



# Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

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## **EPISODE 59: CORDELL CARTER – FINDING BELONGING AMIDST DIVISION**

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### **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**

Hey, friends. Welcome to a new season of Diversity Goes to Work. We ourselves can't quite believe that we're now entering a multi-year arc of this podcast. What started as a fun little side project has grown and grown and grown and grown, and we have nobody except you to thank for it. Thank you for sending us your ideas for episode topics. Thanks for sending thought leaders, speakers, practitioners our way to interview. And most of all, thank you for coming back time and time again to listen. Over the past year, so much has happened in the DEI space. The very idea of DEI has been called into question, called divisive un-American. Some of those arguments are bad faith arguments. If we're real and raw and honest, we have to recognize that some of those are fair, too. We're all collaborative thinking. What does this look like from here on out? This season, we want to lean into those questions and other big questions that we are grappling with. This season, we're going to explore three specific arcs. In arc one, we're going to grapple with the big elephant in the room. There is an elephant in the room. Oh, and a donkey, too. Yeah, we're talking about politics. This first arc is going to play out over the US election cycle, a time where we are all feeling a little bit of pressure, a little bit of stress. No matter who your candidate is or who you're voting for, we're all feeling it. You might be able to see, like we do, that not all citizens of the United States are showing their best selves right now. How do we enforce belonging? How do we bring people together in a divided society? That's the focus of Arc One. In Arc Two, we're going to be grappling with the future of DEI. What happens in that election cycle is likely to change the dynamics of that conversation. In that era where DEI has been called un-American and divisive have been called into question, many of us, practitioners, human resource officers, professors, academics, managers, people-minded people, we're thinking about, what comes next? Because these ideologies are not divisive at their core. Are they? Well, we're going to grapple with those questions and others, talking to practitioners who are thinking about the next season. Where do we go from here? And then we'll round out this season in the spring with a special mini-arc with a focus on neurodiversity in the workplace. And we're so excited to share all of these themes with you. Who knows what will happen along the way, but we know it's going to be a good journey if

we're all in it together. Thanks again for listening. Thanks for your support. Welcome to our new season.

### **Phil Wagner**

Hey there, friends. Welcome back to Diversity Goes to Work. Welcome to our newest season. Today, I am thrilled to have this conversation because, number one, it has been a long time in the making. We've got someone truly extraordinary joining us today, Cordell Carter, who's a powerhouse in the world of belonging and inclusion. As the executive director of the Aspen Institute Socrates program, Cordell is leading the charge to make sure everyone has a seat at the table, and more importantly, that everyone feels as if they truly belong. So today, we're going to unpack just that. What does belonging really look like in our organizations, communities? How can we create environments where everyone can show up as their full, authentic selves? Let's dive in. Cordell, thanks for making time to meet with me. We were supposed to rerecord last spring, and that just didn't work out because schedules are messy. But I'm so glad you're joining us here today. Why don't you tell our listeners a little bit more about who you are and the important work that you do?

### **Cordell Carter**

Great. Thank you, Phil, so much for having me. Yeah, a lot of travel on both of our ends, but I'm glad we're finally here. I'm based in the DC Metro area, and for the last eight years, I've been working at the Aspen Institute. We would focus on creating these environments where leaders can come together and nerd out and really belong with each other for these magical weekends across the world and capital cities. The work was incredible. I loved it dearly. But about three years ago, right after the January sixth riots, our CEO of the Aspen Institute asked me to consider building an external D&I program. I said, well, I am not a D&I specialist, but I can help you find someone. He says I asked you for a specific purpose, and that purpose is you understand Aspen, you understand these issues. I need you to build something that works at Aspen because we're different. I said, fair enough. As I got into my whole discovery process, I realized that I, personally, you couldn't make heads or tails of the D&I space. When I can't figure something out, I start doing landscape analysis. I started trying to figure out the history. Where did it start? What was it first mentioned? It goes all the way back to the Johnson administration, where you're trying to understand who's doing work with the federal government. Deep dark secret in the private sector, the number one purposes of good and services in the country, one-fifth of GDP is the US federal government. That's everyone's biggest customer. As a procurer, it has a lot of power. You don't have to make policy. You just say, Well, I'm going to give five more points to someone that's diverse than someone who isn't. And guess what? It becomes policy because it's a competitive issue. And so, obviously, federal government launched it, but it's taking a life of his own as we've sought to grapple with what I call national compromises. How do we really live out the founding ideals of this great nation? And so, as I got into it, I said, belonging is the right word. That's where the conversation is heading. I would love to take all the credit for being predictive and seeing the massive wave against DE&I. I'm not that smart. It just made a lot of sense to me to focus on something that everyone saw themselves in. This became It's super clear to me. I do a lecture once a month

