

Podcast

Pride at Work: Courageously Building an Inclusive Workplace

By Michelle E. Phillips &

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Meet the Authors



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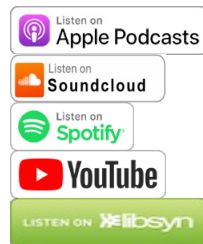
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Details

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Jackson Lewis P.C. · Pride at Work: Courageously Building an Inclusive Workplace



Transcript

Alitia Faccone:

Welcome to Jackson Lewis's podcast We Get Work. Focused solely on workplace issues, it is our job to help employers develop proactive strategies, strong policies, and business oriented solutions to cultivate an engaged, stable and inclusive workforce. Our podcast identifies issues that influence and impact the workplace, and its continuing evolution and helps answer the question on every employer's mind, how will my business be impacted?

Organizational leaders focused on creating and maintaining a diverse and inclusive workplace don't have to have all the answers. DEI at its most effective simply means that employers are willing to be part of the growth process to collaborate in creating better systems and, ultimately, become better allies while allowing employees to feel aligned and supported. On this episode of We get work™, we discuss the importance of allyship, and employees feeling seen, heard, and a sense of belonging in the workplace.

Our hosts today are Michelle Phillips, a principal in the White Plains office of Jackson Lewis, and Jennifer Brown, founder of Jennifer Brown Consulting, an organization that specializes in the development of DEI strategy, thought

leadership, in-person and online interactive education, and ERG formation and impact.

When Michelle counsels clients, she speaks from personal experience and has dedicated her practice to advising clients on race, gender, ethnicity, intergenerational, interfaith, LGBTQIA+, and other inclusion issues. She also conducts internal investigations concerning senior management, litigates discrimination cases, and conducts training programs on unemployment discrimination, unconscious bias, sexual harassment, and sex stereotyping.

As a DEI expert and globally renowned thought leader, Jennifer envisions inclusive organizations where all of us can thrive. She draws from her 20 years of experience working with leaders on their inclusive leader journey as they inspire groundbreaking conversations across locations, demographics, and cultural differences within their organization.

Michelle and Jennifer, the question on everyone's mind is, "What is inclusive leadership, and how does this impact my business?"

Michelle Phillips:

Well, Jen, it is such a pleasure to have you on Jackson Lewis' podcast. And we go way back. I mean, I remember the first Out & Equal Conference that we went to together and the New York Greater Metro Council. And I've just been such a fan of yours for such a long time and you just bring so much to the table in terms of DEI and really very innovative. And of course, I have your book, and I have it flagged and Post-ited and underlined-

Jennifer Brown:

Oh, God.

Michelle Phillips:

... on how to be an Inclusive Leader. It's a thrill to have you with us today. I wanted to just start, not everyone knows you as well as I do, and I wanted to give you an opportunity just to tell your story. And how did we get here from you being a famous opera singer to now being running your own DEI consulting firm?

Jennifer Brown:

I get that question a lot. It seems unusual, but actually I'll explain it, and in hindsight it all makes sense. It all aligns. But, yes, I came to New York to be an opera singer, studied, got my master's in vocal performance, was heading towards Broadway. And I unfortunately injured my voice, and it kept happening, and I had to get surgery several times to repair it. And going through these is obviously really scary. You don't know if you're going to sing again.

It's also very deeply stigmatized. I think you are very afraid that anybody ever learns that this is

something that has happened to you, because it makes you less reliable of course. So there was a lot of shame and fear. And I got through the surgeries and I would sing again, but I would never really have the instrument that I would need to be able to do eight shows a week, aria after aria.

So I really ultimately would need to leave the stage, what I thought was leaving the stage, which, PS, is not exactly what I've done. But at the time I thought that chapter was over and it was really heartbreaking to lose what I thought was the means to express myself. The primary way that I would move in the world, and all my dreams and all of that talent that when you get to that level you're really, you're excited about.

