



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 37: CHON GLOVER – STRATEGIZING THE LONG GAME

Chon Glover

I do believe that a better day is coming. I really, really do. And I know that it will not be easy, but I try to have faith and persevere.

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 episode of Diversity Goes to Work, the podcast where we center real, human-lived experiences that shape and inform our diversity work. It's a true honor today to speak with someone who I have learned so much from in my own DEI leadership journey. Dr. Chon Glover is a monumental fixture and a change agent here at William & Mary. She came here in 1996 from Presbyterian College, and she has served in so many roles since that time. Most of us know her now as the Chief Diversity Officer. That's a position she's served faithfully in since 2012. She has done so much for this campus, so much for DEI leadership in the context of higher ed. Chon, it is an honor to have you here on our podcast today. Thanks for joining.

Chon Glover

Thank you so much, Phil. It's a privilege.

Phil Wagner

All right. So, Chon, you're a fixture here at William & Mary. You have been here a long time and someone who has had monumental impact on my own time here. So as a tireless advocate for DEI since '96 and really before. You have helped move the needle forward on so many initiatives here at William & Mary. What are you most proud of all the things you've accomplished in the last 25 years?

Chon Glover

Well, first, I have to tell you that that was a wonderful way of saying you've been here for a long time. It was a nice way, just to say fixture. I think for me, Phil, I did not necessarily come thinking I would stay 25 years. I came in with the purpose of trying to make some change. DEI is all about transformation and change. And so I have had so many opportunities from different areas of the campus and different perspectives to be able to have some impact on

change, and I've just tried to do that on a regular basis. The things that I'm most proud of are probably what I see as the things that are going to last for all time coming. And those are the landscape changes that we have seen over the last couple of years from 2016, when we dedicated Hardy and Lemon Hall, the first residence halls that were named for people of color. And then Shenkman Hillel Center, the renaming Boswell Hall, Willis Hall, Chancellor's Hall, the wall plaques at the Wren building that recognized the women, the 24 women who integrated William & Mary and also the three first African American students who were in residence. And then all the way up to the Art Masu marker that was dedicated just this past spring and also penultimately the Hearth memorial to the enslaved, which really, really added a whole front door to this campus in a way of acknowledging our history.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And to our listeners. Like many other areas in the geographic south, William & Mary has had to reckon with some past naming that we have attempted to sort of not rewrite over that history, but acknowledge the pain of that history and then be committed to a better 330 years ahead. And if you haven't been to our campus to visit some of those spaces, particularly Hearth, the Memorial to the enslaved, come at night walk by it, and it's just chill-inducing and just such a beautiful memorial. But Chon, you know William & Mary, we've been through a lot of change ourselves. We have a very long and sometimes complicated history. And I know that our institutional definition of DEI, or kind of our institutional understanding of DEI, has changed quite a bit over time, too. How has your own understanding of DEI work shifted in parallel to that process, too? How have you grown, and how you see that term and understand what it actually means to do this work?

Chon Glover

So when I came in 1996, we were still using the term minority and multicultural. And so, as you will understand, as I talk about this, the nomenclature for describing this work has changed and evolved over the years. And so a lot of that is because of those blind spots and biases that we hold that give people opportunities to create shortcuts, to create categories for people. And so we've changed because we changed from minority, because in many cases, we were changing, and the world was changing, and people of color were not necessarily the minority and are projected to be the majority in a couple of years. And so we went from minority to multicultural. Then we went to diversity, and that became a buzzword. And then as we've gone on, you know, now we've gone to inclusion, belonging, equity, and now BIPOC, so black, indigenous people of color. So as we've extended, people have wanted to find a space where representation matters and they can be identified as their true self or their true group and not just put together with other or other groups. And so it's been really important. The thing that we have to be concerned about is that we really can't allow the words to define the work.

Phil Wagner

Oh, good. Absolutely.

