

[00:00:00.85] TORAL PATEL: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees.

[00:00:09.43] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:12.16] Working from home during this global pandemic has brought a lot of changes for us. Some of them have been unsettling. For some individuals, one change includes how to prepare for the arrival of a brand new baby. On today's show, we're going to be interviewing Derrick Barrett. He's a staff member. And he's expecting his first child at the end of this month.

[00:00:31.06] We're going to dive into how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected him and his partner, as well as their preparation to become new parents.

[00:00:37.58] My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:39.13] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:40.45] TORAL PATEL: And you are listening to the inclusive excellent podcast

[00:01:00.16] ANTHONY SIS: Before we begin today's show, we want to acknowledge that this interview was done approximately three days after the deadly interaction between George Floyd and three police officers from the Minneapolis Police Department. We recognize that this incident has left a tremendous impact on our Cornell community, especially for our Black staff and faculty members. At DIWD, we have been working tirelessly to provide support and resources by partnering with the Department of Organizational Development and Effectiveness and Professor Joseph Margolis, Professor of Law and Government in the College of Arts and Sciences, to host a series of programs centered on specifically anti-racism.

[00:01:44.11] For more information on these programs, please visit diversity.cornell.edu click on Anti-racism Resources under the Community tab at the top of the page. I also want to introduce to you all a special weekly series that will be featured on this podcast called Blackness at Cornell that will begin on July 1, 2020. That means that you won't really be hearing much from me or Toral after today's show, because each week you'll hear a new story, a new voice with the purpose of elevating the very real and lived experiences of our Black staff and faculty here at Cornell.

[00:02:25.07] To all of our Black staff and faculty members that are listening right now, we would like to extend a personal invitation to share your story through this upcoming series. For more information or questions on how to do so, please email us at ie-academy@cornell.edu.

[00:02:43.32] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:02:49.68] Derrick, thank you so much for joining us on today's show. Why don't you share with our listeners before we start our conversation a little bit more about yourself-- where you work, how long you've been at Cornell, as well as the pronouns that you use.

[00:03:04.91] DERRICK BARRETT: So my name is Derrick Barrett. I was born and raised in Ithaca, New York. I am the oldest of six kids. My father is David Barrett. My mother is Allison Barrett. Shout-out, Mom and Dad.

[00:03:19.30] And I recently started a new role as a Department Business Administrator in the College of Agricultural Life Science Department of Microbiology working with faculty, staff, and students. Prior to that, I was BA-- a business analyst in CALS IT. And before that, I was a finance specialist in the Office of Finance Administration in CALS as well. My pronouns are he, him, his.

[00:03:45.65] ANTHONY SIS: Congratulations on the new role. That's awesome.

[00:03:47.84] DERRICK BARRETT: Thank you.

[00:03:49.15] TORAL PATEL: So we are going to be asking our question of the day. So today's question we're going to relate it to COVID-19 and the coronavirus. And so how has your life been impacted by the virus? And in that, what I mean is specifically what do you do now that maybe you have never done before the virus hit?

[00:04:08.47] DERRICK BARRETT: Mm, what am I doing now? One of the things that's different around this time period is usually my wife, my in-laws, or some type of family, we're getting together and we're trying to plan for a trip. And usually it's a big family trip. You know, somewhere where we haven't been. Something beautiful. We're getting to the summer.

[00:04:27.42] I'm from Ithaca. So I need to get away from cold and just nasty, right? And usually it's nice to get to a beach somewhere. But obviously with the baby coming in June, the uncertainty as to whether or not we're going to be able to go traveling any time soon, we're focusing now on more of the stuff around us that we have available, you know?

[00:04:47.46] And I'll tell you, for the first, or second time, actually, since living at this house, I fertilized my lawn.

[00:04:54.45] [LAUGHING]

[00:04:55.41] And I take care of fertilizing it. And I kind of set it up so the front section-- our front lawn is kind of split up because of our driveway. So I fertilized the left side of the driveway to see how good of a job I did compared to the right side just to test it all out. And I guess I'm getting more into the lawn care. And I've always loved being outside and caring for my lawn. But I'm trying to get a little bit more specialized in that.

[00:05:27.82] ANTHONY SIS: I know for me, I've just been going outside more and exploring nature. And I've gone to Taughannock all ready. I really find myself just going out exploring more of the area. Coming from a big city, I think-- and I could speak about this now that it's been about a year since I've lived here in Ithaca. But it was really hard adjusting to Ithaca coming from big cities like Miami, Chicago. And I find myself now really appreciating nature a lot more and really appreciating the time to be able to meditate. That's a practice I've currently tried to implement a little bit more of while working from home and as a result of COVID.

[00:06:05.23] So being able to do that in a space like Taughannock was actually really spiritually moving for me. I actually broke down and cried and just thought a lot about many different things while being in that space of Taughannock. So I find myself just being more in tune with nature and really being more in tune with myself and my spirituality, specifically.

