

Episode 2: Inclusive Excellence Network
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Sherron: Hello, this is Sherron Brown.

Cornell: And this is Cornell Woodson.

Sherron: And you're listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. (music)

Cornell: All right, welcome back to the second episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

Sherron: Welcome back, thank you.

Cornell: I'm one of your hosts, Cornell Woodson.

Sherron: I'm Sherron Brown.

Cornell: And we are this time unpacking and talking about a program that we just released called the Inclusive Excellence Network. We're going to uncover and unpack the different programs that exist in it, but really zero in on one of the programs called the Inclusive Excellence Academy. We have a guest that is with us, I'm going to go ahead and introduce her now.

Sherron: Go ahead.

Cornell: Andrea Kylie. We worked together for three years in my role in ILR. Tell us a little bit about what you do here at Cornell University.

Andrea Kylie: I'm the Assistant Director of Student Services in the College of Architecture, Art and Planning. My primary roles in the college have to do with student wellbeing and supporting and promoting diversity in the college.

Cornell: Awesome, awesome. Andrea and I worked together when we were both college associates for the pre-freshman summer program. I've grown to really appreciate her and her insight and thoughts, particularly in those meetings that we had, it's called associate meetings. Andrea is our guest today and we're going to jump off with our question of the month.

Sherron: [crosstalk 00:01:44] Our surprise question.

Cornell: Sherron was able to choose, because I got to choose last time. Sherron, what is our question of the month?

Sherron: Yes, you surprised me last month with that question. This one, it shouldn't be too hard. The question is, and Andrea, feel free to answer if you'd like and if you want to stay out of our fray, that's okay too. It shouldn't be too hard. Share an occasion when you surprised yourself with a diversity and inclusion situation or experience. An aha moment as it relates to diversity and inclusion.

Cornell: Where you learned something new.

Sherron: Mm-hmm (affirmative), learned something new about yourself, a situation, another person.

Cornell: Oh, that's good.

Sherron: I know.

Cornell: That's good.

Sherron: I do good.

Cornell: I have an answer for it. Do you want to go for it, go first?

Sherron: Go for it, you share your first... well, actually [crosstalk 00:02:29].

Cornell: Yeah, I guess. Are you sure?

Sherron: I defer to you.

Cornell: I think that the ultimate thing that I remember so quickly today, answer to that question is when I realized that when I do diversity trainings, or when I do any kind of speaking and I'm engaging with the audience, I tend to interrupt women more often than I interrupt men. And as someone who has been doing diversity and inclusion programming for quite some time, when I realized it, I think it had been six years since I've been doing that. And I was like, "No, not me." Like "Whoa, that can't be possible. I teach this stuff." And some of my friends who are women, they're like, "Mm-hmm (affirmative), and..." And I was like, "Okay." It really blew my mind because I was like, "No, there's no way all this work I've been doing to be better," I didn't notice it. I just had to figure out why am I doing that? Unpack why is my brain allowing me to do that without noticing it? And then what do I do to stop it? But that was one of the biggest aha moments I had around this work.

Sherron: Oh, that's a really good one. That's a good one. I could understand how something like that could develop in our personality and our behavior without us even being conscious of it. And don't like it, but get it.

Cornell: I don't like it either. I don't like it either. That's why there was incentive. I'm like, "I have to work on that and understand where that's coming from and what to do about it."

Sherron: Absolutely.

Cornell: Who wants to go next?

