

Episode 32: Her Journey and Passion to Create a Culture of Belonging with Mary Opperman

Released on December 23, 2020

[00:00:00.35] ANTHONY SIS: 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.

[00:00:08.68] [THEME MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:11.53] Welcome to the season three finale of the Inclusive Excellence podcast. On today's show, we have a very special guest, Mary Opperman, the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer here at Cornell. We have an intimate conversation where she reflects on her path into the field of human resources, as well as some of her most memorable moments thus far here at Cornell. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:34.97] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:36.41] ANTHONY SIS: And you're listening to the season finale of the Inclusive Excellence podcast.

[00:00:59.84] TORAL PATEL: So to get started, we're going to ask the first question. Mary, if you can just introduce yourself with your pronouns and your title and your role here at Cornell.

[00:01:10.22] MARY OPPERMAN: My name's Mary Opperman. I use the pronouns she, her, hers. And I'm the Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer here at Cornell.

[00:01:19.26] TORAL PATEL: Thank you. So we always start all all of our podcasts with the question of the day. And the only person that knows the question of the day is the individual who's asking it. So I have the privilege of asking you the question of the day, Mary, as well as Anthony.

[00:01:34.67] And so in these times, which is everything that we have going on not just in our personal lives, but professional lives as well, everything that's happening in the world, my question is, is there an activity that calms you or a place or a thing that makes you feel at ease during these turbulent times?

[00:01:52.25] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, that's a great question. So to be completely honest, I find it difficult these days to calm down or to calm my mind. I think there are a couple tried-and-true things that I do. So I do like to exercise. That definitely helps. And I always know when I'm in a place where I'm not keeping my own health in the forefront because I find excuses not to. But I think that's probably number one.

[00:02:23.06] I spend time with my family. That doesn't always calm me. But it certainly diverts my attention away from the pressures of work. And I do have animals. I have a dog that means a really lot to me. And so I spend time with him.

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[00:02:40.49] And if I really can't find any other way to calm down, then I play games on my phone, Solitaire. And I play the timed Solitaire.

[00:02:53.63] TORAL PATEL: Wow. That's great. That's a lot of the things that I do as well. How about you, Anthony?

[00:02:58.25] ANTHONY SIS: So I know from you, what I've noticed in all of the places I've ever lived throughout the course of my life, it's always been near water. And so water, for me, just being near it and having access to it, so whether going to a park near a lake or with Cayuga Lake in Ithaca, just having the proximity to water for me has always been very calming and soothing. Because before I even think about it, I'm already thinking about the sound of the waves, like, unconsciously. So then my mind already, then, becomes about just focusing on that, focusing about being present and being in the moment.

[00:03:29.55] And that's something that, particularly this year, I've been very intentional with wanting to do is to be more present in the spaces that I'm in, the meetings that I'm in, virtually. Especially where we can constantly be in these meetings back to back to back, it's hard to be present sometimes and not think about what am I going to do later? What am I going to do about this issue that came up in this earlier meeting, right? So I think for me, just proximity to water, even in the midst of a global pandemic and all of these other events, has really continued to provide me a sense of relief and calm.

[00:03:58.33] TORAL PATEL: And for me, I think, Mary, it was a lot of things that you said. I spend time with my family. And I agree with you that it's not necessarily something that puts me at ease. But I think for me, it's about refreshes my priorities in my mind again, that they are my number-one priority, and it emphasizes that.

[00:04:14.36] The other thing that I do for me is I'm an avid reader. And so I need to get lost in a book. And so when I need that kind of calmness, I'll be honest and tell you that I read what I call fluff, right? And so it's just stories. It's not something that's going to make me think deep about certain topics or anything. It's just a fun story that I want to read. And so I love getting lost in books so that's how I calm myself and bring myself back into kind of that mindset.

[00:04:44.31] MARY OPPERMAN: So for me, quote, unquote, "fluff" is biographies and autobiographies.

[00:04:47.80] TORAL PATEL: [LAUGHING] Yeah.

[00:04:50.95] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I 100% agree. I've been reading a lot of celebrity autobiographies, too. So I just find them to be a very easy read. So I read the one by one of the Queer Eye folks guys. His name's Jonathan Van Ness, his book, his autobiography, very quick, easy read. But I find it easier when I am reading, especially when it's like heavy, dense, nonfiction topics, so simultaneously read an autobiography, something that's light, right? So I can kind of go back and forth between the two.

