



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 6: NATHAN CHIN – SELF AWARENESS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Nathan Chin

Disengage when you need to, there will always be trauma ready and waiting for you to have to work through. So make sure you're taking the time to take care of yourself. It's okay to do slightly selfish, seemingly frivolous things if that means that you can keep fighting for another week, another month, another year.

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. Hi, friends and welcome to another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. Today we're going to dismantle one of the biggest words that we hear pretty commonly in the DE&I sphere, intersectionality. We want to talk about the ground-level implications of that word and what that looks like. I'm joined for today's conversation by Nathan Chin. Nathan is an alum of William & Mary and also a DE&I change advocate himself. Nathan has spent the last eleven years at Cvent working in product lead and product management and then moving most recently into a new position as the senior manager of Inclusion, Equity, and Engagement. Nathan has had an eye on not only this topic but DE&I change management over the past decade or so. Nathan, it's an honor to have you on our podcast. Thank you for joining us.

Nathan Chin

Likewise, thanks for having me.

Phil Wagner

So, Nathan, for this episode. One of the things we're really trying to do is situate this big concept that we hear all the time of intersectionality, particularly as it plays out in the day-to-day world that we operate in. So tell me when you hear that term intersectionality. You've done a lot of work in this area. What does that term mean to you, and how does that resonate?

Nathan Chin

Yeah. So I think for me, at least the term is really about where. Kind of the different common experiences of the different facets of Mayer anyone's identity tend to overlap and where you have the shared experiences or even in some cases, where you have an awareness of how

differently one of your identities is treated from another. So it can be both the similarities they have or the stark differences, but really, just those unique experiences that come together by being a member of multiple groups, whether those are majority or minority.

Phil Wagner

Those multiple group affiliations or identity affiliations, I think, are sort of key, and we always try to be very careful on this podcast, not tokenize anybody and single them out and say, Tell me your story. However, I know that you've sort of agreed to come on and do that. So even with that cautious framing, can you tell us a little bit more about your own intersectional identities and specifically how those inform your professional work?

Nathan Chin

Yeah, absolutely. So at least for myself and my work identity. I am of part Asian descent. My dad is Chinese, and my mother is Caucasian, but my dad and actually his grandfather were born in the US. So we've been Asian Americans for quite some time a couple of generations back, and then I'm gay, been out since about age 15 or so, helped to co-found our employee resource group for LGBTQ+ employees, and then kind of some other interesting things that don't always come up. And I always like to kind of call it some of the parts of diversity that are kind of under the diversity iceberg as it can be. So I was actually born overseas and didn't come to the US till the first time till I was six years old. So my first experiences because we're a foreign service family, we're all with foreign cultures, primarily Asian cultures, spent actually total nine out of my first 18 years of life overseas in Asia, lived in Japan, Korea, Burma, and Singapore. So that's actually a pretty interesting one that I think has come up a lot of work that no one would expect off the bat because we have a large office in India as well as a couple of the global offices. So the cultural sensitivity awareness is something that I think often gets overlooked in our experiences. If you're raised in a margin of society, but then also understanding kind of some of the challenges that different cultures have and giving it through that lens.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. So how did those experiences then shape how you interact with employees? I know we've talked offline a little bit about your work with employee resource groups and your work doing D&I work sort of day-to-day at Cvent as well in terms of the LGBTQ community, correct.

Nathan Chin

Hmm-mmm.

Phil Wagner

So you've done this work. How have those identities shaped that work? I think what we're trying to get at here is as we prepare listeners who want to go out and engage with diversity equity inclusion work but may not know-how. How do we use those past experiences or identity elements to inform our approach? Anything we can learn from your experiences.

