



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 51: MARIKA MESSENGER – CONSCIOUS DEI LEADERSHIP

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.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work here in the Mason School of Business. We spend a lot of time grappling with the question of what does it mean to produce business graduates who make a broader societal impact. What does it mean to be about business for the greater social good, and how do you do that? Today's guest has a few ideas and brings a great research-oriented perspective to this conversation. Her answer, she says it all comes back to consciousness. I'm joined today by Marika Messenger, and this German guy really struggles with his French. Dignity is a core value of mine, so I want to give her a chance to correct my pronunciation there as well. Merika is a consciousness researcher, teacher, advisor. She's a widely regarded public speaker and non-exec board member. She is the CEO and founder of consciousleadership.org, which helps provide tools for leaders toolkit. To help them stay sharp, relevant, confident, and elevated to achieve their full consciousness for express business outcomes and broader societal impact. I'm so excited to chat with you here today, taking our conversation in quite a different direction. I'm excited to learn. Welcome Merika. Thanks for being here with us today. Why don't we kick off by allowing you to tell our listeners a little bit more about who you are and what you do?

Marika Messenger

Sure. Hi Phil, and thank you for having me. So, I'm going to pronounce my name in French. It's Marika Messenger, and I'm the founder of consciousleadership.org, not consciousness leadership. Right. So, who am I? I am 47, and I have 25 years of business background behind me. I started as an equity sales and an equity manager. So I've been on the trading for 15 years and at the end I was head of equities for Europe and Middle East for a big French bank. And I started working on myself when I was 27. So I really saw the impact because I had, like, family problems, and I had to, and I really saw as I was doing this work on myself, that I was becoming a better leader, a better manager, that I was becoming a better sales. So I really, very early on saw the link between self, like, basically, I understood that success is an inside job. And the people, my colleagues were also noticing this inside of me. And when I was, let's say,

at the end of 2020, my company was going through a big restructuring, and my boss said to me, Marika, your job is dead at the end of the year, but I love you, I'll find you another one. You want to be global head of research. And because I have this self-discovery of what actually self-development meant, I was like, oh my God, I just want to explore that. There is so much that I don't know around self-development. So, I actually took the opportunity to stop and train into the disciplines that I thought were very effective in my own self-development. So I trained as an integral coach for a year, but I also train as a clinical hypnotherapist, as a yoga teacher, as a mindfulness teacher. And also, I've been initiated in two lineages of Native American healers, shamans in Mexico and in Brazil. So, that really gave me an understanding of what it means to honor one's potential. What are the different levers that one has? And one of them that is key to our work is that we are physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual bodies. And we need to understand all of these and work on all of these in order to elevate our potential. And so I founded consciousleadership.org ten years ago with really the vision that I wanted to support individuals and organizations, honor their credential and thrive, but also build a community of conscious leaders who together understand that we can create systemic change and we can make a better future for all of us. And that thanks to the private sector, we can have an impact through business in how we work, in how we relate, and who we are as a society. So that's me. So we help individuals, organizations through various programs that I'm sure we'll touch upon. And right now, there is something very interesting that we are launching, which is the Conscious Library, which is actually a tool for organizations that makes consciousness available to all employees and coaching, mentoring, teachings available to all employees online, on-demand, and all of that. Because I truly believe that those tools are needed at every level of society and an organization. So, I'm very excited about the change that this can create.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, lots going on in your world. Where I hope to start is just unpacking terminology a little bit, you know, Peter Drucker reminds us that sometimes it's the stuff that is seemingly simple, almost to the point of being naive, that we don't kind of check and couch and unpack a little bit. So when you say conscious leadership or even just consciousness, is that being present? Is that the same thing as emotional intelligence? Is it mindfulness? Are those all related? Can we unpack that terminology a little bit? What do you mean?

Marika Messenger

Sure. So, all of what you said and more. Consciousness really is truth, right? So I am true with myself, so I know who I am. I am aware of the programming that I have received from my childhood, from society, from my culture, from my religion. And I am able to actually detect who I really am, what is my truth. And I'm able to walk this path of truth of being truthful to who I am and being truthful with others and relating in truth as well. So, it requires self-awareness, it requires emotional intelligence, it requires system intelligence, spiritual intelligence. And it's like an ever-ascending spiral of growth because the more we discover ourselves and the more we peel away layers that are not serving us, the more we elevate our consciousness.

