



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 22: TODD MOORADIAN – BEYOND THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DEI

Todd Mooradian

I'm committed to making people better, but only some people.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Todd Mooradian

Who would that be? Who would say I'm committed to making people better, but I get to pick who I want to make better?

Phil Wagner

Right.

Todd Mooradian

We want to make everybody better.

Phil Wagner

Hello from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes to Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real, human-lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun. Hi, friends. Welcome to Diversity Goes to Work. It's a new season, both figuratively and literally. As the dog days of summer wane into beautiful autumn weather here in Williamsburg, we are excited to kick off season two of our podcast. Thanks for all your support in season one. Your likes, your listens, your shares, your communication. Keep it up, keep listening, because we've got a dynamic second season planned for you. And we knew exactly how we wanted to kick off that second season because, as it turns out, we're in the midst of a season's change here ourselves in the Mason School of Business. And our guest today is primarily the one responsible for all of that. Our own Dean Todd Mooradian, who began his time here as Dean in August, is certainly no stranger to the Mason School. Todd was a fixture in the business school in William & Mary for nearly 30 years, serving as both a faculty member and associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs. He left in 2017 to serve as Dean of the College of Business at the University of Louisville. And y'all, I simply cannot summarize his extensive bio. He has had an impressive career as an award-winning faculty

member, researcher, and monumentally successful dean. His commitment to DEI runs deep, and he's had a huge impact on our own internal DEI efforts here in the Mason School. We are so excited to welcome him back to Miller Hall and exceptionally excited to welcome him to our podcast today. Dean Mooradian, thank you for making time in your very busy schedule to chat with us here. It's a true pleasure.

Todd Mooradian

Phil, it's great to be here. Thank you for having me.

Phil Wagner

So here's what I want to do today if you're willing. Again, I know you as someone who is deeply committed to DEI, so I thought instead of waxing poetic about the value of DEI, we might actually situate that idea on the crosshairs just a little bit. We often hear the conversation sort of start and stop at the business case for DEI. It's good for organizations to be diverse. It's good for group and team dynamics, for multiple stakeholder opinions to be represented. And I think that business case, while true and while valuable, only carries us so far. So today, I'd like to talk about taking our work beyond the business case for DEI. So first things first is a framing device as Dean of a top-ranked business school. Where do you see DEI issues factoring into the landscape of business or business education?

Todd Mooradian

I think one of the essential values we give to the 21st century is that we're preparing the future leaders to function and contribute to a diverse, multicultural world that is in every way a better world for those qualities. And honestly, I think it would be a great disservice to those young people if we did not invest in their preparation. It's really just table ante for our students to be able to function, contribute to, and thrive in a multicultural world. And it's going to make them happier people, to make them more fulfilled. If they can take joy from diverse people and take value from working with diverse people, I believe those things absolutely.

Phil Wagner

Excellent. So this is a little bit of a personal question. Feel free to rebuff completely, but I'm wondering where you found your passion for this work. You speak of this as sort of a love language, and I love that framing. When you were here at the Mason School during your first tenure, you were a mover, and you were a shaker. And so much of the work that faculty like me get to do now is because of the seeds you planted back then. How did you find yourself in this space? What's your why? Why is DEI so important to you personally and or professionally?

Todd Mooradian

Well, first of all, you're very generous. I appreciate those comments about my contributions here and the contributions I made at Louisville that you know about, we do what we can, and then we get up tomorrow and try again. I grew up in a family that was dedicated to higher education. My mother was a librarian and an artist at the University of New Hampshire. My father was a coach and then an athletic director and administrator. And so, for me, being part

