

The logo for 'LIFE at Disney' is centered in a dark, rounded rectangular box. The word 'LIFE' is in a clean, white, sans-serif font. 'at' is in a smaller, lowercase, white, sans-serif font. 'Disney' is in the iconic white script font. The background of the entire image is a colorful, pixelated pattern transitioning from yellow and green on the left to red and purple on the right.

LIFE at Disney

Episode 4 Transcript: Disney Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Disney On The Yard and Business Employee Resource Groups

Ashley and Tony (Podcasts Hosts)

Welcome to the Disney podcast, the show where you discover what it's like to be part of the story and a career with Disney as we bring the Walt Disney Company's core values, culture, and work to life. We're your host, Tony Williams and Ashley Siegel, and we are going to share some remarkable stories from the perspectives of the people and the teams behind the magic.

Tony

This week's episode highlights our commitment to increasing representation at all levels across Disney. Through our inclusive hiring approach and initiatives that create opportunities for underrepresented groups. These programs and initiatives are available not only to employees and cast members, but to all of you listening as well. From our culture to our content and experiences we're working together to translate our intentions into real actions. And with that in mind, please help me to welcome to our show Corey Savage, Senior Outreach and Engagement Manager. Or as we like to call him, the mayor. Welcome to Corey.

Corey

Hi, Tony. Thank you.

Tony

Thank you for joining us today. I know you have a pretty busy day, so taking a few minutes to chat with us is really appreciate it.

Corey

Absolutely. I'm looking forward to being here and excited to have this conversation.

Tony

Awesome. Awesome. So, would love to hear a bit about your career and your start at Disney. How did you come into the organization and what was that journey like?

Corey

Yeah, absolutely. So, I have been with The Walt Disney Company now for 11 months. I will be celebrating one-year next month. So really excited about my time here so far. I actually started out as the HBCU recruiter working on our campus recruitment team, and then I made a shift over to our outreach and engagement and working exclusively with Disney on the Yard. So just really excited about the work that we're doing to partner with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and work with those students and the faculty and the staff. So yeah, so I came to Disney, and like I said about a year ago by way of working for several HBCUs in the fundraising space. I had an opportunity to spend some time at Hampton University, North Carolina Central University, and my alma mater, North Carolina A&T State University, Aggie Pride. I know there be some Aggies out here listening to this. They have quite a few Aggies at Disney. And then I spent some time working for a syndicated radio show host, Tom Joyner, with his foundation that was founded to support historically black colleges and universities. So, I was looking for a new career opportunity and came across the role at Disney that was looking for a recruiter to work specifically with HBCU and to help pipeline HBCU talent into the company for internships. And I thought, wow, what an amazing opportunity to work for a company that has the recognition and the global footprint that Disney has and to be able to go there and work. But take my passion and love for HBCU with me. And so, I just thought that would be an amazing opportunity. So, I saw the role, applied. I had my interviews, and here I am.

Tony

Awesome. I cannot believe it's not even a year yet. I am feeling certain that we've worked together for years, but apparently, it's only been 11 months, really. Wow, how time flies when you're doing really important and meaningful work, specifically with the students, the institutions that you work with. And so, you mentioned it and you define it a bit for us. HBCUs or historically black colleges and universities. Can you tell us a bit more about those institutions for anyone that might be unfamiliar?

Corey

Yeah, absolutely. So, wow. You know, I don't even know where to start, but, you know, I'll say HBCUs were universities that were founded at a time when black people could not attend mainstream or PWI, as we call them, predominantly white institutions. So, you saw in the mid-1800s HBCUs being founded, you know, across the country the first HBCU that was founded was Cheyney University and then you just saw them other private and public institutions pop up. You have what we call the 1890 schools or Land-Grant institutions. My alma mater happens to be one of those, so you'll see a lot of HBCUs that we're founded with sort of agricultural and mechanical or agricultural and technical and the in the title. So those schools were established to teach trades to black people. And then there are some also HBCUs that were founded around the arts and when I think about, you know, North Carolina Central University being one of the first arts, you know, liberal arts HBCUs founded. So, there are, you know, HBCUs across the country that were founded for specific reasons really to teach black people and then freed slaves to give them an opportunity to get an education.

