

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob Morgan: Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Celeste Warren, who is the vice president of human resources in Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence over at Merck. Celeste, thank you for joining me.

Celeste Warren: Well thank you for having me, Jacob.

Jacob Morgan: This is a huge topic, as I'm sure you know. It seems like everyone today is talking about diversity and inclusion. Before we get into some of those fun topics, why don't you give some information about yourself [00:00:30] for listeners. So how did you get involved in this space? What was your childhood like? You don't need to go that in depth, but how did you get to doing what you're doing now?

Celeste Warren: I've been at Merck for 20 years this year, actually, and all in human resources, supporting different areas of our business: commercial, manufacturing, research. This was a role that I [00:01:00] had been asked to think about taking on a couple of times, and I was a little bit hesitant in that it was something that I'm very passionate about normally, and I was a little concerned that ... Once I get into a role, I go full blast into it with that passion.

I wanted to make sure that Merck was very serious about diversity and inclusion. [00:01:30] When I was asked by our chief HR officer, Mirian Graddick-Weir, to take this on three years ago, the COE, formally take it on, I said, "I will." And I had a conversation with our CEO, Ken Frazier, at the time. I asked him one question. I said, "Ken, are we serious about this?" And he laughed, and he said, "[00:02:00] Celeste, what if I told you we weren't?"

And by that time I was already committed, and I said, "Well too bad, I'm going to push it anyway." He said, "That's the answer that I was looking for." And so the rest of it is history, and we began this journey. I think it's hand to glove, it's something that I really enjoy doing. We have the good days, and we have the bad days, but I really do enjoy it.

Jacob Morgan: Very cool. It's definitely something that I think companies need to do more of. [00:02:30] So what's a typical day like in the life of Celeste? Are you up early in

the morning and then straight into work? Are you in meetings all day, or what's a usual day for you like?

Celeste Warren:

People make fun of me because my usual day I get up early, depending on where I'm going. I'm based out of our Pennsylvania office, but occasionally I go up to [00:03:00] Kenilworth, pretty often actually, New Jersey where our global headquarters is. I get up early, and I get in my workout ahead of time. So if I am coming into the Pennsylvania office, I'm up at around 5:00, 5:15. I throw on some sweats. I get in the car with my clothes, and my gym bag, and my computer, and my bags, and I go work out at our fitness center, and then come on in to the office after that. It [00:03:30] helps me just sort of get my mind right, and for health purposes as well. Cardiovascular disease runs in my family. Diabetes runs in my family, so I like to make sure that I don't become a statistic.

And so, I do that. And yes, on the days that I go to Kenilworth, New Jersey, I still get up at around 4:15, and head up there, and work out. Get there about 6:00, 6:30, work out, and same routine, getting it in [00:04:00] there. I just think it makes me feel better, and less stress throughout the course of the day. And every day, I must say, and I think that's why I've been in human resources for as long as I have, every day is a different day. You have your scheduled meetings, and appointments, and things that you do, but there are things that happen throughout the day, that might crop up an issue, a situation that you have to give council and guidance to, [00:04:30] and so that's basically how the day looks.

And I also do my fair amount of traveling, and participating in different conferences, either speaking or on panel discussions, and I really enjoy that as well, and just sharing practices, not just best practices, but some challenges that we face, and then learning from others, especially the learning piece of it. I like to say, "What can [00:05:00] I bring back to Merck and steal shamelessly." But every day is a little bit different.

My job is, it's a hybrid role. I have the enterprise wide job of responsibility for D&I across Merck and MSD. But the other half of my job, I am an HR business partner, HR leader for our office of general council, our global compliance organization, [00:05:30] our global public policy organization, and our global communications group in population health. So I have two sides of the coin, but they fit in very nicely with diversity, because I work with these organizations on the diversity front as well, so it actually works out very well. I'm in a very good role for supporting those groups from a business partner standpoint and an [00:06:00] HR leader, and then integrating our diversity strategies through our compliance, our corporate responsibility, etc.

Jacob Morgan:

I think when a lot of people hear of HR, they have a pretty good sense of what HR executives do. But sometimes when people hear that you're an executive that's responsible for diversity and inclusion, sometimes I've heard people ask, "Well what does that mean? Like what does that executive do? What are they responsible for?" So maybe you can give us a sense of, as someone that's

leading [00:06:30] diversity and inclusion for Merck, what does that actually mean? What are you responsible for in that bucket?

Celeste Warren: So basically we look at how are we integrating diversity and inclusion, and the business performance of the company to create a competitive advantage for Merck. And we leverage it in different ways. We leverage it through making sure that we have a diverse workforce, [00:07:00] and so we have an internal focus around looking at our hiring practices, in looking at our talent management processes. So how are we making sure that through our employee movement, promotions, developmental opportunities, hiring, learning and development, how are we making sure that D&I is woven into those practices so we can [00:07:30] make sure that we have the diverse workforce that we need to drive innovation, to drive our strategies, and drive our business.

