



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 4: DIANE GOODMAN – SKEPTICAL (YET OPTIMISTIC) ABOUT THE D&I ENTERPRISE

Diane Goodman

Is this the world you want to live in? Like, is this really the world you want to live in? I know that's not for me, and that's not the world I want my kids to live in.

Phil Wagner

Hello, from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes To Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real, human lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun. Welcome, Diane Goodman, to our podcast today. I'm a fan of Diane's work, and I was so thankful that she agreed to join us. If you're not familiar with Diane. Diane Goodman has been an educator and a consultant on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice issues for three decades. Diane worked with numerous organizations, community groups, schools, and universities to create environments that allow all people to feel valued, to be treated fairly, and able to work together productively. Diane has been a professor at several universities, and she regularly presents at national and international conferences. Diane is the author of the book Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups and co-editor and contributor to Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, as well as other publications. Diane has been cited in The New York Times, Working Mother Magazine, and the Christian Science Monitor and has been a consultant to the Museum of Natural History in New York and the documentary White People from 2015, created by Jose Antonio Vargas and MTV. Her extensive and varied background enables her to bring a range of skills and perspectives to meet the needs of her clients. Diane, it's so good to chat with you, and that's quite an impressive biography. I'm so glad you're willing to join us. Have I missed any details in that biography? Can you share a little bit more about who you are and the work you do?

Diane Goodman

So thank you for the invitation to talk with you. I'm really glad to be here. Yeah, and in 30 plus years, there are a few other details that you missed. I don't know that our listeners need to hear all of them, but really, my life work has been committed to how to create more equity and inclusion and justice in our world, in our communities, in our organizations. And so that's really the path I've been following through different venues, working in higher Ed, being a consultant, writing, other capacities.

Phil Wagner

So, Diane, you and I have chatted offline that the work that you do is not explicitly framed as diversity and inclusion work, particularly in the way that we might talk about it on this podcast. In fact, I know you've noted that in many ways, you've become skeptical of the D&I industry as it's currently configured. I love if we could center that conversation early on in this episode because I think that your framework is an important framework to understand the D&I enterprise. Can you offer any insight or share your approach as a consultant?

Diane Goodman

Sure. So having done this work for so long, it's been interesting to watch the evolution of language as well as how people approach work that is now being called DEI diversity, equity, inclusion work. When I started doing this formerly in the 80s, I was schooled under the framework of social justice, and that's still language that I use that actually is having a resurgence now. We've moved through multiculturalism. We've moved through diversity. We've now been DEI. Sometimes it's JEDI Justice, equity, diversity, inclusion. People are now using the term belonging so clearly the language and ways people frame this vary and evolve. For me, what's been important to hold on to is the sense of are we talking about issues of systemic inequities? Are we acknowledging issues of power and privilege? Because what I have found is that diversity, which I think of, is how do we really value and recognize the diversity among us? And that can be around race or sexuality or ethnicity or ability or religion? Many of those different categories. So that's really important. And thinking about the representation of people in our organizations is really important, but it's not enough, I believe. We also need a sense of inclusion. Do people feel respected? Do people feel valued? Do people feel really part of an organization? But the piece that a lot of people then leave out is okay. Given those, how do we also acknowledge the fact that we are positioned differently in society, and that shows up in our organizations? That we do have hierarchies, power hierarchies in our society based on race, based on gender, based on sexuality, based on class, and so on. And we need to acknowledge how those are impacting people's lives historically and currently in society at large. And then how that's manifesting in our institutions. So that's why I hold onto and frame my work, including social justice.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I think this is such a timely contribution, too, because as we're recording this, there's a social battle over the very thing that you're speaking to, right. Like we're in the midst of a battle right now on critical race theory that will change three months from now, then three months from that. And it seems to me that a lot of folks focused on D&I work really lean into, particularly in the organizational sphere, that belonging piece, because that's easy, right? Like, we can all see the business case for that. But your work, as you noted, really centers the term social justice. Now that's loaded, Diane and I would imagine, because it's not often discussed favorably or it's not always discussed favorably. There are a lot of organizations specifically that are hesitant to frame their D&I work as social justice. So I think my question is, can you do D&I work apart from a commitment to social justice?

