

[00:00:00.92] 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.

[00:00:08.96] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:12.41] Welcome to season four of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. To kick off this season, Anthony and I will be introducing a new segment called Let's Talk. We'll also talk about what we weigh at the moment, but that has nothing to do with body weight. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:28.06] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:29.56] TORAL PATEL: And you're listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:32.05] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:01:00.18] ANTHONY SIS: OK, Toral. Well, before we start this conversation, happy new year.

[00:01:03.45] TORAL PATEL: Happy new year.

[00:01:04.68] ANTHONY SIS: Happy new season.

[00:01:05.73] TORAL PATEL: Yes, you too.

[00:01:07.09] ANTHONY SIS: So, I just want to say it is snowing. We just had a snowstorm.

[00:01:12.60] TORAL PATEL: And it's getting ready to snow here, so.

[00:01:14.76] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, and we should probably clarify to the listeners. So, because of this remote work situation and because of life circumstances which we'll discuss in this episode, I am currently in Chicago, Illinois.

[00:01:25.57] TORAL PATEL: And I am in Ithaca, New York.

[00:01:27.36] ANTHONY SIS: Yes. So that where we are calling from doing this episode, so, yes. So, shout out to all of the folks working remotely in different places. Hopefully people are in sunnier locations than us at the moment, warmer ones, I would assume.

[00:01:40.86] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, definitely warmer ones.

[00:01:42.40] ANTHONY SIS: I could definitely use some beach, some sun. That sounds wonderful, but we're not there yet.

[00:01:47.07] [CHUCKLING]

[00:01:48.19] TORAL PATEL: We'll get there, a few more months.

[00:01:49.57] ANTHONY SIS: We'll get there. Before we get started on the topic of our conversation, we just wanted to share some exciting news in the growth and evolution of this show. So, at the end of each episode, we always wrap up with talking about where to find us, which is Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or SoundCloud, which is probably where most of you are listening to us now.

[00:02:10.41] Well, now you can also find us on at least one new platform which is Stitcher. So, we're working to get the show on a few more platforms as well. So if you already use other platforms to listen to music or other podcasts, feel free to find us and subscribe to the show through our official website which is diversity.cornell.edu/iepodcast. We'll also put a link in the show notes for this episode.

[00:02:37.56] Toral, so let's talk. Let's Talk is our new segment where Toral and I will talk about culturally relevant topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI for short, at work. This first topic is not specific to DEI, but we're going to talk about it because it does affect us at work, and that topic is weight.

[00:02:58.29] TORAL PATEL: Weight? I thought we already did a couple of episodes on body weight.

[00:03:02.34] ANTHONY SIS: We sure did. So, thank you for mentioning that, Toral, because this episode and what we're going to talk about is not about body weight, but it's about something else. So, Toral, as you know, I listen to a ton of podcasts. And so one of my favorite the moment is this one called I Weigh by Jameela Jamil. And so, for folks who don't know who Jameela Jamil is, she is an actress, she's an activist, she's a model, she's a number of different things.

[00:03:29.86] And so she started this movement that's called I Weigh a few years back, and what I really love about the podcast and about the show is that she really interviews some fascinating people, but one of the things that she does at the end of each episode is she asks her guests, what is it that you weigh? That's the question that she'll ask. And so they'll essentially answer it in a number of different ways, but what she really means by that is not in terms of body weight, how much does one weigh, but more so in terms of your lived experiences, your identities, things that you bring to the spaces that you interact with on a regular basis.

[00:04:04.05] That's what essentially she means when she asked that question, and so a number of different people have answered it in really profound ways, and I've always found it very moving. And so for this particular episode, because it's a new year, it's a new season, and there's just so much happening in the world around us and it definitely does affect us at work, I just wanted to ask the question of, what are you coming into 2021 weighing?

[00:04:29.13] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. That's a great question. And, like you, I've listened to that podcast, and it is amazing. I'm going to say that I'm coming into 2021 with a lot, right? And so everything that's happened to you and I this past year has been difficult for both of us in terms of our family and health. So I think definitely that is weighing on me, what I bring, and then kind of how that impacts this year and the future, right, of myself and my family.

[00:04:53.23] And so when I really think deep onto this question, I think I'm going to focus on a conversation that my kids have had at their school lately which is about what is your word of the year. So instead of a New Year's resolution, we were talking about focusing on word of the year. And so I, because I can't just have one word of the year, not going to be conventional, I picked two words that I want to focus on this year.

