



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 62: AANG LAKEY – A CONSCIOUS PATH FORWARD

Phil Wagner

Hello from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes to Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real human lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. We spend a lot of time in recent weeks on this podcast thinking about what comes next. And indeed, as the political wind in the United States shift, we suspect there will be ongoing shifts in this space, in the DEI space. What does that mean for DEI practitioners? How do you keep a sense and sensibility about you when the world and your professional world around you seems bewildering? Well, today's guest is going to help us make sense of all of this complexity by centering the role of consciousness. Aang Lakey is the founder and CEO of Increasing Consciousness, a company created to increase the global consciousness to better facilitate equity all across the world. The primary goal of increasing consciousness is really to facilitate equity in the world by elevating consciousness in world leaders. That's people like you. Aang is a certified life, spirituality and meditation coach, Violence Prevention and Leadership Consultant, international speaker, Senior Advisor for Inclusive Leadership and Employee Engagement. They also hold certifications in change management, crisis intervention, emergency management, dare to lead, anti-violence, victim advocacy, yoga, mindfulness, meditation, and so much more. So, Aang, I'm really excited to welcome you here. You do incredible work. In fact, it's so rich and it's so nuanced. It's kind of hard to put you in a box. When I think of your work, there are a few things that pop out to me. I think of resilience. I think of connection. I think violence prevention, which I'm excited to talk about today. Consciousness. Tell our listeners a little bit more about who you are and the work you do.

Aang Lakey

Well, thank you so much. I am so happy to be here. What an introduction, I will say. I think you can tell just from all of the directions that my academic career has taken me. My professional career has taken me. That I am overall just passionate about equity work, and I am passionate about bringing that work to leaders. My company, I created it just because there was not anything like what I wanted to do in the world. I really wanted to bring a holistic and transdisciplinary perspective to the field, and I wanted to be able to do that in ways that were

meaningful and relevant to the people that I work with. A big part of my role in my professional career over the last 20 years has been advising leaders. The number one question that I get is, yeah, that theory is great, but how does it actually relate to the job that I'm doing? How do I use that to my advantage as a leader? Because of that, I spent a lot of time and energy reflecting on how do all of these concepts relate and how do I use that to help leaders to understand how to be better leaders and how to use that to their advantage to create a more equitable workplace, which is, in essence, what I care about.

Phil Wagner

It's so much of what you do. I teach about it in my classroom, too. And so some of those terms I mentioned earlier, they come up regularly. So I hear you like, okay, put this theory into practice. Make sense of this buzzword, connection. I do some stuff in violence intervention, resilience. Sure. There's a word that you use in a lot of your work, which I don't teach about or use regularly, and that's consciousness. I don't know; maybe that's a term we should define because it's central to the work that you do. I'm wondering, do we need to have any other definition play out before we jump into our conversation? But consciousness, for sure, define that for me. What does that mean? How does that apply?

Aang Lakey

Absolutely. One of the reasons I love talking about consciousness is because it is the foundation of everything else that I talk about. When I talk about consciousness, I mean the most simple and realistic definition of what consciousness is. To me, that is an awareness of ourselves and others, and how we are all interconnected, and how our interactions with each other impact everyone else. When we talk about awareness of ourselves, that is, what are the unconscious biases that we have? What are the feelings that come up for us in our body when we're experiencing different emotions? How do we use that to our advantage as we are trying to navigate complex topics? Specifically, as leaders, we have to engage in hard topics every day. How do we use our body intelligence and our emotional intelligence to our advantage? We have to be able to recognize what is subconsciously happening in our bodies and in our minds. If we don't know what's happening subconsciously, then those are going to become barriers or roadblocks to us because we can't address any biases that we have unless we can consciously bring them to the surface. That, in essence, is consciousness. That is us recognizing what's happening in our body and in our mind, and how do we bring that forward so that we can learn from it. A key part of my work is talking about reflexivity, which is the action cycle of self-awareness is great; self-evaluation is great, but what do we actually do when we have that insight from that self-evaluation? I'll talk probably a little bit more about that. But overall, consciousness, to me, awareness of ourselves, awareness of others, and how we're all interconnected.