But what I ended up doing is following some ex-performers who had reinvented themselves. And we all make very talented professionals in a lot of other fields, because of our experience on the stage and all that resilience and innovation that we practice. So I ended up in a second master's degree at Fordham University in Organizational Change. And the reason that I moved to that discipline is that I could become a trainer in that world, somebody that was, what we say, on platform, different kind of stage, different audience, different topic, but still working with groups, working with adults, talking about what leadership means in the workplace context.

And I pivoted into that world. And I was a corporate training and development person for a while. And then through a restructuring, I went out on my own 20 years ago, started Jennifer Brown Consulting. And then grew that over the years, and morphed it also from leadership development to DEI, more specifically.

And the reason I did that is another piece of my diversity story, which is that I've been out for 25 years. I came out my senior year of college, a member of the LGBTQ+ community. But Michelle, in the early years that you and I met in, I won't say we were closeted, but certainly and still true today actually, sadly, many were closeted. And companies didn't know what they were doing. And we were part of a small but mighty kind of pro bono educational committee.

And you and I were on many panels together bringing domestic partner benefits and the logic of that, the details of that, the logistics of that to these large companies, who really were looking for the first time to the community to understand what does advocacy look like? What does support look like? What does walking the talk look like? Which we're still working on.

So we were there in those early days and as part of the community, I guess I never realized, until I started my own company, that the organizational change piece of me could live with my identity and be actually supercharged. That I could be somebody that's impacted directly by inequitable workplace practices and bias in the workplace, and that I could be part of the solution. And it was so intoxicating, so exciting to be on the front lines of with companies like IBM and at the time Merrill Lynch and Barclays. It was a lot of financial services, because it was New York at the time and that was just who I happened to know.

But being on the ground floor of all that change was really exciting. And eventually I would pivot Jennifer Brown Consulting to focus solely on not just LGBTQ issues in the workplace, but DEI,

more broadly. And it's been just an incredible learning journey, so humbling. And I've met some incredible companies that are doing really courageous work as well as kind of suffered the pain of recognizing we're not where we should be, and that we have some serious headwinds going on, especially now for workplace equality.

So I like to say I was meant to use my voice just not as a singer. And when I realized that the voice would be what I would give to the unvoiced in workplaces, which is all of us, which is so beyond the LGBTQ+ community. And using that voice to lift other voices up and to give voice to what needs to change. That's what I do now and I get to do that on stages all over the world, which is just an incredible place to have landed.

Michelle Phillips:

You have landed exactly where you should land. So it's great to hear your story, and it's great to hear your journey and how you got here. I love listening to you and I've read your book on how to be an inclusive leader, and I wanted to talk to you about some concepts in your book. And one of the most important ones is these four stages of inclusive leadership. So starting from unaware and the echo chambers and moving into awareness. And ultimately, how do you become active and put your learning into action? And then finally becoming an advocate. So it'd be great if you, for our listeners, could walk us through the different stages of inclusive leadership.

Jennifer Brown:

Yeah, thank you. And I really think it does come down to what we are personally doing to grow. I think corporate strategies on DEI are very important and it needs to be driven from the top as we know and from the bottom and in the middle. But ultimately, at the end of the day, no change efforts are going to stick if the people, the individuals in those efforts aren't doing the change work themselves.

And so I wrote this book and made this model that you just mentioned with the four phases core to it, because I really wanted to speak to the individual leader. As a firm, we do corporate strategy on DEI. We build the ERGs. We do the listening sessions. We do the metrics. But all of that can be set up, but the leader needs to change. And the leader needs to not be in a passive position of receiving the directive to change and all the talking points and all the checklists.

Because if we do, it lives on the surface, it's just what we call performative. So really the audience I write for and speak to is that leader who's sort of in this growth process. And when I thought about all the models I love about personal development or professional development, they usually have four phases. They usually are some sort of continuum or progression. And this one is a maturity model, for lack of a better word. But it is something that we kind of live in as not a destination but a journey. And I also built it to be known judgmental. Michelle, it was very important for me not to leave anyone feeling, I am less than, I am not a good person because of the ingredients of who I am and where I was born, and where I was privy to or what I either benefited or didn't from.