[00:05:14.67] My first word is resilience. Coming back from everything that we experienced this past year, and myself in particular, and then my second is really just decluttering. So the actionable piece for me is to declutter my life and really focus on what's important. And so I think, like, if I weigh anything, I would say that this past year has given me a little bit of a more keen perspective, and my life has been prioritized slightly different, right?

[00:05:39.78] So I think I've been able to figure out what's more important in my life, which isn't all the things that I think were first before everything had happened. So just decluttering in every sense, right? So, physically decluttering my household and getting rid of stuff that doesn't have meaning anymore, making space for things that do bring value and bring meaning to our lives, and everything else, too.

[00:06:00.71] So, decluttering relationships that really are toxic in a way that you keep going, same thing with the people that I hang out with. And so just really bringing kind of the meaning back, right, and focusing on what's important. And so I think that's how I'm going to look at it. It's kind of the two words. Anthony, how about you? What do you weigh? What are you bringing from 2020?

[00:06:20.24] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, I'm feeling really heavy. Honestly, I think heavy is the best word to describe it. So, part of the reason why I'm currently in Chicago is because of situations with COVID that happened with my family right around the holiday, right around the start of the holiday season in November of last year. And so a number of my family members got COVID, two of them really close to me passed away from it, and then shortly after, I got COVID, and that was right into the transition into 2021.

[00:06:49.50] So it really wasn't-- I'm just laughing in a way not because I think it's funny, but because there was just so much. And I think in reflecting back on it, it feels like it all happened within the span of a week, but it happened over the span of two months. And so when I think about just the intention that I want to set for this year, and it's something that I had set last year with a friend of mine who we had this conversation back in October before all of this stuff happened where we had this conversation about what is our word for 2021, or what is our intention for 2021.

[00:07:19.04] And for me, the word, ironically enough at that time, even to this day, is health, and really focusing on this notion that health is wealth. And so health is really important not just in the physical realm, but also in the spiritual, emotional realm as well, and I think mental health as well, being able to focus on those things. And the moment that something feels slightly off, to be able to really spend time and dedicate some money if necessary, resources, really look up some things, read some things, just to make sure that I'm feeling grounded myself, and really spending more time on this notion that health is wealth and life comes and goes, as I've seen with my two family members who pass, and it's just been heavy.

[00:08:00.80] I think that's really what I'm carrying with me into 2021 is the impact of COVID on my family, and I know a lot of listeners, too, have either family members or friends or loved ones who have been impacted by COVID. And so I just want to give recognition to our listeners who have been impacted by it, and I think it's an important topic to mention because it does affect us at work.

[00:08:20.60] I know for me, personally, in terms of feeling like 100% productive, that didn't start until last week, and all of these things have been happening for the past two months. And so it's caused a huge disruption in terms of my workplace productivity and getting work done. Have I gotten work done? Yes, but feeling and kind of being in that moment, I haven't really felt that until this past week.

[00:08:41.48] And so I just really want to highlight that. That, for me, that's what I'm coming into 2021 weighing, and I'm hoping that, as the year progresses, we get more vaccines, that we learn more about this virus so that we can do more about it, right, and that we continue to wear our mask in public spaces or even indoors, too, if we know people in our spaces that have COVID. Just continue to take care of ourselves and really focusing on this notion and emphasizing that health is wealth, and the moment I invest in my health, I will become wealthy in so many other aspects beyond just physical money.

[00:09:14.06] TORAL PATEL: I agree with you. I think that was the, you know, if I have a resolution, that's kind of the same resolution I have. I think I worded it slightly differently. The way I worded it is that I am putting myself first, and so taking care of myself in every aspect, whether it's emotionally, mentally, physically, taking care of my skin, taking care of my hair, being conscious of the food that I eat, all in every way, and so a very similar outlook for this year.

[00:09:37.13] So, Anthony, I just have one question for you. I know you mentioned that this year's just heavy, right? Like, you're feeling very heavy, so how can I help, right? And so, how can your other colleagues help? And what can we do knowing that there are other people at work here at Cornell and elsewhere that feel similarly? How can we help each other?

[00:09:53.28] ANTHONY SIS: That's a wonderful question. I love that you ask that question only because I don't know if I have the best answer for it. For me, personally, I

will say the Cornell community has been super supportive of me during this particular time as well. And so I received just a number of cards and gifts from Cornell staff members who have just wanted to express their sympathy, their condolences for my losses, and that has been a huge relief to know that those gifts, those cards, those emails, every little thing counts.

[00:10:26.23] And I think, especially in times like these, I'm not a gift giver in terms of the first thing I'm going to do when something bad happens is to give someone a gift. No. The first thing I'm going to do is check in with somebody or send them some type of words of affirmation going into love languages a little bit, and so people really have come through with providing support in that realm, which has been extremely great.

