to make a change, we have to work together. I feel that there is a seat at the table for everyone that has something to offer. My mom and dad taught me, whenever you get a seat at the table, bring more to the table than your appetite. Bring something to the table, contribute, and make a difference. And there's enough business, there's enough opportunity, there's enough access for everyone that is qualified, regardless of their background. So, I commend you for starting the group in Philly.

Helen Shelton: I know there are other trade organizations for our industry, such as the PR Council, and PRSA, and all of those things. And we work collaboratively to put these things together. And that's why I think the strategic partnerships, which is one of the pillars of our program at Finn, is so important. We could not do this work without our colleagues at other agencies. Without our colleagues on the client side, and so forth. So I'm just happy to be here, and to see so many people that I know, and that I want to get to know. You. That, it's just the thing that we can do in order to make our industry a better place for everyone.

Michael Lynch: I highly respect that all of you are hopping on board with that strategy. Because it is extremely important. Of course, we compete, but if we want to keep PR strong on topics like these, it has to be as Andy called it, an all in approach. But specifically, talking about hiring, I was having a conversation with an HR manager about the same issue. Because she just kept talking about, "I can't find people." But it's also because you go to the same schools. You go to the same places. I know it is some outstanding, smart students who came from historically black colleges and universities.

Michael Lynch: It's students who came from community college because it was cheaper to start off in community college, then transfer into PR program. But because that person may not have the school or the titles or whatnot that we typically go after, that's also hurting us. Because we are typecasting ourselves into hiring the same people. And as Andy spoke on, diversity isn't just about skin tone. It's about thought. About education background. It's family background. It's all of these other things that can be incorporated. But if we're only looking at the same spaces, we're only going to get the same people.

Kenon Brown: Thank you.

Andy Checo: So I believe that introduction to youth is really the best way we can make an impact. I was just at Syracuse University, just sharing my experience within the Hispanic PR Association, with the comms program. In the new house school, and they know this because they [inaudible 00:42:18] to us as well. They still have ways to go into having more diverse student population within the new house school.

Andy Checo: But I think the only way that this industry is going to change is if that new wave of young professionals have an understanding of the importance of diversity inclusion, and know what the issue within the industry is. And we always say you don't have to be Latino to be part of the Hispanic PR association. You don't have to be of color to be a champion for diversity inclusion. I know many champions of diversity inclusion who are not Latino, who are not Afro-Americans, who are not Asians. We work as an industry, and we all have to come together in order to make sure that our industry is addressing the issue of diversity inclusion.

Helen Shelton: May I just say one other-

Kenon Brown: Absolutely.

Helen Shelton: Very quickly, the other thing is that to your point, we are committed to a robust pipeline of professionals. Diverse professionals, color, LGBT, whatever. So I encourage if there are people here from the HR departments, or people that run diversity programs at agencies, or people that want to get into an agency. We work with specific colleges and universities, and one of the highlights is a partnership that we have the with the City College of New York, which happens to be one of the most diverse institutions of higher education in our country. It's in Harlem, but there's all kinds of students that go there. And we literally go in there every year. We started out with identifying one student that was recommended to us.

Helen Shelton: They go through a rigorous application process. And we actually give them a scholarship to finish up their senior year, and an internship. When they finish the internship, they have an opportunity to become a partner in training. And from there it just goes on. So we're not in our third year. Everybody that has

gone through the program is now on the rise. They went from intern, to partner in training, to assistant AE and whatever. And one of the young ladies, Chantal Gomez, who was our very first candidate. I brought her to a meeting with my friend Shelley Spector from the Museum of PR that she was doing for the Latino Voices initiative, a panel discussion.

Helen Shelton: Chantal was an intern, she was a senior at CCNY. Flash forward to today, she's now on the board of Hispanic PR Association of New York, and doing very well. So that's just one example. But I just think if everyone can just do what they can, where they are, and literally go where the people are. Diversify the diversity effort. Go where these students are. Go where there is a diverse pool of candidates. And go in there, and recruit. Get to know them. Create opportunities for them. And then you won't hear people say, "Oh I can't find any good diverse candidates." That's such a cop out. It's such a sell out. So, that's a whole other conversation. It just is.

Kenon Brown: Yes?

Annabelle: Hi, I'm Annabelle. Thank you guys so much for being here. Hi. Okay. Really love the conversation you've been having. I want to shift gears with the conversation a little bit. There is a lot of emotional labor that I think goes into this work, and I would really love to hear about the mindset that you guys are bringing with you as you go through this emotional labor, and maybe the things you're doing to take care of yourselves, and anything you recommend for people who are going to be entering this and also dealing with that emotional labor?

Kenon Brown: Andy, you want to start?

Andy Checo: I think I'm the wrong person to start. You mean on how do you balance your personal life with all the stress of being in communication?

Annabelle: So I'm thinking about the times where you're really working to create this diverse and inclusive work environment, and people are just pushing back on you. And you're like, "Oh my god, how do I deal with that?" How to take care of yourself as you're facing all of that.

Andy Checo: I would say you should always feel proud of yourself. If you think you're doing something positive that would impact others, and would impact the environment you're working. Whether you're getting pushback or not. At least you should always know that you're doing the right thing. And I think it goes back to what I said before. Do not expect change to happen overnight, or an individual to see your point of view from the get go. It takes work. And you just have to persevere on it, and keep at it.

Andy Checo: And, there's a point that you'll get to a point where if you feel like there's no point to this, you move on. And that's where retention is an issue, and that's why people leave organizations, because they're not heard, and they don't feel

like their concerns are being addressed. So, I don't think I have the right go to answer, but it's just you have to keep at it. And it becomes tiring and disappointing sometimes.

Michael Lynch: So, before I respond, I just want to make sure I understand the question right. So, are you asking about self care practices in these type of industries?

Andy Checo: Whatever comes to mind. I'm just thinking emotional labor in general is really troubling when it [inaudible 00:47:36] like that.

Michael Lynch: Got you. So, I'll speak on the self care aspect of it. So what happens after five o'clock, what happens after 5:30. My good friend Asa Perry, who's a councilor, is here today. Having a strong therapist, people. I tell you all the time. Having one, but also understanding I am not my job. I'm not my specific title. I don't connect who I am as a person to this specific job. As Helen spoke on. PR extends you outstanding opportunities. Outstanding clients and all of that type of stuff is fantastic and great. But that can't be everything.

