



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 56: KAMINI WOOD – TOSSING ASIDE SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

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 excited to welcome to the podcast today, Kamini Wood. Kamini is a certified life coach on a mission to empower high achievers. With over 20 years of experience and as a mother of high-achieving young adults, Kamini understands feeling overwhelmed by expectations. All of those realities we talk about but don't ever really talk about or explore deeply. Bandwidth, burnout, imposter syndrome. Kamini's work focuses on those very aspects of our lived experience, and she helps high performers become confident in their leadership by overcoming anxiety, boosting their resilience, setting boundaries, and being unapologetically true to ourselves. Kamini takes a direct and holistic approach to help transform those clients that are ready to invest time and effort. Kamini, we're ready to do just that. Let's take some time. Let's invest some efforts. Let's talk a little bit more about self-limiting beliefs. It's an honor to host you. Why don't we start by you telling our listeners just a little bit more about who you are and what you do?

Kamini Wood

Phil, thank you so much. That was actually an awesome introduction. I am a coach that works with individuals on helping them understand themselves better. So, really, what I focus on is moving away from pathologizing and trying to diagnose and say, this is the thing that's wrong with me, and instead, it's, can I understand myself better? Because when we have that deeper understanding of self, we actually have the opportunity to move forward. When we are stuck in those old narratives, that's what doesn't allow us to move forward. And this just comes from, as you mentioned, I am a mom of five, so a lot of what I work on definitely has been from my own learnings. Yes, I've been trained, and happy to talk about all the training that I've done, but I honestly will say that my lived experience has also made me even more, I would say, just more in tune with what my clients are going through.

Phil Wagner

So, I'm going to cut right to the chase here. A lot of your work explores what you call limiting beliefs. Why don't we go ahead and just sort of define the main thing that we're going to be exploring today? What are limiting beliefs? Are they the same as like self-doubt, the same as impostor syndrome? How do you operationalize that term?

Kamini Wood

So, limiting beliefs is a very. I want to say it's part of pop psychology at this point. Everyone talks about limiting beliefs. I call them false beliefs. And what I mean by that are those false narratives that we subconsciously live by. So a lot of those will stem from, I'm not worthy, I'm not good enough, I'm not lovable, I'm not deserving. And when we're talking about diversity, for instance, and marginalized communities, a lot of times, what ends up happening is those are the false beliefs and false narratives that are underlying what we're experiencing, right? So the subconscious has those beliefs, and then that keeps us from moving forward, which does lead into things like self-doubt. And impostor syndrome is a form of how we experience those false beliefs. Because if I don't believe I'm good enough or I don't believe I'm worthy, that's going to come out in impostor syndrome of thinking, well, this was just, my success was by fluke. I didn't actually deserve it.

Phil Wagner

I love that. And so I'm wondering then, because you kind of tee us up perfectly in our podcast, this is a learning space, and we deeply explore issues of diversity. How might those, let's call them dominant cultural narratives or maybe even just a lack of representation, how do those feed into this cycle of limiting beliefs and impostor syndrome, particularly for marginalized groups? Like why might people from underrepresented backgrounds have more critical inner voices to grapple with?

Kamini Wood

Well, especially if somebody is part of a marginalized community, right? So, look, I'm going to draw on my own experience as an Indian girl in a white community growing up. Granted, at five and six years old, I didn't have this awareness. This obviously came after the fact. But there is this underpinning of needing to belong. Like as humans, we want to belong, but if we're part of a marginalized community, we're not part of the majority. There is this constant hit that we're getting of not belonging. And so those underlying false beliefs of not being good enough or I don't belong, or I'm too different, or I'm not deserving, that's constantly getting played upon every interaction that we have. And so if you take that and you bring it into even the workplace, for instance, when you're part of a marginalized community, if you have this subconscious belief that you don't belong or you're not deserving of being there, you have to prove your worthiness. That's going to keep you constantly chasing, constantly trying to do more. Like, for instance, I was just talking to somebody about burnout, and she's saying, I'm pushing myself to this point of exhaustion, almost like, then I've earned the right to take a break. But really, what's underneath that is her needing to prove worthiness. And when you take that and extend it to marginalized communities, we're seeing it time and time again that

those individuals are the ones that are really dealing with things like burnout because they're constantly trying to prove themselves.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, I hear that. We work with students all the time. I think a lot of first-gen college students who are working so hard to prove their worth, to prove their value, to prove that they belong.

