



The Economic Club of New York

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Webinar

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Introduction

President Barbara Van Allen

Good afternoon and welcome to the 702nd meeting of The Economic Club of New York, in our over 100 years. I'm Barbara Van Allen, President and CEO of the Club. The Economic Club is known as the nation's leading nonpartisan forum for wide-ranging discussions on economic, social and political issues.

Over the past three years, through our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work, we've been leveraging the Club's platform to bring together prominent thought leaders to help us explore and better understand the various dimensions of inequity in underrepresented communities and to highlight strategies, best practices, and resources that the business community can use to be a force for change. We're not doing this work alone, and we'd like to give special thanks to our corporate partners, which include BlackRock, Mastercard, PayPal, S&P Global, and Taconic Capital as well as the many members, speakers, and subject matter experts that are now and continue to be engaged in our work.

We'd also like to extend a warm welcome to students from Mercy College, the NYU Stern School of Business, and Georgetown University joining us virtually today as well as members of our largest class of 2023 Fellows ever – a select group of diverse, rising,

next-gen business thought leaders.

I'm truly honored to welcome our special guest today, Dr. Ella Washington. Dr. Washington is an organizational psychologist and DEI expert with a wealth of experience through her involvement as the Founder and CEO of Ellavate Solutions, a Professor of Practice at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, and the co-host of Gallup's Center of Black Voices Cultural Competence Podcast. Within all these roles, Dr. Washington continues to deepen her research pipeline and thought leadership as a Gallup Senior Scientist studying inclusive leadership, strengths, and other DEI workplace topics.

She has global consulting experience in the human capital space, which has allowed her to impact clients across a myriad of industries, including but not limited to financial services, sports and entertainment, oil and gas, higher education, and the government. Previously, Dr. Washington worked at Gallup and led the Diversity and Inclusion Practice where she provided insight to clients on issues of culture, strategic DEI and engagement.

She recently released her first solo book published by Harvard Business Review Press, *The Necessary Journey: Making Real Progress on Equity and Inclusion*.

The format today will be a conversation, and we are delighted to have with us the Head of Inclusive Programming for Bloomberg Media Editorial, and Deputy New York Bureau Chief of Bloomberg News, Shartia Brantley, doing the honors of moderating. In addition, please note we'll have the chat box open for this conversation. You can enter questions directly into the chat box as the conversation progresses and they'll use them if time permits. So, as a reminder, the conversation is on the record and we do have media on the line. Shartia, if you're ready, I'm going to pass the mike over to you.

Conversation with Dr. Ella Washington

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Thanks so much, Barbara. I am just truly honored and delighted to be here to discuss how we can create a more equitable workplace with Dr. Washington. Welcome, Dr. Washington.

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Shartia, and thank you, Barbara, and The Economic Club of New York for having me. I'm excited to be here and looking forward to this conversation.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And congratulations on your book. We have a lot to get to. But before we dive into some of the core themes, can you give us an overview of your background and how you were introduced to DEI work?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Yes, it's interesting because my identity as a Black woman has always put me at the center of some of these DEI conversations, whether they were happening in my high school when I was the only Black girl in my AP classes, or whether they were happening in college when I went to Spelman College, which is a historically Black, all-women's institution and you would think there wouldn't be conversations around diversity, but that was the very opposite. Not only were we talking about what was happening in the world, but as a seemingly homogeneous college environment, you start to notice how diversity is so much broader than just race and gender. You get to go to those deeper levels of diversity.

So it's always been part of who I am. I think that my love for understanding people as a psychologist and also my desire to make the workplace better for people that look like me and people from other marginalized identities is what really drove me into this career path.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: So then, I totally understand that, so what motivated you to write *The Necessary Journey* now? Your book was released in November of 2022, so why now?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Yes, so it's interesting. I've been doing work on the maturity model for organizations and their DEI efforts for quite some time, since about 2015. But

in 2020, I noticed in my conversations with CEOs and Chief Human Resource Officers, it was like clockwork. At the end of every first meeting with one of these new companies, whether we were doing a town hall meeting in the summer of 2020 that many of us attended, right?, or they were doing some other type of efforts in response to the racial reckoning that was happening, they would always pull me aside. And they would also say, okay, so I understand that this is going to take time, but really, you know, where are we on the journey and how do we compare with other people?