Michael Lynch: So, I would say after five o'clock, if you have the opportunity to turn off, truly turn off, go periods of time without checking email. Without hopping on Twitter. Without hopping on Instagram. I promise you next week, it's still going to be there at eight o'clock in the morning when you're on it headed to work. But also, on the mental health aspect of it, but as far as experiencing it in the moment, I'm able to be [inaudible 00:48:47] I'm able to be still in this field because it was people who saw something in me to say, "Hey, I'm a tad bit concerned, so I'm going to step in and offer that input, that guidance, that counsel." So if people have expressed an interest to helping you out and providing input, take that.

Michael Lynch: Especially when I was at FH. I'm calling out everybody today. I'm sorry guys. But there's two people here, Rachel Komen and Andrea Rogers. Hey y'all. Who I had to have those in depth conversations about hey, I have this extremely hard project, I have this extremely hard problem. I'm still trying to figure out how to [inaudible 00:49:39] navigate. So, I think it's telling me to wrap it up. So having a strong hybrid of mentor system who is able to counsel, and also having a strong personal support system to protect and look after the person and not so much the PR [inaudible 00:50:01].

Kenon Brown: Helen, your thoughts?

Helen Shelton: I would just say, people that push back for these issues, people that are with you for the issue, everybody comes at thing with their baggage, with what they're going through. I don't take a lot of the stuff that people do and say or push back seriously, or personally. You have to be focused on what you want to do. And there will be people that push back. There will be people that aren't willing to ride the ride with you. But again, it has to do with yourself and self care is important. But if I decided that I was going to melt down every time

somebody said something stupid to me, or did something dumb, I wouldn't be here. You know what my father taught me when I was a little girl?

Helen Shelton: And my sisters, I was going to Hunter College High School, and it was a big journey for me, because I went to an all black elementary school in Harlem and had to journey downtown to go to school at 11 years old. And he told me one day when I was saying it's so different. People go to Switzerland for Christmas. I couldn't even understand something like this. And it wasn't like I felt like I didn't belong. I love who I am. And that's what my parents told me. My father said, "You know what, in life, you have to be a wolf. The world is made of sheep and wolves. Wolves eat sheep. And super wolves eat wolves. And I'm not raising you to be a sheep."

Helen Shelton: And I would go to school every day, with my little suit on, thinking, "Okay, I'm going to be a wolf today daddy." But that's the advice that came to me, and comes to me even to this day, I tell people it doesn't matter. Some people are going to do what they want to do, they're going to be with you, or they're not going to be with you. And again, I'm not here to make it seem like it's easy, because it's not. But you can't change what other people think. You can only help yourself and go on your journey, and just get out there and do what you have to do to help us drive this agenda forward. If we don't do it, then we're going to be here a hundred years from now with the same conversation. So just keep pressing on and be a wolf.

Kenon Brown: Okay. So we are out of time. I do want to end on this note. And I just have one final quick question to ask you. So if we look out in this room, we have a lot of students, a lot of young professionals in this room. And if you look at this room, and equate it to what the industry is going to look like, the future is bright. In terms of diversity, in terms of representation. We are looking at a new generation of PR practitioners that will hopefully become champions of that as well. You each have built successful careers despite barriers, despite setbacks, despite frustrations. Could you share either your secret, or your motivation for sticking with this industry? And Helen, we'll start with you.

Helen Shelton: And I'll be quick. I just really like what I do. And PR and communications is the kind of field that allows you to pursue your interests on a professional level. And that's what keeps me going. Things like fee to salary ratio can keep you up at night, but the reality is, if you enjoy what you're doing, I don't know how to do anything else. So, that's my motivation. It's just being in love with what I do.

Kenon Brown: Thank you, Helen.

Michael Lynch: [inaudible 00:53:33]

Kenon Brown: No problem.

Andy Checo: Sure. So I think you have to be flexible and adaptable. I think our industry, you never know especially if you work on the agency side, what's going to happen tomorrow. What's going to happen the next hour. So you just have to be prepared for change. Because things are always changing. And so that's the only way you can really navigate a career in communications. And adapt to the situation. Because if you don't, then you're going to feel like this is not the thing for you. And I think that's the way I see it.

Andy Checo: And I think what I do is very specific. My entire career has been around Hispanic PR mostly. I do work in general market accounts once in a while. Which to me, is a passion. Because I feel like I am doing a service to my community specifically. It doesn't matter what client, or what brand. For example, I work on TurboTax. I'm educating the community about taxes every season. So you just have to look at the positive work that you're doing, and hopefully there's a positive side to every campaign out there. But be adaptable and do not think that every day is going to be the same. Because it changes all the time.

Michael Lynch: Is this on? Okay. Stay a sponge and take up every opportunity that you can. I think that's something that has kept me in PR as they spoke on. It's something to do, some new idea, some new strategy and whatnot to pick up on. But also what keeps me inspired is to see so many people feel when I used to come. Historically, I was always accustomed to being one or two or three. But to see so many people here, it inspires me to keep going. Because it means that people like Helen and Andy are having an impact, because there's people here in these seats.

Kenon Brown: Helen, Michael, Andy, thank you so much for giving us your time and your effort.

#### **Session 4: Fireside Chat with Chicago Mayor, Lori Lightfoot. Moderated by Glenn Eden**

Glenn Eden: The mayor has been really doing a wonderful job leading us into this larger conversation, many of us here in Chicago and nationally, that of building more inclusive and diverse world. To create the inclusive communities and corporate cultures that value diversity inclusion. You know what? We must become the change that we want to see, and research shows that leaders are the ones who set the tone for that. But unfortunately, we have so far to go. But before the mayor and I talk about some potential solutions and strategies to really help drive and be more consistent and intentional about diversity inclusion efforts from both public and private sectors, I want to dig in a little bit on the mayor's constitution about how diversity inclusion has influenced her life in terms of work and leadership, starting all the way back from coming from a small town in Ohio, to our beloved University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago as a law student, to being a young prosecutor, turned prominent

partner at a major law firm, and now the first black female mayor of the third largest city. [inaudible 00:01:30].

