

Episode 8: More of What's Going On? Veterans at Work
Released on July 23, 2019

Anthony: 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. Thank you all for joining us today. My name is Anthony Sis and you are listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

Anthony: Welcome back. Thank you for joining me and Sherron another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

Sherron: Hello.

Anthony: Hello, hello Sherron. How are you doing today?

Sherron: Today is a very good day. It's a little rainy, but still a very good day. I love summertime in the Finger Lakes.

Anthony: Summertime is really beautiful, I will say that. So I definitely have enjoyed all of the nature things to do, somebody who is from a large city like Chicago.

Sherron: Yes.

Anthony: There is definitely a lot of nature here, so I need to get to exploring a little bit more, but I'm excited that the summer is here.

Sherron: Ithaca and Cornell are known for their trails, their hiking, their biking, so just jump in wherever you want and also the lake. Please, feel free to jump into the lake too. That's a great spot.

Anthony: Cayuga Lake or is ...

Sherron: Oh, no. Cayuga Lake is the only one worth jumping into.

Anthony: Oh, that's good to know. I didn't even know that. So on today's episode we have not just one but two special guests who are joining us for more of what's going on.

Sherron: More of what's going on.

Anthony: Oh, that was perfect. That was really great. This means that our guest speakers are continuing a conversation that Sherron and I discussed on what's going on, in the previous episode. As you may recall, we spoke in our previous episode about the strengths and advantages that veterans bring into the workplace and we're delighted that our guest speakers, Craig Wiggers and Amber Alpizar will continue this conversation today.

Anthony: Craig is the Director of Administration in the Department of Physics and the College of Arts and Sciences. Craig is a veteran and served 25 years in the United States Marine Corps. Craig is also a member, a board

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member, of the Veterans Colleague Network Group and serves as the veteran representative for the employee assembly.

Anthony: Amber Alpizar is the Human Resources Director for Alumni Affairs and Development. Amber is also a veteran and served 10 years in the US army reserves. Amber started her journey here at Cornell two years ago and we actually just recently met at the Inclusive Excellence Summit.

Anthony: So Craig and Amber, thank you so much for joining us today.

Craig Wiggers: Absolutely. It's a pleasure to be here.

Sherron: Yeah. Thanks for being here.

Anthony: Before we get started, I do have a question of the day for all of us to answer. So this is a tradition that we do for each and every podcast episode.

Sherron: And just so you know, I don't know the question until I am here in the hot seat.

Anthony: Right.

Amber Alpizar: Oh.

Sherron: I'm right here with you.

Amber Alpizar: All right. Bring it on.

Sherron: So we're all in the hot seat together.

Craig Wiggers: Yes.

Anthony: But it's a pretty good question, I think.

Sherron: Of course it is.

Anthony: It's a interesting question that I think will benefit everybody. So we try to ask questions that will get people to think, who are listening to this episode. So the question for today is what is your best piece of advice for those looking to get started on diversity and initiatives in their office?

Craig Wiggers: I would tell you to get out of the office, to get out across campus and to meet those that are currently involved in different initiatives, to really understand some of the complexities of the large space that we work in. And if you have a clear picture of the different work that's happening, it will facilitate your ability to make those connections once you're back in your office and move things forward.

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- Anthony: That's a great answer.
- Sherron: That is a great piece of advice. I'd like to piggy back on that if possible. In addition to getting out of the office and see what's happening around you, I would say inquire about the history of what's already happened within your office, within your space and your department or even division if it comes to that, depending on the level of change that you want to see happen in the area of diversity and inclusion. I would say definitely look back in order to make steps forward. So that would be my advice.
- Amber Alpizar: I would also say I would think about where you may have allies or other people within your own office who has interest in this and the two of you or three of you or hopefully a collective of you are both reaching out across campus to understand what's happening and bringing some of those ideas back to your home department, office, division, college as well.
- Anthony: For me, I think the best piece of advice I can give is the buy in. I think the buy in is so important and so I think what oftentimes happens with diversity and inclusion in different offices is that there's one person solely designated to focus on diversity and inclusion, but diversity and inclusion in an office or in a team really requires the buy in from everybody on that team, because I think what often ends up happening is that that one person gets tasked with solely diversity and inclusion, but then they're also trying to get the buy in while also doing the work and those are two different jobs.
- Sherron: Right.
- Anthony: I think the buy in from the team and from a unit or an office needs to already be established before giving somebody the task to really focus on diversity and inclusion. And I think if everyone has that buy in already, then it makes the job and it makes the work of starting diversity inclusion so much more effective and easier for it to really come into fruition.
- Sherron: So with the four answers that we just shared here, I think the entire listening population is now ready to go out and do diversity inclusion work.
- Anthony: I think so too.
- Sherron: I think that's great advice.
- Craig Wiggers: It's team effort.
- Sherron: Team effort.
- Craig Wiggers: Yeah.