And those are totally understandable questions but when I got them 20, 30, 40, 50 times within the short period of summer of 2020, I realized that although my colleagues in this space have done some fantastic work, there seemed to be something missing in terms of people really understanding what the DEI journey, especially from a corporate and organizational perspective, is all about. And so I wanted to demystify the journey. I wanted to make it real for people because it seemed like this notion of this really big thing that people were talking about but didn't truly understand.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And with that, you know, how, you mentioned some of the questions they've asked about how they stack up on the journey, but how have those conversations evolved over the last two and a half, three years? And what are your students asking versus what C-Suite executives are asking of you?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: So, you know, for most C-Suite executives, unless their company has formed in the last five years, they are asking how can we close gaps that were already developed? How can we think retroactively? How can we honor the values and the mission and purpose that we set out to at the beginning? Versus my students are very forward-looking, they're like, you know, how can we keep pushing the envelope? What's the future going to be like? How does AI fit into this conversation? How does this hybrid work environment that we are definitely going to be working in as opposed to previous generations may or may not have worked in, how should we be thinking about the global conversations around DEI? And so they are just thinking much more forward-thinking. The sky is the limit for them so it's quite exciting.

And to answer your previous question around how the conversations have shifted from the businesses, you know, I would say that there were many organizations that were on their DEI journey prior to 2020. But I think what shifted is those organizations that were on it before as well as many, many new organizations that just started their DEI journey in 2020, they all know that this is something that is expected from them, from their employees, oftentimes from other shareholders, from their board. And so the conversation is no longer, like should we be engaging in this, or is this important, or is this a priority? It's kind of table stakes for many organizations or it has been for the past few years. I know we're going to talk about some of those shifts we've seen. But there's just an elevated conversation.

You know, most organizations were at two of the five stages that I talk about in the book – awareness and compliance. Many of them self-reflected and said, yes, we really are just at this awareness stage or we really have only been doing check-the-box exercises that are more around compliance. And now they understand that in order to move forward they have to do more than that. They have to have a strategy. They have to have goals. They have to have metrics.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And you've talked to so many companies, what if anything has surprised you about some of the conversations that you're having with these leaders?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: You know, what surprised me, it kind of goes back to pure psychology. When you're talking to leaders, most of the leaders are in their positions because they are seen as very competent. They are seen as having the right answers. And what's been the biggest challenge, and maybe even surprise, is that there's this huge discomfort with not getting everything right. You know, saying that, oh, maybe we didn't do the best in that space or maybe we do have some room to grow. And so it's been working with these leaders to get them comfortable with being uncomfortable, first of all, being comfortable with saying, okay, I don't know everything. This is something I need to, you know, understand more or dig into more, or self-reflect more a bit. And then being brave enough to share that information as a lesson learned and as an opportunity for their organizations.

In my book I talk about the three things that organizations should be thinking about, their purpose and why they're doing this work, their pitfalls, it's that holding-that-mirror-up process that I'm talking about in terms of what has kept them from achieving that purpose. And then progress, what does progress look like? And of those three P's, the hardest by far is that pitfalls area because we just don't like to admit that we don't have it all together.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And how do you help them become more comfortable with being vulnerable and looking at the organization and its mirror, if you will?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: So data is our friend. Data helps us understand where we are today. And I think, you know, having conversations about where they see their organization in the future helps them to bring it to life, but what exactly are you trying to do? So you can't go into those pitfalls without really understanding, well, what exactly are you trying to do? What is your purpose? How does this work align or mis-align with your company's mission and values? Right? You've got to be honest about those things upfront.

