EPISODE 55: CAROL PARKER WALSH – NORMALIZE MESSY: DOING THE REAL WORK

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.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. I'm thrilled today to welcome to the show Dr. Carol Parker Walsh, an award-winning executive coach, keynote speaker, and author. As founder of Carol Parker Walsh Consulting, Carol helps organizations unlock innovation by providing coaching, providing training, and foresight strategy. She leverages her extensive experience as an attorney, professor, and social scientist to help clients amplify excellence. Carol's a published Forbes and HBR contributor, a TEDx speaker, and a three-time Amazon bestselling author. Her firm was named the 2021 Impact Company of the Year. We were talking before pressing record. She's got some old ties to Williamsburg and the William & Mary community. So, I trust that we're going to have a great conversation in the next few minutes ahead. Dr. Parker Walsh, it is an honor to welcome you to our podcast. Thanks for making time to meet with us. Tell our listeners just a little bit more about who you are and what you do.

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah. Well, thank you. It is an honor to be here. I love having these type of conversations. My career has been a long one. When people look at it, they think that I've kind of made different pivots and shifts, but there's always been an underlying thread that has guided the work that I do. I started my career as a labor and employment attorney and did that for ten years and did some employment discrimination litigation and then transitioned into a stint as a directing in HR, kind of creating an HR department for a small transportation company, actually in Atlanta, which was a lot of fun, then moved into coming into organizations. The thing about that didn't jive with me about the legal work that I was doing was that I felt like, what if I went inside of organizations and prevented them from being sued and helping them to create places that didn't require a lot of the issues that I saw on the back end of a lot of those lawsuits that I was involved with. So I went in, became an organizational consultant internally when I moved out here to the Pacific Northwest and just really coaching leaders, developing leadership

development programs, creating trainings, a lot of the stuff that I do now, but doing it in-house, and I just really enjoyed the work. Initially it was going in teaching leaders like, don't do this so you don't get sued, but then as I went back and got my own doctorate and start really understanding human development and organizational systems, it was really about how to think differently, about how you show up in the space and how do you create spaces where people feel valued like they belong and that they can do their absolute best work. And I was doing that. Then I moved into academia, where I started teaching a lot of this work, structural inequity and leadership and things of that nature. Became an associate dean. And then, right around the precipice of my 50th birthday, I decided I really wanted to go back and work with leaders in organizations and organizations. And so I started my own practice and have been doing that ever since. And it was an interesting time because I remember when I did that, my children, my son was about to go to college, and my daughter was in high school, and both of them were like, are we going to be poor? Like, why are you doing what was happening? Why are you leaving this work? Which I thought was interesting. But what I love now, as they're in their 20s, they love the work that I do, and they're so excited and proud and feel even empowered in terms of what's possible for them and their life and career by watching the steps that I've taken. So, yeah, it's been a fun journey, but that fundamentally has been the through thread, through all of the work that I've ever done, even from practicing to now, is, how can I help organizations create spaces where people can thrive and flourish? I mean, we spend, what's the number? Ninety thousand hours working, or it's probably more than that, but it should be enjoyable. It shouldn't be something that's a drudgery and a misery. And so that's what I feel like my contribution to this work is.