[00:06:24.68] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, and for me, I'm actually in a way grateful, because without the virus allowing me to work from home right now I wouldn't be in Dallas, Texas helping my mom recover from a major health scare that she's had. So my mom just spent about two months in the hospital. And I've been here the entire time, spending the night in the hospital with her. And now that she's home, helping her at home a little bit.

[00:06:50.87] And I'm grateful that because also schools are closed, my kids-- or not closed. I mean, physically kids are not able to go into the building. My kids are here with me, because otherwise what I would have had to do is leave them in New York while I come here to help my mom. So in a way, like I said, there are some positive things that have come out. Because I also probably wouldn't have been able to stay as long as I have been able to stay.

[00:07:12.80] And I'm still working from here. And I think I'm just very thankful for that. So I'm trying to put a positive spin on all of this. But I am thankful that I'm able to stay here and help my mom as much as I have been. So that's probably one thing that I wouldn't have been able to do for as lengthy of a time that I had been able to do it had this virus not impacted us as a whole.

[00:07:35.13] So Derrick, we are here to talk about parenting during the coronavirus. And so as we know, that it's been a challenge for many of us who have children or who are expecting children. What has been some of the unique challenges for you as a result of the virus?

[00:07:54.56] DERRICK BARRETT: Yeah, I would say what stuck out the most to me during this whole period during pregnancy was my wife not being able to have a baby shower. You know with the baby shower comes a ton of gifts, comes a ton of family love and appreciation, family and friends, really, and support. And we missed out on that opportunity.

[00:08:23.00] You know, we were planning to have a baby shower in May. Obviously with everything happening in COVID-19, we had to kind of shift things around and take a different approach to that. And luckily, we had my sister-in-law Justina, an amazing individual, working with my wife, putting together a nice cohesive letter, a message to our family and friends who wanted to be a part of our baby shower. Let everybody know what the plans were after the fact and when we have a chance to get back together. And also put in there a little opportunity for people to send us gifts if they were willing and able to.

[00:09:04.76] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, no, I completely understand. That is an important part of pregnancy and this moment. I have a couple of friends who are also expecting at this time. And we held a virtual baby shower for them. But again, you know, it was an hour virtually via Zoom. And it's not the same. So I completely understand how you and your partner have been impacted by that.

[00:09:27.68] DERRICK BARRETT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we actually sat through another friend of ours who's having a baby around the same time as us, actually. I mean, we're due June 27. And they're due like June 24 or 25th or something like that. And they had a virtual baby shower and really were creative about how they put it together, were thoughtful about the interaction, the games that they were going to have their friends and family participate in.

[00:09:52.94] I wasn't able to attend, because I was doing some work around the house. But my wife sat through it and really had some fun experience with that. And we tried to think about potentially having a virtual shower. But we weren't sure we were going to get the same experience out of it that we wanted. And we both have really busy lives right now with not even just COVID stuff, but trying to transition and get ready for our departure, or our time away from work. So we just figured we'll do a sip and see afterwards or something. And going with the flow.

[00:10:22.58] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, Derrick I appreciate that you mentioned that in terms of the time away from work. Could you talk a little bit more about what that preparation has been like and how that may just really impact you personally, professionally, even as you're preparing to become a parent yourself?

[00:10:36.56] DERRICK BARRETT: Mm. Well, I will say that personally as I try to transition for work and prepare people for it. You know, early in this year I was having conversations with my chair, with our faculty, with my staff just so that they knew that this was going to be the case. You know, I was going to be away for some period of time. And even then I wasn't sure how long it was going to be.

[00:10:59.49] But now as we're getting closer to the date, I mean, we're like four weeks away from this baby coming. And who knows, that could come sooner. I'm having to put together a more detailed plan about what types of activities need to continue while I'm away, what deadlines are coming up. So I'm working with my staff on that, working with the chair on that and trying to get that all put together.

[00:11:20.76] But I'll tell you what Anthony, because of COVID-19, because of just this delay or postponement of all this work and having to focus our attention on leaving campus, coming back to campus, whether or not we can be on campus and things like that, I really haven't had much time to put into it. And luckily, though, I'm surrounded by a really good support group in the departments around me and my friends, people that I just work and talk with about work. And I feel confident now that I have a plan that would work.

[00:11:53.00] But it was really a point of, lack of a better word, stress for me for a little while.

[00:11:58.52] TORAL PATEL: So what kinds of considerations did you have to put into it that were different from when you were planning before the virus hit us?

[00:12:07.01] DERRICK BARRETT: Well, honestly I haven't made many adjustments. My plan was very bare bones at first. You know, I was trying to think how can we create an opportunity for somebody that would gain an experience for them? Possibly, a gig or something so that if they were trying to apply for a similar position in the future they could use this as part of their resume.