You know, the other thing that I help organizations to understand is that we are all on a journey, every single one of us. And there's often a parallel journey happening for leaders. There's that personal journey of them, wherever they are on their

understanding of these social and justice issues and their own experiences and how that has played a role into developing who they are. And then there's the organizational journey. In the best-case scenario, the organization and the individual are moving towards the same direction at the same time, but we know that's not always the case.

And so one thing I help them to understand is like even if they are, you know, super far ahead on their own journey, they have to meet the organization where it is and bring it along or vice versa. Right? Sometimes the organization is ready to run and you have a leader that's just not comfortable, right? And so both of those factors are really important.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: I appreciate you saying that and I look at our multi-generational workforce we find ourselves in right now and I'm working more and more with Gen Z colleagues and it has just been a delight. I often say I'm a Gen-Xer with Millennial and Gen Z tendencies. So like them, I want to see change and I want to see it yesterday. So what do you say to our younger colleagues and leaders who are very passionate about equity and inclusion in the workplace? How do we help them understand that it is a journey?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: So one thing I love about this next generation is they don't want to wait, like this should have been done yesterday. And I agree with them. It

should have. But the reality is that it wasn't done yesterday and we are working against, not only changing hearts and minds, but also systemic structures. And so what I would have them to make sure they understand is the history and the context and why things are the way they are today.

And why that's so important is because I get questions all the time from my budding MBA students that are, well, what do we do when we want to have these conversations at work but the person beside us has no idea what happened during the civil rights movement? Or the person beside us has no idea about the women's suffrage movement, or has no idea, like all of these things, historical context that really matter.

I think sometimes you speak from a place of assumption. And what I learned in my very first year teaching at Georgetown, when I said, you know, that policy was like the separate but equal policy back during the Jim Crow era. And I kept talking, kept going, and I had a brave student that said, wait, can you go back, what was separate but equal? What was Jim Crow? And for me that was like a moment of like, okay, I have to step back. I have to provide context. I can't just jump in. And these were junior and senior students at Georgetown.

And so that was a lesson learned that for this next generation, lots of them don't have the same context, and that's really important for them to understand. So I want them to

keep their fervor, keep their foot on the gas, but also understanding the structures and working to change structures and not just, you know, opinions or things that maybe elevated on a social media sound byte.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And, you know you talked about the ability to dismantle systemic barriers, it's a challenge. Can you talk about the role of changing corporate culture when it comes to increasing workplace equity?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Well, first we have to recognize that even our best organizations, they are a microcosm of what's happening in the larger world. So while we would like to think that as soon as we log on or enter our workplace we are now in this different umbrella, it's not true. We are still who we are, inside and outside of work. And what happens in the world, more so today than ever before does have an impact on what's happening in our workplaces. Let alone because we have our smartphones that give us alerts every 30 minutes about what's happening in the world. There is no kind of inside/outside perspective anymore.

And I doubt there ever was, but there used to be this notion that, you know, when you go into work, you leave everything outside of work, you know, at the door, and that's just not the case. We don't leave our identities at the door. We don't leave the challenges we may be having at home or in our personal lives at the door. We don't leave our

personalities at the door. Right? We want to bring all of that.

And so if workplaces are trying to create environments where everyone can thrive, they have to honor the full person. And this is not to say that people feel comfortable bringing their entire selves to work but there should be a space that they can bring as much as their full selves as they want to. And so I think it's critical for corporations and other organizations to be thinking about how they can create environments for everyone to thrive.

Because even if you're a for-profit organization, the way you get the best from your employees is giving them that space where they're able to lean into their strengths, is giving them that space where they do feel like they belong in the community so they'll raise their hand and give that bright, new idea. And so it's not just, you know, good for society, which is very important. It's also very much good for business and the environments that many organizations proclaim they're trying to create.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And so when we talk about these challenges, then how do we keep people, our colleagues motivated to continue to do the work?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: First of all, I think knowledge is hard. I think we have to be really transparent that culture change takes time. One person cannot change a culture.