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[00:05:21.50] Well Mary, thank you so much. We are super excited that you are guest for today's show. But I also think that what I'm really excited about in terms of having you on the show is to just for listeners, and also for us as well, Toral and I, to just get to know a little bit about who you are as a person, right?

[00:05:37.43] So we know with the work that you do, you do a lot for the university, within the university, and especially on behalf of representing the Division of Human Resources, advocating for the folks under your division, as well as across the university. So our first question really that we want to pose to you is to just talk a little bit about what led you to do this work and what drives you. What motivates you to do the work that you do here at Cornell?

[00:06:02.99] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, I didn't have a plan to become a human resources professional. That wasn't-- I actually don't even know if I knew there was such a thing as a human resources professional. I was in college for my undergraduate degree, and my father passed away. So my life changed pretty quickly in my-- middle of my sophomore year.

[00:06:25.17] And so I was just trying to recalibrate from the life I had had before to the life I had after that. So I was proud that I actually got my degree. It was difficult, for a number of reasons, to finish. And when I did, I got out at a time when there weren't very many jobs.

[00:06:45.11] And what's interesting is that the first job I got offered was by the company my father worked for as a personal assistant, because that's what they called it back then. And I didn't accept it because I thought it was charity. And I didn't want a job because someone felt sorry for me.

[00:07:05.16] So what I did instead was take an entry level position working for the Oneida County, the county I grew up in working in the Office for the aging. And I did a lot of program planning in that job. And then on the side, I worked as a bartender. And that was sort of full stop. I didn't have a sudden awareness that I was going to be driven to human resources work or anything like that.

[00:07:33.41] But I was dating my husband. And we got married. He was-- we flipped a coin, and he won to go to graduate school. So we moved just to Syracuse. We moved to Syracuse, and he went to SU for his graduate degree.

[00:07:50.03] And I needed a new job because we had moved. And there was a position for a small consulting firm. And it was really a very entry level position that I took. But that firm was in a part of human resources, and that's how I started in the field, was in a very small company that did a portion of HR work.

[00:08:12.90] And when my husband graduated, we moved to Boston, Boston area. I didn't really want to go. I had never really lived outside of upstate New York. And my mother was alone, and I was worried about her. But I went.

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[00:08:29.21] And then I was-- then I was pouting because I didn't really want to be there. And so I finally realized if we wanted to make rent, I needed to get a job. And there was-- I applied for exactly one job, which was in that portion of HR at Harvard University. Honestly, I was lucky to get it. And I stayed at Harvard for 13 years, and I began to learn the other components of HR.

[00:08:54.20] So that's how I got into the field, wasn't that I had some deep understanding of myself. But once I got in it, then I began to really think about the roles that work plays in someone's personal sense of accomplishment and identity. And in our country, having a job is an enormous part of your identity and your own self respect. And so what drives me always is that I believe that every person should have the opportunity, a free and fair opportunity, to a position that provides them with self respect and dignity and that there are some things that in my role I can do to help that.

[00:09:44.08] TORAL PATEL: That's great. Actually, I have known that you have a love for the Boston Red Sox. And I never knew where that came from, Mary. So I'm glad to know now hear about your background in Boston. And I agree with you, that once you go in New England, that love of the sports there, it just-- it comes naturally. I think it just is ingrained in you.

[00:10:03.62] My husband and I, very similar, when we first moved to this country, we actually landed in New England. And so all of our sports teams that we support in every capacity are all from New England. So--

[00:10:13.98] MARY OPPERMAN: And I always try to tell people that we were fans of the Patriots and the Red Sox when they didn't win. And so for the Patriots-- this is probably embarrassing to admit. But there were times when we would go to Foxboro Stadium, and we just never left the parking lot. We just stayed out and tailgated because the games weren't really worth going in for.

[00:10:39.06] And with the Red Sox, we would often say that it was a good lesson in having your heart broken because pretty much at a certain time every year you would realize that your hopes of a championship would wane. And so they didn't win for the first time till we had moved here to New York. And as you might know, in 2004, to get to the World Series, they had to get by the Yankees, a big favorite in this area.

[00:11:07.54] So by that point, we were busy with school activities with our kids. And one of the things that we did was we worked the concession stands for football at the local high school. And they were-- the Red Sox were down three games and-- to the Yankees. And I had given up. But my husband kept saying, it's not over till it's over. It's not over till it's over. It is a good lesson in never giving up.

