

Episode 39: "It's the Last Word...for Now" on Leadership, Legacy, and Inclusion with Angela Winfield

Released on April 30, 2021

[00:00:00.51] ANTHONY SIS: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees.

[00:00:10.18] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:11.89] Welcome to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. On today's show we have a conversation with Angela Winfield, Associate Vice President for Inclusion and Workforce Diversity at Cornell. We talk about leadership and what does it mean to leave a legacy and also lead with inclusive behaviors. We also reflect on her time here at Cornell as she transitions into a new and exciting role. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:41.70] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:43.02] ANTHONY SIS: And you are listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:01:00.17] Angela, thank you for being here on this show today. Great to have you back on the series. You are our second, second timer now after Jeremy Stewart, who we interviewed twice on the show, so really great to have you back. Before we get into our conversation today, I want to do something that, Angela, I know you do with us and our team, which is a temperature check. And so before we start our conversation, let's just do a temperature check and Angela, why don't you kick us off in terms of where you're at.

[00:01:30.62] ANGELA WINFIELD: Yeah, so the way we do it is on a scale of 1 to 10 where are we today. And where am I today, knowing that there's no judgment here, right. You're not going to judge me if I'm at a 1 or a 10.

[00:01:39.75] ANTHONY SIS: No judging.

[00:01:40.76] ANGELA WINFIELD: And I'm entitled to be anywhere on that scale. I think today, I'm probably, let's say an eight. But it's a kind of a wobbling between a seven and a nine, eight. That's kind of where I am. And I'm sure we'll get into it.

[00:01:57.53] You know, it's my last full working week where I'm full in with the position. So I'm trying to wrap up a number of different projects. Still got a lot of stuff going, but also looking ahead and excited about that. So yeah, about an eight I'd say.

[00:02:14.15] ANTHONY SIS: Awesome. Toral, how about you?

[00:02:16.04] TORAL PATEL: I am going to say, same thing, again, no judgment, I just have a lot on my plate. And as Angela said, it's her last full working week, so that has added to my number. So I'm going to say I'm probably at a solid five. I'm feeling some of

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the stress, but looking forward to some of the opportunities but there's a lot going on right now. So probably a solid five for me. Anthony, how about you?

[00:02:39.20] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, so I will say I'm definitely at a solid seven. You would think that with everything that's going on right now and all of the projects on all of our plates that I would be a little bit more overwhelmed or have a lower number. But I actually feel like I have a solid grasp on things right now, which I haven't felt in a while. So I will firmly plant myself at a seven today.

[00:02:58.74] So we are all kind of in terms of the numbers, we're in very different numbers. And so I feel like this conversation around leadership and what does this look like in terms of legacy, in terms of transitions, right. I feel like it's a very timely conversation.

[00:03:14.30] And I just kind of want to kick us off with just acknowledging also too just that there are a number of things, especially when we're talking about DEI at work, right, there are a number of conversations that are happening around how do we take into account things that happen outside of work in work or in a work space, whether that's remote, whether that's in person, because there are a number of things outside of work that are definitely affecting people and how they show up, in terms of their productivity, in terms of their sense of belonging.

[00:03:41.21] And so I feel like a good place for us to really start this conversation is how are you all, how are we individually working through and accounting for the things that are happening outside of work with our workload and the things that we have to do, the things that we have to get done at this moment. So I'll say, I'll kick us off, by really just saying that it is a lot. And it would be remiss for me to not say that I don't think about those things, especially with the work that I do in terms of trainings, in terms of teaching people how to navigate and have these conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

[00:04:17.61] What are the things that I've been doing to really help guide people is to not think of DEI conversations as always challenging, that's something that I think over the past few months I would say I've been really trying to steer people in saying, well for some people, this might be challenging, maybe some others this may not be challenging. Maybe part of that could be because this is part of their lived experience, this is part of things that they bring into the workplace every single day, like I said, whether it's remote or in person. And so for me, like that's just one way in which I've been trying to address this, especially with the work that we do in terms of just reminding people that these things affect us, right, these things affect us on a number of different levels. And it's definitely, specifically with my work, they're not two different things. In terms of the things that I teach people, the things that I tell people for how to navigate these types of conversations.