[00:12:26.51] I will say right now that because I kind of didn't have a plan in place or a concrete plan, I was able to be a little bit more flexible about what types of tasks I could give to somebody else. The bigger things that I'm trying to get a handle on were access to technologies, making sure that people had the appropriate authority to do the task so that others that they would need to work with would work with them. And some of it as well is just getting a sense of a solid idea of what the deadlines are.

[00:12:58.82] I mean with COVID-19, postponing a lot of things like capital assets, or space inventories, or just different year-end things. I had to wait until these deadlines came in before I was able to tell people this is when that particular project would need to be done by. Or whatever the details would be at that point, because people had to change their plans as well. So I had to wait until they made their adjustments so I could make mine, if that makes sense.

[00:13:25.31] ANTHONY SIS: Absolutely. Flexibility is key, especially in this time period, because we just don't know, right, with all the changes that are happening what could come up tomorrow or next week. But hopefully, things will be working out for the better in the long run. So it has definitely become much more of a common practice for parents who are expecting to create a birthing plan. I don't know this myself as a parent, but I consulted with some expert parents who have done this before or know of things like a birthing plan.

[00:13:54.18] And so for you in particular, have you and your partner thought about this? And if so, how has that birthing plan been impacted by the coronavirus and COVID-19.

[00:14:03.19] DERRICK BARRETT: Mm. I think that's an interesting question. As a kid, you kind of start to draft a birthing plan in your head, right, when you're playing house or whatever when you were a child. At least I did. I talked about what it was like to have the kid coming and all that.

[00:14:24.11] I guess basically what I'm trying to get at here is as a kid, I was the oldest of six. So I had five other kids after me where I was able to experience or see part of that birthing process, that plan that my parents had put in place. And I really enjoyed that piece. I loved going to the hospital.

[00:14:42.86] Even something as simple as smelling the floor, the maternity ward, the birthing floor was something that I remembered. And growing up, thinking about what that experience was going to be like for me being a father, I wanted to continue that. And part of the birthing plan, I guess it spans pre-birth, to labor, to after birth, I was like we want to have all our family in the labor. Or not all of them, but the matriarchs-- the mothers, the sisters that we want to experience this with. We want to have them in there.

[00:15:15.63] And I've also heard other people's stories of people passing out. So I'm like maybe I need backup to catch me in case I fall, right? But it wasn't until recently that we were told I was actually going to be allowed in the room. And for a while when all of this kind of happened with COVID-19, I was a little worried that I was going to miss out on the baby's birth.

[00:15:39.27] And to this day, I still don't know yet. I mean, I would assume that they have to do testing-- test me at least and see if I'm positive or not. And then if I'm not, hopefully I'm allowed in the room. But we've had to be really flexible.

[00:15:52.47] I mean I almost want to say, Anthony, that we've had to throw everything out of the window in terms of what we previously thought our plan was going to be and just be willing and flexible and nimble enough to adjust if the doctors say, Mr. Barrett, you have to do this instead of doing that. And just being honest with the fact that we're not going to get out of this what we were looking to get out of it. But at the end of the day, my baby, I'm praying, will still be here and with us. And I'll be able to experience life after that with them, so.

[00:16:21.95] ANTHONY SIS: That's so powerful too, because I also then think about what if for example, you know, worst case scenario, I mean, would be like if you like coronavirus or your partner got coronavirus for whatever reason. But then how that might shift even that experience for you as a parent. Like, that's really powerful, you know? And so I really appreciate you sharing that. That just gave me so much insight.

[00:16:42.59] I'm like, wow, this is a really-- it's a really unique time period that we're in. And how this is just not only affecting parents, but parents that are going to be soon to be parents. And just so many aspects of I guess what we, I think, previous to this pandemic, kind of took for granted in many ways, right?

[00:16:59.85] DERRICK BARRETT: Right. I definitely agree with you. And even what I was just mentioning, I didn't even scratch the surface in terms of the things that we've had to think about and to consider. I mean, you know, I'm not even the one that's going to be in labor, right? You know, it's my wife who has to deal with the situation and push her body to limits that we haven't even thought about pushing her to yet. And you know, God bless her. She's amazing.

[00:17:24.71] She's doing amazing with all of this. I just want to give her a quick shout-out. She's a champ. But it sounds like too she might even have to wear a mask during labor. And like we're walking through the store trying to wear a mask. And I'm like, this is annoying. You know, like, it just gets hot. You know, it gets nasty. It's uncomfortable. But you have to obviously wear it, right?

[00:17:42.80] And if she's having to wear a mask while she's trying to breathe and push this baby out, I can only imagine the need or the feeling she'll want to just pull that thing off and be like I'm done with this. I'm just going to have the baby.

