**Transcript**

Updated Spring Forward Podcast Ep 3.mp3

**Spring Richardson Perry 00:31**

Welcome to the Spring Forward podcast.

I'm your host, Spring Richardson Perry, the organizational change agent that is going to help your business achieve the excellence you desire.

If you're a business leader looking to take your business to the next level or simply looking for new ways, to spring your business forward then this is the podcast for you.

So let's get down to business and spring forward into excellence.

Welcome to another episode of the spring forward podcast.

**Spring Richardson Perry 00:50**

Today we're talking about cultivating success nurturing workplace culture.

And so, we're gonna talk about DEA as well with this today.

And to give us some insight on this, we have the doctor Mary m j McConner.

How are you?

I'm doing well.

**Spring Richardson Perry 00:52**

Thank you so much for having me spring.

It's so

**Spring Richardson Perry 00:57**

It's such a pleasure to be on your show, and I'm just really excited to have a good conversation.

**Spring Richardson Perry 01:49**

I'm excited too, MJ.

So a little bit about doctor McConnell, she is a certified diversity executive who has worked in deI and international education sectors for over 14 years.

She is an award winning DEI consultant and entrepreneur who has recently selected as 1 of the Memphis business journal 20 23 superwomen in business honorees.

And additionally, she is a top 40 under 40 urban elite professional awardee and a 20 23 a woman of impact with the American Heart Association.

Some of her professional affiliations include active membership, with the society for diversity, the society for human resource management, star scholars, network, Memphis, urban league young professionals and greater Memphis chamber small business council.

**Spring Richardson Perry 02:37**

Her company Inclusive excellence consulting is a full service diversity equity and inclusion firm which is headquartered in her hometown Memphis, Tennessee.

She's worked with Fortune 500 corporations, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education and professional associations.

So across the spectrum, she knows how to help organizations maximize the power that equity and inclusive diversity brings.

And servant leadership in her dedication to transforming organizations and communities through education, collaboration, and inclusion is what motivates doctor MJ the most.

And, it's really what drew me to her as I was connecting with MJ and seeing all the wonderful things that she's been doing.

**Spring Richardson Perry 02:40**

And I was just like, girl, when do you sleep?

**Spring Richardson Perry 02:58**

And here's the thing, I believe it or not, people I get that question a lot.

I sleep, I make it a priority to sleep at least 7 hours a night, so I do get a full night's rest.

I love it.

But you know what it is, Spring, when I get up, I'm very intentional.

So I am a part of the 5AM club.

**Spring Richardson Perry 03:25**

I get up every day at 5AM.

This early.

But I found that I'm most productive when I get up early and once I, you know, get my day started, I just I hit the ground running, and then, you know, about 06:00, I may wind down.

Sometimes I'm still working all the way up until I go to bed just to be honest, But, no, I I just I try to make the most of the time that I have because, you know, as entrepreneurs, we are super busy, so we have to be productive.

Well,

**Spring Richardson Perry 03:48**

I'm excited to get started, so let's jump right in.

And so again, today we're gonna be talking about culture in the workplace, specifically diversity in the workplace.

And this is MJ's Jam here because she is a certified diversity executive.

So I wanna start by talking about what diversity in the workplace looks like and for you, what does that mean?

**Spring Richardson Perry 04:04**

Well, that's a really good question.

And the thing about it is it's not a range from workplace to workplace.

Right?

And what I always tell people is diverse to the equity inclusion is a journey.

And so you can see different organizations are at different stages in their journey.

**Spring Richardson Perry 04:28**

But for me, when I hear the word diversity, I think of difference.

I think of range.

I think of different lived experiences.

A lot of times when we talk about diversity, 1 of the first few things we think about is race, gender, ethnicity, But I see it so much broader than that, I think, because of my personal lived experiences.

So I'll just share with you and the listeners, so I am dyslexic.

**Spring Richardson Perry 04:44**

And I'm also hard of hearing, so I can only hear in 1 ear.

I can't hear out of my right ear.

So my experience Yeah.

I'm hard of hearing.

And so that's why, you know, I do a lot of work around neurodiversity and disability inclusion.

**Spring Richardson Perry 05:23**

Because the thing is a lot of workplaces just aren't designed with disability inclusion and access accessibility in mind.

