

Hummingbird Humanity

an LGBTQ+ owned business

Conversations of Hope, Heart, and the Human Spirit with Danielle Schmelkin

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Angelo Cilia: Hello folks that have joined already, welcome to our seventh episode of Hope, Heart and the Human Spirit. We will begin shortly. We're waiting for a few more folks to come in. So if you're already on and you wanna say hello, please say hello, share where you're from, where you're Zooming in from, not dialing in. I wanna say dialing in, Zooming in from. We wanna see where you're joining us from, all right. We'll get started shortly, so give us a few minutes.

Brian McComak: Hello, everyone, happy Wednesday. I feel like I could say happy again, even though there's still a lot going on in the world. I wanna go back to my greeting, happy Wednesday. That doesn't discount all the other things that we need to talk about and think about which we'll get into this afternoon. Thank you for being here. We'll wait just another minute or two before we get started. So check your cell phones, respond to a text message, check in email, get a glass of water. Stop by the restroom if you need to. We'll be with you in just a moment. I'm really excited to have today's conversation. And actually I'm Danielle, I'm gonna take you off mute for a second. If I can figure out how to do that again. 'Cause I'm really curious 'cause I know we used a dog as the background with this great rainbow. Are you a dog person? I meant to ask.

Danielle Schmelkin: I am, I have a dog, A Maltipoo, named Mackenzie and you might hear him bark. I don't know.

Brian McComak: We love appearances from dogs and we love appearances from kids.

Danielle Schmelkin: I just hope the kids don't walk in and I've told them, but you know, short attention spans, we shall see.

Brian McComak: Well, they need their mom.

Danielle Schmelkin: I hope not, during this, one hour, they can make it.

Brian McComak: They're gonna be okay.

Danielle Schmelkin: They are gonna be fine.

Brian McComak: I love it. Okay, I think we're gonna get started. Let's see here. I'm gonna make the screen so I'm not distracted by all of the different things that happen on my screen. We all have those popups and the things that fly in and out and they can distract us. I wouldn't be focused on the conversation. So hello everyone, happy Wednesday. Welcome to Hope, Heart and the Human Spirit. I am delighted to be joined by my friend and also an amazing leader and human Danielle Schmelkin. You know what, I meant to double check. Do I say your name correctly, Danielle?

Danielle Schmelkin: You do.

Brian McComak: Yes.

Danielle Schmelkin: Thank you.

Brian McComak: Awesome, awesome. I'm glad because I coached Angelo before and I was very confident and then I said, I don't actually know. So well, I'm really delighted that you're here Danielle

Danielle Schmelkin: Thank for having me.

Brian McComak: Of course, of course. And then of course for all of you, who've been with us before, I see Karina Stevens wanted to say hi, Danielle, I don't know if you're sleeping.

Danielle Schmelkin: Hi Karina. No, I have the chat closed because like you, I don't wanna be distracted by the 1,000 things, but I will pull it up, hi Karina.

Brian McComak: I love it. And then of course for those of you who've been here before, but just in case you haven't, there's Angelo Chilia, who is here with us as well. Angelo is a longtime friend of mine and a communications expert. And so he'll be our producer behind the scenes, but also in front of the scene, that is what it is. So he'll engage with you on the chat and help to make sure that your questions

are answered that Danielle and I don't miss them. And he'll also capture key quotes and things that we say that we can refer to you or that you can copy for yourself. So I'm so glad that Angelo is here and next week actually, that you'll actually have a new face in Angelo's role. Another member of the Hummingbird Humanity Team will be joining us. So I'm gonna leave that as a little bit of a secret for now and we will surprise everyone next week. So, I wanna just, so those of the logistics, ask questions in the chat. Danielle and I are gonna just talk and we're gonna learn from her and about her. And if you have questions along the way, just let us know. So Danielle and I for some of you may have read this in the some of the posts, Danielle and I worked together at Tapestry, which is just in case you're not familiar is the home of coach Kate Spade, & Stuart Weitzman, amazing brands. And it was really just a great place to work. And when I was leading diversity and inclusion there, I had the opportunity to ask some of the leaders to be part of leading our employee resource groups. And Danielle was one of the leaders, who kindly enough said yes. And helped as the executive sponsor for our women's group. We'd worked together with my HR business partner role. But that's I think when we really got to know each other. We got to bring International Women's Day to life, like in no way that Tapestry had seen before. And it was really great. So Danielle, I have many things I wanna say about you and who you are. But let me let you share a little bit about yourself and what you think is good for your help for all of us to hear.

Danielle Schmelkin: Sure, love it. So that was a great intro, I'm so excited to be here. And when you asked me, I was like, Oh God, what am I gonna say to people that they'll find interesting? But I think we're in such a unique moment. Maybe it's not unique, but we're in this moment where it feels like the world has turned upside down. And so, when you asked me if I would join you on this, we were in a you know, a slightly different place than we are today. And so I've thought about what would be interesting now. And I think the way that you've framed this conversation, being all about humanity is where I'd like to start. Because we can talk about my career. We can talk about being a woman in technology, being a parent, being Jewish, being a member of the LGBTQ community. We can talk about so many things, but I think right now in this moment, really focusing on who we all are to each other, is how I'm trying to focus, whether that's at work and being there for my team, making sure that we're creating the experiences for my team, for our larger community at work, for my family and for the community that we are as part of this world. And so like I know we're gonna, have conversations about all of that. But like I really think, especially in today's moment and why it's so important that the humanity aspect comes through, it's just the perfect grounding for the conversation.