[00:17:55.02] ANTHONY SIS: Right. Wow, that's powerful. That's really powerful.

[00:17:58.07] TORAL PATEL: It is. And Derrick, what about once the baby gets here. Are there things that have changed in terms of how you've thought about like you're having to wear masks around your own baby so that you don't pass anything off in case you do have something where you're asymptomatic or anything. Have those changed any for you?

[00:18:16.85] DERRICK BARRETT: You know, Toral, I haven't even really-- you raise a really good point. And I haven't even really had a chance to think about that, right, what happens if I'm asymptomatic. Will I have to wear a mask all the time? Will I have to quarantine myself? Ah, man, you hit me with a lot right there.

[00:18:33.65] I'll tell you what, we have thought about though is other people's connection or social distancing from others around us that we would normally want to be around, right, with the baby. Obviously because the baby is new to this new world of germs, in any normal situation, we would have to keep the baby kind of isolated until they were a little more healthy or a little more able to sustain the things that they would be exposed to. But now, I've seen videos of people showing their babies to grandparents, to loved ones through screen doors, through windows. And that, to me, it sucks, you know?

[00:19:13.01] To put it simply, it really is frustrating. Because as much as I have this unconditional love and appreciation for this new life that we're bringing into this world, and while I may have an opportunity to be around and be with the baby, there are other people that are feeling this same feeling. The same unconditional love-- grandparents, cousins aunts, uncles that won't be able to experience that as much as I will. Just because we're planning to be cautious with it, you know? We want people to be patient with us.

[00:19:49.28] You know, we're trying to figure this new thing out. And we don't know. I mean, you brought up a couple of things now. My mind just going in circles trying to figure out what could the possibilities be. Could I potentially be isolated from the rest of my family? Will I have to live in my basement and never see the light of day for two weeks or something? I don't know.

[00:20:09.17] I'm glad you guys are bringing this up and talking about all of this. I mean, in some way I tried to prepare myself for all of this and think that I have a plan in place. But you know, what I've really started to realize for myself is sometimes I don't know at all. You know, I don't know enough. And it's important for me to know what I don't know so that I can ask somebody else and figure it out.

[00:20:32.75] And I think it's a real possibility that I could be in a situation where I set up in the garage and not here. And I haven't even thought about that, right? And we have to now plan for that if that were going to be the case. And what's the turnaround time look like. And I didn't mention this before, but I think Jessica and the baby-- Jessica is my wife-- will only be in the hospital for a day, I think. I believe the current procedures are saying a day.

[00:21:00.66] So we have to turn around preparation really quick. And luckily, we've got most of our stuff set up. But it's that thinking, that planning that you had just described that we'd have to get ready if I were to have to live in the basement or the garage for a little while.

[00:21:14.00] ANTHONY SIS: Wow. I mean, so much to consider. It's amazing for folks like you, for people who are about to be parents, as well as for parents right now who are just every day a new challenge, new flexibility, new things to adapt to in this environment. So transitioning over, you know, we talked a little bit about how families, and how your family in particular, is going to support you.

[00:21:38.06] How has particularly your support system been during this time period. Has the virus affected particularly the people that you would lean on to support your newborn during this particular time? And any considerations around that as well?

[00:21:51.50] DERRICK BARRETT: Yeah, our support system has been impacted by this. I'm thinking about it, I'm like getting a little emotional. Sorry.

[00:21:58.55] ANTHONY SIS: No, please take your time. Take your time.

[00:22:00.57] DERRICK BARRETT: We've had some people that have had to do furloughs, take a little bit of time away from work, and not necessarily sure whether or not they're going to get back to work and be in the places that they were before. So the support that they would have either provided with structure or some type of infrastructure for the baby, if it was a crib, if it was wipes, if it was diapers, a lot of that wasn't there in some cases. Or we weren't sure if it was going to be there. But I'll tell

you what, it definitely takes a village. And that village showed up for us in many big ways throughout--

[00:22:37.25] Oh my gosh, sorry. They've shown up in really big ways for us. Like I was telling you before, you know before all this happened, I had a chance with my father-in-law to-- whoa, sorry. I apologize. I did not think I was going--

[00:22:55.08] ANTHONY SIS: No, no. Please, take all the time you need. And thank you for this vulnerability and for sharing this space with us to share your story.

[00:23:02.39] DERRICK BARRETT: Oh, thank you. You guys got me there. Man, you guys are good. I had an opportunity with my father-in-law to work on our nursery and went through a whole transition. I mean, it was an office space that had-- really, it was not even really an office space. There was no way you could work at the desk. It was like filled with just junk. It was a catch-all, because it was our new house and we were still trying to get ready and organized and all that.

[00:23:26.30] I had a chance to clean everything out, paint the room with my father-in-law. That was an amazing experience. This was prior to COVID-19. And then shortly after, we were kind of informed that, hey, we got to social distance. You know, you can't just come over to somebody's house and do the things you thought you could do.