Phil Wagner
It's so funny to hear you sort of muse that if you look at my career, it may look like it doesn't make a lot of sense. And I think when I look over your experience, I think just the opposite. When you follow sort of the thread of DEI theory or the canon, you need a little legal background. You need a little education background. You need to have a foot in the door within organizations. I mean, you sort of, like, live the theoretical legacy that we teach in our diversity in the workplace course. And so I am looking forward over the next few minutes to unpacking your observations. Someone who has had a multi-decade career in know a lot has cropped up in recent years. We talk a lot about this, the post-George Floyd moment. There were DEI consultants everywhere. What really makes this legitimate work beyond a social moment but something that actually can shake organizations at their core and make them operate better. We're going to start by talking about talent pipelines because I know a lot of your work explores access into organizations, which is the key to organizational equity issues. So, you talk about talent pipelines in your work, and I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit more about why talent pipelines specifically may be related to women and women's leadership in complex, hybrid environments. Such a challenging problem for organizations to fix. What is the underlying issue here?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, well, to your point, what has happened since COVID is that a lot of women who have been trying to function in a very kind of patriarchal system, in a very militaristic organizational systems, just were like, we're done. And so we saw this massive exodus of women, right? There were like one in four women were leaving the workplace because for a variety of reasons. And actually a recent study came out earlier this year that said about 27% of women are going to leave the workplace even this year. So it's not ending. And what has happened is that organizations haven't taken the time to create those kind of pipeline opportunities, those kind of legacy-building opportunities to allow women to promote, but also for women to sustain within the organization. And so when you start seeing this trickle effect of leaders stepping out of CEO positions, stepping out of leadership positions, walking away from what seems to be lucrative positions, that has a trickle effect in the organization, and where one goes, others follow. And so what we're seeing is that if you don't have a good, solid leadership of females or diverse leaders at the upper echelon of the organization, you're going to have a hard time retaining and building that pipeline to the next level because there's not the opportunity for people to see themselves represented, which makes a huge difference. Studies have shown us that when people see themselves in leadership positions, they see it as a possibility for those individuals to rise at that level. And because we're missing that kind of legacy leadership at the top, that information is not getting passed down for successful section planning and for the ability to really position the next generation of leaders with those future-ready capabilities that they need to step into those leadership roles. And so when the pipeline is broken, you know, McKinsey calls it a broken run. When the pipeline is broken, then you don't have an opportunity for that smooth transition for the next generation to step into those legacy leadership positions.

Phil Wagner

But it's not just a flip switch, right? I mean, there has like a check engine light, so to speak, where something is like, hey, buddy, check this out before this comes and wrecks you. And, of course, we find ourselves in that position now. But how can leaders or the organizations they lead recognize this is a problem before it becomes too late?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, that's a great question. And one of the key ways to recognize that is, are you starting to see your females leaving the organization? Are you struggling with retention? Are you struggling with recruitment? And what does your advancement systems look like within your organization? And if you don't see a lot of women in those areas, then that is a check engine light. When you start seeing people walk away, people not going for advancement positions, or you're struggling actually just keeping and getting them in the door, because people see that, right when they're going to step into an organization, or they're interviewing or thinking about moving into an organization, they're going to look to see whether or not someone is actually available there. So a check engine light, is that in the pool of candidates, how many women are you seeing in the pool of those getting promoted, how many women are you seeing? And as you look at your attrition rates, when you look at the numbers, how many of those are women

who are actually walking out the door? Right. So those are some check engine light moments that organizations need to pay attention to in order to make sure that they're responding to the issue and making a change that should happen.

Phil Wagner

In your work, do you find that women are leaving, like, I'm thinking, particularly corporate America? Because that's why I'm most familiar with what the data saying, like, black women are leaving corporate America in droves. Women are leaving corporate America in droves. Is this because corporate America isn't representative of enough of their needs, just not flexible enough for their needs? Or it's just better to have a side hustle or become an entrepreneur? Is it better for women to leave, or is this really hurting women, too?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, that's a really good question. And it's interesting, since COVID, we've seen a huge influx of women actually leaving and starting organizations, kind of taking their marbles and playing with them elsewhere. The problem is that organizations aren't doing enough to create career advancement opportunities for women that are. And not just like they have HR. They put out job descriptions and things of that nature, but they aren't creating. And I really hate to use this word. It's not cultural competence, but it really is something that reflects and appreciates the specific needs of women of color, particularly in the organization. How are they addressing bias? How are they addressing microaggressions? How are they addressing the needs for flexibility? How are they talking about coming rising into an upper echelon of an organization when you're either one or a few or just the only one in that particular kind of leadership cadre that's there? How are you looking at intersectionality? How are you looking at looking at developing leaders through the lens of both gender and race or gender, race and class or gender, race, and age, right? All of these. Too often, we want to look at organizations, or we want to look at populations as this monolithic group that, if we just do this for one, that it applies equally to others. But what they're not doing is creating these nuanced ways of supporting women of color in particular, or just women generally, just across the board in order to support them in the ways that they need to be supported. So they become really tone-deaf around certain issues because they're treating women as one collective and not seeing that there's nuances that they need to address, even for the LGBTQIA population. What about this disability or ableism issues? Right? So there's so many different things that they should address. Now, from an organizational perspective, they would think, well, I mean, how minutiae do we need to get into the weeds in order to support all of the differences that are there? But that's why you need inclusive leadership, right? That's why you need people in the upper echelon that can pay attention to those nuances so that when you are creating programs, or you're creating some levels of support, you're doing it through the lens of the needs of the individuals. There was a book written years ago by R. Roosevelt Thompson, I think is his name or Thomas. And he talked about the story of a giraffe and an elephant. That sticks to me to this day. I don't know if you may have heard the story, but he's talking about the whole point of this. How do you create a space where people can feel like they can belong, grow, and flourish? And the story goes that a giraffe, I'll just paraphrase it, but a giraffe builds this

