

# Podcast Episode FINAL

## David (he/him):

All right. Y'all welcome to another episode of Diversity and Inclusion: Revolution or Reform. It's David rolling solo today, Connie isn't able to join us, but we have a really special guest Carissa Begonia. Carissa is a first-generation Filipino American. She's the founder of Conscious Exchange and Equity Focused Leadership and Business Coaching and Consulting Company with a mission to forward the economic advancement of black and indigenous people of color, women, and other folks of historically marginalized identities.

Among other things she is the former head of diversity equity inclusion at Zappos, and has over 15 years of experience working on the both operations and human side of some of the country's biggest retailers, including Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and [inaudible 00:01:19]. A lot of her work now sits at the intersection of DEI and emotional intelligence, supporting leaders and organizations in developing and operationalizing their equity strategy at the personal interpersonal and systemic level.

Those are all wonderful things about Carissa, but I was really excited to connect with her last year around March or April. I thought about the height of visibility of anti-Asian racism. Those problems haven't gone away and we've both continued to do the work and I'm really excited to reconnect. So thank you for being here Carissa.

## Carissa (she/her):

Thanks so much for the invite, David. I'm really excited as well.

## David (he/him):

We always start by asking our guests to share their lineage in this work of diversity and inclusion. So how did this get started for you?

## Carissa (she/her):

Yeah. So if I take it back formally, it started with my role at Zappos. I was the head of direct diversity and inclusion at Zappos. Prior to that [inaudible 00:02:12] happened because I spent most of my career in an operational capacity and strategy operations. And I had successfully climbed this ladder that I was so ambitious about climbing and finally got my seat at the table. And at a progressive company, it was like, yeah, it's going to be diverse here, and I get

there and I was the first, the only other. I was the first woman of color. The youngest one on the team [inaudible 00:02:42] like with the decision making power. And so it was just really interesting. I gave myself a pat on the back, but then I was like, wait a minute. Where is everybody?

And this new role that I was leading, and this new team I was leading, I think I was starting to feel some of those I think typical things you feel when you are kind of that first person and that only person the seat at the table. And it was really identifying as a woman at that time.

And so I was looking for other women leaders in the company. And so I started a women's group really like it's kind of reminiscent of an [inaudible 00:03:16] and I ran that for about a year and a half. It did kind of community programming, internal fireside chats [inaudible 00:03:23], educational programs and such.

And then I started to realize that I was enjoying doing this kind of work more than I was enjoying my actual day job. And I was of course wasn't getting paid for that side stuff. So I decided that I really want to see if there's an opportunity to do DEI work internally. And I noticed that we didn't actually have a formal role, which I was a little bit surprised by because we had some of the other CSR roles with environmental zoning and what's called philanthropy. And so it was a little surprising that we didn't have a formal DEI role.

So I kind of took some months to pitch for that and put it all together with the aid of some of my fellow women leaders in the group and pitch that to the late Tony Shay and others [inaudible 00:04:10]. And thankfully they gave it to me. I was a little kind of shocked actually. I'm really excited, put everything together, they gave it to me. And I guess almost immediately as I got the role, I also had imposter syndrome. I was like, what am I doing? Like, what qualifications do I have to be here and to be doing this work? But that's a little bit of that background of how I showed up into that formal role of DEI and kind of after that was going back into school, learning a lot more, doing a lot more multicultural education and stuff. So that's a little bit of that initial journey.

### **David (he/him):**

Yeah. Two things. One like, nobody grows up as a kid, like, you know what I want to be, the director of diversity, equity and inclusion when I grew up at whatever company. You talked about having more of a business operations background. What were the things that you were wanting to do coming to work? Because you have a pretty extensive business background. What were the things that you were looking to achieve? You talked about the shift that happened

when you started feeling lonely at the “top”, but what were your initial goals coming into the workforce?

**Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah, well, I was excited it was the first time I had left New York. I grew up in New York and I was really wanting to move to the west coast, namely LA. I didn't quite get there.

I landed in Las Vegas. So it was almost the test time that it was in Vegas. And that's a fun story too. I was working in the fashion industry for most of my career and starting to get really bored with it and just not excited, kind of what I felt was really superficial. And so I had a little bit of an identity crisis and it was at a company that I immediately knew as soon as they got there that I didn't want to be there.