[00:05:05.46] ANGELA WINFIELD: Yeah, so for me, I mean, this is one of the things-- I guess let me start with this, so I'm a values driven person, not only a values driven

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leader, but a values driven person and that's really, really important to me is to know where my core values are. And I'll tell you my top five, and this is in no particular order, freedom, growth, respect, wisdom, and spirituality. And when things like what has been going on in the world for the past year and social unrest, racial injustice, when things like that come up, because it's going on all the time. But when these incidents in particular come up outside the workplace, that's where I really lean on my values and in particular, wisdom and spirituality, and particularly that spirituality.

[00:05:50.61] So I don't subscribe to a particular faith, but I am a faith-based person and I do practice yoga and I do meditate. And that's something that I come back to time and time again in situations like this and in circumstances like this. I'm constantly thinking about the barriers, the structural barriers, the injustice, the challenges, the obstacles, that people face based on their identities. And that's race, that's gender, that's disability, all these different identities. And looking at oppression and figuring out how do I integrate that, right, how do I hold that without making myself sick, right, and overly stressed because if I do that then I can't lead, I can't do the work, but how do I hold that, how do I maintain a space where I can be empathetic and compassionate, but also kind of garner my strength to move forward. So that's where my values come in, that's where that spirituality comes in. And I know that when I have times like this there are certain things that I need to do to take care of myself so that I can show up and I do those things.

[00:06:54.39] TORAL PATEL: So for me I think I'm a combination of something that both of you said, that there are three mottoes that I live by. And one of them is that you just never know what somebody else has going on, right. And so that's within the work setting or outside of the work setting, things that are happening in their life might be impacting them at an individual level. And also in how they show up at work. And so that's something that I always try to keep in mind in any conversation that I have with individuals, that you just never know what else they might have going on.

[00:07:20.54] ANTHONY SIS: This reminds you of something that we had talked about in the previous episode with Jamal and Fanesse down at Weill Cornell Medicine, which is also something that Fanesse specifically had shared around making sure that she takes care of herself when she has these conversations, especially as a Black woman and as a woman of color. So one of the things that comes to mind for me is when we're talking about leadership, we're talking about this notion of legacy. What are some of the things, aside from personal values, which Angela I think you shared yours so brilliantly, so eloquently, what are some of the things to consider, right, when we're talking about this leadership piece and in terms of legacy.

[00:07:54.80] In leadership specifically, right, I'm thinking like if somebody is trying to leave an impact and especially with all of these things that happen within organizations, right, happen within Cornell, but also handling the factors of things that happen outside of Cornell that also affect what happens internally, right. It's this back and forth negotiation, I'm wondering for both of you, especially Angela, with the work that you've done so far over the past five plus years, is how have you been able to do that and how

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have you been able to really acknowledge the challenging moments, but also recognize the moments where you were able to accomplish a significant barrier, as you had mentioned earlier.

[00:08:32.96] ANGELA WINFIELD: Yeah, it's really about perspective. And again, I'm going to go back to my values, because this is where it comes to, growth and advancement that's one of them. So I really love to see progress but when you're doing DEI work, you've got to balance that with change comes incrementally. It's slow, you've got to have that sort of stamina and endurance to be in it for the long haul and balance that with the little wins, because there are little wins.

[00:08:59.45] And the way that I do that is I really try to keep my line of sight on two places. One, the long run, right, like how do we make an impact, a lasting difference, and what is that 5, 10, 15 year, or even generational, what's that goal down the road and how to make a little bit of progress towards that. Because we're not going to get there, like we may not achieve this in my career or my lifetime, kind of hearkening back to Martin Luther King Jr, may not get there with you, but I keep that end goal in mind because that's motivating to me.

[00:09:32.09] But then the other place that I keep an eye on is what are people's individual experiences, right, because when it comes down to it, the way that I look at leadership, it's not about me, it's not about me. I am a person, I do need to take care of myself, I'm not a martyr in any way and I don't see myself in that way. But I do realize when I've been given the privilege to lead and to lead in a space like D&I that is so personal, that is so pivotal and critical to people and their identity and their experience. It's not about me.

