



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 30: MARCELLE CIAMPI – REWIRING “NORMAL”: NEURODIVERGENT LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

Marcelle Ciampi

Who says that you have to make eye contact and be very good at communication skills to be an effective leader? I'm reading all of these qualities and traits of effective leaders, and I'm thinking, no, no, I've been a very effective leader.

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. Welcome listeners to yet another podcast episode here on Diversity Goes to Work. Today I'm delighted to welcome Marcelle Ciampi, also known by her pen named Samantha Craft. Marcelle is a respected autistic author and international ambassador, and she's been featured in over hundreds of events around the world. She is best known for her writings found in the well-received book *Everyday Asperger's*, and some of her works, including the Autistic Traits List, have been translated into multiple languages and are widely shared in counseling offices globally. By day, she's a senior neurodiversity advisor and ambassador at Ultronauts Incorporated, an engineering firm with an autism hiring initiative that's been featured in the *New York Times*. There, Ciampi is credited for largely architecting an innovative universal design approach to workplace inclusion. I'm so excited to speak with her. Welcome, Marcelle. We are so excited to have you on our podcast. And as we begin, I'd love to ask you to share a little bit more about your story. Can you tell us a little bit about your background, maybe how you went from school teacher? Because I know, that's part of that story too to consultant for major organizations and then maybe on some of your writings like *Everyday Asperger's* or the Autistic traits list.

Marcelle Ciampi

Fantastic. Sure. And thank you so much for carving out time to have me on this platform today. It's a privilege to be here, and welcome to everyone who is tuned in to our conversation. I'm looking forward to a fruitful discussion today. Your question involving my journey. So I was a school teacher, I was an elementary school teacher, and a middle school teacher, also pre-K and some adult education as well in California. And after many years of teaching, I became a stay-at-home mother, primarily to raise my three sons. My middle son is on the autism spectrum, all my sons are in their 20s now, and one of my other sons is also

neurodivergent individual, as am I. I left teaching to be at home and home-schooled my middle son. And after several years of being a stay-at-home mom, I discovered Ultronauts Inc. It was a small advertisement on social media, very small company at the time, about ten workers. And I was brought on as their very first recruiter. This was about 2014. Their very first recruiter, their first community manager. I later also became the recruitment manager, outreach specialist, and so forth. So I've had hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of conversations with professionals aligned with autism hiring and neurodiversity hiring initiatives around the globe. As part of my job role, I help to architect and design an inclusive hiring process as an inclusive talent acquisition recruitment process for the company. Ultronauts did a unique thing that I have yet to see with any other autism hiring and neurodiversity hiring initiatives. They put an actual autistic person at the core of their talent acquisition team, which was me. And because of the nature of my mind and my neurology, I set out to do my very, very best work and became intensely focused on how to create an inclusive recruitment process for not only autistic individuals and those are similar neurological profiles but for the human talent pool in general talent pool, I should say. And that resulted in over now 3000 hours of study into best recruitment practices and hiring practices, and inclusivity practices. Because of this expertise that I gained not only firsthand from my work and recruiting and hiring, and interviewing autistic individuals but also in my studies and research, and conversations with over 10,000 autistic people around the world, I was able to hone a lot of knowledge and wisdom. And this has attracted leaders in Fortune 500 companies and similar agencies to me. And they've asked me to share some of my knowledge through workplace discussions, panels, forums, webinars, podcasts, and, more recently, a workshop series on what is neurodiversity and how can we best support our neurodiversity colleagues. And I also focus on Universal Design Inclusivity which is how to support the general workforce, everybody. How can we make accessibility for everyone in the workplace, not just specific neurotypes or people with specific abilities?

Phil Wagner

And I appreciate how you volunteered your expertise, even for our own internal programs. I know you work with our part-time MBA students in our Diversity in the Workplace course to share their to sharpen them in this space. So you are clearly a person who is on the move, and you have so much expertise, which takes me to my second question. It's a simple one, but I think it's important. Which is, do you have any preferences and or insights into language that we should use? So in this space, there's a lot of terms that get tossed around that we're mindful of person-first language, you say person with autism, person with ASD, autistic person. I know we throw around on the spectrum and that's been sort of misunderstood, I think. We don't actually talk about it as a true spectrum, more like a gradient. So I'm always very mindful to ask my guests how should we talk about what we're talking about.

