

Unlocking Allyship: Engaging the Magic Middle for Inclusive Leadership

A Conversation with Julie Kratz

Jean 00:11

Hi, I'm Jean Latting. Welcome to the Leading Consciously podcast where we support you in making conscious decisions to foster inclusive leadership and achieve your goals. You're about to meet Julie Kratz, who has dedicated her distinguished career fostering allyship and inclusion. She has many books and is an author on Forbes magazine. She has a column there. You can learn more about her below in the notes.

Jean 00:49

To be clear, we're talking about allyship, which means actively supporting people from groups different from your own. It's about listening, learning and using your voice and actions to create a more fair and inclusive environment for everyone. Sometimes people from nondominant groups think inclusion is all about what it takes for their group to be included, and they forget that they are nondominant in some situations and dominant in others. Judy's work is about what we can all do to make sure we're part of the solution, and that we support groups who are different from ourselves through taking allyship actions. All of us have a responsibility to be allies to members of other groups who may feel left out or that they don't belong. Here's Julie to tell us how.

Jean 01:50

Hello everybody. I am totally delighted to bring you Julie Kratz, who is an expert in allyship, and for those of you who don't know what I'm saying, spelled, a, l, l, y, s, h, i, p, Allyship. She's dedicated her career to working on helping people get better together. Her organization, as you can see, behind it is Next Pivot Point. She has an esteemed career. She's at the Indiana University, Kellogg School of Business, and she's widely recognized as a thought leader. I read across one of her articles on allyship, and was riveted to the spot and said, I have to have this woman on the podcast. She has things to tell us. So welcome, Julie.

Julie Kratz 02:52

Oh, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Jean 02:56

Okay. So give us some background. I focus on inclusive leadership. Give us some background. Why does this topic even interest you? How did you get from point A to point B? What in your background got you here?

Julie Kratz 03:15

Yeah, I started my career in corporate America, and like a lot of you know earnest young people, I thought I was going to change the world. And, you know, was raised by a single mom that told me that feminism had solved all the problems for women and the workplace was equal now. And as you can imagine, when I entered the workplace in the early 2000s, my experience was different than what I thought it was going to be, and I spent time in a lot of different industries, construction, manufacturing, operations, supply chain, consulting, agriculture, financial services, as you can imagine. And still, today are very dominant group dominant and so there wasn't a lot of women, there weren't a lot of people of color. And as I kind of worked through my corporate path, I just, despite my best efforts, really lacked that sense of inclusion. Didn't have as many inclusive leaders as you would say, or allies to kind of lift me up and help me along the way, and so ultimately, after 12 years, I left. Not because I wasn't being successful, but because the success wasn't fulfilling without feeling included.

And that's still the case today. You know, fast forward to today, 10 years doing this work on allyship and DEI and inclusion. You know, we're in a fraught time where all the indicators say that we need to keep focusing on this work, but sadly, political indicators are indicating otherwise, at least for now. But I really believe we need our allies now more than ever, especially those with power. And so new research that I'm doing is around people with power and how to engage them as allies in the conversation, and now I'm sure we can dig into it more, but it really starts with just addressing the fears, the fears holding people back, the lack of understanding of the power that they have, and ultimately how to take action.

Jean 05:23

Okay, so let's just stop right here. I want to dig into your background, but what you just said is so provocative. I have arguments with people. Is it fear or is it meanness?

Julie Kratz 05:38

Well, there is some meanness. I don't want to be naive. There are mean spirits of people. But what the research shows is that, and this is based COCL has done a lot of research in this space. And a recent study, a 2024 study, late 2024 shows that of the general population, especially dominant group members, that 10% of them are naysayers, might be the meanish people. 48% are kind of in the middle. They're persuadable. So they call them, I call them the magic middle, kind of like, I don't know. I don't know what I'm supposed to do or say. I don't know what I don't know. And then the remaining are all in. So we have 90% of people potentially engaged or already engaged.

Jean 06:24

Whoa wait a minute, 10% of the naysayers. 48% I don't know what to think. Yeah, no, I don't have time. I have to go feed the cat and the rest are in. If I can do 50 plus 10 is 60. So 40% are all in, 40%?

Julie Kratz 06:54

Yeah. And they want to be allies. They want to be supportive of things like DEI, allyship, inclusive leadership. And what we're seeing is these strong, you know, headwinds coming from our political environment are kind of tucking in the persuadables. They're kind of hiding, running cover, feeding the cat, as you say. You know, worried about themselves. And you know that in times of scarcity and change and uncertainty, caring about yourself and your family and what impacts you when you walk out your front door is a very natural, primitive human need. Yet this is the time when we need them the most.

Jean 07:36

Okay, so your work is about getting them basically.

Julie Kratz 07:41

Well, hopefully they want to be gotten. But--

Jean 07:43

Yes, but okay, I come very firmly out of the science of persuasion and how change occurs. And one of the things that frustrates me is people think they should be able to go over, deliver the right lecture and change somebody's mind. And we know that's not the way it works. So what you let me rephrase that. What you're about is how to be persuasive, literally, how to work with the persuadable and how to help those who are already in.