Chon Glover

I was fortunate enough to be a part of the team that worked on our values and our mission statement, and we had never had an actual value statement. If you'd ask any person on campus what are our values, everybody would probably come up with a totally different list. And so when we were doing that process, one of the things that I really stress is that I don't want us to say that diversity is our core value because I knew that that was going to be a target word. Some people like it, and some people don't. And so I really stress that we go with belonging because that is much more inclusion. That's how does a person feel in this community? Do they feel seen, respected, valued? And that's what we want for our community. I really wanted to not have buzzwords as our value statements. And we've had a lot of conversations around belonging for the last couple of years. We did this in 2019, and it's really caused, I think, some really great conversations because people don't necessarily want to admit what belonging really means and what inclusion means. We say, let's get the numbers, let's get all our numbers, increase our numbers. But numbers don't mean anything if people don't feel like they are part of the community.

Phil Wagner

No, I 100% agree. What I love is that it's not even just belonging, which is, of course, sort of the on-the-nose value that aligns here, but all of our other value. I'm just going to sort of William & Mary cheerlead for a second because I really am proud of some of the progress we've made. Our other values of curiosity and integrity and flourishing and service, and respect, those all directly map onto this work too. So I think leading from those values, let the values drive the language, let the values drive the initiatives, and I think that's very powerful. I mean, you've been a DEI leader, Chon, for almost three decades. I mean, really more.

Chon Glover

Right.

Phil Wagner

Where do you or where have you sought insight for your own professional development? I mean, in 1996, right when you got here, things that seem so common now, right? Like we just accept non-binary gender perspectives, or we read Land Acknowledgments, those things. It's not that they didn't exist, but they didn't have the place that they do now. Things have changed a lot. So since so much has changed, what have you found to be most helpful in your own leadership journey? To sort of keep up with the times as the seasons and the language and the concepts change?

Chon Glover

I think one of the things that's so important to me is continuous life on learning. People will say, I'm an expert in DEI. It's not that I don't want to claim that I have a knowledge base in this area. I am continuously learning because things are changing every day. William & Mary is a microcosm of society, and the world changes every minute. And so I've had to make sure that I committed myself to being a lifelong learner to read, to stay current on events, to really seek

out professional development in areas as things come. And here's one of the things you probably wouldn't even think. I have to listen.

Phil Wagner

Oh, yup.

Chon Glover

Storytelling is so important, and we learn so much from people's life experiences, and we know what we need to do to actually make people feel like, again, representation matters and that their space and existence is very important and very respected. Again, going back to the nomenclature part, justice, social justice, I mean, we saw in 2020 with the aftermath of George Floyd, we saw how much justice actually really mattered. And so you now hear people saying JEDI as opposed to just DEI. And so, I just think that I have tried to stay current, do research. The data will speak for itself. I'm not a fan of Game of Thrones. I don't watch it.

Phil Wagner

I'm with you. I tried, I can't get into it. But I'm with you, Chon.

Chon Glover

But the whole common statement about winter is coming. Winter is here.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

Winter is here, and so I think we have to make sure that we know what's going on, and we are open to that and being willing to accept it. The thing that I think that prevents people from moving forward on the spectrum of learning and being advocates for DEI is that they refuse to want to learn and be open to other perspectives. And the communication is broken down. No one wants to take the time.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

And I think that is so crucial. And in order for people to do that, you have to take the time to do it.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And if we've lost any Game of Thrones listeners, just come on back, come on back.

Chon Glover

It's not that I didn't like it, it's just that I've never watched it. Yeah.

Phil Wagner

I love what you're saying. It requires such an intellectual humility. Something we've talked about a lot on this podcast is you have to quiet, even maybe your inclinations or your preferences, to create rooms for other stories, some of which may be uncomfortable because you're recognizing new realities that you have not lived. And so it takes a certain higher-order skill set here. One of the things I know about you, Chon, is that you're just so human. I mean, you are kind, you are fun, you have such a positive energy, you're humble. But I know you've faced challenges. I know institutionally, we have faced challenges. And this work is certainly not always easy work. So what advice do you have for folks who are just beginning their own DEI leadership journey about how to be resilient in the face of opposition? I mean, there had to be times where you wanted to throw in the towel. What's kept you on course?