And I stuck it out for three months because I don't know [inaudible 00:05:59] daughter of immigrants, you don't leave a job less than a year, I guess, or you don't leave without a job either like lined up. But I was just so heartbroken being there. I just was miserable every day. And I was like, this is not going to get better, and it was funny because I wanted to be at that company. Like I did all this research to say I targeted that company and I got it. And sometimes be careful what you wish for. So I was there for three months. I resigned and I immediately panicked and got another job in the same industry, same fields and turned it down. It was more money, bigger title. And I turned it down because I said, hey, this is just going to be more of the same.

So I packed up my stuff and my expensive New York City apartment, moved with my parents for a few months and just kind of sat there and figured out, what is it that I want to do? And what is it that's going to be meaningful for me? And I kind of had some discernment of I am not sure I can go back into the nonprofit space and starting from scratch and feeling like I have to not make the best money. I got used to a certain comfortable lifestyle. And so I kind of said, hey, wait, I might need to go into some role that is similar to, or the industry that I'm used to, but finding a company that was more aligned with my values. And at the time it was Zappos and Tom shoes for the fashion retail industry. Those were kind of the two players or places that were more culturally and responsible or engaged and socially responsible.

And so I applied to both. [inaudible 00:07:31] LinkedIn recruiters and such, and within both companies. Tom shoes never got back to me, but Zappos did. And I was flown out twice for a couple of different roles. And three months later I found myself moving my entire life to Las Vegas, Nevada, and I'm nothing I

would ever assume or thought I would end up. But it was a very pivotal kind of moment, both of my career and my life. And so it was first that shift of what is it that is meaningful to me? What is purposeful for me? And honoring that and not just saying, well, I can make more money and I can get a bigger title, but that doesn't actually bring me joy or satisfaction at this point. So let's change this thought process and fix this.

And so I did, and again, did not think that I would end up in a DEI role there, but I think what I first wanted was lifestyle. I wanted to move less. So it was aligning with dreams and bigger ambitions of lifestyle and again, purpose. So that was the biggest motivation. And what was cool. The role I ended up taking was innovative like a new role. Was kind of like a startup within the larger Zappos ecosystem and the Amazon ecosystem.

So it was really fun in that way that it was a smaller team. I had a lot of responsibility, I could make decisions and stuff. So I really liked that element of it too. So bringing still a business strategy element in [inaudible 00:08:53] for my professional side, but then my lifestyle was probably, or my life values were probably the biggest driver of moving there in the first place.

#### **David (he/him):**

Yeah. We're talking about 2013 at this point. And so over the next couple of years, working your way up, like the other thing that stood out to me in that story like, there was no DEI role within the construct. What was it like to pitch that and how did that respond in that space? Because I imagine there are some people listening to this who are like, yeah, we don't have someone who is really pushing those things from the top in our org. What was it like to engage people in senior leadership? Like, no, this is something that we need.

#### **Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah. I'm going to say these are fun stories because I think they actually are really interesting fun stories and how you ended up in places that you wouldn't have imagined. That one of the all hands meetings, there was this activity where basically deck of cards, any employee at the all hands could have taken that card and say, they're supposed to write in deck and pitch an idea basically to the entire company on stage.

And I had been feeling, I had gotten a new role within that startup division to spearhead a new team. And that was where I started to get those feelings of a little bit of loneliness. Where are the other women leaders in this company that I can kind of lean on? And so that'd been kind of on my mind for some time, and so when this all hands came around and there was this opportunity to ask

whether or not anyone else was interested in this topic amongst you all the employees. I was nervous to get up. And I think I saw a couple of friends get up and I said, you know what? Let's go, just [inaudible 00:10:] it. I'm just going to go and share what I am thinking about.

And that was the first kind of courage somebody encouraged I had for myself speaking on stage the entire company and pitching this idea, and it was immediate. It wasn't like anything planned. So it was just free-flowing. So that was one. And then part of that activity was we would go to another space where after all 52 ideas were shared, the employees could kind of gather with those speakers to see, and just kind of do something from that. Like come up with something from that idea.

And from that idea later, I was told it was the most attended or most interesting topic of all which again was about limited leadership and really promoting more women within the company. And so that was kind of proof to me that it's not just me who's thinking about this. There's a lot of folks who care about this subject evidently, and so that gave me my first push to start creating programming. And then I think that just got me to be bolder just to start like aligning and frankly, some of the senior women that I was looking for initially were really thankful that I started that pitch that it's kind of helping them re-evaluate what's going on for them in their roles, even though they've been there for 10, 15 years or so.

And so that was exciting to have that ally ship, I guess, and camaraderie. And so that's kind of the first iteration was when I was running that ERG for instance, for about a year and a half. And so then coming to pitching this idea and I'll share that it wasn't absent from DEI programming. It just wasn't formalized.