Nathan Chin

Yeah. So first and foremost, I would say, and this is something I actually teach a course that our company provides for anyone when they first get promoted to manager for the first time. We have a little people leader boot camp for them. But the course that I actually lead for is called leading inclusively. And one of the things that I try to highlight first for everyone is there's so much more to diversity than what's there at the surface. If you think you don't have anything to contribute, chances are you're wrong. It could have been being raised in a single-parent household, having different cultural experiences, having different moral, ethical value systems than most of the others. So what's really important is to kind of find the things that are important to you important to your identity and lean into them, try to bring them out as much as possible. Let that determine what causes you to engage with or what perspectives you have, and definitely don't be afraid to speak up. I think the other thing that really helps is just putting as much of your diversity on display. That doesn't mean necessarily need to be antagonistic or aggressive, or every time someone makes a comment jumping up and down in their face. But one of the things I've found over the last few years is that the more I try to be and it's become a buzzword but my authentic self at work, and that's just representing all my communities, representing myself, not censoring and saying my partner, my significant other, but saying, my boyfriend. People really appreciate that even if they aren't necessarily of the same group. I can't count the number of times I've had people reach out to me after the fact and say, hey, I just started. I really appreciate you talking about being out at work. I didn't know if I could bring my partner to the holiday party—little things like that. So even if you're not doing the active work on committees or within HR or trying to drive initiatives, just the very act of being yourself and representing those different parts of you publicly can actually really move the dial as far as making people aware or making them feel like they have a community or are included.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I really like that. I think we work a lot with executives who are very nervous to center the touchy, feely nature of D&I, right. Like they're all about results and data. But at the end of the day, this really is about those human lived experiences and simply being human. Right. Living out your authentic experience has a way of at least telling us a little bit more about the health of any organizational culture has a way of contributing to that D&I work. We've talked a lot about different identity affiliations, and I so appreciate you sharing a little bit more about yours. I don't think that we often take the time to really sort of sit and dismantle or figure out how all of those identity elements work together. And I'm sure that while they often work together in ways that enhance our approach, they can be complicated at times as well. I mean, I think we're probably a little bit guilty of being reductive here on this podcast sometimes, but I'm wondering how your intersectional identity elements, I should say, situate you in relation to diversity and inclusion work. So I'm thinking about the complexity here of those identity collisions. So, for instance, we're recording this in June 2021. June is Pride Month. That's the month where we really celebrate and recognize the contributions and the obstacles surrounded by the LGBTQ plus community. But June 2021 isn't just Pride Month, right? It exists on the continuum where just a few months ago, in March, there were heinous acts of violence committed against Asian American folks. And just last month, the nation watched as Derek

Chauvin went on trial for the murder of George Floyd. There's a lot of different identity-related things playing out in society at large. Can you share a little bit more about what it's like to navigate those identity streams? Like celebrating Pride Month while also recognizing we're not too far removed from heinous acts of violence that really show us this diverse and inclusion picture is a little bit more complicated.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, that's a great thing to bring up, and I'd be remiss to not also point out that we have Juneteenth coming up to us around the corner. We're recording this a few days before, which just finally got passed as a federal holiday earlier today, thankfully. But it's interesting. I think the best overarching thing I can say is you kind of have to take everything as it comes. When we had those horrible shootings in Atlanta against the Asian spas, I pretty much spent that week crying every time I looked at the news, and I just had to be very upfront about that with co-workers like, hey, look, hey, How's your day going? I was like, I've cried three times, and I would make sure to tell why so they could understand. But it's tough sometimes because we have a whole month of Pride activities with our employee resource group that we put on a mix of educational sessions, kind of more fun social things that we partnered with. But like, we just talked about, we have Juneteenth coming up just a couple of days from now, and there's some heavy things happening as well. I think it's very easy to focus solely on your own group, and sometimes for a period of time, one group might need a little bit more attention because it's hard to try to juggle all these different identities simultaneously. So you might have to do a little bit of a rotation system for the lack of a better term. But it's also important to know to find allies in those other groups and know that you working on something doesn't necessarily take away from something else. Like, I really appreciate the Culture, which is our Black Employee resource group. No one has made any comments or suggested, like, hey, maybe we should tone things down to the Pride activities leading up to Juneteenth. While we're both focused on a lot of our individual goals and initiatives, we also want to celebrate the other groups. So we try to cross-promote as much as possible and try to find ways we can bring it all together. A lot of ways that comes out is in the content of the programming around work that we provide. So some things I pushed pretty hard for as far as our Pride Month activities. They've all been on Zoom because we're all working from home these days, but continuing a panel we had last year as well, which is just talking about the LGBTQ minority experience and how that's different when you're just in multiple minority groups as opposed to just one and a lot of things that folks might or might not realize that they have to go through and have to give some credit to my old professors for a lot of these topics that I'm aware of now, but talking about things like passing and contact switching and microaggressions, at least being a multiracial individual are a big one for me because whether it's asking where my dad or my grandfather came from five times, even though they're both born in the US or saying I don't count with the white folks because I'm Asian or I don't count the Asian folks because I'm white. You simultaneously can be part of multiple things but also not belong to anything completely. So a lot of juggling and balancing, but I tend to just kind of go with where my emotions take me at the time. I think there's always something to be upset about with any of these groups, and rightfully so. And you definitely want to push those things, but you need to

balance a lot of the kind of anger, frustration, activism with a lot of the celebration and things that make them wonderful. And for every kind of push that I try to make within the company for one of these identities or groups, I try to also balance it with something celebrating those groups or bringing more people in and educating them on something, whether that's just cultural practice or things they might be doing that they're unaware of.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And I love that contribution to this conversation because I think that it shows some of the benefits then could come along with our diversity and inclusion work. If we're willing to put in the work, there are a lot of folks who roll their eyes and say you add another dimension to this conversation, but if you actually choose to dig deep and see that there are nuances and there are complexities and obstacles, and we don't have everything figured out just by slapping a D&I Vision statement on our website. But we have to toil with some discomfort, and I think it's okay to lean into that discomfort and say, well, as much as we are being inclusive and as much as we are invoking an intersectional lens that doesn't just make it an open, widely acceptable experience for everyone. And I think that complexity brings some value. I think personally to ourselves, as well as we dig deeper, we grow in our cognitive sophistication and our empathetic self-awareness towards others. So really good points here.

