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Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit with Chelsea C. Williams

This episode was originally recorded on May 27, 2020

Brian McComak: So exciting. So, we'll go ahead and dive in and as we dive in with today's conversation, please continue to comment in the chat. Angelo will help to make sure Chelsea and I get your questions and we'll make sure that we answer some of what's on your mind, 'cause we're here for you. So, I'll back up for second though. I want to say welcome to everyone, welcome to week four of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit. I am delighted to be joined today by Chelsea Williams. And I'll talk a little about her in just a moment. So, Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit is this new endeavor that I have kicked off as the launch of, as part of the launch of Hummingbird Humanity, a new consultancy that is focused on working with organizations to bring human-centered workplaces to life. And so this was a way for us to start that conversation, start that work, really centering it around real stories of real people that these workplaces impact, both from an unemployment perspective, as well as from a client and customer perspective, as well as from a vendor or partner perspective. So I guess I shouldn't use both. In all of those ways, 'cause there were more than two there. How do we bring those workplaces to life? So, that's really the spirit behind these conversations and to start with just a conversation around humanity. What I'm hoping we'll get to do today is we'll learn a little bit about Chelsea, the person, and we'll also learn about Chelsea and the work she does, and hopefully hear some words of wisdom that she has for us. So, Chelsea, do you want to just. I know you and I know each other, have known each other for a little while.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah.

Brian McComak: So, of course, I know a lot about you. But do you wanna share a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Chelsea C. Williams: Sure, sure. Hello, everyone, I'm so excited that you are carving out some time on a Wednesday afternoon for this segment. Brian and Angelo, thank you for the introduction and for the invitation. I am Chelsea Williams, currently I'm social distancing in Charlotte, but I am, I live in New York City and work out of New York City. I am the Founder and CEO of College Code. Our focus is on re-imagining early career development for diverse populations. So, I'm very passionate about preparing this next generation for the world of work, making sure that the pathway into career is less confusing and more streamlined and more supportive, particularly again, for diverse populations. I started College

Code about two years ago after spending eight years on Wall Street. I'm originally from Raleigh, North Carolina. I went to Spelman College, a historically black women's college in Georgia, and found my way in New York City for work. So my own particular career pathway and opportunity to navigate to college and prepare for my next steps has very much informed the work that I do at College Code. So, yeah, I'm really excited to kind of dive in and share a little bit more.

Brian McComak: Awesome, awesome, well, I'm so glad you're here. And for those of you who may not know the story, Chelsea and I met while I was working at Tapestry. And we, at Tapestry, we were working on developing a diversity and inclusion, or inclusion training, what we called it, program for our creative team. So, that was marketing, design--

Chelsea C. Williams: Supply chain.

Brian McComak: Supply chain.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, yeah.

Brian McComak: Communications.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah.

Brian McComak: So, really all of the people that were responsible for creating products, and messages, and imagery that would go into the marketplace and Chelsea was the consultant that helped us bring that program to life. And delivered, I think, every one of those sessions too, right Chelsea?

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, I did about 40 sessions, 40 sessions with the teams across the years. So we started in April, designing the actual session, doing a pilot with leaders across the creative space, and then eventually reaching everyone from senior executives, literally, the CEO of Coach, at the time, and of Stuart Weitzman, all the way down to, kind of, your coordinator entry level employee. So, it was, I spent a lot of time at Hudson Yards, it was great, it was a great experience.

Brian McComak: Yeah, it was a great program and it's one of the, when I think about the work that I'm excited to do, and I know you share this passion, Chelsea. It's helping organizations think beyond just the core of just employees only.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: But really thinking about how a commitment to humanity or a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, which I find, I see as part of humanity, how it really is infused throughout every part of the company. It's not just about representation in employee populations. It's about representation at awareness, and respect, and inclusion for everyone.

Chelsea C. Williams: Mm-hm, and one thing, I think, I'm thinking about that experience because it was rich, one thing we did really well from the offset was hearing from the employees. I think a lot of times, for training and development our DEI practitioners, sometimes will come in with our content and our theory, and we will, you know, we'll certainly have our introductory conversation so that we can understand the culture, but I think in this case, a best practice we had was focus groups. We started by saying, let's hear from the people, let's understand their challenges, let's understand the opportunities, and from that knowledge we then built the two and a half hour journey. I wouldn't even call it a training, the journey that your employees went through that actually became pivotal in really making sure that there were no mishaps in marketing and mishaps in communications broadly. So, it was a powerful experience.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Well, good stuff and I'm so glad we got to meet while doing that work. And then we became close colleagues and friends. And Chelsea has taken a few of my calls where I'm like, hey, I need someone to talk to me off the ledge. I think I've done that for you as well, a couple times, we're there for each other. And now we actually both, in addition to our work with College Code and with Hummingbird Humanity, we're both part of the Jennifer Brown Consulting DEI consulting team. So, we haven't had a chance to work yet on a project, but I'm sure it's gonna happen.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes, absolutely.

Brian McComak: Look forward to it. So, I wanna back away from work for a second because, and just for the group, I think, you know, Angelo, and Chelsea, and I were all, just before we started the call, we're just all acknowledging, we're trying to find joy and happiness in the day, but there's also real life happening and we're all dealing with our own stuff. Which I'm sure is true for all of you, in your own way, 'cause that's just, I mean, that's life, and it's also certainly life right now. So, Chelsea, I'm curious, what brings you joy today?