Lori Lightfoot: Coming from where I come from, I certainly didn't have in my mind's eye, when I left my parents' home and went off to college, that I was going to be a mayor of the third largest city. It wasn't even something that in was my conception. And really, a lot of the things that I've accomplished over the course of my life and my career were not something that I thought about, because I didn't have access to people or opportunities that would've said, "Okay, this is a trajectory that you can reach." And I think that's exactly the point, right? You can't be something that you cannot see. And everywhere that I've gone, I've tried to take advantage of the opportunities in front of me, really learn from my colleagues, particularly people that were maybe one or two years more experienced than me and [inaudible 00:02:17], and then work with people who really cared about helping me expand my skillset.

Lori Lightfoot: When you think about diversity inclusion, you've got to be intentional about it. It doesn't happen naturally. It just doesn't, unfortunately. We like to work with people who we like, and many times, it's people who look exactly like us. And particularly in the legal world, I know that if you had attention without thinking about building the pipeline, nurturing the pipeline, giving people opportunities, that doesn't happen. By the time that I left my firm, which has a history of having diverse leaders at the partnership level, whether it's women or people of color, I was one of the few African American partners in the entire firm. And I don't say that as an indictment on my firm, which I love and served me well, but it's about, you have to keep being intentional and creating opportunities, going and looking and hunting for talent. And the reality is, I know from my experience, I've led our firm's diversity inclusion committee for a number of years, you're competing for the same talent many times, and it's got to be something that you are offering, an opportunity that you are going to afford that sets you apart from somebody else. But then once you get people, the retention is, I think, in some ways, a hardest part, particularly when you're talking about more senior people than more junior people. So it's that intentionality that really has to inform the work.

Lori Lightfoot: I'm happy to say that if you look at our senior leadership team, what you're going to see is mostly women, and mostly women of color. And that gives me great, great joy. Now, again, we will, of course, thoughtful and intentional about it, but I'm also happy to say that the people that are around the table that advise me on a day to day basis are best in class. I mean, they are absolute experts in every area that we touch, and that's great. And then they, in turn, built very diverse teams as well.

Lori Lightfoot: But it really starts with, "Do you value this? Do you see the reason for why having diverse talent and voices around the table is important? And if you do, then what do you do to actually walk the walk?"



Glenn Eden: How has your background, Mayor, really helped you not be seen as different? How have you used a lot of your differences, or not necessarily difference, but the depth of your training, your education, your cultural experiences, how has that really helped sort of get you where you are today? Because I think this group here today would love to have a little insight in terms of... Because we're in a field that is obviously very, very white, to be quite honest. And when you look at some of these folks in here, they are the future of how companies, how institutions really talk about who they truly are, and they are striving to be the face of these companies. So when you look at, oftentimes, what is different about certain folks, particularly in this business, how can we use that as a strength versus a weakness?

Lori Lightfoot: Well, I mean, you all are going to form the narratives of the companies that you work for and the companies that you service, and really kind of understanding the value of the world that you're in. I'll say a couple of things, I guess, in reaction to your question. I'm old enough that I came up at a time when there weren't a lot of women and people of color in rooms. Particularly when I was a young lawyer, I would tag along with the partners that I was with, but many times they were white men, who I was fortunate enough that they saw something in me and they helped nurture me. But I'd go to meetings, and this was really pre-internet in many instances, maybe having talked to somebody on the phone, and then you'd see their eyes kind of get big, and they're like, "Oh..." I literally [crosstalk 00:00:06:06], "You're taller than what I was expecting." Yeah, that's not true.

Lori Lightfoot: So I think it's important for us to really seize the opportunities. And when you are one of a few, people are going to look to you. As a black woman, as a LGBTQ person, you're going to be the example and the touchstone for people who are not necessarily diverse, and owning responsibility for that and recognizing how important it is for you to advocate, and not view other people who look like you or have the same demographics as competition, really, you being at the table gives you an opportunity to open up the door wider for other people to come through, I think that is one of the most important things. And it's hard to feel that horror and really seize that power, particularly when you're junior or mid-level, but you've got to be thinking about that. I say this all the time, particularly in groups of women who are talking about, "Well, what do you do? What's the ladder?" We can't view each other as competition. If we do, we're all dead. We have to view any success that any of us has as success for the whole, and that we've got to then create ladders of opportunity for other people to ascend the ranks and maybe exceed what we have done.

Glenn Eden: Thank you, Mayor. You've been in a very unique situation where you've seen both the corporate side of dealing with this equation and also the public sector. Diversity is hard work. This is really, really hard work. Why do you think that we've not had consistent success in driving diversity inclusion efforts? Is it more not enough attention, like you just said, or accountability from the top? Is it just lip service? Is it competing? There's so many diversity initiatives that can compete with each other, and also unconscious bias and microaggressions. All

of these things can play into this. But what can be strategically done to really start to show some momentum and progress in this area?

Lori Lightfoot: That's a great question. Let me kind of diagnose what I see as a challenge first. I think it comes from a couple of different things. Number one is making sure that we are creating a menu of options for young people to see themselves in jobs and businesses. And I think that's one of the things that I really take on as a responsibility as a mayor in a city. If young people don't see themselves in the future of the city, in the future of particular jobs or industry sectors, that's a huge problem, and we will not ever break through there. So I think that's part of it.

Lori Lightfoot: I also think that... I grew up in relatively modest circumstances, and we didn't have a lot of money at all. We were family that absolutely lived paycheck to paycheck, and we were one financial burden away from crisis. But the one thing that my parents taught me, and my mother in particular, was that nothing could actually hold me back, not my race, not my gender, not our financial status. And from the time that I was really young, that was kind of a mantra in my house. My mother, the shorthand was, "Remember you're Ann Lightfoot's daughter." Now, when I was very young, I thought that meant, "Don't go out and act a fool, because I'm going to hold you accountable." And I'm sure it did mean that.

Lori Lightfoot: But what it also meant was, both my parents grew up in the segregated South. They were born in the 1920s, they labored under Jim Crow, and their whole lives were shaped by race and by their skin color. And so what my mother was also telling me was, and I've seen this, and you know this: too many of us take in all the victimization and the negativity that comes from being different, that comes from being diverse, rather than using it as an opportunity to propel ourselves forward. And one of the other difference-makers that I've seen over the course of my life is: do you believe that you have a right to have a seat at the table? Do you believe that you have a right to lead that table, that discussion? And if you don't think that, if you don't believe in yourself in that way, then you're never going to be successful.

