

Hummingbird Humanity

an LGBTQ+ owned business

Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit

with Surabhi Lal

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Brian McComak: Hello everyone I love when I'm just talking to my computer and nobody can hear me. The most interesting moment of the entire hour.

Angelo Cilia: I tried to raise my eyebrow for you Brian, I was like.

Brian McComak: You did, you did a good job. You did a good job. So we'll get started here in just a moment, thanks Karen. For those of you who may have missed the first episode, I actually spoke to myself for like an entire minute. It was really the most riveting moment, and I'm sorry everyone missed those beautiful comments and welcomes. So thank you everyone for being here, we'll wait just another minute to give everyone a chance to to join us. But I hope everyone is doing well today. It's Wednesday, is that right? Do I have it right? Yes, okay, oh, it's Wednesday because we're having the call and this call is on Wednesday so, oh my gosh, Kelly Harris, oh, hello, hello though. I love going down memory lane when people join and I really just appreciate everyone dedicating time to be with us, where I know everyone is busy and we all have lots of different things pulling us in many directions, so thank you for being here. And as Angelo mentioned, please introduce yourself in the chat, connect, share LinkedIn information, share what you do, share where you're calling from. And this is an opportunity for you to network and engage as well. So we will, let's see what time is it, 3:04, I think we'll go ahead and dive right in. So welcome to Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit. We're on week six of this series, which will run through July 29th when we'll have episode 12 and 1/2, because thirteen is a bad luck number, so we're going to have episode 12 and 1/2. And so I hope you'll join us for as many Wednesdays as you can. And if you do miss a Wednesday, the episodes are recorded, you can find them on YouTube afterwards as well to watch at your leisure. So it's great weekends, or while you're eating your breakfast, whatever works for you. So I'm delighted today to... Actually, before I introduce Surabhi, I should acknowledge there may be some people that have come back and I'm sure some people that are new today, so welcome to both of those groups. And if you fall in the third group that I haven't figured out how to quantify that, that's okay too, you're also welcome. For those of you who may not know, Hummingbird Humanity is a new venture that I started. It's just a month ago now. I feels like it's been much longer, but it really is just over a month ago, and much longer in a good way. Hummingbird Humanity is a consultancy that will work with companies to bring humanity to the workplace, and help organizations have a humancentered workplace culture. And I'm super excited to be doing this work. I've spent 20 plus years in human resources and diversity, equity and inclusion, and so this is a new chapter for me to find other ways to make a difference in the world and to make a difference in the lives of others. And with

that said, I'm super excited that my friend, and colleague, and thought partner, Surabhi Lal, has offered to join me today. Before I let Surabhi introduce herself, I'm gonna share a little bit how we know each other. And I'm gonna try not to cry at this moment, because crying was involved the first time that we met. So when was it, Surabhi? Was it--

Surabhi Lal: February.

Brian McComak: February? I feel like I've known you for so long. We became fast friends immediately. In February, Surabhi was one of the wonderful, amazing women who spoke at our friend Eduardo's Fearless Four series. And Eduardo was the guest on week one, so the world all comes together, we all know each other. And Allison Davis, who's on the call today, I met that night as well, and I had a chance to hear her speak and talk about her imposter, Patricia, which we can talk about another time. But Surabhi shared a story about how she felt like another her entire life. And her story was centered around as a woman of color being in rooms where she didn't see herself. And she brought me to tears several moments, because I have felt just like she has felt. Now, I'm not a woman of color in case anyone missed that, but as a gay man and from so many years of my life not knowing and understanding why I felt like another, that was also complicated and confusing, and why it just never felt like I fit, and just to hear someone share that story in such a powerful, and eloquent, and honest way, and I could feel myself, I might cry, it just really moved me. So, I walk up to her afterwards and I'm like, "I have to know you." And we've been friends ever since, so welcome Surabhi, I'm so glad you're here.

Surabhi Lal: Thank you, I think that you said, "I hate that you made me cry. I don't do it often." And I thought, okay. I cry all the time.

Brian McComak: I love it, I love it.

Surabhi Lal: I cried on my sleep. Yeah, I think it was interesting, 'cause it was such a powerful story, and I will say, Ben is also on this call, and works with Eduardo in Fearless, and what they're able to do to pull a story out and bring it to life, 'cause I knew it was a story that I wanted to tell, and I didn't necessarily have the wherewithal by myself to tell the story, and so, big love to both of them and props to both of them for being able to really help guide a story, which is very much my story. And one of the things that Eduardo said as we did this, is that this is a story that a lot of people have, and I think about that in terms of our connection as well of, it's a story that a lot of people can relate to in the depths of our being, a feeling like, what does it feel like when you're the only one there? What does it feel like when you don't belong? And I think on a societal level right now, this is the question that we're wrestling with in the US, is around what would it mean if we we're building a society where everyone felt like they belong? What would it mean if our policies reflected that? What would that mean if our schools reflected that? What would it mean if our budgets reflected that? And certainly in the workplace, we're hearing calls for the same thing. So I think we can tell from an individual standpoint,

it can feel really uncomfortable and not great, and many of us have felt it for very different circumstances.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, absolutely, and so there's two things I'm reminded of before we move on, one is Surabhi and I had a prep call, as I do with every guest, we agreed that we have three to four, maybe five hours of conversation we'd like to go through, so just make sure you buckle in, no, of course, we're not going to do that, but we're gonna cover as many topics as we can, and certainly wanna engage your questions, I want to make sure I give a nod to Angelo Cilia, who is your producer with the most best so he will be helping us behind the scenes to monitor the chat and making sure that we don't miss any important questions that you might have. So Angelo, thank you for being with us as always. And before we dive into the conversation, Surabhi do you wanna tell, of course, I'm a huge Luminary fan, I've spent so much time at Luminary in the last six months, which is awesome, do you wanna tell us a little bit about the work you do, and what Luminary is?