Julie Kratz 08:16

Yes.

Jean 08:16

So I want to ask you a question that I hear a lot, and I'm sure you do. People say there's nothing you can do about those people. They won't listen. What's your response to that?

Julie Kratz 08:30

I think for the naysayers, the 10%, that's probably true. You can't want it for those people, and I think spending our time on a non-persuadable group is just a bad use of time. So where I've been arguing that companies, organizations, individual people, if you want to make a change, find the people that are kind of sitting on the fence. They're kind of in between. They don't know what to say or do. They're confused. They're not super happy with the way things are going, and just listen to your point. You're not going to convince somebody to join your cause just because you said so. Listen to them. I know what motivates them. We know, I mean, just one of the strongest human connections is relationships, the longest happiness attitudinal study was done at Harvard, and they found that of the people that lived the longest, key ingredient, not health or exercise. It was relationships with people. And allyship is about relationships. And so if you want to improve your relationships, learning how to be an ally for people that are different from you, seems like a great place to start.

Jean 09:47

Okay, so that takes me to another thing that's very relevant to this. I have clients who say I'll never speak to my sister again as long as she votes that way or I am no longer talking to my father when I found out how he voted. What do you say to people who have that attitude?

Julie 10:09

Oh, I know. I feel it too. I think the first thing is like, don't make assumptions. So I made an assumption with a family member recently, and they called me out on it, as they should have, that was not the way they'd voted. Had they voted that way before, yes, but not this time. So just be careful with those assumptions. It's very fair to draw boundaries if someone did vote in a way that's against your values. Having boundaries around that is really healthy, you know, to me and for you, I'm sure inclusive leadership, DEI, allyship, being attacked is clearly one party's agenda, and that's very central to not only how I feed my family, but how I want to live my life and the legacy I hope to create. So it does feel very personal, but for a lot of people, I think giving space for a back and forth dialog. I really think again, the persuadables is the only way we're going to get out of this mess, is by finding those magic middle folks that they might have voted a different way, and they also might be rethinking that. And if we alienate them and continue to push them away, we're just going to further dig into this polarized, these holes where we're not talking to each other, we're just talking at each other. And I just don't think that's sustainable. Yet it'd be a lot easier if more people did that work. You know, both parties need to do that work. So if someone's not willing to do that work, right, then I think you need to protect yourself and your energy too.

Jean 11:49

Okay, so you're saying protect yourself, which means if you just can't stand it--I'm trying to operationalize "protect yourself". What does that look like?

Julie 12:01

Yeah, I mean, for me and for those I interviewed from my book, a new book about allyship, it's really about knowing your values, knowing the values that are non negotiable for you, grounding yourself in those values. So one of mine is fairness. For example, every self-assessment I take on values, that fairness is a strong driver for me, and so I need to say that. I need to honor that in those conversations, and remind people of that boundary, and if they cross that, if that's something that they're not willing to respect, a value that I hold near and dear to me, then that might be a signal that this isn't a good use of my time or energy, at least right now.

Julie Kratz 12:50

I also think I like knowing when to hit pause so where I get in trouble with these conversations is where I let them hit that emotional boiling point where you kind of lose your, you know, and you're like, oh, shoot, I said that. I did that. And we know when we're stressed that cortisol hormone kicks in our body and we can't think as clearly, we say and do things that we might regret. And so just keeping a temperature check on your emotional energy, and when it starts to bubble up, you can't think clearly. Pause, time out. Like we need to come back to this too, because these conversations, right, it's not a one and done, like there's going to have to be multiple iterative conversations to move this forward.

Jean 13:40

Okay, so by protect yourself you're not saying, drop the person. You're saying temper your interactions according to your ability to handle.

Julie Kratz 13:51

Yeah, yeah.

Jean 13:52

Don't expect a one and done conversation.

Julie Kratz 13:55

Right. Yeah. I mean, most people think they're self-aware, and remarkably, we are not very self-aware. We can't see ourselves. We can't, you know, feel how we're being perceived. And so a lot of us risk thinking, well, I, you know, we want to just really, you know, self load, like I showed up in the right way. They were the ones that did all things. And it's like, yeah, I know that feels really good in the moment, but it's also probably not 100% true. So you protect yourself, protect your energy, know your triggers, know your emotion, know what drives you, and if you feel threatened and you feel those emotional triggers happen, it's okay to time out to your body's telling you something that you need to pay attention, that there's danger, and so it's okay to do that and revisit it later.

Jean 14:50

Okay, so I'm sitting here with my mind whirling. You know, you probably know Black women all over this country saying we. We understood the assignment on November 6, we executed, and it's now other people's turn to step up.

Julie Kratz 15:08

I hear you.

Jean 15:09

So I have that feeling on the one hand, and on the other hand, I have the feeling of sympathy for my friends who either don't want to alienate their relatives, or they don't want to even be around their relatives, and either way, the persuadable opportunity is lost.