Even your best and brightest CEO that's really committed, it can't be just one person. It can't just be the Chief Diversity Officer. It must be all of us within an organization. And the more positions of leadership you have, the more responsibility you should have to see through the strategy to make sure that you're doing your part. As long as these issues are just seen as HR issues or the ESG issues or, you know, the Chief Diversity Officer issues, and not issues that impact our whole company, we will continue to see stagnation in these things moving forward.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: That's very interesting. And some of my observations and just talking to colleagues across industries, I often hear that some leaders view DEI as a separate entity and not understanding that it should be integrated into every decision, every fiber of an organization.

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: But I wouldn't say just mostly. I think most people in a corporate environment do see it like that. And it's been like that for a long time. This is not a new conversation that I've been having. I've been having this conversation forever around, you know, there has to be both top-down and bottom-up integration of DEI. So you need those grassroots efforts, those employee resource groups, those other similar efforts. But you also need that direction from the top and you must have managers being able to and knowing how to activate on the strategy.

So it really must be top-down and bottom-up. Everyone in the organization should see themselves as a culture carrier. And I think organizations have to do better jobs of making it plain, like how does every person within our organization contribute to this strategy that maybe housed with the Diversity Team or may be housed in HR, but we all are culture carriers and we all can contribute. And so I think it's really critical.

In my book I talk about, you know, the fourth stage around the DEI journey is to be integrated. And it's in juxtaposition to the stage before which is the tactical stage which means that we're doing a lot of good things, but they may not be strategic. They may not talk to each other. A person within the same organization may have very different experiences if they're on one team versus another and that's not what we want to have. And when we're at Stage 4, in that integrated stage, it really is thinking about our whole spear of influence. And so it's thinking about our employees in every part of the organization, but it's also thinking about our connections to our communities. It's thinking about our peers in the industry and how we're having these conversations or how our efforts kind of push them in certain ways to do more. Right? How we have an impact more broadly. And so for organizations to really move forward, they have to be thinking about this from an integrated perspective, not only in their business strategy but also beyond their internal organization. They have to think throughout their whole spear of influence.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: I want to take a step back a little. You talked about the importance of ERG groups, employee resource groups. As I'm currently the co-lead of the Black Professional Community here for Bloomberg, LP, New York offices, and, you know, one of the things we've heard over the last several years, you know, post-George Floyd and during the pandemic is that so much responsibility is put on ERG groups to do the work, but yet in most organizations those are not compensated roles and things like that. What do you say to people who may feel a little disheartened about their efforts and not seeing the results they would like to see?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Well, what I would first say to their leadership team is that this is work and it should be viewed as such. Right? So, you know, we all have our day jobs, but passion does not create more hours in the day. And what I mean by that is for those wonderful ERG leaders that are very passionate like yourself, and very committed, that doesn't mean it creates more hours in the day for you to do the work. It doesn't mean that your day job, you know, is able to fall by the wayside. And so we have to look at this as work. And if we are asking employees to do any other work, we do compensate them in some way.

Now, ideally it is financial compensation because that's, you know, what speaks to most people. But there are also other ways to compensate employees, by making sure their positions of leadership are seen as that, an actual leadership position in the

organization where they get exposure to the senior leadership teams. They get opportunities to present, opportunities to engage with maybe leaders they wouldn't have at their level. Other ways they may be compensated, when people, you know, bonus and spot pays and things like that. Like there are other ways, time off when appropriate. And so I encourage organizations to, one, think of this as work, because it is work and remember that passion doesn't create more hours in the day. But also be creative, like, you know, let's say you don't have the budget to do everything you would want to do, what can you do to help these employees to not feel like they're on an island.