Surabhi Lal: Absolutely, so the work that I do, is really centered around the future of work. And I do that in a number of ways. And one of them is being the chief impact officer at Luminary, which is a women's collaborative hub, and workspace in New York City, really dedicated to advancing women through community, in all of the ways in which it might manifest, whether you're working in a corporate job, whether you're working as an entrepreneur, whether you're in between jobs, but really wanting to advance women, and so it is that sense of belonging or an equity piece that comes in our work, and my job in particular, is to think about what impact are we having, both to our members, and to thinking about how we drive conversations and organizations as they're thinking about their women. And that piece of it is really, really important. And we welcome our male allies. We know that that's not something that we can do by ourselves. The other big piece of what I do, is think about learning. And this fits very well into what I think part of the future of work is going to entail, which is, work is gonna be a place to learn, it's not just going to be a place to work, it is very much gonna be a place to learn. And certainly as technology grows, people are going to need upskilling, reskilling, different skilling, whatever word you wanna use. And so really thinking about learning and how we establish learning patterns, as not only a way to be ready for the future of work and to build that muscle, but also to start to think about how we build learning into Luminary's life. So we run lots of programs, they're very much part of, hang on one second, this is the reality of working from home.

Brian McComak: There's a little one behind you.

Surabhi Lal: There is, there is, and he's in another room, but he's learning how to use his voice at a very young age.

Brian McComak: Amazing.

Surabhi Lal: Which is great, in lots and lots of ways. So I'm gonna travel with you for a minute.

Brian McComak: Amazing.

Surabhi Lal: And just ask him to kindly--

Brian McComak: So for all of you out there, one of the things that we've talked about a lot in the diversity and inclusion space, and I'm sure many of you have been in these conversations, is this is the reality of work today, that we have parents who are at home, and as some of you may have seen in previous calls, sometimes my dog Bosco makes an appearance as well. It's a different world. I've heard some really powerful stories about how leaders and colleagues have really supported their colleagues, and how parents who have worked hard to cover in the workplace and not, so that their colleagues don't feel like they're pulled in these different directions, they want to present an image that they're fully present, and they certainly are, as best they can be, but they have other responsibilities and all of us do. And now those two realities are merging, and what I've heard, is some really great stories about people who have had colleagues and leaders say, "That's okay," like, be where you are, and say, "You do great work, and you're also managing other life, and that's okay."

Surabhi Lal: Yeah, and that is, I think Angelo just wrote this, right? This is about bringing your whole self to the workplace and I do, it is one of my big hopes, as we come out of this time, that we will collectively do a better job of doing that, as part of the future of work, which is building our relationships with our colleagues, even when we are not in kind of remote, to allow for that, to wonder what that's like, what is it like if you're taking care of, if you are a caretaker in some way, shape, or form, or there's something else that has nothing to do with another human, but is really just important to you to help you get on the way. So it could be your fitness class, it could be your creativity art class, it could be something completely different, but I think we're learning to understand what is necessary for people, and where people live, and what their mess looks like. And so if we can welcome more of that, then we may actually be kinder to each other, and to that humanity in the workplace, so, this is part of the humanity.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely, and I love what you captured there, and it's something that I really believe in is, if we can share more about ourselves and who we are, then we become, rather than this person in a box of I'm employee, or a manager, or HR person, or communications person, or whoever that may be, I'm a person first, that happens to also do these other things. And if you can treat people like humans in the workplace and say, "They're gonna make a mistake, they're going to have a bad day, they're going to get a call from their school, 'cause their kid is sick, they might have a parent who is

elderly and something happens," like, that's real life. And if we can bring that with us, I think it can really facilitate humanity in a way that is actually powerful for how people work together.

Surabhi Lal: Absolutely.

Brian McComak: So I wanna go to the conversation, a conversation that we promised we would cover, but I'm gonna throw a bit of a curveball real quick, because we're talking about a topic, and my co-host, producer, friend, is a caretaker right now, and Angelo, can I ask you just to come on for just a moment and just share a bit, 'cause we haven't done this yet, can you share with the group, where you are right now?