Also, we look at it holistically at Merck. A lot of times I say, "We look at diversity and inclusion beyond the numbers." Beyond just, "Well, how many women do we have in the workforce?" Or, "How many persons of color?" Etc. But how are we leveraging those [00:08:00] individuals, the entire workforce to really drive our business performance? And there are individuals within our organization that their day job, they have to do through a lens of diversity and inclusion. For example, in our clinical operations organization there is a group of individuals that are responsible for getting diverse patients through our clinical trials, as an example. So we partner with them [00:08:30] to say, "Okay, how can I do this job, and do what I need to be doing, and helping people to understand the importance of getting diverse patients to our clinical trials?" As an example.

We look at it a little bit more holistically, both from an internal focus with our employees, through our business integration, through our marketing practices, through our global supplier diversity. As an example, educating [00:09:00] our internal leaders and our external constituents around health literacy, as an example. So we like to look at diversity and inclusion holistically. And that's what really gets me excited about this particular field, there are so many opportunities to integrate diversity and inclusion through the various aspects of our business.

Jacob Morgan: I realized, I never asked you [00:09:30] about Merck. And so for people who are not familiar with Merck, can you give them a sense of, how big is the company, and what does Merck actually do?

Celeste Warren: We are a pharmaceutical organization. We make drugs legally.

Jacob Morgan: That's good. That's good to know.

Celeste Warren: We operate in about 140 countries globally, and we have about 60,000 plus, employees.

Jacob Morgan: [00:10:00] So a large sized organization, obviously.

Celeste Warren: Yes.

Jacob Morgan: And I live in the Bay Area, and I think you guys have a pretty strong presence here in the Bay Area too. I usually see your Merck building, I think it's in downtown San Francisco. I think a lot of people are familiar with Merck, but just in case, at least now they have some background.

You mentioned a couple of things that I thought were pretty interesting, first you touched on business performance. I was curious, how [00:10:30] are you able to tie diversity and inclusion to business performance? Is this still a really big challenge that companies like Merck and others are trying to figure out? Or is it pretty easy to tell what the impact of this is?

Celeste Warren: I think that every company is on a journey going from where they are, from basic understanding of diversity and inclusion to where we call sustaining. [00:11:00] It's in the DNA of the organization. It's sustained through systems etc. It is a journey. In some areas of the organization, we are at more of a basic level, where we're still trying to build awareness of the importance of diversity and how it can create a competitive advantage for the company. And in other areas, we're doing a lot better.

I mentioned, in our Clinical Operations organization, understanding the importance [00:11:30] for our clinical trials, and having a diverse patient base going through them. I talked about global supplier diversity. In our marketing teams, we've made very good progress from the standpoint of really breaking down our patient base, and understanding the demographic makeup of the patients, and being able to apply marketing strategies for those various different constituency groups across our markets. There are [00:12:00] some franchises that do better than others, but that's what we're striving for, that sustainability where it is not an afterthought.

Diversity isn't something that's on the outside of the window looking in, but it's fully integrated into our business practices, and from an HR standpoint, our people practices. We work very closely with our Global Talent [00:12:30] Management organization, our Learning and Development organization, our staffing organization to really make sure that we're doing what we're doing through a filter of D&I. And when I say that, meaning that we have a global employee base that is very diverse across those 140 countries, and we need to make sure that whatever it is that we're designing or creating, from a people standpoint especially, that it is applicable, and it reaches [00:13:00] the hearts, the minds of all of our employees, whatever that particular initiative is.

Jacob Morgan: Obviously, yeah. I mean that's hugely important, and another issue that I think a lot of companies are trying to figure out.

But looking at business performance side, Is the idea one day to be able to show that, as a result of investing of these things, we're more productive, we're

driving innovation? Basically attaching this to traditional business [00:13:30] metrics that companies use to measure success?

Celeste Warren: That's where we aspire to get to. And in some areas, we do have some of those metrics, but that's where we want to link it to.

There's always this debate in the D&I space around, what are the appropriate metrics that you measure the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives? And I've always been a stickler around, our business performance, [00:14:00] that's the metric. Whatever we have as metrics today, why would we not basically sort of use it as a baseline, and as we integrate D&I thinking, strategies, strategies, practices, policies, procedures, that we look at that progress.

For example, in our sales organization, we already have statistics where we measure how we're doing in our sales performance. So if we were to look at something from the standpoint of homogeneous sales [00:14:30] teams versus more diverse sales teams, and see that difference, we would be able to have our own case studies within Merck. You see the external data, but there are, I think I would like to see a day where we basically say that the proof is in the pudding. It's in our statistics that we already have. And from an HR standpoint, you have the normal things around turnover, and employee [00:15:00] pulse surveys, or voice surveys, or opinion surveys, where you can understand the pulse of the organization and what's going on. But I think from the standpoint of more sophisticated metrics, that we use the business metrics that we have already in place to see how we're progressing.

Jacob Morgan: That was actually going to be my next question for you, so you already answered that.

I guess looking at the diversity [00:15:30] and inclusion stuff, I'm assuming you keep track of, like percentage of men versus women. What might be some other indicators that you guys use to figure out, are we diverse and inclusive? Any advice that you can give to other companies that are listening, and what they should be looking at?

Celeste Warren: Sure.

You have some of the lagging indicators that are your basic HR metrics, turnover, [00:16:00] retention, looking at your talent management practices, and looking at your key talent, your top performers, what does that employee makeup look like from a demographic standpoint? That tells you if you need to be applying more development, more learning and development programs and resources to women, or persons of color, [00:16:30] or other dimensions of diversity that you might have in the employee base.