Lori Lightfoot: The roadblocks are everywhere. The landmines are everywhere. But if you believe and you want something in your heart, then you can get it, and you can achieve it, despite the odds. And that, I think, is something that we don't talk enough about. Because, look, I've seen people, and particularly people of color, will say, "Yeah, but they..." That's another of my mother's pet peeves. We weren't allowed to use the word "they." Because when you talk about, "They won't let me," "They did this to me," you are giving away your power, and you're making somebody else control your destiny. I think that we all have to control our own destiny.

Lori Lightfoot: And it's hard to do. Believe me, I've bumped up against a lot of glass ceilings, a lot walls, a lot of people who wouldn't give me the time of day. And frankly, not until recently, right. Just because I'm there doesn't mean that those hurdles don't exist in my life. They do. I see them and I recognize them, but then I

strategize about how to overcome them. And it's a constant battle. You've got to be willing to be in the fight, because if you're not, we can have all the great programs and initiatives that we want, but individuals have to believe that they have a right to be part of an institution, be part of a narrative, and that's critically important as well. We can't give up that fight.

Glenn Eden: Thank you, Mayor. Lastly, because I know we probably got about five more minutes, or two or three, but... I want to ask you, as mayor, what's your vision and strategy to help drive more inclusive and diverse communities in our city? And you've done a lot of work already off the bat, in terms of addressing some of the economic disparity with Southwest [inaudible 00:00:12:29]. What is those challenges and opportunities look like? And also how does that relationship look like to make this happen from a public and private partnership?

Lori Lightfoot: Well, look. First of all, for me, I talk about this issue everywhere I go: equity inclusion have to be part of the lifeblood and the DNA of our city. As I said, I grew up in very humble circumstances, and I see myself in neighborhoods across the city. I see young people who, there but for the grace of God, I could have been. And so I want to do everything that I can to open up opportunity for them. The difference between me and them is that I had opportunities that I was able to take advantage of. You can have drive, you can be very charismatic, you can do well. But if you don't have those real opportunities to propel you beyond your current circumstances, it's not going to work. So I feel one of my primary responsibilities as mayor is to do everything I can, not just to talk about the issues, but really use the power of my office, use city resources, and then the power of the bully pulpit to create real and lasting opportunity in neighborhoods that have just been bereft of hope for way too long because the investments haven't been there.

Lori Lightfoot: And we do that through making sure that we are creating safe and healthy communities. We do that by making sure that we extend the reach of neighborhood schools and education so that people really have the opportunity to connect up. But it's also just, for me, being present in neighborhoods. It's not a good thing that I continually still hear from people all across the city, and not just young people, but people who got gray hair like me, "I've never seen a mayor in my neighborhood. I've never met a mayor in my life before." That doesn't give me pleasure. It doesn't make me feel like I'm this heroic person going out. What it says to me is: I need to even do more. I need to even be more present, because I want people to understand who we are and what we're trying to do, and it helps me to be out and present.

Lori Lightfoot: And finally, I'll say: I want to make sure that we are doing a much better job to tell the incredible stories of people all across our city, even in neighborhoods that are crime-plagued, that are economically stressed, you know this, there are unbelievable things happening. Neighbors are stepping up for each other in really profound ways, and it doesn't sell, right, in newspapers, but that is truly the story of Chicago. So telling those stories and making people see that

whatever their life experiences is reflected in what we're doing as a city, to say, "This is why Chicago was great."

Lori Lightfoot: So Glenn and I have been talking for a while about, how do we visualize and tell the story of Chicago to make it enticing for tourists? But part of it is also, how do we uplift our spirits ourselves? How do we sell neighborhoods and people in residents in the city on why Chicago is great, why Chicago is the place that they should devote their lives, and their fortune, and their resources? Selling to our internal audience is every bit as important as selling to the external audience.

Glenn Eden: I couldn't agree, wholeheartedly. And I want to take the time to say thank you to our mayor. We are lucky to have one of Chicago's most inspirational and influential leaders with us today during a very busy last two weeks. So thank you so much, Mayor. And the good news is Michigan doesn't play tomorrow, so we have a [inaudible 00:16:09] week. So thank you, Mayor.

#### **Session 5: Keynote Session featuring Bill Imada**

Bill Imada: But the reason why I'm here, aside from just Kim Hunter and the work that he does, the inspirational work that he does, and Pat Ford from the University of Florida, and Dr. [inaudible 00:00:18], who's on the Plank board, asked me if I would please be one of the keynote speakers. I wanted to bring it back to Betsy Plank. Betsy Plank one said, "Build a can-do reputation," so I can do.

Bill Imada: So that's the reason why that I'm here today is I wanted to be able to do what Betsy has been telling each and every one of us to do, is to build that can-do reputation.

Bill Imada: But part of my presentation today is going to be focusing a little bit on D&I, and we've had a tremendous conversation about D&I. And I have to say, this conversation is always in transition. As many of the speakers mentioned, it is part of a journey, and I've been trying to change the nomenclature around D&I for a while.

Bill Imada: So one day I was suggesting that we ought to call it diversity, inclusion and engagement, because you can't have diversity and inclusion without engagement. The only problem with that is the acronym is D-I-E, die.

Bill Imada: So the next year I said, "We cannot have diversity and inclusion without representation and equity." So then they said, "Bill, we can't have that either because it's DIRE."

Bill Imada: But I do think that we should continue to have these conversations on the best way to be inclusive, the best way to engage, the best way, as the mayor said, to be intentional.