Tony

Awesome. And thank you for kind of laying out the history for us and helping us understand where these institutions came from. And that they've persisted. Right. There was certainly a time for when they were the only option for black and African American folks in this country. Right. These institutions have persisted. Right. Despite the fact that the other institutions are also open for our community now. Help us understand the role that HBCUs play today for us.

Corey

Oh, wow. You know, they play such an amazing role for us, for us today. And I always like to say HBCUs are really national treasures. They you know, they provide an opportunity for students to get a world-class education. They are safe havens for students that want to be at a place where they are in the majority they you know, and you can look at some of the data and see that HBCUs produce some of the most degreed professionals. They go on to do other things after getting their bachelor's degree. So, you know, they mean so much to our community. They mean so much to our students. Just because of the nurture that happens there. The education that happens there. The experience that the students are able to gain. So, when I think about HBCUs and kind of what they mean today and how they are here to really serve a purpose. You know, initially, they were founded to serve a purpose to educate people of color when they couldn't go anywhere else. And as you said, they have continued and thrived through so much and to kind of still be here doing that and also leading some amazing research and having stellar, stellar programs. You know, it's just amazing to see that growth. I think about an article I read recently about Xavier University in New Orleans, and they are known for producing some of the most African American medical professionals. And now they are in the works of developing their own medical school because so many students go there and, you know, kind of major biology or pre-med, and then they go off to medical school somewhere else. That Xavier is now kind of creating, they're going to have an opportunity to create their own medical school so those students can start there and continue that professional training to become a doctor there. So, it's just so amazing to see these things happening now and kind of looking back at as to why they were founded and kind of what they were doing then, and to see what they're doing now is just so amazing.

Tony

That's awesome. And thank you again for that history lesson. Right. But by then bringing that kind of full circle and calling these institutions what I think they are right, national treasures, given the impact that they've had on our nation and the world by creating opportunities and spaces. Right. For so many black and African American folks and others as well. Right. Knowing that these are not exclusive institutions to really learn and grow and develop and lead the way and innovate in so many ways and ultimately for many come to Disney to become the amazing storytellers that we are. And that sounds like that was your journey as well, right, in coming to Disney. And so want to understand what your work is now. Right. You have an incredible passion for these institutions. Disney has really

doubled down on our commitment to these institutions and their alumni and their students. What is your working engagement look like there?

Corey

Yeah, absolutely. So, you mentioned earlier about calling me the mayor. So that unofficial title that I have, in my work, I really am going out to these universities, to these colleges and universities and making connections and talking about the great work that Disney has been doing and that Disney is doing and what Disney will do in the future with faculty and staff. And kind of highlighting Disney as an employer of choice and then working directly with students to expose them to the career opportunities that Disney has, as well as so many of the other brands that fall under the Disney umbrella. You know, when we go out and we talk to schools and we show we have a presentation and has a slide where we show all of the companies that fall under the Disney umbrella, you know, I'm always surprised I'll ask the students, did you see a company that you didn't know that that was a part of the Walt Disney family? And they raise their hands and it's like, oh, you know, I didn't know Nat Geo or Hulu. And so being able to kind of talk to them about our company and the opportunities that we have. So really, I have the, I really like that one of the most amazing jobs here at the company because I get to marry one of my passions, something that that I love near and dear, and now go out and talk about this amazing place that I work and the things that we're doing to uplift the HBCU community as well as the amazing work that we're doing internally with our cast members and employees that are HBCU alums.

Tony

Incredible. I think so much of the work that we do. Right. And creating and sharing opportunities is one, letting folks know that there are people behind the magic, right, to letting them know that you can be one of these people. But I think what's most exciting is opening up the entire world of Disney to folks to say, as you mentioned Hulu, Nat Geo, ESPN, all of these organizations are part of the Disney family. Right. And so, opportunity is really limitless for folks that are interested and that come into Disney. And sharing that with our HBCU partners, I think is so important. And so, you've mentioned those external efforts, right? Where you get to go out and share kind of the good news of Disney and the work that's possible here. You mentioned the internal efforts and those are all part of a larger body of work, right? Disney on the Yard. Can you tell us about the Disney on the Yard initiative?