Nathan Chin

I would completely agree. And I think one of the things I've seen volunteering with a lot of the D&I work at work because it's not my full-time job by any means. But I've been blessed enough to have bosses that believe in it and allow me to spend as much time on it as I want to. Like you said, we can't be afraid of difficult conversations. Almost everyone I've talked to who works and volunteers on D&I-related activities within our company. I can tell you that I feel like I'm pretty comfortable speaking the large majority, if not all of them, would prefer a leader that says I did this wrong. Let me continue talking about this with you.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Nathan Chin

Then someone who tries so hard to get it right the first time you don't make any progress. I think, like you're saying in the heights, it's perfectly fine to discuss those issue representation. And this is my personal opinion, but it's also sometimes don't focus solely on the one bad thing and acknowledge some of the other benefits that come from it because it's never going to be perfect. We need to be able to celebrate what progress has been made as well as what areas of improvement there are. And if we're afraid of those conversations, or if we're afraid to put anything out unless it's perfect, we'll never really get there. Progress is incremental. We need to say, hey, great. We did this well; we can do this better. So let's iterate on that for the next time that we approach this. So I have kind of the same frustrations with folks that tear something apart because of one item and don't really kind of focus on the rest of the positives it provides.

But similarly, don't think that they should ever be ignored or anyone should ever be censored for calling out the elements that could be improved.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely. And that's the narrative of innovation, right. Like we did some things good. There are some things that we could do better, and we roll with it. And I think that it's really important not to lose sight of that. We've talked with a few guests on our podcast, and there's a theme that really has emerged across episodes, which is that D&I work is necessarily ego-free work. You cannot do this work if you've got a fragile ego because you are always going to be off in your interpretation in some way or wrong. And that's okay. That discomfort, if you can lean into it, can actually be fulfilling in the end. If you have a growth mindset, not one that is so driven by such a fragile ego, I should say. I want to talk a little bit about how identity plays out in the professional world because you've spoken to a few things here, and I think there's something to explore further. So I think we have to also bring up in conversations like these the idea of tokenism, right. So you mentioned doing D&I work, although not as your full-time job, but just sort of being involved. And I assume that that comes because you care about this work. And I think that's why a lot of us do this work. But I think we have to be very careful because tokenism typically plays out because somebody in the organization, albeit well-meaning or with positive intent, seeks to put someone on a stage as a voice of authority simply because of their identity. Right. So you're the black guy. How do you feel about this or like, hey, you're gay? Let's be sure we put you and make you the leader of the D&I committee. And I think that's well-intentioned but can also push folks in spaces that they might not want to engage in or tokenize them. I'm wondering, have you seen that play out in your life? Do you tend to see it play out in one area, like sexuality, more than the other? You mentioned being pinpointed? Where were your father and grandfather from? I'm curious how that tokenism plays out.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, at least within the work context. I would say definitely more of my LGBT identity is brought up as token. But one thing I tried to do very early on was to lean into it. There are some things that I can't speak well, too. And so, if I'm brought on to something, we did an audit a while back of our language last year within the application. So we had our content team going through. And luckily, we weren't like any of the companies that had references to Master-Slave and code or things like that. We went through and did an assessment looking at the etymology of different words, and it was myself, black female, one of our content writers, and then at least one or two other individuals that I'm blanking out who are involved. But I definitely got the sense from some of the other folks while they cared about it. It was a little bit of fatigue at that point. This is happening last summer-fall. It was like, hey, it's great that we want to change this. Why do I have to be here? Why can't someone else take this up? And that was pretty eye-opening for me, realizing that. I think as long as you're very honest about the fact that you can't speak to all experiences or you aren't necessarily represented that community, that doesn't mean that you can't do good for them. So I realized the other person wasn't talking as much. So I leaned heavily in and was looking up origin of words, giving my