Also, we look at managerial metrics. The employee opinion surveys are huge gold mines to find out where some of your pain points in your organization are,

and really going and applying interventions and solutions to get after that. But some of the things that, when you look at some of your managerial, [00:17:00] your responses around managers and leaders to see if you need to apply certain capability building in your manager ranks, or in your leadership ranks. Those are just some of the areas that we look at. We really do use our opinion surveys, and we do ours every other year, and look at that data, and cut it by various different constituency groups, in generational areas to see where [00:17:30] some of our areas that we need to focus in the organization and apply interventions.

Some other areas of metrics are, again, looking at succession plan. For example, when you look at some of the PNL roles, in your major, critical roles in your organization, your larger roles, and you look at the successors, how many of those successors are women? How many are persons of color? For example. [00:18:00] And start to put interventions in place where you see that, that's not happening in different organizations. So those are just some examples of how you can look at some metrics to try to drive it.

Jacob Morgan: Those are all great, great things to look at.

I wanted to switch gears slightly, just because you brought this up. Looking at employee engagement and pulse surveys, can you give us a sense of how often you guys are measuring this stuff at Merck? You mentioned [00:18:30] you do one employee opinion survey every other year, but you also said you do pulse surveys. What are you guys measuring, and how often are you guys doing it?

Celeste Warren: The big survey, well our big survey is ... I call it pulse survey, but it's the same thing. Our opinion survey, we call it our voice survey. It's a way of giving our employees a voice on various different categories within Merck, our senior leader commitment, our strategy. Do you understand our strategy? [00:19:00] Our questions around manager effectiveness, questions around how engaged they are, those types of organizations. How are we as an organization when it comes to our specific culture? That survey is every other year.

When we conduct the survey, and when we get the results back, we do look at it across various different dimensions of diversity, [00:19:30] and look at the data to see if there are any issues that we need to face, and really look at. And then in between the two years, different organizations, pockets of the organization will conduct pulse surveys, just to follow up on some of the action items that they put in place as a result of the biannual surveys. That's where they'll put together small surveys to really, maybe addressing [00:20:00] key issues to make sure that the action plans that they put in place, after they saw the results of their voice survey, that they're really the right initiatives, and they're getting after what it is that they want to resolve in their respective organization.

Jacob Morgan: I was just going to ask you if you guys have thought of doing these surveys more than once every two years, but it sounds like you have specific teams that do,

do them more ongoing to kind of see how things are progressing, [00:20:30] so you kind of already answered that question.

Celeste Warren: We used to do it, Jacob. We used to do it every year, a few years back. And we found that by the time you analyze the data and you put action plans in place, you really need to give an opportunity for those action plans to really permeate through the organization, so you can see if there really was results, and if you're moving the needle along what you want to do. [00:21:00] And so we actually pulled back and said, "Let's have the survey every other year." And we made that decision a few years back.

Jacob Morgan: Got it. Okay, that's helpful.

One of the questions that I hear, that gets floated around a little bit is what's the difference between diversity and inclusion? Are they the same thing? I'm curious to hear your perspective on that. What's the difference between diversity? What's the difference between inclusion? Are they kind of the same thing that we keep [00:21:30] mixing up? Or how would you explain those?

Celeste Warren: No, that's a good question, and we do get that question a lot.

Diversity is simply differences. It's the differences that individuals have, whether that be differences that are visible, like male or female, black, white, latino, asian, etc. Or differences that are not visible, so secondary aspects of [00:22:00] dimension from the standpoint of a disability that may not be visible, whether someone is married or single, their genetic differences, so differences in individuals. When you look in an organization from the standpoint of different levels, different jobs, different disciplines. Diversity is [00:22:30] difference, differences in individuals and what difference they identify with. I am an African American woman who's a mother, a working mother, etc. All of those different aspects that make up Celeste contribute to my diversity.

Inclusion comes in when you, and let's talk about it from the standpoint of [00:23:00] the work place. Inclusion comes in when you have all of those employees with differences in the organization, how do you create a culture of inclusion that allows them to be able to bring themselves in to work? Whatever it is that they identify with, whatever that dimension of diversity is that they identify with, so they can be productive, [00:23:30] and they aren't marginalized, and their ideas are received, and considered, and through to contribute to the success of the organization.

I get a lot of times where individuals will say, "Well, you know it's easier to have a homogeneous team, where everyone sort of, thinks the same, and we get each other, and it just seems [00:24:00] easier to get things done." But any data, any external research tells you that, the more diverse your team is with the different perspectives, the different ways of viewing a business challenge based on the culture of that person, based on the filter that they come through, based

on their experiences and their diversity, you create a more innovative, creative [00:24:30] solution.

There are lots of different examples, even some in recent history, where you see a commercial, or you see something on social media, and you wonder, "Wow, did they have a diverse team sitting around the table when that idea was being generated?" Because if I were in the room as, fill in the blank of whatever dimension of diversity that is, I would have said something in the room when they were talking about it in [00:25:00] its infancy, and that wouldn't have hit social media. That wouldn't have hit the television air wave. Leveraging those diverse perspectives in a work environment, is the art of inclusion.