of a campus community, campus communities tend to be more diverse, and to celebrate diversity and new ideas just came naturally. But I think my father actually had a unique, especially for his generation. He had a unique commitment to embracing everyone that came forward to get an education and go on and change the world. He believed in that. He was born a few years, a couple of years after my grandparents arrived from Armenia. And he was a guy with the greatest generation. And I think it's probably true of a lot of them. They lived through some extraordinary challenges and came out more appreciative and able to find happiness and embrace other people and help them get ahead. I know that was true of my dad. He had been a great high school athlete, something that apparently skips a generation. But he was recruited to an Ivy League school nearby, where he grew up in Boston. And I heard him tell this story probably a hundred times, Phil. His father, who barely spoke English, put them on the light rail train to Cambridge and took him over for his day being recruited. And they took him to lunch at one of the dining clubs, and one of the brothers said, well, he's a good athlete. He can eat here, but we're not letting his father eat in the dining room. So he walked away from Harvard to get back on the train. And, of course, anybody in Boston in 1940 would have thought, what a great thing for my child to be able to go to Harvard. And my grandfather turned to my dad and said, Andy, this is going to be great. You get to go to Harvard, but try not to be one of those jerks. And my father picked the University of New Hampshire, which was a place that took all comers, meant to serve the greater good, and knew that they didn't think that their stuff didn't stink. And he told that story about his commitment at the University of New Hampshire, where he spent 50 years after that serving the greater good, embracing everyone who came and living through desegregation and strife and all sorts of things that happened in American society. And so I saw my father with a deep commitment to not being one of those jerks. By the way, my grandfather didn't use the word jerks, at least not as my father's full-blown story, but now I'm a dean, so I'll say, he said, don't be one of those jerks.

Phil Wagner

All right, fair enough.

Todd Mooradian

And I think that my father is emblematic of the type of person who may not have naturally thought that they would be for diversity because they might not gladly say, oh, yeah, this is the kind of thing that I spend all my time committed to. But as a matter of fact, they're the kinds of people who believe deeply in fairness, in investing in other people, and they commit their lives to the idea that if we provide opportunities in education, the world will get better. You look here at William & Mary, there's lots of examples of that same kind of person, and I think they're the unusual person to say, oh, would this person be committed to diversity on campus and committed to that. Jim Kaplan has the basketball arena named after him. And I knew Mr. Kaplan. He passed away about a month ago. But Jim probably wasn't an active supporter of diversity, but he was a passionate supporter of fairness and opportunity. He came out of the coal mines, I believe, in western Pennsylvania, but it may have been West Virginia. And he talked about how William & Mary was the pathway to all that he was ever able to do, and he

was committed to giving back. And what I'd like to do as a dean is to be able to find in all of our people, not just the people who naturally say, yeah, I'm for diversity. And then you look and sort of they're part of the new generation. But all people that are part of William & Mary, I think if they don't say, hey, I'm for diversity, if you push it a little, are you for fairness? Are you for opportunity? Do you think that the college can change the world by giving more people an opportunity to contribute? They'd be passionate support for that. So I think that my commitment to diversity and inclusion comes first from the idea that's just who we are. If you came into higher education and you are not for embracing everybody that comes across Ukrop way into the college of business, you made a mistake. You're not in the right place. This is a place that believes in embracing, celebrating, and nurturing everyone. And so I get passionate about it because I grew up around people. My mother was an artist. My father was a coach. And they gave everybody their full commitment to make them better. And they would never have imagined that their son would look at somebody and say, I'm committed to making people better, but only some people.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Todd Mooradian

Who would that be? Who would say I'm committed to making people better, but I get to pick who I want to make better?

Phil Wagner

Right.

Todd Mooradian

We want to make everybody better.

Phil Wagner

I love that framing. I love that framing. And thanks for allowing us to get to know you better through that story too. I love that human element. So, as dean of the business school, you're very familiar with the fact that we often take our conversations immediately to the business case for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. And indeed, that's legitimate. There is a business case for it. Data tells us time and time again that an intentional focus on this is good for us. It's good for our culture. It's good for our productivity. It's good for our profit. So as someone who's worked in overseeing undergraduate and graduate business students at Louisville, can you frame that from the dean's lens, this business case, or the business value for an intentional focus on DEI?