Brian McComak: Yeah, I love that. And I have to say I was reflecting before I joined our conversation online before the call. And what hit me is you are the epitome of one of the things we talk about in inclusion and diversity about the reality of intersectionality. You have, and we all have all of these diverse identities. You have a collection of them that fits in all of the different ways that we think about, the work that we do and that we talk about a lot. And so I think it's fascinating and you bring all of those different identities to you in the workplace, and collectively it makes you a human just like each other. And I think that's really beautiful. So since we're gonna start with humanity, because it's the way my mind works now, I'm gonna frame it in context to one of your identities. When we were talking the other day about what we might share today, you mentioned that this phrase really stuck

with me, that you want to raise good humans. Tell us about what that means today and how that maybe shifted from what it meant maybe six months ago. 'Cause the world has changed.

Danielle Schmelkin: I actually think it's not coincidence maybe it is. Being home now during this COVID crisis. And now the intersection of everything that's going on in Black Lives Matter. I am more grateful than ever to have this more focused time with my kids at home. Because, without the commute and with the ability to pop out of this new makeshift office, a few times a day and really have conversations with them and see what they're learning and make sure that I'm doing everything I can to impact their thinking and expose them to things that just don't naturally occur, and were we not in this COVID situation. And I was in and out with work like literally in and out. I don't believe I would have the same focused attention. And I think it's as eyeopening and horrible, as many of the things that are happening right now. We have conversations literally, and I'm using that word right? Literally every single night at dinner, we sit down, whether it's about Black Lives Matter, and it usually is the last several weeks, but on Monday and after you and I spoke Monday morning, Brian with the Supreme Court ruling and we had a 45 minute conversation about that ruling with the kids. And so for anyone who doesn't know, I have a 12 year old daughter and nine year old twin boys. And obviously the conversation we have to make sure that they understand it. That it's at a level that they can understand. But I'm trying to constantly push it slightly above their understanding and push their thinking and make sure that it is kind of like, we think about this now, this is not something that is happening to other people, everyone is always other. Everyone is always other. And so what are you gonna do about it? And I think what's interesting is my kids, they're kind of used to a little bit being other. You know, we are Jewish. There's an otherness to that at times. They have two moms, there's an otherness to that. And so they're not numb to the fact that there's something that's just perceived as different about them. However, in this moment, you know, really explaining to them the privilege that they have, that they didn't earn and why it's important that they stand up and that they're vocal. And some of my proudest moments candidly are hearing them now interact on their morning meetings with their classmates when they're discussing it and hearing it in their voice. And so in this moment, being able to be so present for that, and have those hard conversations, they become less hard if you have them every single day, because it's just part of our normal life now. But I think that has been something I'm really grateful for.

Brian McComak: I love that, I love that. And we're gonna come back to the Supreme Court. 'Cause I can't believe we didn't start with that, but I wanna keep going on this conversation for a moment.

Danielle Schmelkin: Go ahead.

Brian McComak: You mentioned a story that's from the Jewish faith that is really encapsulates what you're talking about. Can you share that with us?

Danielle Schmelkin: Oh my God, yeah. It's funny when we were chatting about this, and we were kinda talking about the intersection of pride with Black Lives Matter, and the moment and I even think about, just a tangent per second, like pride. We celebrate today with these parades. Well, not this year, but we celebrate. We celebrate that all started with protest, and to see the parallels and especially in June, it's the intersection there is profound to me, but you know, the story I shared was there's this I'll read the quote like as it is from a teaching from the Torah, it is, "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." And there are many, there are iterations that I'm sure, most of you have heard, but it comes from this story where there was this old man who was nearing the end of his life, planting a carob tree. And someone comes by and they're like, why are you bothering? Like it's gonna take so many years for that carob tree to bear fruit. And the old man's response was, people have planted those trees before me, so I could enjoy the fruit of those carob trees. It is my responsibility to make sure that that's there for the next generation And we wanna leave a world, of course, we wanna live in it too, but we wanna leave a world worth living in for future generations. And that it runs for the Jewish faith of you need to act, even if it's overwhelming, you can't do it alone. None of it is gonna be on you nor can you ignore it.

Brian McComak: Yeah, it's an interesting time to reflect on our responsibility. And that's something that I have certainly been reflecting on over the last three weeks. I think everyone here knows I have for many years committed myself to doing this work. And to celebrating others, and to making the world a better place. So these conversations and that commitment is not new to me. I would also have always told you, and I will still tell you today. I have so much more to learn. There's no person who can understand fully the lived experiences of everyone else.

Danielle Schmelkin: No.