Phil Wagner

You're getting closer to where I played then. I would use the term emotional intelligence. Is this emotional intelligence? Is this a part of emotional intelligence? Is this something different altogether?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. I personally see this as something that is foundational to emotional intelligence. I see it as something separate, but you cannot have emotional intelligence without consciousness. You can have consciousness without having emotional intelligence, but you can't have it the other way around. In order to be an emotionally intelligent leader, you have to be able to recognize what's happening in your body and what's happening in your mind, and how that is going to impact your interpersonal dynamics.

Phil Wagner

I would agree. I think research agrees, too. If you're familiar with the work of Daniel Goldman, you know that leaders who score high in EQ demonstrate greater sensibility to do this, emotional self-awareness, and to be in communication, intra-personally, and those that struggle with emotional intelligence, most of the time have lower score, because this is the foundation.

Aang Lakey

Yeah. Actually, to put it in a way that's very simplistic, you cannot manage or regulate your emotions if you don't know what your emotions are and how they're impacting you.

Phil Wagner

Right. And you have to be honest because you can say, I don't ever get sad. I don't ever. Like men do this, I don't ever. But if you can't honestly figure out what those emotions are, do you know how they disrupt the communication process or disrupt the equity process? So I cosign all of this, Aang. This is great. There's another foundational piece here. I know consciousness is foundational to your work. One of the things that's foundational to my work, and I think DEI work, is it's really my favorite theoretical underpinning of DEI, and that's the role of storytelling. And anytime I have somebody on this podcast, I'm always interested in knowing more about what their story is. You have a powerful, powerful story. I've seen and heard you share it elsewhere. I'm not sure if you're willing to share it here, but if you are, I'm wondering if you can share a little bit of that story with us and how it drove you to where you are in this professional line of work.

Aang Lakey

Yeah. It's so funny because when I present and when I talk to people, I share snippets of my story, and that seems to be what people cling to. I'm learning the power of storytelling as I engage with more and more people here, even for myself. I grew up in severe poverty. My parents, frequently, were incarcerated. They struggled with substance use. I was in a really physical and emotional, abusive situation. I had so many things in my life that prevented me from really stepping into who I was, really before I went to college. So much of my identity and so much of who I am did not kind of come to me until my college days and my graduate work. Even 10 years following my first graduate program was really trying to dig in and understand who am I and how does my story relate to the person that I am today. Also, how do I use that to my advantage? What I mean to my advantage is my own story has I think, helped a lot of

people to understand how to overcome socialized ignorance. Because my first graduate program was in social work. Every day, we were writing on all of our previous socialization, how it impacted us, what that means, and what it looks like for doing equity-based work, and how do we acknowledge all of those biases. I will be the first person to tell you that I have a lot of bias for all different things. I was a racist person. I was homophobic. I was xenophobic. I'd never been outside of the small towns that I grew up in in Southeast Texas, and I was as ignorant as they come. It took me over 10 years as someone who actually wanted to make the commitment to make change to overcome that. When I talk to people about the cycles of socialization and how to liberate ourselves from that, a big part of the discussion is recognizing how hard it is to question these deeply held beliefs that we have. For me, what that looked like was shaping my own identity as a non-binary person and as a queer person in the world. How could I be non-binary, and how could I be queer when my religion teaches me that those are all sinful and that I'm going to go to a bad place? My socialization from everyone that I interacted with was that these people are different, and because they're different, you are not entitled to certain things, which is crazy to think about. But yeah, I feel like I might be rambling, so I am going to pause and say I think as much as I can, I like to help, especially leaders, to understand how difficult it can be to navigate these topics, not only for themselves, because as leaders, we have to recognize that our bias is coming into these conversations, and we have to recognize that the bias and the emotional and the physiological reactions that the person that's sitting across from us is going to impact that dynamic. I'm going to say, too, my hands are shaking, my body is having a physical reaction to just recalling my own story.