And to those leaders I would say, you know, encourage the organization to not just put all the burden on the employee resource groups. They are a great vehicle. Grassroots efforts are amazing, but they can't do all the work. Managers must be held accountable. Senior leadership must be held accountable. And so I would tell them to, you know, keep going, hang in there, but drive and ask for, call for more accountability because they can't do it alone. I mean that, it's proven time and time again, and they shouldn't be asked to.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Thank you. You mentioned earlier about stakeholder priorities and, you know, C-Suite executives have to balance expectations from customers, investors, employees. And I don't know about you but I feel all of those stakeholders are expressing themselves to organizations and telling companies and orgs exactly how

they're feeling at this time. So, as so many companies navigate this anti-ESG climate we find ourselves in, how do companies then stay focused on combating bias and fighting inequity when now we're in this new climate of anti-ESG?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Yes, and maybe you can explain a little bit, just so everyone is clear what you mean by anti-ESG. I know what you mean but I just want to make it clear because there's so much happening, so much that goes into the bucket of ESG. So maybe just give our listeners a little bit of understanding there.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Yes, so what some companies are facing, you know, activist investors who want companies to maybe pull back on some of their environmental priorities or some of their social priorities in which DE&I fall under. And so, I don't want to get political but we've also, you know, have heard rhetoric from some elected officials as well on this topic. So as CEO, when you have to focus on so much, and now you have this, maybe not so welcoming climate, how do you stay committed to fighting bias and fighting inequity within your organization?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Thank you for that. You know, it's interesting, it really is interesting when you take a step back and look at all that is happening in the world. There was a great article in the *Harvard Business Review* just this week on this topic of anti-ESG, so I encourage our listeners to take a look at that. And the article talks about

so many different things from a woman's right to abortion and how that impacts the workplace to diversity, equity and inclusion to LGBTQ rights to environmental and sustainability efforts.

And, you know, what I think an organization must be really clear on is going back to that first P I talked about, purpose, what is our purpose? What are our values? What do we want to stay true to? Because you will have to make hard decisions, you will have to push back on some of those shareholders at times, right? And you will have to be accountable for whatever your bottom-line results are. And so you can't ignore any of those factors. But if you're going to be supportive of an ESG initiative, you want to be clear on why you're doing it, how it aligns with your purpose, and how you're going to demonstrate progress.

If you're just doing things because it's the flavor of the month, then it's going to be hard to stand up in the face of that anti-ESG rhetoric or calls to pull back. If you're doing this because it is core to who you believe the organization to be, then that's a very different conversation. And I think where we're seeing organizations start to flinch is those that just got on the bandwagon in 2020 and they really weren't all that committed. And I hate to say it, but that's what we're seeing. That's what the data tells us from, you know, anti-ESG rhetoric to what we're seeing in the media every other day around these issues to what we're even seeing in terms of the level of attrition for diversity-related roles

compared to other roles in organizations.

So we're seeing the evidence there. I think organizations have to own, like where they are. I mean they're not going to come out and say, well, DEI is no longer a priority, we were just faking in 2020. But I mean the writing is on the wall, you can see it.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Now, in your book you wrote about the concept of a workplace utopia. What is that? And what must organizations and leaders do to achieve it?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: So workplace utopia came about as I, I mean years ago I was thinking, you know, this work is really difficult. And people always say to me, you seem so positive, like how do you keep your head up in the face of all these trials when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion? And for me, workplace utopia is imagining what could be. So it's not about a workplace of butterflies and unicorns. It is about a workplace where everyone can thrive and what it would take to make that happen.

And so when I think about workplace utopia, for me personally, it's an environment where bias and inequities have been dismantled and replaced with environments where every single person is able to lean into their strengths. They're valued for who they are as an individual and they have the opportunity to thrive and succeed in our organization. And so in my book I wanted to ask every single leader that I interviewed, you know,

what is workplace utopia for them because for me without being able to imagine what's possible, you'll never be able to reach there.