fabulous house. It won the Giraffe of the Year award. All the giraffes talked about it was in the giraffe magazine, and one of his friends was walking down the street, who was an elephant, and he said, oh, my friend, the elephant is here. I would love to invite him into my home. Well, of course, the elephant could barely even get to the doors because the doors weren't built to fit into, you know, to fit an elephant. But the giraffe said, well, unluckily, we made the doors flexible, so there was a way for the elephant to get in, but as soon as he got in, he tried to go down the stairs, and he was breaking the stairs, and then when he tried to turn around, he was breaking different things in the house. And the giraffe's first thought was, maybe we should send you to ballet class and so you're lighter on your feet, or maybe we should help you lose weight so that you can fit into this house because I really want you to fit here. And the elephant's comment was, yeah, but I don't think a house built for giraffe is really going to fit an elephant. And that is the same kind of construct that's happening within our organization, is that they're built for a monolithic group, but they're not making room for all the diversity that's in there. And when you have inclusive leadership, when you bring other people to the table, that can give you different ideas. So instead of having just giraffes build the house, if you have inclusive leadership, you have an elephant or a rhinoceros or a porcupine or a lion or whoever at the table helping to build the house. To think of the things that the giraffe probably in and of themselves couldn't think about, not in a mean-spirited way, but just, it's not their worldview, it's not their lived experience. And that's part of the issue. Right. And that's what keeps the pipeline broken and the inability for organizations to really be able to get that dearth of leadership that they need from a diverse population. Studies show, over and over again, the impact on revenue, right? When you have women in leadership, the impact on growth and innovation when you have diverse leaders. So the evidence is there, but there's just a disconnect in terms of how do we really do it.