Phil Wagner

I appreciate you going there with us, and you're not rambling at all. In fact, I'm taking notes on this side. It's like I'm back in grad seminar here. There's something so powerful about stories and how and why they guide us to the work that we do. I just think I think that's something that we need to center in this season of pushback. I'm going to call it a season because I refuse to believe it's forever. Many of us are wondering, what's next? What grounds me? I appreciate you sharing yours with us here. Okay, so let's go back to consciousness, shall we? With that, let's talk about what we're here to talk about, which is this context of a mass corporate movement to effectively dismantle DEI. We know that there have been major companies that have and are walking back or doing away with their DEI commitments altogether. Lowe's, John Deere. I mean, the list is going on and on and on. Now we've got DEI officers, people who have been on a shoestring budget for a long time, fighting even more for legitimacy. Jobs are being cut for them, for us. What does resilience look like? How can we continue to push for meaningful change in environments where support is shrinking? I'm wondering if your work on consciousness and conscious leadership might help us figure out how to sustain that work and how to think about our well-being in these challenging, turbulent times. That was 14 questions in one. I don't know if that's. Just take it, run, however. But I'm wondering, can you help us figure out how to make sense of this complicated moment?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. Well, there's so many places to go with this. I want to first just start by acknowledging the impact that the politicization and weaponization of DEI, those acronyms they themselves have on the work that we're doing, and the way that I see navigating this. I also want to say I just had a conversation at a yoga class with a good friend of mine who works for a large organization. She used to manage their DEI program, and in the last year has had to reassign over 150 employees and let go several more employees. This is real, and this is happening. At the same time, talk about how do we manage this and how do we navigate this. I will say that the way that I always frame these concepts is I try really hard not to use the letters. I will actually be writing my next Brains article is going to be on this topic because I get asked about this quite a lot.

Phil Wagner

Interesting.

Aang Lakey

I think the approach that I like to take is helping people to understand that it's not about the letters. We're talking about basic leadership principles. When we talk about basic leadership principles, we're talking about building psychological safety, increasing trust, modeling accountability, all different kinds of things.

Phil Wagner

Largely uncontroversial things, things that are part of any organizational behavior textbook that are foundational. These are not new. They're not controversial. I like this, this shift.

Aang Lakey

Yes. Any leader that's had any basic level of leadership training is going to know and understand these terms. When we, as DEI practitioners, can frame our work and put it into that context, it helps the leaders to understand the importance of the work that we do, and it also helps us to stay relevant and to do the meaningful work that we want to do. My entire mission is to increase equity work, but I do that through leadership education, and I do that through teaching principles like reflexivity, consciousness, intentionality, and basic leadership principles that are so deeply ingrained in doing equity work. Because you can't do equity work if you don't have this foundational level of consciousness of what are your biases what are your go-to emotional reactions when you're involved in having a conversation about something that's difficult, regardless of whether it's diversity and inclusion-related, and really helping people to understand that it's about core human needs and it's about leadership. If we can master learning what our leadership cares about and reframing our approach, then we're going to be much more successful in the long run. I will share with you, my dear friend; she was smart enough to know that this was the angle to take. She was able to reassign 150 employees instead of firing 150 employees. If we can maintain our integrity in the work that we're doing, help leaders to understand the impact and the way that this fits into the larger picture, then we're going to be much better off in the long run.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I love this. So, I hear this as a recipe for demonstrating continued legitimacy. I think there's a flip side to this conversation because DEI is so polarizing right now. I mean, you can't even say it without somebody being like, Eh, woke, right? And so particularly in corporate spaces. So now you've got folks who. I mean, they've already had a heavy lift. DEI is heavy work. If you're doing it the right way, you're going to be feeling something because you also have to think, who this work disproportionately falls to. Now, to also have to fight for legitimacy and to also have to be a master of business strategy and to think about how I reallocate on it. I mean, there's so much of an emotional burden that it seems attached to. I mean, more than ever. So your work can also help us figure out, yes, I want to establish continued relevance, but also I got to take care of myself because this has always been heavy work, and it's heavier than ever. So I'm wondering how this idea of conscious leadership helps me think about navigating that opposition and thinking about, I don't know if the word is self-care, I don't know what the word is, I don't know what the term is, but taking care of myself as a DEI practitioner where the stage I've been dancing on seems to be dismantling underneath me.