Todd Mooradian

I can. I guess I'll try. My first reason for committing to diversity and inclusion is because of the people I love who are so diverse, and all of whom deserve to get that investment and to get that fair shot. And I think that's kind of a principle, not a practical perspective. It happens that

I'm a Christian, and I believe there's a lot of rules in the world, but the Christian faith is based on a story about somebody who loved. And so I would like to say that the business case isn't the first thing that comes to my mind, and in fact, it's not the second. Have you ever been to New York City, Phil?

Phil Wagner

I have many times.

Todd Mooradian

What's wonderful about New York City?

Phil Wagner

Well, immediately I go to the food, but I think I probably should say the culture and the diversity of people, which I think those things maybe work together.

Todd Mooradian

Yeah, and even the food is better.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, the food is pretty good.

Todd Mooradian

I'm with you. I go to New York City. I think I could go out, get any type of cuisine.

Phil Wagner

Anything.

Todd Mooradian

And I can find any type of person, and I can find all sorts of art. It's the diversity. New York City is not apologizing for being a rich diversity of experience and cultures that come together into something wonderful. So if the first reason is principle that I'm passionate about diversity, inclusion, the second is probably joy. The joy of

Phil Wagner

I love it.

Todd Mooradian

It's just joyous to arrive in New York City. I met a student who traveled to South Asia this summer as I was walking across the parking lot and all the places they had been. Diversity across people and across cultures. Art, cuisine, music. That's joyous. So finally, we get to a practical argument, right? And you're right. Businesses and business schools fall to that practical argument too quickly because we should remember that we're passionate about it also

because it reflects our values, whatever faith, and it reflects our joy. But if you get to a practical level, did you know that Birmingham and Atlanta were approximately the same as far as population and economic activity in the early 1950s?

Phil Wagner

Interesting.

Todd Mooradian

In Birmingham decided it would spend the 50s and the 60s hating. It became synonymous with segregation and exclusion. And Atlanta had a slogan too busy to hate.

Phil Wagner

I like that.

Todd Mooradian

And Atlanta exploded. And Atlanta is a global hub, and Birmingham is kind of not. And I'm not hating on Birmingham. I don't mean to do that. What I mean to do is to contrast very similar communities that are not far apart. And one chose to exclude and hate, and one chose to be too busy for that, and one prospered, and one didn't. I think there's a wonderful project that's called the Einstein Project. I actually Googled it, so I would sound smart. Raj Chetty is a Harvard-trained economist who's at Stanford. And that project looks at who gets patents as kind of an outcome variable of people's ability to contribute to the creative economy. And it's a good proxy variable for that. And it took, I think, third graders who got in the top 10% on their math exam, so it was controlling for aptitude. These were all smart, mathematically inclined third graders. And it looked ahead. I haven't read the article in a few years, but maybe 30 years, and it said, how many patents did the different demographics get? The white males got, I think, seven and a half or eight patents per thousand on average. And white females got something less than that, but still a significant number. And then, if you looked across people who have been disadvantaged and not given the privilege of participating in our economy as fully. You had numbers like one and two, and three. There was a New York Times article called The Lost Einsteins, which is worth looking at. It had good graphics, and I won't make up the numbers. But you know what? If we can get seven and a half patents out of one group and we only get two or three out of another, that's outrageous because society is leaving behind four patents per thousand. We're missing the opportunity for the social benefits, the medical benefits, the scientific benefits that that creativity reflects. And it's not a matter of penalizing the people who have had the opportunity to get their seven and a half or eight patents. It's a matter of how do we possibly think we're going to get ahead if we're leaving behind four or five or six patents to some of these demographic groups because we don't include them in the progress and education and opportunity. So, to me, the practical part is not that it predicts profitability or Tobin's or anything like that. That's great. So it predicts profitability and productivity to have a more diverse organization. That's something a manager can think about. But you and I are educators. We're thinking at a little bit higher level. And I think the college of business has to commit itself every day to getting those four darn patents we're missing, to

getting all of those people engaged. They'll be having more fun. They'll be having personal prosperity. But you know what? Even from a purely selfish perspective, as a leader in the economy, we should be saying we want the darn four patents we've been missing.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I think there's such a formula embedded into that, too, that shows us that this has to go beyond diversity. It's not just about bringing diverse people together. This is about cultivating an environment of equity and inclusion and belonging so that that work can then funnel up, can then bubble out. There's a bigger thing at play beyond just bringing diversity into your organization.

