

Episode 292: How to Make a Meaningful Impact in DEI



Intro: [00:00:00.18] Welcome to the Workology Podcast, a podcast for the disruptive workplace leader. Join host Jessica Miller-Merrell, founder of Workology.com, as she sits down and gets to the bottom of trends, tools and case studies for the business leader, H.R. and recruiting professional who is tired of the status quo. Now, here's Jessica with this episode of Workology.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:00:26.49] Welcome to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskil HR and ACE the HR Exam. Diversity, equity and inclusion are not new ideas in the HR and corporate arenas, but in recent months, the importance and significance of DEI in the workplace has gotten leaders throughout corporate America to think about doing the right thing and what that looks like in our communities. For many of us in H.R., this means we are not taking our DEI initiatives to our stakeholders. They are coming to us looking for answers and we must be ready to respond. Today, I'm joined by Cathy Light. She's the founder and CEO of the Lideranca Group and DEInamics. The Lideranca Group helps corporate leaders build and manage internal teams committed to achieving excellence. Cathy's company recently introduced a unique metrics driven roadmap for developing meaningful and substantive diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. It does so by helping leaders identify opportunities for improvement, evaluate conversations around diversity and inspire change. Cathy, welcome to the Workology Podcast.

Cathy Light: [00:01:36.73] Thanks, Jessica, I appreciate the invitation and I look forward to sharing my journey.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:01:42.89] I can't wait, I mean, so many conversations. Well, every conversation I feel like with an HR professional right now is focused on the DEI side of things. And I am so excited that this is something that we're shining a spotlight on. I just want to make sure that the momentum continues and we continue these conversations and grow and evolve. So you have worked in the corporate world in a variety of leadership roles, including vice president and general manager of Sunrise Technologies, also the senior sales and marketing executive at Fuji Optical Systems. And you began your career with a little known startup called Apple Computer. Might have heard of it. Can you talk a little bit about your corporate experience that led you to entrepreneurship and that focus on the DEI side of things?

Cathy Light: [00:02:33.08] Sure. I had a very exciting corporate career. All three of my positions stretched my capabilities into new learnings, you know, and certainly invoked creativity. I needed to figure out how to do and reflect upon new and emerging competencies. I was going to college full time at night and then working full time. So this position at Apple in terms of marketing and doing the PR and all the the tours for the most automated factory in the world, the Macintosh factory was just exciting and everything moved so quickly. It was acceleration, factory acceleration on steroids. So I really had to get up to speed quickly, get things done quickly in order to create some initial success for me in this very market emerging company. And then my

second job was at a division of Fuji Film, Fuji Optical Systems. And I was there for over a decade and it was probably one of the most reflective highlights of my corporate career. I had an opportunity to co-create a completely new marketplace in the dental industry. I developed relationships, partnerships, global distribution, agreements, multiple conversations in terms of advisory conversations, people who opened doors for me. Can you imagine how many people get to create a multimillion dollar marketplace in their career? I felt very, very fortunate. And then my last corporate job at Sunrise Technology, it was the first time I was an officer of a company and it was definitely, again, fast paced.

Cathy Light: [00:04:36.44] I seem to always do everything at a fast pace. So that seems to be my, my mindset in terms of the jobs that I take on and things that I do in terms of innovation. But it was a very hard job. I mean, I'm not going to sugarcoat that. It was a division turnaround. The stock price had become delisted and we had a lot of angry shareholders. So I just womaned up and created a new team, created a new vision, a whole new market strategy. And we were able to sell the division, turn it around, profitability, great growth within three years. So, you know, it was definitely when I look at the culmination of my corporate experiences and summarizing what led me to where I am today, I think it's just an innovation mindset, using lots of openness to, to my thinking. I don't like, you know, no, we can't do that. I'm the type that will say, OK, well, we're going to figure out how to do it. If it's meaningful and important, we're going to figure out how to do it. So all the department functionality, learning about processes and I think the agility to move quickly and execute quickly with some of those, I think, key competencies that led me to where I am today.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:06:00.95] So how did you decide or what led you to get involved in the DEI side of things?