Brian McComak: I have learned significantly in the last three weeks about the experiences of the Black Community. Things I wish I had known previously. Things I'm grateful that I know now, and I want to continue that work. And continue understanding and continue to be an advocate and a champion and ally. I'm curious what that looks like for you. Not only are you an ally and an advocate for inclusion, you're also a C-level leader. And so you have another level of responsibility, I'm sure for the employees of your company and how you think about leaning into that role, and apparent as you've already covered. So how are you thinking about this moment in time with Black Lives Matter? And how are you leaning in as an ally?

Danielle Schmelkin: You know everything you say so resonates with me, and I think we think very similarly and I would just add to that a little bit. There are times that I feel angry at myself, for not having educated myself more in the past. And so, okay, no excuses and I'm trying every day now, but I think one of the things is I do have the privilege to be able to make change. And so that's my obligation. That's changed at all levels. That's change of making it okay to talk about. That's change of making everyone feel supported and giving them what they need. That's changed around how we think

about recruiting. How we think about using our voices in the campaigns that we put together and how we show up. I feel so fortunate at Madewell where I am today. The culture is really open. It's a free-flowing conversation and I'm grateful to be part of it. And I even there, I feel the responsibility to speak for those who may not feel like they can. And so I recognize that I have that both privilege and responsibility. And I've always thought, I've really always believed this ever since I was a people manager, and this was a while back. That my biggest job is to be a good leader for my team, whatever that looks like in the moment. But I think this moment amplifies that even more. And I think you and I spoke on Monday, like one of the things, if I can articulate this well, is this is not about making another sale. This is not about looking at our expenses and making sure that we've got the right structure, for the organization. This is about right versus wrong. And I try to lead from a place of right versus wrong. It's not that black and white, we know that. There is everything in between. But where in the past, I may have been in situations where I didn't feel like I could use my voice, or I was in a place where it could be heard. I'm not okay with that anymore. And it's more important for me to be able to do work on behalf of what's right than worry about, oh is this place a place I can speak up? If that makes sense.

Brian McComak: It does, it really does. Something in there sparked for me, and it's largely probably driven by the fact that I admire you as a leader and a people manager, which is what you were talking about. With the calls I'm getting from clients and colleagues today, what I'm hearing consistently is they don't know how to lean into conversations with their teams or employees right now, who are struggling with, how do they navigate this time? Whether they're feeling upset or they're feeling scared about how do they lean in and support? I'm sure you've had conversations. And I'm curious, if there are managers, people managers out there, leaders out there who are like, how do I lean into this? What advice or suggestions would you offer?

Danielle Schmelkin: Yeah, I can only give it obviously from my perspective and I'm sure it's not one size fits all and it's not even one size fits everywhere I would be, right? But where I am right now, again I'll go back to COVID being like, it's kinda like a good thing right now because the size of my team is fairly small. We have a meeting every single morning with the whole team, so we can see each other's faces and there's no formal agenda. You might call it a standup in the office, but a stand up in the office really had a purpose of setting the foundation for the day. Us, it's really, how are you doing? And we've been doing this since mid-March when we've been working from home, right? But in the last few weeks, while we've maintained that, I personally, I always have weekly touch bases with my direct reports. I also now have touch bases with every single member of the team. They're optional, you don't have to come. I've reached out to those who, and when you see someone's face without saying anything, you might get a sense of, is there something going on there? And you might be wrong. But my opening with any of those folks is like, how are you feeling today? Just that. And sometimes they wanna share, and sometimes they don't. And that's okay. There have been times though, when we've had a couple of virtual town halls in the last couple of weeks, really addressing this as an overall company. And then, I've taken the chance to bring the team together after and try and make it a smaller conversation. And I think everyone is kind of asking that same question of how do I do this in the right way? And I just don't think there is a right way, but I think I know I've tripped over myself. But I keep trying because it's right. And I believe in look, there's many people in the leadership of Madewell

that you can feel, even when someone's tripping up, you can feel the genuineness from someone who's not. And I hope my goal is to always be genuine with my team. And when that's the place that we're coming from, I feel like we've been able to connect.

Brain McComak: I think this goes back to the first thing you talked about, which is it's really about humanity. Each person has their own things that are happening, their own feelings, their own challenges, their own fears, their own anger, whatever they're feeling right now.

Danielle Schmelkin: And their own learning process. Your own way of internalizing and understanding where they fit in.

Brian McComak: And how they're going to move forward, How do they lean into this, absolutely. So I have to go back though.

Danielle Schmelkin: Go back.

Brian McComak: I'm gonna switch gears. There was a SCOTUS decision on Monday.

Danielle Schmelkin: Was there?

Brain McComak: I'll do more reflection probably later about why I didn't lead with that, 'cause that's big news. What I think is probably the reason is as much as pride is typically celebratory, there even within that the work for the LGBTQ plus community, there's so much more work to do. This year celebration doesn't feel like the right tone.

Danielle Schmelkin: No.