[00:23:41.72] So Jessica and I did everything we could to put the house together, put the baby's room together. We weren't sure if we were going to have the baby shower. Then we weren't going to have the baby shower. Like I said, my sister-in-law showed out and she put together-- sorry, y'all. She put together this amazing invitation that informed everybody about what we're going to do, like I said earlier, about where to shop if you were going to get gifts and to let people know that afterwards we were hopefully going to do a sip and see after the baby was born.

[00:24:24.89] So Jessica and I were talking about all this stuff and we were like we don't want to be a burden on people. We don't want them to feel as though they have to buy us gifts to make us feel good or appreciated. And obviously, we're talking about people that may not have jobs, may not have the money that they need, or trying to plan for a long period of time of not having work. And we didn't want to be those people. But at the same time, we were fielding a lot of requests to open it up so that people could support us.

[00:24:53.04] You know, everybody is like I want to babysit the baby. I want to give you this gift and that. Well, after all this work that my sister-in-law did, that my wife did, and after a couple of weeks of waiting and figuring out what Target and all these other companies were able to do with sending online gifts-- thank you online shopping-- just packages, packages, packages start showing up at our front door. And I'll tell you what, man, people are amazing.

[00:25:26.81] During a really tough time, people showed up and supported us in more ways than one. And I can't thank them enough. You know, we had aunts, a front line worker who was a paramedic, make some time out of her day-- sorry-- a paramedic come and drop off a gift on her dime, wrapped it all up all nice, and had plastic in there so it wasn't getting touched by too many people or whatever. Stopped at the door, saw Jessica's belly. Ah, man. And then it was like, you know, they're gone.

[00:26:10.44] You couldn't go outside and say thank you.

[00:26:14.96] TORAL PATEL: But can I just say something Derrick here? That having this amazing support system also speaks to you and Jessica's personalities and the fact that you're a support for all of them in return. So it's not a one-sided-- you know, I'm sure there's been plenty of time where the two of you have stepped up and shown your support for others. And this is the reason why they're all stepping up now.

[00:26:38.80] DERRICK BARRETT: Thank you, Toral. I mean, you're 100% right. People have been great. We've tried to do what we can in the past for others. But it's amazing what everybody's been doing so far to just come back together and try to keep that social interaction. Even though we're being socially distant, keeping that social interaction, that social support that people need during times like this to get through. Man, I mean, it's been a blessing.

[00:27:05.35] TORAL PATEL: So can I ask you the opposite question of that. So how has this virus impacted your ability to support others?

[00:27:13.15] DERRICK BARRETT: You know, I love helping people. You know my job as a Department Manager requires me to be support for a lot of people through our microbiology community and in our CALS community, in our Cornell community, and in some ways, Ithaca as well. I try to make myself available. You know, it comes to the sacrifice of my wife sometimes. I'm not able to spend as much time with her.

[00:27:37.96] And she understands that and she gets it. And she provides me with the time to get out there and do that. But because of the fact that we're socially distancing, because of the fact that I don't want to compromise somebody else's immune system, I don't want to be compromised, and I don't want to put ourselves in a risky situation, I'm not able to just jump up and go do the things that I would like to do. Whether it's going into the building and fixing a piece of equipment or working with our facilities coordinator to address a piece of equipment, I'm not able to do that like I would like. One of the tougher things that as I take part of trying to support a community, it's not as easy to just talk face to face about something and work through the problem.

[00:28:20.66] You know, we have this extra barrier of virtual togetherness and connectivity that we have to get through. And for some, it's easy. For some, it's not. And we just have to work through those situations and figure it out. But because we have that barrier, it makes it even much harder to get a person's message across. And I've

been struggling with this for a while now. And you know, each day you find little things to help you get through it and to be open and honest with yourself.

[00:28:51.69] Anthony, I want to give you a shout-out too and thank you for the messages you've been sending. I can't exactly remember the names of those messages right now, but they're like a weekly, daily--

[00:29:02.51] ANTHONY SIS: The Weekly Connections, yeah. And just as a note for that for our listeners-- for all of the CNGs, actually. Toral has been a part of this. Our whole entire department has been a part of sending weekly messages to all of the CNGs. So the men of color, women of color, veterans, disabilities, as well as the LGBTQ CNGs. So that's actually a department effort that we put on and we sent it to all of the CNGs on a weekly basis.

[00:29:24.97] TORAL PATEL: And the CNGs, for those that don't know, are Colleague Network Groups.

[00:29:28.51] DERRICK BARRETT: Thank you. You know, I appreciate you all sending those out. They have come at the perfect time when I'm down and out and need a word of encouragement, just to be honest and truthful with myself and know that I can't I'm not Superman and I'm human. And I go through different emotions and feelings, and to be real with those emotions and feelings when they come.