- Bill Imada: But I want to hone my message into three specific areas. The first message I want to focus on is to the boomers and the gen Xers in the room. And then later on I want to talk to the students.
- Bill Imada: So a lot of people know me because of the National Millennial community. It's now been expanded to the National Millennial and Gen Z community. And part of the reason why that organization was set up is several major corporations around the country started sending me their reports on gen Z. So I got a really great report from Nielsen, I got a really great report from PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Pew Foundation, and there was a pile, a huge pile of reports about millennials on my desk. And one day I decided to take it home. I thought this would be great reading just before you go to bed. And I started to read the reports and I went, "Wow, this report is funny."
- Bill Imada: "Millennials aren't going to have sex. Millennials are going to kill the insurance industry. Millennials are going to ruin the banking industry. Millennials don't drive cars. Gen Zers are all connected to their mobile devices, they never put them down."
- Bill Imada: And then I looked at the other report and it says, "Millennials are the best savers. Gen Z are going to save the country in terms of the way they look at corporate social responsibility." Another report says, "No, gen Z are not about corporate responsibility, they're all about themselves." And I put these reports aside and I said, "I'm going to give them to my interns." So I brought the reports to the office and I put them in front of my interns and I said, "Over the next two days, I would like you to review these reports and tell me what they say." And in the conference room, I heard laughing, screaming, crying, shouting.
- Bill Imada: Two or three days later, I said, "What did you learn?" They said, "Mr. Imada, we own up to 20% of what is written. The other 80% is wrong. Is wrong." And I said, "So what are you going to do about that?" And the millennials and the gen Z folks said, "Mr. Imada, there's nothing we can do. Millennials and gen Z are defined by boomers and gen Xers." And I said, "Well, you know, you're wrong about that. You can have a voice."
- Bill Imada: And they said, "Mr. Imada, did you check any of these agencies? These boomers, they have a new lease on life when they turn 65. They don't go anywhere." All of a sudden they say, "We have still a little bit of gas in the tank and we're not leaving our agencies or corporations." And so what happens is the gen Xers have nowhere to go and the millennials have nowhere to go, and the gen Z people have nowhere to go because they're stuck. And so they move around for a reason because that's one of the reasons why they can't get promoted and get new jobs because nobody else is letting them advance.
- Bill Imada: So I said, "You need to speak up because you're the future of our country." And they said, "Mr. Imada, we can't do that because no one will allow us that." So one of the messages to the boomers and to the gen Xers in the room is let millennials and gen Z at the table early. Do not hide from the millennials and gen Z. The problems of your agencies or your companies, let them be part of the solution.

- Bill Imada: And if we're going to actually have diversity and inclusion, if we're going to include people of color, women, rural white people, LGBTQ, we can't just have them at the table, we've got to engage them, make them feel valued, and bring them in early to help solve not only our clients' problems, but the world's problems as well.
- Bill Imada: Now to the other messages around boomers. I actually spoke at a university in San Francisco. Some of you have heard this story before, and I didn't think I would learn that much from a group of students, but I will tell you, students are my mentors. Students guide me, students help me, students help me understand the world from their perspective.
- Bill Imada: And so I went to this university in San Francisco and I walk into the room. It's a communications class. There's 25 people in the room, almost all of them were immigrants to America. And I went, "Why are all of you studying communications here in America?" And a student stood up and said, "Mr. Imada, I'm studying communications in America for one reason. I want to understand how Americans communicate. It's really hard to understand Americans." I said, "Well, what's the text you're reading?" He said, "We're reading a text about idioms. Americans have the strangest idioms we've ever heard."
- Bill Imada: So again, for the boomers and the gen Xers, you're going to love this. And I was said, "Okay, well let's talk about idioms. Give me an example of an idiom that confounds you." And I had a South Asian gentleman from India raise his hand. He goes, "Mr. Imada, I was in an IBM conference and there was another Indian guy there, and he said he was confused by the term, 'you need to think outside of the box.'"
- Bill Imada: Now, how many of the boomers and gen Xers in the room say, "We need out of the box thinking here." I say it all the time. And I said, "Well, what's your point?" And he said, "Mr. Imada, where did the box come from? Did they buy it at Walmart? How do they build it and create it? What do they do with the box when they're finished with it? And why is there a box in the conversation anyway?"
- Bill Imada: And I said, "Well, you're not really understanding. And part of the reason why we say that is because if you're in the confines of your company, or you're at an agency, you have a tendency to develop this stagnant kind of culture where you perpetuate old ideas and you keep bringing them up. And so a lot of times, we look for inspiration from people outside of the company, outside of our organization."
- Bill Imada: And this Indian guy says to me, "Mr. Imada, why do Americans believe that the best ideas are outside of their universities, outside of their agencies, outside of their companies? Why do they hire young people and not ask for their opinion? And why do they have to hire consultants like you to tell the companies and agencies what employees have been saying for the last 10 or 20 years?"
- Bill Imada: Ladies and gentlemen, think inside of the box first, then step out.

Bill Imada: And I had a Japanese student raised his hand. And he's raising his hand and he's like, "Mr. Imada, Mr. Imada, you'd probably understand me because you're Japanese." And I said, "Well, yeah, I'm Japanese, but I was born in the States." "But you're still not one of them." And I said, "I'm not sure what you mean, but what's your question?" And he goes, "Why do Americans say we shouldn't reinvent the wheel?"

Bill Imada: Now, are there people in the room that say, "Let's not reinvent the wheel here." Boomers, gen Xers, you want us to fess up to this? I say, "You know what, that's been done," or, "There's a process in place, there's a product or an advertising campaign that works and it works well. Why replace it? Why spend the energy to change it?" And that's the thinking that we have, that's what we say that.

Bill Imada: And this gentleman from Japan said, "Mr. Imada, I moved to America for one reason. America's the land of innovation. I can't find that innovation in Japan. If Americans can come up with a better wheel, why wouldn't they? We invent wheels all the time and make them better."

Bill Imada: Ladies and gentlemen and young students here, if you can reinvent the wheel, make it better, do it.

Bill Imada: And my favorite was the Taiwanese and the German guy. They sat in the back and they had three pages of idioms, and I said, "Can you just start with the first one? And he goes, "Mr. Imada, why do black people have a special shopping day called Black Friday? Why do Latinos, Asians and white people get to shop on the same day? Black people should have a one hour headstart." And I just said, "Can we go onto the next topic?"

Bill Imada: And the German guy says to me, "Mr. Imada, why do Americans say you should walk the walk and talk the talk?" Do you hear that?

Audience: Yeah.

Bill Imada: And I said, "Well, part of it is if you have a person like me saying you should do this or you should do that, and I do something completely opposite, you're going to call me out on it. We expect people to live up to what they say, what they preach, and if we don't, then we'll criticize them. People should walk the walk and talk." And then the Taiwanese guy said, "Mr. Imada, why do Americans walk and talk? Why can they walk and just shut up? Why can't they show people what they're capable of doing? Why does it always have to be through words and why can't it be through deeds and actions?" And that's a better way to communicate with people today.

Bill Imada: And so, my message to all of the boomers and the gen Xers in the room is don't tell people they should think outside the box. Tell them to think in the box first, step out and learn as much as they possibly can, bring it back. But to start with the people that you have in your organizations first, especially your young new hires. If you could reinvent the wheel, do it, and don't just walk the walk. Do what this Vietnamese woman taught me after class.