And so that's why I think my lens has been a little bit different because because I've always been considered different because I've passed all of these to different intersectional identities.

But, yeah, no, I I think it's really important and You know, and this might be a question you ask later, but I think we're in an interesting time too because if you look at certain states, There's this pushback on, oh, no.

We're tired of talking about d e and I.

There's even certain governors.

**Spring Richardson Perry 05:42**

You're right.

It's even certain governors right now that are trying to put laws in place to stop us from having DEAI initiatives in the workplace.

It is so unfortunate.

It's it's unfortunate, but then there's also push back on that like, no, this this can't happen.

That our country is evolving.

**Spring Richardson Perry 05:58**

We what's this generation z?

Is a generation that's currently in in the workforce, the youngest generation in the workforce, and they're 1 of the most multicultural generations we've ever seen.

In our nation.

So we have to talk about diversity.

Like, it's not going anywhere.

**Spring Richardson Perry 06:11**

So that's what I tell people.

I'm very honest with them, like, hey.

You know, you can you can stop having conversations about this, but it's not gonna change the fact that you have a diverse workforce with diverse needs.

**Spring Richardson Perry 06:30**

So many people when they think about DEI, they only think about race or gender equity, but what happens when you have that neurodiverse employee that we kinda just forgot about.

Right?

So how do we support that neurodiverse employee and cultivate that sense of belonging for them in the workplace.

**Spring Richardson Perry 06:45**

Yeah.

And that's that's a really good question.

And I'll say it's a little bit tough and and here's why because, you know, with race and gender is usually pretty apparent.

Right?

You can usually look at a person and say, okay, she most likely identifies as black.

**Spring Richardson Perry 07:17**

Or she most likely identifies as a woman.

But with neurodiversity, it's not always seen.

And and I'll tell you, and the list are for years, I never told anyone that I was dyslexic.

So I kinda had the luxury of hiding it for a long time, and a and a lot of people do because of the stigma that comes with it.

So I and I just had this conversation with someone who is on the Spectrum, and she said I'll probably never tell my employer that I'm autistic.

**Spring Richardson Perry 07:56**

Right?

And it's it's unfortunate that so many people feel like they they can't be open about, you know, their identities.

But 1 thing I do appreciate is I feel like there has been a lot of momentum around becoming more neuro inclusive in a lot of workplaces, So there's a lot of different organizations out there that do work specifically on neurodiversity and promoting neurodiversity awareness.

So for example, we just had neurodiversity week, which was a I wanna say it was, like, 2 weeks ago, but it was, like, an international celebration.

And that's pretty new.

**Spring Richardson Perry 08:04**

I I think it and, you know, I don't wanna throw out a date because I could be wrong, but I wanna say it's been around for maybe at least 4 to 5 years.

**Spring Richardson Perry 08:06**

Okay.

Yeah.

That's still pretty new.

Yeah.

**Spring Richardson Perry 08:32**

It's still pretty new, and I could be wrong.

Like I said, it may have been around longer, but it it didn't really reach international status and have the type of momentum that it has until recently.

So, like, things like that is what's really helping is is generating awareness.

And and people are learning about the different, you know, the different diagnoses that are under that umbrella of neurodiversity.

And so I think I think we still have a long way to go.

**Spring Richardson Perry 08:44**

I'm a be straight up with you.

We still have a long way to go when it comes to workplaces being more neuro inclusive, but we are making strides.

So

**Spring Richardson Perry 09:18**

here's another thing that comes to my MJ when we're talking about neurodiversity.

Both you and I were in education as well before we got into these spaces that we're in now.

And so in k 12 education, kids are legally mandated to have accommodations if they have a documented learning disability.

So, we see in this foundational space that neurodiversity is being supported, but once they graduate, it's a whole different ballgame.

Universities and those institutions of higher learning, they're not mandated to provide those support.

**Spring Richardson Perry 10:12**

But they have gotten better as a whole in doing so in recent times.

However, we've set the tone in the foundational k 12 space that we are willing to support you, but then once they graduate, it's kinda like we're throwing them to the wolves.

So, this is what really drew me to you and your work because you have that background in education, so you understand where it's coming from in the k 12 space and then moving into the higher ed space and workplace, we simply just fall short.

There there's laws that govern employers that state they must provide reasonable accommodations for disabled employees.

