

Kellogg Insight Podcast Transcript:
What Should DEI Work Actually Look Like?

Laura PAVIN: Hi, Rachel?

Rachel DARICEK: Success!

DARICEK: How many degrees does it take to figure out how to work Zoom?

PAVIN: Hey, it's Laura Pavin. The other person you heard was Rachel Daricek...she's a Kellogg alum...but lives all the way on the East Coast now. Hence the Zoom call...and the all-too-familiar tech problems that came with it...

And I want to say that...the reason you're hearing from Daricek, who is a member of Insight's audience — and not a professor — is because...we're doing something new today.

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It's called Ask Insight, and it's a new project from The Insightful Leader...where you, the listener...ask us your questions about business and leadership...and we have our experts at the Kellogg School answer them — sometimes in writing, sometimes on our podcast. Sometimes, we'll have you join the podcast to get your answer straight from the professor. And that's what's happening today.

You see, Daricek reached out to us...with a *really* interesting-but-relatable question we wanted to tackle. She currently works for a health tech company...she's a senior director of product marketing. And as she's climbed the corporate ladder, she's noticed something.

DARICEK: Once you hit that senior leadership level, in my personal experience, every company I've ever been at...the number of women...down to almost nothing. It's fine up until the manager level. But once you get more into the leadership and executive level, it just...and it's even worse when you think about people of color.

PAVIN: Daricek, who is white, noticed that representation just gets more sparse when you get to the room where all decisions are made. And this gap has become even more glaring as the country grapples with how people of color are treated in all aspects of American life.

Daricek wants to be clear though...her company's been having conversations about representation in its ranks, and she's happy about that...but even then...in those meetings...

DARICEK: We all acknowledge that we need to do something...we need to do more. We need to do better, but what do we do? What's that, what's that first step? What's that second step? How do we even start scaling that mountain?

PAVIN: Daricek wants to know how, as individuals, we can give more diverse groups a seat at the decision-making table. How can we make *high-ranking positions* at organizations more representative of the populations we live in? And I should say that the "we" here is anyone in a leadership position...maybe it's you...who looks around at their peers...and notices homogeneity.

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So today, Daricek and I talk to a professor about what improving diversity, equity and inclusion — or DEI — should look like at organizations...and beyond. And we learn that changing the status quo isn't so cut-and-dry. It's going to take some self-reflection, and it's going to take what might feel like a frustrating amount of time. But our Kellogg expert says the result could be transformational.

That's next, on The Insightful Leader's first episode of Ask Insight.

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PAVIN: Hi, Nicholas?

Nicholas PEARCE: Good morning.

DARICEK: Hello!

PAVIN: To answer Daricek's question, I got her in touch with Dr. Nicholas Pearce. He's a clinical professor of management and organizations at Kellogg. He also, like Daricek, was a former student at Kellogg.

DARICEK: The atrium will always have a place in my heart. It was just like, it was a fun place to...

PEARCE: Oh yeah, I mean, the Jake was a vibe. You know, the big purple chair...

PAVIN: A big part of what Pearce does is look at organizational culture and D-E-I.

So, we got into Daricek's story.

DARICEK: Yeah, So...

PAVIN: So she explains her situation...how she works in tech and how she's noticed that, while the employee-base is usually diverse, it doesn't seem to be the case when you get up to the executive team level.

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This isn't all in her imagination. One 2021 report, for instance, found that just 20 percent of C-suite roles are held by women, 13 percent by men of color and only 4 percent by women of color.

DARICEK: And now that I'm in a position to really lead teams and more aware of these things, I'm wondering...what can I do better?

PAVIN: What could Daricek do to help raise a more diverse group of leaders up to the executive team level? How can she improve DEI in a meaningful way?

What Pearce said next wasn't exactly what Daricek and I had expected.

PEARCE: You're looking for the kind of quick digest of tactical takeaways that you can run away and do your thing with. And when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion in a very deep way, there aren't five quick bullet points to take away.

PAVIN: There are, however, some bigger picture ideas for Daricek and people in a similar situation to consider...when trying to improve diversity at all levels of the org chart. The first was...to start your journey within yourself. With your own personal story of adversity. And use that to motivate yourself to make change.

PEARCE: Owning your diversity story, whatever it may be. It may not be as moving, dramatic...as someone else's story, but it's still your story. Whether it's...you were the only Jewish kid on your block or you are the shortest person in your class...or you're the only woman here...whatever your experience with human difference is, own that.

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PAVIN: Pearce told us that, when trying to raise others up, think about what it would have meant if someone tried to help *you* push back against adversity when *you* needed it most. Thinking about it this way can help you commit to this journey long-term. Because getting people from all different backgrounds...with different experiences...at the leadership table...it's hard. And you might need some reminding about why you're doing it from time to time.

PEARCE: At this point in 2022, going on two years after the murder of George Floyd, a lot of people and organizations of good will are losing patience with the journey and are opting out... "This is" quote "taking too long..." quote "this is taking too much of me..." "I don't have the willingness to rearrange the furniture in my brain to really do this in a sustainable way." So I would just start there by saying, enlist for the long haul.

PAVIN: Change is hard and change takes time. Use your personal narrative to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and get ready to run this marathon for and with them.

Once you've taken stock of your internal motivations and you're feeling committed to making a change, you'll want to look outward...and think about how you're actually behaving with people out in the real world.

PEARCE: How do I engage across lines of difference, whatever they may be: Race, religion, genders, sexual orientation, socioeconomics? How do we bridge across lines of difference, culturally?

DARICEK: Yeah.