- Bill Imada: After the classes, a Vietnamese woman runs up to me and says, "Mr. Imada, you are an amazing PR person and marketer, I need help." And I said, "What can I help you with?" And she goes, "I'm starting a restaurant in America." And I said, "Well what is this restaurant going to be called?" "Taste of Saigon Street." Saigon is now Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. It's a dirty, grimy city. So I just said, "You're going to call it what?" And she goes, "Taste of Saigon Street."
- Bill Imada: And I said, "That's gross. First of all, Saigon is a stinky, smelly city. There's all sorts of cars that pollute the air and it's noisy. I don't think that's going to work in America. People are going to have the image of licking the street." And this woman stopped me and said, "Mr. Imada, you're wrong. The noise you hear on the street is music to my ears. The smell you smell along the streets are like perfume to me. If you really want to understand the flavor of my culture and who I am, you will find it on the street."
- Bill Imada: So from this point forward, ladies and gentlemen, I want you to say taste the street.
- Bill Imada: I also wanted to mention something else. One thing that Betsy Plank said that is really important and I need to practice this more, is that we should spend more time listening. I think as PR practitioners, we're always thinking about what we're going to say, but sometimes what we need to do is spend a little bit more time listening. And one of the things that Betsy Plank said is, "Listening is an indispensable half of the communications process," and it's a process that we often ignore.
- Bill Imada: And I want you to all know, and for the students here, that you could also learn from the boomers and the gen Xers, and I learned from people that are living and people that are past.
- Bill Imada: And I wanted to end, because I want to make sure that we get to our rounds of networking, with some of the people that have influenced my life. By the way, my mentor, aside from Kim Hunter, is a gentleman named Jesse Aguirre from Anheuser-Busch.
- Bill Imada: When I started at an agency, I was the only Asian American at this 100 plus agency. The only other person that worked who was a person of color was a Latino guy in the mail room. And I used to get asked the craziest questions by the way, so people bear with me, but the president would come up to me occasionally say, "Bill, what do Chinese people eat?" "Chinese food." "Brilliant. What do Cambodian people eat?" "Well they probably like a little bit of Italian food occasionally because there's noodles involved."
- Bill Imada: I wasn't an expert in this area at all, but I looked at these... I used to be really upset about them, but now I realize, moving forward, if somebody does these things to you, and we call them microaggressions or implicit bias, look at it as a teachable moment. One thing that I'm very worried about moving forward is that we are too PC. We are way too PC in this country.
- Bill Imada: I would prefer that somebody just came up to me and said, "Are you Japanese? Do you like Japanese food?" It's a little easier for me to deal with that because I don't have to



worry about that person worrying about hurting my feelings. So if something like that happens to the students here, think of it as a teachable moment, think of it as a way to help communicate and bring people into your community, into your culture.

Bill Imada: So let me end here. These are the people that influenced me. And the thing I love about diversity, inclusion, engagement, representation, is that you could be influenced positively by multiple people. And one person that influenced me very early on was an Italian American woman named Katherine Barchetti, a feisty person that wanted to start a retail empire in Pittsburgh. But every time she tried to start something in Pittsburgh, she got blocked by all of the establishment people in Pittsburgh.

Bill Imada: And one of the things that she said that rings true to me today is, "Make a customer, not a sale." So to the students out there, it's not just about selling yourselves, but finding a way to let those companies and agencies know that you have something of value to bring to them and to the people they work with and represent.

Bill Imada: Then there's Booker T. Washington. He's best known for starting with the Tuskegee Institute, which is now the Tuskegee University. He once said, "If you want to lift up yourself, lift up someone else." And so my feeling very strongly on that is even if it's somebody you do not like, sometimes it's not a bad idea to help lift them up because it'll come back to you tenfold.

Bill Imada: And then Latinx people, I don't know what Latino came up with this saying, but they say, " [foreign language 00:15:42]," if you could feed five, you could feed six. If you could feed six people at the table, you could add another and feed seven, eight, nine, ten. This is how we should all be looking at ideas, including the ideas that we may not agree with. There should always be room at every one of our tables for an idea, even if we disagree with it.

Bill Imada: I want to get back to Betsy Plank. Betsy Plank said, "We should aspire to be inspired." Ladies and gentlemen, do what you can to inspire the next generation, but also to inspire the boomers and the gen Xers who are ahead of you. Thank you so much for your time and I hope you enjoy the rest of the afternoon.

Bill Imada: I think I'm supposed to answer some questions. Was that less than 20 minutes? Anybody have a question? You guys are all [inaudible 00:16:59]. Gisele from the University of Florida.

Gisele: [inaudible 00:17:04]. You said about like teaching people about like when it comes to the microaggressions, but how do you I guess stay with a clear mind when it comes to that? Because sometimes, in the moment, it could be hard to not be offended or not get angry, as I know I tend to do. So how [inaudible 00:17:28]?

Bill Imada: Take a step back and breathe. I think somebody mentioned that last night. And I will tell you, I actually was at a Diversity and Inclusion conference and it was pretty heated in the conversation. And there was an older Caucasian gentleman sitting in the back, and this is what happened.

Bill Imada: He sat, he was taking notes, he was observing, and then he finally got the courage to stand up and he said, "Bill, thank you for being here. A lot of people in the agency and a lot of people at the company think I'm racist. I'm trying very, very hard to relate, and the Latinx people in the office especially think I'm racist. I just want the people in the audience to know here today that I love Latin culture. In fact, one of my favorite things to eat is tacos."

Bill Imada: A person in the front row who was from Nicaragua gets up and says, "Mr. Imada, this is the reason why I don't like this man. We don't even eat tacos in my country." The man sat down, and about five minutes later he covered out of the room. And I asked the person in the front row, "Was there a better way to have that conversation?" And she said, "Absolutely not."

Bill Imada: And then somebody said, "I want to say something Mr. Imada. I'm Mexican-American. We eat tacos, we have a lot of variety of tacos. My response to him would have been, 'I'm [inaudible 00:19:04], we don't eat tacos, but what we do eat are these foods and I'd love to invite you to lunch with me so you can learn a little bit about my culture.'" And to me I think that that's a better way to bring people in than to embarrass them in front of 300 people.

Bill Imada: And so my message here is sometimes step back for a moment and say, "Was the intention wrong? And is there something that I might be able to teach this person and teach everyone else in the process?" And I know that it's not easy. The mayor said we have to be intentional. The mayor says we have to stand up and speak for ourselves and set our agendas, but sometimes there's opportunities. When people try, meet them halfway there. And I think that that's something that we should do as diversity and inclusion executives and leaders, is to find those teachable moments, and sometimes it's important to step back.

