

Episode 7: What's Going On? Veterans at Work
Released on July 8, 2019

- Sherron: The opinions expressed by guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Sherron Brown and you are listening to the Inclusive Excellence podcast.
- Sherron: Welcome back. Thank you for joining me and Anthony on another episode of the Inclusive Excellence podcast. We're so excited to be back and to share with you about how wonderful the Inclusive Excellence Summit was on Tuesday, June 11th. But before we get there, I do have my question of the day and it's for both of us to answer. Anthony, you're ready?
- Anthony: I'm ready.
- Sherron: The question of the day is name one situation or experience that you've had with Cornell University where you felt really included, like they made space for you with intention?
- Anthony: That's a good question. I like it. Who's going first? Me or you?
- Sherron: Of course you go first.
- Anthony: Okay. So many moments initially when I first started.
- Sherron: Right.
- Anthony: But I think the one that I... The first thing that came to my mind was going to one of the HR meetings that we had and seeing pronoun options.
- Sherron: Okay.
- Anthony: I thought that was really, for me, that was, and also seeing they, them stickers. We signed in, we wrote our name on a sticker tag because it was a large meeting from people in HR and then there were the pronoun options so people could put their pronouns on their name tag. For me it was just so awesome to see that there was they, them as an option.
- Sherron: Yes.
- Anthony: I don't know if that was as a result of me coming on board or if that had been done before. But I felt that was one of the first times when I first started here that I really felt included and I felt I was being seen and heard. What was also really shocking for me was to see that, I think at that point when I grabbed my they, them" sticker, there were two other ones that were already gone.
- Sherron: Good.
- Anthony: I was like, "My goodness, I'm not the only one."

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Sherron: Yeah. You're never the only one. That's the beauty of having the option of putting that on your name tag is that you get to see I'm not alone.

Anthony: Yeah.

Sherron: There are other people.

Anthony: The funny thing is I actually never found out who the other people might've been who took the they, them pronouns. I'm always conscious of that now when I go to those meetings and when I see those pronoun options and I see other people took one, I'm like, "Okay, cool." It's just so reassuring to know that I'm not the only one that uses they, them pronouns and that other people use them as well.

Sherron: As a result of seeing other people using the they, them pronouns, do you feel you're more likely to use yours? If you did not see that two other people had used the they, them, their pronouns, do you think you would have still used it for yourself?

Anthony: I think so. I think definitely, in regards to this role, I feel much more inclined and much more liberated to be able to say that my pronouns are they them theirs. Had I not seen other people grab it, I don't think it would have necessarily impacted me. It just, for me, goes back to the piece around belonging and feeling I belong because I know that other people are also using those pronouns. I think it also just elevates. To answer your question, yes. Essentially it does give me a little bit more boost to say my pronouns when I enter a space or enter a new event with new people.

Sherron: That's fantastic. I just have to let you know that, I think I said it on the last time we did What's Going On episode, I mentioned that although I am deep in the diversity and inclusion work, I still have my own work to do and I know that using my pronouns, I'm still working on that. I'm great in some scenarios and not so good in others. But it's like a muscle you have to keep using it and practicing to build it, to put those pronouns after your introductions. Granted I'm a cisgender woman, but still knowing that we're making space for a person to identify as they feel most comfortable or most suited. That's what we're after. I can't make any assumptions. Yeah, I agree. I think that the mere fact that Cornell does allow for pronouns to go on name tags for all the world to see that is one of the great ways where you feel they were intentional about making space for you.

Anthony: Absolutely. I just wanted to add a clarify for our folks who are listening. Cisgender is somebody who is gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth. In a previous episode I had disclosed that identify as gender queer. My gender assigned at birth doesn't necessarily correspond with how I identify in terms of my gender, but that is what the definition of cisgender is. Thank you for sharing Sherron.

Sherron: Thank you for clarifying.

Anthony: Absolutely.

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Sherron: I'm going to answer the question for myself. A way that I feel that Cornell has intentionally made me feel they made space for me. One of the situations and scenarios where I feel Cornell really made space for me particularly is the LGBTQ Colleague Network Group. What that is, is a opportunity for people on campus, staff on campus, who identify as LGBTQIA+ to come together a few times throughout the year. I want to say monthly, but depending on what's happening, we may or may not. Summertime, we don't come together as often because of vacations and things like that, but the Colleague Network group, I find it to be a very warm and welcoming group of people who identify as LGBTQIA and we talk about our issues as queer people in a space working in this institution and queer issues in our individual lives. Knowing that this university has made space for these conversations to happen in an organic and authentic way.