Julie Kratz 15:34

And I totally get it, Jean, like I feel all of that like so many of my Black women friends have said it, this is yours. You all did this. Like, clean up time, right?

Jean 15:48

Like, if you can't talk to the person, you can't clean up. I And if you don't know how to talk to the person, you can't clean up. So I listen, and I'm thinking I stopped talking to my relative about politics, right? Because it just would fracture our relationship.

Julie Kratz 16:11

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there's a lot of that, I just don't talk about that with this person. Or I've had a lot of people say, like, I just don't watch the news anymore, like, there's things going on, and...

Jean 16:25

And that leaves me feeling me, and a lot of people like me feeling abandoned.

Julie Kratz 16:32

Exactly, yeah, yeah. It's that's very personal to your safety and to who you are and what you stand for, and it's a very triggering thing that's been a phrase that has triggered me

recently. But, you know, back to your question, Jean, if someone said, you know, I can't talk to a family member anymore because of, you know, political differences. I think just reflecting a little bit on that like, and you don't have to. Well, number one, it's totally your choice, and your use of energy is 100% your decision. But I might just want to, like, dig a little bit further before making that kind of decision as somebody that's also based that decision myself is have I seen like, is there evidence that they might be open to a different point of view? Not changing their mind, but just listening to a different point of view. Have you seen evidence of that, that they'd be willing to listen? I mean, that's one bar that's pretty important to hit. If they're not willing to even consider a different point of view, then probably not a healthy place to put yourself in and I don't blame you if you need to take a time out on that relationship. Hopefully it's not forever. This will not be forever. Feels like forever. But the other thing is, do you feel like you have trust with this person?

Julie Kratz 17:58

Whoa, great question.

Julie Kratz 18:01

If you don't have trust with them, absolutely not. You're never going to feel psychologically safe, and so you're going to be threatened, and you're going to, you know, go back and forth, and it's just going to reinforce the narrative that they're unreachable. So really, trust and willingness to be open from both parties are really essential for that. If you don't mind, I have a quick story about that.

Jean 18:24

I would love a story. I was just sitting here thinking, I need this to be more concrete, and so I would love a story.

Julie Kratz 18:30

Stories help me with these kind of nebulous ideas, right? Because it's like, oh yeah, easy for you to say, you know. And I really struggle honestly, I had a very close relative of mine that had a very difficult conversation recently, and I'm feeling all the things that you're saying. So I'm not immune to this by any means. But a couple of years ago, there was a local school board election, and I live in central Indiana, and so we're in a purple area, and that was

where, at the time, a lot of voting dollars were going into school board elections, if you remember that. And still continuing, still happened last election cycle. It was really bad a couple years ago. So as somebody that was pro DEI pro inclusion, which I couldn't believe was actually on the ballot for a school board at the time, but now that's like child's games. Pun intended, but I volunteered at the polling district--precinct, rather.

So, I'm in the parking lot with our school board candidates that were pro inclusion, their information, stationed alongside somebody of the other political--well, it's not a political party, it's nonpartisan--of the opposite school board candidates. So basically, anti-DEI, and we're there for three long hours, Jean, three long hours. And I'm like, an hour one. I'm like, I am not talking to this person like they are awful. I like go for a walk, which is really helpful to burn off that emotional energy, you know, get it out of your system.

I come back, and he says something like, Well, someone came by, and I didn't know what to do with your liberal information. And I was like, well, first of all, this is not a partisan election, it's a school, school board and nonpartisan. He kind of grimaced and shuffled. And I was like, oh gosh, it's going to be a long two more hours, right? So it's like, Well, hey, Dave, tell me about your position. I'm curious about your candidates. And he went on for a very long time, which this is a test of patience, right? And then I don't have trust with him. I have no reason to believe he's willing to listen to my perspective.

So I'm not following my own advice at this point. But after the 20 minutes, I picked up on a few things, like there were certain things about test scores, parents' rights and not indoctrinating children. There were some things that I picked up and I was like, okay, if I'm hearing you correctly these things are important to you. And he's like, yeah. So, well, do you mind if I share what's important to me as a parent of children in the school district? And he said, Well, yeah, sure. And so I just, you know, shared a little bit about our platform. I did not go on for 20 minutes, just went on for a couple minutes and in the end, I just said, you know, I think we're doing our kids a disservice if we don't teach them about inclusion in a most certain, diverse and hopefully inclusive world someday. Like these are skills that they need to be competitive, to be to survive. And he kind of looks at me and he's like, I've never thought about it that way. And I thought, huh, well, I'll take it.

So we spent like, the last hour or so kind of just back and forth a little bit. And you know, I asked him a few big questions.

We had interesting responses. I will say, Jean, no minds were changed that day. But at the end, I'll never forget it. At the end of my shift, he turned to me, he gave me a firm handshake and said, I've never met anyone like you before. Glad we met. And you know, I'll take that as a win. You know, it's hard to hate someone like me, when you know someone like me, and that's what this polarization is doing, we're dehumanizing each other. I found myself in the same battle like you must be a "fill in the blank ist" if you support this monster, it just that's those are things I say. That's not how we're going to get out of it, though, we have to find our way back to each other and bridging, finding some sort of common ground in the middle where we can be humans alongside each other. Even if we have, we're never going to agree on everything. But if we can find some common ground, just a little bit of common ground, and be willing to listen to each other, I think, I hope we can get out of this mess.