When I talk to individuals about that talk about that discussion around homogeneous groups versus diverse groups, one of the things that they'll say ... And research does say that when [00:25:30] you have diverse teams, as you are building that diverse team, there is a time of the norming, storming, forming type nomenclature. And so there is that time where you are bringing the teams together and you are doing that norming, but at a point, when you have the homogeneous teams, you level off, because the creativity and the different perspectives are not driving the [00:26:00] optimal performance that you see in an organization, that you want in a work team. But when you have a diverse team, it may start off kind of slow, but then it catapults, and it really just does excel.

The manager of that team ... And I always tell some of my colleagues this. It's about the ability of that manager to really lead a diverse team, that really contributes to how successful that team is, along [00:26:30] with the diversity that comes into play. Inclusion is a skillset that we really have to embrace, because in reality, every organization is diverse. No matter how you look at that diversity, every organization is diverse. In the labor market, you've seen the statistic around generations. The millennial generation is one of the most diverse generations coming up, from baby boomer, [00:27:00] and generation X, etc. So the ideals, the way they think, the way that they look at the world through the advent of social media and the internet, the world is their oyster, and so the aspect of diversity takes on so many different dimensions when we think about this employee base. Inclusion is being able to leverage that diversity and those differences to really drive the performance of a work team or [00:27:30] a group.

Jacob Morgan:

Well that's a wonderful explanation, so thank you for going into detail on that. Listening to you talk, I was kind of wondering, how do you keep track of that, right? You talked about differences in thought, differences in genetic things, differences in physical appearance. As somebody that's listening to this, that's thinking, "I want to build a diverse company." Are these all things that they somehow keep track of? How do you know, for example, [00:28:00] that you're properly building a diverse team? Is it okay to ask employees, "Do you have any genetic differences? What do you think about this?"



How do you make sure you're getting in that diversity instead of just assuming you are? Hopefully you understand what I'm looking at, but I think it's kind of a ... It might be tricky for some people, right? To make sure that they're building this kind of a team, or a company.

Celeste Warren:

Yeah, and it can feel like [00:28:30] you are boiling the ocean at times. I want to go back to how I approached it when I stepped into the role at the end of 2014. I basically looked at ... Did the analysis. I'm a closet data hound in reality. I just looked at the organization. I looked at our employee opinion survey results. I looked at [00:29:00] various different quantitative data to look at our employee movement, what was happening from the standpoint of employee movement, promotions, hires into the organization at the different levels, our movement within the organization at the different levels, whether that be promotions, lateral moves. And then exits, people that were leaving the organization.

I looked at all of that data and said, "What story is this data [00:29:30] telling me?" And then once I got that story, we put together, "Well, where do we want to focus? Where are some of the pain points in the organization?" And we put together a strategy, which basically entailed some initiatives that were in the foundational area, or the compliance area. What do we need to do from the standpoint of, there are government regulations that are in various different countries.

Again as I mentioned, we're in 140 different countries. [00:30:00] There are various different regulations that are coming, so what does our strategy need to be around making sure that we're mitigating risk? The second part, we looked internally and said, "Where are some of our pain points in the organization?" And we put learning and development strategies in place. We put talent management strategies in place to look at our people practices, to make sure that we were giving the right tools to managers to be able to make those decisions appropriately around hiring, [00:30:30] promotions, and separations.

We looked externally in partnering with different organizations to help us to build a diverse and inclusive environment in the organization. Organizations such as catalyst, and Tanenbaum, and HACR, the Hispanic Association for Corporate Responsibility, [00:31:00] and the National Urban League for example. And really partnering with those organizations, different veterans organizations, to partner with them to help us. And then the partnership internally with our global communications organization, and our workforce analytics, leveraging them, because when you're putting together ... This is change management. We're talking about mobilizing the organization to a different place. [00:31:30] I fundamentally feel that, a partnership with global communications, you have to have an effective communications strategy in order to mobilize the organization.

So you basically, step one, I think is analyzing the organization to find out where your pain points are, and then focusing in those areas, and putting strategies and initiatives together. And also creating an infrastructure to help you. There

are four, I call them diversity ambassador teams [00:32:00] that I work with, and we chartered back in 2015. One group is our employee business resource groups, or affinity groups. We have 10 in Merck, and what we created was a leadership team. Our employee business resource group executive leadership council, and it's comprised of the 10 global leaders of our 10 employee business resource groups.

We come together once a month, [00:32:30] and we act as a leadership team, like any leadership team in the organization. We talk about the various different issues that are going on within the organization, and we align the 10 EBRGs to our GD&I strategy. We also leverage them to be the voice of their constituency groups in the organization, in the employee base.

You asked a question around, how do you know [00:33:00] when you're doing things right? I really leverage this group to make sure that we are getting it right. We bring in different business leaders, and HR practitioners, and leaders to come in and talk to the group as they are building, either people practices, strategies, policies, or business strategies to come into the group and get the feedback from the 10 EBRG leaders [00:33:30] that represent the voice of the employee base in those various different constituency groups. So when we are going out to the employee population, those 60 plus thousand employees, that we know that we have received feedback from different constituency groups in the organization. So we make sure that we do hit the minds and the hearts of our employees with various different initiatives that we have [00:34:00] going out.

