

# 61 The big mistakes when building a culture of belonging wit...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

organizations, belonging, person, people, equity inclusion, leaders, meeting, diversity, agree, talk, culture, uniqueness, company, values, inclusion, coach, structures, team, create, unconscious bias training

## SPEAKERS

LaTonya Wilkins, Murielle Machiels



Murielle Machiels 00:00

It's been a while now that I wanted to talk about belonging, inclusion or diversity on this podcast. So when latonia Wilkins contacted me, I was really grateful. She's an expert in building a culture of belonging, but also in coaching what she calls the only ones. I have often been the only woman in a management team or in a board of directors. And it wasn't always easy. I really had to learn to navigate that without losing my uniqueness. So in this episode, we'll talk about the mistakes company make when starting a culture of belonging, what you can do instead, but also how you can handle a situation where you feel that your uniqueness is not being accepted. I'm Murielle. co mom, an educator, I used to work really hard and sacrifice the important things to me until I lost my motivation. Fast forwards passed many failed attempts and lessons learned. And I found a way to reach great results while working less. Today, I'm obsessed with helping other leaders build meaningful lives. So each week, I'll be sharing inspiration to change your life and organization. This is rebel leader with a hearts digitalization was already fundamentally transforming organizations, teams and their leaders. But the pandemic accelerated this transformation and complexified things working from home the lack of boundaries, the disconnection the increased workload, the increased time spent in virtual meetings, the anxiety of going back to the office, but also more time spent with family less traffic jams, more exercising. And so a lot of us are rearranging our priorities. Because we've been in

touch with our mortality and fragility. teams have been impacted heavily as well. And the hybrid model will probably be the new way of working. So leaders need to adapt to this new reality to get the best out of people and from their teams. So we are organizing a free two part webinar series on how COVID is impacting the people and leaders that is part one, and how it is impacting the teams part two. So if you want to participate, just go to key leader.com slash events, or to the show notes of this episode. And if you think you can go back to normal think again, because the pandemic is accelerating the birthing shift of our society. And you choose if you want to be part of the bright future, or hold on to the crumbling past. So go to key leader.com slash events to subscribe to our webinar. Now back to our episode. Hi, latonia. Nice to meet you. Hello, Mary. Oh, nice to meet you, too. Yeah, from all over all across the world. And she can when I'm now in under luzia. So can you a little bit describe who you are?



LaTonya Wilkins 03:26

Yeah, so I'll keep this brief and short, because I know we're going to get into an interview. So I'm an executive coach, team coach, how I mainly help organizations create cultures of belonging, also coach, the only ones that work and I'm the author of the upcoming book leading below the surface, how to build real and psychologically safe relationships with people who are different from you.



Murielle Machiels 03:46

Yeah, great. And when you see when you say I coach people that are the only ones What do you mean by this?



LaTonya Wilkins 03:54

Yeah, so a lot of organizations are starting to really focus on diversity in within their executive ranks, especially in their leadership ranks, and then the pipelines. So a lot of times there, there might be one black person that's on the leadership team, or one woman, or one person that's part of LGBTQ community. And so I I coach them to be able to navigate at work more effectively. And I also coach the companies to to better engage with them and and also be more inclusive.



Murielle Machiels 04:27

Yeah, nice. And where do you start? How can you build an inclusive or a culture of belonging like you say, because you say you don't like the word inclusion?



LaTonya Wilkins 04:38

So it's, I hate the AI. So diversity, equity inclusion is, is usually what people how people refer to the work I do. The reason why I hate it is because I spent a lot of time in large organizations that were doing quote unquote diversity, equity inclusion, or were voted top companies for diversity, equity inclusion, and when you actually got an attorney if that wasn't true, especially for people like me, who were the only ones at work? And so how do you how do you get to inclusion? Well, I'll tell you some of the things not to do to start. Don't start with training, I get many calls, where people want to do training, I think where you have to start is, with a clear, clear observation insights into your organization, basically, where you're at now, and I reckon with that. I also think that second place that you should not start is, you should not start with quotas, and you should not start with, you know, making statements that are not backed up. So those are, like the three areas where people usually start to really get inclusive, like I said, you will, it really starts with, you know, getting below the surface, getting below the culture surface in your organization, really accessing, again, where you are right now, like how how, how inclusive, are you right now? And that, you know, within your day to day interactions, what that looks like?