Jean 22:53

From the Stages of Change standpoint, you stopped at exactly the right point. It's cognitive dissonance, where people lose it. They're trying to drive the whole point home and to get an immediate mind change and declaration on the spot. That won't happen. He said, Hmm, I've never thought about it that way. Bingo. Conversation executed, that was what needed to happen. Now he can go home and think and learn, instead of expecting him to learn all of it right then in that one little conversation. That's a total win to me. I'm excited about it. And when I hear stories like that, I get really excited, because you knew enough to stop and just then be human with him and let him come to you.

Julie Kratz 23:49

You know, it wasn't easy. I failed at so many of those conversations over the years. That's just one that seemed to work. And you're right. It is the cognitive dissonance. You can't keep hammering somebody when they're in a state of I thought this, and now I think this. Our brains can't process all of that at one time, and it fights it, because our brains love what it already knows. New information, something especially conflicting with existing informations, it causes some turmoil in our nervous system. And, you know, I later read a

book by Monica Guzman called, I've Never Thought of It That Way. She has a TED talk called Curiosity Will Save Us All. Actually, the founder of Braver Angels, which the organization deals with political divide. I read that book a couple months later, like, literally happened to me in a parking lot. This stuff does work! More on that. I highly recommend Monica's work and braver angels and her TED Talk. It's a great curriculum to understand that concept more.

Jean 24:57

Okay, so let's switch gears. I'm really excited. I'm so glad you said that Braver Angels is one of the organizations that's trying to bridge the gap, and they deserve a shout out.

Jean 25:12

Okay, talk about what a middle manager might do in an organization that's ambivalent about inclusion. Three years ago, yay, yay, yay, let's make it work. Now with the new political climate the organization, the leaders are literally not knowing what to do. They asked the leader, the middle manager for some information. What should they do? What? What should the person recommend?

Julie Kratz 25:52

Oh, you nailed it. Like that is quintessentially the problem with corporate America right now. Rah, rah, it's cool. I'll post, I'll donate, I'll say all the things. Sure. Was a short few years, wasn't it? Now, there's a lot of those persuadables, and middle management is a huge, huge part of culture. So it's estimated about 80% of the employee experience is tied up in their relationship with their direct manager, and that is the middle management rung of organizations, basically. So a lot of the employee experience, and of course, senior leaders are critically important, and the C suite, etc, the middle management is where we have a lot of those persuadables, a lot of those dominant group members that want to get it, that don't get it yet, that have heard some things that they don't necessarily fully agree with, maybe had a bad experience or two. But at the end of the day, if you ask them, they'd say, of course, I want the world to be fair, equitable, inclusive, like when they understand the terms, they are absolutely in fierce agreement. So this is the whole rub. They don't know what to do, so they're doing nothing.

Jean 27:04

Yes, that's why I'm saying it. What should they--

Julie Kratz 27:07

We know what they should be doing right Jean, but we can't tell them. If there's anything we learned in the last few years going in with all the things and giving the To Do lists, and, you know, checking all the boxes. I participated in some of this, so I am not innocent. That is not the most effective thing of getting a persuadable, especially in what seems to be a risky environment. So the first step that I found is really starting from a place of, where are you at? I know this sounds super simple, but it is so true, and it was a missing step in nearly every DEI book I can look at my bookshelves. We just assumed everybody was all in. Where are you at really? What are your perceptions about this? What are your fears? What's holding you back? What are the risks to wanting to be an inclusive leader, or as I would say, an ally. Let's get it out. Be honest, and you have to have a really trusting place or another ally to facilitate that conversation, then really understanding their sources of power.

Julie Kratz 28:10

So most people I interviewed for my new book about allyship for people with power, they told me, actually, I don't have any power. I am just one person inside this organization, right? And like, oh my gosh, look around. And just by way of being a dominant group member, people are going to listen to you differently. People tell me that a lot about anti-racism work when I speak about it as a White person, it just lands differently. It shouldn't, but it does. And when we have dominant group members saying, yes, inclusion is important. Yes, this is an expectation in our culture to behave A, B and C. And I'm going to model that.

That's a huge, huge deal to tap into that power and that social influence or positional influence. The other piece is the (Wickham?) What's in it for me? You knew that would change. You have to have a strong why for it. And I call that the "ally why" and really spending some time crafting. It's not about extrinsic, what's happening in the news cycle. You know, what my organization expects me to do. What matters to me, like me as a human being. And if it's your daughter's rate, you know, there's 1000 other reasons it could be, but that seems to be the most common one. And then it's really, what do they do,

right? So they do need to do some introspective work first before they take action. This is a huge miss, because intentions and impact can be misaligned, as you know, in this work. So then I have people map out kind of what ally role they want to have. Do you want to be a mentor, a sponsor, a coach, a challenger, an advocate? And I kind of use that umbrella to work from, what speaks to you, what are you strong at? What do you enjoy doing? Who in your network could benefit from those types of allyship activities? And then it's all, it's kind of like dominoes from there. So those are the first four chapters of the book and then the rest kind of flows on, like how to tell good stories, because role modeling is important as an ally, to show what good behavior looks like. But telling stories, much like the Dave story that your listeners will probably recall from this interview, telling stories actually impacts people much more so than just simply role modeling the behaviors.