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Sherron: That's right. Yes.

Amber Alpizar: I would add one other thought too that I think it's important to understand what the value proposition or the return on investment is. So in my experience in D and I work at Cornell and prior to Cornell, we thought about who are the customers or populations, what are we, what's our mission, who are we serving? And oftentimes, we look at we're serving a population that is increasingly more diverse, and so we need to emulate that internally as an organization too.

Amber Alpizar: I would encourage people to think about what is it that's unique to the work that you do? What's the mission overall at Cornell? And then how do we start to put those pieces together and understand what the investment or value proposition is for the space? It's not a nice to have. It's an imperative.

Sherron: Right.

Craig Wiggers: Yeah.

Anthony: Well, thank you all for sharing.

Sherron: That was a great question. That was a great question and it sparks good conversation then. That's exactly what we try to do here on the podcast. It's just about having conversation and getting some things started.

Sherron: Okay. So with that said, here is the first question, which is really, it's easy, and I'm going to throw it out to Amber and Craig. What pronouns do you use?

Amber Alpizar: I had a feeling you were going to ask this question because I've been listening in on some of the other podcasts and so I will put myself out there on a limb a little bit uncomfortable to say, but I present as she and as female in the world, but I've also been for a number of years working on really integrating my internal sense of my masculine and feminine energies, so internally I don't really identify with a gender, but I present as female to the external world.

Anthony: Thank you for sharing that.

Sherron: Thank you for sharing that.

Anthony: Yeah.

Sherron: That was great.

Craig Wiggers: And mine are he, his, him.

Sherron: All right.

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- Anthony: Great.
- Sherron: Well, thank you both. So veterans, let's find out more of what's going on, shall we Anthony?
- Anthony: I say we do it.
- Sherron: In your opinion, what are some of the unique benefits that a veteran would bring to a workplace, whether it's Cornell or any workplace. Maybe one or two things that are specific that a veteran would bring to an organization and either one of you can start.
- Craig Wiggers: Yeah. I'd say the experiences of working in teams to achieve a specific goal is critically important. And regardless of the technicality of a job or a requirement within a staff position description, those intangibles of teamwork and the right attitude, enthusiasm, bringing all that to the workplace really can have a positive influence on those around you.
- Sherron: Thank you. And I see Amber is shaking her head yes.
- Amber Alpizar: Yeah. I would absolutely add onto that leadership, communication, problem solving. When I think about what veterans have is unique to bring to a workplace, you have to look past what are the specific technical skills or what was the job that they did in the military and think about the exposure that they've had to working in teams, particularly under really stressful environments, working with people from all walks of life. So exposure to diversity and the need to create your own inclusive team, and as I mentioned, the leadership and communication are really things that don't always pop at you on a resume but are so valuable to bring into an organization.
- Sherron: So what doesn't pop on a resume? I just want to expand on that because I do feel like when Anthony and I spoke two weeks ago, we talked about the fact that there are skills that you are being trained in as an active military person. Can you just share one or two skills that may not be easily transferable onto a resume, but you know that they are value that you're bringing to an organization?
- Craig Wiggers: Sure. Amphibious landings. That's a difficult thing to translate into an academic environment, but what it requires is the timing, the coordination. The landing is something that takes place with thousands of people involved and being a part of that larger evolution and bringing your expertise to the accomplishment of that goal, it's intangible in some respects, but it's also relatable if you're able to talk about that large group collaboration, if you're able to talk about what you have to accomplish in a challenging environment.
- Craig Wiggers: So it is difficult to translate your service to a civilian resume, but it's not impossible, for sure.