Chelsea C. Williams: Wow, that's such a good question. Well, I was sharing with you that I held off, I was in New York City for about eight weeks before I said, you know what, I need a mental break, I need a reset. So, I got to North Carolina about a week and a half ago and I've been social distancing with my brother. He's four years younger than me. And it's been just joy. It's been years since we've been together for this long, longer than like two days for a weekend, you know, a few days for the holidays, but it's been so rich just to spend time. There's a park around the corner and he's a runner and an insanity person and just love the green. So, if it's not raining after the day, we go for a long walk, you know, we make dinner. It's really special. So that has brought me a lot of joy. And I think on the College Code side, I am very passionate about the next generation, hence the focus of College Code. And I really believe that they, there's an intention there and a passion for change, and social activism, and really bringing people together across different backgrounds. I'm really joyful about what the future is gonna look like as they start to move into the workplace. So that brings me a lot of joy on a day-to-day basis.

Brian McComak: Well, I love that, although I'm sure there's a lot of fear about going into the workplace in the midst of, like for graduates, the 2020 graduates. How are you helping? Because I think it is such an exciting, right? Finishing the, your university experience, or college experience, or what other program you might be in, you know, I think there's lots of great programs that are outside of the, you know, the university and college world as well. But you've done this program, you're ready to go do your thing, and the world's in the midst of this madness. How are you helping people, and particularly these organizations and these young professionals navigate that, what does that look like?

Chelsea C. Williams: It's so interesting, because I remember when COVID first, early March, when COVID was starting to really be a thing, and in the city, we were all preparing for what is now our reality. And I remember someone asked me, what do you think that College Code will be in the midst of all of this? Like, is it even going to be a thing? Is it gonna be necessary? Is college gonna be something people go to? Is career gonna be important? And at the time, for like 24 hours, I was like, oh my goodness, my whole plan and vision, I don't see it happening. Oh, no! And then as the day went by, and I got into solitude and just really reflecting and speaking, I'm very big on staying close to the end population. So students, early career professionals, adults who support that generation. I realized there's actually never been a better time to have the conversation. I think. I believe there will absolutely be an opportunity to reimagine education, but then also to reimagine career and what that looks like. Chelsea Williams' introspective has been there has been one option pushed, often college. There has been one option pushed, often full-time employment. You go and you work, you get a job, nine to five, make it work. And I think that there's an opportunity to holistically share with this next generation, what their options can be to prepare for a career. There are many different pathways, there are many different opportunities and options, and I think that the education and awareness piece is such an opportunity, particularly now, that I'm really excited just to, you know, through my partnerships, and through kind of the work that we're doing, and what we're seeking to roll out in partnership with organizations, to reimagine what's possible, and then to make sure that students understand these diverse pathways and that they're prepared. There's a lot of conversation about the future of work. We started hearing a lot of buzz about future of work in 2019, and you know, it was

interesting 'cause I was following that terminology, that space since last year. And what I noticed was, in my lens, a lot of that conversation had been very white. Very white male, transparently, in terms of who's driving the conversation? What will the future look like? Who is currently in those roles? Where is there an opportunity for others? And so I became passionate about making sure the work we do at College Code, we're in the forefront of understanding this future of work conversation, and that diverse populations understand what this means, and most importantly, how that's gonna influence their future and how to prepare. So for me, I think that it's been pivotal to understand where we're going, realize that COVID might be creating more opportunity to discuss and pivot, but making sure that this next generation is aware. So that's where I spend a lot of my focus.

Brian McComak: I love that. Well, and it reminds me of, there's been, several times in the last handful of years where I've given, well, facilitated a conversation, or you know, given more more formal presentation of sharing my career path. And it, you know, and I was one of those students who came to, who left, you know, finished college and said, I'm just gonna go right on that vertical path up to the top. And it doesn't really work that way in the real life. It can have backwards, and forwards, and sideways, and there's all sorts of different ways that we get experiences, and those experiences, I actually, I believe, have helped me to be better at what I do because I've had those moments of learning different things and working in different types of organizations or with different leaders. And so there's all these different things that have happened, which gave me more diverse experience. So, is that part of what you're trying to help them understand? Is that the path--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah.

Brain McComak: Will look different from what they expect?

Chelsea C. Williams: Well, I think it's two points. Our focus is, first we focus on talent development, which is for an organization. How are you developing your people? That could be training, that could be coaching, that could be mentor programs for a higher ed or a nonprofit who are a majority of my partners right now. It's this whole career readiness conversation. What does it mean to prepare for career? But technical skill and your, I don't like the word soft skill, but interpersonal skills and how we connect with people. And there's still a lot of work to do there. Now, there's a lot that's been done, but there's still a lot of work to do there. The other side of this is retention. I am a firm believer that talent development and retention need to go hand-in-hand because when we talk about retention, retaining early career professionals, there is a development piece there but it's also culture. It's a culture conversation. It is a managerial conversation. It's a career pathway conversation. And so what we've really seen is, when we're talking talent development and we're preparing the next generation, it's certainly skill conversations, but it's also, most of the questions I'll get from graduates or recent graduates is, from my lens of identity, what can you help me to know now about how the workplace and the workforce will be for me? So, if I'm a woman of color, if I'm a first generation graduate, sometimes the assumption is made, figure it out, you know, like, it'll be the same, but it's very vastly

different for these different groups. And so I think I'm very big on customizing, training, and coaching for the individual themselves so that they're able to create a pathway that's actually realistic. And so that we are kind of sharing upfront what some of the barriers and hurdles that particular populations have. And if they know the information, that's what I love about Gen-Z, I will say, from my work with them, if they have the information up front, the vast majority are taking it, grabbing it, and they're moving things forward. I think that you, sometimes, will get these assumptions made about generations that are lazy or disinterested, and I would say from my lens, the vast majority, I lead a workshop, I will give resources at the end, check out these resources, let us know if you have any questions. The amount of followup and the depth of followup is so incredibly strong, that I see that if we are being mindful of how we coach and we're making sure that we're sharing vast resources, they tend to jump on it. So I'm passionate about just making sure, again, that the pathway is more clear, that it's not a hidden secret, and that we're setting up the future of work for success.