Cathy Light: [00:06:08.09] So it was in 2017, I was actually working with a couple of Fortune clients, and within a two week span, the executives had just asked me, do we have an instrument, a tool that would measure diversity and at that time inclusion. We really didn't have equity. We didn't have it necessarily in, you know, coupled with diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging as it is now. And I did say to my clients, I said, I don't have one. Let me see what's in the marketplace and I'll get back to you. So my team and I, you know, went out and did some discovery, and there really wasn't anything in the marketplace at that time that we thought was meaningful to showcase to our corporate clients. And so therein lied an opportunity for me to develop it. So we began the journey of creating a data analytics tool and it has evolved. And it's now in phase two with one of the top AI developers recognized by Microsoft, Crayon. Crayon is recognized as a global key partner for Microsoft in the artificial intelligence space. So it has definitely evolved. You know, it's self-funded. We, I've self-funded the, the software development. And so it's been an interesting journey. And what's interesting, Jessica, is while I grew up in Silicon Valley, did both my undergrad and grad in the Silicon Valley area and I worked in technology, I never considered myself a technologist. And then long behold, I'm now running one of our portfolio divisions is DEInamics, which is the software data analytics. So I had to learn how to shift my mindset to becoming a technologist.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:08:13.11] So interesting. So the division, so, so DEInamics, that's one of the divisions. But there are three other companies or divisions that you lead as the CEO. Can you talk a little bit about those and what they all do?

Cathy Light: [00:08:30.99] Yeah. So back in two 2003, I started the first and that was an LLC at that time, AssessmentLeaders.com. So we provide leading hiring, retention, development tools. So AssessmentLeaders.com. Then we have Leadership Balance and that's kind of been in another innovation that we created a whole new way of leading in the 21st century around mind will in heart to lead. So that's kind of been my baby. We do a lot of leadership development around those three competency areas and it's very important to, you know, the new generations that we have leaders who could lead with heart. And then DiversityEquityInclusion.com. I'm, I'm just super excited that we own that URL. I had the vision a long time ago to capture that we provide consulting services a la carte or end to end solutions around a DEI strategy and roadmap. We also have online learnings. We've curated three programs in our diversity collection, embracing diversity, leading with diversity and winning teams when with diversity and inclusion. Super successful launch back in 20 when covid hit, just a lot of remote learning took place. And so this was, this was, talk about agility that we were on the runway with our new software Tool DEInamics and covid hit and things really slowed down from a professional services and consulting standpoint. We were able to just shift a lot of what we do. Leadership balance. Winning teams when program became live, our diversity collection became live. And so, while it impacted us and our clients, we're really seeing an ice hockey stick trajectory now in in 2021. So we're grateful for being agile. Not a lot of companies were able to do that, but we did

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:10:54.84] Yeah. Pivot and and agile. Those are like the words of 2020, I feel like.

Cathy Light: [00:11:00.21] Yeah, you're right. Absolutely. Jessica. Yeah.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:11:03.06] Recent events in the United States have shed a lot of light on the topic of racism and equality. What are your thoughts on where this leads us and what should workplace leaders be doing maybe that they already haven't done?

Cathy Light: [00:11:18.06] So I think we as leaders need to do a lot of self leadership, self monitoring now and be open to having discussions around what has transpired from the pandemic to to racism to social injustice, you know, the inequalities, and, and really take, put on a different leadership hat, that building self understanding and then translating it into an organizational context is is much easier said than done. So the alignment and connection between personal and organizational growth can be, you know, elusive. It's complicated and it could be noisy and it is noisy. I do believe leaders can translate their strengths and opportunities for development that will lead to business growth. But right now we need cultural understanding that leads to cultural intelligence. I think that's one of the reasons why we put together our online diversity collection. It's much needed and I think fostering diversity of thought contributes to higher earnings in a more productive workforce. So we can change the narrative for leaders, right? Strategy, execution results, earnings and start to focus more on people, especially since we've had to work remotely this last year. And what does that new hybrid return to work look like? And so I think, you know, along with being better listeners, communicators, self-monitoring, we we really need to see flexibility in the workforce and, and, you know, all, I hope to share in one of your questions about why I feel that well-being is going to take precedence as we return to some hybrid form of working.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:13:25.10] It's interesting. Everybody's kind of, their hybrid is unique and very different. Some aren't going back in to the office probably through the rest of the year. Others have already started and have gotten back to the office. So it's it's definitely a moving target.

Cathy Light: [00:13:42.83] Right. Yes, it is.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:13:44.75] One of the other questions I wanted to ask you, because DEI isn't just the right thing to do. I mean, it is, but it's more than that. And research indicates that DEI directly impacts revenue generating business models. Can you explain how this is so and maybe the the why or the how behind that?

Cathy Light: [00:14:05.39] Yeah, great question. You know, I feel that there's been so much research around this, and I'll and I'll share some stats with you in a second. But what's really perplexing to me, you know, as a trailblazer in this DEI space and I'm proud to be recognized as that, but it is alarming to me why this has to be so difficult, because there are so many rewards. And I think the rewards are what I call 360 DEI rewards, where you're benefiting, when you can do the right thing automatically without having to think about it, right? That it becomes natural, becomes a rhythm or a harmony when you're working with people and you're making decisions that are more diverse and equitable and inclusion, everyone benefits, 360 degrees. So McKinsey has written many, many papers and they state that companies who have higher gender diversity are 21 percent more likely to have higher profitability. And also, you know, companies that are ethically diverse are 35 percent more likely to have better financial returns. A couple other leading consulting firms, Deloitte says that organizations with inclusive cultures are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets as those without. Think about that. Two times the financial success, if you have inclusive culture where you're giving people a voice. Forbes says that companies with diverse leadership teams experience more and better innovation. Leading to 19 percent higher revenue. So creating an inclusive work environment, how difficult should that be?