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- Sherron: No. It's not impossible. And we don't want it to be. This is why we're having these conversations so that other employers who may be listening to this podcast can say, you know what? I can find correlations between your experiences and positions that we have available. So yes, I like the more obscure amphibious landings that are out there and I love seeing connections in ways to make that translate into a position here or anywhere else.
- Amber Alpizar: I think that the military in general can be very process oriented and so those skills can translate into so many different jobs and careers, but there's also flexibility as well. So not ... there's process oriented, but you also have to be able to maneuver quickly, depending on what happens in a situation. So you both have to be flexible and grounded at the same time.
- Amber Alpizar: What's coming to me now, I'm like laughing to myself because it's been so many years since I was in the military, but I still remember even through basic training, the acronym leadership. Loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. And all of the ways that that, bringing that as part of your identity into an environment is just incredible.
- Craig Wiggers: And if I can piggyback on that.
- Amber Alpizar: It doesn't go away. Sorry. Yeah.
- Craig Wiggers: On something Amber just said too with regard to that flexibility piece, because I think a lot of folks would expect that there's not a lot of flexibility within the military environment, but we operate under this thing called commander's intent. And commander's intent is basically, ultimately, where do you want to be at the end of an operation. And sometimes that requires subordinate leaders to work within still a larger parameter, but it gives them that flexibility. If they understand I've got to get from point A to point B and do it in a certain way, there's a lot of ways you can take that route.
- Craig Wiggers: And so it's kind of like, I'm going to tell you to make some eggs. I'm not going to tell you how to cook them.
- Sherron: Right. Right.
- Anthony: Yeah.
- Sherron: As long as the finished product is still something that everybody can benefit from.
- Craig Wiggers: Correct.
- Sherron: Awesome.

- Anthony: Yeah. So I think for me, one of the things I think about a lot with veterans is that there's so much kind of misconceptions and stereotypes around veterans and kind of especially in their transition back to civilian life. And I think a lot of it tends to be more so kind of the negative piece, right? That there's a lot involved in that transition, but it's not always negative. Right. And so I think, what are some of the stereotypes, misconceptions that maybe you've heard in previous experiences about veterans transitioning into the workplace and what would you kind of say to combat some of those stereotypes for people who are listening?
- Craig Wiggers: So I would say from my perspective, the community piece is such an important factor in bringing service men and women back into the fold, if you will. But it's also, you mentioned regarding the stereotypes, it's a two way street. There are stereotypes from the military side too about civilians that are not positive.
- Anthony: Yeah.
- Craig Wiggers: And you know, I remember prior to coming to Cornell to teach ROTC, I had spoken with some colleagues and they said, "Oh, you're going to that really liberal place." And I said, "Well, you know, whatever Cornell is, that's where I'm headed." And the reality is so different. I mean, this is a welcoming environment. And if I would wear my uniform over to say Trillium to get some lunch, rarely would a student or a staff member or faculty member not just say, "Hey, thanks for your service. Thanks for what you did." I even had somebody buy me lunch one time just to acknowledge what we did.
- Craig Wiggers: And you know, whether it's on campus or down in Ithaca, we live in a really remarkable community that I think embraces these differences. And so, it's unfortunate that it is that two way street sometimes, but you know, folks have to keep their eyes and their ears open and treat others with respect and move things along.
- Amber Alpizar: I think that it's important for anyone, I'm trying to think about this through the lens of a veteran, but it also translates to everyone. When you're coming into a new community or a work environment, it's really important that you have a friend or you find a place where you have your sense of belonging. So being able to integrate into the community, being courageous enough to open your mind to say I'm going to show up and this is who I am and this is a part of my experience, maybe not my entire identity. But to put yourself out there and then to find community to help you along the way.
- Sherron: That's exactly what we are doing with the Belonging at Cornell. It is about allowing people to be who they are, be their full selves, as they come into the organization. Whether you are approaching Cornell from a student, staff or faculty avenue, we want you to feel like you belong here.