Brian McComak: And there are black people who are being murdered just because they're black, and that is not okay. And I don't feel like celebrating. Am I incredibly grateful for that decision? And do I hope it changes lives in significant, powerful ways? Yes. Do I also know that there's more work to do? Absolutely. But I'm curious, you and I happened to both be part of this community, the LGBTQ plus community. What did it mean to you?

Danielle Schmelkin: To me it meant more than the actual decision. It showed and this is something I do truly believe. I do believe that most people are intrinsically good. I do believe that most people have good intention, right? But our history through many threads will show that that is not what guides much of policy and much of what has been put in place to reinforce something that may not be so good. And I took this as a bigger statement than just the actual decision. I took this as a step forward for a lot of the good conversation that I hope is coming out of these crazy moments right now that are so necessary. And I know you didn't ask this and we can go on tangents or we can't just the protests going on right now about Black Lives Matter, the protests and the riots, the peaceful and the violent. If you go back in history and look at significant change and how it's come about. It's usually not just by a couple of quiet people. And so I viewed this as maybe one domino. And so while it was very specific and those of us in New York really, we've been a little bit more protected. And so it wasn't as monumental for New York. What now it's law of the land. And to me, when you even looked at the way, it wasn't just a 5-4 vote, 6-3 felt better, right? And so, I wish it was unanimous nothing's ever. But it felt like a domino.

Brian McComak: And I hope it is.

Danielle Schmelkin: I do too. I will say there was, and I'm glad you mentioned it, the 6-3, that felt significant for me.

Brian McComak: Mmmh.

Danielle Schmelkin: It did. And we know it's a conservative leaning courts. And it was still six three.

Brian McComak: Yeah. That for me was that something that said we are making progress. It progress takes time, but we are making progress.

Danielle Schmelkin: And even Brian, I don't, you may realize this, I don't post on social that often I'm more of a lurker. I like to see but I don't even know what to share, but on Monday night I did share on Instagram, probably the image that many people shared with the flag. And what also was interesting on was who obviously in my network likes it. In an empowering way, folks that you're like, oh I didn't even realize this would be top of mind for you. And maybe you're just liking it, 'cause you don't see my name come up that often you just liked it. But I think it was another nod to we see you, we see that this is important and it's just one thing and there needs to be more.

Brian McComak: There definitely needs to be more, absolutely. I'm gonna switch gears again,

Danielle Schmelkin: Go ahead.

Brian McComak: Because it cause we can. And actually I mentioned if there's any questions out there, we'll lean into the questions. You can drop it in chat. You could drop it into Q and A. we'll find it, we'll respond. Throw hard questions at us, just no math problems, which before the call, we also learned that neither one of us know how to work printers, so don't ask us about printers. But in all seriousness, if there is something that you're curious about, please ask us. So, one of the things that find, I think it's an important conversation for us to have. we know that representation is a challenge across corporate America. And it can it's from a gender perspective, from an LGBTQ plus perspective, from a race and ethnicity perspective. Some companies do better than others, certainly. And they're certainly some companies that do such a great job that they really should celebrate. To be a woman who is at the C-level is significant. And you're also in technology which is a space where we've made progress I think in having women's representation in technology. So I think that's wonderful. I would presume, and we haven't actually talked about this. I just have this feeling that it wasn't an easy journey for you to get to where you are today. So I'd love for you to share, my guess is they're probably some other women on the call who joined because they admire and they get to see a woman who's in a C-suite role, and that means something. I know what that feels like personally. So what would you share with them about your journey?

Danielle Schmelkin: Oh gosh, it goes back a long time. It goes back to high school, how much time do we have? So I don't even know if you know this, but I legitimately wanted to be an astronaut. Like legitimately.

Brian McComak: Did you watch Space Camp as a kid?

Danielle Schmelkin: Of course I can quote it, we won't go there.

Brian McComak: Obsessed with .

Danielle Schmelkin: I quote it, obsessed.

Brian McComak: Okay, we'll talk about that some other time.

Danielle Schmelkin: Okay, good. Oh, and I went to Space Camp three times by the way,

Brian McComak: Amazing.

Danielle Schmelkin: In high school. So I was serious, I was going to be an astronaut and I was not going to join the military, which was the most obvious way to get there. I was going to be a mechanical and aerospace engineer because that just sounded like what you were supposed to do. Right, so, and I was always better at math and science. It just came more naturally to me. But in high school, I know the first thing is my parents said we don't want you just to put all your eggs in a basket of a very technical school like whether that's an MIT. Because if you don't like it, you have to transfer. So maybe choose a school that has an excellent program. But if you don't like it, you could just transfer majors. Okay so that just put that away. But I remember in, whenever you, when do you apply? In the beginning of senior year, you applied to college?

Brian McComak: I think so.