Corey

Sure. Absolutely. So, Disney on the Yard is The Walt Disney Company's Initiative to strengthen and deepen our relationships with HBCUs. And it really has to focus, the first focus is student success and when we talk about student success, we're talking about making sure students are career ready through our mentorship program. We have the Disney on the Yard mentorship program, which is really one of our hallmark initiatives. And that program is open to our what we call our internal population as well as our external population. So, we invite our Disney UNCF scholars to be a part of the program. We invite our current HBCU interns but also any student that has attended one of the Disney on the

Yard events, one of our virtual events, or in-person events. They also receive an invitation to join the Disney on the Yard mentorship program, and they are paired with a Walt Disney employee for six months. And so that employee works with their student as it relates to personal branding, we do some workshops and programming around networking, building your resumé, and, you know, this program is definitely a giveback, but it's also a way for these HBCU students to connect with someone at Disney and have someone that will be an advocate for them when they then decide to apply for an internship or an early career role. So, it's really just kind of it's really about us kind of being with that student from the start of their journey to the end. So that's one of my favorite programs that we have with Disney on the Yard. I also mentioned Disney's UNCF corporate scholars. That's a program that we have in partnership with UNCF. It's in its second year where we provide an internship as well as housing and relocation for up to 25 scholars. And they come in their junior year. They do this internship with Disney and then we're also committed to helping convert them into employees within the university. So those are some of the programs that we're doing that fall under our student success. As well as our career exploration sessions, where we work with various segments across the company to talk about the career opportunities. I've always loved to use this example of accounting. You know, a lot of accounting students, they go to school, and they really think about working at a financial institution. Or one of the Big Four. And then we come in and we talk to them about some of the amazing opportunities where you can use that accounting and finance degree at Disney. We had a student whose internship was working with *Dancing with the Stars*, and she was in charge of making sure all the dancers and the stars get paid. You know, you're not going to get something that exciting and, you know, at an accounting firm. So, exposing these students to these career paths that are here at Disney. So that's our kind of what I like to call our student success pillar of Disney on the Yard. And then we have our faculty engagement where we have sessions with faculty to share information about The Walt Disney Company. We do a newsletter that we send to faculty that highlights some of the job opportunities that we have. We're also working directly with various segments across the enterprise to take Disney professionals to some of these universities. It can be virtual or in-person to talk about their experiences and what they're doing as well. And then we're also helping faculty to make sure that the curriculum at the universities is relevant and that the students are prepared for careers when they come to Disney. So we're talking about like, you know, what happens if things that they need to know and learn in order to be competitive students. So, when Disney on the Yard started, we really wanted to make sure that we were showing up on the yard everywhere, not just one place. So, there's a student focus, there's a faculty focus. And we're working on also creating a component that touches HBCU alumni because there are opportunities here as well for individuals who are not looking for early career roles. So, you know, the Disney on the Yard work is growing and evolving. And so, yes, those are kind of the main key components about the work that we do. And it's a lot it keeps me busy.

Tony

And while we're at it, right, I think this might be a common term, right, in some spaces. Help us understand the naming of the initiative. Disney on the Yard. What does that mean?

Corey

Yeah. So, every college campus has a yard, you know, but the yard on an HBCU campus is a, you know, kind of is a sacred place. There's so much that kind of that happens on the yard. I have to think about my college experience. And, you know, just from, you know, kind of if you're just hanging out on the yard in between, you know, your classes and you're walking, everybody come by. And if you know anything about HBCU culture, it's a fashion show. So, you know, like the yard is where you see you know, like, oh, so, you know, everybody's kind of walking through an outfit, you know, they're festivals and things that happen on the yard. And that's really kind of, I feel like it's something that is quintessential to the college experience, but very quintessential to the HBCU experience. And anyone that has attended an HBCU has some memory of something that has happened on the yard or, you know, kind of be, you know, kind of being on the yard or, or just having that interaction. So, I think, you know, with the name Disney on the Yard, it's, you know, it's a couple of things. It's showing that we know and understand and have an importance of HBCU culture and history and, you know, so and then how can Disney really show up, you know, kind of on the yard and be and be present?

Tony

That's awesome. I totally agree. Right. I think drum major Mickey is a really amazing addition to this work, particularly knowing what it took to really create that and get that off the ground. And I'd be remiss not to acknowledge and applaud yourself and so many of the HBCU alumni that are across Disney who have raised their hand, raised their voices right, particularly in getting this work off the ground. As we think about our designers who have said, hey, this is within my skill set and I want this done right. Right. And authentically. And they have done that, right, at the early stages of this work and continue to support it with mentorship and career sessions and all of those things. And so, I think so many folks are going to hear this and think like, Corey has a dream job, right? He gets to live his passions every day. He gets to do these things that are so important and impactful. What advice would you give, right, to someone that's listening to us now and thinking, hey, I would love a career that allows me to create opportunity in that way? Like Corey, what advice would you give?