Todd Mooradian

It's not about penalizing the people who have had the opportunity to get those patents or to get through. Nobody loses if everybody has a chance to bring their information to the table.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely. I was going to ask you, how do you do that? How do you go beyond the business case that you gave us that answer? And I really like the very human things that you return to, to finding love in this work, to finding joy in this work. I think those are very important values. So I won't repeat that question, but going to sort of higher order thinking. As a dean, you're very much a broker. You're a broker of buy-in. And you are, in so many ways, I think, charged with the seemingly impossible task of aligning the competing views of diverse stakeholders. And in the case of DEI, those competing views often map onto conflicting value structures and worldviews, and ideologies. I know you as someone who is widely respected by people from all walks of life. So how have you developed such a great ability to gather people around a common initiative like this, where there are so many different or competing viewpoints?

Todd Mooradian

Well, again, I'm going to repeat that you're very generous. I hope I made a contribution. Most importantly, I feel challenged to make a significant contribution as the Mason School moves forward. And that's yet to be seen. That chapter is yet to be written, but I'm committed to it. I also think you were generous in saying I brought people together with different values. But that's our task, right? Bringing people together with consonant values is easy. So we'll go get everybody that thinks alike, and we'll be the expression preaching to the choir. But I do think that there's a way to do it, and I hope that lots of people will join me in this. And that way is to recognize. I started out with the story about my father and about Jim Kaplan deliberately. I'm a big sports fan. They were both deeply involved in athletics. My father was a coach and athletic director. Jim Kaplan built the arena named after him. I like that story. In sports, we find a fundamental idea about fairness. Nobody wants to win a game on a tilted field. It has to be profoundly dissatisfying if you find out you had an advantage because the court wasn't level. Everybody believes in fairness. And what I'd like to do moving forward, regardless of whether we've been successful doing it in the past, I want people like Phil Wagner and everybody else

in the Mason School, all the students, all the staff, all the faculty to commit to finding the higher level values that we do share about fairness and opportunity, about giving everybody a chance to find their patent or their passion. And I want everybody to take joy from it. And if we are finding that, we may not believe in a specific policy about diversity, but, gosh, we are all committed to a level playing field, and we may not feel like that we are the advocate for one group or another, but we really believe in fairness, and everybody getting a full investment from society. Then we can come together. And actually, the story about New York is important, too. I'd like everybody in the Mason School of Business to find joy in being part of a place that embraces people. There's a campaign for LGBTQ teenagers that says it gets better. Don't you want the Mason School to be a part of that better? A place that young people come who haven't felt fully embraced by their society and find out that they're great and they're at home. And I don't know anybody in our building who wouldn't commit to that.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And I think our value structure really calls us to that at William & Mary. Those values of excellence, flourishing, belonging, curiosity, those really help us corral around those initiatives. I think those things work hand in hand. Dean Mooradian, I'm wondering if you can speak directly to our students. As you know, we're kicking off the fall semester. I'm getting ready to work with some 200 graduate students who are coming in as part of their soft skills and communications courses, getting training in inclusive leadership. Can you challenge them to think about DEI in the way that you think they ought to think about it? Why is DEI such an important part of their education and our curriculum, and our initiatives here? How do you recommend our students see DEI as part of their scope of leadership?