Danielle Schmelkin: So my guidance counselor started trying to talk me out of applying to these types engineering schools in these competitive more male dominated fields. And here I was like 16, 17 years old, super shy. Didn't have a voice and listening to him, right? And I go home and I tell my mom and she was not having it. You know, here's a woman who she was a graduate school professor for Statistics, like accomplished and she wasn't having it. She was like, you apply where you wanna apply. It has nothing to do with him, and I did. And so I think that's the first bit of like, why are you trying to discourage me before you even know what I'm capable of? And that for a teenager, that's hard, that's hard to hear. Well, so I got into engineering and realized right away, like maybe within a month or two of my first semester that I hated engineering. And 'cause like you don't learn that in high school. And I'm like, but when he started learning, I'm like, Oh, I'm not actually interested in the subject at all. Not to mention yet again, it's 90X% boys, men were they boys or men at the time. So luckily I had listened to my parents and I was able to switch my major and not my whole school. And there went my astronaut kind of thoughts 'cause I'm like, that's never, what, I'm gonna stay in engineering on the tiny, tiny chance that this actually gets me to Mars. Anyway, so then I found that, you know, I was a statistics major, the math just it made sense, that's how I think. And then when it was time to graduate and you know, everyone's applying for jobs as a stats major, you could either be an actuary which, you create models for an insurance company or you went into consulting. And so I got a job at Anderson Consulting only to find out that a classmate of mine in the same major who happened to be a man was offered more money than I was. Same job, out of the same school and I'm like, what is this? And again, I'm 22, I don't look the gift job in the mouth, I take the job and I did well, absolutely.

Brian McComak: I want you to continue the story. You acknowledged the awareness.

Danielle Schmelkin: Yeah.

Brian McComak: Really curious how it felt to learn that a man was making more than you for the same job.

Danielle Schmelkin: It was horrible. It was horrible and I was like he's a friend of mine and he was just sharing, like he shared his letter with me and I'm like, what the? He wasn't being mean-spirited about it. It was, we're just sharing, right? And I actually called, was it a recruiter? I don't know. So whoever my contact was and they tried to explain here I'm 22, you know. They tried to explain, no it really was different, but I knew what our grades were. I knew and you know, this was a friend of mine. This was not, and it felt awful. It did because I'm like, I don't want to pretend that I've felt every step of the way. Like it really was that different because I was a woman. But there were these few times when it's been like, Oh my gosh really is, is this what it's gonna be like? So yeah, it felt awful. And I couldn't do anything about it and I took the job. I took the job and it was the best, first job I ever could have had. You know, the folks I worked for, they taught me what it meant to be a professional about work ethic, about your work product and being part of a team. And so like the things that I learned in my two years there, I really credited with credit that company with giving me the foundation that I built upon. And so, you know, I don't look back on it poorly. But it's a lesson to me that when I'm in the position to be making these decisions, I have to be conscious of that every day because no one cared when it was me. You know, and then for me, I did my work. I took pride in my work, I worked really hard. I have always been raised. And I believe to this day that while it's not enough, I think cream rises to the top. And I believe if you put in the work and you're good, you'll get rewarded for it. It's not as simple as that. I have learned throughout the rest of my career that you do have to be an advocate for yourself because no one else is gonna do it for you. I have learned to be able to use my voice more. I have built my confidence over the years. I was always confident in my work product. But it took me a long time and it's not something that I'm ever like, I don't have 100% confidence today. But it's something I work on and I practice because it matters you have to do it, no one's gonna do it for you. And speaking up, whether it's the small things around, or what's your opinion of this solution we're trying to put in place? Or how do you think we should approach this cultural topic? You have to use your voice. And I feel like where in the past, I may have felt like I couldn't, I don't know when a switch just flipped in me that I knew maybe it was, you know what, it probably was at Tapestry before it was Tapestry when it was just coach 'cause . And I would see other peers and colleagues getting recognized, and I wasn't being my own best cheerleader, 'cause it felt uncomfortable to me. But I think there's a balanced way of both being your own advocate without it being like, you're just trying to get ahead 'cause they're different. They're different. There's a difference between being recognized for your accomplishments and making sure people are aware of them and kind of the competitive cutthroat, when you didn't earn it kind of. And I think finding my voice, I found it there. I definitely found it there.

Brian McComak: Yeah, well and that takes a journey for each of us.

Danielle Schmelkin: Everywhere.

Brian McComak: Yeah. And one of the things that I hear in that story, and I know you've mentioned this already, that early in our conversation that you're aware of this is, you've had these moments where you've learned that there is disparity and how you know, and the gender pay gap is real. And hopefully we're still we're closing it, but it's real.

Danielle Schmelkin: Can I share a story?

Brian McComak: Yeah please do.

Danielle Schmelkin: And I'll just be a little anonymous about it. So it's all, we're all friends here. I was having a conversation with someone about this once, not about my first job experience, but about more recent. And the answer that I got back was I said, why aren't we analyzing this? We know this information. You can look into the system and see this information. This is not so hard. You sort this by M versus F and you know, the answer. And the answer I got back was, if we see that we have it, then we're gonna have to do something about it. So it was almost like if we don't see that we have the problem, then we don't have to do anything about it. And that to me was again, so disappointing. So disappointing 'cause it was an actual acknowledgement that there is a problem, but we're gonna choose to put on our blinders, and I just think we have a greater responsibility.