Corey

You know, one, never give up. You know, I had so many no's before I got here, you know, so it's so easy to get discouraged when, you know, when there's always the no. And then you get in your own head and then think, well, is this a space I need to be in, and do I need to continue to try to move here and be here? And I'm going to say yes. You know, don't let that no set you back and always be open to feedback and, you know, kind of asking for it and being willing to receive it and knowing how to grow and prepare yourself. So, when that opportunity comes, you know, you will be ready. As I think about it now, all the no's that I got for work that would have put me in this space. I'm glad I had those no's, you know, one, because I probably wouldn't be here, but two because I had those no's, I had an opportunity to continue along the path that I was on and continue to grow my network and meet people and have some of the relationships that I have now that made it a little bit

easier for me when I was here. You know, once I started, you know, if you were to say, oh, hey, we need a connection at this HBCU and I'm like, oh, well, I happen to know the provost, or I'm thinking, well, you know what? I don't know anyone there, but I do know someone who is connected there. So, all of my experiences, I feel like have prepared me for the place that I'm at today. So just, you know, our word of advice is, you know, as you're going through these things and you're getting those no's that you're trying to get to where you want to be, know that while you're on your journey, I strongly believe that is preparing you for the place that you'll get to next. And what you have learned there will help you in that role once you get there.

Tony

I think I can say on behalf of all of us here, we're so happy that your path has brought you here. Right. And you are leading the work that you're leading and bringing all of your experience to that every day. Mr. Mayor, Corey, thank you. Thank you not only for what you do. Right. And creating opportunity. But thank you for taking time to come and share that journey with us, to share your work with us, to share the impact that you're having with us. I'm looking forward to the next thing for Disney on the Yard, because I know there's always the next thing. I'm sure you are cooking that up and really, really look forward to chatting with you again.

Corey

Well, thank you. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my story and to talk about this work. It's so important, you know, it's important to me. It's important to our organization and hopefully, someone will hear this and decide that they want to be connected. You know, they want to be a mentor or, you know, they want to, you know, talk to us about possibly being able to engage students at their alma mater. So please feel free to reach out to the Disney on the Yard team.

Ashley

It's so exciting to be featuring our incredible Disney on the Yard team and outreach and engagements' own Corey Savage. I'm thrilled to be diving even further into the incredible work we are doing to continue building on our dedication to historically black college and university students and alumni communities here at Disney. Continuing the conversation around diversity, equity, and inclusion in our recruiting and talent attraction spaces, I'll be diving even further into our initiatives that focus on the needs, expectations, and lived experiences of our people as we're able to further foster an inclusive environment where all employees can contribute and work towards reaching their fullest potential. To talk more about this and how she's driving equity in the tech space, let's welcome tech recruiter and my friend LaJoy Mercer. I'm so happy you're here.

LaJoy

Hey, Ashley, very excited to chat with you today. Thank you for inviting me.

Ashley

Absolutely, LaJoy. Now, you have a really awesome Disney story, so why don't you start with that? How did you end up where you are today?

LaJoy

Okay, well, first I have to say, actually, a week ago today, I celebrated 15 years with the company. So, it has been quite a journey. Actually, started as a professional intern for the Disney Institute. And if you're not familiar, basically they do business programs for different companies that want to benchmark with Disney. And so, their tagline is "The Business Behind the Magic", and I actually was able to stay on with the company as a campus representative. So I went back to my school, which is the number one public HBCU, Florida A&M University, and as I was finishing up my master's in business, I was able to help recruit other students for internships as a campus rep. And then once I graduated with my MBA actually became a leader in our theme parks. So, I started out at Disney's Hollywood Studios working one of my favorite attractions, the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Fantasmic, and many different shows and parades. Then I transitioned to Magic Kingdom, which was just iconic. So, I actually worked in Fantasyland attractions, and I got to be a part of the expansion there. So, I was there for almost five years. And so, I always tell people I was trained on everything from Snow White Scary Adventures to the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. So just a lot of fun and a lot of pixie dust being a part of that theme parks world. And then from there, I transitioned my career into consumer insight research, and so basically got to work on various research projects around The Walt Disney World Resort, which was a lot of fun. And then last year, I actually transitioned over to the talent acquisition team as a recruiter. And in the past year, interestingly enough, I've actually had three different recruiter roles. So, when I first returned to the company, I was a recruiter for casting, and so I got to help place cast members all throughout The Walt Disney World Resort and then I transitioned to the campus team in the fall. So, it was just this full circle moment where, you know, I went from being an intern to now getting to help recruit interns and so initially I was recruiting for Disneyland, Engineering and Safety and Health. And then this past spring I transitioned over to the tech team. And so, I'm just really excited to be a part of this team. And I always like to say because I'm a huge Black Panther fan that I'm recruiting our future Shuri's. So that's just a little bit about me.