Chon Glover

Yeah, there have been many times I wanted to throw in the towel. And there have been many times when I felt like I was running but getting nowhere. And I started out in student affairs, so that's my background and my training. And so with student affairs, you have the opportunity to see the change maybe in two years, three years. And students, many times, are just very thankful and grateful that you took the time to help them. And so, when I moved into a more generalist position, I realized that those things are not necessarily the case. You don't have every four years to kind of regenerate and have seen some of the successes. One of the things that I always say, Phil, is that this is heart work.

Phil Wagner

Oh, yeah.

Chon Glover

Like H-E-A-R-T work.

Phil Wagner

No, I got you.

Chon Glover

And hard work. And we, as DEI professionals or leaders or whatever, have to make sure that we know it's a marathon and not a sprint. I had to learn that because I wanted to see change right away. And one of the things about our venerable institution that is we're 300 years old, and change is not going to happen tomorrow. But I've stayed, and I've tried to have courageous curiosity and really be brave in the part. Maya Angelou says that if we don't have courage, we can't really have any of the other virtues or take advantage of any of the other virtues. And so I've had to really reshape my purpose and just know what my purpose is and be intentional about it. But more importantly, I have to give myself grace.

Phil Wagner

Absolutely.

Chon Glover

The other part that gets to be really difficult there are a lot of times when you're standing alone. That's in any leadership position, but when you're doing DEI work, because it can be polarizing because some people have strong beliefs, it's really tough. And sometimes you got to stand by your stand on your own, and you got to have tough skin.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, you have to have really tough skin.

Chon Glover

Really tough skin. And you're not sometimes going to always have friends. And what I think the Pandemic taught me more than anything is valuing self-care and valuing time with myself, to center myself, to be able to take everything in around me, but to also regenerate myself to keep going and to do what I need to do. And I'll just say quickly, and finally, I am a proud product of a people who were resilient, who persevered, who had faith, and who went through so much more than what I feel like I go through every day. And their story is what keeps me going.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, that's so powerful.

Chon Glover

It's because if they did it, then why can't I, even with the privileges and the education and the opportunities that I have, I've got to keep doing it? Because the blood, sweat, and tears that they did and gave was for me to be able to do it. Wear these T-shirts that say I am my ancestor's wildest dreams. It's real. They didn't do this. It's like voting. People did not stand in line, get shot, killed, and all this kind of stuff for us to have the right to vote and for us not to do it. So I guess what I'm saying is I've tried to stay excited about the positions, about the work, and the job. It does get hard. It really does. But it's so impactful.

Phil Wagner

I think there's two things that really deserve some unpacking, which is the first giving yourself grace. Giving yourself grace is so important because I mean, also, you're going to say the wrong thing a time or two. You're going to maybe do the wrong thing or time or two in your effort to be well-intentioned. I think that that's really important. I think we don't do that. We don't talk about or normalize that enough. But also, I think the slow and steady wins the race thing is also something I work with a lot of our students, who I love and adore. But a lot of those folks are so justice minded they want to come in and upend the tables and change tomorrow. And organizations, much like higher education, don't often work that way. So it's finding that balance. Don't give up your values, don't give up your energy and your zeal, and your want to

be a change maker. But also, how can we make this more of a strategic effort that leads to long-term sustainability? And I think your career and tenure here is one we can definitely learn from.

Chon Glover

We're working towards durable change, and that takes time. You can do things, and they're gone tomorrow.

Phil Wagner

Tomorrow, yup.

Chon Glover

We're actually talking about change for all time coming.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

This institution is different now in 2022 than it was in 1996, and it will be different in 2050.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

And we need to make sure that that's real.

Phil Wagner

And I hope you're still our Chief Diversity Officer in 2050, Chon. We can get a lot done.

Chon Glover

Phil, I care a lot about you, but I'm going to ask that you rebuke that statement.

Phil Wagner

Just kidding.

Chon Glover

That's a long time away.

Phil Wagner

I got you. So I do want to walk back a little bit. I want to talk just a little bit more about opposition, and no need to list out your enemies or anything like that, but it's speaking in a general way. This is a work that brings about a lot of opposition. How do you do that? How do

you deal with that? I mean, how do you engage with DEI skeptics or those who are just completely just rebuffed by the DEI enterprise? You have to sort of meet people where they are, but also, you don't want to sacrifice your own values. So what do you do with those types of people that were likely never going to win over? How do you deal with sort of diverse stakeholders here? I guess is what I'm asking.