Brian McComak: Yeah, what it reminds me of, there was an organization that we had a chance to partner with, and you may be familiar with 'em, the Black Retail Action Group.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes, BRAG.

Brian McComak: Yeah, BRAG, which a great organization. And, you know, I know one of their programs is when you work with them for summer internships, they take those interns for a week through a program to prepare them for corporate life. And it just, it said to me, you know, so there are those of us who, you know, whether it's our parents, or our mentors, or someone in our lives, who sort of give us the, I'll say the decoder ring for life in corporate America, but if you don't have someone giving that decoder ring that's what that program at BRAG does, is it helps you with the decoder ring. And it's so necessary, if you don't have that understanding then someone has to help you with it.

Chelsea C. Williams: 100% and something I'm really passionate about that became so clear to me when I stepped up to do this work, I think a lot of times, if you say, diverse intern or early career, automatically people's initial thought will be race. Like racially diverse. But I want to make it really clear, most of the partners that I have, I'm thinking holistically, we serve a lot of first generation students. First generation students are not just, you know, not just black and brown, right? This goes across the spectrum because it's associated economic, in general, lens. And so I think that, you know, I don't know an organization that has a robust support system for first generation, certainly, college students, but even for first generation employees. Like, it's the first time being in a white collar space or in a blue pot, you know, whatever the case might be. And so I think there's an opportunity from a socioeconomic lens to just provide people more resources, that's one. The other area that I've really honed in to is the military space. I posted yesterday on LinkedIn. I work with the Corps Base Foundation and they support military families. They asked military veterans, you know, what would be most important to you to support your families? The company asked this on behalf of the Foundation. And automatically, the vast majority said, higher ed support. You know, we understand

socioeconomically, we want to be able to see our children do better than we did. That's what most parents would say. And so they're investing in scholarship, mentorship, and career development for military dependent youth and children. And I think, again, that's millions of students across the United States. First gens is one out of three, one out of three college students are first gen. The numbers are astronomical, and I think sometimes we think diversity is only race-based, but I really I think it's very important for us to take a moment and understand the socioeconomic piece too, because that's vastly important when we talk about outcomes in the workplace.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, absolutely. Well, I don't know if you know this, I'm a military brat myself.

Chelsea C. Williams: I don't think I knew that about you. I don't think I knew that.

Brian McComak: Yeah, yeah. I was one of those kids that grew up in lots of different places.

Chelsea C. Williams: Oh, wow.

Brian McComak: My dad was in the Army. I spent most of my elementary school years in Berlin, Germany.

Chelsea C. Williams: Wow.

Brian McComak: I don't speak German, unfortunately.

Chelsea C. Williams: That would have been a cool fun fact, if you did.

Brian McComak: That would have been a cool fun fact. But yeah, so we lived lots of different places. And my family settled in Tampa, Florida, about 30-32 years ago. So then my parents have been there ever since. Of course, I wasn't able to stay put, so I have been all sorts of other places. But yeah, I grew up as a military brat. And, you know, it's, I think that's certainly shaped some of my life experiences. And my parents like to joke, they're like, with my sister and I, they're like, you know you didn't have to keep moving as you became an adult. You actually get to choose a place if you want to, if you want to.

Chelsea C. Williams: Mm-hm.

Brian McComak: So, one of the things you just mentioned a few minutes ago, Chelsea, is the experiences of black and brown people and those communities. And I want to talk just about a really serious topic and hear what you're, sort of, how you're feeling. And maybe you can give some advice to me and others who would want to be allies. The tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, and Greg Floyd?

Chelsea C. Williams: George Floyd.

Brian McComak: George Floyd. Apologies.

Chelsea C. Williams: No, that's okay.

Brian McComak: You're keeping me on track.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, George Floyd.

Brian McComak: George Floyd, which was just sad news to wake up to this morning. And I know that those aren't the only three, they're three that have really come to our attention recently. And each of them are tragic in their own ways. One of the things that I try to think about in these moments is, and of course, you know, I've committed my work and my passion in life to this work, but sometimes it doesn't feel like enough. And sometimes it's, I want to be an ally, I want to be a supporter. I also, you know, it's not my experience, it's an experience of others, although we're all part of this world, and we want to make the world a better place. And so sometimes I'm like, I'm not sure what's best for me to do. But I wanna be a good ally. And I want to try to help, I want to help in most ways I can. So first, I just, I want to make sure I ask how you're feeling and what these messages, what do they mean for you, and what maybe some advice you might have for those of us who want to show up as allies in these moments.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, no, thank you. Thank you so much for asking the question, Brian. You know, even in our preparation for this conversation, when you sent me the questions, it meant a lot for me for you to even ask. To create this space on your show, many of which are your community to say, well, let's go here. So, first, I want to acknowledge that because I I think that is an example. That's an example of a real life allyship. When you think about being in a place of decision making, when you're in a place of deciding what gets covered, who gets a seat at the table, you're thinking holistically. And so, you know, that is, that's a gem. That's a gem right there. I think I told you before, this time around