Brian McComak: Yeah, and I would agree with that. And that is the driver behind emerging legislation that requires reporting, which would hopefully help to equalize the playing field, which should be equalized. And the other part of what I heard in your story is this yes, you had those moments of challenge and yet you also have moments of privilege. That has also allowed you to get to where you are or to have those moments where you can advocate for yourself because you're allowed, because of what you look like or who you are, right? And not everyone and I know that's true for me as well. I have had my moments I'm challenged, and it's not the Pain Olympics as Kenji Yoshino says, "My pain and your pain can both be real and significant for us individually, but there is this awareness that we don't start as far behind as potentially others."

Danielle Schmelkin: Have you seen the video, it's from a few years back, I think it's like in a high school and it's on the field and there's this coach, there's all these kids lined up in a line, he goes we're all gonna race for a \$100 bill. But before we do, I'm gonna ask you some questions. And if it's true for you, I want you to take two steps forward. And the questions are all like, did you ever have to worry about having a meal on your table for dinner? And all of the white people take a step forward. They never had to worry, right? And so after 10 or so of these questions you see, it's mostly two white kids in this school who have a huge headstart before this race starts, right? And the lesson and he's like, I'm telling

you the folks in the back, they're equally as talented as you. There's nothing that you stepped forward for, that you earned. You did nothing to step forward, but this \$100 is gonna be yours because of your headstart. And so it's your obligation to make sure that you stop that. And it was just, it was such a good video. I show it to my kids and that they were like, Oh, I get that, I get that. And I feel that way too. You know, when we spoke about this on Monday, I was so happy when you're like, okay, you're using your voice, but you realize you have a privilege to use it. And you're right. And I've turned it into and therefore it's my obligation to use it for others. You know, for me, it's one thing And I'm thrilled that I've gotten to where I am, but like my most important job right now is to do it for others. That's my most important job at work and at home.

Brian McComak: Yeah, absolutely. We will have to find that video and get it posted.

Danielle Schmelkin: It's so good I will send you a link.

Brain McComak: Amazing

Danielle Schmelkin: Oh, you mean right now?

Brain McComak: No .

Danielle Schmelkin: I can't multitask that Brian.

Brian McComak: Danielle says I'm talented, but I'm only so talented

Danielle Schmelkin: Not that talented.

Brian McComak: Well, for those of you watching we'll get the video and we'll get it posted on the Hummingbird Humanity Facebook and so keep an eye out for it. Well, and it's something else that you reminded me of. And actually one thing I realized this is a complete sidebar that we didn't ask everyone to do or encourage everyone to do is feel free to share your information, who you are, where you're from. We usually do at the beginning, so I know it's 3:43, it's an odd time, but hey, this is when I remembered. So I'm just gonna mention that you feel free to introduce yourselves and connect with each other. This is part of what we get to do in this forum. Something you reminded me of in what you were just sharing is that you and I and others that have similar characteristics and others that don't

have privilege and we have a responsibility for that privilege. And I was having a conversation this morning with a colleague about and it's largely women in my life, women that are leaders that I've had the opportunity to work for. Who have opened the doors for me, who have given me opportunity, who have seen potential in me, and said I think you need to be here, who have mentored me, who have made time for me. And I believe that I've always been the leader and person, the manager who has done that for others. I'm becoming more and more aware of the importance of doing that because I have the ability to open doors for others. And I've had people open doors for me. And I'm sure you have a whole collection of people. The first person that comes to mind for me, I know it's a leader that we both got a chance to work with, Tapestry Mike Braine, who I know has been a mentor to you and helped you in your journey as a CIO. And he's a great example of a straight white cis man who is committed to people because they're people, but he does that.

Danielle Schmelkin: You know, I reached out to him a few weeks back and I was just basically telling him, like, I just wanted to give him some feedback in a way that he probably doesn't understand how much he influenced his team. Because you learned something from all of your managers and leaders and I've taken so much from how he thinks, and how he frames up topics that I can't imagine doing that in my role now without that wisdom. And so I reached out to him just to say like, Oh my God, when you said this. I say that all the time now. I say it all the time and the way that I think about, what I can do for my team or the folks coming up in the organization, whether it's on my team or the partners that we work with is painting a vision, imagining those possibilities, and creating that thread for your team and showing them being that teacher leader. And it's something Mike did this very well. It's also something I follow this blogger. He's like this analytics guru from Google, I'm gonna get his name wrong, but it's Avinash. I think it's pronounced Kaushik. And he has this weekly newsletter that I subscribe to. A lot of times, it's like a really technical topic about analytics, which I eat up. But the one that he had last week was all about being this teacher leader. And he started with this scenario where he was describing how he and his wife are being teacher leaders to their children in this work from home, learn from home scenario. And then he weaved it into being a teacher leader in your work life. And he really focused on two things and I'm like, I do that, but I wasn't conscious of it. And he's like, you've gotta always be making sure a good leader will continue to nurture the technical side of their role, technical being, whatever your domain is. You know, so for me, it would be, you know, continuing to stay current on innovations and technology, as well as the human organizational side of your leadership. And that's all around growing and mentoring your team and the organizational political structure and business acumen. Because there are great leaders who can just inspire and there are great technical contributors who can do excellent domain work. But if you're not the combination of the two is where this teacher leader comes in, that is growing that next generation. And it really resonated with me. And I find that that's how I like to be. And so maybe that's why it resonated with me. . When you like something you know, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy sometimes, but the examples he gave, and I think we have a link for him too, we may have a link for him too. Examples that he gave around challenging your team, but don't do the problem for them, but working through the frameworks with them and painting that vision, giving them the framework in which they can succeed really was powerful for me.