So there were other leaders that were doing other programs and having conversations, hosting things through some time. And this just gave me more experience. And just again, I was meeting people. People who helped me figure out what the strategy was to pitch this role.

And I think from the experience of doing that for about a year and a half, I think it's a lot of times when people ask me, how do you get into a DEI role? How do you start something when from nothing? It wasn't immediate. It took at least a year and a half. And I know again, there were some other programs happening with other folks for something more formal to be created. And I had to have that courage to spearhead it myself too. So some internal work was going on or sometimes you're [inaudible 00:12:54] just at your wit's end. Sometimes you're like, I can't do anything else. There is no other option. This is so important. I have to just go with it.

And I think when you trust that magic can happen. And so I prepared a whole deck and all this stuff for the C-suite to kind of prove what I was talking about was going to be useful and beneficial. And again, because I had a year and a half of doing it internally already, they're like, yes, we want someone to do this. And in retrospect, I will say, I will hope that they have more qualified educated person coming in now, especially in this world where there are a lot of DEI consultants that have been doing some of this work for years and even if not, maybe some adjacent work.

But I think just starting and having people around you who see the vision that you have, who can support you, is wildly important. And a lot of those senior leaders, the women who were senior leaders in the company that I met through this ERG helped set up the conversations. They encouraged me when I was not ready to [inaudible 00:13:59]. You can do this. I will set up the conversations for you. Here are some of my own examples and things that I'd want. Here's my experience in pitching or whatever. So getting coached by them informally too, or mentored by them was also really helpful.

#### **David (he/him):**

Yeah, I love that you're highlighting; one, that this takes time and two, that you don't do this alone. There are people alongside you who are experiencing similar things. You talked about women feeling lonely, unheard, unseen in the ways that they needed to be seen. And of course, like there are lots of other intersections of identity that inclusion, equity, all of that can, for lack of a better word include. But as you build that momentum, build that community over time, that kind of change can happen.

So that's words of encouragement for folks who might feel like they're alone in their space. You're probably not. Find your people and start to build. Change can happen from inside in some ways. But what do you do when you get to that seat at the table? I know you said you're experiencing some like imposter syndrome, but what did your work look like starting not the DEI work from the ground up, because you said there were already things going on, but like, what did it look like to be that first within the construct of Zappos at that time?

#### **Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah, I'll say that it felt like home bought by pressure. So I have a lot of graves for folks who are [inaudible 00:15:21] who had a DEI in their companies because. Just like a lot of people say, you don't get a lot of resources. People are confused at what you do, and it's not something that's so specific and technical that's like, hey, you're an engineer and say, right, you're going to build this

program. I'm going to build this thing. DEI stands across the entire company. And we're starting to talk now of removing it from HR. And it's a company strategy, not an HR strategy.

And so at the time that was still kind of a new conversation. And so I understood this as, wait a minute, I have to talk to the head of marketing, and the head of tech, the head of finance. I have to be aligned with all the heads. I am a director manager, not a VP. And so my influence is not as strong yet. Seniority here is not as strong yet. Thankfully I am a social person. And so I have climbed the ladder successfully for a reason, maybe because I know how to talk to folks and it can be influential, but there was some fear of who's going to listen to me?

I think that's where that coaching and that mentorship was really important. And what was great about Zappos is it was somewhat kind of flat in terms of the organization that they didn't put so much emphasis on the titles and your seniority. So, that's what gave me this opportunity. But I still carry that because that's a lot of what the structures are like in other organizations. So regardless of whether the organization itself had that company culture, I was still holding that against myself. First time at the company, I think it was embraced. It was exciting for it to have a formalized kind of a person to run specific programming.

What I found challenging was, it was overwhelming in terms of how many different areas of the business I would have to now put this lens on. And I think I underestimated that truly myself. And so I really started more on kind of the numbers and seeing what the lay of the land was in terms of representation say, and my former role was as an operations as an analyst too. And so when I'm breaking out data and numbers, it's not just like, well, here's the black and white representation and now why is this happening? So when you're trying to do too many things, it could become like you're only doing so many things well. And I think that was in retrospect if I kind of think about it. I really wish I could've focused on maybe two initiatives, as opposed to trying to like, meet all these different leaders and try to spear a peddler initiatives in all these different areas of the business.