Diane Goodman

Well, I think people do it all the time. Again, people have different approaches, and I think talking about I know we'll talk more about being consultants in organizations. I think it's important for people to be clear about what their approach is and what they're trying to do, and what the goals are. And so, yes, people do D&I work, and that can have value. But people just need to be clear what it is. I mean, for me, I always make sure to include the E, so I don't talk about diversity and inclusion. I always make sure that I include the E, which is equity, which to me, aligns more closely with the social justice piece—again, recognizing power—issues of power, issues of privilege ensuring that they're equitable outcomes for different groups of people. So I don't always use the term social justice. I'm always sensitive to what language resonates for different groups and organizations, but I make sure I include the E along with the D and the I.

Phil Wagner

I think that's so important to it's just like the LGBTQ acronym, right? Like that continues to shift in how we do we use the plus. Do you do IAP? And I think the language around diversity, equity, and inclusion. As you know it, now we're adding belonging and justice. I think language shifts, and that's part of the discomfort of just growing with how the conversation develops broadly speaking. I think you tee'd this up well to talk about consulting, and so you're a consultant, and you work to really help others, I think build consciousness, build a competence and understanding and a commitment to equity and inclusion. Can you talk a little bit about what a consultant in this area does, particularly from the lens that you invoke in your own consulting work?

Diane Goodman

One aspect is doing organizational analysis. Some people call it equity audits. Where is the organization currently at in terms of its environment, culture, policies, practices to be creating environments where everybody can really thrive? Everyone is valued. People have access to resources and opportunities. So often, that's a starting place. Let's look at where are things at? Where are we doing well? Where we need to be paying some attention? Other pieces that happen are creating DEI plans. So based on the information, how do we want to move forward? So really creating measurable benchmarks, accountability measures, a real plan for how to move forward. Another piece that often happens in conjunction with that is different aspects of training, and that's where I really focus my efforts. That's what I love to do most. So I love doing education. I love doing training. I love doing facilitation, and that's really helping people develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills to implement the changes. Because what I find is that even people have good plans and they have good intentions. If we don't understand, we don't have self-awareness around our identities. We don't understand other people. We don't understand how we are reproducing inequitable dynamics. If we don't understand what microaggressions are, those subtle insults that we do unintentionally. If we don't have skills about how to speak up or how to analyze policies and practices to make them more inclusive. Then we can't be creating the change that people say they want.

Phil Wagner

In so many ways, I think you're talking about inserting a new lens into how you see the world, right? In those learning conversations. You're asking people to really occupy an uncomfortable space where they become necessarily self-reflective to the degree that they acknowledge things that are not fun to acknowledge. You've been at this work for quite some time, spanning three decades. Do you have any tips and tricks for those of us that are newer to the game in trying to facilitate productive conversations that are going to waltz into that territory of discomfort for the people engaged within them?

Diane Goodman

First, I appreciate you recognizing that, yes, this can be uncomfortable. So I don't think it always is, but it often is. And that's not a bad thing. As an educator, that's often our learning place, our growth edges. When we feel uncomfortable, it's like, oh, what new is happening for me or what new am I learning? So embracing the discomfort is really valuable when we're doing this work. What I have found and many other people have, and research is validated, is when people feel shamed and blamed. That is not opening them to learning. So that's the first place I start. That is not a useful approach.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Diane Goodman

If we want people to be open to learning.

Phil Wagner

Right because there's no productive outcome to that, you're going to shame somebody into a corner. You're not empowering them at all to make the change. I love that.

Diane Goodman

And also, it shuts people down. It doesn't open people up.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Diane Goodman

People get into a defensive place, and that's not opening people up to learning or hearing or new perspectives. The other thing that I start with is the assumption that we are all socialized and culturally conditioned by the society in which we are a part. And I do most of my work in the US, although I also do some work globally, and wherever people are, there are systems of inequity. They don't always look exactly the same, but there are power hierarchies everywhere. We are all socialized into those. So we all get messages about which groups are valuable, which groups are better, which groups are worse, what's more normal? We all have biases. We all have lenses, as you're saying, that we need to shift because of how we've been socialized and

how we've been culturally conditioned. In the work on implicit bias extensively shows that we all have implicit biases no matter what our group is. And even when we're part of marginalized groups, we're still socialized to accept the negative messages about our groups. So when I start there, it's like, okay, I just start from the place. We're going to have biases. We're going to have stuff that we don't know. We have not been adequately educated. So okay, let's just start there. Me included. And let's see what we need to reevaluate? What we need to relearn? Where things that we have stereotypes around, and how can we get smarter and more competent?

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I mean, as a consultant who has again been engaged across three decades, I'm sure that you've had to keep a close eye on the social conversations surrounding D&I. Do you have any concerns about where that conversation is right now because you talk about the necessity of or the lack of education, rather? And I think you see a social movement that's really trying to ramp that up, right? Not educate students on systemic issues, particularly surrounding race. How do you, as a consultant, anticipate that's going to play out for when we train what might be corporate executives 20, 30, 40 years in the future?