Aang Lakey

I will first start by saying that self-care is the term that I use. I believe so strongly in this that one of the first courses that I created was on self-care and helping individuals to to learn and understand what is self-care. Sorry, go ahead.

Phil Wagner

I was just wondering, can you then define it as someone who's done some work in this area for us? Because when so many people close their eyes and they think self-care, they see shopping bags. It's so corporate, and it's so like, I know that's not what your work leads us to. So maybe you're exactly the person that should help us figure out what that means. Is that an okay aside?

Aang Lakey

Yeah, of course. I'll say that self-care can mean a whole number of things. But what I try to help people to understand is that there are good ways to take care of ourselves, and there are bad ways to take care of ourselves. Shopping or retail therapy is not a good way or a healthy way to take care of ourselves. And fast food and sleeping all day is also not a good form of self-care. And when I look at self-care, I talk about what are the practices and the behaviors that I can implement in my life that are going to bring me peace and calm and that are going to help me rebuild my energy or re-energize me. And how do I integrate those practices into my routines? And so when I talk about self-care, I give people ranges of what it can look like for you. And I'll share my personal self-care routine. I'm a big fan of taking care of my physical body because of the trauma that my body and my consciousness has endured; I carry a lot of physical stress in my body. A way that I like to practice self-care is through massage, acupuncture, cold therapy, sauna. All of those things are things that I like to do. Now, I also recognize the privilege that goes into that. There are many other ways that we can do that: practice self-care. But for me, my issues and my concerns are related to tension that I store in

my body. Now, if you're also like that, and maybe you can't afford to do some of those things, there are scan and release techniques that are free. You can watch a guided meditation on YouTube on how to scan your body, recognize where you're holding tension, and release that tension. There are all different kinds of other practices that you can engage with, whether it's walking meditations to help clear your mind, whether it is going to community events that inspire you or encourage you and all different kinds of things. The keys to self-care is, what do you need, you as your individual self? What causes you stress? What causes you to not be the person that you want to be in the world? What activities do bring you joy, do bring you calm, do bring you peace, and how do you find ways to intentionally incorporate those into your life?

Phil Wagner

I love this. I love this. All of those are practices the DEI practitioners then engage in to bring about a consciousness during this time of pushback. Is that how this works? Is that the model here?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. When I talk about consciousness practices, I use that as an overarching term for mindfulness practices, self-care practices, gratitude practices, reflective journaling, qigong, and yoga; all of these things that are considered self-development or self-care and self-help kinds of things are all related to increasing our consciousness. Mindfulness is the example that I like to use the most because I think most people can connect it the easiest. Mindfulness practices help has to recognize what's happening in our body and what's happening in our mind because if we don't know what's happening in our body and what's happening in our mind, then we cannot engage in that next step of emotional and social intelligence. Mindfulness practices are one of the best ways that I think leaders can practice consciousness practices because it helps them to find presence, to respond appropriately to different situations with confidence and with ease, and it helps them to release and let go of things that they don't need to hold on to and other things. But I group all different kinds of things into consciousness practices, and my last article, I think it, was on Brains. It might have been on Awaken magazine. But one of my articles that's on my website is on ten daily practices that's specifically for leaders. I cover ten different areas, how you can practice them, some examples, and where you can find some of those details.

Phil Wagner

I love that. So one of the things that I always like to think is like, okay, I would do this because there's no harm in this. This doesn't hurt anybody to be more conscious. But I know someone like you, you've been this work for a while, you've got to have some success stories, right? This actually works when put in practice, eh? I'm wondering, can you share with us, I don't know how consciousness can drive creative solutions or new approaches to bring about equity. I mean, what is your work yielded in terms of success cases?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. Well, I will share my all-time favorite success story, and that was someone that I worked with for quite a while that didn't understand. I'm going to share this story, if that's okay, to demonstrate the relationship that I had with this person. This person started, called me into his office, asked me to sit down, close the door, and proceeded to tell me that he had heard about how passionate I was from other leaders in the organization and how his job was to help me find my way. He shared a story about how the organization sees everyone as boxes on a conveyor belt. He said those boxes go by on the conveyor belt, and they all look exactly the same. He said, then your box comes by, and it's open, and there's confetti, and there's streamers, and there are all of these things. He said, my job is to figure out how to package you so that when the box goes by on the conveyor belt, you don't get noticed. I was like, I'm pretty sure you're insulting me right now, sir.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I thought that was going to go in a way different direction. Okay.