Phil Wagner

I love this. And I have a question right? As somebody who wants to develop more in this area, are all truths valid or helpful in that context? My truth is I grew up in a very religious community very specific, strict, detailed set of ideological and social values handed down to me. Do I carry those forward and say, these are my truths? Even though that might get in the way of me building authentic community and relationship with people across other faith communities, across political or ideological boundaries? I know that's something I've unpacked in my own journey. So, how do we think about truths and their resonance and their helpfulness?

Marika Messenger

Yeah. So first, I'm going to answer the first bit, which is very simple, which is not all truth are meant to be shared. Right? Before we share our truth, we have to ask ourselves, is it true? Is it necessary? Is it useful? Is it kind? Right? So all those questions.

Phil Wagner

The same things I teach my kids, right? So, it really does come back to the simple details.

Marika Messenger

But then your question had another dimension to it, which is, what is my truth beyond what I have received? And is my truth limiting me or allowing me to expand? And am I conscious of that? And how do I respond to that? Right? And for me, ultimately, truth is also choice, right? And once you know that, you've unpacked this within yourself, and you're like, I have certain beliefs that are coming from my environment, and I know where they're coming from. And now I have a choice to make. Do I want to continue to embrace them? Because yeah, it might have been a program I have received, but I am aligned with those truths. They are in line with my values. I think that they support me to do the right thing. I enjoy the community of people that actually are aligned with that. So, I have the right to choose to stay within that truth. Or I can also decide that, in a certain way, that truth is limiting me. And I can decide to open myself to challenging my beliefs or being more open and receptive to people having other beliefs. But it's a choice. But it's a choice that is conscious.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And I love that. And we talk a lot about emotional fragility here. The College of William & Mary we're entering our 330th year. We have been around a long time, and I often joke we are the institution that has educated everybody from Jefferson to John Stewart. We are not an emotionally fragile place. And so we know that challenging our beliefs only makes us better leaders, better humans, better people. I can't help but find the connection between truth and value systems in your work, you know, even if you think from a religious lens or a political lens or a social lens, what you choose to accept as truth then guides you into the development framework, the mental model for your values. So, how does that value creation process factor in on your end in your work on consciousness, leading from a value-driven standpoint?

Marika Messenger

Yeah, and thank you for that question because your value system is your inner compass, in my perspective. Right. So we actually have a training on that. It's like, what are my core values? What do I stand for? Is it integrity, transparency, excellence, or generosity? Right. And can I identify three or five core values that really feel real and meaningful to me? And then, because you were asking, how do we work on our consciousness, actually, core values are a tool to do so. If you identify five core values, then you can also define them. What do they mean for you? Because they mean everything for different people. And you would be surprised. One day, I interviewed a woman who one of her core values was honesty. And I said, what does it mean to you? And she said, well, it means that as long as you have a good intention, you can lie. I was like, okay, that's not my definition of honesty. But that was interesting. And then I said, how much am I aligned with that value within myself in my life? Right. So, if integrity is one of them, are there places within your life, personal, professional, social within yourself, where actually you are not in integrity? Because misalignment of core values is a place of suffering automatically. So it's really very important to align with that. And same if you are joining an organization, a university, or a community, if your core values are not aligned with that of the other entity, it's not going to function. There will be friction. The way how you're going to handle things are going to be different or even opposites because, at the core, the values are not aligned.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I feel that so deeply. I think about my own value systems. In our family unit, we talk a lot about values. We have a family value system that we've developed together. And some of our core values, some of my core values, dignity, giving honor. We talked about dignity when we opened this call. I said, all right, dignity is the core value of mine. Do you please tell me how to pronounce your name? So I give you that dignity, and I still botched it, and I'm so sorry. But dignity, honor, excellence, belonging, and authenticity those are key to me to our family here. And I often feel that I grew up in the church, and so the old church folks will call it conviction. When I am out of line with those values, it really does cause me to step back and say, wait, something's going on in my life. So, I feel that as a leader, I see the value in leading from those values. This podcast and much of our work here focuses on the diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging enterprise. And I think there are a lot of well-intentioned leaders who want to do something of impact in that space, maximize their human capital, build organizational cultures that are defined by belonging and excellence and authenticity and showing up as your true selves, but they don't often know where to start and how to do that. Does your work suggest starting with your own personal values is what it takes to get us to that sort of conscious organizational space as it relates to DEI?