Diane Goodman

Well, hopefully, we will be in a very different place 40 years, you know, in the future. I really, really hope. But we've been seeing that play out already under the Trump administration, like banning federal money to support anything that mentions certain words related to race. So we've seen that happen. Fortunately, that's been overturned. But as you're saying, certainly there are many campaigns to limit what people learn. And I think it is essential. We need to know our history. We need to know our history. And that includes understanding racism. That includes understanding ideologies of white superiority that have shaped this country. And the other thing that I think is really important, going back to your previous question, is it's not about individual blame? I mean, I identify as white. I also have many other identities.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Diane Goodman

But it is not about me being a bad white person. It is understanding systems that were created to benefit white people to keep white people in power. But it's not about me being a good or bad white person. I think I'm a good person. I try to treat people well. I try to create more justice in the world, and I have benefited historically from the laws and policies and practices, and ideologies in this country that have benefited white people. And it continues to this day. So I think that's a critical piece of we need to understand history. We need to understand systems. We need to understand how those legacies impact us today. And there's no getting around the importance of that knowledge. If we are to move forward and create more democracy. To create more equal opportunity. I mean, things that people hold dear as principles in this country.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I want to come back to that whiteness conversation because you really center that in your work, and that's been very impactful to me, but it's not lost on me that it seems like it's a blunder or a very ill-informed approach to assume back to the conversation on critical race theory that if we just don't talk about it or if we ban conversations about it, the problem will just work itself out or go away. I think that's a blunder. And I'm curious, as a consultant who's worked with a lot of clients, what types of common blunders do you tend to see with the clients that you work with? Like, what types of issues tend to occupy most of your time as a consultant as you work alongside clients who need to fix issues or work proactively to ensure they are fully diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Can you share some of those blunders with us?

Diane Goodman

Yeah. And so again, this is other choices consultants make about which clients we choose to work with. So that's the other thing. Some people want to work with clients that already have a significant commitment to issues of equity and social justice. So they're starting at a different place than other organizations where this may be very new. As well as the demographics of a particular organization. But I think one thing that I see fairly frequently is the sense of wanting to keep it very surface. So sometimes the extreme is like to check the box. It's like, okay, we need to have a diversity workshop. So we're going to have an hour diversity workshop. We've checked the box. Now we can say we've done diversity, and we're all good.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Diane Goodman

But then even for people who have done more work, not really willing to dig into what I think is the harder work of looking at the power dynamics in an organization and being willing to look at what needs to shift there to give people who have been kept out of positions of power in an organization as well as in society access to those and in really serious ways, move aside or create real pathways to those positions. Because in most organizations, if you look at who is in the top echelon, it tends to be white people, men, and other dominant identities. And as you move down in an organization, it tends to get more diverse if there is diversity. And so, being really willing to shift that is a lot more challenging for organizations.

Phil Wagner

So is that sort of the end goal, too, like as a D&I consultant, work to reconfigure organizational spaces and hierarchies to open up room for those, I guess, non-privileged or marginalized communities to occupy leadership positions. Does it go beyond that? Is that where you tend to focus most of your time?

Diane Goodman

It's one piece, but not the whole piece. So, yes, I think our organizations need to reflect our larger communities. And so people should be in different positions throughout an

organization, including in leadership, and especially when people have been kept out of those positions, it's even more important to ensure that those voices and perspectives are being centered at leadership levels and are having the opportunity to offer leadership. So that's one piece. It's also more broadly shifting the culture of an organization. And that is both the formal and informal dynamics. So it's the policies and practices about looking at outreach and recruiting. It's looking at performance evaluation. It's looking at benefits people get so all those kinds of things, as well as one of the norms, the cultural norms about how you need to speak, how you need to dress, what kind of flexibility is given to people for different situations, what kind of holidays are recognized? So I think it's really creating cultures in organizations that reflect the diversity of people that will then allow everybody to show up as their more authentic selves and can thrive in this environment.