Marcelle Ciampi

That's an excellent inquiry. Thank you. And thank you for your consideration and empathy there. For myself, I'm not very particular, but because I serve as a role model, and an ambassador, and an educator, I try to stay updated on what the autistic culture and autistic

community wishes. And like any other culture, take, for example, LGBTQIA plus community. I want to honor that culture. So while everybody's going to have their own individual preferences, I'm trying to look towards the majority of the autistic community. And in the most recent polls, such as Autistic Not Weird 2022, that you can Google and search for, I believe it's more than 80% of autistics are now saying they prefer autistic over with autism. And so I'm honoring that. Me personally, it doesn't matter to me, but I honor that. And so, I would ask autistic. I'm also comfortable with on the autism spectrum. On the spectrum can be a little vague. What is the spectrum? Aren't we all on some type of spectrum one way or another? But on the autism spectrum, I'd say it's a more safe, inviting word than saying with autism for me personally and from other people.

Phil Wagner

No, that's excellent insight, and I appreciate that. And I love the word you use, which is honor because that maps closely onto a closely felt value I have in this space, which is upholding the principle of human dignity. When you have an acknowledgment of dignity towards a person, you can honor them in that way.

Marcelle Ciampi

That's really interesting because I coined the word diversity with dignity out of a lot of the research and studies and some of the personal experiences that I went through of how to hold a space of dignity for people. And so, yes, language is so essential in honoring that space of dignity for people. So thank you for that.

Phil Wagner

No, absolutely. And dignity, I think it has to be foundation. I go back to Donna Hicks work so often. If you're familiar with that work, and it's so simple, but that work on dignity affirmations and dignity violations just to me, anytime I come across a complex problem in the DEI space, almost always, if not always, I can point it back to dignity in some way. So it really keeps me grounded. So I'm glad to be speaking to a like-minded person here. Look, you're a well-respected international ambassador. I know you shared a little bit of your story on sort of how you have found yourself in advocacy. I'd like to talk a little bit more about that international advocacy work. I'm curious, in your research, in your scope of expertise, can you share out share about, excuse me, how experiences of neurodiversity might play out differently across the globe? I mean, has your research shaped your perspective on international perspectives on autism in any way?

Marcelle Ciampi

I would say it has to a degree. I've spoken with people in all parts of the world, including mental health professionals in Ecuador and social workers in Mexico, and social workers in India. And, of course, we're all part of a societal norms, and what society dictates how we should act, what we should talk about, what we should keep private. So from each culture, especially when you're talking about Western culture as opposed to non-Western cultures, there are different social expectations and norms, and how autism is perceived and talked

about in different subsets of society differs. I would say that I have actually seen differences just from home to home, city to city, even in the United States, where some people are view autism being autistic as an identity, as a way of being, as a way of what I call the three P's perceiving, processing, and presenting in the world. How we perceive, how we process and present in the world. Well, and people see it as part of the social model of disability, where disability is partially an artifact of society not completely put on that one individual, where on the other end of the spectrum, you might find individuals, whether this is in the United States or other parts of the world, where they see autism through a narrow medical deficit lens. And how someone perceives and processes autism itself affects how they present and how they interact with the word and with the notion connotations, et cetera. I know that in speaking with people from some countries outside of the United States, there's still a lot of stigmatism around it, and they're actually warned or told. Don't you mention that? But I would like to share a story about my own advocacy journey and how it actually started to give you insight to what happens here in the United States as well if that's okay.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, please. We're all about storytelling here.

Marcelle Ciampi

I think we can heal and connect so much through storytelling and narratives, and that's lacking so much right now in our workplace cultures. And I'm seeing a trend that I welcome and applaud where more and more stories are happening and vulnerability and transparency. So I've shared this story before. One of the reasons that I started one of the primary reasons that I started writing, and I set out to write every day for a year and ended up writing for three years, three blogs, and over half million words online is because I was going to get a second master's degree in counseling at a local university several years ago. And while I was attending the university, I discovered that at that time the terminology was Asperger's, that I had Asperger's, and I let my professor know, my counselor suggested that I let the professor know. He was the head of the psychology department at the university. She thought it was pertinent that he knew that I was going through this diagnosis process because I was going to be a mental health professional. At least, that was my goal at the time. And I waited till after class, and when I approached the professor, I said, I wanted to let you know that I might possibly have Asperger's. Again, that was the terminology at the time. And I expected him. You know what they say about expectations. But I thought that he would, at least at minimum, offer me some guidance or support or understanding. What instead happened is he proceeded to shame me for 5 10 minutes. He accused me of inventing my autism so I could feel closer to my son. He asked if I was proud that I was announcing to the world that my brain and my son's brain were broken and so forth. I was highly traumatized from that event.