called *Becoming an Inclusive Republic*, and it's the name of a book that's forthcoming. It's in presales right now, *Becoming an Inclusive Republic*. I essentially argue that every founding era, and I said there's been four, has involved a great compromise. For the first three founding eras, if you start colonial period, the compromise was you are a free person that can operate as a free person, but you're still subject to the Crown. The king is going to ask for his tax often, and you got to deal with it. If you don't deal with it, there's some troops at the Port that will make sure that you deal with it. But in a constitutional period, we're all free, but we must allow for the institution of slavery. Why? It was a major economic driver for the country, and this new country needed some steady cash. Slavery really works at an economic scale. If you can stomach the morality of it. They completely disassociate ourselves from it. You get to the next founding; this is at the post-civil war. Now you're looking at, okay, no more slavery, but de facto apartheid that frankly lasted into the '70s. How do we know this? 1979 was the last public school to desegregate 25 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and it was in the state of Virginia, Prince William County. Here we are in this post-civil rights era. For the first time in our nation's history, we get to deracialize the national compromise. Now, this isn't something that's ever written down, but it's something we all agree to. And I want us to make a different agreement, an agreement that we all belong and that we all should have opportunities to thrive, and that it requires forgiveness and truth telling. You have to tell the truth. Like truth and reconciliation, South Africa style, where there is no penalty for telling the truth. There's only a penalty for not telling the truth. It was really tough things to hear, but I think we need it. We need to acknowledge some things in our country in an environment where people don't get canceled or punished. No lights or cameras here, just people trying to connect and trying to get over some really, really challenging history. That's where I'm pushing through the project I'm *Belonging at Aspen*. I've given up the mantle of Socrates after years, and I'm pushing this National revival, this idea that we can do better, and we have shown that we can do that. Let's try to do it together right now. I'm getting away. Non-coastal cities. This is the middle of the country. I'm focused on the Midwest and what I call the Upper South. It's exciting and terrifying. I have a child in college. What am I doing? I feel driven to do it, so I have to.

### **Phil Wagner**

Which I think college campus is. Ours included is a site where there is a lot of democratic engagement. Who are we as a collective? How are we going to move forward? Of course, we're in the midst of election season, so we're going to nod to some of those themes. You make a pretty good case, the why behind belonging here. You say I'm not a DEI practitioner, but we're a DEI podcast. I think we are because we struggle with the language, too. Are we D? Are we E? Are we I? What are we today? Some point to DEI as part of the problem of polarization. In fact, it's been labeled as divisive and un-American. Do you see it that way? Because you come to this as an outsider from that space. How do you counter that narrative and focus on belonging in its role in the DEI industrial complex?

**Cordell Carter**

D&I, to me, is a strategy that's untethered to a big goal. We don't have broad agreement on where we're going as a nation.

**Phil Wagner**

Say that.

**Cordell Carter**

Because we don't have broad agreement, we have a variety of tactics and strategies that work for a while. You have mass appeal for a while, but it doesn't take a whole lot to cause it to fall. We've seen the rapid descent away from D&I. I was literally having dinner with a bunch of one of the largest consulting firms in the country, a few of their senior leaders last night in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. They were telling me how many levels of checks they have to go through, including the managing partner of the entire global firm, to get a \$5,000 sponsorship of an event that may or may not include the word inclusion and equity. Now, I'll ask you the question: Do you think that's a high-value target that the managing director of a billion-dollar consulting firm is involved in? That's what we've come to. It's ridiculous, right?

**Phil Wagner**

Yeah.