And so that's kind of how I would redo my strategy. But I think it's something that a lot of GI folks also experience. Sometimes it's kind of urgent that, oh my gosh, I have a voice right now. There's a tension now. I think we particularly saw this in 2020, 2021. And we know from experience from the past this probably will go away. And we're seeing that in 2022. This is going to die down. If we didn't already see it in 2021. And so that urgency feels real to us that, hey, someone's paying attention. I'm going to grab that right now. Which

then means sometimes we might have too many things going on at the same time and burnout for sure.

So that's kind of the structural stuff that I was working towards. And at the same time, personally, what I was going through was not being able to do enough for everything for everyone. You talked about intra sexuality and I was really focused on women a little bit more, probably heavily because I, that was the space I was in prior. And so starting to introduce conversations around the LGBT plus community and like bring programming in there specifically for that identity and finding the right experts and leaders, both community and internally to kind of spearhead initiatives, but it all takes time and it all requires building trust.

This industry is not something I think where people come in with a lot of trust. And so that community and that personal relationship building has to happen. And so again, I think I felt really pressured to do all the things for all the people. And I know I failed at that. And that was heartbreaking. I'm a solo practitioner now internally. So I don't really have anyone to talk to you about this really. No one really understands. I'm also a woman of color. So yes, a lot of the people I'm talking to do not look like me. And so how am I finding kind of comfort or kind of support? And it was challenging.

I definitely felt alone in that role. But I put so much emphasis now again, when people are asking me, they're so excited to get DEI jobs and like please understand the emotional labor that this takes, especially if you're the solo person in there, you need to find your community outside of your organization because you also have this pressure of being responsible for it internally. You have to kind of know everything. If there's no one else doing this work, then you have to know it all. That was what I was telling myself at least at the time and already coming in with some imposter syndrome of feeling not qualified enough to even have this role and going back to school simultaneously and learning more to kind of help build and frame my frameworks and create my strategy.

There was a lot happening in my own education at the same time of trying to teach and gather everyone and kind of find the right people, also the right experts around to also take on some of that work and then influence them to do want to do it. Because again, it's not like everyone's getting paid at least on the internal side to do it other than myself. So there's just a boat to navigate. And even for organizations, I say, I'm almost not sure that it's going to be possible if there is one person trying to do this. I think you can make some headway.



But I think for the larger kind of shift to happen in organizations, organizations have to take this seriously and staff it appropriately. That means every division, marketing, finance, whatever, HR all have DEI leaders within those verticals. And if we're not putting our resources and money and such towards that and hiring towards that, I, frankly, am not sure how successful organizations will be in executing, not just a DEI strategy but truly making, inclusion and belonging real for folks, especially folks of color in these organizations. So I will say that pretty strongly.

**David (he/him):**

Yeah, for sure. If it's not on the agenda with both time, resources, financial as well, what are the results that you're going to expect? Because solo practitioners putting this all on one person for hundreds, thousands, even tens of employees, that's just not going to cut it.

**Carissa (she/her):**

Not everyone is a subject matter expert and identities either. So it's actually impossible for one person to truly do all this work. They have to have external other resources. They have to have other partners, thought leaders and experts to both teach, educate, and then carry people through with “strategy” or create a real change and again, culture of belonging.

**David (he/him):**

So you're not at Zappos anymore. You left a little bit after you took that role. Why the transition?

**Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah I had been in Vegas for almost five years at that point. And I think part of my heart knew I was never going to be there for a long time. And I think knowing when I took that role too, I was starting to see how long change was going to take.

And I'm not talking about a year or two. I'm like, this is going to be a 10 years plus [inaudible 00:23:07] to get to a place where I really believe we could be. And I still, I have a lot of it for them. I think I had a lot of hope at the time. But I think this comes back to when I was at the other company that I ended up leaving after three months was just honoring myself more and saying, this is no longer something that feels good and fits for me. Even though this role is important to me, actually, what's important to me in terms of my lifestyle and my priorities is that I don't want to be in the city anymore.

I think I have outgrown the city in a period and kind of weighing how long. Laborious emotionally, especially this role was going to be and how it's going to take out of me and knowing that I wasn't even sure how much I wanted to be here anymore. The excitement I think was, I don't know if I have it in me to put all the energy that it's going to take to do this well. And so ultimately, I think I really decided on what was best for myself and I still have the dream of moving to LA. And so that was something I really wanted too, but more than I think moving to LA at that point, I always knew I was going to be an entrepreneur. I was doing entrepreneurial work, probably from the start of my career.

