

EEP EP142 - Cynthia Owyong - Diversity and Inclusion Deliver Real Results. But Have We Made Progress?

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SPEAKERS

Cynthia Owyong, Maria Ross

Cynthia Owyong 00:01

What we're seeing in more recent years is that there's a heavier usage of data to drive strategy to understand where bias can be impacting, how we work, right, when who gets in and who doesn't. Right, and things like that. And so definitely, like needing to look at your data and understand what it's telling you where you have gaps. And that might be where you end up prioritizing is so necessary to be able to actually drive progress. But you have to pair that like it can't be its own thing. It has to be paired with empathy, with perspective taking with proximity to different perspectives, right and the curiosity to want to understand that

Maria Ross 00:51

Welcome to the empathy edge podcast the show that proves why cash flow, creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. I'm your host Maria Ross. I'm a speaker, author, mom, facilitator and empathy advocate. And here you'll meet trailblazing leaders and executives, authors and experts who embrace empathy to achieve radical success. We discuss all facets of empathy from trends and research to the future of work to how to heal societal divisions and collaborate more effectively. Our goal is to redefine success and prove that empathy isn't just good for society, it's great for business.

Maria Ross 01:35

The data show that diverse leadership teams and inclusive cultures deliver better performance and engagement. So why are so many diversity equity inclusion and belonging or D ay b initiatives stalling out, many companies ramped up initiatives pledging to improve hiring practices and they even hired C suite leaders to create cultures of inclusion in recent years. But have we made progress? My guest today, Cynthia Oh Jung shares where mistakes are being made. And whether public pledges of anti racism support and proposed changes to corporate culture have made a difference. Cynthia is the author of all our welcome how to build a real workplace culture of inclusion that delivers results, a

playbook for driving progress in D E, IB. From the perspective of those in the trenches doing the work. She's established and led de IB initiatives for 20 years as an executive at organizations across tech, media and financial services, including Robin Hood, Charles Schwab and Yahoo. In addition, Cynthia founded breaking glass forums, a boutique agency developing strategies to accelerate diverse leadership and inclusive organizations. Entrepreneur Magazine recognized Cynthia as a 100 Women of impact in 2021. We discuss what brought Cynthia to this work and how her own experiences as a Chinese American shaped her perspective. We also talk about the real world challenges of dei initiatives, which she outlines in the book, why change is hard, even with good intentions, and the backlash certain company leaders have publicly had against dei initiatives. We also explore whether the public commitments made after George Floyd's 2020 murder have really made a difference in corporate culture. Such a juicy episode, take a listen. Big Welcome to Cynthia. Oh Jung, thank you so much for joining us on the empathy edge podcast today to talk about all things, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

Cynthia Owyong 03:39

I'm so happy to be here. Thank you so much for inviting me.

Maria Ross 03:42

Well, and I've been very eager to have this conversation with you after you came on my radar through a mutual friend. And I attended one of your breaking glass forums, summits, which was amazing to hear from leaders and women of color talking about their experiences, and, you know, attending as a silent ally, to just really listen and learn. And the conversations were amazing. So well, you know, we'll definitely have a link to breaking glass forums in the shownotes. So other folks listening can check out the summits and the events that you put on. But first let's talk about you, you and I share a little bond here of being you know, brand strategists, but being called to this work of all things empathy, inclusion, belonging, all the things So just quickly, tell us your story and how you got to this work.

Cynthia Owyong 04:36

Yeah, you know, it's both a long and personal story, but I'll try to condense it as much as I can. I actually started my career in advertising, doing consumer research and brand strategy work. And I did that for about a decade and while it was like fun and exciting and great and use sort of my educational background and marketing and psychology I wasn't feeling really fulfilled through that work. And after a while, it got to be like, oh, you know, I'm just selling widgets for no real purpose in making the world a better place. And I decided it was time to kind of stepped back and reevaluate what I wanted to do with my career. And that's when I sort of reflected on the work that I felt the most engaged in and got the most sort of gratification from. And I realized it was a lot of the pro bono work that I had done. I was working on different campaigns. And so I decided I was going to go back to school, get my MBA. And you know, at the time, I thought I was going to launch a nonprofit. But in school, a couple of things happen. First, I ended up taking a diversity management course, and heard the speaker come in who had that as a job in at Toyota, actually. And I was like, Wait a second, you get paid to help people get jobs and thrive? And

Maria Ross 06:10

what does this mean? Yeah.