Ashley

I love that. And I love to hear kind of your full cycle story here. I mean, it sounds like you were Disney on the Yard far before we had our Disney on the Yard work really formally worked here. So that is just so cool to hear, especially with your campus rep days. That was you.

LaJoy

That's right, that's right.

Ashley

I love that. I love that.

LaJoy

It was definitely meant to be.

Ashley

Yeah. Being in the role that you're in now as a tech recruiter and bringing in our professional interns into technology roles all across the enterprise, what does that look like day to day for you?

LaJoy

So basically, it's cyclical, like for recruitment as a whole when we're talking about internships. So, I'm a huge basketball fan, so I kind of like to break it up into four quarters. So basically, the first quarter is meeting with our hiring leaders, identifying what their needs are, etc., and then actually posting those internship positions on our job posting sites as well as various platforms. And then the second quarter, of course, is reviewing the resumes and doing lots of different interviews. And then the third quarter is making the offers. And then once we have all of our internships, the roles accepted, we continue to engage with those interns, help get the hiring leaders prepared for their arrival, and help prepare the interns for their arrival as well. And then once they're here, we welcome them, we check in with them, make sure that they are successful in their roles and our ultimate goal, of course, is that they will convert to full-time with us. So, we have a very specific process for that. But basically, our tagline is we like to interview once and hire twice. And so, in the tech realm, we've found a lot of success with conversions through this process.

Ashley

It's so special and I think that full cycle, that full story of making that connection, helping someone find their role, and then of course through to that conversion where they're really starting that next phase of their career. It's super special and I think it's something that especially our campus teams are doing such an amazing job of really prioritizing because this next generation is just so brilliant and to see everything that they're bringing to the company. I mean, we have the honor of having a professional intern on my team right now, and just watching that energy and that excitement and the perspective that they bring, it's just brilliant. And there's really nothing like it. Now, you've been at the company for a long time. How have you seen kind of that focus on our interns and how we've worked through these professional internship programs change from your time as a professional intern to how we're really working on these on these programs and with these students now?

LaJoy

Awesome question. Well, I think the biggest change is in the most recent years there truly is that focus on converting interns. Which is nice because I think during my time a few years ago, it was more about like we were happy and excited to get the internship with Disney. But most interns knew that they would then have to try to find their own full-time

opportunities. So, the fact that we really have put a lot of work and planning into creating these conversion plans so that we're keeping this great, like you said, this brilliant talent within our company. So yeah, it really, really excites me.

Ashley

Now, besides your day-to-day with recruiting itself, you're really involved with a lot of our diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. So, everything from our Business Employee Resource Groups (BERGs) to of course our Disney on the Yard work with our historically black colleges and universities. How has that really changed in your time here? When we think about the work here in the company from a DE&I perspective?