I was always given a new division or a new thing to spearhead and even when I was young. So I think that was always something burning in me. And I think when I finally had this role and I was getting starting something from scratch again. I saw how more effective I might be as a consultant doing some of this work. So I left to pursue an entrepreneurial life. I wanted to be able to live everywhere and anywhere. I'm from New York but I really wanted to move to LA, but I'm very close to family and all that and have a huge network in New York. So I was very adamant about being by the coast.

So I thought the only way I could do that remote work was not necessarily prevalent at that time, was to be my own boss. So like all the kind of situations cards aligned at, this was the right time when I felt there was no other option. There was no second guessing. And I was like I want to just do my own thing. If I'm successful at creating new things from nothing multiple times over internally, then I have got the knowledge of things. I know how to start running a business. But what if the passion was really up there, what could I create? But it wasn't going to be something I would create for someone else, for other companies.

It was going to be something I had complete control over and creative direction and what on. So that was more of the impetus for me to go the saying, this is going to take some time and I don't know if I have it in me to do it. I actually think I could also be more effective if I was external than internal, and I still almost say a little bit of that for the DEI industry for both consultants now external consultants and internal folks that I think it takes both.

I think there's people internally who have the ears, who have the influence, who can spearhead initiatives and get them approved of by leadership, and then there's the external folks who, again, you have to hire so many different people because of the subject matter experts, identities, and such that you need along. Everyone's got a different flavor to bring to the table. And generally those people are internal. So expertise or subject matter expertise and even different areas of

a business like the verticals. I don't think a communications person is the same as an HR person is the same as someone doing learning development. So even just if diversity involves the subject matter and the verticals as well as identities is, I think what's required as well. That's why I think teams whether that's internally built or externally built and the combination of both have to have so many different people in it and hence the resourcing has to be there for it.

**David (he/him):**

Yeah. And so now we're fast forwarding a couple of years from that transition. You're working through the lens of like conscious exchange. What is the work that you're doing as a consultant now?

**Carissa (she/her):**

If you asked me this a couple months ago, it's actually changed from then until now. So I think I'm in this evolutionary period of my career, I think all of us are constantly. And so I think I'm embracing that evolution. And so at this point of time, I realized that what I have a lot of passion around is talking about the intersection of diversity and inclusion and EQ. And EQ being the emotional capacity to both hold yourself in these spaces, as well as other people. I think a lot of practitioners do an amazing job of education.

And I think at the time when I was trying to start these initiatives, the education part of it wasn't so welcomed in terms of even textbook education, historical education, it is what I specifically mean. And now we're realizing how critical that is to the understanding of where we are today and the policies that we have in place today. And so where I find my strength is really having the conversation like both from an influence, like, hey, get foot in the door, but also from holding space.

And I think some of the work out there is very heady, and that's needed and necessary and important. And there's also, well, what about the processing part of this? And I haven't met a lot of folks who are able to do both. And so maybe again, this is why I'm saying there were teams of folks. How do you teach? Are you a social justice educator? So you can teach the facts. You can teach history. That's what you've been studying, learning for some time. And there are other coaches, for instance, that are folks who are a therapist or whatnot, who are able to hold the spaces for the emotional processing that is happening often, even real time. And I love how organizations too are starting to bring in more like mental health and programs getting or experts or advocates and such so that their thought processing can have space whether that's DEI of race-related or otherwise.

So back to your question, though, of like what I am specifically doing. I am finding myself teaching workshops around. The baseline of emotional processing. How do we be more in tune with what is going on for us emotionally? How do we give language to our feelings? How do we start to name them? How do we start to identify patterns in both the way we act or triggers that we may have and how we are responding to them? And also some of the body-based stuff that we're feeling like paying attention to what our body is telling us and very important information about how something is feeling about a person, about our situation, and conversation and what not.

And then also how to navigate all of that. And then help you with be from productive in your conversation next so that you can kind of get what you want out of it. So you can set the boundaries that you want. So that you can move forward with safe. There's a strategy around this. So you can build relationship with people. So that's largely where I'm finding more of my work both from a workshop kind of standpoint and coaching standpoint, as having people as practitioners, employees on how to better regulate or how to manage [inaudible 00:30:09]. There's deep emotions that are coming up.

And then also stories that we've had from a past, and those are the root of why these emotions are coming. They're experiences that we've had that in my work with folks with individuals [inaudible 00:30:25] they don't realize how these stories have impacted them and that these stories even exist. I think I have my own personal story of racism that I did not really quite understand until I went through emotional intelligence training. When I started to retell this story of when I was 9, my first experience with racism when I was 9. I was realizing that was driving so much of my motivations and even my experiences and my adult life, but had not connected the two things until my late 30s. And so to me, that was such an eye opening kind of time to see how that story of when I was 9, the experience when I was 9, was actually impacting my life today.