Phil Wagner
I love that story, and I'm shocked I've never heard that before. What a wonderfully simplistic way to keep the main thing. The main thing, and here's the thing. If the giraffe builds an adaptable house for all, yes, he's going to have nice tall ceilings in that giraffe condo, but he's going to have a nice open floor plan to accommodate too who wins. Yes, the elephant, but the giraffe, too. And I think so often there's so many simple examples: when you create a truly agile work environment that is right for all people to contribute equitably, nobody's sacrificing anything. We all tend to gain so much more. I have a dear colleague who often talks about the buttons that open the doors automatically. We think so automatically for people who live life in a wheelchair and certainly for adaptive physical needs. But the mother who's carrying a child or father who's carrying the child or somebody who's carrying grocery bags, that button helps everybody. And so I think you make a great point here as well. All right, so let's help organizations then. How can companies go about solving this problem? What do they do? It's a well-known phenomenon. I mean, there's data abundant. I mean, we know the data. It's almost like you don't even think about it anymore. What do we do to actually fix the issue? What does your work say?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, so one of the things that I found to be successful, that even we've been able to do, is to really go in, and it sounds so simplistic, but it's really connecting to the humanity of the individuals within the organization. Right? And I know it sounds simple, and to some people, it sounds maybe like woo woo, but that's really what it is because so often when we come in to try to talk about diversity, we start the conversation about differences and respecting differences and acknowledging differences. Right? And that really creates to a lot of individuals a zero sum game that, well. If you're different and I'm different, then who's going to win, right? It creates almost this tug-of-war system as opposed to what we just talked about; it's a win-win all along the way. So what we do is go in and we try to start at the basis of humanity, of grace, of understanding, of open communication, of creating safety for there to be trust and dialogue and open communication. And when you can start with that by bringing people down to a level where we are all in it together, that we all are going to benefit from it, that there's something in it for everyone, and that we can have real dialog and real conversations, then we can raise the bar and start having more difficult conversations because we created a sense of safety and trust. That means that if I say something, I know there's going to be grace and understanding. I'm not going to be accused of something, I'm not going to be told something about myself that's going to maybe trigger something within me, but I can actually sit down and dialog in a way so I can actually hear the other person to begin creating the solutions within the organization that works, that's foundationally and then one of the best things that, the other thing that we really do is creating what I call, like, mastermind groups, where we bringing people of diverse backgrounds together in a collective community to be able to support each other. Because what also tends to happen, particularly in large organizations, is that they're isolated. So there may be a woman leader in this department, but way over in the other building, there's probably another leader over here. And neither the two shall meet or see each other because their work doesn't overlap or their job responsibilities don't overlap. So by, creating communities of support it allows individuals to feel fueled and empowered because they know they're not isolated and they're not alone. And then the other thing, the other level of this is, actually, most people say, oh, mentorship and sponsorship. Right. That's what we need to do more of. But what we've seen, what the data has shown us, is that most mentorship and sponsorship programs are unorganized or volunteer basis. And it's just on the whim of whoever can step up and say, hey, I'll do it, but not even knowing how to do it successfully. And sponsorship is about you putting my name and my expertise in rooms that I cannot be in. And so they need to be allies and advocates, as opposed to just someone who is sitting over them, giving them well-meaning advice. So when you create these programs where you're supporting people of color, you also need to create sponsorship programs where you're teaching people how to be sponsors and to do it successfully so that they're actually supporting people in the ways that they need to be supported and not giving them advice in the ways that they think are necessary or needed. So it's like a layered approach that you do this. And we found that when you come in and create the foundation, you can build out the rest of the programs if you do them correctly.

Phil Wagner

You got me jumping out of my seat on this side of the webcam because there's so many themes that I want to unpack. Obviously, organizations need some help. So, in a second, I want to ask you where they go to get that help. Obviously you. But where do they start? It seems like you're talking about an investment, so I want to talk about that, but I want to tee up that help question because this is confusing work. Right?

Carol Parker Walsh

It's messy.

Phil Wagner

It's messy. Right. So how you'd be well intended, you say, okay, well, this female employee and this female employee, and they should get together, and I should create a group. But then I also have to wonder, well, wait, if I am that female employee, do I to be the female employee? If I am the gay employee, do I want to be the gay leader? If I am a black employee, do I want to be the black mid-level manager? Or do I just want to be folded into the fiber? So if I'm an organization, do I create these ergs? Do I create these support groups? Do I not, do I ignore? Ha, ha. It's a mess. So again, because it's so messy, where do organizations go to get help with this, and how do they know? Do I deal with this internally and use my resources, or do I got to get somebody from the outside, a true expert, somebody who knows this or sees this through a different lens, to come in and help me? What do you think?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, that's a great idea. So it depends for the most part. I would say finding an outside expert helps because inside people, you're never a prophet in your own land, and so you're so close to it. And inside, people have already pre-designed objectives and goals that they have to meet that are aligned to the organization, to what the organization wants them to do. So they may have their hands high if they're limited about what they can do. Also, sometimes, internally, the level of expertise that you need to do this is just not in the organization. Right. They appoint someone, or they have them, and they may know some things, but to have an outside, objective person really helps. Think of it this way: it's like the inside person was a giraffe, and why not invite an elephant, right? Because we've all been thinking about it in this way. Let's bring a different lens that maybe can expand the way that we think about it. So bringing out outside help can actually be a cost-saving factor because you're bringing specific people who have that expertise, who have done the specific work, and who can help you really create something that is going to be more effective within your organization. And it does take time. One of the first things I always talk about is let's normalize messy. Let's normalize messy, right? If you're going to remodel your kitchen, it's going to be messy. Right? Before you get that beautiful end product, they got to rip all the stuff out, and you're left to the bare bones while they rebuild it back up to something that makes sense. So you got to normalize the fact that it's going to be messy. We are messy. We're humans. We're messy. So this work, when you're moving someone into a different way of thinking and being in the world. It's going to be a little bit of a pain process to get to that other place. So you have to normalize that, and you