Julie Kratz 30:19

And also psychological safety and perspective-taking. People may practice at that and kind of practicing those behaviors, and then, most importantly, taking it to your organization. So taking it from an individual level to a team level, and then in an organizational level. Are you building inclusive policies? And these are things that can be done well under the radar, right? Think about caregiving leave at a minimum, that is a huge opportunity in this country. How can you use your voice for change around pipeline development and how we start much, much earlier in developing an inclusive pipeline, because you're going to have a talent shortage very soon, and you're going to struggle to retain talent if you don't do this inclusively. And also just really how we measure the impact of the work. And then one big a-ha I think, that we've realized from the last really two years of backlashes, this work has to be tied to a business imperative or a business problem, and we have to measure the impact of it. So what are we measuring? What are we expecting the organization to do differently, and how are we going to hold them accountable for that?

Jean 31:29

Okay, so let's, let's stop here, because you've given a mouthful. You've gone through about six things. Let's start with the first, the pain. What? What are you in it for? Are you suggesting the middle manager should say this to her direct manager, who's inquiring? Set up a literal real life scenario of who's talking to who?

Julie Kratz 31:55

I think the conversation starts with somebody that cares about somebody enough to say, Hey, I see something in you. I see something new, whatever it is, you know, you're really good at project management, or I've really loved how you did that client presentation. I see something new from a behavior perspective. And it starts with appreciating that behavior, and then maybe it opens the window, opens the door to a deeper conversation around, hey, there's something I'm really interested in. Here's a book, a tool, a thing I've been working on, and I would love for you to be engaged in this. I see you as an incredible ally or mentor, whatever word you want to use, and just open up the door to that conversation and see how willing they are to join.

Jean 32:45

So you're talking about, I'm gonna use the word recruiting an ally. So the way to there's another word that begins with the E that I can't think of, okay, recruiting an ally, enroll.

Julie Kratz 33:00

Yeah, maybe that's a better word, or engaging.

Jean 33:03

Enroll, engaging. Okay, so we start off with why I'm talking to you. What are your concerns in this area? In this area or it concerns generally? Which one?

Julie Kratz 33:23

Yeah. I mean, I think find the avenue that's most appropriate. If you want to start big, inclusion or, you know, allyship, whatever word you want to use to open the door. If you want to be really specific, I usually find that approach to be better, or create a bridge through something specific you observed, or something that you saw in this person, so not to stroke their ego, but just to kind of meet them where they're at and help them understand how, like those actions--

Jean 33:53

Build on strengths.

Julie Kratz 33:54

Exactly. Meet them where they're at. And people need encouragement right now, I know I feel like, really do I have to encourage everybody? I need encouragement too, but we need them. We've always needed them, but we really need them right now. And yeah, Jean, if I had to break it down into action steps, it would be, find some common ground, you know, just find something, an avenue, a topic, something that happened to start the conversation. A clear, hate to say it this way, but a clear ask of like, here's what I'd love to see more from you. I'd love for you to mentor other people that are different than you. I'd love for you to be at our Employee Resource Groups events. I would love it if you sponsored other folks in the organization, and just listen. Listen to their perspective and see if they would be willing to engage. Most people when they're asked in a way that fits their strengths and kind of their skill set and what they're interested in doing, they're probably going to say yes. And if they don't, that's okay, too.

Jean 35:02

This is going to sound very strange, but it never ever occurred to me too. Do this ask and ask, not as a philosophical discussion about the politics of the day and the future of the world and the value of inclusion, but asking someone, "Are you willing to participate in this and use your talents for this? Because you have talents."

Julie Kratz 35:29

That's what they've been waiting for, Jean, they've been waiting for an invitation. I thought the invitation was delivered a long time ago, but apparently it was not received.

Jean 35:39

The invitation is blatantly obvious, which is why I never, literally, I'm very serious. It never occurred to me to make it an ask.

Julie Kratz 35:48

It did not occur to me either. I spent 10 years in this work, studying allyship for like the last nine and so this full circle for me. The first, you know, 2016 product work, and so we're back at it. So I just thought, after the election, I'll just write a new edition of my book about men as allies. And what I quickly realized, after 50 hours of interviews and 70 different sources

that I found, they didn't get the invitation, they didn't feel included in inclusion work. And it pains me. Because I didn't feel that any rooms I was in. I, like you, was like, what? Huh? And then I heard stories, and there were such consistency in the stories of people that I've had as allies in my life, White men that have gone to bat for me, that have made sure that I was included. They've gotten me promotions, that helped me start my business, helped me teach at university. And I said, Yeah, this happened, and I didn't like it. And these are the good guys saying that. So, yeah, our work isn't perfect. It's never been perfect. I don't think anyone's to blame for it, but as we clean this mess up and climb out of this hole, eventually, we are going to need the help of people with power, especially dominant group members, to get there. We're not going to be able to get there without them.