The second group is our Global Diversity and Inclusion Business Consortium. I talked earlier about those business leaders that in their day job, they have to do it through a lens of diversity and inclusion, and so all of those different leaders that we have on that team, and it's about 15 different leaders across different areas of the company ... It's different disciplines, but the one thing that is the general theme across [00:34:30] all of them is they have to do their job through a lens of diversity and inclusion. We come together and we talk about the various different areas of focus in their different areas, and learn from each other, and help each other.

The third area is in our HR area, our global diversity and inclusion extended HR leadership team. That organization is pretty much ... When you think of HR, you think, "Well they already got it. They understand diversity and inclusion." [00:35:00] But we want to make sure that as we develop practices, and policies, and procedures for the employee base, that they're done through a lens of diversity and inclusion. And that team really is comprised of, all of our HR organizations are represented on that team, and we discuss the various different people, policies, and practices, and procedures that we're getting ready to implement, and make sure that [00:35:30] is done through a lens of diversity and inclusion.

And then the fourth organization. We want to create a culture for employees with disabilities that is inclusive. This is something that we embarked on our disability inclusion strategy council three years ago. We set out to create an integrated strategy, disability inclusion strategy. Integrated meaning, it's facilities, [00:36:00] it's IT, it's health and wellness, it's learning and development, it's compliance, it's a wealth of different organizations, and through their discipline looking at it, and saying, "Through my lens, are we creating that organization? Are we contributing to creating that organization that is inclusive for persons with disabilities?" And so [00:36:30] that's the fourth group.

When you put that infrastructure in place to really focus on those areas of need in your organization, it really helps me to compartmentalize, but also not feel like I'm getting overwhelmed by looking across the sea of the organization, and saying, "Good lord, I can't boil the ocean. Where do I need to focus? Where do I start?" And that's basically my journey [00:37:00] the last three or four years that we've been plugging at this.

Jacob Morgan:

Why do you think organizations should care about diversity inclusion?

Some of the things that I've heard is, "Why can't we just hire the best person for the job? Why do we need to think of diversity and inclusion? Why do we need to think of diversity of thought, or men versus women, or gender, all these different types of things? Why can't we just see who the best person is for the job, and hire that person?" [00:37:30] That's how it used to be, right? That's the mentality that a lot of companies used to have.

So maybe you can talk about why should organizations even care about diversity and inclusion, and why should we embrace this different way of thinking instead of just, should we hire the best person for the job?

Celeste Warren:

That is a very, very good question. Let me answer the question this way. Why don't we hire the best person for the job? [00:38:00] Number one, we do. I don't think there's any organization that doesn't feel, especially when we think at Merck, our scientists. We're talking about trying to make sure that ... We're in the business of saving lives, and we can't afford to not have the best people in the roles. Our scientists that are discovering and developing drugs for our patients. Our manufacturers that are looking at, how do we distribute [00:38:30] our products and our services in the most cost effective way? And our sales and marketing organization, how do we make sure that we're interfacing with our physicians, with our government, with our NGOs to make sure that we are meeting the needs of the patients, and having the right health outcomes that we need?

I will argue, and I always argue with folks, Jacob, that the best person for the job doesn't necessarily [00:39:00] mean that it's a white male. I think that's where the mindset that a lot of folks have. That when you say, "Well, why can't I just hire the best person from the job?" Intertwined in that, is the assumption that

the best person for the job is not a woman, is not a person of color, is not a person with disabilities, is not a veteran. I think we need to flip it on the outside, and say, "Yeah, we are hiring the [00:39:30] best person for the job. And the best person for the job is this person."

I think, especially when you look at the United States, and going back to the '60s and the Civil Rights Movement, and all of that. We were in a situation where it wasn't a level playing field. And so when we ask the question, "Why do we need diversity?" We want to be able to create that playing field where there are equal opportunities [00:40:00] for everyone. And so we can make sure that we have the exposure to women, to persons of color, to veterans, to persons with disabilities. That we make sure that those opportunities that we're aware of fact that there is such a vast skillset that we haven't even tapped into, because we keep going back to the same ... We keep fishing from the same pond, [00:40:30] and going back to the same things that we're comfortable with.

So when people say, "Why can't I hire the best person for the job?" I say, "You absolutely can. And in our business, we have to hire the best person for the job, because our patients are depending on it." But I will argue that the best people for the jobs aren't necessarily what you're saying, needs to be white males. The best people for the job in the labor market, are all different aspects of diversity, and dimensions of diversity. [00:41:00] I challenge leaders, and I challenge managers to make sure that you are casting that wide net, so you know who's out there in the labor market, so you can bring in and hire truly the best people.

Jacob Morgan:

That actually transitions pretty well into the next thing that I was going to ask you. That was the role that managers and leaders play in diversity and inclusion. You were just starting to talk about that as well. [00:41:30] When you think about the role that ... And it doesn't need to be a senior level executive, right? It doesn't need to be like the CEO, or a C level, but maybe just a manager, or a senior manager, or a director at a company. What role do you think they play in the whole diversity and inclusion space?