[00:29:50.48] TORAL PATEL: That's amazing. I'm glad to hear that. Yes.

[00:29:53.24] ANTHONY SIS: Thank you. Yeah, I mean I think that means a lot for us. We talk about when we get emails from our respective CNGs that we work with, of people who are like, oh, this came at a right time. This is so great. And so it uplifts us as much as I think it uplifts you all as CNG members. That people are taking this message and that people are resonating with it. Because that's really what it's there to do, to remind folks and take that pause in whatever part of the day that they're reading the message, just to say like, hey, we're here for you. We want to show you some words of encouragement, positivity, empowerment to be able to get through some of these challenges that we've already talked about that are unexpected, as well as things that we hear about in the news, in the media.

[00:30:32.16] So thank you. Thank you for the shout-out to us and the Department. Transitioning a little bit into brief-- and we've talked a lot about personally how the coronaviruses impacted you as an expecting parent, but I think it's also important to talk about what's happening nationally, internationally, especially around things like bias and how this pandemic has impacted many marginalized communities in particular. And so given just kind of everything that's being spread in the media, as well as understanding of the impact and the public health implications of particularly for marginalized communities, how have you grasped with what's going on and how it might affect your ability to become a parent or just ability to parent as a whole?

[00:31:15.82] DERRICK BARRETT: I'll start off by saying, for me, grasping it and trying to understand it all, it's knowing what I don't know, you know? Social media has allowed us all to get a better perspective on what others are going through and what's happening. And for me, I tend to think of myself living in like this small town that is not really connected with other things. But it really is very connected, you know?

[00:31:40.58] Ithaca is 10 square miles, I think, they say, surrounded by reality in some cases. But I'll get back to knowing what I don't know and seeking knowledge from others in their perspective. You know before this, I would like to say that I was a very caring and understanding individual that looked at others and tried to put myself in their shoes. But now, I don't know. And I try to keep my eyes open now. You know, I try to listen and hear and just take the information in.

[00:32:10.58] I have been blessed to be a part of some amazing meetings in the Men of Color Colleague Network Group. People have come in there with their perspectives and have shown me or given me a better idea of what's going on out there. And I'll tell you what, man, it makes a lot of sense. It makes a lot of sense. And if I'm thinking that and my first reaction is to get up and do something about it, I'm hoping that as a country, as a world, that we all see the same and act upon that and help those who are less fortunate or more impacted by this coronavirus. I mean, it's a mess.

[00:32:47.20] ANTHONY SIS: So Derrick, I always like to say when I do my seminars, when I talk to people about practicing allyship, I always like to talk about the allyship piece and the word allyship and really focusing on the action rather than what it means to be an ally. Because in order to be an ally, you have to accompany it with actions. So I always like to say and ask people particularly for folks who are expecting to be parents, are parents currently, what are some ways that people can really practice allyship for folks like me who are single. I don't have anybody who is expecting to become a parent or have a child. But how can folks like myself really showcase allyship during this time for expecting parents?

[00:33:31.69] DERRICK BARRETT: Well, I would say patience. You know, show patience and empathy. It's interesting. It's a really good question, Anthony. And I'm kind of struggling a little bit with how to answer.

[00:33:43.70] But I will just say that for myself and my wife, we're going through a life changing situation right here. As much as we're bringing a new one into this world, the world itself is also going through a lot of change. And we're trying to change and adapt with that and figure things out. We're all going into new uncharted territory. So I would just say at first, you know, it's patience with people. You know, we want to connect, we want to talk, we want to learn, we want to understand each other, and share new things, and have a drink, or go to a movie, or have dinner with each other. But for people that are in my situation where you're bringing a new baby into the world, we're still just trying to digest this current situation, this current baby, and understand how can we be better parents? How can we protect them?

[00:34:39.20] As much as this baby is going to be a blessing, it's also scary. You know, it's going to be a challenge for me. It's going to be a challenge for my wife. I know that. And a challenge on many different levels, not just taking care of the baby. But figuring out how to interact with our family, how to interact with our friends.

[00:35:02.03] And those friends that may not have kids, I feel at first they may not understand why we aren't able to go out or why we aren't able to do a certain thing with them. Or why we've kind of cut ourselves off socially, right. Why aren't you posting as much on Facebook? Why aren't you putting anything on Instagram or whatever you're using to showcase your story?

[00:35:24.08] You know, why aren't you calling me, right? Or why aren't you Zooming me? Why aren't you Facetiming? We're trying to figure this thing out. And it's a lot to comprehend, try to wrap my head around.

[00:35:35.15] I would say that before COVID-19. And now I'd say that even 10 times or 100 times more because of COVID-19. We don't know what the impacts are going to be to this baby. So patience, empathy, care. I was going to say allyship. And you said action, right?