Cynthia Owyong 06:14

This birth, right. And that turned me on to diversity and inclusion as a career potential. And then the second thing that happened was, I have a brother who is developmentally disabled. And he had lost his job, pretty much when I was about to get out of grad school. And I was tasked with finding him a new job, which was incredibly difficult. It actually took me almost three years to do Oh, yeah. And that experience just made me it just opened my eyes and made me think you know, what, if I need to, I could do one of two things, I could either be the person knocking on people's doors, asking them for help for people like my brother, or I could be on the other side and open them. So that's what I decided to do, I decided to go into diversity and inclusion, take an HR Human Resources route to that because at the time, and keep in mind, this was 20 years ago, I'm, I've been doing this a really long time now. But back then, while the field has evolved, incredibly, not a lot of companies were doing it back then. And so it was definitely like in the Human Resources realm, and in the world of compliance. And, you know, I decided to kind of get into it from that angle, because that was really one of the few angles you could write. And, you know, now it's been 20 years, and I've hopped from, you know, tech company, to tech company to financial services to like doing my own thing. But all of it is in service to helping people no matter who they are, where they come from, be able to fulfill their own potential. Right at work. So that's my story. I love it.

Maria Ross 08:08

I love it. Definitely, as we mentioned, before, we started recording a very similar track to where I'm, I'm being pulled as well. So thank you for sharing that. Now, you wrote a book, called All are welcome how to build a real workplace culture of inclusion that delivers results. And what I love about this is there are many of us out there talking about these concepts of Compassionate Leadership, conscious leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion, no longer trying to make the moral argument for it, at least me personally, I just realized the moral argument wasn't working. And so I decided to build a business case based on results and performance. And I feel like that's as sad as that is that we have to do that sometimes. Sometimes we also have to be empathetic and meet people where they are. And if that's where they are, and that's going to help them, you know, drink the Kool Aid. You know, in the end, it benefits everybody. And so tell us a little bit about your book, why you wrote it? And how is it different from so many of the D E IB books that are out there today?

Cynthia Owyong 09:20

Great question. So I think that, you know, when you think about the world of, you know, corporate, right, And to your point, right, like you to get anything done in corporate, you have to have that business case, there has to be a reason why some incentive for people to want to engage in the work that they do. And that is very true for the IB. I mean, if moral arguments were enough, everyone would be doing right. And since everyone's not we know, we have to do more. And so one of the reasons that I wrote the book was because in the 20 years that I have been doing this work, I've encountered so many people who are really well intentioned, right? They want to do the right thing. They know they should do it, and they want to do more, but they just don't know how. Right they they're worried about offending people, they're worried about doing the wrong thing. They're worried about, you know, spinning their wheels, and, and just, they need more guidance. And so, you know, after the events of George Floyd's murder in 2020, it became like, there was an explosion of demand and interest in figuring this stuff out.

Like we know, we have to do better, right? Everyone came to that realization at that point. But how do you do it? So I wrote the book to be a playbook for employees and leaders of companies to understand what it actually takes and how to implement a plan to drive progress in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. And I think the the reason that this is a little bit different than a lot of the books out there is because it's written from the point of view of a practitioner on the inside. You know, there's a lot of consultants out there who do this work. And what's wonderful about Consultants is that they can give you that outside in perspective, they can give you best practices and expertise, but oftentimes they don't get to implement. And when you implement, you run into issues and systems and processes and budget things and like lots of problems that you have to solve to actually get to the outcome that you want. And, you know, necessarily anticipate and so this book gives you that internal perspective of trying to anticipate those things before you actually have to deal with.

Maria Ross 12:03

I love it. Well, I mean, it's like, it's like reading a book about skiing, versus getting on the slopes and going skiing, and realizing all the things you're gonna run into, right. So I, I want to just pick up a thread from there, because there was a big push after the George Floyd murder. That, you know, sadly, there have been so many murders like that the country has overlooked. And there's been different theories about that of like, well, it was during the pandemic during lockdown. And so it got a lot of focused attention. And because there was video and but there was a big push by a lot of companies and brands to say, we are really going to double down and commit to this. Do you think that's lasted? Or do you think that the appetite has waned? since then?