Phil Wagner

Oh, my goodness.

Marcelle Ciampi

And I started processing through writing ended up going to the dean. They mentioned that I should never speak of Asperger's at all in professional circles, that it had no place. And as a result, I ended up leaving that program.

Phil Wagner

Good.

Marcelle Ciampi

Which was a smart choice. It was a toxic environment. And as a result, I ended up writing. And my writing ended up reaching thousands and thousands of people around the world and has led thousands upon thousands of people to self-diagnosis or professional diagnose. So I call it my dark night of the soul that turned into something bright and light. And I wouldn't change any of it. But I share that as an example of it is ableism, stereotyping, discrimination. It's alive and well in the United States. It's not just in other countries. And I would receive emails and other communications from people of all walks of life. I don't even like to say walks anymore because of ableism, but all types of life, all colors of life, all sizes and shapes across the gender spectrum of life, of their experiences with professionals in trying to seek out a diagnosis. And there was this pattern over and over again of the same things that you cannot be autistic or then with Asperger's because you make eye contact because you know how to dress because you have decent hygiene, you held down the job, you have a degree, you have children, you are a parent, you've been married, so forth, on and on. And that's one of the things that led me to do more and more writing and more advocacy work and to speak out more because of these inequalities and inequities and injustices and these myths and stereotypes about autistic people. We're all different. Some of us can't make any eye contact. Some of us cannot use our vocal cords to speak, but we still have a voice, we still communicate, we still have thoughts and ideas. And I don't really remember what my point was. My point is that's how my advocacy journey started. You had mentioned that and going globally, it's been an expansion of that. It's been an expansion of collecting other people's stories, sharing my stories. And one of the reasons we started the Diversity with Dignity Global Roundtable, we meet every quarter on zoom across the world. And it was because I was being contacted by other people about their stories, about their trials and tribulations, and challenges and questions. And I wanted to help to create a safe and brave space where people could ask questions and share stories because I'm only one person. I only have one perspective, and I only have one brain and heart that can only get stretched so far. I don't have unlimited energy and capacity. So that's why we created that, to have that global connection and to share resources and to network with one another.

Phil Wagner

And I think that's a dignity-oriented perspective, one that recognizes what's the common saying, if you've met a person with autism, you've met a person with autism. This is one person. These experiences are not monolithic. It is a very individualized experience through life. And so I think that that dignity approach really shines through, and gosh, I really

appreciate you just talking about your own sense-making process. I've been very open with my diagnosis of having Tourette's and a few other coexisting conditions on this podcast, and it's through my conversations with my own therapist which shout out to all of the therapists out there and shout out to those of you that see therapists and prioritize your mental health. But what I've learned is that sometimes in our attempt to sense, make our own darkest moments or our own biggest struggles that really propel us to action. And so the story you share, it really resonates with me, and it's so impressive to see how you have turned that into direct advocacy that is clearly making an impact, particularly in the world of work. I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about your work at Ultronauts Inc. So, I know you shared a little bit about what you do, but you've done a lot there, and you serve as the senior neurodiversity adviser and ambassador. Can you share a little bit about how your story has informed your advocacy at Ultronauts Inc?

Marcelle Ciampi

Yes, well, Ultronauts, first off, I would like to share is it was founded by two MIT graduates, and it's 100% onshore, 100% remote engineering firm. And one of the questions I get is, well, what do you do there? Not for myself, but what does the company do and to share to those that are tuned in, the engineers work alongside our clients company development team, and they write code that test software to identify those errors that come up during the software development life cycle. That's as brief as I can be, so people get an idea of what Ultronauts Inc. does.

Phil Wagner

For sure.