[00:10:02.63] The only time it's about me is when I can draw on my experience of challenges to inform the work that I'm doing for other people. But it really is about being a servant leader, and knowing that sometimes what I'm in that space, even though I am a Black woman, I don't get to own that. In some spaces I've got to put that aside and really hear and listen to other Black women or men of color and take that in and say OK, I'm in two places right now. I'm leading, I'm in an institution, but I'm also a part of the communities that I'm trying to advance and really finding the space and finding the strength and courage to say when I'm at the table I'm going to try and make a difference for the people that I'm here to serve.

[00:10:48.38] ANTHONY SIS: Angela, when you think about the many accomplishments you've achieved in this role and as you talked about in terms of how you view leadership, that it's not necessarily always about you, but the communities that you work with within an organization, within here at Cornell, how does that resonate with you in terms of the legacy that you'd like to leave behind or overall with just the general understanding of legacy and how you understand it to be?

[00:11:11.64] ANGELA WINFIELD: Yeah, It resonates deeply with me, especially being the only and being the first. So the way that I look at it is at any table that I sit at I've

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always been the only. I've never had a chance, at least professionally, to sit at a table with a blind Black woman. So I'm really, really comfortable being the only. But it's about what do I do with that and what does that mean for me.

[00:11:38.30] And recently I actually had a conversation, a one on one conversation, with a woman of color here at Cornell, staff member, really talented, talented woman. And we were just having a real frank conversation about leadership and her experience. And I had to tell her at that time that I was transitioning out of Cornell and she was very disappointed but happy for me at the same time.

[00:12:00.38] And one of the things that I told her, and this again hammering home on these core values, but around growth and advancement, one of the reasons why that's a core value for me isn't for my own personal edification, right, like I think that's a part of my legacy that I leave, because the higher-- this is what I told her, I said, the higher and farther you go, the bigger wake you leave behind you and the more opportunity that's available for those who come after you. And if I can be that person who forges a path or opens a door at a table and leaves a vacant seat or two vacant seats, that then becomes my legacy.

[00:12:39.80] I don't think I was thinking a lot about this in preparation, like well what is my legacy in terms of-- it's not projects, it's not initiatives. Those are important and I can certainly point to those things, but those are personal, right. Those are resume things, those are skills and those are things, they'll change, they'll absolutely change over Cornell's time. That's not long lasting I don't think.

[00:13:01.73] But I think what is long lasting is the impact and the experience. So again, going down to the personal for people. I am a huge, huge fan of Maya Angelou, I actually, one of the greatest moments of my life, because my mother was an English teacher and she loved Maya Angelou, was being able to take my mom to see Maya Angelou give a reading before actually both of them passed. But I went and I saw her.

[00:13:27.14] And one of the things that Maya Angelou says is that they won't remember what you said, they won't remember what you did, but they'll always remember how you made them feel. So to me if I could make someone feel like their experience mattered, that their experience is valued. If I can make people feel that they think differently, feel differently about inclusion or feel differently about difference and identity, that's my legacy. That's my legacy, allowing people to come up after me into my position, into other positions. If I can open doors that's what I want my legacy to be.

[00:14:06.11] ANTHONY SIS: Well, I think there's no doubt that that is your legacy and that many people have felt like that across the University with their interactions with you, with the projects that they worked on with you, and like you said, the legacy not being about the projects, but of how you made people feel, I think is definitely a core part of your legacy. And you mentioned your transition and so we do want to explicitly name that on the show to our listeners, that Angela Winfield will be transitioning out of the

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University soon. And so with that we kind of want to take a trip now and transition over into memory lane. So Toral, why don't you kick us off with taking us down that trip.

[00:14:44.03] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, Angela, can you tell us about maybe some of your biggest accomplishments while you've been here. What are you the most proud of?

[00:14:50.48] ANGELA WINFIELD: That's such a good question, such a hard question, Toral.