Murielle Machiels 06:07

Yeah, I agree. Because I, I often see that with diversity, or inclusion, or even sustainability or other things. Some leaders see that as a check the box or a KPI and more like a marketing tool, or we have to have this so let's do and they work only superficially on like symptoms, but they don't go deeper into like you say, the culture and what is really happening? And how, how can you really have that?



LaTonya Wilkins 06:41

Right? Yeah, and it is always, it is usually a check the box. And there's a large company I'm working with, and I know I'm talking kind of an esoteric language right now. So let's, let's boil this down a bit. One of the really effective strategies to really get to get below the surface with your company and understand where you're at right now, are listening sessions. listening sessions are amazing. A lot of times, the big thing that you want to be careful of is that you want to do it, right, you want to do them, right, you probably want to bring in an outside professional, to help you facilitate them. So people feel honest. You also want an executive to come in and just listen, not do anything else, not write anything down, just be present, and listen. But that's what I mean about where to start just getting below that surface, and really understanding where your organization's at and that don't fight it. Just listen, and kind of start there.



Murielle Machiels 07:35

Yeah, it's a little bit the same as in coaching, when you really want transformation, it starts with observing yourself. Absolutely. If you're coaching someone else, it's also starts with listening, that's how you get the real transformation.



LaTonya Wilkins 07:50

Yeah, and it's so hard for people to do that. And it's, I think, especially now, when, you know, we're all working remotely, we're all connected all the time. I mean, you know, there's, there's studies that say, just having your phone on your desk makes you not be able to listen, just having it on the desk. And so it's, it's really difficult to to listen, and, you know, I talked about two different types of listening, I mean person to person listening, which is, you know, US lets me listen to you playing back what I hear, and then person to belonging, listening. And that's observing, you know, how well that person fits into the environment. And then, and then responding to that. And I think, balancing the two of those, I mean, the ladder, I rarely see leaders do that were looking at the person and seeing do they fit in? Do they fit into the team meeting? Are they talking? Are they talking at an event? Like all those types of things?



Murielle Machiels 08:47

Yeah, yeah. Because I've been in situations like that, where I was the only woman in a management team or the only woman in a board. And sometimes the only young woman in a board with a completely different mindset. And yeah, how it wasn't easy sometimes, especially when you're the only one like you say, Yeah, because you just feel like people are not talking the same language. And when you say something, you just see that it's not landing. It's not your point is not coming across because they they see things differently, especially when I was hired in boards for CES where you had, like more older white male, and they wanted somebody for digitalization with another mindset and preferably a woman. And we weren't talking the same language. So how do you deal with that? As a as an individual?



LaTonya Wilkins 09:51

Yeah, you know, it's one of the things that I talk about in my book is I talk about the notion of a surface leader and speaking what the world One of the things surface leaders do, and these are leaders that are vulnerable or empathetic, they're just focused on stick to business. One of the things they do is they say speak my language, speak my language. And there's like this standard of like, what the, the leadership's but leadership says, or

what they look like. And, and so in order to do that, I think, again, it's it's like, you asked the question around, you know, how do we get to real inclusion? And again, it's, you know, that's, that's co creating the path forward together. It's, it's, you know, when you're in those board meetings, it's, it's someone being able to, to get to that level with you, where they're asking you, they're kind of telling you where they want to go, but they say, hey, this isn't the language we have to use, you know, what language would you like to use? And again, that goes back to, to the to the empathetic listening, that goes back to just being vulnerable and being open again, being inclusive. Hmm,



Murielle Machiels 11:01

yeah, yeah. And what I found important as well is because I saw a lot of women change when they became a leader or change to become part of the management team. And some of them became almost men and lost all their feminine, feminine need to you know, I'm not saying it's right, but and I remember I felt for myself, I'm just going to stay myself, I'd not willing to change to be part of that. And I know, that's what I appreciated, but it was also because I had the confidence. So you really need to work on your confidence to be yourself to be accepted. I have the feeling.