Cathy Light: [00:16:10.32] I mean, the reality is it shouldn't be difficult if you have in poses the right leadership confidences and then Deloitte again, in terms of inclusive leadership, states that it improves overall team performance, greater team compatibility, collaboration, creativity that drives innovation, 17 percent higher performance, decision making 20 percent, and team collaboration, a whopping 29 percent. So creating a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion in my perspective is, you know, you have to start with what type of culture do you have and are you meeting those cultural values, developing a plan, communicating it, having leadership practice what they're they're preaching, you know, those words on on the website then hanging up on walls and then, you know, really be intentional about how decisions are made and how do employees actually feel. So it's that perception versus intention by leadership. And I'll talk more about that as we get to our DEInamics products. So, you know, I think just that it should not be that difficult. And then, you know, diverse management teams are more innovative. We want to have perspectives from people with different backgrounds. They have unique sharing, unique experiences. And I think education, which is why we put together the, curated the the diversity collection, so we need to become more

educated as individuals and in our workplaces, and from that, leadership needs to create experiences. So education plus experiences will help drive, I think, improve social impact internally and externally.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:18:08.51] We've covered a lot of ground here. We have the business case for the short term, for the long term. This this is awesome. I feel like you have just served up. And I want to go ahead and we'll try to include some of these reports in the show, notes over at this for this particular interview with you so that they have access to those. So if they are talking with their executive team or the leadership team about the why and the how and what it can do for you and your organization, DEI, you have just given us like the playbook in terms of like all the all the resources that we need to site to be able to talk with our executive team. So thank you.

Cathy Light: [00:18:48.26] Yeah, and thank you. And I think the more knowledge we have, the more I think that, you know, the more we can accelerate our learnings in, the faster we can accelerate our learnings.

Break: [00:19:00.98] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell and you were listening to the Work Algy podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE The HR Exam we're talking about measuring diversity, equity and inclusion with Cathy Light.

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Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:19:32.14] We have a lot of great sets where we're talking about how to drive performance, the business case for all these things, I wanted to ask you about DEI metrics for the organization. How can we use these? And maybe what are some of the metrics that we should be looking at in terms of DEI to help us do better?

Cathy Light: [00:19:52.72] Yeah, we definitely need metrics to establish a baseline. Where are we going to go if we don't know where we're at? So it's it's almost like now it is fundamentally should be something that we all do, is establish what the baseline is to know where we need to go, where do we need to springboard and then gathering data that's meaningful, right? Not just taking a pulse on the organization that's not going to generate meaningful outcomes, that will drive, you know, priorities and initiatives that are really going to make a difference in the workplaces. So I think prioritizing what questions we, with dynamics, we measure what matters around people process power and belonging. We incorporate some proprietary technology around emotion gauging, it's called a Morphy. And and that's really a game changer for us in terms of how are the employees feeling when they're actually, including leadership, because we take, we survey and assess the whole company with our data analytics tool. But, you know, how is leadership feeling when they're filling out and completing these these questions? And how are the employees feeling and what's the actual intensity of how they're feeling? Direct correlation between how they feel. How they're showing up and

how they're answering the questions, so it's it's a differentiator and it's it's a good data point. So, again, I think that we need to continue with metrics.

Cathy Light: [00:21:38.40] It doesn't matter whether you're a small company, medium size or enterprise company, gathering information that's going to help leadership make better decisions and create a happier, healthier workplace. I think that's number one. And, you know, it's interesting, when we sought out to do to develop dynamics as a sas data analytics tool, we found research that said that 70 percent of executives state that diversity and inclusion are important issues in their company. So think about this, 70 percent of the executives say it's really important. 45 percent of the employees believe that managers have the highest potential to change the narrative, to boost productivity and to improve employee engagement. And then 41 percent of the managers say that they're too busy to prioritize diversity and inclusion to higher priorities because they're so overloaded with achieving their OKRs in their organization. So there's just such a disconnect as you go in through the organization and and take a pulse of what I call layers in the organization to really see where the breakdowns are. And again, leadership sees it one way and the majority of the other part of the company sees it a totally different and feels a totally different way. Companies, they have spent 64 billion in turnover costs due to unfair treatment of of minorities.