PAVIN: How do you make people feel when you talk to them? Do they feel like you're talking to them as a peer? Are you making an effort to talk to people who aren't like you?

Pearce remembered a time when he came across some teenagers...probably about 15- or 16-years-old...and they were kids of color...this was in Cambridge, Massachusetts...around the time Pearce was going to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University.

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The kids he talked to lived between these universities. But they hadn't been on either campus. And Pearce thought that was strange.

PEARCE: How does that work? You can walk from MIT to Harvard. How do you live in the middle and never been on either campus? It's just a bunch of buildings.

PAVIN: You don't have to go to either of these colleges to walk their historic grounds. Heck! Non-students and non-faculty walk around there all the time. They take tours there. I am one of those people! So...for the teenagers Pearce was talking to...to live right there and never set foot on either of the campuses' grounds...he thought there was something more to that. Like there was a subconscious monologue happening.

PEARCE: "It's not a place where I'm welcome. Not a place where I feel relevant or don't feel that I am seen as relevant or welcome," right?

PAVIN: So how can we ensure that people from a wider range of backgrounds feel more welcome in certain spaces...in this case, workspaces? And how can we get them in our spaces to begin with?

PEARCE: It's asking who's missing from this environment and why?

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PAVIN: But all of these efforts, Pearce said, can't just happen at the individual level. As a leader, you have to take DEI work a step further...to the institutional level.

PEARCE: By institutional, I mean organization-wide. I mean societally, community-wise. You have the opportunity to make impact.

PAVIN: For example, from a company perspective, who are you hiring?

PEARCE: Where are we looking for them? Do they even know our organization exists? Are our job posts exclusionary? If we list 20 requirements, the research tells us that if a woman only has 10, she is more likely to disqualify herself than a man who has 10 and says, "you know, I mean...more or less, I'm qualified. I'm going to shoot my shot."

PAVIN: This resonated with Daricek's experience.

DARICEK: I love that point. I am the biggest advocate for my female friends that are looking for a new job. I tell them that all the time. If you are 70 percent qualified, go for the job. Do it.

PEARCE: Absolutely. The institutional fix is...fix the post, right? Yes, we can continue to encourage women and girls to go for it, but we can also stop the extraneous, exclusionary posting...the language and words matter. And so, if we know these things to be true, we can fix it.

PAVIN: Pearce said Daricek should think about the reasons why someone might not have applied for a job, or asked for a promotion, for example, and then work within the broader institution to make changes.

PEARCE: So situate yourself in an ecosystem with other leaders or other organizations that have a similar vision of the way the world could or should be, and are willing to commit resources, whether they're social, economic, political, or what have you—human—to making this vision a reality in our space.

PAVIN: Because you can't make change all by yourself. You need to have a number of people at the helm trying to do it, too.

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This actually brought up something else Daricek has been thinking about: She recently got involved in the parent teacher association at her son's school in Cambridge, Massachusetts...and she and the other leaders have been stuck on this one thing.

DARICEK: We're faced with this situation where...like, it's PTA, we have to have a meeting.

PAVIN: But just getting the word out about the meetings...and setting them...has been difficult. For instance, not everyone speaks English...so the PTA's website and fliers are hard for some to understand. And also...

DARICEK: Not everyone works a nine-to-five. People can't be available during dinner time. Not everyone has access to technology, so meeting virtually can be challenging for some people. It's like all these different competing dynamics. How do you make something like attending a PTA meeting perfectly equitable?

PAVIN: It's left Daricek feeling defeated. As a working mom, she doesn't feel like she has the time to troubleshoot ways to accommodate everyone's needs for the meetings. And to that, Pearce responded with a bit of a hard pill to swallow.

PEARCE: Efficiency and inclusion are often in competition. Until resources are distributed equitably, this is going to be a very inefficient process. If you look at the group that has the constraints versus the group that doesn't have those constraints, you'll probably see some similarities, and that's not by accident. And a solution that may work in Cambridge public schools may not work the same way for Boston public schools. Boston's history with race and Cambridge's history with race, just as examples, are different, right? And so, when you have different diagnoses, you have different prescriptions.

DARICEK: Yeah. It's exactly—that is exactly it.

PEARCE: So. Well, happy to stay in touch.

DARICEK: Thank you so much.

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PAVIN: About a week later, I wanted to see how Daricek was thinking about the conversation with Pearce. And her biggest takeaway was this:

Daricek: You just have to care enough to make the time and to not be okay with the way things are.

PAVIN: And it made her wonder: This whole time, have I just not cared enough? And if that was true, she thought...

DARICEK: That makes me complicit with the way things are, and that's why nothing's changing. And that is really hard to hear and think about as a human being.

PAVIN: Right now, she's thinking deeply about how to improve DEI as an executive at an organization...but she's also working on finding new ways to just advertise her PTA's meetings in a way that reaches people who don't have great internet access and who don't speak English. And it's been a lot of work. But she's working hard to make it work.

DARICEK: We're all wrestling with the same questions.

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PAVIN: This episode of The Insightful Leader was written by Laura Pavin. It was produced by Jessica Love, Emily Stone, Fred Schmalz, Maja Kos and Blake Goble. It was mixed by Andrew Meriwether. Special thanks to Doctor Nicholas Pearce. As a reminder, you can find us on iTunes, Google Play, or our website. If you like this show, please leave us a review or rating. That helps new listeners find us. We'll be back in a couple weeks with another episode of The Insightful Leader.

By the way, if you want to hear more from Pearce, we'll be doing an Insightful Leader Live webinar with him about DEI work on Wednesday, May 25th at noon Central. It's free! You can register for that on our website later this month.