with George Floyd, because this happened yesterday, I think the news broke yesterday. This time around, I decided to stay off of social and to not immerse myself and immerse myself into the news. You know, with the Ahmaud Arbery case, that was a very difficult low that I experienced, and many of my community. So, you know, I want to start by saying, I'm speaking on behalf of Chelsea Williams' lens and the people who are part of my community, but that was very, very, very, very, very, very difficult. My phone went off nonstop from each and every person that I knew. Each and every, and I'll say in this case, black person, that I knew. And I did have several non-black people, several reach out and check in. And I appreciated it so much. This time around, I needed to protect my mental health and wellness. And so I chose not to immerse myself into the story. I know it happened, I'm sad it happened again, but I think that's the thing. This happens so frequently, I am so tired of reciting the names. Every single time the name appears, another name, it's just as painful as it was the time before. And so, how I'm doing today is good because I've realized that I have to protect my wellbeing, and so my choice to not immerse myself was good and healthy for me, and those healthy boundaries we all need. But my disappointment level, my sadness is high. And I think that I have so many different thoughts on this topic. It's interesting because I actually now feel, in this role, that you and I do, more empowered than ever to speak. I can remember my time when I worked in finance, I told you I started my career there, and I'll never forget a year where there was, you know, back-to-back we had the black men shooting, Trayvon and then Michael Scott, like it was just, it was a lot. And I can never forget, I was working in finance and walking into my office. It was me and another black millennial woman on my floor, and I didn't want to even go into work. Had I been the Chelsea I am today, I would have been like, I'm taking a personal day. But at the time, we're all growing, right, we're all learning and so, I got ready and went into the office, such as sad subway ride. But walked in, had my smiling face on and my head up, looked at the other black girl on my floor, we just started crying, looked at each other, started crying and ran to the conference room. We ran to the conference room. And we were there for about an hour crying to one another and no one checked in. Not a person asked a thing. And so, when I think about what's necessary, I know that is the experience of many. And for this purpose of this conversation, I'm gonna speak about black people because that's what I am, my experience, right? I know for a fact that there are many stories of that same experience because people have shared them with me. And so now, when I think about what it means to be available, you know, I've spoken with a lot of people who say, Chelsea, I don't know what to say it hurt me too. I was so disappointed, I just don't know what to say, I don't wanna offend, I don't wanna overstep. But I will tell you, when we're doing DEI training in facilitation, when we set our norms at the beginning of the session, we say, seek to understand. That's one thing, Brian, you know this, we always say, when you go into this two hour or three hour session, we want you to seek to understand. Which means, you're taking a moment to really explore, assess, and put yourself in the shoe, and it's very difficult to do it, but put yourself in the shoe of the other person. And I really, really wish, or my ask would be, that people who are allies, 'cause all I could speak to are people who identify as allies, right? Would seek to understand. And sometimes that seeking to understand is simply just to check in. And I did, one of the bravest moments I've had was a post on LinkedIn, through the Ahmaud Arbery case, where I said, just checkin' in. Don't overthink it. You know, don't worry, 'cause sometimes I know there's this thing, and am I saying the right thing? Just check in. Because that's the humanity piece. That's the piece that I see you. That's the piece, even if I'm wrong and you're upset that I checked in, I did it from a place of love, I did it from a place of sincerity, I did it from a place of caring for you enough where I can put my personal feelings to the side to simply be present and check in with you. And so, I think about that as one piece. The other part that I would put

into this is someone who is a diversity and inclusion leader. So anyone who's on the line who's advocating for DEI, as a thought leader, as a executive, even employee resource group members who might be on the line. I think that there's a responsibility, I think that there's a responsibility when these things happen not to make the assumption that there'll be okay. 'Cause I think that's the assumption, they'll be okay. Give it a few days and we'll move forward. But I think we have to address. I think the progressive organizations are saying, we don't wanna talk about this but we're gonna talk about this.

Brian McComak: Right.

Chelsea C. Williams: We're not gonna be okay with having black employees running to the bathroom crying and no one even asking, how are you doing? We can do better than that, I know we can. And so I think the first step is seeking to understand and then putting emotions aside, and just simply asking. I don't get what you're going through but I care enough to ask you what I can do. And by the way, I'm also gonna speak up. And I think that's the other part that sometimes doesn't happen. So I gave you two, several different pieces of my thought process. But hopefully that, you know, that helps get started on other parts of discussion.

Brian McComak: Yeah, I think that's, I think that's really, really helpful. And it reminds me of something else I've seen. I've seen a few comments about this on LinkedIn, around CEOs who are acknowledging these tragedies, when they're, if it's a message, or if it's a town hall. I think those moments are powerful and mean something. It reminds me of the CEO action for inclusion and diversity--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: It was a great organization and--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: A big part of where they started was, it was the incident where the, if I remember it correctly, it was the officer who was killed in her apartment in Texas. Who the--

Chelsea C. Williams: Sandra Bland?

