



Talking B2B

COMMERCE AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

hosted by Doug Caviness



Diversity & Inclusion in the Tech Industry

with Israel Greene

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION SPECIALIST

Doug: Israel, when you reflect back on your own life, was there an individual or set of individuals or organization that particularly helped you make such significant progress in your own life?

Israel: Usually, it was teachers, to be honest with you. I got involved in acting, and that became a haven for me. The drama teachers and speech teachers that I had really took an interest in me and my efforts. To this day they still support me. I remember doing a show several years ago, and there was a group of teachers that took up the front two rows of the theater, and I hadn't seen them in 20 years. They read in the paper that I was going to be at this theater performing for this particular show. And they showed up and showed out, you know, and that's the beautiful thing about those opportunities and moments of when you can support others.

Also, I try to take the opportunity to ask questions of CEOs and COOs or any entrepreneur about where I'm striving to be. What obstacles, advice, concerns, gotchas, etc., should I be thinking about? I keep those nuggets in mind as I continue to grow.

Doug: That's amazing. Could you tell us a little about your own backstory?

Israel: Yeah, absolutely. I've been in tech, honestly since I started working professionally. I started off in telecommunications many moons ago working for Sprint in their heyday and cycled through several telecom companies as they went through mergers and acquisitions. Tech has always been a passion industry for me.

And what I noticed in all areas of tech, is that so many of these companies are moving at breakneck speed, many of them are forgetting about the most important asset that they have...their people and their development. This is really what brought me to where I am today and why I do what I do as a Leadership Trainer and Certified Diversity Executive.

Tech companies are required to move fast. In order to stay relevant, they have to constantly be innovating. The challenge to that is they are often moving so quickly that they are changing the engine mid-flight and as a result gaps begin to emerge in different areas. More specifically it usually shows itself first in the development of their talent. The divide between the potential and the resources given to succeed often widens. This happens especially for people who resemble me. Opportunities are missed, training is lacking, mentoring or sponsorship opportunities simply aren't there. When you see a problem, you find or create a solution. This is why Greene Consulting Group was birthed, to take everything that I have learned over the years of being in the tech space, added certifications, and passion – now I bring that into organizations to help them transform their company culture and recognize equity and innovate to the fullest.

Doug: Has there been a shift in the conversation about race? Perhaps it used to be, “am I a racist or not?”, where most people would say, “no, I’m not racist,” and then the conversation might be over. Now the conversation seems to be “is there institutional racism?” and “what role do I play or not play in perpetuating this?” Is that a fair assessment?

Israel: There is undoubtedly a shift in the questions being asked today. We should still pose that question to ourselves though. The disconnect is that people think they can’t be racist if they aren’t overt with the actions. So many people think that, well, if I’m not calling someone the N word, or if I’m not out there beating up someone that is a different ethnicity than myself, or calling them derogatory names then, I’m not racist. However, there are actions that can definitely identify a person as having racist tendencies.

Institutional racism is so deeply embedded in who we are as America, we often times do not question it and it is overlooked. Think about it for a moment if a sitting president states, “anti-racism training is un-American” that should speak volumes. The effects are felt in BIPOC communities. It is such an American thing that when we see it, we’re immune to it. As a result, these practices lead to one social or ethnic group being put in a better position to succeed, while putting other groups at a disadvantage. And that’s what creates the disparity between the two. I think it’s important to identify those areas and be able to say, “This looks strange to me” and call attention to them.

Doug: Are there any big myths we need to confront?

Israel: There are three immediate ones that come to mind. The myth that diversity and inclusion programming and education is anti-American. This was recently put out there, and I am fearful of organizations buying into this belief. As a result, we have seen a couple of universities pull their programming out of fear of losing funding from the government. Implementing training like this isn’t intended to divide, it’s to help us to better understand where we were, how far we have come, and the work that still needs to be done.

Another myth is that equity is a threat to anyone that is non-white, this is just simply not true and when we advance one group, we are all better for that.

The third myth is that this is no longer a problem. Racism was wiped out with the series of laws that were passed. The reality is that we are still feeling the impact in many of these areas such as housing, education, justice, and so on. We have to continue to be cognizant of this and work together to ensure they do not continue to manifest itself.

Doug: Are there things we can be doing higher up in the pipeline, like in universities or other work settings, to find diverse people and bring them into our organizations?"

Israel: Definitely, from a university/company perspective we think about environment. The number of BIPOC that are graduating with computer science degrees, I think last year, was only about 9% people of color and 10% Latinx. So, when you look at the number of students, how do you get more students involved in STEM and stem-like programs?

If you are headquartered in Silicon Valley and the number of minorities in that area are slim, then the likelihood of your finding qualified talent is greatly diminished. Companies have to get creative in how they are attracting and engaging BIPOC talent. One thing they might do is for any college in that area, possibly fund scholarships for BIPOC in STEM. From there you move to internships for those students, and then job offers when they graduate. This gets

the students in close proximity, introduces them to your company, allows them to build roots, and then presents them with a great job upon graduation. Yes, the investment may be large, but the return will be exponential.

From an organizational perspective we have to be clear on what we are looking for and committed to that search. Wells Fargo is an example of what this shouldn't look like. They announced some diversity initiatives shortly after the George Floyd murder. The CEO in one of their companywide meetings announced that they missed their diversity goals with the reasoning of, "We simply just can't find people of color that are qualified."

The question is, where are you looking? You have to expand your network and be committed to the search. Ironically, Wells Fargo was set to attend the [NBMBAA \(National Black MBA Association\)](#) National Conference and host a symposium, and shortly after that comment they pulled out.

And it's like, okay, you're claiming that you can't find people of color that are qualified. Yet we have 6,000 people in attendance, of which the majority have MBAs and other advanced degrees, yet you claim you can't find talent.

The other piece is rewriting the values and the missions and making sure that we are embedding this into our daily structure and communicating it in a way that shows the importance to the entire organization.

Business

Wells Fargo CEO apologizes after blaming shortage of Black talent for bank's lack of diversity

The San Francisco-based mega bank has been struggling to rebuild its reputation after admitting to consumer abuses



Wells Fargo chief executive and President Charles Schaefer testifies at a hearing before the House Financial Services Committee on March 20, 2020. Alex Brandon/AP

By Hamza Shaban

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Doug: Based on your comments, it now seems surprisingly obvious to me that geography, the location where your organization works, can have a big impact on your ability to see and hire diverse talent. Your typical Tech clusters in areas like Seattle, Boston, Southern California, Bay Area, and Austin, are not known to be particularly diverse from a BIPOC standpoint.

Israel: Think about it for a moment, who is in your circle. If you're a CEO or C-Suite of a company, odds are, you know several other CEOs, and you need to take a look in your circle and say, okay, how many of these are BIPOC? I would venture to say that probably 90% or more of these execs are not diverse.

To your point this is largely environmental, meaning, what does the landscape look like where these organizations are headquartered?

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