[00:10:47.44] Now, I think, in terms of help from the team, I think just checking in and just seeing kind of where I'm at and just recognizing that it's not a one time incident, or just to not check in with me maybe immediately after something like this happens and then just expect like, OK, work moves on, right?

[00:11:05.14] TORAL PATEL: Right.

[00:11:06.10] ANTHONY SIS: You know, at the comfort level whenever it's appropriate, I think it's OK to just simply say, like, how have things been with you personally in terms of your well-being and whatnot, even if it's like six months down the line because one of the things that I'm starting to noticing really in terms of my mourning in my grieving is that these sentiments come and go, and they might happen at random intervals.

[00:11:26.87] So I know for a fact that there are other staff members who are mourning and grieving in many different ways. And so I think that the one thing I would like to say in terms of how you can help but also how other people can help others who are going through similar experiences is just to be mindful of it and to not be afraid to check in with them because it looks different for every person.

[00:11:48.05] And I'm starting to realize as time goes on that, this morning in my own grieving, too, there's not like-- how do I say this? There's no one way to do it.

[00:11:59.53] TORAL PATEL: Right.

[00:11:59.80] ANTHONY SIS: And it doesn't look any one particular way. It can happen when I'm at work. It can happen when I'm out of work. It can happen just at really random times and because I have lost a close family member in previous years, but these two in particular were really, really close family members for me, and so it's just a different type of process. It's a different type of mourning and grieving, and I think, in terms of how you can help me, just being mindful of that, and then when appropriate and whenever you feel comfortable just to check in with me about it.

[00:12:29.08] I mean, we have a great working relationship. So I think, you know, when you ask me at any given point, it's OK. But for other folks listening, if you have that solid

working relationship with your colleagues and you know they're going through something heavy, just don't be afraid to check in with them.

[00:12:43.46] TORAL PATEL: It kind of brings me back to you the three philosophies that I like to kind of live by and really put into consideration whenever I have any conversation with anybody. One of them is always that you never know what somebody has going on, right? So keep that in mind when you are having a conversation with somebody, just keeping that philosophy mind that I just don't know what else this individual's going through. That really helps guide my conversation with them.

[00:13:06.64] And then the other two, just to kind of for the sake of sharing, is assume positive intent that people are doing something for the right reasons and their goal isn't to ruin my day, or make me do this extra work, or whatever it is, that they had positive intent. It was really to be helpful. And then the third one is to look for the silver lining, and sometimes it's difficult to see, but if we look hard enough that we could see it.

[00:13:28.96] ANTHONY SIS: I'm going to ask you the same question, too, Toral, is how can I help you as your fellow colleague as well with some of the stuff that you're going through?

[00:13:37.45] TORAL PATEL: I would say it's very similar to what you shared. I think the checking in concept is key for me. And then also, there's times when I do want to share and times when I don't, and I think being conscious that, though you're checking in, if I'm not sharing, it's not because I'm trying to be rude or anything. It's just that because of whatever I'm feeling today, I don't have that energy to share additional information, and I think that's OK.

[00:14:01.00] And so I agree with you that just being there, checking in, keeping that thought in mind that you just don't know what somebody else is happening in their life.

[00:14:09.55] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. I think that's important, too. It's an important thing to really emphasize is that not every moment-- kind of similar to what I said, too-- is that not every moment will be an appropriate time for people to share some really personal things that are happening in their lives that affect them at work, and so I think that's just something that I really want to emphasize. And what you shared is that sometimes folks may not want to share, and that's also OK, too, but knowing that they're going through something and just having that information, right, is enough for you to be able to at least just do something to be able to just check in with them.

[00:14:39.64] Whether or not they want to share more, that's up to the individual, but I think that's also a really great takeaway for folks.

[00:14:45.58] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:14:47.53] TORAL PATEL: Well, that's it for our first episode of Let's Talk. And just as a friendly reminder, we love it when you reach out to us to tell us about the impact of

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this podcast has had on you, whether at work or in your personal life. So be sure to subscribe to us wherever you listen to the podcast and rate and submit a review on Apple Podcasts. For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell, be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:15:15.61] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:15:21.67] TORAL PATEL: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in collaboration with Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:15:29.56] ANTHONY SIS: We would like to thank our producer and sound engineer, Bert Odom-Reed, as always, for making us sound wonderful each and every episode. Thanks Bert.

[00:15:38.63] TORAL PATEL: Thanks Bert.