Cynthia Owyong 12:48

And I think that the intention is still there. And you know, in the first couple of years, you saw a lot of companies put in more resources, right, invest in hiring people to do this full time on their teams invest in black owned businesses invest in, you know, putting more capital towards racial justice initiatives and things like that. And that's progress. Right. But I would have to say that, especially right now, in this moment, with we were almost, you know, we're more than two and a half years out from that moment. And, you know, we're across a lot of industries, we're facing an economic downturn, and there's layoffs happening across so many companies, and you see leaders having to really tighten their budgets. And because of that, I think they're having to prioritize, you know, what other things inside their businesses. And that means, you know, when you've got a very small pie, right, and that pie is already starting to shrink, then a lot of initiatives in the D EIB realm are going to be under invested compared to the levels they were a few years ago.

Maria Ross 14:13

Yeah. And I've even you know, as of this recording, I know, I've read articles about the fact that even though there was so much hiring for Dei, full time practitioners in the last two years, there's also been a huge percentage of those jobs that have been cut, as companies have made those prioritization decisions. And so, you know, I'm wondering, do you think some of the things that were put in place around that time and I'm not talking about the surface things like all the social memes and all that kind of stuff, but do you think that those those big company promises, those pledges, those initiatives they were able to put in place? Do you think they've made a difference?

Cynthia Owyong 14:55

I do, I do not as much of a difference rinse as I think everyone would have liked, though, but I do think that you know, things like companies like Netflix that funnels \$100 million to black owned banks, right? Like, that's a big deal for them. That is something that is going to make a difference. You have companies like indeed, holding, you know, diverting some of their capital to support bipoc filmmakers, right? To expand more jobs in Hollywood, for people from different backgrounds, right. So like, that makes a difference. But does it move the needle necessarily, you know, the the 10%, or more that we'd all love to see in terms of representation in those industries, and, you know, across those different channels that they're touching? I don't think they necessarily are. And I don't think that that can happen, frankly, without a broad cross industry coalition that's all driving towards the same thing, as opposed to optimizing just for my company or just for my audience.

Maria Ross 16:07

Yeah, it's about creating that groundswell. So that becomes the norm, rather than the exception. You know, you're citing all these things that aren't, you know, are wonderful, but unfortunately, are the exceptions to what's happening on a day to day basis with these companies. And I'm wondering what your thoughts are about the companies that have backlash against their employees Dei, grassroots efforts, companies, like last year, coin base, and base camp where they outright don't, you know, got rid of those groups and said, This is not the place we need to get to work. We need to not be having these these quote unquote, political conversations. You know, everyone thought that that was going to be a huge pendulum swing as a backlash. Do you think that it has? Or do you think that those companies have actually been hurt by the fact that they made those decisions? And I know, you don't, you can't speak directly to what those company's performance has been. But do you think that that's becoming more common? Or do you think that that was an anomaly?

Cynthia Owyong 17:09

You know, I think that that's always been actually there's, there's always going to be like a set of companies across the spectrum of like, we really believe in this stuff. We want to champion it. We want to drive change, like maybe the Netflix's of the world or two companies that are just like, you know, what, this is all outside of us just trying to do our business. Right? We don't want to dedicate any time or energy to this posits feels irrelevant to us. And I think you know, and of course, I'm biased, right? Because I think that's a mistake. Right? That that's not acknowledging that we're all human beings. And as human beings, most of us aren't really able to compartmentalize to the extent of if, you know, I am experiencing trauma, because I saw the latest news report about somebody in the Latino next community, you know, being shot in my neighborhood, like, I'm, I'm not going to be able to operate at my best when I go to work the next day. Right, right. And I think leaders need to acknowledge that, and, and honestly, not be afraid of sort of having the conversation in this space, I think, I think leaders who, who try to paint this, as you know, it's a political conversation. And therefore, that's not something that we want to engage in, are seeing the point, I think it's you know, about having a human conversation, right? being empathetic to each other, as people who bring all of these, you know, the context that they're in with them to work like you don't just sort of leave it? Well,