also have to normalize that it's going to take time. This is not an overnight proposition. This is not something that's going to happen. I get so frustrated with all these trainings because a training, the forgetting curve, you forget anything you would have learned in the next month or 2, 80 percent of it. And we're talking about behavioral change. So you need to figure out a way to bring this work in where it becomes a part of their day-to-day experience and not just a one-off thing that they go check off and then go back to business as usual. Right? And so you want to develop something that's going to be embedded into the culture and day-to-day practice of the organization. And that's going to take time, right? That's going to take at least twelve months to not 24 months for you to really implement some change because you're going to deal with a few months of resistance, a little deer in the headlights, a little what are we doing here? What is this meaning for me? A lot of fear and a lot of unknown that's going to happen around this. And so you need time for it to really be embedded into the day-to-day operations of the organization. So bringing people in from the outside, I think, can be a great strategy to partner with organizations on the inside to really create something that's going to be most beneficial and to normalize messy and to make sure that you're giving the time and space to create true behavioral shift and not just information sharing across the board.

Phil Wagner

Well, you just named the title of this podcast, which is absolutely going to be normalize messy because I think we don't talk enough about that. Right. You want to assume that because this is such a tentative, scary territory anyways, you have to have everything together to do good work. And I love your kitchen example. Absolutely not. It doesn't work that way. And if you toil in the mess, we make room to do that in every other entrepreneurial adventure and beyond. Why not here?

Carol Parker Walsh

A mentor once said to me that discomfort is the currency of dreams, which I thought was powerful. And that is true, that it is through the eye of the needle, the eye of the storm, it's the caterpillar becoming. It's through all of that that you get the other to get to the other side. Like if we all hopped and skipped to the greatness, none of us would experience pain or things of that nature. And if you're really committed to doing this work, you have to be committed to the messy.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. Do you really know victory unless you felt the struggle? I mean, I think you have to feel it. You have to feel and walk through the lows to really appreciate and understand the highs.

Carol Parker Walsh

100%.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. So here's the other thing. As somebody who's been through a kitchen remodel, you're right; it is messy. It can also be expensive. Right. It has that, like remodeling a living room or

buying a new piece of furniture or not. So, let's talk about investment, right? Because I get really tired of organizations who want a quick fix. They outsource a training; they bring in a wonderful speaker, they jazz and wow you with some great lunch and a keynote, and then wash their hands and move on. This takes money, doesn't it? So how much time and money should organizations maybe plan or think about investing to, let's say, fix this or just address it? Move the needle forward?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah. Honestly, in our experience and the work that we've done in the literature that we've looked at, we're looking anywhere from minimally twelve months to 24 months because you need time to implement and you need time to have accountability. You need time to course correct. You need time to really make it implemented into a place where it's embedded into the body of the organization. And we're looking at six figures. I mean, let's just be honest. We're looking at minimally 60-75,000, but we're definitely looking at six figures, up to $200,000. But let's translate that into the impact on the bottom line. If you invest that, which, to be honest, is not a huge amount when you're looking at organizations revenue, particularly big organization, but if this work will lower your retention so that you're not paying months and months looking for a replacement for a position and then overburdening your team while you're looking for a replacement if your innovation increases because you have a diverse and inclusive leadership that's thinking out of the box and creating strategies that allows you to move faster and keep your competitive advantage. If you are seeing retention within your organization with people staying, and that productivity and engagement increases, and not only with that, your revenue increases by 20 or 30%, which studies show it can increase up to 20 or 30%, then $100,000 is nothing as an investment to get that type of return on investment.