Marcelle Ciampi

As far as my role, I help to establish different ways to create universal inclusivity, which we call the universal workplace at the company. I can go through some of the specific things that we do. One of the things is we make sure that our key point indicators, our KPIs, and our mission statements are actually aligned with what we are wanting to do so that our spouse values what we say we're doing towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is actually matching those implicit assumptions, what employees and workers are feeling and sensing about the workspace. We do a lot of work around reducing ambiguity. I'd like to disclose that I'm not only an autistic individual, but I also this year was diagnosed with ADHD, complex PTSD, and OCD. And I'm also dyslexic and dyspraxic and diagnosed gifted intellect. And all of that sometimes affects my working memory and the way that I present. So if I fumble across a word or something, that's typically what's going on. So I talked about the mission statement. We work towards reducing ambiguity, and some of the ways we do that is creating. I've helped to create handbooks on what is communication. Simple things that might seem simple to some people are more complex for those that are autistic, such as how long should an email be and who should I email about what? And what does a brief email look like? We also create agendas ahead of time, so people know what to expect. Our job descriptions are very, very specific. I've worked a lot on job descriptions, and I teach about that how to make a job description as

specific and aligned with the actual job as possible. So it doesn't have things like great team player, you know, what does that even mean and how many people might look at that and question that.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Marcelle Ciampi

We also spend a lot of time getting to know and understand and support team members. That's something I helped to develop, where each of the team members has a biodex, what we call a biodex, and it talks about when they do best with feedback when are their best peak performance hours, what are their skills, what are some of their challenges. And that really helps with the management to understand the team that they're working for and those spiky profiles that we sometimes have as neurodivergent individuals. We focus time on understanding the history and culture of some of the underrepresented groups of the company, such as the LGBTQIA plus community and, the autistic community, those with PDS like myself. And we do diversity and inclusion education. And I developed a Managing Stress and Anxiety in the Workplace series as well that I think any company, especially during these times, could benefit with their employees having key ideas about how to handle stress and anxiety in and outside of the workplace. We also do a lot of collection of feedback. Feedback is very important to us, and anonymous feedback when possible. We have 60-day follow-up calls asking employees how things are going. Do they understand their job role? Do they feel connected to their colleagues? Do they understand what their supervisor is doing? We have an independent audit of psychological safety outside of the company for our employees so we can have that accountability and monitor how employees are feeling as far as feeling sense of belonging and safe in the workplace. We look at those leading benchmarks and indicators and evaluate how we're doing continually. Another thing that I've helped with is focusing on our strengths, and we've actually brought in my fiancé, my partner, J. David Hall, who runs the not-for-profit narrow guides. He's a coach for autistic people around the world. And he's autistic himself, as are his three children. And he does a strength-based approach of coaching with all of our employees if they are open to it, focusing on helping them navigate the workplace but also looking at their strengths. Some of the strengths I'm sure you're aware of that autistic people demonstrate that we've heard many times are such as pattern-seeking ability, that ability to really intensely focus and learn a lot of things. But some of the other strengths I'd like to mention also are a tenacity, this tenacious moral makeup. It's actually been shown in research that autistic people come to situations with less bias. It's been demonstrated through research. And also, I've known thousands of autistic individuals who would risk their own reputation for social justice. That is very important to them to be doing the right thing, whatever that means to that individual. And also, I think one of the most important things that autistic people can bring to that workplace is that those novel ways of looking and approaching situations, and you know that old saying, outside the box? I think it's even more than that. It's what's beyond outside the box, what's in that other dimension.

Phil Wagner

For sure.

Marcelle Ciampi

Really deep layers. So a lot of my work has been focused on bringing inclusivity measures like the ones that I mentioned that not only help the autistic worker but help everybody there as much as possible. And that's that universal workplace approach.

Phil Wagner

That's it. That's it. I'm so glad you said that because that's what I kept thinking about in our first season. One of my colleagues, MaryBeth Asbury, wanted on to talk about size diversity, of all things. And in that, I love the visual that she gave us in that making accommodations for people who live life in larger bodies, making those accommodations in the workplace kind of works out well for everybody. Let people choose their own chairs, that's good for everybody. What you talked about, like, what are your productivity peaks? That's good for everybody. That is universal design. That is such a coherent DEI action philosophy. It just resonates so much with me. One of the things I'm wondering if you can share a little bit more on is Ultronauts autism hiring initiative. Can you share a little bit more about that initiative?