Aang Lakey

That was the first interaction that I had with this specific leader that I worked with. In this circumstance, he was actually in a supervisory role. It's complicated the way that the organizational structure worked, but he was my formal supervisor. It took me about six months of constant struggle with this individual before one day; he had a significant emotional event that caused him to rethink something in his life. I will never forget this person in my life because he then shared with me this personal event that happened to him, and he shared the specific example was related to sexism. My work at the time was in sexual and domestic violence. He refused to believe that sexism existed within the organization and refused to believe that it impacted individuals in society at large. And the conversation was with his daughter. He had a six or eight-year-old daughter who shared that she could never be President because she wasn't a man. And I'll never forget him telling me. He said I have always raised my daughters to believe that they can do anything. They can be anyone that they want to be. And he's like, My wife and I empower her, and we encourage them to do all of these wonderful things. The fact that at this age, she has already internalized this belief that she can't be President because she's not a man that hit him. From that moment on, he actually became one of the best allies that I had ever had, probably even still to this day. The only reason that happened is because I had to coach him every day on these specific topics because there was a time when normally I presented to the legislator, but the organization was thinking they might want him to do it. I had to coach him every day on how to talk about these topics, how to understand these topics. He's just like, I don't understand this, and I don't think this is a legitimate concern. But to have him have that complete shift of everything that you've been saying and everything that you've been teaching about is so apparent to me now. That is a consciousness shift. He couldn't see it before because it didn't impact him. The only way that he could see it was through the impact of his daughter.

Phil Wagner

I love that. I love that. I teach in the soft skills space, and so it's easy for someone to get skeptical and say, Oh, these soft skills. This is a great case. You want to be about the business of change management, you've got to be about the business of relationships first. Now, I know that was a familial relationship, but you never know, by creating space for stories and lived experiences to intersect, how you open up someone's potential to sense make, to become more cognizant of how this actually may play out. That's a powerful story. I know time is fleeting. I'd actually like to shift pretty greatly into another aspect of your work that I don't think gets talked about enough. If it gets talked about, it gets talked about in such a small niche way that I don't know that it's helpful, and that's Violence Prevention. We're recording this at the height of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Like you, some of my initial foray into this work was sexual and domestic violence advocacy. It's a topic that's near and dear to me. You focus on violence and violence prevention in corporate culture, specifically. How do you actually see that issue manifesting in, I don't know, workplace environments, particularly outside of the ways in which we might normally think of it manifesting? Again, a poorly worded question. I've just jazzed out this conversation with you, but talk us about the ways in which we might see violence impacting our culture in ways we might not suspect.

Aang Lakey

Well, anytime I talk about violence prevention, I talk about a couple of things. The first thing is that we know from the research that all violence stems from an establishment difference. Whether that establishment of difference is I'm of one racial ethnicity, and you're of another, I'm of one specific religion, and you're of another, or whatever the topic is, there's a difference that has been socialized in the cultures that we're in. Depending on where we grow up, it may look different and it may feel different. But for the most part, that difference is established. And when we talk about sexual and domestic violence, it's about the gendered norm, and it's about the masculine and the feminine, and the binary, honestly, of the masculine and the feminine. And when we talk preventing violence, we look at violence on a continuum. And that continuum actually goes from whatever the form of violence is, let's say, sexual and domestic violence. So when we walk it back along that continuum, and we say, how do we prevent sexual and domestic violence? Well, we have to prevent sexual harassment. How do we prevent sexual harassment? Well, we have to prevent socialized gender norms that says that masculine is better than or greater than the feminine.

Phil Wagner

Dominant, yeah.