LaTonya Wilkins 11:49

Yeah, you know, it's really interesting that you talk about that. So one of the things that that I talked about in my book is self authorship. And it's keygens. I'm sure you've heard of Keegan's theory of the vault adult development. And he talks about self authorship. And basically, self authorship is what you said, it's like, you know, instead of following the standard that's already put out there for, for us, we kind of create our own standards, we kind of pave our own path forward, takes me back to the days when I was doing succession planning and large organizations, and there's one or two women and they the way that their path forward was different from men, even though there were only one or two of them, and they kind of self authored it themselves. And, you know, what's really interesting is only 35% of the population, it's estimated, I was reading a study, and this is also my book is capable of doing that self authorship on a level that you've been able to do it. It's really hard to do. And I think we think that people can do that. But that's a large burden. And not everybody is at that developmental level. So it's like what we said, I mean, we really, we have to change the standard, right? It's not, you know, inclusion is not about, you know, hey, you're here, we have a woman. So now we need to include you in our pilot? No, it's like you have to co create the path forward and really question those standards entirely that you have there. Because not everyone can do what you did. You know, I also went through a period of self authorship, but that's very took years. And it's very hard to do. And so there's really no way for unless we're co creating, and then

everybody really has to be involved in that.



Murielle Machiels 13:29

Yeah, I agree. But I wasn't able to do it all the time. And I feel like it was like, I could push like, one level further. And then once we were there, I could go one other level further, you know, it was not like doing like five steps, because then the resistance would have been too big. And, and I needed to feel safe, confident and safe. Of course to be able to do that and not afraid of being Yeah, I worked a lot of not on, I worked a lot on not being afraid to getting fired because I was different. Or just if I'm getting fired, I'm getting fired. I know I will find another job. So I think you have to work on your fears as well.



LaTonya Wilkins 14:19

Yeah, yeah. And it's it's a That's right. And it sounds like in a lot of those organizations, you you also weren't experiencing psychological safety, you know, like where you could talk about something and not be not be feared, not fear of losing your job for speaking up, you know, and it's, again, it's, it's like, yeah, we have to work on our fears that I think organizations like, like when we talk about inclusion and diversity, inclusion and belonging, organizations have to do their part and I get there, they're usually focusing on the wrong things and focusing on the things that we're talking about, you know, that psychological safety, so so you can To speak up and say, Hey, this does not work for me, this does not work for people like me, and not be and be listened to. And like I said, the other prongs are empathy. And the third prong is real leadership. And so really thinking about that as if you really, truly want this in your organization.



Murielle Machiels 15:19

Yeah. And why should organizations invest time in building a culture of belonging?



LaTonya Wilkins 15:27

Yeah, you know, it's funny, because I was, I was on LinkedIn the other day, and I saw a study that said, it actually challenged all of our, all of our metrics, or the benefits, the quote unquote, benefits of diversity, equity inclusion. So you know, there's been a millions of studies out there, I think McKinsey has probably been the front runner of it, where they really say, Hey, you know, you want to you want diversity, equity inclusion, because it's, it's, it's good for your bottom line, right. And now that's being challenged. Because I mean, there's been research out there that says also that, yeah, diversity is great, but it takes

time to really see the benefits because a team, it's harder for the team to work together, because they're different. So it's going to take a little bit, it's going to take a little bit more time and effort. So So why should we do this? That's, that's the magic question. Why should we Why do we, why do we have a business? You know, I mean, what, what our business values? Like, why do we Why do we hire people? It's all the same. It's like, you know, why wouldn't you do it? Right? It's, that's the question I asked. I'm so sick of this whole thing of like, Oh, we have to make more money. If we're gonna do this and show me the money. Show me that business case. Show me that PowerPoint that that shows the ROI. Forget that, scratch it, let's stop it. I mean, it's just like anything else? Like, why are you starting a business? If you're starting a business, because you want to change the world, like, you know, if you think about like, like a big business that, that maybe wants to wants to improve collaboration across the world? So if you want to do that, then why wouldn't you care about your people, right? any organization that's bringing people in, it's you have to do this. So I'm just so sick of me, I'm not even, I'm not even going there anymore. And when people say, Why should I do this? What is the business case? I walk away from those clients? Because I'm like, if you don't know by now, and if you are, if you have a business, and you have people in that business, that's just like saying, why would I be nice to my spouse? You know, like, why would I respect my spouse? Right?



