

Philip Ideson: So why are you passionate about diversity in the workforce?

Div Pillay: Yes, I'm passionate because it comes from a very personal place.

Div Pillay: Diversity because I am sort of a migrant several times over. I'm of Indian heritage but born in South Africa and then have lived in Australia for 15 years. We've sort of been in a rebuild [00:00:30] or restart phase as a migrant moving through different countries.

Div Pillay: I am noticed the way that I have personally gone about making myself included in the workforce or not being included. So it is from a very personal place and I do notice the real different ... especially you know, in terms of expectation coming into Australia believing to be a very progressive [00:01:00] workplace and economy.

And thinking coming from South Africa where race discrimination is very overt.

Div Pillay: I grew up in the apartheid era.

Div Pillay: I came with the expectation that it would be easier. And then really realized there were lots of vices that existed in the workplace and from a representation point of view. For example, in my last corporate role, I was the only person of color in 358 [00:01:30] HR professionals.

Div Pillay: And so when you notice that you realize gosh, there's a lot to be done in terms of having diversity represented and a lot to be done in terms of how they are included and where they sit. So that's coming from a personal place for me and that's why I think I'm so passionate about it because I have lived it

Michelle Redfer: My experiences, I've been a woman in business so I've been a woman in business who came into leadership very young in her life and [00:02:30] went through a range of stages in my career. But ultimately ended up you know, hitting I suppose the ubiquitous glass ceiling

Michelle Redfer: Or the sticky floor or the glass walls. Whatever you want to call it. But I'm a mature woman, so I'm now in my 50's. I'm also in a same-sex relationship and so there are layers upon layers of reasons for exclusion that I have experienced directly [00:03:00] and indirectly.

Michelle Redfer: But the ultimately the reason I'm so passionate about diversity inclusion because I am a businesswoman because I know how successful companies are run. And they are run when you've got highly engaged workforces. And you can't have highly engaged workforces without all of your workforce going included.

Philip Ideson: Do you find that there's a disconnect between the demographics and the demographic diversity in Australians generally and then what you see in the workforce? And specifically [00:03:30] in leadership roles?

Michelle Redfer: Absolutely. Yeah, in Australia the leadership well-documented and statistics are there. It's generally middle-aged

Michelle Redfer: Generally male and generally of Anglo-Celtic background. Women in ASX also Australia Stock Exchange the top 200 companies in Australia on those boards we have less than [00:04:00] 26% female. We only have nine female chairs in the ASX. And of those statistics, culturally and linguistically, diverse women represent less than two percent of those statistics. In fact, that at a board or leadership level.

Philip Ideson: So I'd love to hear your perspective or your insights and from I think your experiences as well of how businesses can curate the environment. Essentially the enables that encourages inclusion, specifically at the leadership level?

Div Pillay: You know, what organizations need to do is really understand the diversity [00:08:30] that they are dealing with. And specifically not put the diversity labels into boxes.

Div Pillay: So really what has happened in the last couple of years is there's been a focus on gender. And gender has become synonymous with females potentially only looking at or progressing one type of female. And traditionally that has been in terms of looking at the numbers. [00:09:00] You've seen Anglo-Saxon females progressing

Div Pillay: And what we really have to do is think about those intersectionalities and by that I mean, there is a cross-section of diversity that often actually clash to create more barriers, if you will. So, you know we can't just say, "Oh, let's cover gender first" as an organization and once you get gender right then we'll go onto

Div Pillay: Cultural diversity. Then we'll go onto LGBTIQ. Then we'll go onto these ... and it just doesn't it is not a siloed approach. It is about inclusion first off and it is about recognizing that in one person they will set multiple diversities, you know. For example, you know I'm perceived also young. So there's also a perception of

Div Pillay: So I think that's the practical thing that organizations can tap into is really stop looking at us in terms of labels and silos. Understand what you're dealing with [00:11:00] and then understand how to really foster inclusion of everyone. And this also about diversity of thought as well

Div Pillay: People are all different. And it's just having the patience and the real commitment to be able to do it daily, not seasonally. Another irritation of mine

is having all of the specific days that get dedicated in the calendar year to celebrate [00:11:30] diversity

Div Pillay: So it shows that it is actually in a box

Div Pillay: And it's quite siloed. International Women's Day. Harmony Day. Cultural Diversity Week. It's just shows how siloed we are and we take the box and we go, "Oh, yes."