Brian McComak: Yes and Tim Ryan, who's the chairman of the PwC said, we have to talk about this.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: And he said the entire company is going to have a day, we're going to have these conversations and we're going to be real about it.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah and here's the other thing about this, Brian. It's our responsibility to have the conversation. And here's the other thing about it that broke my heart, that happened to me last week. I was speaking with a leader in an organization, and they were talking about wanting to create a custom training for bias and you know, because of the whole COVID-19 and the bias we've seen to many Asian Pacific Islanders. She wanted to create an awareness training for her employees, right? And so, I'm like, yes, that's great. You know, she's telling me about 'em, and I'm like, that's necessary, that's needed. And then she's like, oh yeah, by the way, Pride's coming up in a few months, I also want to get us on board to make sure we don't miss it. We won't have the parade this year, but I definitely want to make sure that we do something for pride. And I'm like, oh my god, of course, like, we have to do this. I don't want to have a moment where I'm like, she didn't mention anything about Ahmaud Arbery. And it wasn't a judgmental piece, but it was a moment for me, as a black woman, to take a step back and say, yes, I'm all for building bridges and awareness about other people who are in underrepresented and marginalized communities, and being able to advocate for them. But not even an acknowledgement of that. And I don't know the root of why that wasn't brought up, like the other things, because I actually end up asking her, yeah, and I actually think we should probably discuss Ahmaud Arbery too, and that senseless murder. Because black employees, wow, they have been, it's been rough for many of us. And she responded, oh my goodness, that was so bad. I agree, it was awful. And so, I had a moment before I asked her where I said, does she not know? Like, is she unaware? Is there a fear in just bringing it up to me as a black person, but the fact that there would be an acknowledgement that it happened makes me wonder, it's more a question, why? Why is this particular topic the one where there's such a resistance? And maybe I'm using the wrong word, but there's such a resistance to have the conversation or to acknowledge, versus all these other things that are happening around us. And I think that's the painful piece. So, that's where I think anybody who's leading these efforts, we have to make sure the things that we typically don't want to discuss are what we need to discuss.

Brian McComak: Yeah.

Chelsea C. Williams: Where we have that fear moment, like, oh my goodness, I don't want to go there. That's where we need to go.

Brian McComak: Yeah, and I, of course, I can't speak for the person, you know, the person in that story. But I know one of the things that I get stuck on sometimes is that there's so much that we need to fix. And some are worse things than others, and as, was it, Kenji Yoshino says, it's not the pain

Olympics, there's a lot of pain and there's a lot of pain to go around. And we do need to make the world a better place. And so what I try to do in those moments, 'cause I get overwhelmed sometimes.

Chelsea C. Williams: Absolutely.

Brian McComak: Because I want to fix it for all of us. And I try to pay attention to these moments, and I try to track it all, but I also realize, I'm not gonna be able to absorb every moment that's happened, and I don't want to minimize these significant moments 'cause they're, we've lost lives in those moments and that's tragic. But what I try to do though, is to say, okay, I can't fix everything, but I can take actions that are tangible. I can show up, I can ask questions--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: I can make space for a conversation, I can check in on a friend, I can do work that hopefully changes how people see the world. So, what is within my control, or what is it within my sphere of influence, and say, and hopefully say each day, at least I tried today, and I hope I impacted someone's life today in a positive way. And what I love though, is there are lots of us, like you and me, and Angelo, and others on the call, I'm sure, who are people who want to show up in the world that day. It takes all of us with all those collective of each of those individual acts and steps that we take to try to get to fix some of these things that are really wrong.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, and here's the thing that I had to let go of. Transparently, Brian, you and me can work until we are, we feel like we've received the A badge. Some of these challenges are so systematic and so ingrained into society, for me to ever think that I could solve the whole thing would be, you know, pretty prideful. Right, and so to your point, I think that the bigger thing is, what things can we do within our control? And what we can do within our control is actually so much. Because we have the sphere of influence that translates through each and every person that we connect with, each and every person that we engage with, each and every time that we work and partner with someone, and I think a lot of times, we think the opportunity to be more inclusive and to advocate for equity and belonging is so difficult but it's not, you know? And so, I thought about a few examples of what it looks like. Hearing something that rubs you the wrong way and you react and you said, that person really say that, and letting it go, continuously, and not having a moment where you say, you know what, I think it's worth in love, caring enough to confront. And I'm not gonna coin that, I saw that on Instagram. But caring enough to confront. And I think that that's the thing, when you care deeply and you really want to see it change, we have to confront things. And so I think hearing things and responding is important. I think when we talk about equity, how we are providing resources, whether that's capital resources, or time to particular people, who we see as credible sources, who we see as capable. I think even, Brian, as you were planning your panel for this series that you're having for Hummingbird Humanity, your thoughtfulness about the voices that you wanted to highlight. You know, I think for many people on

here, when you have a decision to talk compensation or benefits for particular people, making sure that it's equitable, there's still this humongous pay gap, particularly for women of color, that is so prevailing and it festers itself through so much of society. And I think we have an opportunity to challenge or we have an opportunity to make sure within our wheelhouse that we are assessing what we put out, what we work on on a day-to-day basis to make sure that we are being most inclusive. And I think if each and every one of us took that responsibility seriously and understood we're gonna have our great days and our days where we feel like we failed, but we're still going to get up. That's where we'll start to see change.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, absolutely. Thank you for all that. I'm gonna respond with something, but I just want to encourage anyone in the room, if you have questions, feel free to drop them in chat, and Angelo will make sure that we cover them. So just, I encourage you to share your questions, 'cause we're here for you and we want to make sure that we're covering what's important to those of you in the room. One thing that you just highlighted though, Chelsea, which I wanted to respond to is, and I love that you mentioned it, is I think one of the areas that is overlooked but it is extremely important in this work for diversity, equity, and inclusion is the benefits and the compensation pieces. And you know, those are, when I think about it from a business perspective, part of what I also think is these are great ways to tangibly demonstrate commitment to different groups.

Chelsea C. Williams: Absolutely.

Brian McComak: And you know, one of, and this is not specific to this conversation, although in one of the groups that is, when we think about intersectionality that has had some significant impacts, and unfortunately a lot of these individuals have died, are transgender women of color. And their access to the resources they need is so limited that they end up in unsafe situations. And so the systemic impacts that play out to these individuals, companies can do things to support individuals. Last week on the episode, when Ben Greene was with us, we talked about the various components of supporting individuals through transition.