I really, really wanted to present a model that everyone could see themselves in. And that was very open and inviting and forgiving of self for what we don't know, for what we haven't been taught, for what we didn't know how to do. Just making room for all of that, because where we are right now in the work is that would be allies, those who of us who could be doing more, may not know what more looks like, may be afraid to try more and are trying to learn, but feeling perhaps overwhelmed, self-conscious, awkward, afraid, et cetera.

And I just wanted to push through that and say, "You know what, let's just like boil it down. Let's talk about our growth in terms of phases." Where we go from unaware, which is phase one, which is I don't know, there's a problem. I don't see myself in this. I don't perhaps agree because my experience tells me one thing and that's what I'm going to believe. I don't think I'm biased. Unaware can be just asleep, unconcerned, unaffected, apathetic, unaware, can also be resistant. And unaware can also be, "Hey, I'm a good person," "Hey, I believe in this," or, "I have daughters, so I'm a champion of gender equity in the workplace."

You might be, but just because you're related to a female person doesn't mean necessarily that what you're doing every day is going to shift systems around you. And that's really the invitation that I'm laying out for people. So wherever you're in unaware, the goal is to move into phase two, which is aware, which is, "Okay, now I know what I don't know and I'm learning and I'm listening and I'm reading and I'm gaining exposure. And I'm putting myself in places where I'm the only. And I'm investigating my diversity dimensions, visible and invisible, and really challenging myself to go deeper in my own story."

And it in aware is a beautiful phase two, and it can be overwhelming, but it's such, such an important place. And I by the way, return to each of these phases. Like I said, it's a journey, not a destination, and it's something we live in. We don't finish, necessarily. We are not finished. I'm a work in progress and I do this work, so we're never finished. And we're sort of destined to go back to where am I still unaware? And where do I need more awareness? Where do I need to learn and get more exposure and challenge myself?

So that is completely par for the course. And I just think it's an important reminder to let people know having space and grace for ourselves and what we don't know and what we haven't been exposed to is such an important thing to acknowledge and to hold space for in each other, too. And that means we make space for each other to be learning, and to not get it right and to not know.

And then the third phase is active, which is, okay, now I take what I learned, and I get into the game. I get into the arena. I begin to use and this and speak and try new language and have new conversations, and do something every day that feels uncertain and awkward, where I don't have expertise and yet I'm learning. And I think active is building that muscle, practicing, getting comfortable, being uncomfortable, and not making perfect the enemy of the good, particularly.

And look, I struggle with all these things I'm talking about, I struggle with in myself. Not wanting to make a move of allyship until I know how it's going to turn out, until I know I'm going to be able to

do it and have expertise at it and it's going to be received well. And I think at this phase, and I would imagine a lot of the listeners now are find themselves here, which is how do I know what I'm doing is making a difference?

And it's Pride Month. I think, so importantly, you're only an ally if someone in an affected community calls you an ally. It's not something we can assign ourselves. So I like to say I'm an aspiring ally. It's not my word to use necessarily for myself, but what I can say is, "How am I doing? Is this making a difference? And what more can I be doing? Or what can I be doing differently?" So in active, phase three, we're resilient enough to seek that feedback, even if it's hard, even if it's feedback that it wasn't actually effective. But I would hope it would come with a suggestion for how to do better. So anyway, so active is that experimentation, that muscle building, the practice.

And then advocate, which is that last phase, is really the, I know what my voice is, I know what to say, how to say it, how to push, how to ask difficult questions. Advocate level is a squeaky wheel agitator. It's those of us who are constantly pushing for change and we know how to do that. We are fearless, we are consistent, and we are insistent on change. But I think living there, Michelle, is tough, because you always feel like the burden is on you to educate, to push. And if you don't push, then nobody else will.

And I think what I want to is to see more folks traveling this continuum, and developing their muscle and practicing so that when the time comes we're ready. If we're the only one in the room, we need to be able to voice what's not being voiced, and we need to make sure we redesign our processes, we challenge our own biases in ourselves and others. Sometimes we are the only one that's there and we need to be ready.