Aang Lakey

When we talk about socialized gender norms, we're in the diversity and inclusion space, and we're in the consciousness space, right? Because we are socialized from our childhood to know and understand that there is that difference. That masculine and the feminine difference, and you have to choose one or the other as a kid, and you have to live your life that way. And then whichever one you're in is kind of just the way that it goes. And if we are talking about

violence prevention and consciousness, At the root cause of every form of violence is our own consciousness. How were we socialized to believe whatever the topic is, whether it's gender, whether it is religion, whether it is race, whatever it is, how were we socialized in that regard? Can we, as adults, consciously acknowledge, this was the socialization that I was raised in, and do I actually want to continue to believe this in my life and make the decision or the conscious choice to change? And so example for me, I had to decide at a very young age, do I want to maintain these beliefs that one race is dominant over another. Then again, in my adolescence, do I want to maintain the belief that if you're queer or non-binary, then you're less than others, right? And sometimes, people have to navigate these themselves, and sometimes, people can do it with self-reflection. But at the core of that is bringing these things to our consciousness. For me, when I talk about consciousness and I talk about violence prevention, it's all interconnected. We cannot do violence prevention work if we're not also doing consciousness work and we're not also doing equity work because all of it is interconnected.

Phil Wagner

One of the things I think then is, doesn't it require a DEIA, or DEI, or equity framework or infrastructure to prevent the intrusion of violence into the workplace? I think what role can leaders play in preventing violence in organizations where there isn't a DEI infrastructure, which was bolstered post-2020 as a way to rebuff against what's happening in our streets to Black and Brown and Indigenous folks and what's happening with the onslaught of violence against LGBTQ+ folks. So how do we do that in a context where the very infrastructure that was established to help with that is, again, being dismantled?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. I will come back to the same thing that I said earlier. But first, I want to acknowledge that you're absolutely right. You can't do violence prevention work if you don't have the infrastructure to do diversity and inclusion work because they're so tied together. The same is true. You can't do diversity and inclusion work if you don't have the infrastructure to facilitate increasing people's consciousness. What that looks like is teaching people the skills that they need, whether it's in nonviolent communication, whether it is in basic managerial skills, whether it's talking about psychological safety and leading with congruence and integrity, all of these core concepts that are required to be able to engage in diversity and inclusion work, which, again, foundational leadership stuff, but by teaching the specific skills to everyone in the organization. There's an education component. When I share in my masterminds, I talk about, you have to have the knowledge, you have to know how to apply the knowledge, and you also have to be able to use the knowledge to your advantage to refract those behaviors and those skills into the rest of society. There are many, many components to that, but for the most part is, you have to teach, you have to give people the practical application, and you have to facilitate the competence of the practical application. Practicing specific skills and behaviors over and over and over again so that they become reflexive to the leader so that when they're in an environment where they have to say, here's all the variants in the context. Here's all of the skills that I have. How do I choose the best skills to apply to this situation? Then, you also have to talk about things like bystander intervention and appropriate accountability. A lot of

people do not have basic bystander intervention skills. If my colleague says something that's ignorant, how do I talk to them about that? How do I do that in a way that doesn't come off as confrontational or doesn't come off as aggressive? You have to normalize engaging in difficult conversations. One, you have to give them the skills, and you also have to normalize the culture. I think probably the last thing that I'll say is you have to have dialog and you have to encourage accountability around whatever the new norms are that you want to establish. Let's say that you want to bring certain norms into your organization. You have to dialog about those norms. You have to get commitment from everyone on the team that those are the norms that we want to have. Then we have to hold people appropriately accountable to those norms by teaching bystander intervention skills and how to facilitate that in everyday life.

Phil Wagner

There's so much to unpack here, but I've got one guiding final question for you as our time runs down here, and that's trying to bring it back to this core tenet of consciousness. There's so much to unpack, and we've reflected that in a world where corporate culture can sometimes foster harm or at least collect critical issues that lead to harm, how in your mind does cultivating consciousness, making this the main thing, the pursuit, making consciousness cultivated at the leadership level, how does that help us create, I don't know, not just safer workplaces, but ones that truly thrive? I'm wondering how leaders can start to shift their mindset and their actions to embrace this conscious approach that you speak of. Got any tips for us if we want to try to do this well?

Aang Lakey

Well, I had a couple of things that came to me while you were shifting.