Chelsea C. Williams: That's great.

Brian McComak: So, I just, I think it's an overlooked area. And when I think about, again, what you highlighted about, the disparity of pay for women of color, when when we talk about systemic impacts, like there's all these, there's these impacts the trickle down around access to education--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: And resources that help the children they may have or the people in their lives that they're supporting-

Chelsea C. Williams: Yup.

Brian McComak: To be able to rise and to have their own fruitful lives that, you know. So it has this trickle down effect. And how do we start to right the systemic issues?

Chelsea C. Williams: I'd does, and Brian, you know, to that point about pay, I really want to stay on this for just a few minutes because it was a life changing experience that I had when I worked in finance. I was co-leading global compensation at one of my organizations, which, I'll never forget those days, a lot of work. But one of the benefits was from my diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. My director and I made that, we said to ourselves, we're going to do what we can do within our leadership and within our role to make sure that we are asking questions to our managers as they come back to us with compensation recommendations for their team. So we went by line-by-line, every single employee, at the time, we did it from a gender and a racial lens. And I can remember, 'cause I was doing it on the back end, looking at each person in a group, and anytime I saw something that looked questionable, going back to a manager and asking the question. We don't dictate outcomes. It's not a situation like, well, this person. But it is okay to ask the question. And a lot of times, if a manager has done their due diligence, which the vast majority had, it made sense when the explanation came. But not having an explanation, actually is a problem that we have to go back and say, okay, we gotta make sure that we are clear about the reason for the discrepancy between these two people, because right now it just seems completely off, right?

Brian McComak: Yeah.

Chelsea C. Williams: And so, I think, again, that's the power that we have. That is advocating. That's advocacy for diversity and inclusion. They're likely, none of my colleagues who knew I was working in HR at the time, probably knew that happened. But those are the things that happened behind closed doors that make all the difference for people's lives and for their families. And so, if each of us can think about what opportunities we have to do things like that, from the work in the sector and industry we work in, I really believe that we can start to push for change.

Brian McComak: Yeah, agreed. Well, and when I, and I'm sure you've done this as well, in training, I like to talk about the employee lifecycle or the moments that matter in that employee lifecycle, because it's impacting the bias that may creep in, or discrimination 'cause that certainly happens as well. How do we mitigate that in each of those moments? Hiring decisions, promotion decisions, you know, special projects, stretch projects. You know, so on. There's each of those moments. Those moments

are the moments, that if we can fix the bias that's in those moments, then we can start to move the needle in the right direction. But it takes that intentionality and it takes someone having those conversations that might feel uncomfortable. But they're important.

Chelsea C. Williams: Absolutely.

Brian McComak: They're important.

Chelsea C. Williams: Absolutely, absolutely.

Brian McComak: Angelo, did we get any questions? No questions!

Angelo Cilia: No, we're very quiet today, we're very quiet.

Brian McComak: A quiet day, I love it. Well, I mean, I have plenty of questions. So we can keep going on that. But you know, feel free to jump in with questions, as always. So, well, maybe we're just doing so good, Chelsea, that's what it is.

Chelsea C. Williams: I'm glad to hear that, you all had me a little nervous.

Brian McComak: You know, I'm, you know, I'm curious. You know, you were talking about how you're, one of the areas you're focused on in your life today is self care and how you're taking care of yourself in light of some of these tragedies. But there's also this bigger event, that some of you may have heard of, is this pandemic that's happening.

Chelsea C. Williams: Oh, that thing, yeah, 'rona.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, and you know, and there are moments, you know, for even myself where I am, you know, I'm enjoying this adventure that I've tried with moving into consulting, and I have great colleagues, and partners, and supporters, and fans. And so I've been really fortunate and I know there are many others like that, but there's also, you know, there's been so much that's stopped. And we're all trying to figure out how do we navigate this? So, I'm curious, sort of, how you're, you know, are there life experiences that you think prepared you for this time and how you're navigating the

pandemic because I know you are also in the same, you know, you do fractional work and you piece it together like I do. And I'm sure there are a lot of people on the call today that are the same way. So just any words of wisdom from your experiences?

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, wow, I think it all goes back to our personal story. Like, this season for me has given me such a beautiful opportunity to reflect on my story. The story of my parents. My parents immigrated over to the United States as high school graduates going into college. And so I'm not first gen by the official government definition but I feel like first gen, for sure. And this thinking about my journey in a predominantly white school, being taken. My mom used to drive me 30 minutes to a high school in a very black area, that was the only magnet school in my county, to get a great education that would set me up for college. Making the decision to go to Spelman College, a historically black women's college, North Carolina has great colleges. So a lot of people were like, do you really need to leave? Do you want to leave? But feeling like I needed that moment to understand who I am as a black woman, to see the beauty, and the opportunity, and the vision of black women in a way that I hadn't seen it before growing up. And transparently, I would say, my educational journey, in many ways, has led me to this work. Because I feel as though at many points in my life, I've been dissecting what it means to be a black woman, what it means to be an educated black woman, what it means to be a black woman in faith. Like, all these parts of my life that continue to evolve and continue to be refined really started from my childhood with education. And so I'm very much passionate about continuing to assess and explore what my story is and being more comfortable speaking about my story, which I think is still, I think it's still an opportunity. Like, we talk about humanity and we talk about heart. Wouldn't it be so powerful if more organizations created a space for people to authentically share their story, without a fear of repercussion, without, you know, we do, when we are facilitating we have the iceberg. We talk about what's above the waterline and below the waterline, and all the juicy stuff below the waterline that people don't feel comfortable to share because of whatever reason that is. And I don't think everything needs to be shared, right? But I do think that there's more that we can share about who we are, what shaped our lens, what we value. And if we knew that, I just believe organizations would be that much stronger. I think innovation would be over the roof, it would have more productivity. And so I want to get back to the storytelling, authentic storytelling, and creating a space where everyone truly knows that they do have a story, and that most importantly, there's a space created to share the story. And I think, I'm hopeful COVID, I think one of the best things that can happen as we prepare for whatever a return to some type of normalcy looks like, is that we take the time not to ignore these months, but that executives, and HR managers, and leaders really say, let's sit on this for a little bit. Let's come together, in whatever way is authentic for the organization, let's talk about it, let's address it, and then let's use this information to help us imagine what our future culture needs to look like. What's the new opportunity post-COVID? 'Cause there's an opportunity in all this is. As difficult as it's been for many of us, there was a huge opportunity. Brian, we talked about it. So I think that I really want that, I would really love for that to happen. I think the same thing should happen at campuses across the United States. I think there needs to be discussion on identity, and stories, and inclusion, and belonging at the college level. Starting when they first get in and starting to create that space of community. Because if their muscles are flexed there, they'll be more prepared for the workplace. So I think it really can hit many different sectors.