Celeste Warren:

Our managers play a huge, huge role. We've had a lot of emphasis on manager effectiveness. Because most people will tell you, [00:42:00] when individual employees, when they are feeling marginalized, when they are not feeling productive, when they leave the organization ... Statistics will tell you that they're leaving the organization. They're also, more importantly, they're leaving their, one of the number one top causes of why people leave organizations, is their immediate manager, or their management. They play a critical role. They're at the front [00:42:30] lines, number one, of our employee base. That they are who the employee sees in a lot of different cases. People, they don't see the CEO. They don't see the executive committee. They don't see executives in the C suite. They see their immediate manager. Whether they are a scientist in the labs, whether they are an employee in one of our plant facilities, [00:43:00] whether they are a sales rep in the car, driving to different physicians offices, they see their manager. That's who they know.

And so the manager plays a really, really critical role in creating the environment and the culture that we want to see. That inclusive culture that we want to see in the organization with their respective employees. And so we need to make sure that our managers understand, how do I create [00:43:30] that environment so my employees feel valued, they feel energized, they feel engaged, and very importantly, they feel empowered to be able to do what they do in a way where they're contributing to the organization. They're the first line.

The senior executives, they are not seeing the employees through the organization like the supervisors and the managers are.

Jacob Morgan: [00:44:00] So if there are some managers listening to this that are thinking, "Okay, I'm going to listen to this podcast, and right afterwards, I'm going to show up to work tomorrow, and I want to start to make some changes." Right? "I want to start to bring diversity and inclusion to my company." Do you have any ... I don't even want to call it simple, but anything that managers and leaders can start doing right away to move towards this direction?

Celeste Warren: Yeah, I think there are a couple of different things. [00:44:30] Let's talk about them initially. One of the things they can do, is really just look inside themselves, and say, "What are my capabilities around diversity and inclusion? How knowledgeable am I? How aware am I?" And getting in touch with themselves. There are lots of different ways that you can do that. You can read articles. If you don't have time to read long books or novels around diversity and inclusion, [00:45:00] picking up the paper and reading the latest articles around diversity and inclusion, and what's happening in the world. You can turn on CNN and see just the various different things that are happening around D&I.

And maybe taking a few online courses that are available around unconscious bias, for example. And really understanding the biases that we all have within ourselves, [00:45:30] and understanding that, and saying, "Okay. Well, how does that impact how I'm leading my group? How I'm managing and supervising my group? The way I am. The way I was raised. The culture that I came in, and I'm a part of, and how I identify myself in whatever dimension of diversity that might be." And so the first step is basically getting in touch with yourself. And then building your own capabilities around D&I.

And [00:46:00] then coming into work the next day, and say, "You know what? During my staff meeting, or during a shift change meeting, or anything." And just basically bringing in an article and saying, "You know what? We're going to talk about the task that we have for the day, but I'd also like for us to just ... I was reading this article around diversity, around inclusion, around this that happened in this company. I wanted to garner a conversation around it, and see what you guys think. [00:46:30] It's not about what I think as the manager." Need to be conscious about not forcing your ideals on your team, but just getting into a conversation about it.

And that's one step that you can do, just engaging in a dialogue with your team. Creating a safe space for people to talk about it. Creating a brave space for people to speak up and talk about it, and talk about various different things. And then that will translate to, "Well, what are you all [00:47:00] seeing in our organization? What are some things that I could be doing better as a leader, and as a manager, and a supervisor of this group to ensure that we're creating a culture of inclusion, and that I am doing better in this area?" So asking your team about how you could be doing better, because they will know, and share with you, in creating that safe space.

One thing that I do want to say [00:47:30] is. Two, managers, we shouldn't be afraid that we don't know everything there is to know about D&I, because nobody knows everything there is to know about D&I. It's impossible. You can read, and read, and watch TV, and just talk to all the leading experts, but there is multiple ... If you look at Merck, 140 different countries where diversity is defined in different ways, in [00:48:00] different dimensions in those respective countries. In every country though, there's haves and there's have-nots. So as a manager asking your employees, and not feeling bad about saying, "I don't know, but I want to learn, and I want to get better in this space."

So I think those are some things that you can walk away with, and do right away with your team. And then taking that information and [00:48:30] going to your peers and your manager, and saying, "You know what? I had a conversation with my team, and here are some areas that they felt that we're doing really good in. And here's some areas that we're not doing so well in." And bringing and having that discussion with your peers, and your manager, and saying, "How can we, on a larger scale, create the environment that our employees want to see." It is our accountability as managers [00:49:00] to be able to create and foster that environment.

So if there's managers that are listening, I'd say those are the three things, areas that I would do. Get in touch with yourself. Build your own capabilities around D&I. Talk to your team. Build that environment in your team where people want to speak up, and talk about what's going well and what's not in your own environment, and what you can work on. And then bring that to your peers and the next management level, so you can create that, and foster [00:49:30] that environment across the enterprise.

Jacob Morgan:

Wonderful advice. And you actually transitions very well to what I wanted to ask you next. And that's the role of employees when it comes to diversity and inclusion. So people that are not in management or executive roles, just every day employees, entry level, maybe even some mid level employees that don't really have any ... They're not responsible for other people. They're individual contributors or employees. What role do you think they play [00:50:00] when it comes to diversity and inclusion? And do you have any advice for them for what they can be doing at work?