Murielle Machiels 17:32

What's the bottom line? Right? No, I completely agree with you and and get what I see fortunately, and I see this in Europe. And I hope it's also the case in in the United States. But I see more and more CEOs of large organizations, when I'm talking with them about what I want. They're using words like love well, being purpose values, much more than in the past. It was like, yeah, we need to grow people and make profit and grow our revenues. It's not that that's not important anymore, because of course, you need to make profit if you want to survive. But there is this consciousness now that we need something bigger, and we want to to matter and to be part of something bigger than just profits and profit will follow. I believe that profit follows purpose.



LaTonya Wilkins 18:38

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I, I, I, you're preaching to the choir here. I mean, I think I agree. I just, you know, it's, it's, but it's like some of these organizations. And I hear you, I think there are several organizations trying to focus more on, like, Heart Center type values, right. But, you know, my question is, you know, what, to what extent is their leadership team embodying these values, you know, it's like, it's easy to say it. And I work with a lot of CEOs. And it's, again, I think that they, they usually the want their leadership teams to kind of, you know, to basically make the culture what it is right to mindfully mold the

culture, but it's the CEOs, they'll have a hard time, like, they can say the words, but they don't. It's hard to embody what that really means. Like what, you know, heart centered leadership is or purposes and, and I i'm not saying that you can't do it, but that's just something to think about. It's like when you there's a lot of, you know, one of the things I got in my book is like, a lot of when I was job searching several years ago, there was this whole thing about cultures have fun, and I'm like, What does that mean? And then I interview at some of these companies, and there's like no one in the game room. And so you just got to be careful about, yeah, I love that we're talking about this. And but it's like really about embodying it and choosing to do it and moving forward with it. And it's, it's really hard for anyone to do that, especially leaders that again, they have not been, they've been not been socialized that way to run organizations in this in this in this manner.



Murielle Machiels 20:27

Yeah, exactly. And that's what I teach, because you have been educated for so long to, to do what is expected from you, and what is expected from you, from the teachers, your parents, and then when you start working your boss, and even when you're the CEO, your shareholders, we're always looking up and doing what is expected from us. And that's where I believe we have to free ourselves from that and truly look at what do I really care about? And how do I want to? Yeah, have my career and live my life also in line with those values? And that means making all the decisions in line with those values and not simply sticking those on the walls?



LaTonya Wilkins 21:18

Yeah, yeah, I love that making the decisions in terms of values. And, and, and I love everything you're saying. And it's like, it's an exciting time, and that people are like, when you see people talking about this, it's not just fluff anymore. It's like, I think there's more and more folks that are that are actually interested in reading about it. It's just how, how do we do it?



Murielle Machiels 21:37

Yeah. And so you talked about empathy. And what I also believe, is that when you are the only one, and I don't know, because I've been there as a woman, of course. But when you are the only one, I believe you also have to show empathy to the person who is having a bias and who is maybe not treating you as you should be treated, but maybe because he or she doesn't know better. So I don't know how I showed empathy, also an understanding,



and that's how I managed to shift the mindset of the other person, because I believe if you then get angry, and all your reactions are from a place of anger, then you're making it worse for yourself also.



**LaTonya Wilkins** 22:34

Yeah, yeah, I hear what you're saying. And I, this is something that I, when I work with folks who are the only ones at work, that we that we focus a lot a great deal of time on, you know, the two steps I do is like, number one, I first asked them, if they care enough about the company or the person to try to move forward. And I would say 50% of the time, they're like, no, this person, I know, I can't work with them. And the 50% of time, they're like, Oh, yeah, I love this company, I want to, and so if they're the half the last half, then what we do is, through alignment meetings that I do with, with my clients and their bosses, maybe it's more than one boss, that's when we kind of try to learn each other better, try to understand each other better. So, you know, if someone is is basically feeling like maybe a CEO moves too fast, and they're they're moving, they just have a bias for action. And then the client might be taking that as they don't care about their opinions. So we find out ways to, to be able to balance the behaviors that are depicted with with your actual, you know, deep down values in that situation, for example, the bias for action, instead of, you know, taking a step back, the CEO might take a step back and ask the my client, you know, what they think before they move forward. So that's the types of stuff that that we work on. And I definitely agree, I think it does make you more angry. And I think it's like finding out upfront if, if that person wants to do it, if they want to work there. And I think that's, that's a fundamental step that we skip a lot. And when I take organizations through that step, they get a little, they get a little iffy, because they're like, Well, you know, I'm paying you to kind of help me, let's help this person stay. And I'm like, Well, I can't control that. But what I can control is I can give you I can give you more information, I can give you more data around, you know, what you need to do and where this person stands.