And so I think this is kind of 101 for every leader. It always has been, but inclusive leadership is good leadership. And even more increasingly going into the future, this is a competency that every leader is going to have to have. And you cannot wait for somebody else to give this to you, and a training class will not do it for you. It just has to be a personal journey. But good news is this is sort of core to the future. Most successful leaders of the future, this is core to what they will bring.

Michelle Phillips:

And reading in your book you say, "In the advocate stage, you leverage your power and influence to propel change. You draw attention to systemic inequities and get involved in solving them. You work in allyship with others to shift systems and behaviors and take action to disrupt the status quo." For a lot of the people who are listening, both within Jackson Lewis and a lot of our clients, we're all in the advocacy stage. That's what we do as lawyers. We are advocates for our clients. That's how we effectuate change. Whether it's negatively through a lawsuit or more positively through our prevention piece, we are often living in the advocacy stage. Any specific suggestions or recommendations for what you think is important and how to be in this stage as an advocate?

Jennifer Brown:

I love the analogy you just made, Michelle, that this is something we know how to do, because we do it in this other context and arena in our lives and we have expertise in it. So I would say you know how to advocate for ideas, for people. You know how to be alongside in solidarity. You deeply study what the nuances are of somebody's experience and journey and context, so that you can argue most effectively on their behalf.

And so it is similar, actually, allyship is that solidarity. It's just taking what you just described and pointing it towards the topic of belonging for certain groups of people, certain identities in the workplace context. Now remember, most workplaces were not built by and for all of us, the reason that we're where we're at with representation, which is woefully under representative of the world that we do work in and that we exist to serve, is because of longstanding, unchecked biases in systems that have never been looked at critically, that have never been challenged, that have been allowed to persist. And where people, particularly people with power in those systems have not been the ones to lead any positive changes.

There are plenty of us that can critique the systems we are suffering in, because we don't feel seen and heard in those systems. But to me, real change will also happen more faster if those who benefit from those systems are the ones that can stand outside of those systems they benefit from and say, "Well, this may be comfortable for me, but this is very uncomfortable for so many others, and this is what I'm learning about that."

2020 was all about that listening. It was all about, okay, so we're hearing from these communities in our workplace, in a way for the first time, for many organizations. Or maybe previous dialogues had been superficial at best, or there had been a lot of fear in organizations to really tell the truth. So I hope all that we learned in 2020 and 2021, we are carrying forward with us and we're not forgetting what we were told, which is that workplaces feel like very uncomfortable places for a lot of people based on identity, based on not being able to see role models, not having identities that are real for so many of us, be addressed, be supported, be educated on.

I think it's so telling that in this whole return to office conversation that, for example, 3% of black women actually want to return to the physical office. When you consider that, to me, to unpack that, what I see in that is so many identities, not just that one feeling uncomfortable in these systems, environments that weren't designed to make us feel psychologically safe. And therefore, we can't do our best work in them.

And I think that's where the rubber hits the road for organizations to consider. This isn't just a moral conversation, this is a productivity conversation. The question should be who is not comfortable? How can we make people most comfortable and feel most, I think, aligned and supported, which creates belonging, which then creates better output and creates more retention and loyalty and engagement? This is where we want to end up. But I do think that what we've learned is identity gets in the way of that. A bias in organizations gets in the way of that.

And we can't leave all the change work to those of us who are experiencing the most bias in a

system not built by and for us. We've got to participate in change. But I think that the change architects and the accountability for change needs to sit amongst those of us that have access to the levers of change. And that's the opportunity for allyship, and particularly for leaders in every organization to really take this on.

And it's, like I said, awkward, maybe unfamiliar, maybe not your experience, but to me it doesn't matter, because leaders are nothing without followers. And leadership is nothing without basically being oriented around, well, what do... being other focused. And I think that's hard for some of us because our generation was not raised to be listened to. We don't have, and I'll say we as a gen Xer, how we felt belonging was irrelevant in our employment, if I can say. And so we didn't really ever experience this.

And yet if we're in leadership positions for X and millennials too, even if this wasn't our experience, even if these questions were never asked of us, even if we couldn't bring our full selves, it doesn't matter. We now have to lead for the future and we need to build a workplace that's better so that future folks can thrive in it. And I think we got to get out of our own way in many ways when we consider it through that lens.