Angelo Cilia: Yes, I am in Kansas City, Missouri. I'm from San Francisco, but I've been in Kansas City since March 9th, and I am living with my 91 and 95-year-old parents in their Assisted Living, so while it's in lockdown, so I was here before they went into lockdown, and they've just allowed me to be here, and I've had sort of the flexibility to be here. It's basically the silver lining around to the storm, the ominous cloud that we've all been facing with, the COVID and everything that's been going on in the world, so it's been great being here, my mom's had some health issues, and I've been able to help her through some of those. And it's also been crazy, and it's like, like I had them moved down the hall. Like, if I had them in the room with me right now, I wouldn't be able to be on this call, so it's kind of given me a new appreciation for what parents go through, because it's kind of like I'm having two kids, everybody knows that adage of your parents turn into, you do reversal, so I'm experiencing that right now. And it's been a great learning process, and a wonderful heart experience for me, so that's it, I hope that's what you wanted me to say.

Brian McComak: I think that's perfect, that's perfect. The other thing I just wanted to mention is, Angelo asked if he could help with Hummingbird Humanity, and we had a conversation earlier this week, and he's been wonderful, and we've been thinking about what are the other things that he can do to help that allow for flexibility, because there's always stuff to do, but it doesn't always have to happen in the nine to five, 'cause his parents are his priority right now. And I think those are the conversations that leaders and managers are actually learning how to really have today with the current climate, which I'm hoping we'll take with us. So we'll come back to flexible working, probably later on, but, where I left off last week with Tim was, for those of you who were here, I said, "I really wanna talk about intersectionality, but we're out of time." So, Surabhi and I decided we're gonna talk about intersectionality today, but we wanna talk about it in the spirit of the current climate and context. So first, I want to, for anyone who may not know what intersectionality is, it is the reality or recognition that we all have multiple dimensions of who we are. So I am both a white man, and a gay person, and someone who's battled mental health, and a dog dad, right? We have all of these things that have come with us, and there's an infinite number of those possibilities and ways they come together. And when we think about the current context, and how that concept of, we all have multiple identities for who we are, it takes us back to, so right now, as we all know, we're having a real

conversation, and an important conversation, and hopefully truly taking action to improve the experience of the Black community in the United States and hopefully the world. It's also Pride Month. And Pride feels different this year, it's less celebratory, which I think is actually the right thing for a variety of reasons, but certainly related to Black Lives Matter. And what Surabhi and I were talking about is, the person who threw the first brick at Stonewall in 1969, was a black transgender woman. And her name is Marsha P. Johnson, and she is credited for being the person who started so much of this movement, that has led to acceptance in many ways for the LGBTQ plus community, we also have a long way to go. And so I think it's really interesting for us to remember back where we started recognizing what's happening, for this community, where we started, and what's happening today. And recognizing that hopefully, the energy, and the passion, and the emotion, and the anger, and the sadness, will really ignite something powerful that will make the world better as we move forward. And I know Surabhi, you have lots of thoughts on this, and how this will also translate to what happens when we come back, we're also working when we return to the office or return to our new normal, so what's on your mind?

Surabhi Lal: Well, one of the things that I'm often reminded of, is that we just do a terrible job of learning our history. And I am certainly part of that terrible job of learning history, in that there's so much that I didn't know, that I didn't learn, that wasn't in my history book, and things that I have learned along the way, and so as somebody who really does like to learn, and is curious, I think that this is one thing that all of us can do, which is really, where are the gaps in our history? What don't we know? And also be really curious, about who's the author of that history? It is his story and not her story, and that's his story, right? History is his story. And who is the person who's been telling history for a long time, and I have this memory from when I was younger, reading about Indian independence, and about India, and my family is originally from India, reading it and talking to my parents about it, and my mother kept saying, "That's actually not it. That's not how the history was written." And I remember being the Taurian that I am, and incredibly persistent and stubborn saying like, "No, but in this book, this is what it says." And was also probably around a teenager, so you can only imagine. And her saying, "But that's not the right history, you have to understand who's telling the history." So one, I want us to think about who's telling the history and whose history are we learning? But then two, how do we start to find out those other stories. And this is where I think stories are incredibly powerful to understand how your story and my story contextually can be really different, but at the heart of our story, there's something really, really similar, and that we can see, when we see these histories and these stories, who is being given power and who isn't, which can lead us into conversations, I think around power. Who's making the rules. And that could be in the workplace, that could be in school, that can be in our society at large. So I think it helps us see some of those intersections in different ways. If we start to delve into all the stories that help make up where we are, and what we know, and it helps us. I've been posting a little bit about how unlearning is harder than learning, because it really does make us think about, what are all those things that we took for granted to be true, that maybe aren't true? And how do we start to see movements, and histories, and our stories differently, and really start to see your story as valid as my story, as we start to pick those apart. And so as we were talking about it being Pride Month, and I was thinking about Stonewall, and thinking about how that actually started as a riot, right? It didn't start in a parade with people waving flags, it was very violent, and there are still places in this world where being out and being outwardly out, it can be very violent. And there are places where being, we're

seeing it now, that people are being targeted, because of usually their black skin, often their brown skin, and that sometimes it takes a really major, violent, visible protest to really get us to pay attention to some of those histories, now, do I really want people to live in violence? Absolutely not, however, we also know that a lot of movements are started through violence. The Revolutionary War was rampant.

- [Boy] Very.

Surabhi Lal: Very, you got even an eight-year-old.