Sherron: The meetings, they range from, I don't know, maybe five or six people to some meetings have almost 30 people attend. Just last week or the week before our get together was to celebrate our pride. We went around talking about what we are prideful for or what we are prideful about. Not surprising, I guess pride turned into gratitude and it was just such a wonderful way to hear all of our, the participants talk about the things that they were thankful for and what they take pride in and being part of that community, the LGBTQ community. I think that's one of the best things that could possibly happen, especially at an institution this size. Thank you. Thank you for that. That was great.

Anthony: Special shout outs to the Colleague Network Groups because I was also at that event that happened a few weeks ago. I think for me, having been, somebody who's young, a young professional coming into this role and trying to find and build community, I definitely found community through both the Men of Color Colleague Network Group as well as through the LGBTQ Colleague Network Group.

Sherron: Right.

Anthony: Definitely special shout out to the Colleague Network Groups and if anybody's interested in learning more about that.

Sherron: Yeah, we definitely have information on that. The Colleague Network Groups are CNG and a person that you want to contact if you are interested in any of them is Cassandra Joseph and her net ID is CPJ25@cornell.edu that's CPJ25 and yes. Thank you. That was a great question. Thank you for answering that and I just wanted to share with our community, our listeners out there that if you are interested in answering this question, we have a prize for you. If you go to our site on SoundCloud and puts your answer to the question which is share one way or a situation where Cornell really makes you feel inclusive, they thought about you. If you answer that question, you will get a prize. Then we're going to do this a few times. Let's just say the first three people that go ahead and put their answer there on the site, we will give you a multicultural calendar.

Sherron: Granted, yes, the year is just about half over, but there is so much information on this calendar and it is an excellent, excellent way to see all of the different ways

of celebrating diversity and inclusion throughout the year. While the calendar will expire at the end of the year, there's still so much information that I promise you, you're going to want to keep it just so you can have it to refer back to many times throughout the year. Go ahead, put your response to the question is to explaining and sharing ways that Cornell makes you feel included and ways that you feel that Cornell has thought about you while doing the diversity and work. We will give a prize of a multicultural calendar for the first three people who respond.

Anthony: Yeah, I still look at that calendar every day and I'm trying to figure out what it is that I don't know, what new events are happening that I'm completely unaware of and then I try to Google them. It is an extremely beneficial calendar to simply have.

Sherron: Yes. Also I did not mention earlier that you can also send your response to the question to ie-academy@cornell.edu that's ie-academy@cornell.edu.

Anthony: Be sure to send those responses for a free calendar.

Sherron: During the introduction I mentioned to you that we had our Inclusive Excellence Summit on June 11th and it was so successful. I am going to have Anthony share with you all of the takeaways, not all the takeaways, but some of the highlights from the Summit that took place. That was a Herculean effort from Anthony and Caroline Hedlum. She was in our office helping out with this event and I've had nothing but good feedback about this Summit. Anthony, why don't you go ahead and tell our listeners some of the highlights, some of the things that were really good and why it was such a success?

Anthony: Yeah. I think definitely for me the success came from the level of engagement and the energy from everybody who was at the event. We had over a hundred people who attended from all across the university. We had about 14 workshops and they were all extremely engaging from what I heard from other people. I facilitated one around ally ship and intersectionality. I really loved the amount of information that people were observing and how engaged people were. I think, for me, that was definitely the best part of it. We also had some other workshops around microaggressions, around creating a culture of inclusion for those who are deaf and hard of hearing. I felt in terms of the topics, it touched upon so many different aspects of diversity and inclusion here at Cornell. It was really, really great.

Anthony: We did have some who also facilitated a workshop from outside of Cornell. They gave some context about how people here could also foster some additional aspects around diversity and inclusion. Yeah. That's what I really enjoyed about it and it was awesome at the very end with the session that we had about it starting with us as agents of change.

Sherron: Yeah.

Anthony: How people started brainstorming ideas and really started putting some of that knowledge that they learned at the summit into action and really putting a plan in

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place and really coming up with some ideas, really strong ideas about how they can take some of that information into their own units. That's what I really loved about it. I really, really look forward to doing this again in a couple of years from now.