Kamini Wood

Deserve to be there right?

Phil Wagner

I deserve to be here. Yeah. Like, look at all that I'm doing to the point that they're wearing it quite literally on their body through their mental health or health decline because there are clearly consequences on the table here. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more on the false beliefs that dominant culture perpetuates about minoritized populations. Like, how do societal biases or discrimination reinforce those beliefs? As we kind of address the main thing, and we're working to broader justice. That's important because doesn't that feed into those limiting beliefs?

Kamini Wood

It does, absolutely. Because if the majority culture is kind of sees the marginalized communities as different, that's where they're operating from. So we're seeing this in corporations a lot, where, for instance, individuals who are part of marginalized communities do not have the access to sponsorship. Why? Because the majority sees them as different. They don't understand. They're not going to get what we're trying to say. So they don't have access to that sponsorship or the bias stereotypes like knowing that they're different or seeing their differences. It's the attribution bias. Right. I'm going to only stick with the people that seem like me. So therefore, we're seeing that those people who are part of the marginalized communities aren't getting access to the opportunities because people want to stick with what they know. Familiarity. Right. That bias keeps them from being able to move forward. And so when we are in those situations where biases are at play, or we are not having the access to sponsorship, that then leads into the stress on the individual. Right. Because now this person is completely stressed out because this is refeeding and really accentuating this understanding that they are different and that now they've got to. They're not worthy, or they're not deserving. And so then they put in more and more. So now we're seeing, again, we're going into that chronic stress and that chronic overload, trying to prove themselves also, that leads into the things like imposter syndrome, because if the false belief is I don't belong, then, of course, if you've even had even the slightest bit of success, you're going to think that, again, was a fluke or I didn't deserve it. Somebody's going to figure me out eventually. This is going to be taken away from me. I work with a lot of college students, and I'm seeing that even in the college age group where they think that the successes that they're having is merely by fluke and that whatever they have is something that they don't deserve. If they feel like it was just kind of given to them, they didn't do enough to earn it.

Phil Wagner

Did those feelings disproportionately impact? I feel like, anecdotally, I hear much more of that sort of happening. I think, particularly women in the workforce. I think the research would agree here, too, that when something good happens, it was like, well, right place, right time. Whereas men, white men particularly, are more inclined to see this as just sort of a logical progression or their career building sort of naturally in ways that they might expect. Does your work find that?

Kamini Wood

I would absolutely agree with that, and I'm not trying to create a big stir, but it is true that women definitely are part of that marginalized group. Right. Because it's almost like you said, it's just like, wow, I happened to be here, and I kind of got this by happenstance versus with white men, generally speaking, it's well, yeah, that makes sense. Of course, that's the natural progression.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. And speaking as a white man, I don't see it as a stir at all. I mean, I think it's a call for white men. It's a really small investment you can make to those on your staff to just acknowledge good work when it's done, to reinforce and to give positive support where it's needed, and it feels right. And I absolutely think it's a call to be more involved. And again, this is a great investment to make sure you're not burning out your employees, and you're not spinning out the best and the brightest. We're there to help build your company. So earlier, you noted that belonging was sort of key. That's a theme that's come up time and time again in some of your answers. I'm reminded, though, that one of the ways that people try to belong or feel as if they belong is to do what we might call assimilate. Right? They fold in. They code-switch. They become someone performatively that they may not be authentically, and it's not because they're a fraud. It's because they may have safety concerns. I'm thinking of, like, trans folks who may need to cover in some ways to be safe in their job. I'm thinking about folks who have shattered the glass ceiling or the black glass ceiling, who may feel like they are the only one representing a community, or maybe the first representing a community, so they feel the need to sort of cover or perform in different ways. How do you encourage your clients to think about the nuances of this conversations, to be unapologetically true to self, but also recognize that belonging is a complicated process? Sometimes, assimilation may feel necessary, particularly for safety concerns. So what do we do? How do we think about this?