Phil Wagner

And I think that's what distinguishes a D&I consultant from a good D&I consultant or DEI consultant, right? Because it's not just here's a boxed solution that I toss across to your desk. It's taking the time to have those conversations, to listen, to get a pulse on the organizational culture, and then develop a tailored approach to that organization, too. That reflects what you do in NYC is going to look different than what you do in Chicago, which is going to look different than what you do in Albany or down in Georgia. And so it's being mindful of those smaller dynamics. And I think that tees us up for where I want to go the next, which is back to that conversation on whiteness. A lot of those cultural dynamics are found or revealed as we have those teaching opportunities, those learning moments that you talked about earlier, and you've published a lot of works on this, including some that have been really impactful to me in my own teaching. In one of your pieces, Diane, you ask what's a nice white girl to do in an unjust world like this. And I think even just the framing is such important rhetoric because there's this pervasive idea that if we're just nice, racism, sexism, homophobia, and all of those things that we deal with will go away. Is being nice enough? Is that what this work is all about?

Diane Goodman

No, certainly not. I do want to just explain that title a little bit that in that it was really reflecting on my experience in the world. I've often been perceived as a nice white girl, and this was about my own social justice learning journey, and the framing of that was to acknowledge that clearly, the way I'm experienced in the world is very different than how many other people are experienced in the world and that I have a role, as does anybody in working towards justice. But yes, on one hand, we should be nice to people. On the other hand, niceness can often mask the willingness and the ability to be more authentic, to deal with conflict, to really address issues that need to be addressed. And that happens frequently, talking about blunders in organizations that is something that is very predominant. People are often very uncomfortable about really engaging difference. And again, I don't put this as personal blame. We have not been taught. We have not been given opportunities, most of us, to really learn how to have these honest conversations. So we tend to avoid them, and how we avoid them is let me just be superficially nice, but that is not addressing any of the issues that will really allow

people to really feel as if they belong or treated fairly, are respected, and create a more equitable environment.

Phil Wagner

I couldn't agree more. And the second part of that title, it goes back to that white piece, right. So what's a nice white girl to do this? I think white people specifically, Diane, often struggle to figure out how do I occupy space. I think you have people who choose to disengage because they're like, I'm white. That doesn't apply to me. And then you also have well-intentioned folks who say I want to be engaged in the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. But I don't want to hold space or occupy even more positions of power. What have you learned in your journey as a white person doing this work? Can you share a little bit more on that?

Diane Goodman

First is do our own work, educate ourselves. Read, read, listen, watch. So I find the more informed I am. It makes it easier to figure out what I need to be doing. And now there is a plethora of wonderful material out there written by other white people who have been struggling with this and have learned as well as people of color. So that's the first thing I think the self-awareness and learning. And then it's listening to people of color. If we're talking about race. And I would say that anytime we're part of a dominant group wanting to be in solidarity or support or allyship with people from marginalized groups is listen to them. What are they saying? What do they want? And then how do we figure out how to work in solidarity with folks in collaboration with people. To be addressing those issues and concerns? So there's no magic rule. There's no magic thing that one always needs to do. But I think that's really where we get the guidance to figure that out. And the other thing that often comes up is not looking to people of color to educate us. I think it's nuanced. I think we need to be open to having conversations, and we learn through those conversations, but not looking to someone to explain something to us when we could easily go on the Internet, and there it is.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Diane Goodman

And I also want to underscore your point about really being mindful of the space we take up. And I know this is a struggle for a lot of white people, me included of. When is it important that we speak up? And when is it important that we don't? I think sometimes white people air to the side who are conscious of this. So I think a lot of white people take up way too much space. But people who are conscious of this, I think they shrink in a way in which we're not using our power in ways that would be effective.

Phil Wagner

Wow.

Diane Goodman

And so we do need white people speaking up around issues of racial equity, and especially when we're in positions of power to say, wait a minute, what's going to be the impact of this policy? Whose perspectives aren't we including? Whose voice needs to be at the table to be making this decision with us? And I think those are critical spaces where white people really do need to be speaking up and speaking up with other white people. So it's not left to people of color to be correcting the biases or microaggressions that might be happening.

Phil Wagner

And it's certainly in our best interest to do so right. I have talked about some of your work that's been impactful to me, and there's two pieces as we move towards the final set of our questions here today. One of those pieces notes that there are significant costs associated to oppression, and those costs are also felt by people of privileged groups. Can you speak a little bit to some of the work you've done in that area on the costs of oppression, even to people who are white who occupy positions of power or privilege?