[00:11:35.66] TORAL PATEL: That's great. So in your role at Cornell currently, what do you think is one of your biggest challenges or obstacles?

[00:11:43.26] MARY OPPERMAN: Right now?

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[00:11:44.42] TORAL PATEL: Right now or overall, just in your role as the VP of CHRO.

[00:11:49.95] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, I'll start with right now. And then maybe we can talk about more broadly. Right now I would say that there are a number of world challenges that are affecting everything that we do. So one, of course, is the pandemic. When we sent people home in March, I certainly never thought that we would still be in the thick of things nearly nine months later.

[00:12:15.55] The other is the emerging conversations around social justice and having such important conversations occur during this period of time and what that means in terms of advancing the conversation beyond where the speed bumps often stop us. It's not like we haven't had this conversation multiple times. And so I think the challenge is to push past the speed bumps.

[00:12:41.46] And the last, I think, is the divide in the country. And there's an enormous divide in our country. I would say it's political. But I think it's deeper than a political divide, that I don't think we've really tackled and understood. And at least for some of us, I don't think I even was quite aware, which is perhaps embarrassing, but I don't think I realized just how deep it was until the last few years.

[00:13:09.55] And so those are-- I think they just lay, like, sort of a blanket over top of the other challenges that you always face. And when you get closer to home, we're a large, complicated place. We are in a part of the country that people often grow to love. But not everybody loves it immediately.

[00:13:31.29] There are a number of issues related to having a relatively monolithic economic system in our area in terms of opportunities for people who move here. And there's a lot of demands on the university, expectations of the community, which is fine. But it does add to our challenges.

[00:13:51.36] But those are persistent. I think we work on them. We chip away at them. We deal with them. When you overlay the issues of the day on top of it, I think the challenge is to recognize that you have to address those issues that we're dealing with today. But you still have to keep moving forward.

[00:14:08.61] TORAL PATEL: Yes, I know that we're facing a lot of challenges right now not only as an organization, as a university, but across our nation and the world as well. But maybe what are some of the positives that you've seen in your role?

[00:14:20.13] MARY OPPERMAN: Yeah. So thanks for asking the question because you both know me a bit. I don't like to spend a lot of time in the negative. I actually think it's very energy zapping. So what I would say is you can't solve problems that you don't understand and give voice to, at least agree on the definition of the problem.

[00:14:39.22] And so I think the biggest opportunity comes from the fact we are putting words to some of our core societal issues. That gives us the opportunity to actually

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address them. And that gives me a great deal of hope. Just because we've been in similar times before and haven't necessarily leapt forward, doesn't mean that we can't do so now.

[00:15:04.83] ANTHONY SIS: That's so important. So I appreciate you sharing that with us. And one of the things that I think for me, if I wanted to add to the positive experience peace of my time here so far at Cornell, has been particularly when over the summer when the incidents of racial injustice were happening, were getting a lot of media attention, one of the things that you had done is shared an email with a link to the podcast. And I will share-- I don't know if I've ever shared this with you or if I have [INAUDIBLE] told you this. But as a result of that, we've increased our listener engagement tremendously. And it's been consistent over the summer since then because I think people have now, especially in this moment, have really found storytelling to be a very compelling piece to really understand how we address some of these societal issues that you were talking about.

[00:15:49.06] And so thank you, personally. I want to thank you for having done that because I think it really meant for a lot for both of us in terms of the recognition of the work we put into this series, but also to the recognition of people sharing their stories, particularly Cornell's staff members, about their diverse lived experiences and how it affects them in their current role here at Cornell. And so given now that you've recognized some of the episodes and the themes that we talked about on this show, are there any ones that have stood out for you so far and that have really resonated with you as a listener?

[00:16:19.51] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, I try to always listen to every one of them. And I have to say, I was worried you would ask this question because this is like saying, do you have a favorite child or a favorite extended family member or do you have a best friend? I really enjoy and get a lot out of each of them. I do think that the Black at Cornell series may have been the most moving for me, particularly Jeremy's, although Peggy's and Tony's were terrific as well.

[00:16:54.03] And each time I listen to someone's story, I learn something about my place in the world. And so Jeremy's, in particular, brought home something to me that I should have known, and maybe at some level I did know. I'm very driven to create a culture of belonging at the university. I truly believe, and I always have, that diverse opinions bring better outcomes.