**Cordell Carter**

Because we struggle with telling each other the truth, because we struggle with telling ourselves the truth, this is the environment that we find ourselves in, just oscillating from one good thing to one bad thing, one good thing to one bad thing. D&I was a really good approach to dealing with an intractable issue. I think belonging is better because that's where you see most of yourself. Let me take a little further. If you look at SHRM research on the composition of our executive class, who's currently C-level across the country, 70 plus % of C-level leaders in this country, regardless of sector, are middle-aged white men. The way a lot of practitioners talk about D&I is to the exclusion of white men. So my question to you as a human, to the audience is, what mammal do you know actively champions its own demise? None. None. And so a lot of these responses, these negative responses we're seeing to D&I, are intensely personal. They're intensely personal because they feel at threat. They feel like they're being replaced. They feel like they're being pushed out and being forced to champion. No human does that. And so we can't be surprised by it. So we have to change the language so that everyone sees themselves in the future. It may not be me exactly in this executive role ten years from now. But perhaps it's my values, perhaps it's my institutional memory, or perhaps it's my mentorship. But we got to figure out a way that everyone belongs, and we got to really mean that. Otherwise, this doesn't work. We fall apart.

**Phil Wagner**

I can really appreciate how this creates an evergreen pathway. Many skeptics, some of my colleagues, some close industry allies, have long said DEI is flavor of the month. That, I think,

has been quite proven. If you're listening to this podcast in this season, you know that since we've started, the idea of DEI has taken, oh, my gosh, so many twists and turns. I appreciate that this gives us an evergreen format to keep those ideals alive and to keep pushing forward. I want to go back to something you said. You said we struggle to tell the truth, to tell ourselves the to tell others the truth. I so agree with that. Also, I see currently, we see people screaming truths, left and right. I mean, quite literally, politically, left and right. You've done a lot of work on civic dialog, too. Can you share on that and how that connects to this idea of belonging? How can these belonging? Are they initiatives? Is belonging an ideal? Is it a philosophy? Whatever. How can that belonging ethos contribute to more productive, inclusive public discourse, particularly, oh, my gosh, during these polarized times?

### **Cordell Carter**

Yeah. The Aspen Institute is dedicated to civil discourse. That's like the bread and butter of the organization, getting leaders, peers to sit in a room and engage in mutual respect, like forceful dialog, and they adamantly disagree with each other, but we can do that in a way that's still redeeming and in a way that doesn't damage relationships. The last 15 years of social media in this country, where people are allowed to essentially spit in the wind and did not hit them, has created has destroyed our ability to engage each other constructively like normal, civilized human beings. And so what we're seeing in the public space, these outbursts and these striking views, people, their viewpoint on a particular politician becomes a personal battle for them. They can't other themselves anymore. We are out of practice. Practice makes better. We're out of practice of just engaged. We don't do old-fashioned debating societies. It's too volatile in high schools to have people take a position they don't agree with in public just to practice. My daughter went through this a few years ago. She still doesn't talk to some kids from five years ago in seventh grade that had to play Trump as part of the school play.

### **Phil Wagner**

No kidding. No kidding.

### **Cordell Carter**

I'm just like, sweetie, he just had to. She's like, I don't like him because I don't like that guy. I'm like, It's ridiculous, right? But she's out of practice. What I'm trying to do with our version of belonging is this actually looks like nostalgic, almost radio shows, like Garrison Keeler style. Okay? Imagine the Belonging Show coming to Naperville, Illinois, and we're bringing in some of the local context. But we have a script. We have a liturgy if you will. There's music, there's speeches, there's entertainment, there's group work. There's a certain order of the service, if you will, that's happening in different places and getting people energized around like, you know what? I don't agree with Charlie, but he's an all-right guy. I mean, he likes sweet tea just like I do. You got to be all right if you like sweet tea. Just figure out these ways where people can connect outside of their normal routine and hope that that sparked something. Yes, it's a traveling show, but we're intended to leave something on the ground and make them a part of a bigger community of people that are also rediscovering their neighbors and rediscovering this idea, the ideals of America. I'm convinced, and I said this to a bunch of education

philanthropists two weeks ago, that we can come with our evidence-based solutions and innovation this and cutting-edge that, but we're forgetting that a nation is a collection of ideas. We are a figment of our own imagination. If I don't believe in the idea, if I don't believe in the idea of America, if I don't believe this thing works for me, it doesn't matter how evidence-based your solution is. It doesn't matter who wrote the report. It could be McKenzie; it could be the Randolph Maken School. It doesn't really matter. I fundamentally don't believe. My heart is broken, my spirit is broken, and I refuse to accept anything that you're saying. So, I have to fix their spirits. This is a revival. A revival of a civic faith, and that's the part that we're missing. We talk over people's head and say, you're not smart; you don't get it. Let's move on. Or, You don't vote the way I do, so you're an idiot. Let's move on. And we're forgetting those people matter. All of us matter because all of us belong. So that's where we're getting at, this civic renewal, if you will. But it involves civil discourse. It involves music. It involves the great oratory, all the traditions of our founding generations. You'll see all of that in this Belonging Show.