Kamini Wood

You just made a really excellent point. Because there is a form of safety, I think, with marginalized communities, as I do think that there's a fear of safety that comes up routinely. And it is important to always make choices that are keeping in mind one safety. When I'm talking about being unapologetically yourself, part of it is recognizing that that doesn't mean I have to go shout it out to everybody and be in their face about it. You can also be unapologetically yourself to yourself, knowing who you are. That comes through things like setting boundaries, being really clear about your own values, being really clear about your own

needs, and then taking committed action based on that. So it doesn't necessarily mean we go shout it at the rooftop of this is who I am, and to hell with everybody else. But by the same token, it is about owning it for yourself and paying attention to when you are potentially masking yourself or pushing your own self down in deference to somebody else. Assimilation is a really important thing because that was my experience as a five-year-old going into public school where most every other child, except for maybe one other, was white. I leaned into people pleasing. I leaned into I need to fold myself in. How do I figure out how to belong? How to be part of this group? And for me, that's where my people-pleasing started, where as long as everybody was okay and happy, then it seemed like everything was okay for me. And so I had to, in my adult self, recognize where that story came from, recognizing where my people pleasing came from, and in that sense, set boundaries around how much I'm willing to do for other people, recognizing that my worth doesn't come from everybody else's being okay with me.

Phil Wagner

That's so good. I'm wondering what role does privilege play in developing strong self-belief. We're not afraid of the P-word around here. It's so funny to me that everybody on social media can be like, I'm so blessed, and there's no problem saying that. But, like, God forbid you mentioned privilege. What we simply mean is just access to resources, to capital, to support systems, to family units that are support. That's all that we're speaking of here. I want to be very clear how we contextualize that. But how does that privilege play in developing a strong self-belief? Because I'm wondering, you work with a lot of youth. For fellow parents, how do we address that for youth who don't have access to that capital, to that support system, to that family unit who is sort of feeding them and supporting them and helping them develop their self-concept? How do we grapple with that?

Kamini Wood

Yeah, that's such a great point because I do think that privilege does play a part. Even I was talking to somebody about grief in general and grief with diversity in mind, right? Where a lot of times, people of color don't have the same access to things like therapy, for instance. We were talking about it in context of bereavement and being able to take time off of work. And many of us have to work in order to continue to feed our families. And privilege. When we have the privilege to be able to take that time off, we can actually heal as we need to heal. But if we don't have that privilege, we are marginalized from it, right? We have to continue to work, and we're not able to work through the grief that we have. So it was in the context of grief, but it came up in this idea of how does diversity play a part. Because many individuals who are people of color, and I consider myself a person of color, being Indian, it is one of those things that some of us don't have access to because we don't have the same privilege. When we're talking about the youth, there are many individuals who don't have access to that. And so it's important to start speaking about these things and naming them and recognizing that when it comes to the idea of self-concept, it's not just about self-confidence and self-esteem, but it's deeper. It's about self-acceptance. Can we allow these youth to recognize that they have different parts of themselves and encourage them to honor those parts of

themselves, pay attention to what those feelings are communicating to them, and allow them to name what their needs are. When they're able to name that now, they're able to build into this idea of self-acceptance.