[00:17:26.59] And so diverse backgrounds bring diverse opinions, which bring better outcomes. What I did not fully understand-- and I think Jeremy was one of the voices that helped me-- is that we all bring our lived experiences. Everybody does. I mean, that I did know. But the extent to which that lived experience is something I never will understand in the same way came home very powerfully in his story. And it has stayed with me when I try to do a problem analysis.

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[00:18:03.42] But there were others as well. I don't want to just-- there were others as well. I thought the series on body image were fantastic. And the code switching was great. And there were a lot of them. The most recent one with Michelle on the pressures that families are facing, all terrific.

[00:18:20.49] TORAL PATEL: We've had some amazing guests, so definitely agree with you. And it is hard to pick which one would be a favorite. So I think I want to just focus a little bit on what you just said, Mary, that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, these are important concepts. But why should these terms matter to the rest of our staff at Cornell? Why, in your opinion, should staff care about these terms?

[00:18:43.33] MARY OPPERMAN: So I'm going to go back to what I said about why I have stayed in the field for so long. I believe to my toes that a job, if you choose to have one and however you define it, is part of your identity and self-worth. I believe that. And I also believe that opportunity to create a sense of personal dignity and self-worth is dependent, in large measure, on whether you feel like you belong where you are.

[00:19:11.73] Let me add that to the fact that creating a sense of belonging is creating a sense of security. I'm really wanted here. The security that comes from feeling like you belong is the security that you have to make a mistake. And real advancements, real opportunities to take things in a new direction in an exciting direction come from the security of feeling like your mistakes will be more than tolerated, but understood, debriefed, and used to improve.

[00:19:47.53] So we are all here-- I believe this. We are all here because we believe in the mission of the university. I've worked in two universities. I really believe in the mission of education as an empowerment.

[00:20:00.84] If we believe that, then how each person fits in to the tapestry that creates the learning and discovery of the university, then each person in that tapestry needs to feel that they belong and are secure in that belonging enough to be willing to take a risk. So the future of the university and the future of each of our successes depends on having a sense that you matter and that what you do is seen, that you're seen, and that your unique perspective is valued.

[00:20:40.72] TORAL PATEL: That is very powerful to me.

[00:20:42.99] ANTHONY SIS: I just had a realization in something that you shared, Mary, about [INAUDIBLE] belonging to security and having a sense of security. I had never-- I mean, it makes sense. But I just I appreciate you sharing that, because I was like, wow, I never thought about that. But it's so relevant. And so it's definitely going to shift even how I talk about establishing a culture of belonging in my trainings with departments across campus. So thank you.

[00:21:04.44] MARY OPPERMAN: I think we've all been in situations. There was a podcast on the imposter syndrome. We've all been in situations where you start out

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wondering if you got there by mistake, right? And somebody's going to find you out. I think whether we share it or openly experience it, it's a rare person that doesn't have that moment.

[00:21:25.08] But if the winds are against you and you can't get your balance, you can't move your way past that to inch your way to a sense of accomplishment, then you'll never feel like you belong. And every person has that need to feel like what they do matters. When you asked the question-- it's a really fair question. Why should people care about this? It's because we are a collective.

[00:21:52.92] We are a collective. We move forward collectively. And so the experiences of one affect the experiences of others. And we should want that, I think.

[00:22:04.95] ANTHONY SIS: So as we're thinking about the end of this conversation, or as we're thinking about wanting to end it on a positive note, can you talk a little bit about an experience or an accomplishment that you're most proud of that you've done here during your time at Cornell? I mean, you've done a lot. So if you want to share all of them, I would highly encourage to do so. But if there are some key ones that really stand out in your time here, which ones would you choose?

[00:22:28.09] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, goodness, it's a good question. I don't know that there's anything I've accomplished. I think that I have-- probably my pride has come when I have participated in an accomplishment. So there are a few. Opening the child care center was a real moment of pride. Every-- well, not in the last year. But every graduation, when I see the families in the stands and the students in their seats and hundreds of staff giving up a well-earned day off, I feel this just unbelievable sense of pride to be a colleague of the individuals that are there and their red blazers.

[00:23:18.37] I do think we've made a difference in terms of some of our belief systems that we've moved forward, our skills for success, our training programs. There's a number of things I think on the human resource side that I feel really honored to have been a part of. In the economic development space, I firmly believe that the strength of the region only helps our employees and our university and so the work that we've done in that space and our work in equity in Title IX. It's hard work.