### **Phil Wagner**

There's so much to unpack here. If you've listened to our podcast before, you knew I grew up in the Pentecostal church, so I can appreciate how churchy this is. I really can.

### **Cordell Carter**

He can, baby.

### **Phil Wagner**

Okay, so help me here. Okay, so what I love about this is widening this space where more ideas and, thus, ideologies can come together. In the project for belonging, that's what you do. That's some of the key takeaways, right? You help build bridges across divides, and you build stronger communities through civic engagement. But slavery is an idea. Segregation was an idea. Jim Crow was an idea. Homophobia is an idea. All ideas can't matter in the belonging space. How do I negotiate this tug of war? Can you help me here?

### **Cordell Carter**

I call this. Thank you for mentioning that because I'm writing a speech about a race I'm doing it for United Front in Fort Wayne in about 13 days. I'm super nervous about it. I never talk about race in such a forward manner, but I'm doing it this time because they asked me to. I get to the point where I'm saying we have to be willing to take an L. What that L means, I'm harkening back to Freedom Riders. Freedom Riders in 1960-1961, they had to take a personal loss, a loss of esteem, a loss of family, a loss of face because they said, what I'm doing is for the country is not about me. This is good for all. I'm saying, If you want to battle racism in this country, if you want to battle alternate views of history that you know aren't true, that starts at Thanksgiving dinner. We have to tell Uncle Jerry that he's full of crap and his views are not welcome. I have to take an L. I may get cut out of inheritance over that. He may be funding my college education or promise me something. He may have access to a Lake house. But are you willing to take an L to stop this nonsense that we've been on for 200 years? That is going



to take individual action. But that individual action gets us to a collective outcome that is better for all. But we have to eradicate the ignorance. We have to, and this is known as willful ignorance. People know good, and as well, we're all human. They know that for sure. They choose to believe for a second or in a context that others are subhuman or less worthy of the same things they want out of their lives, or somehow, this is their country, not someone else's country. That's a choice. That's not a belief system. That's a choice. People that make that choice, their own families have to eradicate them. You have to eradicate them with old-fashioned shame. I grew up Pentecostal, too. When you used to mess up when a kid in the '80s, guess what? They marked your butt in front of the church, and I don't care how long you cried, we waited till you can clear your throat, and you apologize, and you said exactly what you did and why it ashamed the community, and you will never do it again. You will pray for forgiveness. We will get around you, we will cover you with our arms, and we'll pray and say, don't do that anymore. Don't do that anymore. And guess what? I never saw a repeat customer at that altar. Never. Shame works. We have to reintroduce it.

**Phil Wagner**

Interesting. Okay, you help me here. Okay, I see this. I see this, right? So it's not all ideas, right?

**Cordell Carter**

Yeah.

**Phil Wagner**

But it's all ideas that are all. Right. All ideas that are in pursuit of the common good, right? So that involves. Okay, so you are moving back to Socrates here, right? You're getting back in that, whatever you call it, emotional intelligence or that metacognitive space, right?

**Cordell Carter**

I call it the other AI. This is ancestral intelligence.

**Phil Wagner**

Okay.

**Cordell Carter**

Things our grandmother told us.

**Phil Wagner**

Yeah, yeah.

**Cordell Carter**

This is the jet fuel that powers our current ambitions, the struggles of those that came before us. They were governed by a set of values and ethos, and work ethic. These were tough people. They really endured. I think about my grandfathers. Both were World War II veterans. The

moment they got off that ship in Norfolk, people ripped the badges off their lapel that they earned. They had to fix their face and go right back to work at the same shipyard the next Monday because they had six and seven kids at home. That takes some serious grit to pull that off. I thank God that I don't have to deal with it because with my attitude, cry Jesus, not me.