[00:14:55.04] TORAL PATEL: Especially after you just said the projects are not your legacy.

[00:14:58.34] ANGELA WINFIELD: Right. Exactly. What I will say-- and this is so true for me, it's my team. It's you all. To me being able to lead formally or informally is a privilege but I have absolutely loved the team that I've had the opportunity to work with and put together. I hired both of you and I hired Lauren and I continue to work with Darren and I think the team has grown so much and has really come into its own, partly because you're very talented professionals, but also because-- and I'm going to go ahead and give myself a little bit of credit.

[00:15:40.80] I know Toral, you and I have talked about this before, but leading and managing is really about not only seeing the talent in people, but giving them the feedback that they need to grow, giving them the space to grow, giving them the space to stretch, doing it in a safe way where they're taking risks and chances but you've got their back, right. You're going to catch them, you're going to lift them up, you're all moving in the same direction, you know the vision, you've got a synergy there. And I think that our team, my team, has that and that has been an incredible source of energy for me and pride to be able to see what the five of us, a little teeny tiny team of five, have been able to do in a relatively short time for the staff community, which is large. So I think that's what I'm most proud of is you all.

[00:16:29.30] TORAL PATEL: Yay, so it's lots of feels, Angela here.

[00:16:32.12] ANGELA WINFIELD: Yeah. I know, I know.

[00:16:34.97] ANTHONY SIS: Lots of feels. I just want to say, I want to share with you a story, Angela. I don't know if I've ever really told you this, but I do tell other people. I tell other people in other spaces across the University as well as outside of the University, that I thought I was the biggest inclusion know it all coming into this role a little over two years ago. And I mean, not like I wasn't full of myself, I wasn't bragging about it. But I was pretty confident that I led with inclusive practices.

[00:17:00.89] ANGELA WINFIELD: Can I just say self-assured, because that is one of your top five strengths.

[00:17:03.80] ANTHONY SIS: That is one my strengths.

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[00:17:05.04] ANGELA WINFIELD: You're self-assured.

[00:17:06.47] ANTHONY SIS: Yes. It was very much self-assurance on that and it is one of my top strengths. And so I came into this role and I'm thinking great. And then I remembered there was like some email communication between you and I, and I sent you I think a document or something and you had told me that couldn't access it. And it was like the first time for me in a really long time leading up to that point where I was like oh my goodness, like I really have a lot more to learn about leading with inclusive practices.

[00:17:34.56] And so I definitely think for me, I'll share what the legacy you're leaving behind for me specifically is just the importance of accessibility that I did advocate for previously, but in terms of like not necessarily incorporating it into the work that I do and seeing it as an add on. And I think that it's so important that people think about accessibility in terms of inclusion, right, in terms of just incorporating it. Even if people don't ask for that need or that specific accommodation. And it was really like the first moment for me where I was like oh my goodness, this is embarrassing, because how am I sending something that I didn't know my supervisor could not access, right. And so it was a simple modification that I had to do for you to be able to access it but that's one of the legacies for me.

[00:18:16.85] And it's a really powerful one, I say that because it's really shifted for me just the importance of incorporating accessibility into everything that we do, even into the podcast, even into the academy. That continues to grow and I continue to learn from, but that's one of the biggest impacts for me and has completely shifted how I see this work moving forward. So if accessibility is not part of the conversation for me, then why are we not talking about that, right. And so I just want to thank you for that and for continuing to push and challenge me every one on one meeting that we have. So thank you, thank you, thank you.

[00:18:50.69] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, and my story is probably just slightly opposite of Anthony's, is that self-assurance was not something I came into this role with. And I distinctly remember that when the position was posted I think I reached out to you before I even applied for the position to say I think I want to talk to you about this. I might be interested, but I don't know that I am anywhere near ready in terms of what you might be looking for. I think one of the first things you ever said to me, and I will probably never forget it, is that I don't ever give myself enough credit. And you've said that multiple times since then and probably will have to continue to kind of share that with myself.

[00:19:27.35] ANGELA WINFIELD: I'll call you up every now and again.