Celeste Warren:

That's a good question, and I get that question a lot, especially in September. We celebrate at Merck for the month, a global diversity and inclusion experience month. We usually kick it off with a global webcast, all employees. After that webcast, I always get the question, individual employees coming in, and [00:50:30] they come up to me, and they have such passion in their eyes, and when they're talking with me about, "I'm not a manager. I'm not a leader, Celeste. What can I do? I'm just ... " And they say that, "I'm just an employee. What can I do in this space?"

I tell them one of the same things that I would tell the manager, which is getting in touch with yourself. Understanding your own biases. Understanding and learning [00:51:00] about diversity and inclusion. And the same thing that I would tell the manager from that standpoint of understanding your own unconscious biases. And then coming into the workplace and talking with your peers about it, and again, bringing in an article. We call them lunch and learns, but during the lunch time hour, maybe bringing a few things, a few of your colleagues together in a conference room, or [00:51:30] at the lunchroom table, and talking about something that's happening in the environment, or in the organization, and sharing.

And then you can also have a conversation with your manager, and say, "Hey." We have regular staff meetings. "Do you mind if I ask for an agenda item, and I bring an article in, and garner a conversation around the article?" We send it out ahead of time to the folks on the team. [00:52:00] We just take a half hour, 30 minutes and we talk about the article, and discuss it. So there are some things that you can do from that perspective.

Another thing too, as an individual employee, is join an employee business resource group, join an affinity group. Get involved. Get involved in trying to create the culture that you want to create in however that you define yourself as a [00:52:30] diverse individual, or even if you don't. You know, You don't think you're diverse. You're diverse in some way, shape, or form. And so, join in an EBRG and get involved, and not just become a member, but contribute. Be a leader in some of the ... A chapter leader, or start a chapter in your facility, or in your area. But there are ways that you can get involved, and lend your voice [00:53:00] to what we're doing from a D&I perspective in your respective organization.

Jacob Morgan:

I think that's awesome advice. I always say that employees need to learn to speak up at work. So don't be scared to, like you said, bring in the article. Start the conversation with your manager, and be more proactive about it, instead of just waiting and assuming that other people will bring it up, because that doesn't always happen.

I know we have just a couple minutes left here. I have two questions that I want to ask you, that are guest questions that people [00:53:30] on LinkedIn. One on LinkedIn, and one from Facebook told me to ask you. And then I have just a couple really rapid fire, fun questions.

First one is from Wanda Jean Jones [00:53:41]. She said, "When we think of D&I, the usual topics come to mind, but our world is more different than ever before. Could we be thinking of D&I with older lenses? Could there be more ideas, groups, or realities that we need to begin thinking of?"

Celeste Warren:

Oh, absolutely. I laugh [00:54:00] and tell colleagues sometimes, "This isn't your grandmas D&I anymore." We can't look at diversity the way we have in the past, because the world is changing. It's global in nature, as I said before, with the internet, with social media we're more connected. And so the influence of various different cultures across the globe has a huge impact, and so we have [00:54:30] to think of it very differently. Also, what is becoming more prominent now is the thought around intersectionalism, which basically looks at ... We looked at our diverse groups from the standpoint of lumping them all in one category, so women, or black, or Latino and Hispanic, or persons with disabilities, or veterans.

And for the example, [00:55:00] within women there are multi-dimensions of diversity within the category of women. You have multi-cultural women. You have transgender. You have the LGBT community. Various different aspects of women that are in that category, and people identify with more than one dimension of diversity.

In the example that I gave earlier [00:55:30] around, "I'm a woman. I'm a mother. I'm an African American. Etc." And so being able to really understand that is going to be so important as we move forward with diversity, and how we think about diversity and inclusion. The global aspect of it is becoming ... We can't ignore the important capability around cultural competence, and understand that, [00:56:00] and being able to make sure that, that is something that is really prominent in organizations. So yes. And when you think about the awakening that's happening, you have to look at what's happening in the world around women speaking up around sexual harassment, and men for that example.

There are the, Black Lives Matter, or the Brexit, the changes that are happening, the rise of nationalism, [00:56:30] we have to look at diversity and inclusion a lot more sophisticated than we have in the past.

Jacob Morgan:

I couldn't agree with you more, and you brought up some terrific examples, some modern examples that I think really reflect that too, so perfect.

Next question for you, before we jump into these fun ones, kind of a two [part 00:56:54]. Heather Green ... Oh man, I'm going to butcher her last name. I think it's [Shouche 00:56:59] Heather Green Shouche, [00:57:00] I'm going to go with that. She said, "I'd love to know. In her experience, what are some of the biggest missed opportunities. And I'd also be interested on any thoughts around combating unconscious bias." So last, kind of official question for you, and then Just some fun ones.



Celeste Warren: Missed opportunities.

I think there's always, always opportunities in hindsight, and looking back on different things. I think from [00:57:30] my vantage point, I would like to really make sure that we're leveraging our executives and our leaders even more than what we are now. Many of them are very passionate. We have executives that sponsor our women's network, etc. But really, how do I engage our senior leaders more holistically around D&I? I think is something that I would like to go after in 2018, [00:58:00] and seeing how they can contribute even more to our diversity and inclusion initiatives and our strategy as the face of Merck.