opinion, and trying to weigh in, even though a lot of them weren't necessarily words that were scrutiny against parts of my identity. So I think, on the one hand, if you get a seat at the table unless you really just don't want to do any of the work, and that's better for someone else, in which case definitely find someone else to try to pass it off. I think it's important to take that opportunity and try and push some progress or at least point out like, hey, I'm the token person at this table. Why don't we have more? Why can't you all push these initiatives? Do you have to have me sign off on them? You can actually do a lot as an ally or a person outside of the community. There are so many great resources these days. People. You can talk to things through social media that I really don't think it has to be restrained to those groups, and we don't always need to be the final sign-off on any initiative. I think it is important to listen to them when things come up, but progress is progress, and even if it's incremental, I think it's worth sitting there. One thing I do want to call it that's kind of a personal issue I've come into lately that I think also kind of rested somewhat is, well, if you aren't a member of a group, it's important to still, you can push initiatives. It's important to not be a toxic ally either. There are some folks I've encountered where they leave feedback on various events or panels we have. So like last year, we're putting on some panels, and we're working with all-volunteer, no budget, asking employees in the company who's willing to speak on this topic. And the person is very upset that for one of the sessions where we attached some personal speakers outside of the company that were friends of one of our employees, we didn't have anyone of color on the panel. We admittedly we had our minority panel two days later, which was missed by that individual, but they left just this excoriating piece of feedback that was going on about how we were falling short, and we were basically all pushing everything back from a white female and talked about it with some of the other folks in the other groups, and all of us kind of agreed like this is not helpful. This is not something that we see. It's definitely good to stand up, but make sure you're not creating fights where there aren't any, or if you do have things to be upset about or that you want to be pushing, make sure you have something actionable. Just a complaint or saying this is not an I want to see more diversity. I want to see more commitment to diversity. That's kind of hollow. Like you need to have actual action feedback for someone to work on. The things that we talk about is that the people that you see is that the programs and initiatives there are. There's a lot more that goes into it, but I feel like that I've definitely seen more on the rise, just kind of people on a soapbox, but it's ultimately not constructive.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, that performative allyship, I think, is really tough to grapple with, and I do think it often comes from a well-intentioned place, right? People don't have anything except to raise awareness, but I still agree it can actually run in a counterintuitive way, right? It can work against us because it creates further division, and it kind of tees me up for what I think is an important question in that through everything you just talked about, it's very clear that there is a pretty significant emotional labor felt by people, particularly minority communities, who do D&I work because you've got sort of the double experience of shouldering the burdens of oppression that tend to come. I think society has shown us it's not as equitable as we'd like it to be. And then doing this work tends to be pretty emotionally laborious as well through all that and then experiencing things like the spa shootings or like violence against LGBTQ

people or just the stuff that sort of defines the global D&I conversation. That's a lot to carry. I'm curious how you seek out support, how you seek out healing, how you seek out community, particularly given that identity is complicated. So it's not just you're not isolated to one individual identity pocket. How do you seek out that support when parts of your identity and the communities that associates with face challenges? That's a loaded question and probably not well worded.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, I think it kind of differs for a lot of folks, but having your support circle is absolutely one of the most important. And I'll be one of the first, love a good nap or weekend inside. Disengage when you need to. There will always be trauma ready and waiting for you to have to work through. So make sure you're taking the time to take care of yourself. It's okay to do slightly selfish, seemingly frivolous things if that means that you can keep fighting for another week, another month, another year. It is inherently a human experience that we're going through. So it's important to take care of yourself. For me personally, a lot of that is having some very good and close friends at work that are either very strong allies or parts of these groups and sometimes definitely not our work systems. We'll have some little vent sessions just, hey, can you believe this person that was so annoying? I can't believe that. Get it off my chest, feel much better, sometimes reaching out and educating the person, making sure I say my piece that helps as well, but a lot of it for me tends to be just focusing on things outside of that and really just kind of disengaging for a moment, taking a break, focusing on myself, exercise, meditation. All those are great activities, but I'd also be remiss if I didn't kind of call out one of the that's definitely an issue, but one that's far, far tougher for women and especially women of color in the workplace. I'm very thankful in that while I am member of several minority groups, we're either generally well perceived, or I can pass those majority groups, so I don't have to deal with it as much. But the number of times that female colleagues within my company or elsewhere have told me they get comments like you're being emotional when there really are completely valid things to be infuriated about that you'd be well within your rights to be screaming and throwing things they have to suppress because it's perceived as emotionality, which is weakness or as anger is often the case for black females, which they probably should be pissed about almost everything that's being done. But it's shocking to me to see how much they have to pull themselves back and how much they have to hold back because of those stereotypes and because that's often perceived. So one of the other ways that I really do feel like helps, even if it doesn't necessarily in the moment, is reaching out and trying to be a support for other people that you know are going through those—letting them have that moment to venture, acknowledging the pain and the frustration that they're having to suppress just in order to not be seen as someone that's going through an episode during a day. I think helping others can also be one of the best ways to relieve some of that stress. And I'm lucky that I get a little bit less than some of the other groups, or my expressions are more accepted by those who hear them generally.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and again, teeing up perfectly for where I'd like to go next, Nathan, but talking a little bit more about maybe not just passing, but also just privilege, broadly speaking, right. So not all of your identity elements carry the burden of marginalization, right. So you might have privilege in some areas. It might be economic privilege. It might be masculine privilege. And I know just the word privilege is going to just send up a radar for some folks. But identity is complicated, right. And so there are hills and valleys, so to speak. I'm curious how you use those spaces of privilege to help support others who may not hold that privilege in that specific identity domain.