Brian McComak: Yeah, I love that, I love that. Well, and I'm also hearing resiliency in your story. It's what you choose to do with this time. One of my favorite quotes is, the world shows up the way you see it that day. And it's okay to have a bad day. I've certainly had a few of those.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah.

Brian McComak: During this time and before this time.

Chelsea C. Williams: Totally.

Brian McComak: No, it's okay to have those, and I think it's important that we allow ourselves to do that. And to say like, today, I'm sad, or today I'm angry, or today I'm afraid, and then to pick ourselves up and move forward. And, you know, the two things you highlighted there, I love sharing your story. I still remember the first time I realized that sharing my story that I was a gay man could change the way someone else viewed someone who was gay. And it was, it's powerful, and it was 20 years ago, and it still has stuck with me and I still tell that story on a regular basis. And community has gotten me through a lot. So thank you for sharing that. Angelo, I think I've seen some questions pop up.

Angelo Cilia: There is, there's a good one here from Serabi. And Serabi asks, "I want to ask Brian and Chelsea", so you're both able to answer this question. "What do you do to keep." Sorry, guy, I'm losing it. "What do you do to keep "pushing your own learning?" As in, what are you reading right now? What is that is impactful?

Brian McComak: I love that. Serabi, thank you for asking the question. What am I reading right now? That's a good question. Well, actually, and I'm gonna forget the name of the book, Chelsea, you're gonna have to, there was a book you recommended, I have at home.

Chelsea C. Williams: "Diversity, Inc."

Brian McComak: That one.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, yeah, it's good.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well, and "Diversity, Inc", the reason I picked it up was when Chelsea posted about it is, and I'm curious to sort of, I've always tried to level set my own perspective of this space against others who are experts or who have been in this space longer than mine. But this is, you know, this is a conversation around what's working and what's not working in this diversity and inclusion. 'Cause there's a lot of us trying to make change and I think all of us, or many of us, feel like it's moving more slowly than it should or what we would like it to. And so, what can we do differently or better? So, that is certainly top of mind. And then I would be remiss not to mention the Jennifer Brown Consulting calls.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yes.

Brian McComak: On Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon, where she always brings in another thought leader in to have a conversation with her. And those real conversations were part of the inspiration for this series that I have. But I wanted to take it from a different angle than Jennifer, because I think she's doing what she does super, super well. Those have been really great for me as well. So Chelsea, I'm sure you're--

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, yeah.

Brian McComak: Probably have a whole list.

Chelsea C. Williams: Oh my gosh, I do actually. Serabi, hello, great to see you, great question. Certainly, Jennifer Brown's community calls every Tuesday and Thursday. I am so excited when I can make it to be on with hundreds, literally, of people passionate about diversity and inclusion. That has been fabulous. My other two would be podcasts. So there's an amazing podcast that a Spelman friend of mine, Gabrielle Horton, out of Los Angeles, started called, Natal. And it tells the story, or Natal, it tells the story of particularly black women during childbirth. So there's been a lot of, Serena Williams was one of the people who first started talking about the disparities in health care access for women as they're giving birth in hospitals and just general Primary Care organization facilities across the world, and so Natal tells those untold stories from a health equity lens. Oh my gosh, powerful. So, N-A-T-A-L on podcast. And for those who are interested. And then the third one for me is "Never Eat Alone". So I am, I have had "Never Eat Alone" but I haven't read "Never Eat Alone". So, I'm actually diving into the book and it's really, really powerful. One thing I wanted to make sure I was doing during this season was engaging my network and making sure that I'm building new networks. And so, again, you can never stop learning. So it's been great to dive in to "Never Eat Alone" and really have best practices for staying connected during this time. So those are my three.

Brian McComak: I love it. And I can't believe I didn't mention this one. Glennon Doyle's "Untamed". She is a rockstar. And this one's special for me because the last event that I went to, before the world shut down, was Glennon Doyle's book launch for "Untamed" and I have a chance to hear her speak. And I love her, she has a daily message on Instagram each morning, which is a moment of inspiration and honesty. So it's another, it's another way to just hear someone who is just being real in this time, which I think is just fantastic.

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah.

Brian McComak: Angelo, any other questions?

Angelo Cilia: We do, Jared asks. Sorry, not Jared, it was Brian asks, "What does Chelsea suggest folks "from dominant majority groups do to lean "into self education to learn more about people "from different backgrounds and dimensions of diversity?"