Marcelle Ciampi

Sure. So one of the things that we try to do is be a role model. And research has shown that when you're role modeling political correctness, like when you ask me what terminology should we use to self-identify. That actually brings more collaboration, more sense of safety in groups, and we role model that political correctness even in our recruitment design. One of the reasons I came up with diversity with dignity is because I didn't appreciate how some corporations went about with their autism hiring programs. And what I was seeing time and time again is people were being forced to disclose very personal information in order to get into a hiring program. And there were a lot of flaws with that, and it is shifting over the last eight years. There are a lot of flaws with that because I was getting word from some of these newly hired autistic individuals that they were being discriminated against from day one because their coworkers were told they're autistic. And their coworkers, to a degree, they're innocent. They see the stereotypes. They see the generalizations. They don't know what to expect. They come in thinking these myths that aren't true, that autistics lack empathy, that they can't tell jokes or get jokes.

Phil Wagner

Oh, I'm so glad you said.

Marcelle Ciampi

That can't be friends, et cetera. What I told my supervisor, the co-founder of Ultronauts years ago, and he was so highly appreciative, and he's given me so much freedom and flexibility in my role that has allowed me to flourish. And he's really tapped into my strengths. I told Rajesh, I said, the best way that I think about it is to substitute any other historically

underserved, underrepresented oppressed group. For example, let's take our black and brown friends. Would we put them into a separate hiring program? Would we put women into a separate hiring program? No. It would be grounds for a lawsuit. So why is it okay to do this with autistic people? Because we're still seen as less than because we're still seen as deficit because autism is still seen as a quote-unquote disease, which it never was and never has been. And for that reason, then it must be okay to openly and publicly segregate the people. So I have been on my soapbox for years, saying, this is an injustice. This is not okay. If you were to corral and put 50 women in a room in a different hiring process than everybody else and evaluate them for a month, and then hire half of them and not the other, it wouldn't happen. There would be outrage. But because we are autistic people, it's still happening. So I tried my very best, and with the support of many people at Ultronauts, to make an inclusive hiring program that did not segregate so that everybody has the same benefits. Everyone gets what I created, which was a recruitment overview. So, as you know, autistic people sometimes have discomfort around unknowns, anxiety, and can be very inquisitive, and have lots of questions. So I would be getting lots of questions six, seven years ago from applicants, candidates. And so I started to collect all those questions and answer them and created a 10-13-page document that explained what happens from the beginning of our recruitment process till the end. But it wasn't just for autistic people. It was for anybody who applied, and it was for vocational counselors. It was for companies that were curious in what we were doing and role modeling for best practices and so forth. And other companies have adapted a similar approach. That's the beauty of universal design of a universal workplace. As you were mentioning, what works for one can work for many. I know, for myself. And I'm venturing to guess that if you were to apply for a job, you would love to have an overview of what to expect, right? What's the timeline?

Phil Wagner

Absolutely.

Marcelle Ciampi

What are the possible questions? Where can I go look for more resources? What happens if I'm not hired?

Phil Wagner

So good.

Marcelle Ciampi

So those types of things were at the center of our recruitment process. We really went into creating rubrics, interview rubrics that were as objective as possible. We're human beings, so there's always going to be some bias and being subjective in some form or another, but having a rubric and a scale and really analyzing each question so that it was specific and scenario-based and not judgment based. Research shows that so many people are hired based on whether or not you'd like to go down to the local pub with them and have some fish and chips right.

Phil Wagner

Right.

Marcelle Ciampi

Or how much ancillary, depending on how you look at it.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, so problematic in so many different ways. But yeah.

Marcelle Ciampi

Yeah, so really looked at that how to eliminate as much bias and subjectivity as possible in the process and then also what happens once they're there. So much of these hiring initiatives that I was looking at were focused on diversity and not inclusivity. And that's a big, huge gap I'm still seeing.

Phil Wagner

Huge, absolutely.

Marcelle Ciampi

Is companies don't define the difference between diversity and inclusivity and what that looks like.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Marcelle Ciampi

And so there was handbooks and things written on how to create these diverse hiring initiatives, but nothing about how to include the people once they were there.

Phil Wagner

This is so good.