Sherron: It was great. We are going to hopefully do it every other year. Is that correct?

Anthony: No. We are going to do it every other year.

Sherron: We are going to do it every other year. Okay.

Anthony: Yeah. In two years from now, in 2021 that's when the next Inclusive Excellence Summit will be hosted here at the Ithaca campus.

Sherron: That's right.

Anthony: For some context as well, we could not accommodate for the need for people wanting to come to the Summit. We were literally a max capacity. We are definitely taking that into consideration for the next Inclusive Excellence Summit in two years from now, which I think speaks to the fact that people are really craving these conversations across campus. They really are looking for a space where they can meet other people who are as passionate around diversity and inclusion and really looking for ways in which they can collaborate.

Sherron: It was also a great space to hear the stories and the things that are happening that we wouldn't normally get an opportunity to know about. Based on some of the workshops that were presented in presentations, who's here engagement in the Inclusive Excellence Academy and beyond, that was a facilitated discussion and that basically told us about the history of IEA, Inclusive Excellence, now it's called a network. At first it was called Academy, but we are now a network that includes the Academy, the Summit and this podcast. The workshops that were presented at the Summit, they fell under three categories. There was the self-awareness, there was understanding difference and transformative action.

Sherron: Transformative action, one of the workshops was retaining and supporting our employees of color. That's one of the top topics that were covered. There are things that were happening all across the University, but because it's such a huge university, sometimes things are happening, we don't get a chance to see it or hear about it. When we have an event like the Summit, it's a great way for people to come together and know what else is happening on the other side of the hill.

Anthony: Yeah. I would add to that, that's the whole reason why we're also doing this podcast too, in terms of highlighting and bringing guest speakers from across campus to talk about some of the initiatives that they've spearheaded. Talk about some of the issues that they're passionate about because it is hard. I think it is extremely hard to find people who are also doing similar work in these different areas, in these different units across campus. hopefully the podcast will be a

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continuation of what the summit has already created in terms of the energy and the engagement and wanting to do more.

Sherron: Right.

Anthony: Hopefully the podcast will be that additional venue and that additional channel to really highlight and elevate this work. Well, thank you Sherron, for leading us into the conversation about the Inclusive Excellence Summit. As previously mentioned, it will be hosted bi-annually. The next one will be in the year 2021 hosted on the Ithaca Campus.

Sherron: I can't believe we're talking about 2021 already.

Anthony: Right? 2019 is almost at an end. We're already in July.

Sherron: Yeah, that's mind boggling because I know this might... I don't know. When I think about how far we are into the 20s, I still have flashbacks about Y2K.

Anthony: Yes. I remember Y2K as a kid.

Sherron: You remember that too?

Anthony: Yeah. As a kid, I remember the whole scare and music videos for JLo's Waiting for Tonight makes reference to it and I love JLo. That's the only reason why I know that too.

Sherron: I remember I was away from home and I felt this urgency, "I've got to get back home before midnight on New Year's Eve because I didn't know what was going to happen."

Anthony: Yeah.

Sherron: Boy, I tell you, it seems like just yesterday, but when you look back, that was two decades ago.

Anthony: Literally. Two decades ago.

Sherron: That is something. That is something. Time is flying. I guess that means we're having fun. Because time flies when we have fun.

Anthony: We definitely are having fun. Doing this podcast, delivering it to you all who are listening and interviewing people across campus. We are definitely having fun. This week as Sherron and I were talking about different topics to discuss for what we want to talk about and...

Sherron: And what's going on.

Anthony: ... And what's going on in the world and also in terms of identities. That was something that I think we talked about. We talked about hair discrimination in the

workplace in the previous episodes, which is great. But also for this one I'm wanting to highlight a particular identity and in a specific identity that we don't really talk about or people don't necessarily, maybe not have a lot of information about because they don't necessarily know if these certain identities that we're going to discuss today are in their workplace, in their unit and things like that.

Anthony: I would just wanted to start off by sharing a personal story. That in my previous role I worked a lot with students, faculty and staff, but it was mostly student facing. In that role, the office that I previously worked in was right next to this other office and the office next door was completely run by students. It was an organization, it's called the Veteran Student Organization or VSO for short. Let me tell you, they were the most... They definitely have more people in their office than in ours and that I used to work in a department specifically for students. They had way more people in their office and not just students, but faculty, staff who else identified as veterans too, who were just really looking for community. I really got to meet a lot of the student veterans who were there and who were also the presidents of the organization.