**David (he/him):**

Yeah. We're kind of wrapping our questions around, what are you wrestling with? What do you want people in the field to really know into this discussion? Because it is both for people who have been harmed and people who have caused harm and are experiencing the emotions that come with that, like the defensiveness, the guilt, the shame, and how do we navigate those things? We're all people who cause harm and have been harmed in different spaces.

And through my restorative justice lens, I'm thinking all the time about what it takes to navigate that conflict and meet the needs of everybody involved? But

tending to folks, emotions is so important because humans need to be seen for who they are. I believe at the core, people are good, wise, and powerful, and there are lots of different reasons why people do things that are not good, wise, or helpful or beneficial in any given situation, but being able to meet someone at that human level sometimes with education, sometimes with reprimand or critique, being able to be attentive to those emotions is just so important. Are there any stories of when people that you've worked with have embodied these practices and things have been changed for the better?

**Carissa (she/her):**

Yes, recently I did this DQ DEI workshop and it was really heartwarming to hear the person who brought me in, I guess, had found me on LinkedIn or whatnot, and just listen to some of the things that I've been doing. The DQ work I think it's so valuable and paying attention to emotions as, eeh, especially again, the children of immigrants and what a color. We're told to suppress these things. That is pretty consistent like my Asian culture, like Filipino culture, we don't talk about emotions.

And so I didn't have this skill set when I was younger and it's so relieving to be fully expressed. And so kind of that first barrier is I'm not taught how to do it. And I'm kind of told not to write from a cultural standpoint. And then also Western culture. It's like, we're from a leadership standpoint, we're not supposed to show our vulnerabilities. I think the language is changing now, but even two years ago and currently, strength is being bold and outspoken and powerful and strong. It's not crying in front of your people. Again, I love how that narrative is changing, but it's still a lot of work to do to really embrace that as leadership quality rate, to be able to be vulnerable.

And so this organization I was working with the person who brought me on to speak, just shared with me how, even from one, I think recording she saw me doing something, and the one conversation I had as I was trying to like onboard and kind of talk about a contract and what not. She's like the conversations I have with the person I've been life-changing for me.

I look at the lens of which I look at things now and how I honor myself and my feelings are completely different. And then one of her partners on the team also shared she identifies as a white woman, but has a daughter who is Latina. And I was saying that, I feel like I can better relate and better understand and talk to my daughter and having her feel empowered in the workplace when she grows up, she's young, wildly important to me.

And so the mistakes may be made and some things that are said, but I think to your point, people are good. And we might just not have all the tools and such. And so to hear both of these women telling me that I've changed kind of my point of view, even being able to voice my emotions, that alone has been cathartic and has been helpful. And it's kind of that entry point, maybe to starting to becoming more vocal and share more stories.

One of the stories was told that she's opened up. I didn't connect my stories from the past to now. And I think that's a pretty common one that I get from feedback I got from folks who are in my workshops or who coach with me. And there is a reason that you do what you do. There's a reason you care about this work. And I don't think anyone who gets involved in diversity and inclusion work or anything adjacent to it, does it because like you said in the beginning, because they dreamed of it when they were younger.

I think it comes from an experience I had at some point of life that is just unacceptable and like every bone in their body is like, I have to do something about this because this was so painful to be judged, especially for racism. To be judged by something you cannot change. And like you are naturally born with [inaudible 00:35:44] my eyes. To be judged so harshly personally and systemically for it. It's just so painful that every bone in my body has to work against this.

I think all folks who care and really truly get into this work have a story. And what I initially help people do is voice that story, even if it's just to themselves first. That's how then you end up showing up on a podcast or creating an amplifier RJ or conscious of machines. That's how you get from one place to a place on stage. It's not overnight. So it starts with that first personal story. Why does this actually matter to you? What has happened and how can we heal it? And so that we can help heal others.

### **David (he/him):**

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for going deep and sharing all those things. I know that there are a ton of gems dropped in there that people across different parts of their careers in this work, whether you're just exploring whether you're doing the work from the inside, whether you're doing it from the outside of organizations can relate. We have a couple of questions that we ask on the way out: is D&I revolution or reform?