But when we think about disability, we typically think about somebody that's in a wheelchair, not necessarily that neurodiverse employee, or the employee who's hard of hearing like you shared about yourself.

**Spring Richardson Perry 10:37**

So these employees technically identify as disabled as well.

So this can have a profound effect on how employees show up at work which ultimately affects the workplace culture.

So talk to me MJ about what you do when you're working with these organizations.

What does that look like and how do you help these organizations support their diverse employees.

Yeah.

**Spring Richardson Perry 10:44**

That's excellent excellent question.

And you touched on so many great points.

And can I just The 1 thing you said, I was like, yes?

Come on now, please.

Yes.

**Spring Richardson Perry 11:17**

Preached.

Let the people know is the fact that we do a good job when individuals are students, but it doesn't it doesn't continue on once they enter the workforce.

And so that's that's 1 of the things I I teach people.

And that's 1 of the things I, you know, inform organizations about is that, you know, is equally important for members of the workforce to have access to those same resources and to have access to accommodations if necessary.

And here's the thing spring.

**Spring Richardson Perry 11:47**

This this is this is a fact that a lot of folks may or may not realize, but usually for an accommodation, it's it's free.

Like, it it it it's usually free of cost.

Something like, oh, I need something to read out loud to me because I'm dyslex I used to have software to read out loud to me just to make sure I don't have any typos in my emails.

But that's literally just click download, and it's like that for most employees.

It's it's usually free to little costs.

**Spring Richardson Perry 12:12**

They stay on average anywhere from it'll range most likely up to 500 dollars or it might be no cost at all.

But that's something that we have to to make sure that employers know that.

And then also, we have to change this mindset because it's a mindset shift that needs to happen.

Where we have to stop looking at folks with disabilities as liabilities.

No.

**Spring Richardson Perry 12:31**

Oh my god.

I we have to shift the culture and say, how do we shift it from this liability mindset to the they are assets?

Because usually folks with disabilities are gonna be some of your hardest working employees.

There's data out there that supports it.

Because they're they're they're like, okay, good.

**Spring Richardson Perry 12:42**

I have a job.

You know, because And how they accepted me?

You're right.

The employment rates are much lower for folks with disabilities.

So usually the work they have a strong work ethic.

**Spring Richardson Perry 13:17**

They're very creative because they've had to be creative their entire life and figure out different solutions, you know, because everywhere is not accessible to them, so they have to figure out, okay.

How do I get in here?

How do I how do I fit into this culture?

So it's just so many different strengths that folks with disabilities and people who are neurodiverse, they bring those skills to the workforce, and that's what I do.

I teach employers like This is what you gain by hiring diver well, yeah, hiring folks with, you know, different skill sets and abilities.

**Spring Richardson Perry 13:54**

That's awesome, I really appreciate that because I started to notice a few things about how I show up to work as an entrepreneur, which led me to believe that I may have ADHD.

And these days it seems a lot of people, especially black women, who right now are the largest number of new entrepreneurs are being diagnosed with some sort of neurodiverse disability later in life.

So this is really what made me think about neurodiversity in the workplace and inclusiveness, so can you talk to me about how we shift that culture and really foster a sense of inclusiveness for those employees?

**Spring Richardson Perry 14:15**

Yes.

And you oh, I love that you brought that up.

You are absolutely right.

A lot of black women are undiagnosed and I I think about a moment.

I laugh because, you know, it's not funny, but I I can look back at it now and be like, wow.

**Spring Richardson Perry 14:23**

That person really just didn't know any better.

But I remember growing up.

And there was a time where it's like, oh, baby, you dyslexia.

You gotta pray that away.

You know?

**Spring Richardson Perry 14:37**

By you know, there's this there's this there are certain cultural things that we see in certain communities, and it's just black communities, but also Hispanic and Latinx communities.

And there's a lot of cultural

**Spring Richardson Perry 14:41**

cultural

**Spring Richardson Perry 14:52**

things and insert things.

Yeah.

There, you know, where it's like, oh, no.

Just we gotta pray over you.

And, you know, anything if you even talk about going to a psychologist or a psychiatrist, it's like, no.

**Spring Richardson Perry 15:02**

No.

No.

You don't need that.

You're you're fine.

And so but I do feel like we are getting to a place where we're having more conversations about it.

**Spring Richardson Perry 15:18**

It's because there's more awareness.