**Murielle Machiels** 24:34

Yeah. And so maybe we can talk a little bit about exclusion or racism. And what I see now today is that, at least again, in Belgium is that racism is often very subtle. It's not as open as it might have been in the past. Sometimes it's very subtle and It makes it difficult to react them openly because it's it's. So I was wondering how do you deal with that when that happens during a meeting? Somebody says something, and and it's really sexist or racist comments?



LaTonya Wilkins 25:18

Yeah, you know, that's hard. It's, um, so a lot of organizations just they do unconscious bias training. And again, I think it's a, it's a very basic way to kind of at least be aware that this is going on understand it. Do I think organizations should do unconscious bias training? Yeah, do I think that's the only thing they should do? No. So I do think that the benefit of it. And I mean, there's, I can go on and on, there's been a meta analysis that shows that unconscious bias alone, training alone does not work. But the thing that unconscious bias training can do if the company does it right, is it can create a common language, right. And so when something is coming up, that I know you were talking about biases that we don't know about that are automatic. If you have a common language, you can talk about it. And you could talk about it in a psychologically safe way, if you can agree on what that common language is. So that's the first thing. The second thing is when you talk about racism, and and the big, the big way is, is structures and systems. That's the those are the ways to really overcome this, you know, some people are just going to be racist, and I can't, you know, I was in a board room once. And then someone said, one of the executives boardroom said, we can't cure racism, but we can cure it, you know, we can we can be more equitable at our company. I agree. You can't cure it. We can't cure all that on our own. So I think it's it's thinking about, you know, structures and systems in these meetings. And, again, like it what is really happening, get dip below the team surface, who's talking, what, how are the structure set up, like are the structures set up. So, you know, one person naturally gets more airtime. And so again, I think it's To recap, I think, first off, it's like having a common language. So you could talk about things when they come up. And then secondly, thinking about equity structures and systems. And if if this is happening in meetings, having some sort of evaluation of, you know, the structure of your meetings, how you're running them, and making sure that you know, if it's the same people talking, if you have a bunch of heavy voices, making sure that there's a moderator or something, you know, but that again, putting a structure in place. So it's hard to break. I can't be in the business, none of us can be in the business of curing every racist or curing every sexist, but we can put structures in place in organizations that help us navigate that.



Murielle Machiels 27:51

Yeah, I agree. Agree. So but do you have some tip, if if you don't have those structures, you don't have the the common language? How could you react when that is happening to you? And you feel bad about that during the meeting, and you might be completely shut down and don't participate anymore? How could you? What could you do in that moment?



LaTonya Wilkins 28:16

Yeah, so this has happened to me personally, and also to some of my clients. And so the first thing I would say is to, you know, check out in the meeting, if you have to, you know, I know, in my situation, I turned my video off someone, someone talked over me, I asked him not to talk over me, and he still talked over me. And so I was really upset about it. And so I turned, I turned my camera off. And I unapologetic, unapologetically turned my camera off. So in that moment, take care of yourself, because you want to make sure that you're okay. Then from there. Luckily, what happened is there was someone in that meeting that saw that I turned my camera off, they saw that this was happening. And they they actually stopped the meeting. And they said, Hey, did you see what happened, and he wanted to send me one to see what happened, what just happened? Let's talk about it. And that was like the first or second time that's ever happened, where someone on the team kind of did something about it. And then, and then we talked about it. And it was awkward, and it was gross. And I was lucky. And I had to, I didn't enter the conversation until the end. So that's one way as a team member, if that doesn't happen, what you can do is again, just kind of take yourself out, turn your camera off, be unapologetic Take care of yourself. And then in the next meeting, bring it up to the team, you know, because it's not just that person's responsibility. I mean, if you want to bring it up to the person you can first but you also want to bring it up with the team and say, Hey, you know, I, this is what happened. And as a team, I think we need to talk about how we deal with things like this when it happens. That's how we deal with This is how it made me feel. Yeah, this is how it made me feel. And this, how do we want to deal with this as a team? Yeah. And so it's, it's, it's bringing it up with the person for like, and the team. And if you, you know, a lot of people stop at the person, I wouldn't do it right away. Or if you don't feel comfortable with a person, you could go to the team. And that's fine, too. And I think before you start, you say, you know, hey, I want to tell you, again, do some empathy setting, I want to, I'm gonna say something very vulnerable. I want to tell people how I feel. And I'm, I'm hoping we could forge a path together for