Chon Glover

I think for me, what I've had to do and what I always stress to people who are doing this work is know yourself. So you got to know yourself. You got to know what are you willing to take a stand for, what are you willing to actually push for. You got to be as strong and as integral as you can. You got to be curious. You got to be willing to problem-solve. And you've got to meet people where they are. I mean, you're exactly right. I said earlier that a lot of the problems that come because people refuse to be open and talk about things. It's hard to try to tell people to be open, but when you make it a human condition and talk about human beings and not necessarily people that have any particular identity intersectionality or whatever, people like, what are we trying to do for our people to make them feel comfortable? We want to make sure that we give people the space to be developed into the person that they can be and thrive. And excellence is the key word out of our values that I like to focus in on. We talk about diversity, but inclusive excellence is much more of what we really want. There is nothing negative about diversity. It is about including people and having excellence as our goal.

Phil Wagner

I love that.

Chon Glover

Whether it is academic excellence, whether it is campus climate, excellence it's all about building excellence. And I think when you try to again meet people where they are and also have conversations, but also make sure people don't try to categorize and put this work in a box and the box that's bad, you know that you got to be open and open to it and everyone's never going to agree. That's the first thing you got to understand too. Everyone's never going to agree. But I am much more about changing behaviors as opposed to attitudes because attitudes are much harder to change. And that's a personal thing. You have to want to change your attitude. But in our surrounding, in our community, we need to be able to have the behaviors that allow us to include and make sure that people feel again valued and respected so that people flourish and thrive.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, this is something I've learned from watching you too, and some of my other sort of people who have shaped me in ways of my D&I leadership, which is this goes back to the long haul, right? I came into this work sort of very naive and justice-minded and maybe more of the, like, flip the tables over variety. And I've recognized that I have much more capacity to change or to see the change that I want to see. If I am patient and if I listen and I can try to find threads of commonality in places I never thought really existed, dropping the mic doesn't

really help anybody, but listening and finding where we can maybe move forward together does create that durable change you speak of. Again, I think it's just so important to go back to strategy here. One more sort of deeper layer question, an area I'm still sort of struggling with, and I'm hoping maybe you can help me here. How do you navigate the political complexity of this work? I don't want to speak for you, but I think we probably see a lot of DEI work the same way that this isn't political work, right? You're not like campaigning for anybody. This is work for all of us. But because of our current political reality, Chon, it seems to me at least that DEI work can't be fully apolitical either, right? You've navigated this role through so many different administrations in our very purple state. So what have you learned about moving the needle forward on DEI work in politically turbulent or divisive times? Tricky question.

Chon Glover

Sure, it is a tricky question. And first of all, you need to take the politics out of it and, again, focus in on the human condition as much as possible. You need to educate people, and you need to also make sure that people understand the goals of the work and why we're trying to do these kinds of things. Diversity has so many definitions, and it's multi-dimensional, and so many times, we don't think about the fact that there are different perspectives out there and all those kinds of things. And so it's difficult to sometimes deal with because people aren't willing to sit at the table and be open to listening to different viewpoints and all of that. But one of the things that I have also learned, too, is just as much as I want to laugh and talk about why it's so important to people, I have to also be respectful to listen to the opposition. So there are people who will say, I only watch CNN. I only watch NBC. I only watch certain news shows. Well, I think you got to watch both sides because you need to know what the questions are, the arguments or the viewpoints are so that when you're confronted with that, you have an answer to that question. And so I think you just have to make sure that you try to keep it as apolitical as possible, focusing on the human condition and really try to think about what are the most palatable ways to have some really generative conversations that get us to different places and know that everybody is not going to come at this from the same point.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and I think it can be done. Again, we're not going to get everybody on the same page but exposing yourself to those different sites. We don't want to live life in an echo chamber. And, of course, there are limits to that, right? You don't want to expose yourself to viewpoints that are going to contribute to your poor mental health or things like that but open up the conversation. See if you can bring all of those perspectives together, and maybe you'll get somewhere together that you thought maybe you couldn't.