Nathan Chin

Yeah. Excellent question. Having several identities and being someone who generally passes within several majority groups.

Phil Wagner

Which we should probably define right.

Nathan Chin

Good point.

Phil Wagner

What is passing mean to you in your day-to-day? How does that play out?

Nathan Chin

Yeah. So passing to me is the ability to be perceived as a member of another group, even though you might not actually. So, even though I am a half Asian, I am often perceived as a white male, at least until people learn my last name is Chin, which is about as tiny as it gets or not all the time. But definitely, I've had more than a few people at work or other places assume that I was straight when they first met me, some girls asking if I was single, which, unfortunately for them, didn't work out so well. But it's just that assumption no one ever assumes, or at least most people that are of a different race. But for some of us who are lighter-skinned or multiracial, we might be confused for a different race and thus be treated as if we are an insider of that group. That can often come with benefits. But in some cases, it could mean the opposite. It could mean that you end up going through some things that most people of your actual racial, ethnic origin would not have to.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and it plays out across so many different identity domains, right. So you may have

Nathan Chin

All of them, really.

Phil Wagner

a disability that's not visible, right. You have that sort of like identity negotiation inside of you of am I disabled? I don't present as disabled to the general public. There's a complicated internal dialogue that comes a lot with that as well. But anyways, I digress. We were talking about privilege. Thanks for that.

Nathan Chin

So privilege, and I think it's something most people would assume. But one of the things I try to always do is when I do kind of sneak into some of those groups and almost feel like a double agent. But take a moment, stand up, identify yourself and point out the things that are being done that are wrong. It does put a target on you, and sometimes it's tough, and some people might not be in a safe enough space to do that. And that's entirely okay if you're not safe or comfortable for going into that. But I personally find it really important to make sure when I am in those groups, advocate for others because seeing what it's like on the other side, I know how difficult it is for those other individuals, but if you aren't someone who is moving between those groups or has those different parts of your identity, I don't quite want to say ignorance because it's not like they have the opportunity, but they choose not to. I mean, there is more availability these days of kind of research and other things to get those perspectives, but it's just not being aware you have no idea that it exists, and there is privilege. I know that some people get upset about hearing that, but I have a very good friend from actually met him back when I was still in college, but here in DC, and he's a black man who does drag sometimes. But he and I've heard this point made on drag race as well makes a point to present as effeminate because it is much less dangerous to be perceived as a gay man than a black man at 01:00 am at night when you're walking down the street. If he is carrying a bag and has a great outfit on girls, don't cross the street. And that's a privilege that I can walk up to someone at 02:00 am and not have them clutch their purse or not have them think that I'm going to rob them that some people don't deal with now some might, but 99 out of 100 times that's been my experience. I think we do need to acknowledge the things that we get. There's also been so many things supported by actual data now, like black homeowners and their valuations or the rent or the insurance rates that they're charged. Their homes are valued lower. And then, as soon as you have a white person pretend to own the home, the appraiser gives it a higher value. That's played out time and time again. And if you aren't aware of your privilege, you're not necessarily a bad person for still benefiting from it. But I think it is important for any of us that are aware to try and spread the wealth around a little bit or at least advocate for others and make sure that others are aware of what benefits we get just by being in the majority.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and it's important for leaders to have that vocabulary. It's a tired argument to me because it's lazy thinking that we don't talk about privilege at work. I don't agree with privilege. I don't like that because it's designed to make people feel bad, and I don't think it has anything to do with good or bad, right. As leaders, I think it's our responsibility to have a vocabulary to recognize the very experiences that you just spoke to, Nathan, the guy who presents as a