### **Carissa (she/her):**

Reform. The more I read about activists and emergent strategy from Adrian Marie Brown's work. That was really helpful in giving me language of

re-imagining what is possible. And I think we have to reimagine even the DEI industry, if we're going to be successful in [inaudible 00:37:22] racial equity.

**David (he/him):**

Yeah. What are some of the things that you hope to see? I mean, part of it is bringing emotions into it. Bringing people's emotional experience, but what would have to change in the industry to actually make this about belonging, equity, and justice?

**Carissa (she/her):**

Well, part of me does believe in the representation part. It's easy for me to talk to other leaders who understand this as opposed to teaching other leaders how to understand it from my perspective? So that is part of the push for me to say, yeah, get more POC leaders in positions of power and influence the continual work on any kind of coaching to help leaders get into these spaces and stay. It's one thing to just get there. It's another thing to stay.

And then at the same time, the allyship, it takes to look at some of the policies and systemic practices within your organizations that are preventing that from happening. Like I'm appalled I think when I still hear people say that there's just not enough "diverse talent" out there. Like, if this is still a conversation we're having in 2021, 2022, then my goodness. There's so much more to be on. And again, part of me still feels as if these are old rules that we're playing by.

And so I think what I'd like to see also is, thought leaders re-imagining what the space looks like. And that's something I've been really interested in having conversations around with other DEI practitioners, adjacent practitioners. Well, like let's throw that stuff out and what else can we come up with. So that's an exciting kind of space that I like to explore. I don't know if you're doing anything, David, but if anyone else out there listening is doing something because I would love to.

I think we have to do that in community and to reimagine what is possible. So I think I'm still also figuring out what it is, and maybe that's why I'm pivoting some of my DEI consulting strategy stuff towards more of the emotional work, because I'm not seeing enough of that stuff happen. And I think within all of these conversations, the emotional capacity for it has to be something we all have a skillset in our ability to do.

**David (he/him):**

Beautiful. Well, this second last question. We often share DEI confessions, and these might be things that we have done that are mistakes in the past. Things that may be embarrassing by now. I think I'll share for myself before you go. Over this season, I've talked a lot about the need for myself not to have so much of a sense of urgency. I've had numerous conversations with a lot of people who have chastised me for my work habits. And that's something that I'm still a dear listener working through.

Kristen noticed today that you're so much more cheerful. You have so much work energy. It's like, yeah. That's because like this morning I got enough sleep, I worked out, I ate breakfast, I showered, and like, this is the first thing I did at 10:00 AM my time. So really taking that time for myself, building those things, and it's not something that is routine for me, but I'm still working at it. It's still work. And if you've been listening to this podcast all throughout our run, you know, that's something that I still continue to struggle with, but that's still there for me. Is there anything that you're wrestling with or would like to confess in this DEI world?

**Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah. I think similar to you, David, I hit burnout. And I've been working on what it actually means to [inaudible 00:40:46 and what self care actually looks like for me. And I wish I could say that I wasn't struggling with guilt around taking some time and saying you know what, I'm going to sit here and play with my nephew or have a cup of coffee and meditate when there's an inbox and there's work to be done and whatnot. So I just wrote about this, about my own self of the thing I'm trying to work against, white supremacy culture. Is what I am subscribing to myself. And so that was kind of my own slap in my face, but again, there's a continual learning and there's continuing work to be done. Mistakes are made. And how do we stop though and pause and re-evaluate and change course?

And so having folks who are open and vulnerable about sharing, yeah, me too, it helps. And we could also support each other in that and so we can be better. So hopefully I will be better at that this year. That's something that's top of mind for me in 2022.

**David (he/him):**

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for your time and your sharing your stories. I know a lot of people will have benefited from this conversation. Before we let you go, where can people support you in your work in the ways that you want to be supported?



**Carissa (she/her):**

Yes. If people are looking for the workshops or conversations around the introduction to EQ and DEI, you can hit me up there on my website [inaudible 00:42:08] or I'm often on LinkedIn. So definitely follow me on LinkedIn as well Carissa Begonia.

**David (he/him):**

Yes. And we'll definitely have all of those linked in the show notes for those that are listening. Again, thank you so much Carissa and rest well and you and I will talk soon.

**Carissa (she/her):**

Yeah. Same to you, David. Thank you.

**David (he/him):**

Oh, we missed out on Connie for the interview, but she's back with us. And now, after having listened to the conversation with Carissa, Connie, what are you thinking?