LaJoy

Well, again, going back to when I was a professional intern, I remember having to do that education piece around what an HBCU is to now, hearing everyone speak that language about HBCU, and I think Disney on the Yard has obviously been that catalyst for it. Right? Engaging with our HBCU community from the students to the faculty to our alumni. And actually, this fall I had the opportunity to go back on campus and speak on a panel and also participate in one of the career fairs that they had happening. And I actually met one of my current Disney on the Yard mentees. I met them during that event, and they're now here on the college program and then I have another mentee who I met at one of our Disney on the Yard events this summer who was on the college program but is now a professional intern. And so, it's just really nice to be able to continue to stay connected to the community in that way and just see how far we've come. And in terms of other DE&I initiatives, I will say for me all throughout my career, our Business Employee Resource Groups or BERGS, as we call them. It's really been like a lifeline for me. So, I've been a member of the Florida-based Pulse group, so Pulse is an acronym that stands for People Unite It to Lead, Serve, and Excel. And so, I remember early on in my career being able to go to those meetings and connect with such an amazing community that I've really gained lifelong friends and mentors from. And again, I really needed that because when I went to work, especially early on in my career, I was always the only black leader on the team and obviously the only black woman. So, it was just really nice to have that safe space that I could go to and be able to thrive in. Also, most recently, I had the opportunity to go down to New Orleans for the Essence Festival and be a part of that activation, which was so much fun because really obviously the last couple years the event wasn't hosted in person. But I, you know, my family and I, we went to the event for years and I've always wanted to go and represent the company there. So, it was just really cool to see the power of our brand and the way that people really connect to it. So, we had all kinds of different things. We had various giveaways. Our booth was definitely very popular. We had character meet and greets. We had screenings, just all kinds of things happening. And actually, Disney was the entertainment sponsor for the event, like the primary entertainment sponsor. So yeah, so just really cool to be able to connect, and the list can go on of all the DE&I stuff that I'm involved with, so I'll just highlight a couple more things. So, we also on the corporate side, we have something called the Inclusion Champions Network. So, I was recently nominated to be a part of that, so I'm really excited to get involved with that. And then on my actual

team we have started a DE&I committee, so the recruiters and the coordinators were working together on various programming for our team. And then the last thing I want to make sure to call out is Disney Dreamers Academy, which I've had the honor of being a part of for the last 15 years. An amazing program where we bring in 100 high school students and we truly immerse them in the magic. We bring in various professionals throughout many different industries and essentially allow them to have that time to be mentored and developed and really continue cultivating their dreams and so, so yeah, so those are just a few of the things that I that I've had the opportunity to do. But again, the list can go on.

Ashley

Absolutely. I think it's such an important call out, and I think we see that so often. Right? Our BERG communities are there. I mean, that's why we call them Business Employee Resource Groups, right? Where we're there for about human interaction and for that connection. But we're also there to really help inform the business, whether it's tragic events like George Floyd's murder or attacks on specific communities or cultural or government events that are happening in the world. Right. Our BERGs are really able to inform our leaders really across the company. And then we think about it all the way to our content. Right. You mentioned *Black Panther* earlier. Like *Black Panther* does not happen and is not authentic and true to the richness of black culture without our black BERGs there to consult and say, this is what feels right for us. This is how this movie will really resonate, not only with Marvel fans around the world, but really with the black community. I mean, that release, I think it's incredible to see the impact that our BERGs really have in really everything that's happening around the company.

LaJoy

Absolutely. And, you know, I will say I'm a huge *Black Panther* fan. I saw the movie over 20 times in the theaters and the *Wakanda Forever* trailer, I mean, it's so captivating, it, you know, emotional. I've watched it multiple times, but truly, yeah, that's something to your point, it does start with having that cultural fluency, having those conversations so that when we see those characters, we see a piece of ourselves. And I think that that's what really, really resonated for me, seeing the women of Wakanda and their beauty and their brilliance and their intelligence and, and just all of those various aspects. So, yeah, it's really incredible.

Ashley

Absolutely. I think you know, you're really touching on things that are so important for us to talk about, right? We're living in a really difficult time and were these very full, complex layered people in addition to being people who love this company. Right. And we really want the company that we love to show up for all of us. And to really recognize us in that way. And so, I think absolutely that the concept that we're thinking, you know, not that many years ago that that folks had to think about what my hair looked like so that I could be taken seriously or even permitted to do my job. And really, it is the bravery and the leadership of so many members of our communities that are showing up and saying, this

has to change. I need to be able to show up as my full self and I need my guests to be able to walk into that park and say, look at LaJoy, and that looks like me, right? I can do that. I can be here. I can be a tech recruiter, or I can be working in our parks or I could be the next CEO, and I can wear my hair, however, the heck I want, because this is who I am and it's beautiful and it needs to be celebrated just like that. So, thank you for bringing these things to the table here.

LaJoy

No, thank you for asking the question. I think it's just so important and it's refreshing to see how far in that we've come as a company to where, you know, yes, sometimes it might be a little bit uncomfortable, but that is a part of growing and that's a part of building trust. Right? So, if you want to keep great talent here, then you have to feel safe to be able to express ourselves. So, yeah.