[00:35:50.78] It's not just words. It's action. So some time when we all get normal and things are OK, if you want to take my kid for a week and you show me you can take care of them, let's do it. You know, what I mean? Lend a helping hand.

[00:36:05.36] [LAUGHING]

[00:36:06.08] ANTHONY SIS: I don't know if I could practice or showcase allyship in that manner, but.

[00:36:09.46] [LAUGHING]

[00:36:11.20] DERRICK BARRETT: Nah, I'm messing with you. But family and friends, you know, ones that you're close to and you feel like you can do that with probably would help with people that need a little break, a little time away.

[00:36:24.59] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, you'd be surprised. You will have a hard time letting your child go for an entire week.

[00:36:29.66] DERRICK BARRETT: Oh, man. I know.

[00:36:32.15] ANTHONY SIS: Say's the expert parent.

[00:36:33.44] TORAL PATEL: Right. So I think our listeners know, Derrick, that I have 11-year-old twins. And so it's a different challenge with having older children as well, so.

[00:36:45.77] DERRICK BARRETT: Wow. Toral?

[00:36:47.45] TORAL PATEL: Yes.

[00:36:48.41] DERRICK BARRETT: How would you answer that question, then? When you were having your twins, what was it like for you?

[00:36:53.48] TORAL PATEL: Oh, see for me it was very similar, right, because I was also going through a change that is different from what other people go through. Normally, people would have one child. And I was going to have two of them at one time.

[00:37:05.90] The other challenges that I had was that I was also on bed rest for three months before they were born. And so again, similar situation, I had no baby shower because I couldn't even attend. I had to just be sleeping. And nothing prepared. Except, I think the only thing I had was a take home outfit and their car seats, because I couldn't go shopping for any of that.

[00:37:24.84] And then there was also some cultural variances that played in. Like, there's certain things that you could do at certain times in our culture. So our baby showers are usually in the fifth month or the seventh month of pregnancy. And I went on bed rest during the fifth month. So both of them I couldn't do anything.

[00:37:40.35] And so there's a lot of cultural things at play. But for me, I think you nailed it to be honest. The patience is key, because your life completely changes and you are no longer the same person you were before. In terms of having-- because you're not thinking about yourself. Every day, every thought is all about taking care of this child.

[00:38:00.54] And especially as a new parent, as a first time parent, you think you don't know what you're doing. But my advice to you, and this is what I always tell parents, that you will always know what's best for your child. And so don't ever doubt yourself. You will figure it out. You will get a lot of advice.

[00:38:17.93] I don't want-- a lot of people say in one ear, out the other. But everybody that gave me advice, I listened to it all. And then I implemented what I thought was going to work for my child. Because only you know your child the way you do. Nobody else does. And not everything that worked for other children is going to work for yours. And so that doesn't mean you don't listen. I will listen to every advice that anybody wants to give me. And then I'll apply those that I think will work.

[00:38:43.76] Or I'll try everything. And then if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. And so I think for me, it's what you said about having patience is going to be huge for you. Because you're not going through one life changing event. You're going through two. You're going through having a child and then dealing with this world-wide pandemic that's impacting every single human on the planet, including yourself and your partner. And so you're going through two life changing events at once.

[00:39:10.68] And so I think patience for yourself, patience for your partner. Patience for your support group, because like you said, they're going to want to be in. They're going to want to see the baby. And you'll have to maneuver all of that as well. And so I'd say take it easy-- one day at a time.

[00:39:26.39] Something that somebody told me-- and I take this to heart every single day-- is that the days are going to be very, very long. But the years will go by quick.

[00:39:34.91] DERRICK BARRETT: Wow.

[00:39:35.60] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. So there's no advice there, but when I really thought about it, I was like oh my gosh, like, my kids are 11 years old already. But every single day-- even now, especially now that I'm homeschooling, my day is extremely long. And I always feel like it doesn't end. It continues. And the kids feel like they're on summer break. So they're like, can we not go to bed at, like, 11:00? Why do we have to go to bed early? It's every day. Every aspect is a battle.

[00:40:01.12] But then I was like, you know, they turn 11 in March. And it's already been like three months. And where did all that time go already? And so the years will go by quick, but your days will be extremely long.

[00:40:12.61] DERRICK BARRETT: Wow. You know, you said something quick there. And I did want to mention this today. You said something about everybody having advice and coming to you with that advice, right?

[00:40:20.57] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:40:20.71] DERRICK BARRETT: And at first when we were having this baby, I was like, you know, everybody is going to come here with advice. And I believe somebody even said you just listen to it, you absorb it, you take it. But when you leave, that doesn't mean you have to use it.

[00:40:31.48] TORAL PATEL: Exatly.

[00:40:31.90] DERRICK BARRETT: You use what you feel would work best for you, right? And at first, I was kind of reluctant. I was like, leave me alone. You know, I don't want to take your advice. I don't need it, right?