And so it was really fascinating, and we have hundreds of different examples of what workplace utopia is and every one is going to be a little bit different. But I think the more that we're asking that question, you know, what would it take for you to thrive, what will it take for this team to thrive, the more we can be working towards that, the more that organizations are willing enough to listen to what their employees truly need to be in a workplace that they can be their best.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: And with that, you know, you talk about the journey. And as we know, some organizations are farther along than others. So with that being said, what do you consider progress for a beginner versus an advanced organization on this journey?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Yes, that's a great question. You know, for a lot of organizations, they're really busy comparing themselves externally. And I get it, right, you want to know what the competition is doing, you want to know what that bright and shining company with all the resources is doing. And it's good. We can learn from other companies. But time and time again, the best understanding of where we are on the journey is actually to compare our data to ourselves. Like where were we five years

ago? Where are we today? Where do we want to be five years from today?

And so I want companies to stay focused, like again it's great to see what PWC is doing – they were a company in my book – or what Uncle Nearest is doing, they're another company in my book. It's great to see that. But where are we? Like what have we done and where are we trying to go? So I think that's where companies really must stay focused.

Now, for a company at the early stages of their journey, what they should be doing is aligning on who they want to be in this space. I often say we all can't be Ben & Jerry's, and that's okay. You know, we don't all have to be Ben & Jerry's. We all have our place in this ecosystem and we all have our own organizational values and goals, but we've got to be clear about what those are. And so organizations at the early stages of their journey, what are we trying to accomplish? Let's make sure our whole senior leadership team is aligned.

And by alignment, I don't mean everyone shaking their head yes. I see that all the time. Everyone on the C-Team is like, yes, absolutely, this is important. We believe in it. Yes, let's do it. Let's even sign the check, right? But then when it comes to implementation, then when it comes to asking different departments to lean in, to do things differently, to look at their policies and consider maybe where inequities exist or where their pipeline

could be broader, then that's when you see leaders saying, oh, wait, I was for this effort but I didn't know it was going to take all this. Or, you know, we're for more diversity on our senior leadership team, but if it means holding the position open two months longer, you know, that's too much, too much of a tradeoff.

And while those conversations are not necessarily bad, I think you've got to be honest. Like if we need that new CFO and we haven't found a diverse candidate, maybe we do have to move forward with another candidate, but we have to be able to have those conversations, and the senior team has to be aligned. And I see a lot of hand-wavy early on because they're not having honest conversations about those tradeoffs. There will always be tradeoffs when it comes to this work because if it was easy, it would already be done. And that's just the reality.

I think for companies at their later stages, what they really have to worry about is sustainability, and that's Stage 5 of my maturity model, so it goes from compliance to awareness to tactical to integrated and then sustainability. And at that stage they have to make sure that when that CEO that's been maybe carrying the DEI mantle for the past decade, when they maybe step down or move on, you know, the efforts don't diminish. They don't disappear with one or a few leaders. When we decide that, you know, we're going to have a CDO or maybe we don't have a CDO, that the efforts don't just disappear.

When we go through economic hard times like we're seeing, you know, in our economy this year, we don't just let our DEI efforts disappear. And so for organizations that have been on the journey and have made good progress, they have to make sure that it can sustain through time and organizational priority changes as well as economic changes because all of that is part of the natural business life cycle. You're going to see those things, but your commitment to DEI shouldn't ebb and flow with the ebb and flow of the economy. That's just not a sign of true commitment.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Now, in your work are you seeing more organizations tie compensation to executive efforts on DE&I to make sure that the objectives are being met?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Absolutely. We're seeing it on the recruitment area specifically, but we're also seeing some companies lean into assessments of inclusion and belonging on their teams and connecting that to senior leaders' compensation or bonus compensation or a portion of it. And some companies have even gone as far as to have training and understanding the rhetoric and understanding things they should be saying and doing around DEI as again part of their performance evaluations. So I'm loving to see that push for accountability because until we get it all the way down to frontline managers, as I've said many times in this conversation, we're not going to see the change.

Because while we can think about these big moments, you know, the town halls, the big moments in our media that really do have an impact, inclusion and diversity and equity, it's about those everyday moments. It's what happens when you come to work, what happens when you walk into a room and you feel like you're the only one or you can see that you're the only one that's like you. What happens when, you know, you're presenting for a client and maybe they say something that is aggressive or rude or micro-aggression, right, that's based on your identity. It's those everyday small moments that actually have impacts.