Marika Messenger

Well, values are a tool. It's a powerful tool, but it's just a tool. Our view is kind of more realistic and a bigger vision. What's your question?

Phil Wagner

Good question. Welcome to what it's like to be in one of my classes where I'm just like, well, these words are falling out. I'm just thinking, how can I use your work if I am one of those well-intentioned leaders? And I'm not well prepared in the DEI space, but I know that stakeholder engagement demands it, my employees want it. Research shows me time and time again my employees are more likely to give of themselves, more to stick with me, longer to feel satisfied at work if I am intentional in that focus. But I don't know what to do because I was trained in finance, I'm an accountant. I happen to rise through the ranks because I'm excellent. But I don't know. I didn't go to school for sociology or communications or any of those other spaces where this is developed. So, does your work give me tools for that toolkit to help build that?

Marika Messenger

Yeah, it does. That's exactly why we are launching the Conscious Library. I've been in the consciousness, I mean, researching consciousness for more than 20 years, but really actively coaching, mentoring, consulting with individuals and organizations for ten years. And what I've seen is that right now, at the level of the organization, really, there is support for leaders, right? If you want to develop yourself, your leadership leaders will get one-on-one coaching. It's expensive, I do know because I do coach them and we get some results, but they are on their own with some tools. And there is a common understanding with all the people that I work with, or that we pitch to, that when it comes to middle management, we have a bit of nothing's happening, right? So people know that middle managers needs to be grown by the organization in order to build great senior leaders, but we're not really willing to pay for them for like a one-on-one coaching program. And then we have everybody who is below the middle management who barely they don't get anything, really. They might have a yoga class a month, right? But that's barely it. And so I've observed that, and I also observed that in the organizations I've worked with, I've been really being asked by some leaders who I was working with to go and check within the organization because they had an issue at the director's level. And some organizations have had the opportunity to actually implement conscious leadership within the whole organization through middle managers, doing online programs, doing some workshops for the whole organization, some off-site. And I really saw that, actually, this is how you transform a culture. You need some early adopters, some ambassadors, you need some leaders who are embodying the culture, but you need everyone to have access to the tools. And so the conscious library is really a solution to that because we have kind of repackaged everything that we've done over the last ten years, which is 50 trainings of 2 hours, 100 guided meditation, loads of resources in a library that is very accessible to everyone. So we have 34 questions that everyone would encounter in your day-to-day work or day-to-day life, such as how do I navigate difficult conversations? How do I set up boundaries? How do I improve my self-confidence? How do I prepare for an important presentation? How do I create more purpose in my work? Right? And all those questions you can access. And you have a short video of me explaining you how to do that. You have some key takeaways, but you also have some clear path on how to do that, which means that it's going to be something where everyone, every day at work, kind of arrives to the office with one challenge, right? Today, I have a difficult meeting, and I know I have to prepare myself, and I might be a bit short

because I haven't done it before or whatever. Right? And you go on the library and like, oh my God, I can watch a ten-minute video that's going to tell me the step-by-step pieces that I need to do. And I also have some guidance that's going to tell me, okay, if I need to work specifically on my self-confidence, I have a two-hour training I can do. So it really gives people some solutions to their challenges, but also the opportunity to develop themselves so that they become the person that they need to become in order to create the success.

Phil Wagner

I love this because I think you're preparing and developing whole leaders, not just leaders who have the tools they need to respond in the moment, not just be reactive, but to be proactive in thinking sort of ahead of the curve. I do want to talk a little bit about that reactivity again in this space, just the societal impact space. It might be DEI, but it might be climate and sustainability. It might be the intersection of politics and business, which we like to think doesn't exist, but it absolutely does. What those variables tell us is that this is a dynamic time of change. The world and the world of work, I often say, seem to be spinning more rapidly than ever before. How does consciousness help us in the context of change management and navigating uncertainty? Can you speak to that a little bit?