Jean 37:20

Well, that's the irony. All the people of color and feminist women of whatever color, wanting to tell people off, to make them change. It just frustrates me no end.

Julie Kratz 37:34

I wish it worked, because it feels really self-righteous, and it really helps me, like, take out my negative energy. Instead, I found other emotional releases, like screaming. I really enjoy the leaf blower, yoga, like different things. Rather than screaming at somebody, I can scream in my basement.

Jean 37:56

Well, yeah, you said, Hey, pause and take a walk. You know, I'm at my end, what I can deliver competently, and so I'll take a walk. To me that's a logical next step. Okay, before I want to talk about, you said in a recent Fortune article, how organizations are changing their terminology. And it's not that DEI is going anywhere, is what you're saying. It's that it's transmuting. People are figuring out how to do it in this climate, and it's embedded in many organizations. Could you elaborate on that and give people some hope?

Julie Kratz 38:42

Yeah, yeah, it is. One of my friends, a professor over in Denmark. She says stealth mode, which, in the gaming terms, is like, where you try to not be seen until you want to be seen. I was like, that's a good analogy. That is what a lot of organizations are doing. Good news,

bad news. Good news is they're keeping it internally. They're doing more systems work which is a lot less sexy than bold proclamations and donations and training programs, but it's the right kind of work that needs to be done. We need to de-bias our hiring systems. We need to de-bias our promotion systems. We need to make equitable criteria and objective criteria and diversify our recruiting pools. All of those things are necessary work and not exciting work. So that's where organizations are focused, that are remain committed to inclusion. The bad side to that, though, is that we're losing visibility to the work. We're losing new research, new case studies. I'm seeing it day by day in my Forbes column. I used to get you know 20 pitches a week easily, with great new research, new studies, case studies at companies.

Julie Kratz 40:01

Now like two.

Jean 40:04

Oh, no kidding.

Julie Kratz 40:06

All happened in 2025 and that's concerning to me. We need stories, we need data. We need to know what's happening, and it's happening behind closed doors right now. I have to believe good things are happening behind those closed doors, but people like us that study the work and use that research to make recommendations to other clients, we're just losing a lot of intel right now.

Jean 40:36

Oh, my goodness, I had thought of it in terms of defunding. You know what's happening at the federal level, but it never occurred to me that that means that the research itself is going underground.

Julie Kratz 40:50

Yep, yep, because funding impacts the research too, and no one wants to be vocal against him right now, because then you're his next target, even if it's valid research, it's just, let's keep it under the radar.

Jean 41:06

Okay, you said de-bias hiring. Can you talk about what that looks like?

Julie Kratz 41:15

Yeah. I mean, just the hiring process alone has so many opportunities, right? And so one of the critical opportunities is to ensure there's objective criteria to evaluate candidates on. You would be shocked. Most people, research shows when they make a decision about who to hire, it's who they'd like to spend time with outside of work.

Jean 41:37

Yes,

Julie Kratz 41:40

That's a friend. Do you want to work with all your friends? Really? I mean, think about it, really. Or somebody that has the ability to do the job? One of my favorite ways to de-bias the hiring process and take out all the, oh, they went to the same school as me, or I know their mom, or, you know, all these subjective, non-correlated criteria to success.

Julie Kratz 42:03

I have a use case. When I was in consulting, we used to give candidates an Excel file with data and ask them to summarize it in the form of a presentation. That's something we would expect them to do in the first 90 days. So it's fair game to ask that in the interview process. If they couldn't do that task, there's no way we're hiring them. And if they excelled at that task, they rose to the top of the candidate list, and we usually did hire them. Of course, there were other criteria that were involved in that, and if they had a problem with one part of it, we didn't scrutinize the whole thing, but it was a great objective example to base our decision on.

Julie Kratz 42:41

The other thing is, most organizations don't diversify where they recruit from. They go to the same job site, the same universities. You know, historically Black colleges and universities are not usually on those lists, right? Ivy League schools that are riddled in

privilege are, and not that there's anything wrong with, you know, the school versus this school, but you're just not going to get a diverse set of candidates. If you keep going to the same place, you're going to get the same types of people. And so really diligently posting your jobs on different places, asking people inside your company that have diverse experiences to share with their networks proactively, because people of diverse identities know people of other diverse identities, and making sure when managers are making hiring decisions that they're really encouraged to think about what skill sets, what perspectives do they want to add to their team, because most often you look based on cultural fit, which is code for people like us, and that just proliferates the status quo.