**Connie (she/her):**

Hello everyone. I am sad that I missed the conversation, but first before sharing my thoughts. Thank you to Carissa for sharing so many gems, as David said in that conversation. So personally I also served as an in-house diversity equity inclusion practitioner, the first, the only, and the other, as Carissa said in the podcast. And so much of what you share at Carissa, I resonated with. I was like, I had that experience. I had that feeling.

So there's a lot that really just spoke to my heart and got my blood boiling again, because I remember the frustration of having to essentially do everything as a diversity, equity, inclusion practitioner with no resources, no budget, no team for the entire organization, the entire community. And then essentially getting blamed when you fail, when you have no resources or anything to help you succeed. So there's so much in their policy for you, David.

**David (he/him):**

Well, one Connie, I just want to tend to the trauma that that brought up. I heard a lot of like, yeah, this really is like a limited system to work within when you are the only. One of the things that really stuck out to me is like Carissa came to that position out of advocacy. There's something about what to do when you are in that position of power. It's one thing to advocate for change and advocate for policies and advocate for programs. But when you're the person who has been tasked with making those things happen, you realize that there are limits to what organizations can do given the budget, given the time, given all of these things.

As we talked about in the conversation, this is never a one person thing. And so we can't be everything to everybody. Carissa had talked about how she was primarily focused on things like, hey, I'm the only woman here in this space and how can we bring other women here. But like having to consider the perspectives of other marginalized people, is it really important to like, who are the other people to bring in both inside? Who are the people to promote and listen to you from the inside? And from the outside, bring in to give outside perspectives and strategies and practices and tools and all of that you might not have had otherwise.

### **Connie (she/her):**

Yeah, that really resonates. One thing that really stuck out in your conversation with Carissa is, she talked about the sense of urgency that she was constantly feeling as a diversity equity inclusion practitioner in house and you and I have talked about sense of urgency as a white supremacist called a characteristic and trait. And when she was talking about her sense of urgency, I was like, wow, I literally went to work feeling that every single day, partly because of the limited resources, I'm the only person as you just mentioned. But also there is this factor that Carissa had mentioned around. I have people's attention now. When am I going to get their attention again?

Social justice is trending now. So I have to actually use the moment and move now. And that's just all a really toxic system and cycle that I felt really trapped within and while I wasn't in institution, but I can also see our entire nation being trapped in that also. With the summer of 2020 being now we have the attention then where are we now?

### **David (he/him):**

Yeah. Similarly like March and April of last year, 2021 with a stop Asian hit, where are we now? And I don't want to discount the type of growth that can

come out of trauma, but I really wish that we didn't have to wait for those moments for people to care. I think one of our first D&I confessions that I shared is the reason that I have the life that I have, having this business, doing this work, it's like I'm profiting off of black death. That's the reality. People only care and people will only dedicate money towards things when they see, oh, this is really a problem.

This emotionally moved me and I think part of the work of amplifier JB on the education that we would do at all times, is to create that media, those opportunities that will spark people's interest that don't have to do with tragedy.

**Connie (she/her):**

Right. If we can only get there, and I don't know if this is on this particular podcast season or episode, but I think a conversation that I'm curious about either with you or other podcast guests is around this idea of empathy. How it takes such tragedy for people to have “empathy” to take action, or to finally make changes within their own lives or spheres of influence. But I've always felt like there's limits to empathy because there has just been tragedy for the past 450 years in this country. Nothing has changed. So I don't know how empathy works but...

**David (he/him):**

Yeah, I don't even know if I would call that empathy more than sympathy and guilt, but this is a whole nother conversation we might have on a future episode. Anything else that you want to share as we wrap up?

**Connie (she/her):**

I think the last thing is just that like throughout our season with guests, I heard a recurring theme of how our guests have wanted to re envision entirely what DEI is. And there's always a call-out from our guests to say, who else is doing this because I would love to join that effort and collective? So I think that as pessimistic and despairing as we may sound sometimes on the podcast.

But there is also underlying all of that. I think there is some hopefulness and desire to want to rebuild and envision something entirely different. And I think that these conversations have planted some seeds and we're truly excited to hear what listeners are taking away and if they want to join this effort in re envisioning DEI entirely.

**David (he/him):**

Yeah. I think with that I'll leave us with the words of Miriam Kaba sharing that hope is a discipline. Go be helpful.

**Connie (she/her):**

Thanks for listening. We'll be back with another episode next time. We'd also love to hear from you is D&I revolution or reform. Send us your thoughts and juicy DEI confessions as a voice memo or a text to [revolutionorreform@gmail.com](mailto:revolutionorreform@gmail.com)

**David (he/him):**

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