Todd Mooradian

It's principle. It aligns with the core values that I think are more broadly shared. I think we lose some of that when we wrap it up in particular language or recommending particular policies. Everybody has a principle of fairness. We talked about the practicality of it. We need those four or five patents that are lost when different groups don't get the privilege to grow into their potential. There's a joy of being in a diverse world. These are young leaders. They're going to be in a world that's diverse. Todd Mooradian didn't make that happen, nor did Phil Wagner. The world of the 21st century for professionals is going to be multicultural and diverse. Economic activity is going to be entwined at a global level, and they better learn to thrive in it. But most importantly, they come to us. They're wonderful. The young people that are joining us, I've spoken with four groups already this week. They're terrific. What I've told them is to make sure that while they're so busy getting these educations and doing their assignments and taking their tests and interviewing and working on their resume, that they also take a chance to step back and decide because we're giving them the tools to change the world. In fact, it's really inevitable that they will change the world.

Phil Wagner

And they do.

Todd Mooradian

They do. And what's important is, right from the get, they think about what changes do they want to be part of. And I think they want to be part of making a place that embraces everyone. I think that I've used the example in four speeches this week about the eulogy exercise that people do in leadership training. But at some point, and the earlier you do it, the better off you'll be. Think about the mark you want to leave because someday somebody's going to stand up and say, this is what this person was. This is how they made me feel. This is how they invested in me. And I think that by giving them the tools and the understanding to recognize their core values about fairness and embracing people and inclusion, their ethical commitment to it, and the joy they can take from it, we're going to help them. When they get to the end of that line, say, I'm proud of the mark I made.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely. All right, so final question for you. I'm a vision guy. We're all excited for the next season of the Mason School of Business, a place we know and love, even if you're an external listener. Clearly, you know, we're doing big things here. This is an exciting place to be. As dean, I'm wondering if you'd be willing to briefly lay out your vision for the Mason School of Business's future, a future that definitely is one defined by diversity of thought and identity and equity and inclusion and belonging. What do you think is on the horizon for us here?

Todd Mooradian

You said earlier that diversity and inclusion is consonant. It resonates with people at William & Mary cause it's a place that's been about ideas and about a breadth of perspectives for over three centuries. And fairly recently, we had Larry Pulley as our dean for 24 years, and I knew him for a good part of that 24 years. One of the most decent people that anyone is ever going to meet and one of the most dedicated to the College of William & Mary. I don't think the next generation is revolutionary as a break from any of that past 300 years of being a place, a Renaissance place, a place where polymaths thrive, and diverse perspectives are valued. I don't think we're going to be revolutionizing what we are from the last 25 years. We're going to build on a place that's dedicated to principled achievement, to use Larry Pulley's phrase. But I do think that what we want to be is a place that comes into the 21st century ready to make a renewed impact, be more relevant, and diversity, inclusion, along with an educational model that's based on breadth of perspective and multiple problem-solving paradigms, and a place dedicated to excellence in everything it does. A new vision will emerge. I didn't arrive with a vision, by the way. I'm more committed to listening right now than to telling people what my vision is. But I think that I know that I never lace them up to come in second. I've been an athlete, I've been a coach, I've been around coaching. Take the field as if you're going to be the very best. And I think that the next vision for Mason School should be that we find a way to be the very best in the world at what we do. And I think there's a white space for a business school to be extraordinary at teaching. A lot of higher education institutions take teaching for granted. So give people a book and put them in the classroom. We can invest deliberately in being a great place for teaching. I think there's room in the world for a place that takes impactful research seriously because too much research has drifted off into incremental

knowledge that only your colleagues around the academy read. I think there's a place in the world for a business school that's dedicated to this model of a Renaissance person who is broadly educated and deeply educated, kind of the T-shaped person. I don't see anybody else doing that. But William & Mary is better than anyone at the world at that. And we can take a lead and define ourselves. And I think there's a place in the world for a business school that says we prepare people for a diverse and changing world where they learn to thrive, they learn to express their values, and they learn to take joy from the diversity of other people.

Phil Wagner

Love it. That's inclusive leadership in action. Dean Mooradian, thank you for your time, for your insights, for all you do and are going to do in partnership with us in the years ahead. It's truly been a pleasure speaking with you here. Thanks so much for kicking off season two of our podcast with us.

Todd Mooradian

I have a feeling you got a lot of editing to do, Phil.

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 podcast 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.