effeminate because it's far less dangerous to be perceived as gay than black. Those experiences on the weekend or in the evening. That employee doesn't get to clock in nine to five and forget those right. They don't get to have a whole separate employment experience that is devoid from the memory of that trauma or the memory of just the complications of that identity. And so I think it's so important for leaders to do the work of diversity and inclusion with a full understanding that it is complicated and what happens out there follows employees into their nine to five.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, absolutely. And it doesn't even necessarily, in many cases, stop there just because it takes so much effort to adjust your personality to change how you present yourself that it might not just be an outside-of-work thing. And it's something that then rolls into who you are at work and the identity you present. So knowing just what some folks have had to go through and how that has influenced where they are is why it's even more important to make sure you have safe spaces at work where people feel like they can be themselves without needing to assume any other identities or faces or play up certain things just so that they can be secure. You want to give them, and you really get the most productivity out of people going back to kind of the business argument for it when they don't take any of them or when they bring their whole self to work. I know there have been multitudes of studies, and I always am on my soapbox for a national coming-out day around not being out at work. We'll preface that by saying, I think that's absolutely, each person's decision would never out someone. And I think that should be completely up to each individual. So I would encourage everyone to be out because when you are not out at work, the stress that your body and brain goes through, just making sure you don't mention same-sex boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner that you don't say that you went out to a gay club the other night or that you're doing drag brunch or I'm even coming up probably some of the smallest or silliest reasons for that, but it's cognitive burden, and that's with you every day, and when you're watching yourself 8 hours a day while you're trying to do your work and do your job and be productive, you really don't have your whole everything is not firing 100%, and I think it's been linked to deteriorated health and so many other things. It would be like if someone told you you couldn't answer to your name for a week, and anytime someone says that you have to ignore it, pay attention the active effort of what it would take to ignore being called your name or other things that are just second nature to how you should be, and you'll start to realize how much active effort it takes for a lot of these folks when they're going through this. So really, creating those spaces for people to be themselves at work does so much and honestly builds a lot of loyalty. I think one of my fondest memories of work was our CTO. I've known he interviewed me from my job in product nine years ago and has always been a great mentor. He's actually the sponsor of our LGBT employee resource group, but I just ended a five-year relationship and was passing in the hallway, and he's always got six meetings at the same time he's probably late for, but he saw me and asked how I was doing, and I just mentioned off-hand, and I was like, oh, it's been a little bit of a rough week. This relationship had just ended, and he just stopped in the hallway, admittedly very late for probably several other far more important things, and said, how are you feeling about that? How are you doing and took a moment to stand there and talk to me in the hallway, told me if

I needed any help with work stuff for the next week or two, if there's anything I could do, they could do to help out that they would be happy to, and that's why I've been there ten and a half years now. Yes, another place might have higher pay or some other benefits, but knowing that I have people who care and will create those places for me to be myself and bring any emotion, anything else going on to work so I don't have to hide and suppress it makes me more loyal, makes me more productive because I can take the time to work on those things when I need to I don't need to feel embarrassed about asking for a couple of hours off to not going to say, just go in a corner and cry. But hey, I need the afternoon for some personal time and no one questions. And that's something I'm thankful for. Now that's not necessarily the experience for everyone in my company. So I think that's where it's important then to take the privileges I have and try to push those for others, tell those stories, tell other managers how much that means to someone when they can do those kind of things, and hopefully that all kind of exponential effects and grow the environment.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and maybe I'm just super lofty and a dreamer here. But what I love is that it gives what you just talked about gives an actionable clear framework for how organizations can do DEI work in an effective way. And it's not throwing 17 billion dollars to changing our website and hiring a billion new minority people, which I think all of that is important, right. But what you're talking here, I think, gets to the heart of the issue, and it's the hardest part of it. But it's taking the time to open up for uncomfortable conversations, conversations that inevitably will cause people to draw closer together and build that community. But if you're looking for a clear first step to take your DEI work further, stop and talk and stop and listen to your employees and your colleagues. And I think you'll find that those small conversations aren't small at all, that they actually do quite a bit to move this work forward.

Nathan Chin

Absolutely. I would give a little plug because I think at my company we've had a great kind of heart for a while. At least, that's always been my experience as I've gone through. But the area we've fallen short, and luckily we now have two great new heads of HR that we hired or one global head of HR and one VP of talent. At the beginning of this year, they've been really doing some amazing things, but that's a great starting point, but it's not enough on its own. So we haven't actually had the finance or equity for most of the time. We've been doing things purely volunteer outside of work hours. And it's a lot if you're not lucky enough like myself and a few other individuals to have a boss that says this is a valid use of your work time, it becomes extracurricular, and it's heavy stuff to be doing on your own without a budget being expected to put on educational sessions or drive awareness or improve sentiment when it's basically a complete volunteer effort. I definitely applaud. I think it was LinkedIn who just recently announced they're paying the leaders of their employee resource groups \$10,000 each just on top of their annual salary. Because I'll be honest, it's a separate, full-time job. It's great to think and talk, but if you don't have someone you can delegate a task to, you've got to send out invitations to an event, coordinate speakers, figure out reservations for rooms and timing, or get virtual meetings set up. There's a lot of legwork that goes into it. And honestly, a lot of it

