

Season 3 | Episode 12

# Build DEI Leadership Through a Culture of Belonging



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Welcome to PULSE, a Paychex HR podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

**Rob Parsons:**

Welcome to the PULSE podcast, everyone. Rob Parsons here. This episode is part of the ongoing series we're running on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and I'm pleased to welcome my co-host for this series, Dr. Thelá Thatch. Thelá leads the DEI effort, initiatives, and programs here at Paychex. With a Ph.D. in public policy and administration from Walden University, and more than two decades of experience in human resources, talent management, and organizational development, Thelá is passionate about building cultures where an authentic commitment to inclusion, equity, and diversity thrives. Thelá, thanks for helping out today.

**Thelá Thatch:**

Thank you for inviting me today.

**Rob Parsons:**

Always a pleasure. Also joining us is our very own Yasmin Hebert. Yasmin has over 20 years of experience in the human resources field. Currently, she's one of our area managers who directs a team of Paychex human resources professionals, and she also leads the regional DEI committee. She's also obtained a diversity equity and inclusion certification from the University of South Florida, and she is a member of the National Association of African Americans in Human Resources. Yasmin, thank you so much for joining us today.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Thank you for having me, Rob.

**Rob Parsons:**

It's so great. So, today, our focus is on the importance of leadership training when it comes to successful DEI initiatives. I think a lot of companies don't know where to start and I love where we've landed as an organization here with leadership training. Maybe just to set some context, Yasmin, can you tell us why it's important for companies not just to implement DEI or say they're doing DEI, but to actually do it well?

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Yes, Rob. So, with DEI initiatives, it really benefits the company to move forward, right? It allows employees to be their authentic selves which generates better ideas. Also too, from a financial standpoint, it's just good for business. It has been found, statistically, that businesses that engage in DEI are far more profitable, and they see far more returns on their investment. They also attract better talent into their businesses. So, all of these things make it a win-win when businesses really invest in their DEI initiatives.

**Rob Parsons:**

It seems to me it just leads to a healthier culture which is going to produce better results.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Absolutely, absolutely.

**Rob Parsons:**

One of our previous episodes in this series, we talked to Stacey Gordon, and she had talked about, she had four A's that she talked about as a framework for dealing with DEI, not dealing with but implementing and understanding the process. Thelá, you've really taken that and run with it. How does that come into play when we're talking about training leaders?

**Thelá Thatch:**

Thank you, Rob. I definitely want to welcome Yasmin. It's so wonderful to see you. We partner together on different diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at Paychex, so to be on the podcast with you is definitely an honor. And Stacey Gordon and I have worked together on different projects outside and inside of Paychex, and so, when I came across her book, "Unbias," and the way she breaks down the simple four A's around awareness, alignment, action, and advocacy, it's really crucial to understand these concepts when training leaders.

**Thelá Thatch:**

And so, we all know that organizations are only as strong as the leaders that lead them. Attitudes reflect leadership. And so, when we think about the four A's, when you think about awareness, awareness is where we start with the educational piece, and we understand that we cannot just land that education. We have to take the things that we learn and then build upon it. So, education and awareness is something that we do at Paychex in terms of making sure that all of our employees participate in our inclusion and diversity training on our LMS system. And all new hires are invited to make sure they understand the fundamental concepts around DEI.

**Thelá Thatch:**

So, we all have to start with the fundamentals no matter what level of leadership we're in, and it is my responsibility and other leaders' responsibility to make sure we don't assume that people understand concepts around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, but we really have to make sure they're aware by defining them and having resources to do that. And then once they — and when I say "they," I also mean we, us — once we are aware, then we have to look at how do we align our learnings? How do we align our goals, the missions, the values, whatever those things are that are part of the DEI, how do we align it to our current business objectives?

**Thelá Thatch:**

And then, the third step is to take action. And then we take action. People often want to start with action, but that's really a step that we need to wait, and take action once we have completed the awareness and alignment step, and then last but certainly not least, we want to all get to a place of advocacy, where we are doing so well at DEI, that we can advocate and help others.

**Thelá Thatch:**

And so, at Paychex, we definitely want to walk the walk so that we can help our clients walk the walk. And the more we emulate and practice good action, and actionable practices around DEI, the more we can help the

clients we serve and the communities we serve. And then, there is another A that I added outside of Stacey's A's, and I added a few, but two specifically, around accountability and authenticity. And so, with all of that said, it's really difficult for any of our DEI efforts to be sustainable if we don't have authenticity and accountability. So, I just wanted to make sure we were aware, and I added that.

**Rob Parsons:**

I - I love that you added those, and accountability — it's one of the Paychex values, and it's so important, Thelá — and I think, especially among leaders you have to, the people that are setting the pace, setting the tone for the organization, really need to be held accountable and be accountable to themselves. I think everybody's got to buy in, got to believe it. It's not just something we do because we're told to, it's something we do because we know it's a better way to do things.

**Rob Parsons:**

Now, I know, Yasmin, there's a lot of nuts and bolts now. Being a manager, being a leader, running a business, having a team of HR professionals, that whole employee life cycle — DEI can touch everything. Can you talk about how proper training can help managers handle all those different areas better?

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Yes. So, I want to say I'm also so pleased to be partnering now with you and with Dr. Thelá as well, so I'm super excited to be here. [Laughter.] So, yeah. So, as a leader, you definitely have to be intentional. That is probably the number one word that I would say every manager has to think about when you're talking about the employee life cycle. So, talent acquisition, when we're going out to recruit and acquire talent, how are we going about that process?