Brian McComak: Very, good to have support. Well, and Surabhi, you reminded me of something that really hit me in the last couple of weeks, well, one thing you reminded me of, is what you said a few minutes ago of understanding each other's stories, or hearing each other stories can really bring humanity to the workplace, and how powerful that can be, and how we can work together more, in beautiful, powerful ways, innovative ways, bringing different ideas, and if you feel like you know someone, you can have more of those conversations, so there's a whole path we could go down there. But I wanna share a different story, which is, I have over the last couple of weeks, and I hope everyone here has been, I suspect that you probably are listening to the stories of the Black King from the Black community, whether that's from individuals, or watching movies, or reading books, I watched "Just Mercy" on Monday night, which made me furious, and sad, and was so powerful, so I highly recommend it, if you haven't had a chance to see that. But on a personal note, I live in a country where, even though I happen to be a gay man, and I wouldn't say that every gay man, or gay person, or queer person feels fully safe in this country, and some days they probably feel like they clearly aren't safe, I don't live in fear of the potential of dying, or being killed in this country, it's not part of my lived experience. I also know that there are countries in this world where I am very clear, that I will not visit because I know, that I have a significantly greater likelihood of dying just because I'm gay, or as Surabhi said, when we're speaking yesterday, if I was holding hands with my significant other, that is a moment that could translate to me losing my life. As I was connecting these different realities, though, I realized that is the experience of so many individuals in the Black community here in the United States. And I'm not sure I fully appreciated that a couple of weeks ago of, that is life day-to-day for the members of the Black community, and our brothers and sisters in that community. And that was really one of those moments that sort of just took me back. And I'm grateful I have those moments, because I think those moments help me do the work that I do, but it also just made me sad.

Surabhi Lal: And I think, to a lesser degree, right? We see this in our workplaces, and we see this around who's given promotion, who's given opportunity, what are those pieces that we might hold as this person can do this, or this person can't do this. Who are we putting into leadership? How are we able to get someone into the door? And then once they're in the door, are we creating communities within our workplaces where people want to stay? So for me, one of the things I think about, is how do we create communities of belonging? And how do we create spaces where people can come as their whole selves?

We were talking about this, in terms of parenting and caretaking, and I think that's something that COVID has exposed to many people, and I've certainly been on many calls in the last few months around, what is it really like to be a working parent? What does that look like? But as a caretaker, I think some of that has been exposed through COVID. And that's not the only thing that we need to think about when we think about creating communities of belonging at work, or we're talking about, I think Brian, you and I are talking about this as well, is that if you and I had to hide who we were, if I had to hide being a parent, and say you had to hide being gay, would we be giving our best selves to work? And both of us unequivocally said, "Absolutely not. That wouldn't work." And so I do think that we're in a position to think about how we create that community, but we also have to do that by listening. So, there may be things that we're doing unintentionally, that we don't know, that we're not gonna know unless we ask. So we're not gonna know unless we start to question some of these things that we've taken for granted. So what does that look like? The number of the number of women, black women in particular, who have said to me that they get comments about their hair is astounding, because people do not comment on my hair, right? It isn't a big deal to do, there might be a comment here or there, it looks nicer, it looks better up, or whatever, but certainly not in the way that my hair becomes a value of judgment on whether I can do the job. And that's a problem, because if that person then is spending all this time then thinking about their hair, and whether their hair is determining whether they're, or feeling like they're respected at work, they're not gonna bring their best self to work. And frankly, they lose, and so do we.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. In that example, the reality is, you and I, while it's exhausting, or can be exhausting to cover the fact that I'm a gay man, or that you're a parent, it is an option for us as well. If you're a person of color, if you're a woman, or a woman versus a man, there are aspects of our identities that we can't cover. And although we may try, and there are examples of covering that you can still try to do there, but it's exhausting and it isn't beneficial, and it takes away from productivity, and effectiveness, and job satisfaction, and safety, so there's so many other impacts. You'd mentioned this concept of covering, and I remember when I first started working in HR, and I had to start doing presentations and training, and I also was new to coming out and was coming, I was still finding my confidence with being a gay man and sharing my story, and I remember the energy I would spend trying to make sure that when I was in front of that room that I wouldn't appear to be gay, because I was afraid what people would think of me. I fortunately, I'm not there anymore today, but there are still people in the queer community that still feel that same way and still cover, the last stuff that I, with where I'm from a few years ago, was still about 50% of LGBTQ plus people go back in the closet when they start their first corporate job, because they wanna feel it out, and make sure that they feel like it's a safe place to be. We've touched on these concepts of flexibility in the workplace or flexible working, I should say, which has been a conversation for many years, but has accelerated in ways that none of us would have ever expected with the pandemic. Then you've also mentioned community and how people want to find community and connection in the workplace. And now we're having more conversations around, can people bring their authentic selves to work, there's so many things that are at play right now, and that reality is not going to change, but we will begin to return to the office, start to have a new normal, I'm wondering if you have any predictions on how the pandemic and how can we, the conversations around community or humanity? And how these conversations

with Black Lives Matter and the importance of DEI, how those are going to intersect to shape what the future of work looks like.