And, you know, Gallup has had a statistic for quite some time that 70% of the employee experience is based on their relationship and their experience with their manager. So if we're thinking about inclusion and belonging, 70% of that experience is going to be how they interact and feel about their manager and their direct team. And so until we can get these wonderful strategies trickle down into the team experience, we're always going to be lagging. There's still going to be more work to be done.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Thank you for that. In your work, is there an industry or are there industries that are leading the way, if you will, in this area?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: You know, it's interesting, I would say about 10 years ago, I would have said probably finance and tech would be two industries leading the way in

different ways. I think finance has, for a long time, I think since the late 90s even, put a lot of resources into diversity recruitment. They understood that they were going to have to invest in this space so there's been lots of programs, lots of pipeline initiatives, lots of diversity recruiting. And again they were organizations that really put their money where their mouth was. A long, long time ago. Right? But in those organizations they're still seeing challenges.

So no organization or no industry is perfect, let's just say that. I wish there was. I wish there was a gold star that I could just say just go do exactly what they did and you'll be perfect. But the reality is that's not the case. Which is what I talk about in my book and why I profile nine different organizations in different industries, at different places on their journeys, to really show that you can make progress, you could do wonderful things, but you're still not perfect. There will always be something else to do.

I think tech has been really innovative through the years and especially the last 10, 15 years because they were such a young industry, that they were willing to experiment with some new things. And a lot of things that they experimented with to try to see if they could make changes actually have become standardized now. So things like blinded resumes, right? And things like interviews that were skills-based versus aptitude-based, right?

And so they were finding that their coding interviews were excluding some groups for different reasons, they found ways to make interviews a little bit more accessible to everyone and so they could understand the aptitude of the person and their willingness to learn and grow as opposed to what skills they had just out of the gate. So things like that, tech has done, that has really shown us that sometimes you have to try new things in order to get new results.

However, again tech has struggled severely, still with pipeline issues and some issues of inclusion. So there's no gold star. There's no perfect organization. But I do think we can learn from each other especially when it comes to experimenting, trying new things and being willing to kind of re-evaluate, like is this working? Is this not working? And being willing to say, okay, we tried this new thing, it's not working, let's try something else.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: I feel like feedback is very important in this whole process. Are you finding, you know, you spoke earlier about some C-Suite leaders being reluctant to show vulnerability. How receptive then are they to feedback from employees who express themselves through town halls or anonymously via surveys, that feedback?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: I mean, you know, it varies. You know, some say they're receptive and in the town halls they're like let's not get any questions because we don't

know what we're going to get. Others say, you know, I'm an open book, ask me anything. I don't think there's a right and a wrong because I think every leader is on their own journey and so we have to recognize the human side of this.

The reality is that, you know, I remember a CEO back in 2020. He said, I've been CEO for 25 years and when I first got this job I never thought I would have to be speaking out on social justice issues. That just wasn't in the job description. And so I think we keep pushing but we have to acknowledge the humanity of this.

The CEO role has changed. It's changed in the past decade, but it's changed again in the past three to five years. So now there is this expectation that they have a perspective, that they're willing to speak on these issues, and that wasn't the perspective before. The guard has not changed that quickly. So we still have a lot of kind of legacy leaders that will say, well, when I was coming up this was not the expectation, so they're a little bit reluctant. It doesn't make them a bad person. It doesn't mean that they don't even believe in the efforts, but it is a place of discomfort. And so they have to grow, they have to lean in. It is what the job requires now.

And so, you know, I look up to very much those CEOs that have been willing to be uncomfortable, willing to learn, willing to say they don't know, and allow it to be a feedback and learning process. This is not about knowing every single thing you're

supposed to know about diversity, equity, and inclusion or justice or belonging. It's about having a growth mindset and being open to learning and being open to that information that maybe tells you where your biases are because we all have them.