Marika Messenger

Yeah, of course. Consciousness is a technology, right? And it's a technology that really allows us to master our vibration, right? Our emotional vibration, who I am. And in terms of emotions right, we teach emotional agility and emotional intelligence, and there is a whole spectrum of emotions that one can go through. But really, we only have two polarities. We have fear, and we have love. Right? And you can't be in one of the two polarities at the same time. You are either at the frequency of fear or either at the frequency of love. And consciousness really teaches you to master a higher frequency within yourself. This is really what it does. Right? And so, in organizations, what we all know is that change is constant, right? We live in a world that is VUCA, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. And everything changes all the time, which is very stressful, which creates mental health issues and all of that. Right? And what is the main emotion, the main negative emotion that happens when change is there? It's fear, right? We are scared of change. We resist change. And so consciousness really allows you to build the strong self within you in terms of all the different types of intelligence so that you can master fear and embrace change and therefore, be part of the change rather than shying away from it or resisting it. Right? So that's the big picture. But really, consciousness helps you navigate into this VUCA world. We have to change the way we are because the world has changed so much. We can't function the way we used to. So, we have to be aware of our mental health. We have to be aware of our emotional health. We have to be aware of our physical health, even spiritual health, which is how much am I aligned with my purpose? So consciousness helps you do all of that and therefore really is a solution to function when there is barely any certainty.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I appreciate that, and there's a lot there. And I have a kind of a strange question as a follow-up, but I think your work speaks to this a little bit, too. I'm wondering who consciousness is for. And so I was groomed in communication studies, and so I've done a lot of communications training, I've done a lot of public speaking coaching. And I've always told people for many years communication is always for the audience because it's not successful if the audience doesn't buy your message, right? And I have changed that in recent years because, yes, it is audience-focused. It is for others. But in this space, I also recognize that communication can be cathartic, it can be healing, it can be empowering. It is also for you. So is consciousness. Is it something for leaders who haven't reached their full potential? Is it for others? How do you think about who this is sort of guided, who this benefits the most?

Marika Messenger

Everyone. So when I first started, I was mainly mentoring C-level executives or senior managing directors in finance because I was coming from this world, and it's a very specific environment. So when you know it, you have a unique selling point. Right? And so I really saw how consciousness could support and become a better person, really, and have a stronger impact. But then I was like, okay, I see that. But we have a gap, right? Because the young leaders, the next generation leaders, they are not inspired at all by our leaders, right? To another extent, they don't want to be them; they don't want to be us. Right? So it's a question of how do we leverage on the wisdom that has been acquired by the leaders of today while still inspiring the leaders of tomorrow to actually make their mark. But we don't want to lose that wisdom, and we need to create a bridge. So then I created some program for young generations, like 15 to 27 years old, that are actually quite similar to what I teach to the senior leaders. But it's a very different response because younger adults young adults have much less of a baggage and much less of a program, right? So, the work to actually allow them to allow that potential is much quicker. They are like sponges, so they are much more receptive. There is no resistance. They are really keen to receive those tools and to be equipped to create the most successful life that they want. So it's for them as well. And I've worked with people who were not leaders in organizations who are leaders in their own lives. Mothers are leaders of their family, and the tools do work very well for them as well. So it's really for everybody who understands that success, any type of success, is an inside job and also understands that consciousness allows you to really do the right thing for you, for everyone, your community, your colleagues, your stakeholders. So, it's a tool that is a force for good. So if that speaks to you, it's going to be for you.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I appreciate that. That's great insight. So, do you have a case study? Do you have a success story? Can you tell us? Can you show us? Is the proof in the pudding that, no, this actually does something? This isn't just a cool idea. These aren't just neat tools. This actually works.

Marika Messenger

Yeah, I have plenty of case studies. I come from finance, so I am very aware that you can't change what you can't measure. So I like to measure things, actually. If some people here want to hear, like full case studies, you can go on the results page of our website. We've got 15 videos. But what kind of case studies would you like? Like an organization, a senior leader, a young leader?

Phil Wagner

I don't know. Pick the one you're most proud of. Right. Like, as somebody who's really helmed this content, you stand and beam with pride over which one of those? Any of them?