Surabhi Lal: I think it's exciting. I think it's not gonna be without stumbles, and also without some sort of pain for some folks, so I think, look, Gallup had done research a few years ago, saying that people who work from home, two to three days a week, are generally the most engaged and happiest workers. And part of that, if you think about working in a traditional office, is that I certainly love the interactions that I have with my colleagues, and often love them so much, that there's a long list of things to do at the end of the day, that I didn't get to. However, if I was home away from them, then I could really balance my week differently, which is that I could spend the time with my colleagues and really be with my colleagues. And I could spend the days at home doing deep work, what some people call deep work, deep thinking work, and get some of that done. So I think we've seen research to promote the fact that, there could be good for all in terms of productivity, as well as in terms of relationships. So I think one of the things that workplaces will have to think about, whether they decide to be all virtual, as we've seen Twitter do, and Facebook make some announcements about that, is think about, what are some of the guidelines, what are some of the agreements and expectations that we're gonna put out? So does that mean that from 10 to three o'clock, everybody needs to be available for a meeting, and you pick a time zone, because now if we're spread out across time zones, what does that mean? Does it then mean more like 12 to four Eastern Time? Because I'm East Coast, right? So for me, it's like thinking about East, because then you could meet someone on the West Coast and not have them roll out of bed while it's still dark. So I think that there's something around, how we engage with one another, what might be called rules of engagement. What does that look like? And I think what it's gonna mean, is that workplaces are really gonna have to think about being more intentional, about setting some of those expectations. And I think that is about building a community of transparency. If I tell you what my expectations are, and not make you guess, we are gonna have a better conversation, because you might be able to say to me, "You know what? I can't make it on this day." I know that this is a rule and not have to guess. Does she want me there? Does she not want me there? Is she gonna think that this is weird that I'm not there, but we're making it really explicit, and we're using our transparency to do that. I think you're gonna see a lot more people demand diverse slates, I hope. And then I worked in career development on the college and university side for 15 years, and there are lots of ways that companies continue to recruit to get the same people in the door. It is, we only recruit at X number of schools, and this is one of our preferred recruiting schools, and by the way, if you don't have any Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or Hispanic-Serving Institution on that list, then you are already not necessarily giving yourself the kind of talent that you might. So I think we're gonna see that from recruiting at entry level, all the way to recruiting up, and also a lot of people only recruit at schools, so what about all of this talent that is getting their skills from someplace other than college. College isn't right for everybody. Many people don't go to college until later in life, many people don't go to college at all, does that mean that they can't do a job in your space? Not necessarily, so how are we thinking about making the workplace more accessible? And then I think you'll see things like, what many people are calling for, which is, it's great that you have a statement, who is on your leadership team? And it is not necessarily a pipeline problem, as in there's not enough people moving through the pipe, I actually don't think the pipe is built to keep people in the pipe, and to keep people in the pipeline. So I think all of those things are going to happen, and I do think from a...

I hope that people will also think creatively, so what does it look like, say, Angelo for you and I to share a job? What does it look like, because you might need flexibility and I might need flexibility, and our skill sets might be the same, and we work really well together, for us to do that, and people have been talking about that for years, this idea of job sharing, or what does it look like to have more work that isn't gig economy work, but is part time with benefits, so that you are really thinking about building a lasting relationship with your employees that will allow you to keep that institutional knowledge. So I hope that people will be creative. I also hope that people will revisit ideas that have been foolproofed, that have been in existence for some time.

Brian McComak: Yeah, agreed, agreed, and I'm so glad you mentioned benefits, by the way, and as someone who has just entered the gig economy, it's actually something that I've thought about is, I'd love to work with a company where I'm working, let's say 15 to 20 hours a week, I'm not sure what that would look like, but where I could be adding value, get benefits like every, it's a win-win for everyone, and then have the flexibility to do some of the other things that I'm really grateful that I get to do to, like having these conversations, or hopefully writing a book, or, things like that, where you need some time and space for that, or just to be, or to focus on self-care. So I'm hoping that creativity materializes in the coming weeks, and months, and years. And another hope that I have, is that this conversation, which is certainly fueled in passionate ways for so many different reasons, and then some of those are intersecting reasons, like the pandemic, and the loss of George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, and those intersections have given space and room for this movement to be powerful, but we can't let this movement just, when things go back and life gets busy, and we can go to restaurants and movie theaters again, and we should live our lives, I wanna honor that, but how do we, for those of us that are either external champions, or influencers, or those of us in companies and decision making roles, how do we ensure that there's maintained focus and commitment, and all of the ideas that you just shared, that the creativity and the pipelining, and the thinking differently around profiles of candidates, and where you recruit, and how you keep those people in the door, there's one other one that I would add, that Tim, who joined us last week, and I were talking over the weekend of what are the systemic changes that corporate America can be engaged in and involved in, because one of the challenges, well, first of all, I wanna say that there's lots of talented people that are diverse people out there. There are challenges with our education system, and how that education system helps communities that are maybe disadvantaged or marginalized, helps them grow and have the potential that they have within themselves. So how are companies saying, "Yes, I need to fix it now, but I also need to fix it for the long term." I need to be engaged, and education is one thing, there's, I'm sure lots of others we could talk about, criminal justice reform is another conversation that's happening right now. Those systems that are built to support the white man and the white community, we can go from there, then also disadvantage other communities. So how do corporations really start to engage and how they change, not only who they're bringing to their doors, but how they're changing the systems around them, because I think, to get where we need to go, that needs to be part of it.