### **Phil Wagner**

Yeah. You harkened back to the old days here. I think we're so technologically distracted. There's always a million things to do. We don't have time to get bored, and thus, curiosity is probably one of the last things that we're pursuing. Your methodology that you talk about in your work of generative change involves stages like metacognitive awareness, thinking about your thinking and ideological exploration. Like looking around at the world around you. Can you talk about those stages or some other aspects of your work that we can apply directly in our leadership or just how we navigate this divided world to lead to those better outcomes you speak of?

### **Cordell Carter**

Yeah, there's a methodology that I like called it says: Tinker, Spark, Awareness, Change. I forget the acronym, but I build belonging content. Again, leveraging American history. You think of it as an alternative provider of content for your ERG group. That's the type of where you can basically go through American history with me. But with this view that, I have an inherently positive view of American history. I'm like, well, these are all additive to these amazing outcomes that we're getting to enjoy that truly make us exceptional in terms of how much time it took for change to happen. But you got to have a spark. The spark is all about it starts with tinkering, that you being curious, being willing to acknowledge that maybe I don't have all the answers, being maybe this is a book that shouldn't be banned, but I'm going to read it because why do people not want me to read it? I mean, it's English. What's wrong? Okay, let me read it. I can make my own choices. Get back those Jeffersonian ideals. Don't tell me what virtue is. Allow me to figure it out myself. I had my own internal compass. Then once you get that, that spark, you're like, okay, there's something I read that's interesting. I'll give a great example. I was reading the trilogy on Theodore Roosevelt that Merrill wrote, and there was one spark. This is 2017 on the Metro. I'm going to work. And it was a short clip about him inviting Booker T. Washington to dinner at his home in 1901 at the White House, and that causing such a scandal that it ignited a lynching campaign in the South to put people back in their place. And I'm like, whoa, one dinner. And that's how I started getting into this belonging work. And I didn't know it. I got into it three years before. I was already building material. I had no idea what would cause a person to react that way from one Black dude having dinner at the White House. I just don't get it. I was trying to understand, and that spark created a whole body of work, a whole program at the Aspen Institute. And then that's when the change happened. You keep reiterating and thinking about it and bouncing it off people. And then that's when you get to what I call behavioral change. I'm now going to do something. I am going to take that L with Uncle Leroy because he lives in grievance. You and I both know that he's just lazy as all get out. It has nothing to do with how he looks. It's about



the way he acts. I'm about to call him out in front of everybody, and that will stop this once and for all. He may not talk to me again, but it will stop.

### **Phil Wagner**

Yeah, you have to be willing to put yourself on the line here. I like this tinker phase because we prepare a lot of entrepreneurs here. But entrepreneurial thinking, entrepreneurial ventures, tinkering sometimes leads to failure. So, how do you know you're trying the right ways that will lead to success and you're not doing something good? Because after George Floyd, DEI consultants, belonging consultants, cropped up in mass. So there's every model you could ever want. Tell me, say this, don't say this. Don't do; how do we know what to actually do to tinker in the right way so it leads to productive outcomes? You got any insight?

### **Cordell Carter**

Yeah. I'm glad you mentioned the post-George Ford boom for D&I. It's one of the reasons I refuse to call myself a D&I specialist because I respect the field enough that if I haven't studied it If I haven't gone and set in the tutelage of someone, I'm not going to call myself that. There's a lot of people calling themselves D&I specialist that did tremendous harm, tremendous harm to the country. I just want to throw that out there.

### **Phil Wagner**

I agree.