Brian McComak: Yeah, and I would agree Mike does that. And that's why what does he run last year as Chief Information Officer of the year?

Danielle Schmelkin: For, yes the ORBIE Awards.

Brian McComak: The ORBIE Awards.

Danielle Schmelkin: Yes.

Brian McComak: So well, and this conversation is about Mike, but I think he's a leader who had an impact on both of us because he's one of those people who make space for others

Danielle Schmelkin: Yeah.

Brian McComak: And that's powerful. Don't forget to ask those questions in chat everyone. Feel free, I wanna go back to something we started at. And if there aren't any questions, then I'll go to a couple of my favorite sort of just to who's Danielle as a human questions. But before we get to those questions, I know you and I are both fans of Reshma Saujani.

Danielle Schmelkin: Oh yes.

Brian McComak: And the Girls Who Code organization. One thing that just hit me as I percolate on everything we're talking about, we talked about early on allyship. And you mentioned that you're sometimes gonna get it right and sometimes you're gonna get it wrong. My words, not yours, but the spirit of it. And tomorrow I'm gonna be on another call, which host it's the Jennifer Brown Consulting Diversity and Inclusion, a weekly call with Mita Malik, who's from Unilever. And we are going to be talking about imperfect allyship. And I just realized there's a connection here between Brave, Not Perfect.

Danielle Schmelkin: Totally.

Brian McComak: Tomorrow. So I know that book and Reshma's message has been significant for you. I'd love to hear from you what it means to you.

Danielle Schmelkin: I love it and she is inspiring and she is a powerhouse. If you haven't had the chance to hear her speak. I think she even has a TED Talk, which is like bite-size, and you can get the sense of her. But the premise of Brave, Not Perfect is that I'm not gonna get it exactly right. But boys are raised to be brave and girls are raised to be perfect. And it's kind of a mindset. And the example she uses that really resonated with me, that I then had to challenge myself to think, am I like that? She'll say, if there's an open role in your company or you're applying for a job somewhere, and you're looking at a job description, a woman will look at that job description. I'm generalizing, she's generalizing. But a woman will look at that job description and think she has to check off every single box on the required qualifications. Or I guess I can't apply to that, 'cause I don't have all 50 things. Whereas a man will look to check off about 50% and then he'll apply I'm like, yeah, I can do that. And it's the Brave, Not Perfect where women are looking to, well, it says 50 things, so why would they ask for that if they didn't really mean it? And it's so resonated with me. Because it actually reminds me of a different thread that I've pulled in my whole career, an early leader. When I worked at PepsiCo, my boss's boss, he left the company shortly after I joined like a year after to become the head of IT at Pepperidge Farm. And he calls me and he says, come to Pepperidge Farm. I want you to build a data warehouse. And I said, "what's a data warehouse?" And he said, I don't know, but they say they need one. And we're just gonna figure it out. And I'm like, okay. And so he saw something in me, and knew we were gonna figure it out and we figured it out. But isn't that so what she was saying, if you kind of have the sense, like we're gonna figure this out, it doesn't have to be perfect. We're gonna be able to figure it out. And I've tried to lead that way as well. I don't look for people who have the experience exactly. That we're looking to implement. I look for people who are quick learners, who have some relevant experience, who have a drive, who are willing to change on a dime, 'cause everything changes on a dime. And we're gonna figure it out. And like my career has been a series of just figuring it out. But when Reshma said that, I'm like, why is that so profound to me? Of course, when I've looked at job descriptions, I'm like, oh I don't have that. And it goes against this whole figure it out mindset. And so I'm trying to be more conscious of it.

Brian McComak: I will completely own, that I have many a time applied for a job where I only have about 50% of the qualification.

Danielle Schmelkin: There you go.

Brian McComak: I say, I believe that I can.

Danielle Schmelkin: I'm gonna try it.

Brian McComak: I'm good.

Brian McComak: I'm gonna try it. And I have a commitment in this work to try to understand the lived experiences of others. And I think that's important for me to do the job that I do. And one of the things I've been really paying attention to recently is this concept we're talking about right now, which is, you know, I actually, and I'll put it in the language that's sort of been coming to my mind is I've always been able to believe it's going to work out okay. But I kinda think that's also the experience of a white guy.

Danielle Schmelkin: Yeah, 'cause it never hasn't, right?

Brian McComak: Right, I mean, I've had significant hurdles

Danielle Schmelkin: Sure.

Brian McComak: And you can get bumps.

Danielle Schmelkin: And you got up again.