Surabhi Lal: Yeah, and that is very much baked into everything we do. I posted something on LinkedIn today, that's really around modern management comes out of traditions of slavery, and I can't, last fall, I taught a management leadership class and all through that class, all I could think was, how much of

this is rooted in cultures that were also the slaveholders as well as the colonizers. And so we can't undo something that took 500 plus years to build in five months, but we need to be working towards some of that, and that reimagining, reinventing, being innovative, right? So I think we also need to frame it in a way that maybe people are gonna feel better about, I actually think this could be a really good time to think about how are we innovative, when we think about our talent? How are we reimagining it? Not how are we fixing something that's broken, because that's just, it is, let me do it, let's not get me wrong, it is broken.

Brian McComak: yeah.

Surabhi Lal: But, people are gonna come to the table more excited if we talk about it in ways that feel welcoming. And it is about reimagining, it is about reinventing, it is about being creative, innovative, disruptive, whatever word that you feel like, can bring your people to the table. Let's talk about it. And I think you do need to bring your people to the table, you do need to ask some of those questions. So now we have an opportunity to go back into the office, what was working? What wasn't working? What do we wanna leave in the pre-COVID era? And what do we want to think differently? What's worked well as we've been working remotely? Is it that we've been having a different kind of team meeting? Okay, how do we keep that? But frankly, if you're not asking the people that you're working with those questions, you aren't gonna know as the leader, and so I think some of it is being able to ask and get feedback. And, I know that people get really panicky about feedback. And this is one of the questions that I was asking your guests last week, is that Pixar has a culture of building feedback into the work that they do. And I do think the more that we're able to build those communication skills, and have that be a norm, the better it will be for all of us in terms of knowing what's working and what's not working, and we can get that information. So I think we have to ask, I think we have to reimagine, or disrupt, or innovate the ways in which we think about about talent, and the ways in which we think about work, and not see it as, this is a project that needs to get done, and I need to hire someone as fast as possible, but we think about, I wanna hire somebody that I can invest in, that is also willing to be invested in us, and that might stay, and manage them well and keep them, not saying you placate them, but that you're creating environments where people feel like they can be their whole selves, because people leave, not because they don't like their job, they leave because they don't like their environment and their culture.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely--

Surabhi Lal: I would add one thing to our conversation before, Brian, if I might, which is that--

Brian McComak: Please.

Surabhi Lal: I'm looking at my friend Karen's name, and I think we also... The federal government has amazingly innovative things that they have going on for their employees, and I say this as the daughter of two career civil servants. So my parents were able to do things like details, so detail means that I can go from my agency to another agency that has a six-month position, and my job will be waiting for me, tell me who else does that? If I work for a bank, or a consulting organization, or Nike, or whatever, and I say, "I really wanna go to the New York office for six months," and say I was in Portland, so we'll use Nike, and that I was in Portland, and I wanna go to the New York office in a completely different department, because they have a need for someone with my talent, and someone else is gonna take my job, and then I have this whole new network, and I get to keep my job, that's really cool. So the government does that. The government also has this compressed workweek, where you work, and my mother did this for years, nine hours every day, and then you have every other Friday or Monday, whatever it is you pick off, and I think there are already examples that are in unusual places that we could look at, as we think about this. And it works, and it helps people grow their skills, so you think about, oh, somebody might want to think about building their skills, and building their skill set, and expanding their skill set, a detail is an amazing place to do that. So, that six months somewhere else working, and think about the collaboration that it might invite into a large organization, but you have to be willing to be a little bit innovative and take a risk.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely, I love that, I love that. And another one that comes to mind for me is, so I love the creativity there, and what just came to mind for me, was those companies that offer sabbaticals, when you're offered in a realistic timeline, think 25 years from now, it feels like the world's never, I can't think that far, I wanna believe that I could see the future, but it's just not real. And I forget the company, but I remember learning about a company a few months ago that had, I think it was at year five, you get a sabbatical for 60 days, like that's worth sticking around for, and the power of being able to take a break, we're human, we're not robots. We're human and we need break, and we need time to refresh, and reenergize, and recharge. You also mentioned the word question, and I'm about 20 minutes past, asking if there's any question.

Angelo Cilia: There's a couple of questions, but I just, Allison Davis said, "How fresh would it be to go outside of your org and get feedback from another industry or job description, and then bring it back, bring back that envision, that would be so cool! That would be so cool to go back and forth." So I don't know, I just wanted to shout that one out. Karen Ortiz did have a question, do you actively seek allies, she kind of shifted it towards, I'm sorry, it was from Allison, sorry, there is one from Karen, I'm not doing my job very well. Yes, "As an entrepreneur with a tiny company, I am interested to learn more about creating community of belonging for clients." And I thought that would be interesting to sort of delve into some client ideas.