Div Pillay: We've done what we need to do for diversity.

Michelle Redfer: And from my perspective, Phil, I'd be [inaudible 00:12:30]. So [00:12:30] Div and I differ ever so slightly in our views around what needs to be done first. My first conversation with an MD or a board member or a CEO is to say, "What are your numbers at every level?" Particularly for gender, because I think when you get when you start to look at where are the women in my organization you can then to start looking at where does the where is the divergent point occur between women at lower levels and women at senior levels.

Michelle Redfer: Once that becomes apparent to a leader, they can then start say "Well, okay what do we need to do?" So I also have great concern that we have a sheep's dip approach, an Australian-ism, but we dip every person through the same training

Michelle Redfer: You know, like diversity training, unconscious bias training, blah blah blah. But I would rather see every organization have a culture and it has [inaudible 00:13:26] cultures within each culture. And to be a great leader, [00:13:30] you should be [inaudible 00:13:31] to understand well what is the culture I want to create? A how do we do things around here? And if inclusiveness is important, and it should be, what do I need to do specifically for my workforce? For my community? For my customers to promote inclusive leadership.

Michelle Redfer: So the very first thing is know your numbers. Where are the people in your organization of all diversities? But particularly gender because I think when you look at gender, you can start to scoop up a whole bunch of other intersectionalities. [00:14:00] But I absolutely agree with Div that having solid groups, you know the LGBTR group, the women's group, the disability group, the Indians in business group, the Asians in business group [crosstalk 00:14:12]. It creates those silos. It's well meaning, but it continues to create silos. So the short answer is, inclusive leadership takes work every single day.

Philip Ideson: You talked about a glass ceiling or feeling a glass ceiling. What words of advice would you give to anyone who's listening who feel that you know, they're at that point in their [00:14:30] career where there just isn't any opportunities because of their background to actually progress?

Div Pillay: I'd say it's a two-way sort of view of things. I often see barriers as an opportunity to understand what's going on

Div Pillay: And then work around it.

Div Pillay: And it's you know absolutely it's there, [00:15:00] but if you don't understand those barriers ... who's on the other side of that glass ceiling. Who can pull you through. Who needs to be your absolute champion and sponsor in the organization and how do you create advocacy is really questions I often ask women who I coach

Div Pillay: So it's really important for me to understand whether they know how to navigate themselves through around you know, under those barriers. And it really takes it takes a woman to understand what the message that she's putting out there. Who knows enough about her to be able to advocate when she's not in the room.

Div Pillay: But if her messaging is pitch perfect and that person or sponsor is a real advocate and knows exactly why she needs to progress and where she needs to be, then. And that person is unafraid of putting her name in the ring, then that's [00:16:30] the ticket to break down that barrier. So sometimes it just takes clear messaging, a real understanding of what you know, value add that woman provides to the business. And often I find women find it difficult to articulate it. They're very hard workers. They're hard performers, but in terms of doing the sales pitch on

Michelle Redfer: And from my perspective, Phil, the ... any time that a barrier is perceived. I mean if it's perceived it's real. I'd suggest that ... let me [00:19:30] backspace a little bit.

Michelle Redfer: I want to have conversations with the leaders and with the women themselves. So every strategy around advancing women needs to have a push and a pull. So the women need to be pushing up or pushing forward. Advancing themselves and certainly the advice Div has given us is really positive. And ultimately, they have a choice. In 99% of [inaudible 00:19:58] they do have a choice. They need to [00:20:00] be strong enough and have the confidence and the backing from the people around them to exercise the right to choice. However, if you've got a whole bunch of women pushing up against the glass ceiling and the people sitting above it are not pulling those women up and bringing them up into stretch roles, development roles

Michelle Redfer: Senior leadership roles. Executive board roles. What you're going to end up with is in your workforce you're going to end up with a whole bunch of very frustrated, [00:20:30] highly developed, highly ambitious. And as I said very frustrated women who will start to exit the organization. Which is bad for business.

Michelle Redfer: So the push-pull strategy is one I think is simple to say, harder to do but has to be done.