Phil Wagner

I love that framing, and I think self-acceptance really gets at such a deeper level. I'm a parent of a preteen and then a younger child as well. And I think we talk a lot about self-confidence, and I hate how commercial that concept has become. Right. It's the idea that if you just wear the right brands or you position your neck a certain way when you walk in the room, you'll feel good in your body. That's so flimsy. Right. So this framing of self-acceptance and other acceptance, which is what I think is also required here, I think really gets to the heart of the issue and brings it back full circle to what we're here to discuss today as well. Part of that self-acceptance is accepting what you and your work call permission to succeed. And I got to be honest with you: I have tangentially interacted with that concept in some ways in my own life, but your work really clarified a lot of that for me. So, you talk about how systems of oppression and discrimination often lead marginalized folks, particularly, to lack permission to succeed in leadership roles. Can you talk a little bit about that, and why that's so problematic, and what we can do to address it?

Kamini Wood

Well, when we have the systemized oppression, what that does is that, again, it's continuing the story. It's continuing the narrative that certain people and certain groups cannot move forward. And so as long as we all continue to buy into that narrative and aren't willing to step outside of that narrative, we're just going to continue to propagate that. It's just going to continue going. It continues to evolve and continues to live and thrive. It's like shame. If we don't talk about it, we continue to be shamed, and we continue to live in shame. Same thing. If we don't start talking about this oppression and naming it and calling it out, it's going to continue. The systematic oppression continues, and it keeps people staying stuck in that narrative, which doesn't allow them room to step outside of it.

Phil Wagner

So, who gives the permission to succeed? Is that something we give to ourselves? Is that something we deal to others? Where does that come from?

Kamini Wood

I truly believe that it starts with self. I think that the person we're going to spend the most amount of time with in this life is with ourselves. We've got to start with ourselves. We've got to give ourselves permission to succeed. And a lot of us don't realize that we're actually holding ourselves back. We're actually scared of success partially because we are influenced by these external sources. There's a little bit of fear involved. But when we give ourselves permission to succeed, we actually own the fact, hey, I am unique, I am different. I am not part of the majority. I'm my own person. And actually start celebrating from a place of self-acceptance who we are. Now we're stepping into this. And also I can succeed. And also I give myself permission

to succeed. When we own that, now we have the ability to step forward and to say, I'm going to take my spot. And that's when we start then as a group. Then, we look at the whole group. Can we start giving other people permission to succeed? That's what I was talking about with sponsorship, unequal sponsorship, like in corporations, giving people who are part of these communities the opportunity to succeed by offering them opportunities to have sponsorship to leadership roles and allowing them to step into those.

Phil Wagner

You've been very forthcoming about your own personal journey, so I'm wondering if you can share with our listeners a little bit more about what you've learned in that journey, about confronting internalized bias or stereotypes so that you can confront those self-limiting beliefs and really go out and drive change, do meaningful things like the work that you're doing. Can you share a little bit more of your story, Kamini?

Kamini Wood

Yeah. So, as I mentioned, I grew up in a predominantly white town, and so I definitely stuck out. My name is Kamini. I had darker skin. I was different. And so, for me, it all was about fitting in, belonging, figuring out how I could be accepted by my peers. And so that's why I said before, that's where people pleasing for me really kind of took hold. But beyond that, my parents were immigrants. I mean, culturally, we were different. My parents were working really hard to provide for my sister and I. So there's a part of me also that didn't want to be a burden, right? Because I did not want to cause them any more stress. And so perfectionism also took hold at that same time where it was like, I need to be perfect at these things. I cannot fail because if I do now, I'm creating more problems for my parents. These were two of the false beliefs that I was really dealing with, right? And just the limiting beliefs around that it wasn't okay to fail, for instance. Now, for me personally, it took me actually becoming a mom and starting to see my kids sort of emulate the perfectionism. Now, my kids are actually mixed, and so they have their own identities that were coming up with that because they all have Indian names, and many kids or many kids were telling them, well, you're not Indian. And my kids would come home and kind of be frustrated because they're like, but I am because of you. And so there was that dynamic happening at the same time, which kind of pushed me. It was my catalyst to kind of do that reflection of what's going on and how much of their behaviors is emulating me. And so that was my work. Was recognizing where my own internal lack of self-confidence around it's okay to be different was starting to play out in my kid's world. And it wasn't lack of self-confidence. Let me actually rephrase. It really, for me, was the lack of acceptance. I think, in my brain, it felt like lack of confidence because that's the term, as we were talking about before, that's the term that everybody talks about. They talk about esteem and they talk about confidence. For me, it was that work to recognize that it's okay, first of all, to be different. It's okay to own the fact I actually laugh at the fact that people butcher my name because now I get to use it to my advantage, where if they continue to say my name incorrectly. I'm like, clearly, we're not meant to work together. I'm teasing, but it doesn't bother me like it used to. However, for me, it was also about recognizing that the uniqueness of who I am can actually be the strength if I allow it to be. And that's what I've leaned into,