### **Cordell Carter**

For me, I like to fail up. In my 49 years, the goal is to bat 500. Most of us are batting 750 without even trying. We're only feeling about a quarter of the time because we're too terrified to go back there. I'm trying to be 500, trying things. This is maybe the fourth iteration of the project I'm belonging. I finally found something that works for me and works for others. These previous iterations, they were just not going to work. What I did is I just tested a lot of experiment. I did trial balloons, and I had some trusted people that would give me honest feedback. These people, they spanned in a political spectrum. I wanted some people who absolutely were adamantly opposed to anything D&I-related to see if it passed muster. Now, I count among the biggest fans of this work, some of your most conservative voices in the country, they don't believe in the premise of inclusion and diversity. They think it's self-evident. I'm not saying they don't want people to belong. I'm really saying they think it's self-evident. You work hard, you'll figure it out, you'll find your place. But as I've set them through this work, they were like, I can deal with this. This will work for me. I could deal with this. I don't feel like you're attacking me. I feel more open, and I'm seeing some points of views on documents I thought I understood because we started with Stamp Act Rebellion, 1765. And folks are like, okay, these are documents I've read before. I haven't read them the way you're reading them, but I can see where you're going with that. On the other side, you get folks that are more left-leaning that are inherently suspicious of anything they would deem naturalistic or my notion, like what I say, I'm proud to be an American, they find that very suspicious. I tell them why, because the story that I adhere to, this civic faith that I belong to, is all about

redemption. So, you fully acknowledge your failures. But that's the best part. You to be redeemed. Okay? And I believe we can do this as a nation. I would say, tell your entrepreneurs, try stuff, try stuff, keep trying stuff, keep trying stuff. Get a trusted group who do not agree with you. Some agree and some that don't, but make sure you're very clear in what is the narrative. What is it that I'm after?

### **Phil Wagner**

Yeah. One of the things I love about the fracturing of the DEI industrial complex is that it has started to incentivize us to move out of those ideological echo chambers. DEI practitioners has been just as guilty as everybody else. So again, I share your optimism for a brighter future for sure. Sometimes, it's hard to see that in the complexity of now, but I think we're moving forward productively. Look, we're going back to that polarization theme that we talked about here, and you said, I'm not smart enough to have capitalized on belonging as the next wave back then, but it is. Is belonging what helps us ride this next season? Is there something coming up as the next frontier after DEI, after belonging that will help us support democratic values and civic unity ongoing?

### **Cordell Carter**

D&I isn't going anywhere. Let me tell you why. There are two organizations in our country that cannot lie because the cost of lies are too expensive. One is armed forces. If you want the truest form of scenario casting, and they're looking at the future and seeing all the different scenarios, or of climate change, talk to the US military. Losing 10 feet in a decade from a military base is a major problem if you're the Navy. They are following erosion like you wouldn't believe. They may not be able to say it out loud, but it's a part of a scenario of planning. Then, of course, losing a war because you didn't plan for other eventuality is so problematic because it destroys your place. The other group is the private sector. They need to know what their customers are going to look like 30 years from now. If you're Jamie Dimon and you have billions of dollars in J. P. Morgan stock, and you know life expectancy, even if it's 120, you may get 40 years max. You want your great, great grand babies to enjoy the fruit of your labor, which means you better know who the customers are and start investing in those communities now. So the Black Pathways work, the Hispanic Pathways work, this is not corporate wokeness. This is them trying to maintain their dominance three or four decades later. And so they're not going to stop the work. And for me, belonging is merely sequencing of the work. Belonging is an executive conversation. You're the CEO, multinational; you're saying Acne Corporation will continue to be a place where we all belong and have opportunities to thrive. And then you look at your team, you say, hey, Chief People Officer, all your metrics, all your bonuses are tied to people feeling like they belong and thrive. She looks down to her people and says, okay, we're going to employ the best strategies and KPIs of D&I to get us there because now the strategy is tethered to belonging. Belonging at executive level, D&I is what happens inside the organization. That's the sequence, and that's what's missing. We're having chief D&I officers. No, we should be calling them chief design officers, chief people officers, or chief belonging officers because this is about the health of that organization and its customer set. It's directly tied to the bottom line today and 30 quarters from now.

### **Phil Wagner**

It's incredibly well said and insightful. That's really helpful for the long term. Can we take a short-term dive here? Because we're like, what, 60-some, 70-some days from a monumental day. No matter how you shake it, no matter its outcome, and dear listeners, whoever you're voting for, I hope they win. But that election is rattling all of us from all ideologies, all corners of life, and it's showing our deepest, darkest divisions. So, this election cycle is really showing we got some work to do. What strategies can we put into practice right now, short term, tomorrow? If I'm a leader in an organization and my employees are coming in, feeling all of the pressures of November etching up on us here, what do I do to find and foster common humanity in my organization, in my community, and beyond?