- Sherron: I'll go next, I'll answer my own question. Years ago, before I started working with Cornell University, I worked in a facility that we took care of... It was a residential school environment, a dorm situation. And the school was for young men who have mental health diagnoses and combinations of such. A simple situation is laundry was done and each of the residents/students was supposed to collect his own laundry and put it away. And this gentleman, it's almost as though he just could not grasp the concept of taking care of his own laundry. Me being a staff member, I was like... Let's just call him John Smith. "John, go get your laundry. Go get your laundry. Go get your laundry." I found that I'd been saying that to him all day.
- Sherron: Probably three or four hours after the day started and the laundry was sitting there, I was like, "John, what are you waiting for to go get your laundry?" He goes, "Miss Brown, I have a disability." And then it hit me like, "Oh my gosh, something that I take so much for granted, a simple thing as claiming what's mine, taking it up, putting it away. He was having a problem just processing, just even getting started." That surprised me. I had to take a moment and just slow down and realize this is the environment I'm in. These are young people who need that little extra guidance, a little hand in doing things that I don't even think twice about.
- Sherron: That forced me to slow down. My aha moment was to slow down. Take a minute, get out of yourself, get out of your own head and your own way of being and try to approach something from someone else's perspective. I work actively trying to do that as often as I can even to this day. And this situation I'm describing probably happened about 10 years ago and it is so fresh in my mind because periodically I am forced to take a minute and say, "You know what? This person's coming from a different angle. Let me try to understand and possibly meet that person where they are," as opposed to my having an expectation that they're going to meet me where I am. That was a diversity and inclusion aha moment for me and I've carried it with me ever since.
- Cornell: In our seminars for Inclusion Excellence Academy, we call it seeking to understand. Stepping back and going, "Okay, what's happening here? What's going on for this person potentially? What's going on for me and then how do we re-approach in a way that is inclusive for all people?" Yeah. How about you Andrea?
- Andrea Kylie: I feel like I have those moments often, especially when I go to the Inclusive Excellence Academy programs.
- Cornell: I love it, I love it.
- Andrea Kylie: Because it just makes me more aware of the very diverse experiences that students have at Cornell, what they're bringing to those experiences and how they navigate their way through the university. So often it's something that I hadn't encountered before, an obstacle that a student's

facing that I now have a new piece of information that I can add to my portfolio of the different challenges and obstacles that students face, as well as the many amazing things that they bring.

Cornell: Yeah, absolutely. I find that even in my age of 31 that what they find to be so impactful, but for them it's everything. I'm like, "Okay, all right. That's not a big deal to me but it is to you so let's go with that."

Sherron: Sometimes it's a reflection on where they are in their journey of personal development, personal growth. Because I'm sure that the aha moment you had when you were 21 is going to be vastly different from your moments at age 31 and it'll just continue to grow. And I love when I get an opportunity to look back and say, "Five years ago this would have sent me over the edge. But today because I'm so evolved, I can handle something better." [crosstalk 00:08:16].

Cornell: Every generation brings a new thing to unpack and to learn about. I'm learning and my 30s now like, "Oh I learned all that, but there's a new thing, great."

Andrea Kylie: And it doesn't stop.

Cornell: It doesn't and every decade has something new. And I'm like, "Darn it. Doesn't this end?" We're talking about the Inclusive Excellence Network and for those who may not know, it is a new structure to a older program. The Inclusive Excellence Network is this umbrella cadre of programs and where under that umbrella, there are three programs we call the Inclusive Excellence Academy, which we'll talk about more later. And then the Inclusive Excellence Podcast, what you're listening to right now-

Sherron: Hello podcast listeners.

Cornell: Then the Inclusive Excellence Summit, which will happen every other summer. The podcast and the summit are new things and something that we're giving a new twist to something that happened before. But it's a way to bring people together to provide more opportunity for folks to engage with diversity and inclusion topics and information. Recognizing that not everyone has the ability to leave their desk for two hours to engage in a workshop. So this podcast really allows people to be able to listen to the podcast while they're working or maybe while they're driving home or driving to work or cooking or cleaning or whatever that may be.

Sherron: We hope you're listening to it with a friend or a family member-

Cornell: Yeah, or you're sharing it.

Sherron: Because our goal is to start conversations. So if you're listening to this podcast, I really want to know that someone's in the room and you can

say, "Hey, what do you think about that?" Then you have a conversation going and before you know it, diversity conversations aren't that hard to have.

Cornell: Oh, I love that. Absolutely, absolutely. And then the summit is really because it happens during the summer, that allows when students are gone and people have a little bit more ability to get up and move and to be out away from their office. It's an opportunity for the campus to come together and really reflect on how are we infusing diversity and inclusion into our work and weaving it, excuse me, into the fabric of our everyday lives as we engage with alumni and students and things of that sort? We're hoping that this building of new programs will just provide more opportunities for people to engage.

Cornell: I want to dive a little bit deeper into the Inclusive Excellence Academy because my understanding is that we're coming up on its sixth year of existence. It's not an old program, but it's also not really a baby either though. Six years in program years is [crosstalk 00:10:55].

Sherron: Preteens, right between toddler and preteen.