and that's the message I've given my children. And so, as a matter of fact, my middle daughter, who's applying to college right now, even wrote one of her essays around the fact that she came to really love her name. At first, it felt somewhat deflating because it was constantly butchered, very much like my name growing up. And so she felt awkward and weird in class. But then, over the course of her growing up and me having these more direct conversations with her, she realized, wow, this is actually a gift because it actually makes me who I am. There are no other individuals with the same name in the class with me. So hopefully that answered your question. But that's kind of where I ended up.

Phil Wagner

It does. And before we end this call, I'm going to need your daughter to pop on this Zoom call because belonging is one of our core values at William & Mary. So, as those college applications come, Kamini, you direct her down to Williamsburg. I kid. I kid. You know, this is almost therapeutic for me. Again, I'm a fellow parent, and parenting is so bewildering. It's the most challenging thing I've ever done in my life. So, apologize if I go into my own therapy mode here for a second. But I'm wondering how you address that and how you pour into high-achieving students, high-achieving young folks. Like, what do you do, even as a parent or as a mentor, as somebody who works with youth? I mentioned this recently, but I get so tired of the rhetoric that comes sort of, like, tongue in cheek of, like, this generation. They don't know what it's like. No, let me tell you. Yes, each generation has had their own struggles, but when you just look at the context, kids are growing up, and, my gosh, there's, like, wars and rumors of wars, and there's generative AI and social media, which has enabled bullying and connection in ways that are complicated. I mean, these kids deal with so, so much, and so they have the same struggles we did growing up and also all of these distractions. So, how do you really meaningfully take the time to pour in? So they develop healthy self-concept, so they shred those limiting beliefs and then again, can actually develop in a healthy way. Do you have any insights for a fellow parent here?

Kamini Wood

Yeah. So, honestly, the very first thing that I always say is, do your own work. Because as a parent, when we're dealing with our own limiting beliefs or those old stories and narratives that we're playing out in our children's world, it is so vitally important for each of us as parents to do our own work. I also really lean into respecting our young adults, meaning don't talk to them like they don't know what's going on. They need the same amount of respect. They need to be heard, and they need space to be able to speak about what it is that they're feeling and what it is that they're thinking. That, to me, is the key of allowing them the ability to move through this very complicated world that they live in. Yes, they have the stressors that we have, but it has been magnified by so many things, like social media. I'm working with individuals who grew up through the pandemic and went to their first year of college through the pandemic. That is no small feat. And we have to respect these young adults as young adults and talk to them with that same respect that we would want them to speak to us with. And if we can really find that place of equal respect that opens up so much in terms of being able to help them through this.

Phil Wagner

I love it. And that first point, I once heard somebody say, hurt people, hurt people. And so that point of doing your own work to make sure, no, you've done the important self reflection, professional development. You need to get yourself together so that you don't bleed out on other folks, I think is key here as well. And I love that principle of respect and just honoring the dignity. And that may be uncomfortable. You may have to have conversations that you may not feel prepared to have. And I think that goes well beyond youth as well. As we sit down and we hear and we listen authentically to the needs of historically underrepresented or minoritized folks, that can be tough if you're not ready. So again, doing that self-work is key. Let's bring this back into organizations. What best practices do you think organizations can implement to address those limiting beliefs that stem from, let's say, like workforce discrimination? How do we ensure, in the context of the world of work, we're counteracting unequal access to self-confidence?