Bill Imada: I have it happen to me all the time by the way, and it used to piss me off. I mean, I went to an event the other day and they go, "Bill, we're going to go out sushi." "We don't need to go out for sushi." They go, "No, the sushi is really great." And I said, "Where's the closest ocean?" They said, "Five and a half hours away." I said, "We don't need to have sushi."

Bill Imada: And then while we were there, the executive that was with me said, "Bill, Bill, the sushi chef is Japanese. Say something in Japanese." And I said, "I was born in the far east, the far eastern part of Oregon, but sure. Konichiwa." And the sushi guy said, I'm Korean."

Bill Imada: But rather than embarrass the person I was with, I was just saying, "You know, a lot of the Koreans run sushi places, a lot of the Latinos run sushi place, a lot of white people run sushi places, so don't worry about it, but I want you to know that we have two different languages and I think I insulted him." And so we had a conversation about it and we looked at it as a teachable moment.

Bill Imada: Yes?

- Speaker 4: You had mentioned too about how to make sure that we don't shut down people. I'd love to get your views on that because a lot of times, a lot of agencies, corporations, I deal with a lot of students who are in their first or second year in their jobs, and they come back and tell me, "Oh man, I tried to make a point in leading and just got shut down." So I appreciate [inaudible 00:21:28] get your interns and like, "Tell me what's wrong with this thing," and value their input. So I'd love to get some more insight as to how we can more than empower our students to kind of stand up with courage, but also empower our other more senior folks to allow those opinions at the table.
- Bill Imada: Well, hopefully we don't have to have an American Airlines situation, but I think one of the things that the students can do well is to find champions that will also lend their voices within the agency or within a corporation. So find those champions. It takes something really simple, which I was afraid to do when I was growing up.
- Bill Imada: My mentor, Jesse, this is kind of a [inaudible 00:22:10] way of getting to this, by my mentor was Jesse Aguirre from Anheuser-Busch. And one day, I went to Jesse Aguirre and I said, "Can I have 20 minutes of your time?" And he said, "I'm busy. I'm the executive VP of the company, but sure, what do you want too?" And I said, "I want to pick your brain about getting more business for my company." He goes, "Yeah, absolutely. Fly out to St. Louis."
- Bill Imada: So I flew out to St. Louis and I got there early, and I saw him milling around his office at eight o'clock sharp. His assistant calls me and says, "Bill, come on in the office. Mr. Aguirre is ready to talk to you." So we're having this great conversation about mentoring, about talking to different companies, 8:20 he looks at his watch and guess what he says? "Get out."
- Bill Imada: And I said, "Mr. Aguirre, why did you just say that?" He goes, "Get out of my office right now." And I said, "We're having a great conversation. We're talking about these different companies. You're sharing stuff." He said, "Mr. Imada, you asked for 20 minutes of my time, it's now 8:21. Get out."
- Bill Imada: And as I was walking out, he said, "Stop. I want to teach you a lesson. Ask for what you want." And I said, "But that's not in my DNA." "I don't care," he said, "as a person of color, figure it out because black people and Latin people before you figured it out, and I'm not going to be here to teach you a lesson. You're going to have to learn it from all the people that struggled before you, so now get out."
- Bill Imada: So the message here is sometimes you have to ask for what you want, and that's not easy to do. But I also want students to be smart. I mean, many of you have taken accounting. I hated accounting. But one of the things that I learned in that was LIFO and FILO. Do you know what LIFO is? Last in, first out. That's me because I'm an introvert. So, you know, maybe the professor says, "Bill, you've got to show up at this event and you got to network." I get that, but if the event started at 5:00, I would show up at 5:30, and then I would make sure that all the people I needed to see saw me and then I would be the first one out.

Bill Imada: But now I'm trying to get young people to be the opposite and do FILO, first in, last out. And one of the things that young people can do is get there early, talk to the people that they need to talk to, and say what you're planning to say and what you want to do and why you want to be a part of this conversation. And that conversation starts before the meeting and then is followed up after the meeting. So you want to make a good first impression and then you want to follow it up with a great last impression.

Bill Imada: And I don't think young people do that, and I think that executives will be very impressed if somebody took the time to do the research first and say, "This is what I want to say, this is how I want to do it. Give me the floor to do that. Give me the opportunity to do that." And if you ask an executive for that, executives are probably going to let you do it because a lot of times they want people to challenge them.

Bill Imada: I don't know if I answered that question.

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:25:03]

Bill Imada: Oh, do you have more time?

Speaker 5: Yes. Yes.

Bill Imada: Yes?

Speaker 6: Hi. So my question/comment has to do largely on the education side, just because I was reading [inaudible 00:25:14] After Leadership and learning how to go about diagnosing the system and the diagnosis and how you want to adapt in order to take care of the problem that you're seeing. So I'm relating it to these situations where you're turning these microaggressions or these uncomfortable encounters into teachable moments.

Speaker 6: I was curious because I know, particularly at high school, and there's a lot of people who come from a very distinct background, they're very protective of their culture, of their background, and it becomes difficult to assimilate to these environments, bringing their full self without creating conflict when there's other people who haven't necessarily encountered people like them. So I'm curious as to what exactly informed this point of view that you're able to hold, if there's any literature and any kinds of books that I could take back to my school to be able to give them more substance to this concept of saying [inaudible 00:25:58] and looking at it from an above ground point of view by depersonalizing the issue and using that [inaudible 00:26:03].

Bill Imada: I'm going to try to answer this with a quick story. I'm from a very small town in eastern Oregon, but I grew up in the city of LA, and we were on a trip. And on this trip with the National Millennial and Gen Z community, we invited students from red states, blue states, and purple states. And a large number of the students were from rural communities and they were rural white communities. And on the bus... Oh, no, we went to a Verizon, and during the meeting at Verizon, the executives at Verizon said, "Bill, don't be mad at me." Kim knows this person [inaudible 00:26:38], "But how many of you voted for Bernie Sanders?" And it's like, "Oh, where is this going?"