Chelsea C. Williams: Wow.

Brian McComak: It's a great question. I mean, one of the things that I just want to add on that, Chelsea, is I hear this a lot from when I'm, particularly, when I'm facilitating from individuals who are in these, you know, these diverse communities who are like, it's not my job anymore to try to help you understand. And I can empathize with that frustration. So, and I love that question 'cause I've heard it a few times and I don't know. 'Cause one of the things I, as we talked about earlier, like I say, seek to understand. And so, then they're like, so I'm seeking to understand, but then like, there's this, again, if that everyone, particularly if you're the only black person or brown person in the room, then it gets exhausting. And that could be true for other communities, LGBTQ+, or disabled communities. So we could we could talk about different groups. So any, I love that, any words of wisdom for us?

Chelsea C. Williams: Yeah, it's a beautiful question 'cause the intent and the heart is to grow and to do better as we're all doing. You know, I go back to really spending time to get to know people's story and their experience and not shying away from it. So I think the first camp is thinking about, we can think broadly, think about the diverse people in your life, think about the people of color in your life, one step lower, think about the, you know, the black or the LatinX people or Asian Pacific in your life, and I think really just having a general conversation and saying, I want to learn and understand from an authentic place. Not because I have the answers, and I want to try to coach you, but because I want to understand your experience. I care enough to have the conversation with you. I think is so vitally important. And then I think the big thing is, if you've had a conversation or two, not thinking that those conversations are the holy grail for everyone else in that community. Because I think sometimes it's like, I've done the work, I have my two people of color in my life, as an example. I spoke with them, I know them, I get them, but then you meet someone who's vastly different from those people, and you're thrown off,

could be a reaction, and then you think that there's something wrong with them or your approach with them is very different from the experience you've had with the two people who are close to you, and then it creates some type of conflict or friction. So I think each and every time you meet someone new, it's a clean slate. You know, you meet another black woman, it's not I met, Chelsea, she's a black woman who I get. Why is this person? I'm not, you know, why am I not getting along with them? 'Cause at the end of the day, behind our race, behind our gender, behind our sexual orientation, we're human. So get to the point of humanity and seeing the person for who they are, taking off any prior assumptions or generalizations that you might have, which is really difficult even for me speaking right now, it takes a lot of personal work. But I think that's how we have to approach, that's how we have to approach this space. Last thing I would say is, I mentioned Natale, Natal, however you pronounce it, because I think there's a lot of things that are happening in the world that, unless we had truth tellers who really wanted to create a space for us to know, we would never think that these things are happening. Because it's not our experience, it's not our lens. And so, you know, one thing that I shared on LinkedIn yesterday was I set a personal goal last year to understand a diversity lens very different from myself. And so my goal was, last year was, the military space. I don't have anyone in my family in active service, at all, by a long shot. And so I was very passionate about saying, Chelsea, you need to get to know this community. And I wanted to, I genuinely wanted to. But it's gonna make you that much more impactful as a practitioner as you step outside of this lens of being a woman, of being a being black, and understanding something vastly different. Game changer. Absolute game changer. Being immersed into this new space, it's helped me practice my skill of listening, because that is so much of what you have to do when you're in a space very different from your own lived experience. You've gotta listen and really just be present. And so that experience of taking the time to listen and be present, within this veteran ecosystem, helped me better serve them and now they're a client for College Code, a great client. So that's a success story of like, setting a goal, getting proximate, but then when you're there, listening, and going in hungry just to absorb a new space.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Chelsea.

Chelsea C. Williams: You're very welcome. Thank you for the question, it was great.

Brian McComak: I love it, I love it. Well, and I know we're close to four o'clock, and so, and we can stay on for a couple of minutes, particularly if there is other questions. But if you have to run, certainly we understand. We have, many of us have schedules to keep. And just a reminder that next week, Tim Vigue will be joining us. Tim is the Director of Inclusion Strategies at Pixar Animation Studios.

Brian McComak: And has been a mentor to me. So I'm really excited that he's joining us. He has a background in diversity and inclusion consulting from Korn Ferry prior to that, so really has spent a whole career in this space. And we're gonna talk about his thoughts on humanity, as well as some of the storytelling that Pixar does to shape perspectives through animation. So, excited for Tim to be here. One other thing to note about next week, is it will be live only, we will not be recording next week. So, today's recording we'll share but next week, unfortunately, we won't be able to. So join us

live next week if you'd like to join us. So, thank you for being here. But Angelo, before we head off and I know people are gonna start dropping off, any other questions that we want to answer before we drop off?

Angelo Cilia: There were no other questions. So that was that was it. People are saying goodbye, and thank you for your answers to your questions, we did receive a couple of those, yeah.

Brian McComak: Fantastic, well, Chelsea gives great answers.

Chelsea C. Williams: Awesome, awesome. Thank you everyone for tuning in. Hopefully there's something that you took away. And we're all on this journey together. So keep pressing on and safe, and healthy positive vibes for everyone, okay?

Brian McComak: I love that. Well, Chelsea, thank you for bringing some joy and light, and also some realness and honesty to the conversation today. It's so important. And very much in the spirit of what I was hoping that these conversations would be is, let's go back to just who we are as people and see where those conversations take us in this work. So, thank you for going on that journey with me. I'm really grateful.

Chelsea C. Williams: It is my pleasure. All right, thank you so much, Brian and Angelo.

Brian McComak: Thank you.

Chelsea C. Williams: Thank you, everyone.

Brian McComak: Bye, everyone, happy Wednesday!