Maria Ross 18:59

that's I always say that you don't park your humanity at the Office Store, when you go to work. And so if you really care about productivity and performance, then you actually should care about this. I think a lot of it is also driven by fear, because these leaders are, like you said, they think they're going to do the wrong thing. Or they fear they're going to be seen, you know, their own, their own biases, and whatever are going to be brought to light. They don't even want to go there. They don't even want to examine their own ways of thinking and their own biases that they might have. And so they don't want anybody to, and I think there is a lot of fear. And, you know, it's so interesting what you said about like, I don't think it's political. It's human because I did an interview with at the time he was CMO of Ethan Allen, Rodney Hutton, about two years ago. And he is a black, very senior executive at Ethan Allen and they made public statements after the George Floyd murders, which in hindsight, seems like Oh, of course, everybody did. They were one of the early He wants to come out and talk about it. And he said, You know, I had the conversation with the CEO. And it wasn't really a tough sell to say that we were going to do this. And we knew we were risking customers, we knew we might be risking offending people. But it was a risk we were willing to take because we didn't think it was a political issue, we felt it was a human issue. We weren't taking a political stance, we were taking a human stance. And I think the companies that get that are going to win long term, they're going to win not only with employee loyalty and performance, but customer loyalty. And so I want to pivot to that, because, you know, there is so much data out there, right? Like I've, I've found the data for my book, I know, you've found the data for your work, that diverse leadership teams and organizations deliver better performance, and on many different vectors. And also, if you look at, you know, related vectors of engagement, and loyalty and morale, right, so why do so many dei initiatives still continue to stall out for organizations?

Cynthia Owyong 21:07

You know, because it takes commitment and discipline. But you know, a lot of people can be committed, but they don't necessarily follow through with the discipline to implement. And that's where it all can fall down really easily. Because, you know, strategies are nothing without action. Right? And honestly, what a lot of the EIB work asks of us is to do things in a different way, not the way that we've always done them in the past. And we all know, like human beings, like we don't like to change, change is hard. And what we're asking people to do is change. And so you know, there's that sense of like inertia, that that prevents a lot of people from actually doing that follow through, right. So I'll give you a really good example. That happens all the time in hiring, right? We know from lots of really good scientific studies out there, that part of what hiring, what we have to do in hiring is to pull out as much bias from the process as possible, right to be able to ensure that it's, you're actually hiring the most qualified applicants, right. And yet, so often, you see people who who go through the the effort of creating a very structured and disciplined process. And then when they're actually trying to hire because of lots of various outside influences, right, maybe they're under pressure to deliver on a product deadline. And you know, that it's taking too long to interview candidates, right? Or maybe, you know, somebody came to them referred by a really good friend, so you know, they're good. And, you know, you'll find a whole host of excuses and reasons not to follow this very disciplined process. And then you'll get to the outcome of you know, I just hired somebody who looks like me. And typically, that's me being the white male, majority able bodied straight person. And so we we're not being disciplined about following our own commitments, our own processes, right, even when it when we're under pressure to do otherwise, right. That's the thing that we have to do not just across hiring, but across

how we promote how we develop products, you know, we actually do have to trade off either time, effort, or budget for equity, in a lot of cases. And that's a hard equation for a lot of people that follow.

Maria Ross 23:56

Okay, I love everything you just said, and it brings to mind another episode with a guest, Melina Palmer, who I had on a few months ago who had written a book called what your employees want, or need, but can't tell you. And it's all about, she's a student of behavioral economics and a teacher of behavioral economics. Behavioral economics is all about the way our brains actually make decisions. Economics is about like a rational process for making decisions. But behavioral economics is what really happens in the brain. And she talks a lot about the fact that the reason change is hard. And I 100% agree with her as a former change management consultant is because we've got our conscious brain and our unconscious brain. And the goal of our brain is to move as much into the unconscious brain as possible so that it doesn't have to expend itself. And the scenario you were just describing. There's so many points in that process where it requires additional labor. And just one example is like when you think about talent, pipeline, and recruiting pipeline, well, we've always gone to these schools and we've always gone to these sources to yet new candidates, wow, de IB initiatives are requiring me to think of something different, and go somewhere else and make new relationships with new schools and new recruitment agencies. And that's a lot of work. And I want to get home in time to take my kid to his baseball game, right? So it's just so interesting, because I think this is the thing we rationally know what we need to do. But when our lazy brain kicks in, it's oh, this is gonna be so much easier if I just do it the way it's always been done. And maybe next time around when I have more time, we'll do it.