- Sherron: So that is a wonderful way to just kind of drive home some of the ideas that have already been started and are in motion. And yes, belonging is a huge part of who we are and how we find community is by first trying to figure out where do I belong, where am I where this person, this place has left space for me and welcomed me. So that's a big deal and we do work hard at Cornell to make sure that happens.
- Craig Wiggers: Well, and from the veteran's side, you're seeing it in action at the top levels of leadership at the university, whether it's Provost Kotlikoff and his efforts to increase undergraduate recruitment of veterans, the expansion of the yellow ribbon program and looking at ways that the GI bill can be positively used here on campus. So and it's sincerely appreciated by the veteran community. You know, when we talk about it within the VCNG and you look at some of the efforts that are happening around that undergraduate recruitment, it's exciting to see, because these young men and women are going to be bringing a lot to the table in the classroom to expand the educational experience.
- Amber Alpizar: And many of student veterans also bring, we were talking earlier about that leadership element and many of them are also first generation college students or maybe of color as well. So there's just, there's so much richness that we can tap into as we think about how do we continue to transform our environment that we already have so much in play and in motion in terms of equity and inclusion and diversity work at Cornell to be proud of. But this is a group that we can really tap into to take it to the next level.
- Anthony: I kind of want to transition a little bit more broadly outside of working with veterans and identifying as a veteran, but we started the question with how do you get people involved in diversity and inclusion initiatives. Again, kind of get this conversation started.
- Anthony: I think both of you are really great examples of how you kind of expanded into other diversity inclusion initiatives here at Cornell. So if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about kind of what are some of the things you've done, not necessarily just in your role, but maybe in your office or maybe across the campus and talk a little bit about some of the involvements that you've done to kind of expand on some of those initiatives.
- Amber Alpizar: So I'm super proud, I've only been here for two years, but really proud to work with the Division of Alumni Affairs and Development and the leadership team and team at all levels who've really been taking an active role in our workplace climate. And while inclusion is really at the foundation of that work, we define it more broadly as our workplace climate. So we're focusing on employee engagement, collaboration, training and development, focusing our values mission, and then building behaviors, behavioral expectations around our values and mission, launching division-wide programming in the areas of unconscious bias. We've been moving forward with a campaign against sexual harassment as well.

Amber Alpizar: So with our values and mission, we engaged our entire community to come up with our values and mission, which is sure, service, unity, respect, excellence, and then continuing to understand what that means at a behavioral level, how to give feedback to each other, having leaders in place and employees that emulate those behaviors, focusing on unconscious bias training for everyone in the division, and then expanding that to take on a campaign that we call Sure Together around sexual harassment.

Amber Alpizar: And so in our industry overall, we have a significant population of women that are going and having conversations with other people engaging in philanthropic or volunteer engagements outside of the Cornell community so it's a little bit tricky too. So we've really been trying to focus on who are we as an organization, how do we get grounded in our values and an environment that's inclusive and so that we can continue to bring that out into the world as we interface with alumni and key stakeholders with the university overall.

Amber Alpizar: One thing that I'm really proud of is our leadership team's response to an employee who was transitioning through gender fluidity and had really brought our leadership team and employees together to understand how to support a colleague through the choice to choose which restroom felt most comfortable and identified with the gender in the moment and partnering with our university colleagues from your office, our leadership, our employees, bringing some workshops around transgender issues in the workplace.

Amber Alpizar: That experience was so rich on many levels and just showed how the work that we'd been doing and some of the programs that I talked about came to life truly to support a colleague. And it may have just been one person, but I think that that's also created a sense of safety and a ripple effect across campus that we can continue to take on this work at a deeper level to support everyone's sense of belonging.

Sherron: Exactly. And you did say it was just one person, but that one person may be very far reaching and may know other people who are having similar issues that need to be addressed in their workplace, whether they're at Cornell or elsewhere, that one person, that impact may spread out exponentially across Cornell or Ithaca or Tompkins County and that's exactly what we want to offer. We want people to know that, listen, Cornell thought about me, we have a guide where we offer options of ways to have conversations, ways to share information, a timeline, a very rough draft of an email if the person transitioning chooses that route.