Brian McComak: I've fallen but I've gotten up again and it's worked out and I've never going to the tragedies of that are part of our conversation today. I don't ever leave my house worrying that I'm going to get killed. And when I walk outside my door,

Danielle Schmelkin: That's right.

Brian McComak: It's like, I know it's gonna be okay. 'Cause that's the word I get to live in. So we can go back to that conversation. We've covered that and it will, we've covered it for today. There's always more to talk about. I wanna leave on a light note.

Danielle Schmelkin: Okay.

Brian McComak: Because, these are tough times. They're important times we're having real conversations. I'm really hopeful, I'm sad for the lives that have been lost in the Black Community, it's tragic. I'm hopeful though, that those lives, at this point in time, we're going to see the losses aren't in

vain and that it's going to be wake up call and we're going to do better. So that's my hope. So leading into that, I'm gonna merge two questions here

Danielle Schmelkin: Okay.

Brian McComak: Or maybe I'll split both. Is I'm curious, as you think about your world as just an individual, as a person, as a parent, as a leader, what brings you joy, and what gives you hope? What are, and maybe they're different or the same.

Danielle Schmelkin: You know, there's commonality in both, but personally what brings me joy, lately just honestly, a sunny day and a breath, you know, a chance to take a breath outside of fresh air. That just brings me some joy lately because you have to step out and do a little self care. Hearing my kids laugh, hearing, I said this before, hearing them learning and how they're expressing it. That gives me joy and hope. It gives me hope because seeing that these long held prejudices are maybe being chipped away at, and we're having a larger dialogue, the dialogue gives me hope. Being with my really mighty team gives me hope the energy and the goodness and the talent and the different thinking. And the real, real proven scenarios that we are better together. I know that was a Tapestry thing, but we are. That anyone idea that anyone of us may have, and then we talk about it and we just made it better. And the thing that we end up doing is way better than the thing that we started with. And that gives me hope and gives me joy. And I think if we all could do that a little bit more. Just a little bit more. It can go back to what we started talking about in the beginning with that. That teaching from the Torah, which is overwhelming, but you don't have to complete it, But you can't let it go either, you have to be part of it. And that gives me hope.

Brian McComak: I love that, and even though it was a Tapestry tagline, I still use it all the time because they are still useful.

Danielle Schmelkin: Right, it just works.

Brian McComak: We are better together. And I'm hoping that one of the outcomes of the conversations we're having today allows us to be together even more, And understanding the history that got us to where we are today, helping to build those bridges and extending hands of support and protection and care and love and opening doors for others. That is all in the spirit of we're better together. Okay, so we're gonna do some final comments here and Danielle in a second, I'll just ask if you have any parting words? I wanna do give a plug for next week. Next Wednesday, I'll be joined by Jeffery Smith, really phenomenal leader. He and I had a chance to work together on a client project, Diversity and Inclusion Professional, HR Professional, and one of the kindest, calmest person. Every time I tell him I said, I want to embrace the calmness that you embody Jeffrey. So Jeffrey will be with

me next week. So please join us. If you have comments or suggestions or feedback, we have a feedback form @HummingbirdHumanity.com/live. You'll see that at the bottom right of your screen. Love your ideas and thoughts. So join us next week. Also next Tuesday, if you are so inclined there, we're hosting a special pride at the intersection of Black Lives Matter event with Peppermint and Sean Coleman and Rana Reeves. And we're gonna talk primarily about Black Trans Lives, and the tragic deaths of three Black Trans individuals in the last couple of weeks. So please join us on Tuesday. Danielle, and again please share your information on the chat to connect with each other. We're all part of the community. And as we were just talking about, we're better together. So I am pleased that definitely connect with each other and share your information. I'm gonna say it again. Danielle, any parting words for the group?

Danielle Schmelkin: No, I would just again reiterate how great it was to be able to chat with you. And I'm honored to even be having this conversation. I think my parting words, I'll just repeat kind of what I said before which is trying to take every day and really lead from a place of right versus wrong. And when that guides you, I feel like it gets you to the right place. And it may not be a straight line 'cause it usually isn't. But now more than ever that purpose, I'm not willing to settle to be somewhere you're on the wrong side of that balance.

Brian McComak: Absolutely, absolutely. And in the spirit of the title of Russian's book, sometimes being on the side of rights is you have to truly be brave.

Danielle Schmelkin: Yeah.

Brian McComak: And I believe that for individuals like you and me who do have privilege that this is that time where we have to stand up and we have to take risks. And sometimes those risks can be scary and might not have the outcome for ourselves that we are hoping for. But we we've been really fortunate and it's time for us to protect and advocate for others.

Danielle Schmelkin: Well said.

Brian McComak: I love that. Danielle, thank you for being here. I'm so glad we got to share this conversation together.

Danielle Schmelkin: Thank you.

Brian McComak: I miss working with you, but this was another way for us to bring working together to life. So thank you for spending time with us, everyone who joined us this afternoon, or is watching on the replay, thank you for being with us. We hope that you have found value in our conversation today and hopefully you'll tune in next time. Thanks everyone, be well.