Marika Messenger

A lot of them. A lot of them. It's difficult, maybe because you have an audience of young leaders. I'm going to talk about one of them. So, I'm going to talk about Elliot, who was 19 when he started working with us. And he did our Aspire program, which is for the young leaders. And so he was at a stage in his life where he was in Amsterdam. He had started a university there, and this was just after lockdown, and it's been really hard, especially for that generation. But so he was not happy at university. He felt like it was not aligned with what he wanted to do really deeply. He felt that his community in Amsterdam of friends were not very dynamic, so he didn't feel like he belonged there. And he was finding himself kind of not honoring his potential, more like yeah, not thriving, not being driven and dynamic and passionate. And he had just broken up with his girlfriend that he really liked. Right. And so when he started to do Aspire, he made loads of changes. But really, he managed to understand that he was the creator of his life and that, therefore, it was his responsibility to make some changes. And so he looked at different universities and he did all the process that one has to do in order to be accepted. And he got accepted in a university in the States that he loves. He got much more disciplined with himself and went back to the gym and understand that this was building strength and resilience. He also made some changes. He was working in a restaurant to earn some money, and he was quite frustrated because he was working too much and then not seeing his friends too much. So, he managed to recreate more balance in his life in order to be more fulfilled by his life. And he gathered some very precious tools on how to navigate difficult conversations, how to relate, how to understand potentially how to level up his emotional intelligence. And he managed to get back with his girlfriend. So it was really great outcomes and solving the frustrations that he had as he was starting the program.

Phil Wagner

There's a great case study. Thanks. I appreciate that. And I know you can share many more, and I appreciate you guiding us back to resources as we start to wind to a conclusion. It's a great case that speaks to what this does in the here and now. But what about over the long haul? What about over the long term? What are the benefits of this work in a long-term capacity? What will this continue to do for leaders, and does it just impact their leadership? Or are there personal benefits, health, wellness? You mentioned those here as well. I appreciate your nod to yoga. You'll be very pleased that I just started hot yoga, which has been really

transformative. I'm going to give a shout-out to my colleague, Dr. Katherine Guthrie, who is a master yogi and also my dear colleague here in the Mason School of Business. But does this help us in all areas beyond leadership as well? I know your work speaks to that, so I'm teeing you up to get a home ride here, but can you speak to that impact?

Marika Messenger

Definitely, and you know that's the beauty of the technology is that you're working on yourself. You know, you are transforming yourself, and that's going to radiate in all aspects of your life. It's like the butterfly effect, right? So all our clients find themselves being more successful in their career, but also in their love life, in their social life, and within themselves, right? Because they are clear, they are able to express their emotions. They are able to have the conversations express their truth, and therefore, their relationships are much more harmonious. And when they cannot get harmonious, they understand that it's time to walk different paths, right? So it really creates a sense of harmony and balance within individuals and in their lives and also have them really understand that true success always has a dimension of service or contribution or positive impact. So they also start to think at that level, with that level of perspective, right? So, it also changes the way they relate with organizations, stakeholders, but also with the environment. So it's a holistic transformation, it's a holistic approach to well-being.

Phil Wagner

I love that, and I appreciate you unpacking your work for us. The final question I have for you today is, can you guide our listeners? How can they best support you? How can they grow in their own conscious leadership? Speak to our listeners and tell them how to support your work.

Marika Messenger

Oh, thank you. Well, we share a lot of educational and informative, and inspiring content on Instagram at Marika Messenger, on LinkedIn at Marika Messenger, and we also have an amazing monthly digest where we share some tools. So, if you want to know more about that, I would be very happy to connect with you on Socials, or you can also go on our website, consciousleadership.org, and subscribe to our newsletter. You also can find some free meditations a master class around how success is an inside job. So, we have plenty of resources for you to start experiencing the transformation that consciousness can create. So you can share that, connect with me like that. And at any point, you can reach out to us through the website. We have a contact form there. Yeah, and very keen as well. I do a lot of speaking, so we have some talks that are more geared toward consciousness or conscious leadership and the impact for organization. So if you want to have a chat about that, I'll be delighted. And also, when it comes to the Conscious Library, we are creating some partnerships with people in order to have the biggest impact in organization. So, if this is something that you resonate with, I'm very happy also to have a conversation.

Phil Wagner

Excellent. Well, I appreciate this conversation today on Conscious Leadership. Marika, thank you so much for your contributions, and thanks for joining us.

Marika Messenger

Thank you. It was a pleasure. Phil.

Phil Wagner

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