Sherron: So these are the things that exist already and we are so thankful that Cornell University thought of these things and add to that sense of belonging.

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Amber Alpizar: And we're thankful to leverage some of these tools. I'll speak for that personally and with some other members of leadership that have tapped into the resources and the way that we can work with your team as well.

Anthony: And all of that's happened within the two years you've been here?

Amber Alpizar: And there's more to come.

Anthony: Yeah.

Amber Alpizar: I mean, it's continuing to evolve. Our division will be engaging in the intergroup dialogue project. Having everyone go through that next year as well. Knowing that that experience for first year students is important, when you think about our workforce, that's then working with students and alumni to also understand what that experience was like and connect with them in that way.

Anthony: Yeah. Well, I mean, I asked to confirm because that's a lot. That is a lot that you've done in the past two years. I totally commend you for that and I think that it speaks to just the amount of options and the limitless kind of opportunities that can happen for people who are really trying to have these conversations in their units, that they can come to our office, they can come to any number of different resources. Like you mentioned, the intergroup dialogue project, so there's so many different resources here that people can really take advantage of.

Amber Alpizar: And this isn't, and this was a big we. This isn't Amber and my two years here. Right.

Anthony: Oh, of course. Yeah.

Amber Alpizar: I've been a part of this. I see myself as a connector and a networker and a bridge builder, but the interest has been there from employees, people who are volunteering to continue to engage in this space and leadership setting the tone and importance in this work. Absolutely. So I'm just so proud to be a part of it.

Craig Wiggers: So within physics, this is a field of study that has traditionally had low representation from women and from underrepresented minorities and that's not just a Cornell thing. That is nationwide. And for the past two and a half years, we've been working diligently to try to identify opportunities to create educational experiences for undergraduates who have just graduated and want to take that next step into a PhD program, but either through resources or through some of the academic rigor of their undergraduate experience, they just don't have the CV to be accepted into a graduate program across the country.

Craig Wiggers: So we've been looking at the Creating a Bridge program that would help these students get the opportunities in a laboratory experience as

research assistants, TAing in the classroom, taking senior level undergraduate physics courses and then first year graduate level courses to build up that resume so that the goal being not that they become a graduate student at Cornell, but they become a graduate student anywhere else around the country.

Craig Wiggers: And building that pipeline of talented young folks to make that next step and the collaborations that we've looked at across campus, whether it's Wadi, whether it's through the DPE over an engineering and the fantastic programs that Mark Lewis and their team are doing over there and reaching out to astronomy, chemistry, math, computer information sciences.

Craig Wiggers: There are so many different fields where this issue of women representation and underrepresented minorities is similar. And so we're trying to build a network to then take to both the deans of the respective colleges, but also up to the provost office to find that opportunity for resources that would be necessary to ensure once we have a cohort of students at Cornell, a, do they feel that they have a community, b, are we ensuring that they have the classroom time, the research and faculty access that they need to then move forward.

Craig Wiggers: So we're, we've been working on this for about two, two and a half years and it is a complicated problem to solve, but we're still pushing forward and I think that we will see some success one way or the other and I feel that we've achieved success in many respects just from having this important discussion across campus. But once we, you know, if we actually have students that come to Cornell and are officially part of a bridge program, great. But we still have some more work to do and some more talking to do with our partners on campus.

Sherron: I think it's wonderful how both of you use the word bridge because it is so symbolic of what we have here. Right. Craig, you mentioned the undergraduate student experience, whether it's an underrepresented minority or a woman or something like that in the physics department and just helping that person to move forward. And what I have realized is that if the undergraduate experience is fulfilling and rewarding and these people find community here at Cornell, they will find themselves in Amber's realm of Alumni Affairs and Development.

Craig Wiggers: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

Sherron: And so it's almost like continuing the community and growing the circle of satisfaction and belonging with Cornell.

Craig Wiggers: And who knows, one day one of those bridge program graduates comes back here as a faculty member.

Sherron: There you have it.