Cornell: Again, for those who may not know what Inclusive Excellence Academy is, it's a program that provides a series of different, I'm calling them seminars or workshops, on various topics around diversity and inclusion. So if you want to see what our fall semester listings are, you can go to the diversity.cornell.edu website and under the tab learning will be the Inclusive Excellence Network. And then from there you'll see the list of all the workshops and links to RSVP if you would like.

Cornell: Andrea, as someone who has been to a couple of those seminars-

Sherron: Andrea is one of our regulars.

Cornell: Yes, yes.

Sherron: If they must be a regular somewhere, this is the best place to be a regular.

Cornell: Yes, exactly. I'm curious to know because our hope is that we encourage more people to come out and so I'm curious to know from you, why do you choose to attend those sessions and what brings you back to attend more?

Andrea Kylie: I always try to go if my schedule permits. All of the programs I've been to have been excellent. They've been interactive, I've been able to take information back that's been really valuable. I feel like every time I go I develop more awareness of different populations and their experiences that I bring into my work. I feel like I become more aware of some of my

blind spots and I feel like I often need that reminder and refresher. And often with diversity and inclusion, the language is always changing a little bit and growing as well as the issues and what's going on campus.

Andrea Kylie: Those issues are often evolving so it's not like you can go once and feel like you're all done, you're woke and it's all set. I always feel like I come out of it with really helpful information that I can bring back to my office and to my college. I also feel like it's really helpful to connect with my colleagues who attend the programs too because I start to learn more about other people on campus who are concerned about these issues. And I become connected with the resources that I can partner with and that I can contact if I need help or have questions or I need more support.

Cornell: Yeah. What I heard you say is that I'm not alone and that there's a community of people who are also learning this stuff too and I can reach out.

Andrea Kylie: Exactly.

Sherron: First of all, thank you for sharing all of that. Secondly, Cornell a little fist bump here because all of her reasons for attending are exactly why we do what we do. So thank you. That means that the Inclusive Excellence Academy, the workshops we've been getting it right so far. That's wonderful to hear. I just want to check in with something you said about just the reminder and refresher. One of the things Cornell and I talk about, we struggle with is we want new faces. We don't want to be preaching to the choir as they say. But what I have learned not too long ago is that there is no preaching to the choir because everybody needs a reminder and a refreshing.

Sherron: Because of the fact that we are so immersed in this work, it's easy for us to throw out jargon and to have terminologies and feel real good about ourselves and we're good at what we do. But there's always going to be a newbie in the room and somebody who is going to ask us to bring that down to language that a lay person can understand. So there is really no preaching to the choir. It's like, "Oh yeah, that's right. At the beginning of your journey this is what you need to hear to make you feel welcome and continue." This is really good and I really thank you for pointing that out, Andrea.

Sherron: And also the connection with the other Cornell individuals who are at that workshop. That's important, there's value in that as well so you can start conversations.

Cornell: Yeah. Something you that you sparked. I think that sometimes what prevents people from coming out to things like this is that fear of getting it wrong and how people make you feel when you get it wrong. Or when you ask a question that you really don't understand and other people

expect that you should already know the answer to that question because where have you been? I don't know where I got this term from, but I call it social justice elitism. That this idea of like, "You didn't know that already? You don't know what intersectionality means? How could you not, where have you been?" It's like, "Well, I'm here and I'll let you help me understand. How about we support each other? If this is my first time coming to something, you want me back, let's create a space where I can ask that question that many people might already know. But to me it's the first time I'm ever hearing it."

Cornell: And I really want those spaces to be like that where the new person come in and feel like, "Wow, there was so much I didn't know. But there were people sitting next to me who are willing to go, 'Oh you know what, here's a good resource for you to start with and read that after this workshop because that'll fill in some of the gaps.'" And then we invite people to come back.

Andrea Kylie: There were a couple of discussions last year. One was about the Me Too movement and one was about Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter. And I felt like that format of having a presentation but then also small group discussion allowed for more of that variety of experiences to have a space to learn and to share knowledge. Because I think it was not the same group of people that often would come to some of those programs that we've had in the past. And it did create more of that space for a conversation about diversity issues, when often staff from all over campus don't have a chance to get together for that purpose.

Cornell: Exactly.

Sherron: That's great.