Marcelle Ciampi

So what I was hearing is tales of people being fired or quitting. And the worst was, and I don't know if this is true because I didn't know the person, but the worst was saying that a couple of their colleagues actually chose to leave the earth in their lives. And, of course, hearing that type of information, how can you not say something? How can you not try to make it better? And so I've risked my own reputation and people liking me over and over again. Because, like many of us that are neurodivergents, ADHD or autistic, and the like, I have found at least that being the best person we can be and giving back to the world in any way we can is more important than our own selves. And that's one of the reasons I love neurodivergent people so much.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. No, I so appreciate there's just so much to unpack there, even going back to like just the fundamental misconceptions. I think that's one of the biggest issues in the workplace is just often sort of lay managers who may not identify as having any of these neurodivergent identities. There's just a fundamental misunderstanding, and that impacts hiring, that impacts promotion, that impacts employee wellbeing. Even like you mentioned, the empathy thing, right? That's a common misconception that people with autism lack empathy, and that is not universally true. Right. Sometimes those folks may have extreme empathy, but there just might be, like, a communication disconnect. It may not be understood by others or recognized by others. Some really good research on that. So I think the more we can just normalize having conversations on neurodivergent perspectives in the world of work, it opens up space for everybody. So I just I appreciate the work that you do. I think it's profound work. I want to talk about some of your personal work if that's okay. One of the things I think that's so cool about you is listeners heard everything that you're doing. You're clearly doing a lot, and yet just sort of casually, on top of that, you're in a doctoral program too. So I'm wondering, can you share a little bit more about your personal pursuits and your professional pursuits? I know you're seeking a doctorate in organizational leadership. Do you have, like, a specific research interest or focus area? What do you want to do with that?

Marcelle Ciampi

Sure. So I'm attending Seattle University, and I am working towards I just finished my first year with an A average. Thank you very much.

Phil Wagner

Woo-hoo, that's good.

Marcelle Ciampi

I am pursuing a degree in educational and organizational learning and leadership. So what that means is I can use my knowledge to help organizations like I am doing on best ways to create systems and processes that help a company flourish and succeed. I'm learning a lot about global organizations, and something that's really interesting that I found is what they recommend that global leaders learn completely aligns with what I would recommend that any leader learns. Instead of learning, it talks about learning about different cultures and how their communication is different, their handshakes, their eye contact, their tone of voice. It's like, well, that transfers so well over into learning about the neurodivergent culture and how the neurodivergent culture differs so that you can eliminate those misperceptions and judgments, and you can have a more beneficial workplace and more productivity. And you asked about where my special focus might be. I go back and forth, but one thing that I've noticed is a huge gap hole is a lot of these leadership theories. No surprise, are the neuronormative who says that you have to be an extrovert to be a good leader. Extrovert. Extrovert men of middle class and upper class, right?

Phil Wagner

Absolutely.

Marcelle Ciampi

Who says that you have to make eye contact and be very good at communication skills to be an effective leader? I'm reading all of these qualities and traits of effective leaders, and I'm thinking, no, no, I've been a very effective leader, and I haven't had a lot of these qualities. And it's the same people quoting the same information, and it's this snake or this cat chasing its tail where it's not outside the box. It's not a novel and unique way of looking at leadership. There's so many different ways that we can lead in ways that demonstrate compassion and vulnerability and honesty, and openness. One of the reasons I'm an effective leader and effective role model is because I am who I am.

Phil Wagner

Yes.

Marcelle Ciampi

And there's not all these hidden agendas and these hidden things I'm trying to get out of you. And there's not this gossip, and there's not this backstabbing in it. And the priorities aren't all profit. The priorities are people.

Phil Wagner

Maybe that's not out of the box. Maybe it's just time to build a new box, right? That other box hasn't worked for us.

Marcelle Ciampi

Maybe it's time to run it over with, like a train, a bullet train.

Phil Wagner

Maybe, I don't know. But maybe it's the box that's the problem all along. Gosh, I love that.

Marcelle Ciampi

Yeah. So I've thought about looking at how a non-neuronormative leadership and interviewing and examining successful neurodivergent leaders and what types of attributes do they think led to their success. That's one approach. The other approach is it's been a challenge for me to be at a university, and it would be at any university because I am neurodivergent with multiple learning disabilities and navigating the disability services. Even just waiting to see a mental health therapist so I could get certified to get disability services took seven months. So looking at the accessibility for neurodivergence in online doctoral programs and how many people that are similar to me because I wanted to quit over and over again, when I say similar to me, I should say similar to us, similar minds that are not the neuronormative mind that are the non-neurotypical that are the neuro when I say neurodivergent or neurovariant mind aren't able to be leaders because the barriers of education and higher education, they're not able to finish

their doctorate because they're expected to work in groups continually. They're expected to show their face on zoom meetings. They're expected to answer when they're called upon. And how much anxiety-producing are these doctoral programs, and how much are they shutting out the neurodivergent person from succeeding? And, like I said, this is not a reflection on the university I'm at. These are all different universities.