I think also I'd like to be even more in our employee base, creating that ground swell, and really helping employees to understand that they play a huge role in creating the culture that we want to see, and they're not victims. [00:58:30] We don't want them to have that mentality. We want them to feel, as I said before, energized and empowered. So as we look into 2018, really looking at how we're going to create those opportunities for our employee base to be more empowered and energized. And then of course too, always the focus on the middle management. That's key in any organization, doing more in that space.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect. I think that's a great [00:59:00] way to wrap up.

She also asked you about unconscious bias. I know you touched on that a little bit earlier, and you mentioned some kind of training programs and whatnot. But any thoughts on how to combat unconscious bias when it comes to these things?

Celeste Warren: First of all, is if you haven't been doing unconscious bias training in your organization, I think, number one, that is something that I absolutely advocate. It is a way to help individuals [00:59:30] to understand the biases that we all have. All of us have biases, and so understanding that, and then understand how it plays in the work place, and how sometimes our biases impact how we're making decisions around people. And so understanding it, and then applying it on how we make decisions, and how it manifests itself in the organization with decision making at the manager levels, [01:00:00] and people levels as well.

But also how ... What we're doing at Merck, we just started this year, in another phase of our unconscious bias training in awareness where we have instead of just the, "Hey, you have two hours, why don't you go through this training?" But really integrating very purposeful, smaller [01:00:30] opportunities around unconscious bias in the moments that matter. And the moments that matter around when we're ... For example, a hiring manager, when they're getting ready to ... They have an open position and they're getting ready to go through the hiring process. Sitting down with that hiring manager and basically talking to them about unconscious bias in the hiring process. So active learning, so they are aware of it, and they're implementing it, and [01:01:00] thinking about it, right there, just in time, as they're going through this process.

The same thing for any of the talent management processes that you have in place. Or, "I'm getting ready to make a decision on a really neat project that has great visibility. I'm getting ready to make a decision on who leads that project." Again, a small ... We have little vignettes, video vignettes that really get after ... Five minutes, not long, but really get [01:01:30] after unconscious bias in various different aspects. And so sitting down and going through the little vignette, and having a conversation with the people that are going to be involved in making those decisions, and talking about your biases before you make the decision. So really interjecting unconscious bias right at the moment that you're making these decisions, and it really helps to build the awareness, and more experiential, active learning.

Jacob Morgan: [01:02:00] Perfect. All right. And last, a couple of fun questions for you. These are just rapid fire, you can give even one word answers if you want to, for some of them, not all of them.

First one is, what's the most embarrassing moment you've had at work?

Celeste Warren: Oh gosh, the most embarrassing moment. I think, probably I was in a meeting. I was leaving the meeting, and tripped and fell over the garbage can, a big garbage can outside the door, [01:02:30] and dropped everything. That's probably the most embarrassing.

Jacob Morgan: All right, that's a good one. I like that one, especially because it was a garbage can.

If you were a super hero, who would you be?

Celeste Warren: Wonder Woman.

Jacob Morgan: Okay, perfect. That's what Jenny Dearborn, the chief learning officer at SAP picked as well.

What's a book that you recommend. It could be business or non-business.

Celeste Warren: I like murder mysteries. I am Mary Higgins Clark fan, so any [01:03:00] of her books.

Jacob Morgan: If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

Celeste Warren: Lawyer.

Jacob Morgan: Laywer?

Celeste Warren: A lawyer, yeah.

Jacob Morgan: If you could have dinner with anybody, alive or dead, who would it be?

Celeste Warren: Martin Luther King.

Jacob Morgan: That's a good one.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Celeste Warren: Hawaii.

Jacob Morgan: Hawaii. I'm going there in [01:03:30] two weeks for our family vacation, so that'll be fun.

Celeste Warren: Good for you.

Jacob Morgan: And last two questions for you.

If you could get rid of one workplace practice tomorrow, which one would it be?

Celeste Warren: It would be disparate treatment.

Jacob Morgan: And last question. If you could implement one workplace practice tomorrow, what would you implement?

Celeste Warren: That's a good question.

[01:04:00] Free food for everyone in the cafeteria.

Jacob Morgan: Oh man, that would make you very popular inside of Merck. Everybody would love you. All right. Perfect.

Well, Celeste, I know we went a couple of minutes over. Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. Where can people go to learn more about you? I know you're on LinkedIn, but anything else that you want to mention, either about yourself or Merck, for people to connect with, feel free to do so.

Celeste Warren: [01:04:30] I am on Twitter, CRWDiversity. I like to talk a lot about what we're doing in the diversity space, and so if anyone is on Twitter, I'm on twitter as well, so that's a good place.

Jacob Morgan: All right. Perfect.

So connect with Celeste on Twitter, and make sure you say hi after you listen to the podcast.

Celeste Warren: Absolutely.

Celeste Warren

Jacob Morgan: Celeste, again thanks so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Celeste Warren: Thank you, Jacob. [01:05:00] I appreciate it. It was fun.

Jacob Morgan: Yes, it was. It was.

Thanks everyone for tuning into this week's episode of the podcast. My guest again has been Celeste Warren. She's the VP of human resources and Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence over at Merck. And I will see all of you guys next week.