Phil Wagner

And I think kicking the can further down the line does nothing right. I hate problematizing this, like seeing it as a problem, because this does take an ongoing investment. But let's frame it in that way temporarily. If you address this issue here and now and you really figure out a coherent framework to do it, let's not call the issue fully settled with a capital s, but good to go so that you can focus and harness that collective energy to deal with the other challenges. Right. The rise of generative AI and how you're going to do business in a fractured society. And you can use that power or that extra space, I think, to really innovate and accelerate your organization writ large. I want to talk a little bit about good intentions and how those good intentions don't always lead to good impact because all of these initiatives always start with great intention. But usually, those intentions fall flat, particularly when organizations try to fix these problems themselves. So talk to us a little bit about where those organizations run into problems when they're trying to do it internally, do it ourselves, do the quick and dirty, wash our hands, and move on.

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, they tend to be less effective and sometimes often offensive. So we see the good intentions in the Black History Month programming, these awareness programmings. We see the good intentions with you mentioned before, having speakers come to talk about something, but then there may be tone-deaf around certain issues or populations. So, while one may be thinking it's great you have the population, that is kind of meant to address thinking, where did you find this person? Or when you are trying to create mentorship programs. I talked about before that aren't really supporting the individual but just done through the lens of the mentor, thinking that they know what's best. So they're trying to tell people what to do as opposed to creating spaces for people to do or creating ergs, but not giving them any kind of power or voice, right? Creating them as a way to kind of quiet people down and throw a bone their way by allowing them to get together, but not allowing the issues or challenges that they're wanting to have addressed organizationally being taken up at the highest level. Or when you hire someone who is supposed to be the one in charge of diversity, but you tuck them neatly under HR or some other division and not allowing them to report directly to the president of the organization or the CEO of the organization, because you know that this is a vital project and a vital initiative that you want to take up and that there needs to be conversations at the upper echelon of the organization to really shift organizational culture and to shift the system. So those are some of the things that honestly are very well-meaning, and a lot of people have tried to do, but as we've seen now that we're in 2023, they have not been effective. And it's unfortunate that some organizations that have kind of paid lip service to it, particularly since George Floyd, you know, particularly since everything that happened, there was a massive push to create diversity initiatives and to hire people to do diversity. But now we're seeing with the Supreme Court decision that just came out, people are discontinuing some of their work. They're laying off some of their DEI people within their departments. They're kind of pulling back from having these conversations or doing this work, and it's having a ripple effect in organizations to think, wow, I thought this is where we were going, and now it feels like we're taking a step back. And I think if I were to align these well-meaning intentions that were developed in some organizations, those are probably the ones who are also pulling back on these initiatives, you know, post the Supreme Court decision.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, you packed a mean punch there. There's so much to unpack. One of the things that really resonates with me, though, is the visibility of whatever their title is: chief diversity officer, the equity officer. You know, if you're listening, go find out who those people are. If you don't know who they are, your organization has one, but they're often not given the visibility. Are they in the C suite? Are they in the cabinet level? Do they actually have voice? And you really want to dig? Go ask them their budget. There's this onslaught of, like, these DEI programs are excessively funded, wasting dollars. Ask your DEI officers what their budgets are. They are abysmal. If they exist at all, most of the time, spoken all across the world. And let me tell you, from context to context, this is undervalued and under-budgeted work. So I think that point is so clear. Foster those relationships with your CDOs, your equity officers, whatever their title is, and then find out ways to support them. Let's talk about exemplars. Do you have any examples from your work? I mean, you work with some really huge companies. You've done a

lot of work over a multi-decade career. Are there any organizations who've gotten it right, or maybe even mostly right?

Carol Parker Walsh
Definitely, you know, a lot of the work that we do, when I talk about getting back in humanity, we base that in a lot of psychological safety work. You know, we look at Amy Edmondson's work and her research, and it seems to be a great starting place. You know, when we were asked to come into an organization to do some antiracist work with them. We started there, and over the course of just the first year, it's a longer engagement. But after the course of the first year, their numbers went from really not having a safe place, not having a conversation, with a lot of infighting, a lot of inability to have real conversations, that their psychological safety scores went up about 167%. And now they had these amazing conversations. In terms of antiracism, they're able to talk about not only having conversations about racism but also about pronouns and LGBTQIA equity. And they're having some real deep conversations implementing change in policies and procedures, creating a new vision statement that's really much more inclusive, where everyone feels a part of, where everyone has a voice in. But we start it from that ground basis that made a complete difference, and we're in the middle of year two now, where we've just seen exponential; that's the word I was looking for.