Anthony: Every year when they got a new president, they would introduce themselves to our office and to our staff saying that they were the president for the VSO and that their office was next door. They were always looking for ways to collaborate. Unfortunately during my time there, we didn't get a chance to come up with a truly collaborative event. It was more just about supporting their events, them supporting our events when they could. What I really, really appreciate about them in terms of just the veterans themselves is that they... I learned so much just about what the veteran student experience was like. A lot of them who were older who were coming back to school and just wanting to get either a bachelor's degree. One of them was a law student who had been in the military for over 20 years and was now going back to law school.

Anthony: I learned so much about veterans themselves and their experience as a student, but then also what some of their needs were and what some of the things that I think oftentimes people forget about the veteran student experience. I think, for me, one of the key things that I learned about it was in terms of their behavior, how adaptable and how resilient they were. Because they had so much life skills, life experiences that, for them and not only for them in terms of their studies, but also how they operate in their everyday lives. Their communication with people in their leadership roles. As Veteran Student Organization and because there were a student organizations serving not just students, the amount of courage and really strong leadership skills were necessary for people to really support the large gamut of the veteran population at my previous institution. I think for me it was really insightful to really understand more about veterans themselves. That's really the identity that we want to hone in on and focus is on veterans.

Sherron: On veterans. Thank you for sharing information about the veterans student. Now I have to admit that I do know in my personal life a few people who are veterans. I have a cousin, a brother in law and so on and so forth. A lot of the information that I get about the veterans experience once they come back from active duty are, my information comes from television and movies. Unfortunately it's not always a positive thing. I like that there are opportunities where we are able to

Speak directly to the person and get to know him or her and get to understand the value that these wonderful people are bringing to the workplace.

Anthony: The other thing too that I really loved in my experience with the veteran students too is how strong and fierce of advocates they were. For really highlighting and being fearless in a lot of ways, starting those conversations with "Are you thinking about veteran students? Are you thinking about veterans period?" I think oftentimes when we're thinking about recruitment, that may be probably the one time that it comes up, it's like, "Are we looking at diverse populations in terms of recruitment for a job or for anything for students." But outside of that, once they come here, I think oftentimes we forget that they're veterans are part of the diversity umbrella when it comes to identity.

Sherron: Right.

Anthony: There are specific needs there, specific resources that veterans need to get access to and really know and be aware of in order for them to succeed, in order for them to thrive in the workplace. Like you said, Cornell has those resources, but a lot of other places may or may not have those resources.

Sherron: Right. We also, as the University, should understand that we are lucky that these individuals choose to continue their education with us, with Cornell.

Anthony: Absolutely.

Sherron: We are lucky to have the staff people bring their very specialized skills to the campus. That shows a level of trust. A lot of times veterans have traveled and seen all different things and heard different stories and to know that after all is said and done, they're choosing to align with Cornell University. That's a huge compliment to the organization, to the university, to say that we offer a quality product that we do allow veterans to feel a part of and included and we value the talents that they bring. Let's take a minute and check in with about these talents that veterans are bringing to the university. One of the things is that, as a veteran, you most likely have left the United States in most cases.

Sherron: You have gone out and you have seen the world from different perspectives and because of that you have learned about different cultures and you actually probably understood a lot of the things that we take for granted here in the United States. What I'm thinking that the veteran is bringing to the university is a sense of cultural diversity and understanding that the way we do things in the United States is not necessarily the only way to be successful in doing something. I think that's one of the strongest things that a person can bring to their place of employment or bring to their student experience is an understanding of a broader world that exists other than what they may have grown up in. That's one of the things that I think is really, really valuable that veterans will bring.

Sherron: Additionally, a sense of adaptability. Veterans have been in different environments where they have seen things and they have to be able to make a situation work. People like myself, I don't travel that much and I haven't seen as

much of the world and my sense of adaptability, it might be very limited as to what situation can work. I think that that's one of the things also, an additional thing that the veteran can bring to the workplace or to the student experience is a sense of adaptability, understanding what is and seeing what can be in a certain situation. I think those are extremely valuable things.