Murielle Machiels 30:37

ya, yeah, no, I think it's a good strategy. And I like what you say, I would also first say, take care of yourself, because you need energy for that. And otherwise, you will maybe handle from a place of a negative emotion of anger, or whatever emotion and that might not be constructive. And I also like to say that the best way is not to bring the conversation on the same level. So if there is a bad behavior, I like to say, Okay, let's look at what is the need behind the behavior or the fear. And when you manage to bring the conversation on a deeper level, on a deeper level, it's more efficient than when you attack the other person or defend yourself. So I often say do not attack or defend. Just tell what you feel and what

your need is, for instance.



LaTonya Wilkins 31:38

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that's, that's something that I think we like number one, I agree. I think it's you first have to unapologetic, unapologetically, take care of yourself. It's turning your camera off. And then kind of navigating from there, you know, and feeling. It's so hard, because I think it's to like feelings are hurt. tempers are flared. You know, there's a lot of sensitivities. And so, you know, waiting for those sensitivities to die down if you can.



Murielle Machiels 32:07

Yeah. Great. Well, thank you. It was a nice conversation. And I love also the way you say that it's a culture of belonging, and not inclusion, or just belonging, and that everyone in the way they want to be can be part of a company and bring their own uniqueness, because that's what's making things rich. And also to solve complex problems or to be creative. It works better when you have people coming from different horizons than if you're all the same. That's also something that research has shown. Yeah,



LaTonya Wilkins 32:45

yeah, I think belonging is really where it's at. And it's like, you know, one, one person said to me the other day, I knew I didn't belong when I went to the website, and nobody looked like me. I mean, it's like, things like that. Like it, you know, when you belong, and it's, it's a more visceral feeling that you have right away in so much. It's so different from inclusion inclusion has gotten so watered down. And it's, um, that's again, I'm not saying it's not important, but it's pairing it with some of those other things that we talked about today.



Murielle Machiels 33:17

Yeah, exactly. And then that's for everything for the values, the level of consciousness of an organization, if you feel like, they're only talking about KPIs and performance and profits and revenues, then I know I wouldn't belong in that organization. Yeah. Okay. So where can people find you if they want to be coached or Yeah,



LaTonya Wilkins 33:42

yeah. So you could go to latonya Wilkins? comm la TO en YAWILK ins.com. We'll put



Murielle Machiels 33:52

the link in the description.



LaTonya Wilkins 33:54

Okay, great, great. And then I'm also on Instagram at latonya coaching. And I'm also on LinkedIn at latonya Wilkins. And lots of we have lots of tools and resources on our website that also can help you navigate your organizations, especially with building cultures of belonging.



Murielle Machiels 34:11

Great, well, thank you. It was really a nice conversation. Yeah. Maybe I'll come across to Chicago. I've never been to Chicago. Or let me know or to Spain.



LaTonya Wilkins 34:27

Yeah, I think Yeah, I'll try. I'll try and Spain when I can.



Murielle Machiels 34:33

The weather is better than Thank you, Mario. Pleasure to meet you. Thank you. When you want a culture of belonging, don't start with training. But start by observing what is happening in your organization. Then listen empathically to the people and start co creating this new culture together. And of course, create that safe environment where Everyone can express themselves in his own uniqueness. And when you feel that you're being singled out during a meeting, take care of yourself first, then later on, you can address the person. But it might be easier to talk with the team. Explain how it made you feel, and express your need. Because creating a culture of belonging is not simply your own responsibility. It's your team's. Thank you latonia for this really great conversation. And so subscribe to the podcast. If you enjoyed this or if you want to build a meaningful life or organization and leave me a review. I would really appreciate it. Bye. Thanks for tuning in and have a great week you rebel leader with a hearts