Ashley

So, what excites you next? Like what are the next things that you're really excited about when we think about furthering that culture of inclusion?

LaJoy

Well, I would say I think where we are is kind of that starting point, you know, that saying Rome wasn't built in a day. So, I think these last couple of years we've been doing so much work. And even one thing that you touched on, which was how we have the various heritage months, but how we're trying to move to it being 365. Right? So, these conversations are constantly happening not just in February, not just in June, etc. Right. So that excites me. And just to see the diverse talent that we're bringing in, being a recruiter and seeing the focus that we have on bringing in diverse talent and knowing what impact that is going to have on our company within the next five to ten years. Such that I'll put it this way, I don't want any interns or employees to feel like they're the only right on any team and I want us to just normalize diversity, if you will, that if that makes it such that it's just, we're like, oh yeah, that team has like basically what our world looks like, right? Like, we look like what our world looks like, which is beautiful, and diverse. So, I'm really excited just to see, of course, again, as a recruiter, how we are getting behind that work. But then also what you mentioned the content, we're continuing to bring more and more diverse content. It's so, I think that it's just really beautiful to see even, Princess Tiana, who I have to give a quick shout out to because when we talk about representation, as a little girl, the princess that I knew was the Little Mermaid, Ariel, who I loved. And then when I started working for Disney one question that at that time because this was before 2009, was when are we going - why doesn't Disney have a black princess? Then we had Princess Tiana. Well, the thing I love about her, not only is she authentic to the culture, but I love the fact that she is an entrepreneur. And when I was a little girl, I actually wanted to own an ice cream shop. So, I just think about, you know, when those little girls who now they're seeing Princess Tiana and she's this entrepreneur and they know that that's something that they can do. And now we've gone from the amazing film to we're actually going to reimagine one of our attractions. So that is another aspect that excites me is that, you know, again,

this next generation, it'll be normalized to go to The Walt Disney World Resort or go to Disneyland. Right. And you see this attraction with this black princess who's an entrepreneur, and she has all these amazing friends who are you are musicians. And just that fun story that is going to be here for generations to come.

Ashley

Absolutely. And how lucky are we to have you here fulfilling that mission and that purpose and really just enriching so many lives in the process. Now, I can't be the only one who's inspired hearing about your journey, about your work, really about everything that Disney is doing in this DE&I space. And so, for anyone listening, whether it's you've inspired them to want to come into a recruiting role or diversity, equity, and inclusion role, for any of our listeners who would like to either start a new chapter of the Disney story that they're already telling or start a Disney story of their own. What advice would you have for them?

LaJoy

So, one thing I would say that I think I've learned and I'm continuing to learn on my journey is to embrace rejection and have tenacity because one thing about the Disney Company specifically, there's just so much excellence here. I like to use the analogy of like the Olympics, right? When you go to the Olympics, everyone's an Olympian, and that truly is what Disney is like. So there have been so many jobs that I interviewed for, and I didn't get them, but what I found is that the jobs that I did get, it was the perfect fit for me. It was part of my purpose. It was part of my assignment. So yeah, so I would say definitely just embrace that rejection, get feedback when you can and use that feedback to fuel you. Sometimes, one of my leaders used to say feedback is a gift, which is true. And sometimes, you know, the feedback is actionable and other times it might not be, but that's okay because at least you, you know, put yourself out there and you were willing to take that chance. And so, yeah, I think just sticking with it until you find that right fit for you and knowing that the job that is for you, you're going to get it.

Ashley

Ooh, I needed to hear that. And I'm sure so many of us needed to hear that today. So, thank you so much, LaJoy, for sharing your wisdom, your inspiration, all of the amazing work that you're doing. Having you here today and really sharing the impact that we can have by being our true selves, by embracing rejection and change and difficult times, really turning that into a way to impact others and create a more inclusive space and company for all of us. It's been really amazing having this conversation with you today. Thank you for being here.

LaJoy

Ashley, the pleasure has been all mine. Thank you so much for having the conversation today.

Ashley

Remember to subscribe to our show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. If you'd like to learn more about the topics mentioned in this episode, take a look at our show notes on the Life at Disney blog. Thank you again for listening to Life at Disney and make sure to join us for our next episode.

Ashley

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