Cornell: And are at varying different degrees of understanding it. Then that way it's peer to peer education. It's not some talking head on the stage going, "Here's all the things you need to know and here's the action." I'm one of those talking heads. But it's always nice to be in camaraderie where people who are like, "Wow, I didn't know that either." It's like, "Okay, you too? Let's keep talking."

Sherron: As we do diversity and inclusion work, I find that culturally we're beginning to put names on things that didn't have names in the past. People over a certain age may say, "Oh yeah, we had so and so when we were growing up but we didn't have a name for it." What I'm thinking about particularly is cisgender, pansexual. Terminologies that I'm hearing now. When I say now, I mean maybe over the last few years, that I'm sure my parents and grandparents didn't use those terminologies. It's not as though they don't care, it's just that they didn't necessarily have words to articulate what this is. They didn't have anything, they couldn't name it.

- Sherron: So it's really good to let other folks know, hey listen, no matter where you are in your growth, in your learning, your personal development come on down. Because there's got to be something that you can take back from our workshops. Andrea said earlier that after the workshops she is able to take something back to the office immediately. And that's exactly what we're aiming for too.
- Cornell: That's a great segue into my next question. What has been the maybe most profound thing that you've taken from a session back to the office? Or really the most exciting thing you've taken back? Like, "Oh, I'm ready to share this."
- Andrea Kylie: I think sometimes it's just been an awareness of something in our policies or something about our curriculum that may be a barrier for some students that we hadn't even thought about before. I remember one session I went to was about undocumented and DACA students and if there's a requirement for an off campus study or a study abroad program or something like that, recognizing that that's something that will be an obstacle and that students in that situation may be vulnerable and may not want to come forward.
- Andrea Kylie: For us to have the awareness and be able to think ahead and recognize the impact on students. That was one that I remember thinking, "Oh my goodness, I hadn't thought about that before." But I feel like it's often that sort of experience, where you go to a session and within a week there's a student with that particular identity who comes in. Now I feel like I am better able to anticipate what some of the concerns might be and of course listen to the concerns, but not be surprised or at least have the language to respond in a way that's appropriate.
- Cornell: Yeah, that's really good.
- Sherron: Yeah. These topics are often very personal and individualized. So if a person is feeling particularly vulnerable based on what their situation is, it is so refreshing to talk about a vulnerable thing with somebody who is not surprised. Someone who is able to take information in and not react in a way to make the person feel like oh, you don't know about this. Here, let me educate you while I'm working through my problem.
- Cornell: That's so good because to me that is the hallmark of why these workshops or these seminars are so important. Because it's the idea of we'll all never know all there is to know about someone else's lived experience. Whether it be a staff member or a faculty member or students, we have to come to a colleague or to an administrator and say, "I'm really struggling as a woman in an engineering class," or "as a person of color on campus," or "as a person with a disability," or "as a veteran," or as a whatever, you name it. Already have some familiarity that that identity may struggle in that space and be able to go, Wow, tell

me more about that." And just to go, "Whoa, okay, what does support look like for you?"

Cornell: That's it. I think that people tend to think that we're expecting people to be able to fix everything and to change all the policies and everything. Yeah, that might be an ultimate goal, but I think at the very least it's to be validated in one's lived experience and have someone go, "Wow!" I remember one time I worked in ILR before coming to this department and I had a student of mine and she was a woman, and she said, "I feel like as a woman in the classroom, no one ever listens to me." I mean, she's upset and she's in tears. And I go, "Wow, that sounds like that sucks." She goes, "Yes, yes!"

Cornell: And you could tell that had been the first time that someone validated her feeling of like, "Okay, so I'm not tripping, I am experiencing this and I have a right to feel like I'm being silent." Like, "Wow, yeah, absolutely. And what do you need from me?" I think that's what people are asking. That's what people are asking for is that we create a space in the culture where people would just build community and are able to say, "What do you need from me? I don't know what that feels like, but what do you need from me?"

Sherron: And help them to identify that. They may not know what they need. People don't know what they don't know essentially. If what I need maybe is a 30 minute later start work time, people don't even know that that may be an option depending on their situation at work. They may need, I don't know, our list of resources for their aging parent, who knows? But sometimes we have to leave space for that uncertainty so that a person can process and figure out and meet them where they are in learning about what's available to them. Also, maybe narrowing down what they need. Something that's most efficient as opposed to something that's easiest.