Brian McComak: Well, I could offer some thoughts, but I kind of think that's what Luminary is all about.

Surabhi Lal: It is, I do also think that some of that, is how you bring people together. I think that there's real power in introducing people and telling people why they're being introduced to one another. So I will often say, do you know this person? Do you know this person? Or have you met my friend so and so? And then I'll go back, so we'll use Allison and Brian as an example, right? If I knew that Allison had something that I thought there was a real connection with you, Brian, I might say, "Brian, I really want you to meet my friend, Allison. Here's why I want you to meet her, are you open?" And then you would say, "Yes," and I would have the same conversation with Allison, and she would hopefully say, "Yes," and then I would connect you with, and I would probably ask both of you to send me a little bio about yourself, and I would edit it, and I would send it. So it takes my time to do that connection well, but I think Allison, that's something that you are already good at doing, but letting people know that those connections can happen, or even saying, "I'm gonna bring all of my," I've been seeing a lot of people do this, "I'm gonna bring my clients together for a conversation," and it's open and you start those with introductions. I think one of the things that is really hard to introduce someone well, is if you don't know them, and if you're not listening to their needs, then I could introduce you to a hundred people, but it's actually gonna be a waste of your time, and my time, and those other a hundred people's time, right? So what is the connection? Are you able to help someone see why you might be connected, and then also, really that idea of bringing people together, either around a topic or when you set the stage, it's thinking about how you want people to introduce themselves in a way that feels genuine and authentic, and not just what's your name? And what's your title? Because I think it's so easy for all of us to fall into that, and also want to prove that this is how we do our work. A few years ago, there was a philanthropy organization that would have networking nights, and the rule, was you couldn't talk about what you did or where you did it. So they made cards and the cards had other questions on it, like, what do you what do you like to do for fun? And so it really got people connected in a way outside of work, and I think there's good reason to connect in a non-work way and in a work way, because there are often collaborations that can come from the work side. But I think you have to do it with heart.

Brian McComak: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And Karen, I'm just reading your question, here again, do you actively allies, or do you wait for colleagues, friends, acquaintances to approach you? I'm curious how you're defining allies here, because I usually use the word allyship, when I think about, like if I'm going to be an ally for communities of color or women, which are two commitments, but I'm wondering if you're asking actually about allies for your business, because I think you also mentioned, look, Karen works for the federal government, is that right? So we're talking about allyship, EEOC. Actually, do you wanna talk? We're gonna allow her to talk. Karen, you don't have to come on camera.

- [Karen] Hi.

Brian McComak: Hi.

Surabhi Lal: Hi.

- [Karen] Hi, I won't come on camera.

- That's okay.

- [Karen] Today was an off camera day, but I'm loving--

Brian McComak: Totally fine.

- [Karen] I'm loving this conversation. I was actually asking initially from the perspective of, I guess, one's own sort of, like for me, it would be as a Puerto Rican woman. But I love the idea of expanding that question to include your clients. So perhaps you can--

Brian McComak: Yeah, yeah.

- [Karen] Which is both.

Brian McComak: Awesome, sure, we can do our best, we can do our best. Okay, so your names are on the screen, we're gonna adjust the settings here again, but thanks for coming on, Karen. I've only done this one other time, so I'm getting more comfortable with the cool technology that they offer. So, I think it's an interesting question around, as a member of a community, would you wait for people to approach you or do you invite them to join the conversation? I think either way is probably fine, what I would suggest, and I'm curious what Surabhi thinks is, that maybe the way to think about it, is really do you have a relationship with that person? Because I think it needs to start with a trust relationship. And to some degree that works, probably regardless of where that starts, but if you have someone who you trust who is in a group, that you see as having power or privilege in that scenario, I think it's okay. If it feels like a conversation you would have to say, "Hey, this is something that I would really like to have your help with. And is this is a conversation we can have." I'm hoping that might lead to a conversation that they might say, "Help me understand what this looks like for you, let's understand each other better, and how I can play a role." That's how I would hope I would I would approach that. But Surabhi, what are your thoughts?

Surabhi Lal: I agree I have often found my crew in people who like to raise their voice, and cause a little bit of trouble, for good things, as far as I'm concerned. And I think sometimes somebody says something in a meeting and you think, oh, I need to go talk to that person, because that person might

be my people. And I don't mean like in a visible way, but maybe from a values perspective, they might be my person. And then think about how do we support each other? I think sometimes you might need to go to somebody and say, "Listen, I really need you to be my advocate here. You can enter spaces that I can't enter, and have this conversation, and be heard differently." And I think for me in particular, that is hard, because I am very much like that, I wanna do it everything myself kind of girl, and asking for help is not something that comes easily to me, but I do, and have learned, and I'm learning that that can be a really valuable tactic to say, "Brian, you are gonna have this person's ear better than I can, are you willing to have this conversation on my behalf? Or are you willing to have this conversation, because this person just isn't gonna hear it from me in the same way." And realizing that that may actually not be about me at all. It may be completely about the other person. And it isn't my failing to be able to do that, but it is this, can you help me because you are gonna be listened to in a different way. And I think it also opens the door for that person to say, "Hey, why do you think that that person isn't going to to hear you? Or are you uncomfortable? Or what is it that is bothering you about this? Or what is it that you need my help in? Or what are you seeing that I'm not seeing?" But, man, it's a skill I wish I had when I was younger