Cynthia Owyong 25:34

Yes. Yes. It's always about, you know, like, what can what is going to work for me right now? Right, as opposed to seeing how all of these small short term decisions really start to add up. And if you don't have that long term goal in mind, right, and you're not making decisions that are incremental towards that long term goal, then you're going to screw yourself over what we're really trying

Maria Ross 26:04

to do. There's no nicer way to say that. Yeah. Well, I think also, you know, what I, what I'm encountering, as I get more into this work, and one at learning more, and the learning more is making me want to do more, is you become sort of seen as this activist or radical by other people sort of going through the motions. And not all of us. And I don't say this, condescendingly because I am that person, too. I'm just on my journey, right? Not all of us are built to be activists. And not all of us are built to just be willing to fight the fights to make change happen, some of us are just trying to go along to get along. And so it's even a struggle, like I have found where I find I'm having conversations with people, and some of them get it. And they're the ones that light me up and excite me and motivate me and inspire me to want to do more work. And then you have these other conversations where people just think you're crazy. They're just like, why would you make things so hard for yourself? Or, you know, well, that's great, but that's somebody else's issue, or, you know, I'm thinking of like, my son's school, for example, like, we're all fine, we have a diverse, diverse student body, and everything's fine. Like, we don't have to do more, there's no problem that needs to be solved. And so it's even hard when you're in the position of, of wanting to make the change, when you're surrounded by people who I don't know, if they don't see the depth of it, of the issue. Or if they're not as moved by it, or like I said, they just are

trying to like live their lives and make themselves as comfortable as possible. And so that's a friction there, I think for a lot of people. And I'm wondering if you've seen that in your work, where I know, I'm asking you a row question here. But, you know, have you seen your relationships change with the colleagues or the friends that you surround yourself with? Because of the work that you're doing? Has that changed the dynamic of the way that you interact with people before? You know, when you are in your brand strategy world? I know, it's a very personal question, but I'm just a you don't have to name names, but I'm just curious if that has been part of your journey.

Cynthia Owyong 28:06

Most definitely. Thank God. You know, and when I was in my brand, marketing roles, this, this was not a word I thought about internally, like in the teams that I was working within, right. It was definitely something that I remember thinking about from an audience perspective, right? Because you have to I mean, in marketing, you have empathy is the key. Yeah, exactly. Understand your audience know, what they want, where they are, and how to reach them. Right. That's the key. And so I really sort of took that more into like, the employee context by going this going the HR route, but you know, once I made that, that shift into this doing the work this way, then you really start to notice, like, who cares about it? And who does it? Right? Because you see who's what leaders are actually taking action? Who's a silent in the room when you talk about this as a topic? And who really engages with you? And I definitely recognize, again, that you know, every, you're gonna meet people across the entire spectrum. And, you know, they, I respect people's choices, and I respect their beliefs in Nigeria, but I expect the same respect in return. Yeah, right. Yeah. And so if you're not going to be an activist, that is your choice, and that is okay. Right. But don't stand in the way of progress. At the very least,

Maria Ross 29:52

I love it. I love it. And I'm, I'm curious you know, if you identify as Asian American, do you identify as Korean American or Japanese American, I'm so sorry. I'm not sure what background you are. But I'm wondering if that if that influenced your perspective on this work? I'm thinking that it probably did.

Cynthia Owyong 30:11

Yes, yes, you're right on. And please never apologize for asking the question.

Maria Ross 30:17

I probably should have asked you before how you identify, but see, we're learning. We're all learning. Yes. We're

Cynthia Owyong 30:22

all learning, I actually identify as Chinese American, maybe American, from China, southern China. I'm a first generation born in America. Yeah. And that really does inform a lot of the work that I do and why another big reason why I ended up in diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, or because growing up in, you know, my parents have very traditional Chinese cultural values. And a lot of American us values run counter to what my parents were trying to teach me. And so I've always felt like I've been navigating this line of one foot two worlds. Yeah. And never really feeling like I fit in either. And it didn't help when, you know, I grew up in San Francisco, and I grew up in a neighborhood that was primarily black people.

And so I identify really strongly with the black community because of that. But, you know, when, when I was probably in, when I hit high school, I started to realize that I wasn't one of them.