People are realizing like, you know what?

No.

Maybe Maybe I'm not maybe I'm not, you know, something's not wrong with me.

I just think and process things differently, and they're starting to understand like, oh, maybe I'm ADHD.

**Spring Richardson Perry 15:30**

Maybe I have ADHD.

Maybe I'm dyslexic.

Maybe I'm on the spectrum.

Maybe, you know, it could be so many different things.

And so that is the beauty of getting diagnosed even if it is later in life.

**Spring Richardson Perry 15:47**

At least you have that awareness of, oh, okay.

This is why I process things the way I process it.

And why I do things the way I do it.

So personally, I think it's never too late.

Even if you're 50, 60, 70 is never too late to to have an assessment if you think you might be neurodivergent?

**Spring Richardson Perry 16:03**

It does help you to show up better, and so I really start to think about others who are neurodiverse as they try to navigate the workplace.

How do they show up as their authentic selves at work without feeling intimidated or fear of being harshly judged?

**Spring Richardson Perry 16:20**

Yeah.

I think a lot of that falls on the workplace itself.

It falls on the employers.

Our and I and I say this, but we have to act ourselves as employers sometimes.

Well, I'm not implying it, but I'm speaking of companies.

**Spring Richardson Perry 16:56**

But you have to ask yourself, do we actually have a space where people feel like they can show up authentically?

Are we truly fostering an inclusive and accessible and equitable environment?

And, you know, a lot of folks Like I said, I I can tell you countless countless people I've talked to who are just like, yeah, I'll never disclose that I'm neurodivergent, or I'll never disclose that I have and invisible disability for that very reason.

So but but when employers get it right, because I have seen a lot of employers who are very good about you know, we want you as you are.

We hired you for a reason.

**Spring Richardson Perry 17:17**

We view you as an asset in the in the skills you bring and all of your different lived experiences, we view you as someone who belongs here.

And when workplaces can really get that message across and be sincere about it.

I don't mean just some diversity statement on a website.

I mean, like, they are in You you know what I'm saying?

Like they are

**Spring Richardson Perry 17:19**

They see a lot of that these days.

There's

**Spring Richardson Perry 17:40**

a lot of that, but they true they are truly infusing it in their culture.

Then, I mean, that that's when people are more likely to feel like, you know what?

I can't show up authentically because they have created us created a psychologically safe place for me to do so.

And you know what?

I can be me, but a lot of it it does fall on the employer.

**Spring Richardson Perry 18:08**

Yeah, yeah.

Well, MJ, it has truly been a pleasure talking with you today.

You've dropped some gems for our listeners So I just want to wrap up here and bring it all in in terms of what we've been talking about today, and you've really touched on some great points.

So for 1, neurodiverse employees need to feel included in the workplace.

This helps foster an overall inclusive and positive work Place culture.

**Spring Richardson Perry 18:38**

And second, remember, you may not recognize right away that an employee is neuro diapers.

However, once you do recognize it, there are ways that you can support those employees.

And remember, MJ said that those supports are usually free or minimal cost.

So once again, doctor McConner's company is called inclusive excellence consulting for all your DEI needs, You can reach out to her on LinkedIn, Facebook, and what about Instagram?

**Spring Richardson Perry 18:50**

MJ Maconor, yep, I'm on Instagram, and yeah, I'm most active on LinkedIn though.

That's where I, like, do my most like, in in terms of engagement, that's my favorite platform.

Oh, yeah.

**Spring Richardson Perry 18:57**

Thank you so much, MJ, for being here today.

It has truly been a pleasure.

Awesome.

Well,

**Spring Richardson Perry 19:00**

thank you.

I appreciate you for having me.

**Spring Richardson Perry 19:45**

Thanks for listening to the spring forward podcast.

I hope you were able to capture some of the gems that were dropped and our decided to start using the information to help your business spring forward into excellence.

I would love to hear some of your biggest takeaways from this episode So connect with me on LinkedIn or Facebook or tag me on Instagram at springy underscore springtime and don't forget to subscribe to the show so you don't miss an episode.

And if you'd like to learn more about how we can work together, visit the website at time 2 spring forward dot org.

That's TIMET0SPRINGF0RWARD dot org.

**Spring Richardson Perry 19:45**

And until next time on the spring forward podcast.