Brian McComak: So true, so true. And, I thought that, just in the spirit of, for those of us that are small business owners on the call or work with small business owners that might benefit from this, being new to this space of being a small business owner, actually I think everything we've just talked about, are techniques that I'm using, and how to be of service to others in the space, and also, hopefully, continue to build my business. So, I build relationships and trust with close connections and community. I try to make introductions and connections when I see that there's synergy between two people, either just as humans, or in the work that they do, or potentially both. I try to make those connections, and there are times that I've asked for help, or asked others to be helpful to me, whether it's, "Hey, can you introduce me to someone that's in your network?" Because that facilitation and that introduction, can open doors that might not be opened otherwise? Or, Allison Davis, who's on this call, and we've mentioned her several times, because clearly we're all fans, is, Allison is a sales expert, and she works with people like me on how to sell, and selling is not part of my learning, or programming, or what I do, and she's offered some time with me to one-on-one, to just offer some suggestions and thoughts. And perhaps at one point, I'll work with her, or perhaps I make other connections for her that are beneficial. Regardless, it's a win-win, so it's starting about, from those places of trust, and connection, and community, and to be of service. And I believe that the rest will come from there.

Surabhi Lal: And I think too, Allison had asked a question about how do you build a community of belonging? I think some of that is also about expectations. So if you are having a time for people to get together and connect, maybe you actually say, "Listen, this isn't the time for everybody to share their sales pitch. This is really a time for us as a collective to go deep into a certain conversation." So yes, bring your examples. But this isn't the time for saying, "I did this amazing thing." There's a time for that as well, but really setting an expectation, so everybody's walking into a conversation with something. And they know, they know what the rules are, and the expectations are, of that conversation as you build that community, because otherwise, somebody is gonna come in thinking they're doing something different than someone else, and they're gonna miss each other. They're gonna be talking on different planes.

Brian McComak: I love it, well, I can't believe it's already four o'clock Eastern Time, where does the time go? I wanted to share briefly that next week, I'm gonna actually gonna put up the second PowerPoint slide, this is amazing, I'm supposed to do this every week, it doesn't always happen. So next week, Danielle Schmelkin, who's the chief information officer for Madewell, will be joining us. And I love that she's a woman in technology, she's also a mom, she is also a member of the LGBTQ plus community, and she is an incredible leader, and a very human leader. And I'm excited that we're all going to get to learn from her. And thanks everyone for joining us today. That was a really great conversation. I will ask one other question, once we get to the other side of the formalities, but any closing words? Because the other question is gonna be very personal. So any closing words for everyone who joined us today?

Surabhi Lal: I just think we're in a moment where we need to challenge ourselves to be completely human vulnerable, admit that we don't know, be helpful when we can, and try to do not in a Pollyanna way, but in the hard work way of being more loving. So, loving of ourselves, loving of others, loving of the fact that we might not understand things. And I say this to my husband, like I make a choice to love him and be married to him every day, right? If that's the way we look at love, and not as unicorns and rainbows, love is work, and it's amazing work, and we get a lot of rewards. But we have to remember that it isn't all unicorns and rainbows. And sometimes it really is digging deep, saying we're sorry, saying we don't know something, doing the work to learn something. So I hope that we can really be in a better space of love.

Brian McComak: I love that, thank you, thank you. Well, if you have to run, I totally understand, we all have commitments. I'm going to ask Surabhi one more question, but, again, thank you all for being here, I'm just grateful and honored that you choose to spend time with us, and with the guests that I invite, and hope you find value in these conversations. And to wrap up, and actually you've sort of already answered the question, so let's see if it still works, we're in a tough time for so many reasons, I wanna just hear what's bringing you joy in your life today.

Surabhi Lal: So certainly, you heard my cheeky, little eight-year-old person, brings me joy every day, but the other thing that brings me joy is to cook. It is my creative outlet. And because I am not, I like a little bit of immediate gratification, I can nibble while I cook, I usually end up with a pretty good meal that makes me happy. And since I can't go to restaurants right now, in the same way, it also has a very functional purpose

Brian McComak: I love that, well, I look forward to when we can share a meal together. And I'll help with the cooking, I'm equal opportunity here, but just in case anyone was curious, I love food. So I'm all about it. So I love that and actually, one thing that I've recently been able to start doing, is enjoying

food with friends again, and that has been really just amazing. I really appreciate that you ended on comments around love, and connection, and self-care.

Surabhi Lal: And food

Brian McComak: And food, we all just have to find our way through this tough time. So, wonderful to be here. Surabhi, thank you so much.

Surabhi Lal: It was a delight, Brian, really. I can't wait to see you, and have a meal with you, and talk more.

Brian McComak: Ditto, ditto, and ditto. So, Angelo, thank you as always, everyone who's still with us, thank you for being here. I wish you health and safety. And hopefully we'll see you next week, bye everyone.