Phil Wagner
There you go.

Carol Parker Walsh
In terms of growth in their ability to work together. Right. And their ability to have some realness and authenticity with each other. For them to show up as themselves and not feel like they have to hide, but also connect. We've had another organization that we did work with where we were really successful in creating a mastermind, but also supporting those sponsors and helping to develop both legs of those so they can understand each other, talk to each other, support each other. That implemented a reduction in attrition by over, like, 30% because people saw that there was a commitment to them at the organization at that level, to the upcoming and emerging leaders of color, and a support for them. So, they were able to make moves and shifts in a way that not only advanced their career but also made them feel like a part of the organizational structure. So we definitely have seen success in the work that we do, which is why we're very adamant about when people come to us and asking for that type of support. These are the solutions that we bring forth because we know they work.

Phil Wagner
So what I'm gathering from this conversation, as we start to bring it to a close, is that you don't come in and do trainings that are just sort of emotional exploitation. You don't get in; try to make the people feel good so they'll walk out thinking, yay, racism is dead. You really do infrastructure work. I mean, you're working at the seams, below the surface, the tough places, the non-glamorous spaces, the places that really take some toiling. So, if I'm an organization

because those are such tough places to address, I might want to just have somebody come in and jazz my people up instead of spending time focusing on those deeper, deep-rooted issues, tell us what happens when organizations procrastinate and why there's an urgency to do this now, to get this right now.

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah, because they have the risk of losing 27% of their staff. They have a risk of losing key leaders in their organization that hold that legacy knowledge that could then give it to the next generation of leaders that are coming forward. Because if they don't do this work, they can suffer revenue loss and they can suffer, credibility loss, and lose their competitive advantage if they're not really thinking about how they can really build this infrastructure that they need to go to the next level. Right. Trainings in and of themselves, particularly with this particular work, it just doesn't work. Right. It's a Band-Aid. It's a check-the-box kind of opportunity. But if you really want to make long-term impact in your organization that's going to impact your bottom line, then you don't want to wait on this. I mean, think about it. If you are struggling with these type of issues today and do nothing about it, problems only compound upon problems. It just doesn't stay the same. It compounds and gets worse. And so over time, if you're losing 5% now, you're going to be losing 10% and then 20% and then 25%, it's going to compound upon itself. So, by not acting now, you're causing yourself. You're going to cause yourself problems in the future. But if you were to act now, you save that, and now benefits compound upon themselves as well. So, if you can turn around that 5% loss and turning it into greater retention as opposed to higher attrition, then it's going to make a big difference within your organization.

Phil Wagner

There's so much here to unpack, and I would hope that this conversation would only prompt our listeners to get a little bit more curious about who you are and what you do if they don't know you already. So the final question I have for you today is for those who want to learn more, for those who are really engaged or interested in something you said, where do they go to connect with you? How can they get in touch with you? How can they follow your work?

Carol Parker Walsh

Yeah. The first place to go is my website, carolparkerwalsh.com. Definitely put the www in front of it, or you can find me on LinkedIn. I'm very active on LinkedIn as well, and I love to share tips and share ideas, sharing some of the work that we have done, sharing some of the testimonials that we've gotten from the work that we've done out there in the world. So you can definitely get a sense of who we are, and my values and missions, and what we do there. But you can always start at our website because it's going to pull you out to all the other channels that will support the work that we do.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, and there's proof in the pudding you are somebody who has made a monumental difference. We've seen it quantitatively, obviously, qualitatively, and your LinkedIn presence is

huge. So Dr. Parker Walsh, thank you so much for taking time to share with our listeners what a great conversation. Truly respect, admire, appreciate the work that you do and always here to support in any way we can. Thanks for joining us today.

Carol Parker Walsh

Thank you for having me. This has been an amazing conversation. I love this work, and I love that people are taking it up and having a conversation around it. So, if this helps just one person, then this has been a fabulous, successful event.

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.