can't happen unless you have some of that buy-in, which always starts at the top. You can have as many grassroots movements as you want. If you don't have buy-in from the top, it's really not going to go anywhere. But then you can start to work on those things like creating a better website, getting better recruitment channels out there. And there's really so many different ways to solve some of these issues. You can do a lot of them for low budget. Even little things like, I know in the past I've heard stories that we've had candidates declined to go forward in the interview process because their first three interviewers were white males, and that's not it was. Hey, we need someone from this department to interview who is available. Some people turned it down. We do have relatively diverse staff throughout the company. We've got some areas where we need some improvement, but some are outperforming other tech companies, but that doesn't matter for that one person who went through the interview process and saw three white men interviewing them. So that's an easy free thing that you can do is make sure you've got good interview panels that people are going through. And then that also leads to things like the website and other areas. So yeah, I definitely think emotional conversations and being open, and listening are the foundation, but it doesn't go very far unless you get those additional elements of investment.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And I should definitely back up and clarify here for anybody listening, do not do D&I work absent of a budget or a formal support structure. Do not walk away thinking that because I think that's also a weakness is that we then do sort of cheap efforts. And I agree conversation is a lot, and conversation can do a lot, but it is certainly not enough. Nathan, I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit to those employee resource groups. That's a valuable space for support for building community, for giving feedback. I think up the feedback loop on how to then do D&I work better as it moves forward. What's your experience been with those employee resource groups, and how can those assist us? I think as a tool in our DEI toolkits.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, I think they can be a fantastic resource if your company is just starting to build out these kind of initiatives or efforts where you can check in what I would call kind of just a sanity check for any future plans. Like, hey, we're thinking about doing this. Would you all like to be involved? What can we do? Does this sound like a good idea, helping to direct potential partnerships to talking with those individuals? If you have anyone reaching out to your company for those. For us, it's been kind of an interesting journey. We have four of them now, with some others potentially on their way. But our four are Empower which is for women. We have Fierce, which is for LGBTQ+ employees. We have Cvets, so a play in our name, but for our veterans and family members and then the Culture, which is for black employees. Now all these are groups that are open to all individuals. There is no restrictions on membership or anything like that. But we are looking now with some HR guidance at what the policy on closed meetings with you because it is important sometimes to have a space where just the community members can get together and discuss. But that should definitely be for more kind of tactical and not like social events or anything like that. But it depends because each of our groups were formed independently. We're very lucky. One of my good friends and the Fierce

leadership board members is an inherent product or project manager. He lives in spreadsheets and dreams in spreadsheets, so we're able to get off the ground, organized very quickly, and tap a lot of the networks that we had to get some programming and some events on the way. And over time, as we kind of got onto our feet, we started to get reached out to more. So we do a large conference every year in the US and Europe for our users. And so, we started to push and ask and make ourselves available as a resource for getting more diverse content. So this year, I'll be moderating a panel on building diverse and inclusive event communities, everything from event planning to sourcing to attendees to venues. And even though my folks within my employee resource group is with the LGBTQ+ community going to be making sure that we take that opportunity to hit a lot of other things, like accessibility, ageism, and a lot of the other areas that are very prevalent but often ignored when it comes to kind of the hey, what do we tackle first when it comes to DEI? But I think one of the biggest things you need from a company to make those groups successful budget obviously should be the number one thing, and you can make up one, ask others, figure out what you'd like, but that's a great place to start. You're definitely going to need some sort of support, and it shouldn't be only on your shoulders. Fine to carry it for a little bit, but definitely start those conversations as quickly as you can.

Phil Wagner

Well, this is maybe a good place to insert a question. In that, I was already mindful of the burden we put on people who carry experiences of oppression or marginalization. I think sometimes we bully those people into seeking support, right. And particularly, I don't think ERGs do that. But I think that it can be complicated if you are a black female veteran who has a female partner, right. So it's like there's four ERGs. Do you join all four? And then what does that do to then take you like, how do you decide? And I'm curious, as we take an intersectional lens, how do we navigate being forced to choose between those competing identities? Do you have any insight?

Nathan Chin

Yeah. And I actually did just remember my other point, which I will weave into here as well. But at least for us, our membership is currently very passive, and we are working on building that out and seeing whether we want to have different tiers of membership and what that means. But at the least, I would say have a place where anyone, regardless of whether they have those identities or not, can go to easily find out about what is going on and be at least a bystander to those discussions, because knowing that that home exists and having a place is great, and you don't want there to be a high barrier to entry where if we're going to have this ERG and you're going to be a part of it, you have to attend this many meetings per month or per quarter and meet these minimum commitments. I think that's fine for leadership board or for people that are maybe actively organizing events for it. You can set some standards there, but it needs to be very accessible because, like you said, there might be times where your job pulls you in other directions, and you can't spend as much time on these. So you want them to have that community accessible, and it needs to be open because, particularly with the LGBT group, we can't identify some of our members as easily as some of the others. And you