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- Craig Wiggers: And you know, it's a long view. There's no quick answer. And you know, I think there has to be that longterm commitment to solving the problems.
- Sherron: And I don't think that with a quick answer is something we should even try for.
- Craig Wiggers: Right. Right. Absolutely.
- Sherron: Because everyone brings their individual experiences to the university. And so if the answer is too quick, then it's really not addressing everyone's questions.
- Craig Wiggers: Right. Right.
- Sherron: You want it to be a process and you want, there's value in investing your time in something, because then you find that it means more to you after you go through it and just you have more ownership of something that you've invested a lot of time into.
- Sherron: And I think that's wonderful because with the undergraduate students moving on and feeling like they are supported and there are resources that are available to them as they move through their Cornell experience, by the time they become PhD candidates and so on and so forth, they're already establishing themselves as possible alumni for the future to stay connected with the university and that's exactly what, what we would hope.
- Craig Wiggers: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Sherron: And they would also put the word out to address that sense of belonging, that Cornell is a good place and they did feel that they belonged here as a student and even after they've left.
- Amber Alpizar: And we're thinking about the long view on this too. So we have years and years and decades of alumni who had a very different experience here. There were people here celebrating their 70th reunion this year and what a different experience they may have had as a student then what the Cornell looks like today as well. So this is a really beautiful place where we have a lot of work to do, but where we can connect people from different generations of their experience at Cornell under the guise of inclusion as well. It requires us to dig deep and look at our values and question some of our stereotypes that we may have made. But I'm really inspired by the ways that we're trying to actively cultivate opportunities for people to interact across the generations of alumni at Cornell.
- Anthony: And I just loved the connection in both of your experiences with initiatives and being a part of larger institutional initiatives and smaller ones around that inclusion takes time. Right? And that it doesn't happen overnight. And when we're talking about the return on investment, it's you are putting in

the work now and it's going to take time for that longterm investment of what fostering an inclusive workplace can really be, not just for veterans or for particular populations, but for everyone, regardless of the identity. Right? And so I really love that that connection and in both of your stories and kind of sharing what you're involved with is that inclusion takes time and diversity benefits everyone in the long run. So if you take the time, you take the effort, you engage a leadership that is involved in some of these initiatives and really propose it as benefiting everyone, then you're going to see, hopefully right, some outcomes and some successful initiatives that will lead to a more diverse and inclusive environment.

Anthony: So I think now is a good time to kind of ask for people, staff, especially managers, things like that who maybe don't have veterans in their organization or maybe think they don't, but they may not be aware of it. What advice do you have for them in terms of working with other veterans?

Craig Wiggers: I'd say one, don't be surprised. There are many of us across campus. Some that choose to let others know that they're veteran. But there's also a lot of veterans that are very proud of their experience and want to share their story of what they did in the service, whether it was just one tour or making it a full career, but regardless of that, those of us that are still in the community here at Cornell have made a choice to serve in a different capacity now and so we're, bringing those experiences and sometimes baggage, like all of us have. We're bringing those experiences to the work that we do here at Cornell.

Amber Alpizar: I would also add check your unconscious bias as well when someone tells you that they're a veteran. I know personally when I share that, oftentimes I will get, "What? You were in the military?"

Craig Wiggers: Yeah.

Amber Alpizar: Just by the way I present in the world or something too, and I always wonder, well, Hmm, what's underneath that? Or why would somebody ask me that? Just yesterday I was engaging with somebody who's an attorney, a local attorney from my daughter's softball team, and she went to Cornell Law School and realized that we both grew up in a small town, a farm, and she was also a veteran and went through basic training in the army as well.

Amber Alpizar: And so I had to check my own unconscious bias there too to think, Whoa, what was the story I was telling about myself about this person who went to Cornell Law School, that's an attorney in the world that had this experience as well. So you know, just check your assumptions too.

Anthony: I love that. I love that.