**Yasmin Hebert:**

When we're talking about onboarding and managing individuals and deciding who gets promoted and who doesn't, how are we intentionally going about that process to ensure that we are being inclusive of all the different groups, or inclusive on how we actually recruit and acquire talent for our companies? Performance management, when we're deciding who gets raises and who doesn't, every single aspect of the employment cycle, we need to take all of those things into consideration.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

All of these things fall into DEI, and it's talking about how do we, again, see people as all these different, diverse individuals, as assets to the company, all the things that they bring to them, their different ideas or different perspectives that allow us to grow and not be stagnant. That is what creates winning companies overall.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

And it makes us better as individuals as well when we're far more inclusive of different perspectives, people who come from different backgrounds, different genders, different races, all of that is important, but it does take work. And so, by doing the leadership training that we have here at Paychex, it allows them to really open themselves up to what to look for and how to apply these new principles in order to make better decisions, better business decisions.

**Rob Parsons:**

You talked on a couple matters that are just things that I've really learned as I've started this journey with you both. This idea of intentional, of being awake, of being aware, of paying attention, just opening your eyes. And then, this idea that diversity is really, everybody comes from a different background, everybody has a different perspective. This idea of just valuing the individual. And I know, Thelá, in our webinar, you talked about that a little bit, just all the different ways we can be diverse as an organization.

**Thelá Thatch:**

Yeah. Thank you for bringing that up. There are so many levels and different pieces of diversity. There's a whole spectrum of diversity. It's not just race and gender, right? And a lot of times, I have to be really deliberate to make sure I share. There's neurodiversity, there's diverse abilities, there's a way that we work in terms of our

work styles, and there's different levels of this spectrum of diversity. And the most important thing is that we are all working towards a level of belonging, and people understanding that they belong to an organization. I just recently read a report that over 50% of employees leave organizations because they don't feel they belong. That is really important, but how do we get to belonging? We get to belonging by making sure we're recognizing the uniqueness of each employee, what they bring to the table.

**Thelá Thatch:**

Understanding that there's not a one size fit all solution and diversity, equity, and inclusion allows us to be stronger leaders, allows us to make sure that we're celebrating the differences of all of our different employees and what they bring to the table. And the ROI, the return on investment for DEI, has been proven over and over again. That innovation that that allows to an organization has increased dividends for the organizations in terms of how much money the organization brings in, new products, new ways of doing things.

**Thelá Thatch:**

So, I could go on and on all day. It's really ... I would like to hear more from Yasmin. But yeah, there's so many benefits to not only having a DEI initiative and a program, but to be authentic about it is really key. And you can tell when there's authenticity, when you see real change happening within the organization that can be measured.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Yeah. I think you hit on it to me, Thelá, because we hear the word "performative" quite a bit, right, in these discussions. Like, "Okay, you're just being performative, and you're not actually being real about what you're saying that you're going to do." And employees measure that. They really look to see the results, and they want to see, are you really making substantial change, or are you just saying that's what you're going to do?

**Rob Parsons:**

Boy, I'd never heard that word before, Yasmin. Is it just window dressing, right? Or is this for real? I love it. I love it. So, we're getting close to time here. Both of you. I'd love you to just share some last thoughts with the audience about this idea of training your leaders and getting that leadership team on board, and making sure that we're doing that correctly in our organizations.

**Thelá Thatch:**

Okay. Well, I'll start off, and I definitely want Yasmin to close it out if she can. But in terms of leadership, you're the key. So, leaders listening, my last words is to embrace the power of one. It only takes one leader to really change the trajectory and the culture around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and your teams are looking for you to provide leadership. Attitude reflects leadership, and I just want to encourage you to start today. Reach out to us, reach out to myself, listen to the podcast and just, you know, reach out to us on LinkedIn if you can't find us, if you feel like you want to get started.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Yeah. I, I would say it starts with listening. So, starting out with your management and having just an open conversation where they can share their concerns, and listening to those concerns, and then opening it up and sharing with them why it's going to benefit them, as well as the company, as well as their employees. A lot of times people need to know the why behind things, and they need to know how it's going to benefit them, and why it's the right thing to do and what the vision is. What is the ultimate goal behind why we're taking on this new initiative? I think that's going to be extremely important.

**Rob Parsons:**

And it's funny, I just fell into the trap again. Well, all leaders are the same, treat them like they're all the same. But no, we have to treat our leaders as individuals too. I think that's a great point, Yasmin.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Thank you.

**Rob Parsons:**

Well, Thelá, Yasmin, the time, as always, is too short, but thank you so much for joining the podcast today. I love so much when I get a chance to talk to you both.

**Thelá Thatch:**

Thank you for creating the space for us.

**Yasmin Hebert:**

Absolutely. I have enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

**Rob Parsons:**

Excellent. And thank you to our listeners for joining. You can find all kinds of great content on our DEI resource center on Paychex WORX, including recording of a webinar we hosted on the same topic. We'll include a link in the show notes for that because when I tried to spell out the URL, it was a mouthful.

**Rob Parsons:**

And now, for our HR clients, also, there is now an in-depth instructor-led version of this training available to you. So, Paychex clients, I encourage you to look into that instructor-led training. It's fantastic.

**Rob Parsons:**

Finally, as always, we'd love to hear what you want from this podcast. Please visit [payx.me/pulsetopics](https://payx.me/pulsetopics) to submit guest and topic ideas. That's P-A-Y-X-dot-M-E slash pulsetopics. Thank you all. And please stay happy and healthy.

**Announcer:**

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