[00:19:28.64] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, every now and then leave an email. And to Anthony's point, it's like you've challenged me over the last two years. That has completely taken me out of my comfort zone more than once but I can't thank you enough for doing that because I think that has helped in the learning that I've had. So

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I'm not quite at the self-assurance stage yet. I feel like I'm learning every single day and I owe that to you because if you didn't push me to kind of where I am today I don't think I would be here. So thank you for that as well.

[00:19:56.47] ANGELA WINFIELD: I mean, and it's a journey, right. I mean, that's one of the things that I'm hearing in both of your stories is we're all on this journey. And no matter how inclusive we think we are, how confident or not we are, we've all got room to grow. Like I really truly, honestly believe that. And in working with you and the rest of the team, like I've had so many opportunities to step up, grow, to make mistakes, apologize, learn from them.

[00:20:24.11] Anthony being non-binary and I think you're the first person that I've worked with that uses they/them pronouns, right. So like that was one of the things where I consciously said you know what, if I believe in inclusion, which I do, I've got to incorporate this and integrate this. I've got to hear and understand the experience. But even if I don't understand the experience, I care about you as a person and I care about people as people. So how do we do this and how do I grow, how do I evolve. So thank you both for being you.

[00:20:55.25] ANTHONY SIS: Angela, I was just thinking that as another pivotal moment that I remember too when you reached out to me even before I had moved to Ithaca, New York. And you asked me, you said you wanted to have a conversation with me and you asked me about how I wanted to state my pronouns to the HR community and to our colleagues and nobody had ever done that for me before, no other supervisor had. And so I think for me it just really speaks volume to how serious you take about making sure that you ensure that people feel a sense of belonging when they work with you, when they're around you.

[00:21:26.60] Going back to Dr. Maya Angelou's quote because I was literally thinking that and you took the words out of my mouth when you said it, when I was like oh my goodness, this reminds me of a lot of parallels here. And so very pivotal but also very meaningful. And even just thinking about it kind of gets me a little emotional because I'm like who knows if I'll have another supervisor that will do that. I would hope so, but yeah, but it was just so powerful and the fact that you were the first in my professional career to have did that leading up to where I'm at now is really significant.

[00:21:53.25] So thank you, thank you, so much for your leadership, Angela. Thank you so much for taking the time to be a part of this show. And we want to give you the last word on what you want to share with our listeners, also knowing as my supervisor, right, that our listeners are not just Cornell, there are also people outside of Cornell who are listening to this. So I'll let you take the last word.

[00:22:13.31] ANGELA WINFIELD: Oh, goodness. OK, what do I do with that now. I'm not going to say it's the last word, right. It's the last word for now, right. This is how we're concluding this episode, but like I said earlier, this is a journey. And the journey doesn't end. I as the leader of this team am one leg of it but it's a relay race. And I'm going to be

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passing the baton on and the work will continue at Cornell and the work continues beyond Cornell quite frankly.

[00:22:40.02] And if I can just reflect a little bit about Cornell because I am an alum and I graduated from the law school and I came back and I was given this wonderful opportunity to do incredible work here. So it's been a place where I've been able to grow, and it's also allowed me to be able to transition into this new role, which I am absolutely thrilled about. And it's going to allow me to make a difference on a global scale and in the legal industry, as a whole, which is really, really just exciting, and gratifying, and humbling to me. But I know I wouldn't have had that experience without going through the steps that I went through here at Cornell and knowing that it's a journey. This is just one next step on it. It doesn't end here. The last word isn't here. It's just how do we move on and progress and advance.

[00:23:33.22] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:23:34.45] ANTHONY SIS: Thank you for listening. Be sure to subscribe to us wherever you listen to podcasts and rate and submit a review on Apple Podcasts, it helps new listeners find us and the show. For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:23:54.43] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:24:00.13] ANTHONY SIS: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in collaboration with the Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:24:15.27] TORAL PATEL: We would like to thank our co-producer and sound engineer, Bert Odom-Reed as always for making us sound wonderful each and every episode. Thank you, Bert.

[00:24:24.48] ANTHONY SIS: Thank you, Bert.