Diane Goodman

Yeah. So I strongly believe, and this has motivated my work, that we are all harmed by systems of oppression. Not in the same way, and I want to be really clear about that. I am not suggesting that white people are oppressed by racism and the way people of color are, but these are dehumanizing systems that we all, as I said earlier, need to be socialized and culturally conditioned into these inequitable systems, and those have obvious harms for people of color or people from marginalized groups. But the harms to the people from dominant groups is, again, our humanity gets diminished because we are taught to think of ourselves artificially and accurately as somehow superior to other people that we are taught to have to ignore the suffering of other people. To ignore the inequities that other people face to be able to exist in this reality. And we lose the benefit of all the brilliance of people of color who could be contributing. We lose the opportunities to have personal relationships as well as broader coalitions to be addressing issues that affect us all. So there are tremendous amount of personal costs, social costs, moral costs, societal costs to white people by systems of racism. And I also think a lot about what world do we want to be living in? I know many people were looking at the murders last year of George Floyd and the endless list of other black and brown people as people are also understanding the legacy of racism in this country of all the ways that racism manifests currently. We saw in the COVID epidemic about who had access to health care, who was being forced to work in unsafe conditions. It's revealed the insidiousness and the prevalence of racism. And I look at good people. And I ask, like, is this the world you want to live in? Like, is this really the world you want to live in? I know that's not for me, and that's not the world I want my kids to live in. And that, to me, is the other motivation. It's creating a world that works for all of us. So that's again, going back to how to engage people in the work. I mean, this is again, the approach I take is that this, I believe, is about our collective liberation expression. I use justice frees us all. And I really believe that.

Phil Wagner

I believe that too, and as a parent of two young children, I think that it is important to lean into something that you talk about or utilize a lot in your work, which is the spectrum of emotions that we can and perhaps should feel as we do this work. And I think a lot of diversity and inclusion work sort of segments us. There's a lot of negative emotion. It's fear. It's shame. It's guilt. And I don't think that those are always useful, but I think that some of those are necessary as we work through our own, doing our own work. But you also really center the positive emotions. And I think that gets left out, particularly as we work with people of privileged groups. So Diane, my final question for you today focuses on one of the best takeaways that I've gotten from your work, which is about the joy that can come along with doing the work, the joy of unlearning privilege, of unlearning oppression. As we conclude our conversation, can you speak a little bit to the joy of engaging in this work? I think so many people, white people, in particular, feel threatened, scared, fearful, shamed. How can we change our mindset so that this can be rewarding, if not joyous, in our learning journey?

Diane Goodman

Yes. So the irony about starting with joy 15 20 years ago, I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who also did this work. And she was, I think, said, what spells relief, a take-off on the Tums commercial that you spell relief for her. She was talking about unlearning racism, and I was thinking about the joy of sex or the joy of cooking, and again, was using it. Ironically, the joy of unlearning racism, as if that was ironic. And no one understood the reference to the joy of sex or the joy of cooking and shows how old I am. But I found that as I would do this work. And I would talk about how my own unlearning journey around racism as a white person has been liberating, has been transforming, has been positive, the kind of relationships now I've been able to have not feeling so stupid, feeling more comfortable in different situations, feeling more competent, just feeling more authentically myself and more aligned with my values. I would talk about that, and people's mouths would hang open. And I then interviewed a bunch of other folks who I knew also were having this experience. And so I did write it up under a piece called The Joy of Unlearning Privilege and Oppression. And so again, I use the term joy ironically. But what I found in talking with other people is joy really resonated. That was not ironic. It was real, and that certainly resonated in my own experience. It just opens up worlds to us, opens up healing to us. And yes, there are lots of feelings that are part of doing this work, and some of them are uncomfortable and painful. But I often liken it to therapy and not saying that this work is therapy. But we know when we go into therapy, we realize, okay, something's not right. There's some reason that we're there. And even though therapy itself isn't always fun, that we know it's a growthful experience. And hopefully, if we come out at the other end or at some point in the process and feel like I feel better, I feel more whole. I feel more authentic. I feel better able to be in the world. And to me, that's a lot of what this journey is about. And so I really encourage people to hang in through sometimes the beginning parts. It's hard to feel that as we start to realize, oh, my God, I didn't realize all that I didn't realize, but that really is a process that can be joyful and certainly is liberating and healing.

Phil Wagner

I love it. There is and probably should be some discomfort. But that discomfort is so worth it in the end, for the very goal that you highlighted earlier, creating a better world as lofty as the goal as that seems, I think at its basic level that's what diversity equity and inclusion work seeks to do improve the world by really focusing on improving the world of work. So, Diane Goodman, it is a true pleasure to speak with you. Thank you for your work. Thank you for your candor. It's been a real joy to speak with you.

Diane Goodman

Great. Thank you so much. It was great to talk to you, Phil.

Phil Wagner

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