[00:23:51.78] The work you all do is hard work. The work the Title IX group does is hard work. But you can't move forward unless you face your challenges with a sense of optimism and a belief that things will be even better going forward. So there's a lot, I guess, I'm proud of. But mostly it's been the hard work of other people. And I've just been honored to be part of the team.

[00:24:18.48] ANTHONY SIS: Well, on behalf of the podcast, Toral and I, I want to just, once again, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today and for your leadership, especially, Mary. One of the things that I know when I first started this role a little over a year and a half ago that really caught me by surprise-- but I was like, wow, I think that shows a lot about your leadership style as well-- was the open door policy that

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you had when we were in person. And I think it was from the moment when I interviewed for the position, I was thinking in my head, I'm like, somebody in your role with your leadership and with just the amount of meetings that you have to have something like an open door policy, I thought, to me, it just spoke a lot of volumes to your approach to how you work with your division and with your colleagues across HR.

[00:25:00.18] So I think there are certain things that I personally have just been in awe about in terms of your leadership here at Cornell that I haven't seen in other organizations or even other higher-ed institutions that I've worked at. So once again, just thank you for taking the time to chat with us and for letting our listeners to get to know a little bit more about you as well.

[00:25:16.47] TORAL PATEL: And for me, I'll add that what I noticed is you sharing about you, right? And so even when we have the all-HR meetings, the fact that we know about your grandchildren and your dog and your love for baseball or Boston, those are important to me because I don't know that that kind of stuff happens at a lot of other organizations, where we get to know our leaders at that level. I love that you get up in front of this large group, and you're making jokes, and you're putting all of us at ease almost immediately as soon as you start talking. It was kind of daunting coming into Day Hall from the vet school.

[00:25:51.62] As you know, the vet school is this intimate family HR group, especially. We spend so much time together. And then to kind of come down to Central Office, I was like, oh, I don't know if I'm going to have that same family atmosphere that I'm so used to here down campus. But I did find that.

[00:26:10.19] And I think that speaks to you. And just walking down the hallway, you stop and you talk to people. And so it is important. For me, I notice the personal things. The leadership stuff, I'm like, that comes-- to me, I see that as that coming naturally to you, so I expect that from you. But all of this other stuff, I think, is what is more important to me, and I see that. So I appreciate it as well. So thank you.

[00:26:31.07] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, thank you, both. That was very generous. And I appreciated it a great deal. And I think I've probably said to you and others, I'm relatively introverted. So it's easier to stay in the box of the role and harder for me to get out of it and be vulnerable as a person.

[00:26:51.89] I don't have much difficulty being vulnerable as a leader because I learn every day that I don't know enough to lead alone. And so the vulnerability as a leader is part of my belief system and probably a self-preservation instinct. But being vulnerable as a person is harder. And so I appreciate so much that you both acknowledged and recognized that. Thank you very much.

[00:27:17.54] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And I'll just add real quick that I noticed that even when we started having our HR discussions about diversity, equity inclusion at the beginning of the summer, I think it was your email, the first email that you sent that said,

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I need to do a lot of work myself, that allowed everyone else to be in that same space and all of us to acknowledge that we all need to do our individual work. And because I feel like had you not sent that email and had you not started the first meeting the way you had, I don't think that would have happened. And I don't think the conversations, even in the breakout rooms, would have been as in depth as they've been if it hadn't been for you opening up and saying, hey, I need to do my own work here, and here are things that I realized about myself and where I need to do the work. So I appreciated that a lot, too.

[00:28:01.28] MARY OPPERMAN: Well, and I still have a lot of work to do. But you all and many of our other colleagues, you all have been very patient with me. And I actually am finding it invigorating to think about how what I believe, how to fit that into a broader understanding of other people's experiences has been really actually very invigorating, positively.

[00:28:23.85] ANTHONY SIS: So thank you, once again, for being an awesome leader and for being vulnerable as a person, as well as a leader. So I want to recognize you for both and thank you.

[00:28:33.53] MARY OPPERMAN: Stay safe.

[00:28:40.02] TORAL PATEL: Anthony, what a great way to end our season. That was an amazing conversation we just had with Mary.

[00:28:46.37] ANTHONY SIS: I 100% agree. I really love what Mary shared in the beginning. I felt like it was such a strong way to start the show in terms of what she shared with her father passing while she was in college and how she entered the field of human resources. It wasn't kind of a straight path, or it wasn't-- as she said, it wasn't something that she even knew was a career. And so I really appreciated just how she opened her story and how she shared her story with us. And so that's one of many things that I took away from this. But what did you take, Toral, any takeaways for you?