Cornell: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Sherron: Most effective I should say.

Cornell: What would you say to a person, Andrea, who is like, "I don't know, I'm interested but I'm not ready yet." What would you say to someone to encourage them to take that leap of faith and attend our session?

Andrea Kylie: I've never heard that reaction before.

Sherron: That's great.

Andrea Kylie: I think often it's more an issue of time. I guess one thing would be maybe to choose a program that feels closer to your own identity and see what it's like when it doesn't feel as different. Ease in that way. I guess the

other thing, I feel like no one on campus has experienced all of the identities that our students are presenting to us when they come in to work with us. So we all have some learning to do. It just is a great opportunity to do that learning and I would probably also say that it's such a great opportunity to meet other people and connect with other people and have that sense that you're not alone on campus. Emphasize that piece of it too.

Cornell: I love that. I love that. Sherron, how about you? What would you say to someone who is... Because I've run across that a lot where people were just, they're just not ready to jump into those kinds of workshops and have those kind of conversations. What would you say to someone who might be struggling with making that decision of doing so?

Sherron: What I've heard recently actually in a conversation on the bus coming in from North Campus, a person says, "In my department, we're not about our feelings, we're about data, statistics, facts. We don't really do feelings and things like that. So when I hear Inclusive Excellence Academy in IEC, the topics I feel like it's not really what I need to do my work." And my response I guess to somebody who who's coming from that angle is, "Come anyway because you're dealing with individuals, you're dealing with people. While your work is about statistics and numbers, you are a human being doing that work. And if you want to feel like you can bring your whole self to work, if you're not spending, I don't know, a good percentage of your brainwork protecting an identity or keeping something that you feel you don't want to be vulnerable in front of your coworkers, this is for you."

Sherron: Because what we do is we show folks how to maybe have a conversation, maybe how to delicately unpack something that you may be very protective of that identity. Yes, you may be a statistician, you may be into numbers, facts and data and graphs, but you may have an issue that has to do with naturalization, immigration, citizenship and all that. You're still a human being working through your data. The workshops give you opportunities and ways to work through those subject matters. It doesn't matter what your profession is here on campus, there is something at this workshop that can address something in your life or somebody you know and love who may be interested in these things.

Cornell: The idea that we never leave our identities at home.

Sherron: We never do.

Cornell: They're always with us. While I may not be talking about them, my identities are connected to my lived experiences and my lived experiences impact how I go about my work. And understanding that deeper can lead to a culture of belonging where people get to bring those nuanced ways of looking at a particular problem to the table and then it be respected. Yeah, that's awesome.

- Cornell: Well, I'm hoping that listening to this episode that people will give it a try and feel like they can come and just try out a session or two. Or even contact us and talk to us about the program and what they can get out of it personally maybe based on where they work and with the work that they do and how it connects to the work that they do.
- Cornell: Sherron and I are always open to that type of a conversation so you can always connect with us by emailing us at ie-academy@cornell.edu. Sherron and I both read those emails and either one of us will respond and are willing to meet with you and engage with you in a conversation. Because we really want to work hard and we've been working hard for the last couple of months of creating a way for people to be able to enter into the conversation wherever they currently are in their understanding of diversity and inclusion topics.
- Cornell: Until next time, thank you Andrea for joining us. I know you're busy [crosstalk 00:28:03] have a lot going on with the start of the semester. We both really appreciate you being here with us.
- Sherron: Yes, we do.
- Cornell: Again, check out diversity.cornell.edu under the learning tab for a list of fall semester. I believe I put up there, we have spring semester sessions already up there as well with some dates. Put it on your calendar, make some time. We've tried to expand the topics as well a little bit.
- Sherron: Even if registration may not be open for something, go ahead and put it on your calendar anyway-
- Cornell: Put it on your calendar, yes.
- Sherron: So that when you see that it's available to register [crosstalk 00:28:34] you already have the time blocked.
- Cornell: That's perfect.
- Sherron: That's good, it's thinking ahead. Like it.
- Cornell: All right, well until next time, have a great weekend, the rest of your weekend [crosstalk 00:28:43].
- Sherron: Have a wonderful weekend.
- Cornell: Bye.