Anthony: Yeah. All of that. I think definitely looking back on my experience with the Veterans Student Organization, they exhibited all of that and even the collaborative piece. How they would come in, introduce themselves whenever a new president came on board and we'll talk about ideas for collaboration. When I was in my previous role, there were a lot of conversations around transgender protection for people in the military. We would talk a lot with the Veterans Student Organization around how we can collaborate on a program, how we can collaborate on an event. I think that's also another strong skill that they have is that they have a collaborative nature in the way they approach their work and their leadership because of the heavy emphasis on the teams that they work with in the military.

Sherron: Right.

Anthony: That definitely requires a lot of experience and I think veterans definitely bring that as a strong skillset when they enter any particular environment, whether it be education or the workplace.

Sherron: Right. I love that you have your personal experience to refer to because you worked side by side with the Veterans Student Organization at your previous employment. I like hearing and learning about those experiences because I don't have that.

Anthony: Yeah. I think even just... I appreciate you being honest about not having a lot of experience working with veterans. One of the things that, for me, always stands out too is that as with any other identity, that I think people often think about race as this monolithic group or this one sole category that encompasses everything. Within race there's so much diversity. I think also with veterans as an, there's so much diversity that exists among the veteran population as a whole.

Sherron: Right.

Anthony: You have older generation, you have younger generation and you have people of all different races, all different backgrounds who also identify as veterans. And then you have the Marines, the Army, the Navy, so many...

Sherron: Yeah the different branches they...

Anthony: The different branches. There's so much diversity and each one has a different culture to it.

Sherron: Yes.

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Anthony: There's also a unique skill set experience in those different branches too. There's so much diversity even within the identity of being a veteran. I think also breaking down that assumption that "You're a veteran, you just fought in war." And that's just that. Yeah. I think just understanding that there's so much diversity even within the category and the identity of being a veteran. I would just say that I think the biggest challenge with understanding if you have veterans in your workplace environment is making sure that you're actually utilizing their strengths. I think one of the strong things when I think about what does somebody need to feel they're belonging at a particular workplace environment, is that you have to feel you're being appreciated and valued for what you're bringing to the table.

Anthony: If I'm feeling, for example, I'm not being utilized for my strengths, then I'm not going to feel that sense of belonging in a workplace. Keeping in mind that if you're working with veterans and you understand that they have these strong skill sets that are very unique to other people, how within that particular unit or workplace are you actually utilizing their skill sets to help foster a more inclusive environment where they actually feel they're belonging, that they're part of a team. Where a team where there may not be other veterans or people who identify as veterans. I think that's the biggest challenge for managers and for supervisors at Cornell is understanding what the strengths are of your veterans in your organization and making sure you're utilizing those strengths to the best of your ability.

Sherron: Thank you. That's a really great insight. With that, I am really excited for our next episode because we're going to have some guests on that are going to continue filling up this conversation to make it more robust and I'm excited about that.

Anthony: Yeah. Some self identified veterans here at Cornell.

Sherron: Yes.

Anthony: Yeah. They're going to talk specifically about their experience.

Sherron: That's right. Our guests will be able to tell us more of what's going on.

Anthony: Awesome, Sherron. And just so you all know too, Cornell actually does have a specific website that you can go to. It's www.military.cornell.edu. On that webpage, that'll be the best place to learn about all there is to offer to veterans who are here at Cornell, working here as well as for students. If you're interested to learn more about some of those specific resources, definitely check out that website.

Anthony: I think it's important that we continue to have these conversations. As of May 31st of this year about 2.4% of our workforce here at Cornell identify as veterans. 2.4 it may sound like a small number but in the larger scheme over 10,000 employees, that's a sizable amount of people who identify as veterans here at Cornell. I think it's really important that we continue this conversation and I think there definitely needs to be more attention given our veteran members here at Cornell. We definitely thank all of the veterans here at Cornell for their service

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and know that Cornell values the knowledge and lived experiences that you are bringing in your roles every day here at Cornell.

Anthony: Thank you all for listening to today's episode of the Inclusive Excellence podcast. If you liked this episode, please leave us a comment below and like us on SoundCloud as well to also help people learn more about this podcast and also find this podcast.

Sherron: If you are a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us. I will say the email address one more time. It's ie-academy@cornell.edu. My name is Sherron Brown.

Anthony: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence podcast. One more time. We just want to give a special shout out and thank you to Bert Odom-Reed, our sound engineer from the Cornell broadcast studio for making a sound wonderful each and every episode.

Sherron: Thank you, Bert.

Anthony: Thank you.