Maria Ross 31:33

And then you're like, Where do I belong? Yes, yeah. Because you're like, I'm not quite I mean, I not as close to I'm the granddaughter of immigrants from Italy. But I always felt that push pull of like the Old World and the New World, because my parents were a lot older when they had me. So they were the first generation but from like, the 1930s, right. And so there was always that, like, I'm a little bit different from every group that I'm trying to identify with. I'm not 100% Italian. I'm not even 100%, like, first generation immigrant. But I'm not people don't see me as American, they see me as ethnic, you know. And so it's very hard. And then we're recreating those environments in a workplace, where people are expected to perform at their best. Yes. So it's the same dynamic as when you're seven year old and you don't know who you're supposed to be. And then now you layer that in with now there's expectations on your performance.

Cynthia Owyong 32:29

That's right. And there's power differentials, yes, that you have to navigate as well. So, you know, I think you know, who I am that background, that culture that I come from, it really has informed a lot of why I do this work, but also how I approach it, because I recognize that, that there are, you know, you can't always be the person marching in the streets and pounding on the table. And if you look back on Asian American history, particularly Chinese American history, and you know, back to the days of the the Chinese Exclusion Act that limited the number of immigrants that could come to the US and the racism that we faced, right, and back then and still do, because of COVID. You start you understand that, you know, a lot of our activism back then was through the legal court system, right, where we, we work to change laws that prevented that created exclusion, right, than an inclusion. And so there's just there's so many different ways to tackle it. I think there are all needed frame. We need to have people working at all different levels to be able to drive change in in all different sectors. Right? This isn't something that I don't think anybody can expect just corporate America to lead the charge on even though

Maria Ross 33:52

no, because it's a societal challenge that we face as well, as we've seen the last few years. I mean, we're, you know, some days, it feels like we're getting we're going backwards. And it's scary. And it's figuring out, like, I think you said it really well, you can't kind of fight this battle on one front, we sort of got to have a multi pronged approach to dealing with it. And that's like, for me with with the empathy work it. I liked the data, I liked being able to show the data and to make a business case for it. And that's what I'm excited about. For Dei. And you know, I mentioned this to someone I interviewed recently. I don't really care how people get to it as long as they get to it, whatever, helps persuade because I think once they see, they can't unsee so even if they're, you know, I've always talked about empathy, for example of like, if you're a company and you're trying to act and create an empathetic culture because it'll give you good PR. Great. You'll be transformed from the inside out, because you will actually be in the room with people you never would have been in the room with, except for the fact that you were kind of going at it for selfish motives. And I feel like maybe this is kind of controversial. I know it was in terms of how people reacted to my TEDx talk about it, saying that it was like, Oh, you're just convincing leaders to be more horrible by being fake. And it's like, no, it's not about being fake. It's

about actually being empathetic to meeting people wherever they are. And if what they need to feel safe enough to embark on this journey is data and research and KPIs. And that's like, we've got that for you. So it's kind of nice. And I feel like your work is very similar,

Cynthia Owyong 35:40

very similar. And, you know, I love what you're talking about from the empathy and data perspective. Because, you know, I think that's a lot of what we're the D Id work has actually evolved to where it used to be a lot of people just saw it as like a warm, fuzzy morally right thing to do. You know, we what we're seeing in more recent years is that there's a heavier usage of data, to drive strategy to understand where bias can be impacting how we, how we work, right, and who gets in and who doesn't, right, and things like that. And so definitely, like needing to look at your data and understand what it's telling you where you have gaps. And that might be where you end up prioritizing is so necessary to be able to actually drive progress. But you have to pair that, like it can't be its own thing. It has to be paired with empathy, with perspective taking with proximity to different perspectives, right, and the curiosity to want to understand that, yes, though, that is going to be the key to being able to open people's eyes and their lenses up. So that you know what, maybe people's experiences are different from why.

Maria Ross 37:04

And they're not better or worse. They're just different. They're just different, just a different approach. And

Cynthia Owyong 37:09

they're just as valid. Yes. Right. And so I should probably think about, like, how do I actually honor that perspective in the way that I would want my own perspective honored by other people?