Cathy Light: [00:23:22.01] And that's, you can get that right out of the Center for American Progress. And the sixty four billion dollar annual expense is due to workplace discrimination, and it's costing American companies a whopping 64 billion. So this is due to the cost of losing and replacing more than two million workers who leave their jobs every year as a result of unfairness and discrimination. So when you think about the impact of this towards business growth, business acceleration, you know, driving performance, just just think if we can get a handle on what US companies are doing to cause these these massive amounts of employee payouts through discrimination lawsuits. Just think how much more profitable and happy, think about the cultural impact that this has, how many people have to staff managing turnover, let alone attorneys that are involved in these? So when I saw that number, I really, it really took me back. And I absolutely being in accelerating business and workplaces, I did not see that number coming. And I knew it was high, but I did not know it was that high. So, again, we have a lot of we have a lot of work to do. We have, you know, as leaders, we have a lot of responsibility to turn this around.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:25:09.36] I've had some conversations recently about getting comfortable being uncomfortable in relation to leadership and just a lot of the change, whether it's DEI related or just business related of what we're going through right now. What's your approach to this DEI related getting comfortable being uncomfortable when working with the business leaders? How do we help them be OK with the uncomfortability, I guess, factor that exists?

Cathy Light: [00:25:37.98] Yeah, I have I have many conversations with the C-Suite executives, both male and female. And it's interesting, they they both have different obviously the genders have different perspectives, but I think that they're struggling because they don't know what to do. And, you know, there's been so many challenges to keeping the businesses going in 2020, you know. So they've they've had financial challenges, they've had remote working challenges, they've had essential work challenges. How does the new workplace actually going to be functional and safe for our employees? And and then the social activism perspectives that, you know, have been challenging. They feel uncomfortable because they don't know what to do or what

to say. So we're having a lot of conversations around that. And and as a C-Suite coach, you know, encouraging them to meet individually, to meet with their teams, to have Huddle's. One of our large lifescience companies we helped establish, well, co-create, it's called a GDN program. So it was a gender diversity network. And so they have different hubs, you know, a hub women in leadership, a hub for male allyship. And it's bringing these employees feel comfortable in these certain hubs together to have really open conversations about topics like one of the topics was the impact that women in their organization were having around, you know, trying to keep up with everything, their job, their their children at home, learning there was such an increased amount of stress.

Cathy Light: [00:27:39.51] And as a result of that conversation, the company implemented some change initiatives to help women and provide more flexibility for them. So I think it's just, you know, I, I've encouraged executives. This isn't whether it's right or it's a wrong conversation, right? It's a conversation of seeking where people are, how do they feel, and more importantly, as leaders, how could we help our employees right now? Employee well-being is going to be one of the number one priorities. Over profit and growth, and it should be now, especially in this remote learning and, you know, work environment, but also when when there is some hybrid return to work, as I was discussing earlier. And, you know, now more than ever, I think that we need to see leaders become much more empathetic, much more self aware and inclusive in the discussions that they're having about how employees are really doing and how you can you can help them, because, you know, it's going to be a very challenging time. It is already a challenging time and we're seeing well-being just really being rocked in our personal lives. You know, I think additionally, you know, the pandemic has created so many mental health challenges that, you know, we have to address this and how can we help? I think we have a lot of new learnings on the horizon in terms of employee well-being.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:29:26.54] Well, Kathy, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today. Where can people go to learn more about you and then the work that you're doing, including DEInamics

Cathy Light: [00:29:36.26] So you can go to CathyLight.com or you can go to our corporate site LiderancaGroup.com. Lideranca means leadership in Portuguese, and that's spelled LiderancaGroup.com. And thank you, Jessica. And thanks to those who will be listening to this podcast, very exciting to to share our story and, and definitely our journey to where we are today. And I couldn't have done it without an amazing team that we definitely have our client's best interest as our, as our top priority. And we're a family first company. So very, very happy about my team who has helped get us to where we are today.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:30:25.82] Outstanding. Thank you so much again.

Cathy Light: [00:30:27.77] Thanks, Jessica. Stay well.

Closing: [00:30:30.02] Are you loving the Workology Podcast? Our Workology community reaches over six hundred thousand H.R. leaders every single month. Want to be a sponsor? Reach out to us at [Workology.com/advertising](https://workology.com/advertising).

Closing: [00:30:43.64] Conversations about leadership and culture are extremely important and we need to have more of them because these conversations spark change. As HR leaders, we can support our company leaders with resources, training, and metrics. That can open up the DEI initiatives in a way that sets our companies up for long term success while also setting an example of what doing the right thing looks like. Thank you for joining the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE The HR Exam. This podcast is for the disruptive workplace leader who's tired of the status quo. My name is Jessica Miller-Merrell. Until next time you can visit [Workology.com](https://workology.com) to listen to all our podcast episodes.