Phil Wagner

Writing my dissertation.

Aang Lakey

The question. Let me first start by saying that the reason that I actually choose to work with leaders is because I recognize influence that they have over everyone around them, regardless of whether or not they are willing to admit it. They are going to be able to influence their team and their organization, both directions, up and down. Working with leaders, to me, is one of the best ways to reach the masses because if I can teach leaders how to embody consciousness practices and how to bring that into their leadership, then I get to also influence all of their leaders, all of their employees, and all of the people who are in their organization, maybe from above, who are seeing this leader implement those skills, seeing the and the results of that, and maybe decide that it's something that they might also want to learn and implement.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. I'm really just thinking, what do we do to put this into practice right now? You're a listener, you're like, Oh, I thought I was emotionally intelligent, or I thought I was a good person, or like, Yeah, we don't have a lot of conflict. Okay, all that's great. But no, I really want

to pursue this conscious leadership. What do I do so that I can actually start to really embed this into my ethos and how I operate?

Aang Lakey

Yeah. I will say start small and practice reflexivity, practice intention, bringing intention to your process, whatever that is and whatever that looks like, and do it in a way that is sustainable for you. A lot of times, I talk to people who are like, I love meditating. I meditate for three hours a day. I couldn't live without it. But not everyone can meditate. What is going to be sustainable for you and what is going to be meaningful for you? When leaders talk about self-reflection and self-evaluation, they think, 360 feedback, and, Oh, I'm going to talk to my team, and I'm going to get all of this information. While that self-awareness and that self-evaluation is really important, it doesn't replace the need to take action on the insights that you have. And so if you already know that you can't engage in a conversation with someone about X, Y, and Z topic, take that as your starting point and think about, how can I teach or train my body and my mind to have this conversation. And nine times out of 10, the reason that people don't want to engage out of conversation is because they've never had the opportunity or they've never done it in an environment that has felt safe for them to do it. So, a big part of what I talk about is how do you build community of individuals to explore, and learn, and grow in a place that recognizes the need to explore these concepts. Start small, bring intention to what you're doing, practice reflexivity. And I'll define reflexivity if I haven't done that already, but that is the cycle of self-awareness, self-evaluation, and taking action on your insights. Then, the last thing, do it in a way that's sustainable for you.

Phil Wagner

That's so good. There's some. I feel like I say this way too much, but there's just so much to unpack here. I mean, this is really it's therapeutic to hold space for these ideas that live in our consciousness, but we don't take time to unpack. We don't take time to apply. I think this work is fantastic work. I think it's important work. I think it's resiliency work. Before I let you go, would you just tell our listeners the best way they can find and follow and support you? Because clearly, you are filled with such great wisdom. If folks want to follow up, how do they do that?

Aang Lakey

Well, I tell people that the easiest way is the old-fashioned way, which is send me an email. Well, I say old-fashioned now, but I do also have fancier ways. I have a website it's www.increasingconsciousness.org. Then I am also on many social media platforms. I'm on Instagram at [increasing_consciousness](https://www.instagram.com/increasing_consciousness). On Instagram is where all I do is I talk about conscious practices, what they are and how you can practice them. That's my entire Instagram. I'm also on LinkedIn. I love to connect with people on LinkedIn. I have a YouTube channel at Coach Ang, and I also teach and write in different areas. I mentioned Brains magazine and Awaken magazine earlier. Those are the two that I'm focusing on right now, but I also have some executive contributorships that I am going to be writing for in the near future as well.

Phil Wagner

Fantastic. And thank you for taking time, making time, holding space for these ideas, for sharing your work with us. This has been a great conversation. So fun to chat with you. Thanks for hopping on our podcast.

Aang Lakey

Yeah. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. I appreciate your enthusiasm and your passion for the work as well. So, thank you again.

Phil Wagner

Thanks for taking a second to listen to Diversity Goes to Work. If you like what you heard, share the show with a friend. Leave us a review on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts, and reach out because we're always looking for new friends. And if you'd like to learn more about any of our programs or initiatives here in the business school at William & Mary, be sure to visit us at mason.wm.edu. Until next time.