Michelle Phillips:

You talk a lot about allyship, and how do we demonstrate allyship during Pride Month? What can allies do to create that psychologically safe space and that sense of belonging for people?

Jennifer Brown:

We can do so much. And I'll say we, I'm in the community, but let me just put my ally hat on. No matter what, when you think to yourself, "Oh, we've done that, we've accomplished that. We've fixed that. Why would anybody not be out? We have all the..." whatever, say you're a very progressive employer, there is still so much fear. 50% of us are still closeted in the workplace, and that is a very recent statistic. And those of us who... And I include myself because I can still stand out and stand up and be very overt and very public about how I identify, and I am extremely aware that that is a privilege that I can actually do that.

It's privilege stemming from, for example, my cisgender identity. I'm not a trans person or non-binary person, so therefore, perhaps, I might be more familiar to people, I might be heard differently, also, because of my skin color, because of my gender expression, because of my socioeconomic background and many, many other things. So to be allies in this time is also incumbent on those of us in the community to elevate the voices that have not been heard from in our community. So that's one thing, if you're listening to this, that's a call to action for you. Just because we have suffered exclusion does not make us inclusive leaders. We still have a lot of work to do.

But I think for allies who don't share a lot of the marginalized identities of LGBTQ+ people, for you to share what allyship means to you more publicly than you've ever thought to share it, and

especially if you can influence other people in doing so, that's what we really need. We really need leaders and those with power and influence, who maybe aren't affected by the issues that we're affected by, to stand up and say, "Here's what I've learned. Here's what I'm not okay with. Here's where we need to change. Here's how I'm growing and evolving and stepping into discomfort in my own lack of understanding. Here's what I'm supporting. Here's what we need to do as an institution to improve our support."

And I think then if you want to, Michelle, we can go into the nuts and bolts of what support looks like. But I do think it starts with bringing the conversation that this is important. This is a priority to me personally. It's a priority to our company. And here's all the things we've put in place, but here's where we're still lagging. And I want to encourage everybody to show up imperfectly. On an individual level that means, here's where I don't know the answers. Here's a moment when I realized my own bias. Those are beautiful stories that, and they go so far in building trust and psychological safety.

Because by the way, when we admit that what we didn't know, when we admit where we were corrected or we're called in and invited to learn, and where we've modified how we show up, that makes it safe for other people to say, "Me too. Me too. I didn't get that right," or I might learn from your journey and might do something differently. We can't be afraid to share those learning opportunities and show what vulnerability looks like in action. I mean, we can't all read the Brené Brown's books and not practice this.

And I think this is a really wonderful opportunity to do that, and know that in doing this, we are shining a light for someone who feels really alone, both in the community, but also a potential ally who needs to see and hear how it's done. I just think we're in this moment of not having enough people doing this so that we see what it looks like and what it sounds like. But what my hope is if we have more allies stepping forward and saying these words and talking about the privileges that we benefit from that we didn't earn, I do that all the time. And say, "Here's how I walk through the world. And here's how I now understand it in the context of my comfort and what I benefit from, and then the headwinds that others are experiencing that I'm not."

I think it would be really, really motivational to hear more people speaking in this way. And then I want to know what you're doing about it and how you're holding yourself accountable for affecting the change that you can affect within your sphere of influence. So there's a lot of ways, I mean, companies have ERGs, we have affinity groups, there are executive sponsorship opportunities to really step up and lead in that way. There's mentoring and sponsoring that people desperately need, where there's power-sharing going on.

And let's face it, the workplace becomes less and less about technical skills, Michelle, you and I know this, and more about who and more about who's lifting you up and who's mentioning your name and who's vouching for you. Who is saying, "This person is ready for that stretch assignment and I'm vouching for this"? And I think those relationships mean the world. And those are the kinds of relationships that people who are underrepresented and outside of the system typically don't

benefit from.