And so I feel like the companies that have been able to grow the most in this space, like a PWC or like a Sodexo, like a Best Buy, those companies that I talk about in my book, it's because they have leaders at the helm that were humble and were willing to say I don't know and willing to say, hey, this wasn't in the job description 10, 15, 30 years ago, but this is where we are today and they were willing to meet the moment.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: For organizations who may feel stuck along this journey, how do you keep stakeholders invested and active without reinventing the wheel?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: Well, I think it's important to have short and long-term goals. So, you know, we often want to go for that big number, that big change. And yes, let's have that on our radar, but it does become frustrating when you set this big lofty goal for 10 years from now and every year you're not seeing a big jump towards that. So it's important for us to have those long-term goals. What do we ultimately want to see? We ultimately want to see 50/50 equity for women and men in organizations. Great. Okay. That's a long-term goal. But if we're only at 15% today, it's going to take us some time. So what are some of those short-term metrics that we could implement in order to push

ourselves along and to hold ourselves accountable, yes, but to understand that's part of the journey.

I would say the other thing is, you know, recognize that while we would want success as we see in many spaces, we want success to be a straight line. I want that too. Right? But the reality is that that success often looks much more like, you know, the winding road that we know it to be, and that's the same with this work. And so there will be setbacks. There will be times that you feel like you did everything right and your employees still aren't satisfied. You know that happens. But if you're really committed to the journey and you're committed to what you say you believe in, then you will understand that you have to keep pushing. It's not enough to say, oh, we tried that effort last year, it didn't work. Employees didn't like it. And we're going to throw our hat in the ring. It's just, not if you're truly committed.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Well, before we close, you know we're speaking before a very esteemed audience, what is your call to action today for them?

DR. ELLA WASHINGTON: You know, I would say be undaunted by the fight. And it's hard, right? Like we are all watching what's happening in our world, but be really clear on why you are doing this work, why is it important to you and how you personally want to show up. Even if you can't control all the various factors within your organization,

what can you do to make the team that maybe reports to you feel a bit more heard and seen and valued? What can you do to reach out to that colleague that's new and you can tell hasn't been really fitting in yet? What can you do to honor and celebrate different identities in your workplace, even if your organization is no longer doing a big Black History Month or Pride Month event, right? So we can acknowledge what's happening and we can acknowledge even that our organizations may shift gears. That doesn't mean that we can't still be on our personal journey and be committed. So I would say be undaunted.

SHARTIA BRANTLEY: Thank you so much, Dr. Washington. I appreciate you carving out some time for us. Over to you, Barbara.

PRESIDENT BARBARA VAN ALLEN: Thank you, Dr. Washington, such great insights that we can take away from this. And Shartia, as always, wonderful, wonderful questions.

So I just want to share with the group that we do have a robust list of guest speakers coming up over the next few weeks, starting with Lee Ainslie on April 18th, the Founder and Managing Partner of Maverick Capital. On April 25th, we have a webinar actually with the Chair and CEO of Merck, Robert Davis. On the 26th we have our Member Event, by the way, a complimentary prospective member event in Manhattan for those

members that want to bring a candidate. And then you can see there, we have on the 27th, the New York City Police Commissioner, Commissioner Sewell, joining us. And we'll be at a member's home for that breakfast discussing the situation in terms of crime and related issues in New York City. May 9th, we're fortunate enough to have our Chairman, who is also President and CEO of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, John Williams, joining us for a Signature Luncheon. We're just adding, today really, to the schedule, on May 17th, we're going to host the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States. We'll be doing that virtually. Oksana Markarova. So we look forward to that special conversation. And we're going to celebrate someone's 100th birthday, as well as hear him in a conversation with Marie-Josée Kravis, and that's Henry Kissinger, on May 23rd.

So with that note, let me just also, as we always do, take time to thank our members of the Centennial Society that joined us today as their contributions continue to be the financial backbone of support for the Club. So thank you for all that joined us today. We look forward to seeing you again soon. Thank you again, Dr. Washington, Shartia, really great interview. Thanks to you both.