Chon Glover

Well, again, know yourself.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

Sometimes if you don't have a strong sense of self, there are particular situations you don't want to place yourself in.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, yeah.

Chon Glover

And because you could ignite something and you are just trying to move forward and move the needle, and you don't want to ignite things in negative ways because they blow up. That's all you're trying to do. You're trying to really get to a true understanding of why this work is important. And again, why representation matters, why people want to be really seen and heard and valued. I shudder sometimes when I say those words because I feel like they become such buzzwords and things like that, but they're so real.

Phil Wagner

They're so real.

Chon Glover

When you walk into a classroom, and someone says, Hi, Professor Wagner, or whatever, it changes your whole disposition.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

Because even if you had up a defensive mechanism, it breaks it down because a person was truly kind.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

And the other part of it, too, is if a person that you totally disagree with is not kind, it makes it even more difficult. You don't want to pursue it.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, you feel seen. And I think that is such an understated but important action to give to others the sense that they are seen, that they are valued. One of the things I love that we do here in the Mason Business School is we take just some welcome message and we translate it into every single one of the known spoken languages of our students so that when they walk in Miller Hall on the first day of classes, they're greeted in their own native language. Hey,

welcome. You belong here. We're glad you're here. Just those small steps, I think, really showcase. Look, this is a space for you. You belong here. And that's such an important foundation to DEI work.

Chon Glover

Absolutely. Inclusion that's truly being inclusive.

Phil Wagner

So one final question for you. It's kind of two parts here, right? So, someone who is on the front lines of this work and has been so for a long time, I should say, number one, what keeps you up at night? And two, what gives you hope for a better tomorrow?

Chon Glover

What keeps me up at night? Gosh, it changes every night, Phil. In this work, you always have to be, in my opinion, you have to be proactive. You've got to think ahead of the game and know what you might have to anticipate. So for me, I always try to think about what's going on in the world. And because William & Mary is a microcosm of society, how is that going to impact us? Because it's not going to impact us just because it's happening. It's going to impact the people who are here, the curriculum here, it's going to impact all of us. So I try to be a problem solver and really think about, if this were to happen, how can we address it on the front end and not be reactive? When you are reactive, it really just does not help the case because there are emotions involved and all of that. So when I try to turn the mind off and just rest and relax, I try not to think about these things. But before I turn it off, before I try to get into that rem area of sleeping. I am thinking of what are the things I need to do tomorrow, but then what are the things that I need to anticipate and be willing to be a thought partner with my colleagues around campus, too? Because I can't do everything.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Chon Glover

DEI, DEIB, JEDI is not done in a vacuum. It takes more than just me. And I want to make sure I say this too. Yes, I've been here 25 years. Yes, I think I've seen some change and all of those kinds of things, and I'm very proud of it. But I am not going to tell you that it was all me. There's no way. I have had so many partners who are willing to invest in and go with me to do this work, and it takes everyone. It can't just be one person to do it.

Phil Wagner

So that hope for a better tomorrow, what is it? What gets you out?

Chon Glover

Again, I go back, to I think so much of what those who came before me went through. And if you know history, you'll know that within the African American community, there were songs

that people would sing that would be signs of hope, and that would get them through. Music is very important to me. And I do believe that a better day is coming. I really do. And I know that it will not be easy, but I try to have faith and persevere.

Phil Wagner

Love it. Chon, I think the world of you. You've been so impactful to my own DEI leadership journey here. Thank you for all that you've done for our campus, for DEI, and higher ed, for DEI in the state of Virginia. And thanks for making time to come on our podcast today. It's always a pleasure to speak with you, but particularly here today.

Chon Glover

Thank you. And you're one of those partners that I talked about that has joined me in this journey as we try to do what we can to make William & Mary a better place.

Phil Wagner

Always moving forward.

Chon Glover

That's right. Thank you for the opportunity, 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 podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts, and reach out because we're always looking for new friends. And if you'd like to learn more about any of our programs or initiatives here in the business school at William & Mary, be sure to visit us at mason.wm.edu. Until next time.