[00:29:18.41] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, I thought that was also very powerful as well, because it's a great message to a lot of people who maybe don't feel like they're in the career path that they want to be in. So it's great to know that you can eventually get to where you feel your passion is. And so that was great kind of a message from Mary.

[00:29:36.32] But I think the one thing that stood out to me was when she really talked about creating a sense of belonging is the same as creating security and relating the two of those together. And it's the feeling that belonging comes from having security. I thought that was very powerful. And then she also mentioned something about making mistakes, right?

[00:29:57.71] So when you have that security, that the opportunity to make mistakes and take risks is more tolerated. And it allows everyone to grow from that and move into a new direction and ultimately takes the university into amazing directions as well. And

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so I thought that was very powerful. And really, to me, the message that came out of it was just being secure enough to take risks. And when I am that secure, that I will also feel belonging at Cornell.

[00:30:25.74] ANTHONY SIS: I agree with you. I loved what she shared about making mistakes and what it meant to really feel a sense of belonging within an organization, and specifically here at Cornell. I think one of the biggest takeaway I would say is really this emphasis that she put on the collective and really in terms of her response to why people should care about diversity, equity inclusion, and belonging, this focus on the collective. And it's something that you hear a lot about in terms of how individual managers might see their teams as kind of a collective, as a group, or in some cases as a family.

[00:31:02.63] But I think to hear it from Mary in terms of how she views Cornell as a whole and as a collective and why people should really be advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, as well as belonging in their respective departments and units, I just thought that was a really powerful message. And it's not one that you hear really often. Especially at Cornell in the trainings that I've done, one of the most consistent things I hear about is that people feel like they're working in silos, and that there isn't really this focus on the collective experience or collectively as a department or as a unit that people feel a sense of belonging.

[00:31:36.77] But I think in Mary's sharing that and given her role in terms of her leadership, I think that was just something that I hope other folks, especially managers, really take away from what she shared in emphasizing the collective piece and that this isn't just what we value in certain areas or within the division of Human Resources. No, this is something that we value as an institution, especially here at Cornell, with the core values, the mission statement, so many things that really uplift the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, as well as belonging. So I thought that was really powerful.

[00:32:08.33] TORAL PATEL: I agree with you. And it's this concept of moving forward as one. To quote Mary, she says, "the experience of one affects the experiences of all." and I thought that statement alone was very powerful. And I think it exactly shares everything that you just mentioned.

[00:32:24.35] ANTHONY SIS: Funny that you have pulled the quote because I also pulled a quote from what she shared. And the quote that I pulled was the one where she talks about how in order to lead, she had to learn from others, and that leading, she didn't lead-- I can't remember the specific quote. But it was essentially she didn't lead alone. She led because of others or learning from others.

[00:32:45.00] And I think that's also a great takeaway for all leaders, everyone at Cornell, is that we have to rely on each other to be able to learn, to be able to grow, especially in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and belonging. So I hope that's another message, too, that even for somebody like Mary in her role, she's constantly in

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a state of learning. And she acknowledged that she is not a leader by herself. She has a team with her.

[00:33:10.73] She has the collective of Cornell as an organization that teaches her how to lead and also, I think, was shared in her response to some of what she took away from some of the episodes we've done on the show. So I think that was awesome. Thanks, Mary, for the shout out and for sharing with us some of your favorite episodes, which I thought was also really powerful. And I hope our guests who have been on the show get to hear that message from her directly on this episode.

[00:33:38.00] TORAL PATEL: Another thing that she shared-- and it's kind of going along with the collective piece-- and it was this concept of I think she said specifically that each time I hear someone's story, it tells me about myself, and it tells me about my place in the world. And this concept of looking at it individually, but ultimately it still impacts the whole, was kind of neat to hear in a different perspective.

[00:33:59.36] ANTHONY SIS: Thank you for listening to the season three finale. 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 the show.

[00:34:10.58] Also, if you or a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us at ie-academy@cornell.edu. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:34:22.30] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence podcast.

[00:34:27.82] ANTHONY SIS: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in collaboration with the Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:34:39.07] TORAL PATEL: Anthony and I would like to give a very special shout out and thank you to our co-producer and sound engineer, Bert Odom-Reed for making us sound wonderful each and every episode.

[00:34:49.02] TORAL AND ANTHONY: Thanks, Bert.