Bill Imada: So all these hands, you know, 18 out of 27 hands go up. And he goes, "Well now that Bernie is out of the race, how many of you going to vote for Hillary?" 3 hands out of 18 go up. And we have a conversation about why that happened. And he goes, "Well, I probably don't need to talk about Donald Trump." Four hands go up. And this woman from Colorado shot the dirtiest look to the woman from eastern Oregon, which is where I'm from, who was from a rural white community. Like if looks could kill, that would be it.

Bill Imada: And then on the bus, and I'm going to probably exaggerate just a tad, they had a colossal fight. The woman from Colorado was a Muslim and she said, "How dare you vote for a person like Donald Trump. He's a womanizer, he is sexist, he's racist. How dare you do that."

Bill Imada: And the woman from eastern Oregon said this, "You're not the only one that feels disenfranchised in this country. You're not the only one that feels like everyone thinks you're entitled. Well, I want you to know something. My mom and dad work 18 hours a day, seven days a week to put food on your table. Oh, and by the way, you go to the University of Colorado? You have a lot of electives. Your electives are French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese. You could take literature, you could take a work study course off campus. Oh, guess what my electives are in eastern Oregon? How to fix a combine, how to fix a used car, and one semester of Spanish. Oh, people are saying that your parents need to retrain for another job? Well, guess what? The job training place is 150 miles away, and my mom and dad do not know how to turn on a computer. They've never had a computer. So who is disenfranchised?"

Bill Imada: And the Muslim woman from Colorado said, "I have never heard that story before. Tell me more." And then after that conversation, the woman from eastern Oregon said, "I've never met a Muslim woman before. Tell me what your life is like." And she told her. They're best friends today.

Bill Imada: So the situation that we have in this country today, which really bugs me and doesn't allow us to have a teachable moment, is that we are defending people that we don't like because they voted for a Republican or they voted for a Democrat or they loved guns and they eat guns. To me, that's a travesty. If we're really going to preach diversity and inclusion, we've got to welcome every viewpoint to the table regardless of whether or not we love it or not, unless that person is preaching hate and murder.

Bill Imada: But I think we should always leave that room, and so, I don't think I need a book because people like you are teaching me everyday. I would never have had that conversation and I wouldn't have heard that on the bus unless I was traveling that day. And the professor that was with me grabbed my arm and said, "Bill, stop that conversation. You've got to stop it." And I said, "No, let that conversation go on." And you know why? They got tired after 20 minutes. And after 20 minutes, they stopped and took a breath and said, "Wow, I didn't know that about you," and they learned.

Bill Imada: And by the way, this Muslim woman actually flew all the way to Boise and drove three hours to attend this rural caucasian woman's graduation. And they made a video together, How to Bring The Country Together. And so, if we're going to be good diversity

stewards, we don't have to read a book, we could just talk to each other, listen as Betsy said, we should be doing, and look at that other half as a way to teach other people about who we are and what we're all about.

Bill Imada: By the way, I don't read PR books. I like reading novels because I think you'll learn more from a novel than you'll learn from a PR book. Sorry. Anything else? Are we good? Oh, back there.

Speaker 7: So just like continuing on the topic of like microaggressions and stuff and like having a teachable moment, there's been like a lot of conversation lately saying like why should it be like the community's responsibility to educate these ignorant people, especially if don't want to be like educated or learn more about that? So how would you consider like handling those kinds of situations?

Bill Imada: First of all, [inaudible 00:31:27] is right. There's always going to be a few people that you'll never win their hearts and minds. But you know what? I won't give up. And one thing that I will always remember, there was a Native American who ran for Congress. He represented the state of Colorado. His name was Ben Nighthorse Campbell. And he said, "There's but one factor for success, never give up."

Bill Imada: I will tell you that we all have stories. Once we stopped telling those stories, we're going to miss an opportunity to teach. And sometimes you have to tell that story more than once, and for me that's okay because somebody is going to hear that story and somebody is going to remember that story.

Bill Imada: So yeah, there's going to be a few people that you won't be able to convince and that isn't always your responsibility, but at least you should try. And I won't stop trying because I think that we give up way too easily in this country, and that's the problem. I think what I'm seeing with people that are applying for jobs, you apply there once, you say, "Oh bill, nobody ever got back to me." Well, apply again, or keep trying or find a different way to get there.

Bill Imada: Because I think our mentality in this country is unfortunately one direction. It's go from point A to point B with a straight line. Well guess what? People don't make decisions anymore with a straight line. They'll go this way, this way, this way, and that way. It doesn't really matter how you get to point B as long as you get there. If it takes you two years, three years, ten years, that's okay.

Bill Imada: So for me, it's like if there's an opportunity for a teachable moment, I'm going to take it. And even if it takes me 10 years to do it, if I can help someone understand and I can learn from them, then I'm going to take that chance. So it might be different for you, but that's just me.

Bill Imada: Thank you. Oops. One more and that we think we should probably wrap up, right? One more. One more.

Speaker 8: Hi. Hello. My name's [inaudible 00:33:27]. I currently go to the University of Florida. I'm a fourth year student. Go Gators. So currently I'm the founder and president of the nation's second Black Coalition Student Society. And in a way, I feel like I'm somewhat leading a affinity group at a university level. So what would you say to a student who's a leader within their college, within a group, something similar to my group, and wanting to make that transition into the career field? So what would you say to a student who is trying to serve a purpose and encourage students to serve a purpose on their campuses and in the corporate world?

Bill Imada: First of all, I think it's great that you're starting a [inaudible 00:34:17] chapter at the University of Florida because I do think that each of the communities have their own needs and their own interests and aspirations. But one way to get into the corporate world is to find that intersection.

Bill Imada: And a few people talked about intersectionality. There are intersections with all of the employee and business resource groups at all of the major corporations and at almost all of the major holding companies for PR agencies. So find those connections, but also reach out and make connections with some of the other ERG groups, like the LGBT ERG group, or the veterans ERG group, or the Asian and Pacific Islander affinity groups. Reach out to those because you can learn from every single person that you pull in.

Bill Imada: And I would even encourage you to bring in the people that don't agree with you because we should always look for a way to have those dialogues, not necessarily to try to convince, but to try to understand where people are coming from.

Bill Imada: So you're in a good position as an African American affinity group that's at the University of Florida, and there are plenty of affinity groups all through Florida and through the region. Reach out to them and say, "I need help. I'd like to learn a little bit more about who you are and I'd like to pull you into our community, but we'd also like to be pulled into yours." And don't give up. By the way, when people say no, no means maybe. All right, thank you so much for your time.