Julie Kratz 43:42

And the good news is all of this is associated with great business outcomes. So this isn't sacrificing profits or making costly recruiting decisions. All of this has a huge upside on retention, on engagement, on promotion rates, and so when you do this well, not only is it the right thing to do, but it's the right thing for business.

Jean 44:04

Well, you've said a lot. This bringing them in and getting them to lead, and I'm going to ask you about that in a minute, are the two places where organizations, I think, get really stuck and that are symptomatic of then what goes on in the middle of the experience. So your suggestion for bringing people in to consciously not ask about diversity and break any pseudo laws, but to be objective in your criteria of what you're looking for and round out the skill set, round out the skill set to make sure you're not bringing in a bunch of many needs.

Julie Kratz 44:51

Yeah.

Jean 44:53

Right? What else do we need and what are we looking for? So I think that's wonderful. Okay, so here's the other end, and it goes straight to what does belonging mean anyway? I encounter people who think they have it, but their managers think they don't. People of color, in particular. I can think of one White woman, they think they have it. Their manager

thinks they don't. Is it a question of fit? Is it a question of actual competence? How do you address a situation like that?

Julie Kratz 45:36

A lot of times, especially, we have data on this. People of color, women, historically marginalized groups, are less likely to get equitable feedback, and so yeah, is she it or not? There's usually a disconnect, because they're not getting the feedback they need to improve their performance, or the feedback they need to be considered amongst their peers for promotion rates.

Julie Kratz 45:36

Also the mini me thing is very real Jean, we'd like to spend time with people that are like us. And so when I was in corporate, I did a lot more beer drinking and sports watching and golf playing than I would like to say that I do at all. But you kind of have to play the game, and it's exhausting to keep having to play a game that wasn't designed for you. And so this kind of lack of exposure, this inequitable feedback, also lack of access to challenging assignments, we're more likely to challenge people based on their potential or their association with the dominant group versus people that aren't like me, because I'm not sure how they're going to react or respond, and I don't want to be in trouble or is it something off one my brain, so I'm just not going to do it. And all three of those things are really critical to leveling the playing field and making sure that people have equal access to opportunities and promotions.

Jean 47:05

Yeah, I'm sorry to interrupt, but this is the argument. How much do I have to change to fit into your ways, your cultural ways that nobody said this is the way it had to be. How much do I have to change? How much do I have to smile and grin and pretend?

Julie Kratz 47:25

It's taxing. Yeah. Sometimes people call that code switching or covering, minimizing or maximizing traits about yourself to fit in with the dominant group. It's very real, and this is something that's also not on dominant group members' mind. So like, what you did what? No, they're like in disbelief of the ways we have to twist ourselves in to fit in, because they

don't have to. Like they don't have to think about those things. And that's a luxury. There's a lot of headspace we spend, you know, can I say this? Can I not say this? Should I wear this or not wear this? Oh gosh, what if they think this about me? And all of that headspace is costing organizations a lack of productivity, a lack of ideas and creativity and innovation. It affects the quality of our work. And so everyone's losing when people have to twist themselves into these places, we're losing out on the diversity of thought that we know drives business outcomes. And so again, back full circle, back to boundaries. The beginning, Jean, you got to know your boundaries. And for me, it was like, if I get up one more Monday morning, puking in my toilet because I have to go to work, cannot go to that place anymore. And that is, honestly, why I left.

Jean 48:37

That was what you did. It really happened?

Julie Kratz 48:39

Oh yeah. I mean, I would tell people, Oh, my God, you know, they would say, I'm so excited to go to work tomorrow. Like, what? Why would you lie about that? That's so weird. I didn't realize that you weren't supposed to feel sick before going to work. I didn't feel safe there, so I felt physically sick. That is the boundary was obviously way cross for me, but paying attention. You know, not everyone is a luxury of switching jobs or industries or moving. I get that, but paying attention to your bodily cues, because if you don't pay attention, and it continues to get worse, you can risk your physical health, and no job is worth doing that for.

Jean 49:21

Well, this has been delightful, your wealth of information, your wealth of information, and it's clear that your information is fed by both research and your own tearful experiences, which I think is the absolutely the best framework to speak from. Thank you. Is there anything you would like to tell the listeners, for them to think about or take away

Julie Kratz 49:55

Yeah. Yeah. Well, a couple things of things. Listeners, if you want to learn more, I do, as Jean said, I have a Forbes column, so you can check that. Julie Kratz, K, R, A, T, Z. I publish things at least once a week, usually more. So new research, as long as it's still coming in, ideas

from experts as well. On our website, it's nextpivotpoint.com and there you can find a free downloadable allyship training video. We've had a lot of organizations do that, especially right now. It's a short video module with a workbook that you can do as a lunch and learn or your next team off site. So I'd encourage you to check out those resources over there. And we're celebrating this year International Allyship Days, August 8. So we will be celebrating that. So I'd encourage you to invite your allies. And you know that conversation we had about how to engage them, ask them to come to an event like that, all the information is at nextpivotpoint.com.

Jean 51:02

Okay, and what's one takeaway you want them to have? What's an action step someone listening can do now?