Kamini Wood

Well, I do think that corporations need to do an evaluation of where they are in terms of what is the status and that's that doing the work. I mean, it's the equivalent of doing self-work. It's doing that real self-reflection of what is our status and how does our population, our workforce population, what is its makeup, who has access to sponsorship, having those real conversations. Because we can't make any changes unless we're aware of the status, right? It's the same concept in personal development. Can't make a change unless you bring the subconscious to the conscious until it's in our awareness. So corporations need to take that time, debt to just without judgment, sit down, and figure out where they are. But then, it is about offering ways to create opportunities for those people who are in those marginalized communities. Allow them access to potentially sponsorship, where they can be mentored by somebody so they can see somebody who might be a person of color in a leadership role. Allow them the opportunity to start seeing those things. Allow them the opportunity. Just be mentored by anybody who's willing to actually give them the space to step into a leadership position, perhaps. It is also about having direct communication with the workforce, just like I was mentioning with our teens, respecting them and having open communication, talking to your employees and allowing them to reflect back and not be afraid to hear what the answers are because, like you mentioned before, sometimes we're going to have these really uncomfortable conversations. We can only grow through those uncomfortable conversations. Uncomfortable conversations mean growth is about to happen.

Phil Wagner

Oh, I love that. And I would co-sign that 100%. We are all talking a lot about impostor syndrome, and we know that this impacts, I mean, really, everybody. It doesn't matter your background; I imagine a good chunk of us have felt this. Certainly, I have. Certainly, many of the colleagues that I brush elbows with every day have as well. How do we normalize that as a conversation? Because that's healthy collective sense-making that we all struggle. We all feel as if we are a failure waiting to happen. How do we normalize that conversation while also recognizing and creating room in that conversation to acknowledge it disproportionately

impacts marginalized group? I'm wondering how we might balance the support and representation conversations as we think about impostor syndrome. Any insights?

Kamini Wood

I do think that self-compassion plays a role. Self-compassion being kindness over judgment and also the ability to, like you were mentioning, common humanity. Right. A lot of us have dealt with this, and I think especially when you're talking to marginalized communities, having that ability to relate and saying, I hear you. I can relate to this. I myself have felt this feeling of not being good enough or not being capable. In terms of impostor syndrome, the self-doubt creeps in. But then it's also having honest conversations around what that impostor syndrome is about. Most often, it is an inner critic. It's an inner critic beating ourselves up, saying that we're not capable thing that we're setting out to do. So when we're talking to marginalized communities or marginalized individuals, especially in the workforce, it's calling that into the room. What is the inner critic saying? What is that self-doubt about? Because then, once we're calling it out, we can actually take steps to reframe it and recognize, wow, that's just the self-doubt coming into play. When have you actually maybe succeeded? Or what strengths can you call upon to step into maybe this promotion and put yourself up for that promotion?

Phil Wagner

That's so good. Kamini, this has been a wealth of information that you've shared with us. As the final question for today, I'm wondering if one of our listeners says, whoa, this resonates with me. This tugs on my heartstrings. This is like the thing that I've been looking for but haven't been able to find. Can you tell our listeners a little bit more about what they can do for further self-development, where they can find you, where and how they can support your work? Speak to our listeners who might be particularly interested in what you've laid out today.

Kamini Wood

Sure. Well, I can be found on the web at kaminiwood.com. I actually have a slew of blog posts about things like this, so definitely, in terms of self-work, that would be an option to really dive into it. I do think that there are many individuals who have blog posts and books out there about things like this, but yes, I'm at kaminiwood.com if they want to reach out to me, and also on Instagram and Facebook at [itsauthenticme](https://www.instagram.com/itsauthenticme).

Phil Wagner

Awesome. Kamini, thanks so much for your insights for the work that you do. Here's to shredding those self-limiting beliefs. Thanks for your time today. It's been a pleasure.

Kamini Wood

Thank you so much.

Phil Wagner

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