### **Cordell Carter**

Book clubs. I've been advising a lot of clients. I'm saying, literally, get someone from the executive suite, two or three people representing every part of the organization, and saying, In this space, once a month or once a week, we're just learners together reading a chapter a week. I'm not the CEO. I'm George, or I'm Helen. You're Jimmy or John. For the next hour, we're just reading and writing down thoughts like, What did you get from that passage? This is what I got. Read, I don't know, Huck Finn. Read Great Expectations. Read Cast by Isabel Wickersen. Read some stuff that's interesting. It's going to be really thought-provoking because you're going to build a circle of trust and a different type of relationship that's not based on the hierarchy. And that's going to expand. It's a vibration that you're admitting. And that vibration is going to have ripple effects through the organization. Then book clubs start popping up all over the place. And then your employees are going to demand something more formal. They're going to demand ERGs. They're going to demand something that looks like D, E, and I, because they are now trust each other. They know that Jimmy's out to get me because he's 67, and he's a white dude, and I'm 33 Black woman. He likes Huck Finn, too. So do I. Okay.

### **Phil Wagner**

That's good. I like it.

### **Cordell Carter**

If it's the lowest cost, easiest way to get going. It doesn't require an expert at all. Just grab a book, buy 30 copies, and go.

### **Phil Wagner**

All right. Tell me; I'll give you my Book Club recommendations. You give me yours. You got two? You got one or two?

### **Cordell Carter**

I do.

**Phil Wagner**

What do you got?

**Cordell Carter**

You Squared.

**Phil Wagner**

Okay.

**Cordell Carter**

Really good. It's 37 pages. You Squared. My second one would be Tom Sawyer. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

**Phil Wagner**

Okay. You're going fiction.

**Cordell Carter**

I love the American classics.

**Phil Wagner**

Okay, so I'm going two books that I love. I teach from them, and they always rock my world, no matter how many times I read them. Radical Candor, Kim Scott. So good, right? Because you're always going to experience conflict, and it's so easy to make it about ideology. And her framework is so simple. Boom. You can care personally and challenge directly. And also Charles Duhigg's Super Communicators. So good. You think the world of work doesn't require relational communication? It so does. And it doesn't have to be that hard, and you don't have to be all touchy-feely, but it's an important part of. Yeah, so those are my two. I love a good book. All right, helpful. So it probably feels most appropriate to end circling back to you and all that you've done in this space, but you've got a lot going on. So, as we wrap this conversation, tell our listeners about the book that's coming out, your near and long-term future. I want them to be able to find your work, to support your work. Tell them what's going on in your world.

**Cordell Carter**

Great. The first book is in pre-sales. It's called Becoming an Inclusive Republic. And go to publicizer.com, and you'll find that. I'm currently busy in a campaign to get to a bigger publisher. So, self-publishing to get a bigger publisher. So I'm a couple of hundred short of my goal of 500, but I'll get there. I'm confident. The second thing is I'm giving a series of speeches in Fort Wayne, Indiana, next month, and Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, all in the same week around race, AI, and belonging. And so I'll be bringing in some different materials. I'll be doing workshops at school districts. It's going to be a crazy, hectic week, but I'm so excited. That's September the ninth through the 13th, if you happen to be around in Hampton, Virginia or in Fort Wayne. Thirdly is the Festival of Diaspora. This is the real-life

secular tent revival. We do it in Latin America. It'll be in Medellín, Colombia, next President's Day weekend. So that's February the 13th through the 16th. I have never cried so much in public as when I get with my 300 leaders from all over the Americas in Medellín. We were in Brazil early in the year. It was magical. Just straddling that lane between the secular and the sacred. It's just a beautiful thing. Tapping through these other parts of ourselves through our intellect, our hearts, our ears, just all the senses. And beautiful places, by the way. And so I would say, Hey, get your ticket, join us. It's going to be amazing. Any of those three things, it'd be awesome.

**Phil Wagner**

Fantastic. Cordell, it's a pleasure to connect with you, not just because of our Hampton Roads connections here but because of the incredible work that you're doing. Thanks for chatting with us. It's such a divisive time. It's such a complicated time. We wanted to use the first part of our podcast season to have this arc on how do we find each other again? How do we find our common humanity? And so this is a great way to kick off our season. Thanks so much for joining us today. What a great conversation.

**Cordell Carter**

Thank you so much for having me.

**Phil Wagner**

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