[00:40:39.79] TORAL PATEL: Yep.

[00:40:40.43] DERRICK BARRETT: But now that things have occurred and we're trying to get ready for what's next, I am asking all parents, any friends, family that want to talk to me about how you raise your kids and what you did and what you didn't do, let me know, because I have a journal that I'm writing all of this down in. And I'm taking every piece of guidance I can get, because I'm going to need it.

[00:41:02.83] TORAL PATEL: Yep. And like I said, you might never need it. But in case you, you'll have it written down somewhere.

[00:41:08.98] DERRICK BARRETT: Exactly.

[00:41:11.17] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, but that's been my advice to everybody. It's like take in all the advice. Because as one parent to another, it's how we feel we can help you, right? Like hey, here's what I experienced. Let me tell you so that you don't have to go through that same experience. Maybe I make your life a little bit easier.

[00:41:25.00] And it's also one way for us to relate to each other. And so I say you know what, it's what we as humans want to do, is give this advice. And I tell people take it all in. And then use what you have to, what you need to, and let everything else go. And that's just the best way to do it. It also allows you to bond with people--

[00:41:43.39] DERRICK BARRETT: Yes.

[00:41:43.54] TORAL PATEL: That you didn't have before. So it's a bonding moment as well.

[00:41:46.15] DERRICK BARRETT: Yes, I completely agree with that. It definitely has helped with making connections with friends or family that have had kids before me and really strengthen and build those bonds even tighter. So yes, I agree with you 100%.

[00:42:00.84] TORAL PATEL: So I think we kind of started talking about the next question that we have for you, is as an expectant parent, what are some words of inspiration or encouragement that you might give them for helping them get through this challenging time?

[00:42:13.64] DERRICK BARRETT: I say this all the time-- I found myself saying this earlier in the meeting, but we will get through this. We're going to get through this together. And the reason I say together is because it takes a village to raise a kid. And just imagine how many different perspectives now your child will have if you open them up to that village. How many experiences that they'll be able to gain, the knowledge that they'll be able to go and absorb.

[00:42:40.82] Just keep your head up and reach out, you know? Talk to people if you have questions or concerns, if you're worried. Me and my wife constantly have to second guess something that we'll see or something that she may want to eat, but she doesn't know if she wants to eat. Reach out to your doctors. I mean, they're doctors for a reason. They know what they're talking about.

[00:43:03.05] Some cases you want to listen to them. And you have your choice. But ask somebody a question and you'll hopefully get the right answer, you know? It's a big world out there. There's a lot of resources available.

[00:43:17.76] So I'll just end with we'll make it through this. You will make it through this. And I'm here for you if you need anything.

[00:43:24.47] TORAL PATEL: And I'm just going to add one more piece of advice to that is to hang on to that flexibility, right? Because the world is changing as we know it and as you have a new child, as you're expecting a new child, as we talked about earlier, Derrick, with your birthing plan completely different from what you started as, that things are going to change daily. And possibly, sometimes, even hourly. So just hang on to that flexibility. And I think that'll help as well.

[00:43:49.23] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:43:55.30] ANTHONY SIS: Derrick thank you so much for sharing your story and being so vulnerable. I think it's probably one of the first recordings we've done where somebody has broken down on the show. But I'm completely moved and inspired. And it really moved me to really check in with folks who are expecting. I know a lot of folks, friends, acquaintances who are expecting children. And it has totally given me a whole new insight and perspective on how I can practice allyship and be more supportive of them during this time period.

[00:44:23.15] So Derrick, thank you so much for being on today's show and for just being so vulnerable. I want to acknowledge and appreciate that.

[00:44:28.81] DERRICK BARRETT: Thank you all.

[00:44:29.65] TORAL PATEL: Thank you.

[00:44:30.46] DERRICK BARRETT: I mean, honestly, I want to just say thank you Toral, thank you Anthony, thank you Bert, the sound engineer. You guys are amazing. I appreciate the opportunity to be on this Inclusive Excellence Podcast. This is a really cool experience for me. I love the shows that you guys have done. And just to be a part of it.

[00:44:48.43] You guys got me there. You guys got me vulnerable. I was not expecting to break down and cry. But y'all did it.

[00:44:57.79] TORAL PATEL: That's it for this month's show. If you like what you've heard, be sure to subscribe and submit a review on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or SoundCloud. It helps new listeners find us and the show. Also, if you are a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us at ie-academy@cornell.edu. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:45:18.97] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence podcast.

Episode 22: Expecting during a Pandemic
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[00:45:24.76] TORAL PATEL: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in collaboration with Cornell Broadcast Studio. A special shout-out and thank you to Bert Odom-Reed, our sound engineer, for making us sound wonderful each and every episode.

[00:45:45.15] (IN UNISON) Thanks, Bert.