And this is why we don't see as much diversity as we should in this C-suite, in leadership. It's because we're not being sponsored and mentored up the pipeline and we will leave. We leave if we don't feel that someone's got my back, someone's looking out for me, someone's thinking about my career trajectory. Someone is clearing the way for me, and somebody is joining their capital with mine. That has been shown to lift underrepresented talent up more than any other intervention.

So if you're listening to this, I would ask you, how are you sharing your capital? Who are you sharing it with? Are you sharing it with people that look like you? Are sharing it with people you're comfortable with? Because that is very human to seek out those that we're comfortable with. But that's precisely the practice and the sort of comfortable being uncomfortable piece I'm talking about.

And in the LGBTQ community, there are so many of us that I think would benefit from that kind of relationship. And by the way, it's mutual. We teach so much, also, in these partnerships and in these sponsoring and mentoring relationships too. The mutuality of the learning is so amazing and it's so rich. So definitely audit yourself and make a plan to really diversify how you're supporting others and who you're in relationship with, and how you're pulling new kinds of leaders through your organizational fabric, because that's going to be the name of the game.

Michelle Phillips:

When we talk about this concept of calling in versus calling out, I heard you mention that before. What's the distinction there? And how can we leverage that in the workplace?

Jennifer Brown:

Calling out, a great example of call out culture was the MeToo movement. And by the way, it got to that point because nothing was working. Nothing leading up to that was getting the attention and really making things happen. So that call out was public and that accountability and social media really was the fuel of that.

But calling in though is, to me, something that should be happening as a part of our learning from and being in community with each other. A call in is a invitation to learn. It's not a public commentary or outing, but it is an invitation to reconsider language that you've used or understand the impact that you have that maybe wasn't your intent. A call in as an invitation to understand a gap that you have. And what I encourage people to do is to call each other... Particularly in the business world, where I do think there is so much good intention, poorly applied, the call in is a generous way of giving someone that space to receive the feedback and learn in a way that does not add the shaming element to it.

And I'm not saying that the shaming element is not ever needed, without that, without calling out, we would never have had the MeToo movement that we had. But I do think that knowing how many people are on that continuum, Michelle, and progressing through and really endeavoring to grow

and getting it right and wrong and everything in between, I do think the invitation to growth and a conversation to say, "Hey, you might want to reconsider this." "Hey, can I give you some alternate language?" "Hey, can I let you know how that lands for me?" "Hey, I wanted to understand your intent with that story that you always tell and let you know that it's beautiful and inspirational. And maybe there might be something I would offer from a feedback perspective." The call in is that, I think, gentler way of giving that feedback that needs to be given.

But the question to me is how and when and in what context? And we have a lot of choices. We have a lot of choices to come from a place of space and grace for people and for others. And I think if we're struggling with this, just turn it back on yourself. Ask yourself, "How would I like to receive this feedback if I were the one that caused harm? How would I like to receive it? When would I like to receive it? What would be the most constructive way for me to take something in and then modify my behavior, and then come back and try again?"

What we don't want is to discourage people so greatly that they go away. We just don't want that. And we can't get anywhere if we're going to let that happen. And unfortunately, I think a lot of people are really afraid because there've been a lot of these kinds of dynamics going on. And I'm working really hard to try to figure out how do we get people back in the game? Because if you leave and you take your marbles and you go home, as I always think about it, I opt out. I just don't want to do it anymore. It's too risky. I can't do that. I have too much on the line. I don't know anything. I'm incompetent with this, and it's too risky for me to get engaged. We lose a whole generation of potential allies and champions.

And I'm not okay with that. So every day I wake up thinking not how can I shame people and hold them accountable? Yes, but more, how can I invite growth? How can I make enough safety around me? And how can I be the coach? How can I be the ally to people who are endeavoring to grow and who have so much to contribute? I don't want to squander that contribution. I want to unleash it, plain and simple. And I don't think people thrive from a place of shame. If you've ever remember feeling shame, it's not a productive place.

I love, back to Brené Brown, she talks about the difference between shame and guilt. Guilt is I regret doing a thing, and shame is I'm a bad person. So this is really relevant to DEI work, they are very different. Guilt, regret, I wish I'd done differently. I wish I'd known. Wonderful, we can make change from there. But pivoting from shame, not so easy.