Julie Kratz 51:11

Well, we talked about the concept of bridging and Monica Guzman's work with Braver Angels and curiosity in the "I never thought of it that way conversation". I would encourage you to think about, how can I try to have one of those conversations? Who might I have "I never thought about it that way conversation with"? It just starts with one, it just starts with one opportunity and just give it a go. It's not going to go perfect. Give yourself grace, but give it a try. What's the worst that could happen?

Jean 51:41

Think about a conversation with someone that you have some difference with, some attitudinal difference with, and go into it with curiosity to see what you can learn. That's a great takeaway. Thank you.

Julie Kratz 52:00

Thank you.

Jean 52:02

It's been a delight. Julie was so thought provoking. Here are a few of my takeaways from our conversation. First, she talked about the power of middle managers, which is often underrated to her, as she explained it, they form the culture of the organization. They

maintain it. If the culture shifts for better for worse, middle managers are usually right at the center of the change. She also shared a study about men's attitudes toward diversity and inclusion. The study asked how important is DEI to you at work? The men who responded fell into three groups: the detractors or the no-no people were about 10%. They said DEI wasn't really important to them at all. About 48% were what the authors called persuadables. They said DEI was somewhat or not very important, and the true believers, those who really supported DEI, were 42%. They said it was extremely important, and they are the ones who are most likely to take an action on DEI. Now, you know, in today's times, people are saying DEI is dead, but that's not the research is saying. If 42% are committed and 48% are persuadable, that's 90% who could potentially shape the culture in favor of inclusion and equity, and that's why knowing how to be an ally is so important.

Jean 53:54

I often hear people say, as I told her, You can't change anyone's minds, but they're focused on the 10%, the detractors who are probably the loudest, or the ones who get the most public attention, and not the 48% who are still on the fence. So the real question is, do those of us who care about inclusion, do we have the skills to reach the persuadables? As Julie put it, strong political winds are hiding the persuadables, so it's up to us to find them and figure out how to talk with them.

Jean 54:35

So this leads to my second takeaway: how do we talk with friends or family who have different political views, especially when emotions are high? I shared with her that many people I know avoid these conversations. I shared with her that many people avoid these conversations altogether because they don't want to risk the relationship. Julie agreed, and she said she was in that same situation, and what matters is knowing your boundaries. She told about a respectful conversation she had with someone who was across the political aisle about a school board issue, and at the end, he said, I never thought about it that way. And that's the goal, not to change someone's mind in one conversation, but to give him something to think about. She reminded us to set our boundaries when we need to, and protect our own well-being in those tough conversations. Hit the pause if you need to, stop the conversation, if you think it's getting so heated so that you stop listening.

Jean 55:51

My third takeaway was unexpected. If we want more allies, ask. Invite someone to mentor someone in a different group, or support an Employee Research Group, an ERG or co-sponsor an event. Be specific about what they can do. *ake the ask.* Julie said that many people she's interviewed, especially White men, want to help, but they haven't been invited in. That really struck me, because I have heard so many White men say they feel left out. They hear people don't talk about diversity and inclusion, and automatically thinks that means it's not them. It has never occurred to me that part of the problem is that no one has defined their role and invited them in. If we want to have inclusive systems, we have to invite people in.

Jean 56:58

Judy shared so much more like how to build more inclusive hiring systems and how to prepare ourselves to have challenging conversations instead of avoiding them. She called it a "never thought it that way" conversation, like the guy she met who at the end conversation said, I never thought of it that way. That's a powerful skill, and it's one that we talk about in our book *Conscious Change*. My co author, Jean Ramsey and I, you could even say our book is dedicated to people who want to have different conversations with different others, so at the end of it, they provoke new insights.

Jean 57:45

I'd love to hear what stood out to you in this episode. Please drop your thoughts in the comments or send an email to JeanLC@leadingconsciously.com. You can find out book *conscious change* through your favorite vendor. If your local bookstore doesn't have it, ask them to order it, and thanks for listening.

Check out Julie Kratz's Forbes column and the Next Pivot Point website for resources.

International Allyship Day is August 8th, <https://internationalallyshipday.org/>.



Julie Kratz has dedicated her career to allyship and inclusion. After spending 12 years in Corporate America experiencing many career “pivot points,” due to her own lack of belonging, she started her own speaking business with the goal of helping leaders be better allies. Promoting allyship in the workplace, Julie helps organizations foster more inclusive environments so that everyone can feel seen, heard and belonging. She is a professor at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business, hosts a regular Forbes column on allyship, is a frequent keynote speaker, podcast host and TEDx speaker. She is also the creator of the Lead Like an Ally training program and the Founder of the annual International Allyship Day program in NYC. She holds an MBA, is a Certified Master Coach, and is a certified unconscious bias and psychological safety trainer.

Julie is the author of 7 books including *We Want You: An Allyship Guide for People with Power*, *Allyship in Action: 10 Practices for Living Inclusively*, and *The Little Allies* children’s book and more.

Find Julie at NextPivotPoint.com and follow her on Forbes or LinkedIn.