definitely, from an HR standpoint, can't ever ask. You would get fired so quick, so we have to kind of play it careful, but decide. And that's where I definitely recommend if you are forming or looking at forming ERGs. Get one started if you have others. Get those individuals together to talk about what they want. Having uniformity across your ERG program at a company has so much benefit, so so much benefit, making sure that your membership standards are aligned, that you're communicating in similar ways, that you are cross-promoting events from each other because there's no reason, like women Empower and Cvets have been posting just as many of our events for Pride Month as we do for any of theirs because you'll need to have each other's back when it comes to the administrative things. Hopefully, you're not competing for budgets or anything like that, but you want to present a united front, and probably the one other thing I learned from LinkedIn Webinar that was one of the most useful insightful is as hard as it is, and as emotional these things are try to put some KPIs around it, or at least start collecting some data, say, hey, is there any sort of correlation between the membership in one of the employee resource groups or more than one and employee satisfaction or promotion rates or retention rates. There are so many all companies are doing engagement or poll surveys and some of these other things that we can use to get insight for employees. Marry that with this just basic membership data or activity. And then you can make a better case for an increased budget or for more organizational support when you can show, hey, people that are in one or more ERGs have this much points higher satisfaction in our last employee survey. Track that over time. Make your case. Emotion is a large part of it, but you definitely want to have some sort of actionable element that comes through a lot of that data.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I completely agree. I think KPIs are vitally important, and I think that there's such balance in your answer there, Nathan, because it doesn't take DEI work and devoid it of emotion because that's part of it. Right. But it also doesn't fly in the other directions, which I think we see organizations do and just go like, full data mode, right. Like, let's collect all the data and all of the surveys and focus on only outcomes and not what those outcomes can do for us over the long term—so much fantastic insight there we were supposed to talk about intersectionality. Of course, we're talking about KPIs. We're talking about employees. We've been all over the place, but have one final question for you going back to intersectionality because that's been the central theme throughout our questions here today. You've seen these experiences play out not just as a leader but also as a participant in the world of work, right. And you've likely felt support. You've likely felt a lack of support. So I'm curious. Going back to the theme of intersectionality, can you offer any insight to DEI-minded leaders and managers on how using an intersectional lens to this work in the workplace can make that work so much more valuable. Any thoughts or insights for us?

Nathan Chin

Good question, at least for me personally, and I know that I inherently have that intersectional lens. I always think of the adage that might have been confused as for someone else, but wise man realizes how much he doesn't know. Being able to see bits and pieces into these different groups makes me aware of how much I don't know about the experience that other people

have, so we need to be willing to create space for them to speak up, to tell their stories, to give us opinions or react. And there's never a single person that has this amazing viewpoint into all of the different facets of diversity. You could check off a whole bunch of different races and protected groups. In my mind, that doesn't fully give you coverage to others. In fact, it gives you all these kind of combo viewpoints that are going to be very different than someone that might live solely in one of those groups. So I think the other thing that's probably important for me just to think about when it comes to that is just that there are so many different facets to individuals. You might be focused on one thing in particular, like, what can we do to make our black employees give higher sentiment ratings or something like that? And that's fine to start an initiative, but you need to take a step back and look at how it's going to be perceived from a lot of the other sides or angles. I think a lot of initiatives or things that come up at work are kind of driven by that monolithic lens, or monolithic might not be the right word, but that singular lens that they're used to, they are used to. This is my primary identity, and I only have a primary identity. I don't really have these others, or I switch between. So a similar group would appreciate this in the same way and not realize that for a lot of us, there's a lot of different parts that might impact how we view that, not that's actually the way it works. But like one-quarter of me might find that totally fine or even great, and the other three quarters might be extremely offended or upset because it's going against those. So I think just keeping in mind how things are going to be perceived and not being upset if there is kind of any pushback or if there are things raised, I think it is on both sides. You need to raise things respectfully until they're not listened to and then, by all means, make some noise. But similarly, your best intent will never outweigh execution. It's always a combination of both. So be open and willing to listen to the viewpoints of others because they have ones that you don't and intent is good. But it can only take us so far. It can still ultimately be something that is racist or sexist or ageist or so many other negative impacts on people that it's important to just be open to those perspectives, seek them out if you can seek out different people, if you can, don't put it always on the same person, give them that emotional burden and just be open because there's so much more complexity to these issues into the world and to people. Then you tend to realize just by looking at them.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. It's so important to recognize that intent and impact are two very different things. So always being mindful. But your answer there, Nathan, really, I think, gives us a good framework to help solve some of the issues that we face in everyday diversity, equity, and inclusion work, right. You're telling us to avoid doing this work in silos. You're telling us that it all comes back to community, that it all comes back to open, critical, sometimes dialogue, and that you're telling us I think that there's really room for everybody because we all are comprised of so many different intersecting identity variables. There's a space for you in this conversation, and I always think that's an important reminder. Maybe not every space is for you. Maybe not every platform is for you. But there's room for you to be involved in doing this work and making the world of work a more inclusive place for all. Nathan Chin, it's fantastic always to connect with an alum, but it's really fantastic to connect with alum who has such good food for thought like you've brought for us today. So I want you to know that we

really appreciate your time. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and being willing to chat with us here today.

Nathan Chin

Yeah, the pleasure was entirely mine. Thanks so much.

Phil Wagner

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