Phil Wagner

Of course.

Marcelle Ciampi

And how can we make it more conducive to a

Phil Wagner

Think of the box again.

Marcelle Ciampi

beneficial experience for an autistic person, ADHD person, someone I mean, given COVID the global health COVID-19, the global health crisis for the last two and a half years, how many of us are now neurodivergent because of post-traumatic stress because of generalized anxiety disorder, etc. When I called to get an appointment to see my nurse psychiatrist so I could get my reevaluation. There were 400 people on the waitlist behind me. So how many people out there are struggling with some type of neurodivergency and trying to make it in this world? And something as basic as education is a barrier.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. Again, I think it's the box thing. I keep coming back to that, and I'm with you. I think higher ed can be a profound space where we can sense make, where we can do great things, but also, the system is not a perfect one. And so I love that you are working in that system while also critiquing and dismantling it in some way. So I've got one more question for you, and based on your own doctoral work, I think about mine. That was such a change period in my life, a time in my life where I just learned so much about life and scholarship and academia and about myself. And I studied under one of the brightest social support scholars out there. I love her to death. Dr. Adrienne Kunkel at the University of Kansas. Just a wonderful, wonderful person and a genius. And what I learned is the value of social support in all contexts. And so I'm wondering since mentorship and some of those themes really play out on this podcast. From your own personal and insights, in about 60 seconds or less, can you give us insights on things that you think might be helpful for leaders, managers, C-suite executives to consider as they try to sculpt employment spaces that are supportive and ripe for neurodivergent, neurodiverse employees to just to thrive. Not just survive, but thrive in that work environment. Any insights?

Marcelle Ciampi

Sure. Number one thing is the Disability Now autism motto nothing about us without us. Include the autistic voices.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely.

Marcelle Ciampi

Include their input. If you're creating accommodations, ask for their input. Make it a team effort. Don't make it one person deciding for another person. Also, don't assume that somebody who's autistic needs help. They might be an expert like myself, who can actually offer you ideas and you help. Or they might be someone like my fiance, who has a master's in divinity and who is an autistic job coach. Look at other people's challenges and strengths in the workplace. Everybody is going through something. Everybody has strengths they can bring. And everybody has ways in which they need support and design and create programs that don't single out autistic people but bring everybody together in mutual support. So what can we do to help this ten-person team? Not this one person in this team have a universal inclusivity approach would be another thing. Also, tap into the ERG.

Phil Wagner

Yes.

Marcelle Ciampi

If you don't have an affinity group, an ERG, an employee resource group, think about how might someone in the company or organization create one and have an ongoing conversation with them. Bring in, guest speakers. And as we've mentioned over and over again, those stories, those narratives, and holding a space for somebody's dignity, for each person's dignity to share their stories. And I would say, as a leader, model, role model, just like you would as a parent. We learn through observation. We learn through watching people's behaviors. So practice what you preach. Be vulnerable. Admit your faults. Admit that you're struggling. Admit your anxiety. Admit that you're a human being. We need to bring humanness back into the workplace.

Phil Wagner

That's it.

Marcelle Ciampi

We're no longer cogs in the wheel or the machine, whatever that saying is. We're now coming to a new place in history where the workplace is a place where humans gather. It's going to be one of the last places with all this technology, going less and less to places that people meet and gather and join and connect, and we need to focus on making those connections real and meaningful, powerful, brave, and safe.

Phil Wagner

Oh, my gosh, I'm emotional over here. I'm like, yes, write all of this down. But it fits so well, and it all maps back to dignity, and I think that can never serve us wrong. Marcelle, I don't even want to end this conversation. It's so impactful. All I can say is thank you. Thank you for the work that you do. Thank you for being you. Thank you. Thank you for giving of your time to us. It's been a great privilege chatting with you here.

Marcelle Ciampi

Thank you so much. I've done many of these, and I really appreciate how you navigated the conversation and contributed to the conversation and made me feel like you're holding a space for my dignity. All the best to you and to the people out there who are tuning in.

Phil Wagner

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