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- Sherron: That's a good piece of advice no matter where you are in the Cornell community or even outside of Cornell community, is to always be mindful of our own biases, our own unconscious bias.
- Anthony: That's definitely a theme in I would say probably all of our episodes that we've done thus far, even with guest speakers, is that whether they name it as unconscious bias or not, but there's always the element of bias in any capacity always limits your ability to really foster an inclusive workplace. Whether you're a person who works here at Cornell, whether you're a manager. So it's really everybody's role and responsibility to really check our unconscious bias and making sure that we don't impose our perceptions of what we think of people when we hear certain identities on to those people because we don't know what their story is. We don't know what experiences that they're bringing into our environment. And then all of a sudden when you find those common ground, like in your experience and when you find that common ground, Oh, wait a minute, there's actually more to you than just being a veteran. There's more than you than just being LGBTQ and so on and so forth. So yeah, that's definitely a reoccurring theme.
- Amber Alpizar: I'm just jumping one other thing that's kind of going back to that question too, but this translates when we have other workshops in the diversity inclusion space to get to know the whole person. Those that have gone through transgender issues in the workplace, you're like there's questions that you don't lead with when you ask someone when you find out. And as a veteran, you probably also don't want to lead with, Oh, where did you go? Did you go overseas? Where you at war?
- Amber Alpizar: That may be something, a part of a story that someone may or may not want to share. There may be, you know, everyone's story is unique and I think that that's just like sometimes that comes out as an initial question that might not, somebody might not feel safe enough to really want to go there with you.
- Craig Wiggers: Yeah.
- Amber Alpizar: So ease into the conversation with curiosity about learning about someone's experience as a veteran, but know that it's not just what you see on TV and somebody's ready to like talk about everything that happened to them.
- Sherron: So thank you Amber. That was a great piece of advice. I do have one more question I want to ask really quickly. How can people serve as better advocates or allies to veterans?
- Craig Wiggers: From my perspective, I think that the veteran community, like many communities, just wants to be able to become part of the larger group. And we've made this transition from going from military service to civilian work. And again, it's bringing that, those experiences to the setting here at Cornell and just the recognition that we're out there. We're all over

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campus, whether we're faculty, staff or students. You know, just like there are a lot of other folks, LGBT community. You know, we're just another group that wants to be part of the collective.

Amber Alpizar: Yeah. Stick with your open ended questions, like with curiosity, get to know somebody as a whole person regardless if they identify with a particular affinity group.

Sherron: So thank you Craig and Amber for sharing your information with us, sharing your experiences as veterans. I know that our listening audience have gotten a lot of information from you both. We appreciate you spending some time with us to have this conversation.

Anthony: I also just want to say thank you as well. I learned a lot from this conversation. So I really, you know, I'm sitting with it, absorbing it, processing it, and for me, diversity and inclusion work, it's always a learning process. It's about the process, not the end goal. Right? And so for me, just the amount of information I've learned from both of you today, it's really expanded my horizon a lot so thank you both.

Amber Alpizar: I could say thanks for this experience and this is a huge stretch of my comfort zone, the invitation to be here and checking myself to say, Oh gosh, do I really want to do this? Do I really want to share my story? Who's going to hear this? But as I sit here and we wrap up this really great conversation, I want to send an invitation to anyone listening to put yourself out there and share your story, whatever it is, whether you're a veteran, whether you identify with an affinity group. Just bring yourself, take that courage to share your story and be yourself.

Craig Wiggers: Absolutely.

Amber Alpizar: And hopefully that will inspire others around you to do the same. Like that's what we're talking about when we are creating an inclusive environment, is a space where we can bring ourselves.

Craig Wiggers: Yeah. Thanks for having us. This has been a cool experience.

Sherron: So thank you all for listening to today's episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. If you liked this episode, please leave us a comment and like us on SoundCloud to let people know about the podcast.

Sherron: Also, if you or a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us at ie-academyatcornell.edu. My name is Sherron Brown.

Anthony: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

Episode 8: More of What's Going On? Veterans at Work
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Sherron: And thank you to Bert Odom-Reed, our sound engineer from the Cornell Broadcast Studio, for making us sound wonderful each and every episode. Thanks you Bert.

Craig Wiggers: Thanks a lot Bert.

Amber Alpizar: Thank you Bert.

Anthony: Thank you Bert.