Michelle Phillips:

Right. It's interesting. You may remember, years ago, you and I started doing one-on-one sensitivity training. And the question was, how do we turn this valuable leader who has some flaws into an inspirational leader, an inclusive leader? And what tools can we give them so that they come from the right perspective and they don't make what I'll call bonehead or even discriminatory remarks or engage in inappropriate behavior?

And just a lot of what you're saying is so important in terms of how do we bring people along? We

don't want them to opt out. We want people to stay in the game using their leadership, using it in a positive way, recognizing when they don't know. And it's okay not to know. And it's okay to be vulnerable as a leader. So I know we're coming to a close and it's so valuable to hear what you have to say. I guess just the last thing I would ask you to leave us with is you talk a lot about uncovering your story and micro moments of bravery, what do you mean by that?

Jennifer Brown:

Well, the only way we together are going to realize all the diversity, the dimensions that are alive for all of us is by being brave. And for some of us, that means coming out. For some of us, that means coming out to more people, more broadly. And for some of us, it means coming out about a whole host of other identities that we have not thought were relevant to our leadership, but that are very relevant, actually, that have really developed and formed what kind of leader we are.

And I can say, Michelle, as members of the LGBTQ+ community, coming out was the hugest growth opportunity I could have ever wished for. It clarified my commitment to myself. It strengthened me. It made me more resilient. It made me really emotionally aware and empathetic because I know what that feels like.

But I think that practicing bravery along a whole host of identities is part of the competency that leaders really need to have. So when you think about Pride and maybe you're not a part of the community, think about the risks that LGBTQ people take every day to live their truth, to walk the world in their body and with who they love and expressing their gender in the way they do. And think about all the bravery that that takes. And I would say be inspired by that. Because there's something in all of our stories that we don't articulate, that we would rather people not know, we would rather be safe. But I would challenge us at this Pride to really investigate what is it about me and my own story and my own journey that forged who I am and continues to forge who I am?

And maybe this is something recent. We're all coping with so many struggles right now and naming them for the first time. And in naming things, we normalize them, and we discover communities that we didn't even know we had. And we also educate others along the way and we change organizations through micro moments of bravery. This is how we change the organization/ like I said earlier, we can do change from the top. We can mandate change all day long and we should. Absolutely, build it and they will come, absolutely.

But I think organizations are made up of people, individuals taking those brave leaps every day with each other and more publicly. And that is how we create cultures of belonging. And if you haven't participated in getting comfortable being uncomfortable, now is a wonderful time to take a lesson. And I would say don't let others take all the risks of authenticity.

Don't leave it to other people, but take it upon ourselves, each of us. How can we mimic in a way the bravery that LGBTQ people have to exhibit every day of their lives? How can we take a page from that? And how can we then mimic that and model that in organizations? And that is how we're going to build cultures of belonging. It's up to us, each of us.

And if you're wondering what that looks like, spend that time with your colleagues in the LGBTQ+ community, and ask that question, what's allyship look like? And where am I not getting comfortable being uncomfortable? Where am I not kind of on my growth edge? And where could I be pushing harder? Because we really do need... I mean, I know it goes without saying, Michelle, we're in a tougher time than ever, it seems, these days and the support is needed, appreciated. It's like our lifeblood.

I mean, please know that there's always more you can do and there's so much need to really do more. Because it's only going to be accomplished through all of us putting our shoulder to the wheel, and not just leaving the work of change to certain communities that are most impacted by what's happening in the world. So thank you for inviting me in this conversation.

Michelle Phillips:

Thank you so much for joining us. You're very inspirational and it's great to get your insights. And for anyone who hasn't had an opportunity to read Jen Brown's book, *How to Be an Inclusive Leader*, I strongly recommend that. And I know you have these community calls and all different ways that people can participate with you and with your organization. So thank you again, and happy Pride to everyone.

Jennifer Brown:

Thank you, Michelle. Happy Pride.

Alitia Faccone:

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