Maria Ross 37:25

So as we wrap up today, Cynthia, I would love to leave on Well, hopefully a hopeful note. But what do you think will be the most important issue for the future of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging initiatives? I

Cynthia Owyong 37:41

think that getting to equity is the future. Right? I think we've gone through the diversity piece around representation we were we've really focused in more recent years around inclusion and belonging,

Maria Ross 37:55

if you want it, you want to keep those people. So just hiring them is not enough and hiring them into an environment where they don't feel safe or seen or valued, is not going to do anyone any good. Right.

Cynthia Owyong 38:06

Exactly, exactly. And so I think the next sort of piece to that is, is how do you actually do all of that with equity as the outcome? Right. And I think that, you know, when, when we think about sort of the future of work today, especially in the wake of COVID, where where everyone had to work remotely. And you know, now you're experiencing a lot of companies trying to bring people back into the office, and what does that mean? And if I have a hybrid work, force, kind of plan, how do I maintain equity across, you

know, people who are in the office versus people who are not? Right, you know, and I think that that is a really hard challenge for for companies. And is, you know, you see some companies, companies like Dropbox, actually tackling that in a really different way, just reimagining how they work, and all the work processes and all the tools that they use, and redefining their policies, so that people can have a more equitable experience no matter where they are. Yeah, right. Yeah. And then you see other companies that are kind of going backwards, like, you know, the Goldman Sachs of the world. Just like everybody just needs to be in the office.

Maria Ross 39:25

The Twitter's of the world. Yeah. Yeah, well, and also, you know, the hybrid work environments forced on us by the pandemic actually benefited many groups of people in different ways, people that were taking care of elderly parents, people that were introverts people that were neurodiverse and couldn't concentrate in a large chaotic office. And so that's also that part of diversity, equity and inclusion, which is these these unseen things that people are dealing with, and creating an environment Again, where those people can do their best work and thrive is really the ultimate goal for everybody, like those people want to perform just as much as their employers want them to perform.

Cynthia Owyong 40:10

That's exactly right. And we have evidence to that says all of that, right and supports all of that, that, you know, when people move to the more remote work model, more people with disabilities were employed, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities went down. And now we're going back, we can see it rising again. Right. So it's like people, like you know what it takes? Right, right. I've already done it. Right.

Maria Ross 40:39

So what else I know? Well, like, I think it goes back to what we were saying is like, change is hard. And some people were making change, because they thought it was temporary. And that was the only reason they were resilient. You know, we talked a lot about resilience in the last few years. But they weren't really resilient, they were just waiting to bounce back. In terms of the way they used to do things, that they were just biding their time. Cynthia, this has been such a great conversation, and I'm gonna put links to your book, obviously, just for folks, again, it's all our welcome how to build a real workplace culture of inclusion that delivers results available on all the places that you get books, and I will have all the links in the show notes. I'm also gonna put links to some of the episodes that I referenced today in our talk. But this has just been such a joy to connect with you and the work that you do. And I feel like I've made a new friend today. So thank you, for folks on the go, even though again, all your links will be in the show notes, where's the best place they can stay in touch with you or find out more about your work?

Cynthia Owyong 41:41

They can definitely connect with me on LinkedIn. So look for that. I'm also still on Twitter for the time being at Cindy. Oh, Yang,

Maria Ross 41:51

as of this recording, you are still on Twitter. Me too.

Cynthia Owyong 41:55

And I do these weekly jams, which are audio snippets are amazing.

Maria Ross 42:01

Your weekly jams are awesome. Thank you. Do you only promote those through LinkedIn? Or are they promoted and your other social channels as well

Cynthia Owyong 42:08

in Facebook and Twitter as well? Awesome.

Maria Ross 42:12

Thank you so much for your time today.

Cynthia Owyong 42:14

Thank you so much for having me. It's been a wonderful conversation. I am I've been my cup has been filled today.

Maria Ross 42:22

Wonderful. And thank you everyone for listening to another episode of the empathy edge podcast. As always, please share it with a client or a colleague or a friend. And until next time with our next wonderful guest. Please always remember that kashflow creativity and compassion are not mutually exclusive. Take care and be kind.

Maria Ross 42:48

For more on how to achieve radical success through empathy, visit the [empathy edge.com](https://empathyedge.com). There you can listen to past episodes, access show notes and free resources. Book me for a Keynote or workshop and sign up for our email list to get new episodes insights, news and events. Please follow me on Instagram at Red slice Maria. Never forget empathy is your superpower. Use it to make your work and the world a better place.