

# DEI: Corporate Checklist? Or Shared Goals?



**Rob Parsons**

Manager, Content and Brand  
Paychex, Inc.



**Stacey Gordon**

DEI Strategist & Author,  
CEO and Founder of Rework  
Work

## Full transcript

**Rob Parsons:**

Welcome to Pulse, a Paychex HR podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration, to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

**Rob Parsons:**

This episode is part of a special series we are running on diversity, equity and inclusion. I am pleased to welcome my co-host for this series, Dr. Thelá Thatch. Thelá leads the DEI effort, initiatives and programs here at Paychex. With a PhD in public policy and administration from Walden University and more than two decades of experience in human resources, talent management and organizational development. Thelá is passionate about building cultures where an authentic commitment to inclusion, equity and diversity thrive. Thank you for helping out, Thelá.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

It is my pleasure.

**Rob Parsons:**

Tremendous. We're continuing our conversation with Stacey Gordon. Stacey has focused on improving workplace cultures and her mission is to reduce bias in global talent acquisition and management. As a LinkedIn instructor, she offers diversity, inclusion and career-related online courses, which have been viewed more than one million times.

**Rob Parsons:**

Her new book, "Unbias: Addressing Unconscious Bias at Work," is the next step in her vision to make all the difference in the world. Which, by the way, I love that vision, Stacey. Drawing on decades of experience and research, "Unbias" is an action manual for you to remove barriers and ensure equity throughout your organization. Stacey, welcome back to the podcast.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Thank you so much.

**Rob Parsons:**

It's so great.

**Stacey Gordon:**

I love that you love the vision.

**Rob Parsons:**

I really do. It's- I love painting the blue sky. I love — as Yogi Berra would say, "If we don't know where we're going, how are we going to know if we get there?" It's just so great to have a target like that. So, we're continuing our discussion around the strategic framework Stacey introduced in "Unbias." Awareness, alignment, action and advocacy.

**Rob Parsons:**

Last episode, we talked quite a bit about awareness and alignment and the critical role, just getting your ducks in a row, really play to make this work in an organization. But, now that I'm there, Stacey, I'd love to know — when we're talking about action, what are the things that you feel are most important? I know people always do A, B and C, but are A, B and C always right? Or, are there some things people are missing and not thinking about when it comes to action?

**Stacey Gordon:**

When it comes to action, it really is individual for each organization. One of the things that I always chuckle about, is I'll get asked by a new company or a prospective company, when I'm ready to work with them as a consultant, and they'll say, "Well, have you worked with companies in our industry before?" My answer is always, "Who cares?" I mean, I don't actually say that to them, but I think it in my head. Because why does it matter?

**Stacey Gordon:**

If we are looking at what our neighbor is doing — I get benchmarking, competitive industry, whatever. But, when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion, looking at what other people have done in the past is you looking in the rear-view mirror. You need to be forward-thinking and thinking about what matters for your company, not only what matters today, but what do you want it to look like in five years, 10 years?

**Stacey Gordon:**

The action that needs to be taken has to be specific to your company. It can't be specific to what your competitor did, because they're a different type of company. They have a different culture than you do. Yeah, you can get some information. You can get an idea — it's going to help you maybe spark some thoughts — but you really need to be paying attention to what matters to you.

**Stacey Gordon:**

This is why the awareness phase is important for the action phase, because what action you take is going to be correlated directly to the data that you got, when you started thinking about and becoming aware of what's happening. Because, when your employees — the same employees I mentioned in our first episode, who say, "You should have been doing this sooner. Why aren't you doing more?" You can't answer that question, if you don't know what you're doing.

**Stacey Gordon:**

The action that you're taking, when they come in and they say, "Why are you working on this gender initiative? You should be paying attention to our Black employees." You can say, "I hear you, and we intend to work on this initiative to help with promoting more Black employees in our workplace. However, the data shows that we actually have a much more pervasive gender problem right now, so we're starting there."

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Great.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Now, it's not you as a leader, sticking your finger up in the air and seeing which way the wind is blowing, or which employee is making the most noise about what you should be doing. Instead, the action is based on what is good for the company and what the data tells you.

**Rob Parsons:**

That's, that's really interesting. It kind of comes into play now, you're making me think of the Great Resignation. Thelá, I think you were telling me about an article you recently read?

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Yeah.

**Rob Parsons:**

That Stacey wrote?

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Yeah, thank you. I was just digesting what Stacey was saying and thinking about how important it is to recognize that each organization is unique. I really appreciate you mentioning that DEI doesn't have one prescription that can be given to all companies. And I think a lot of times, we do, and leaders miss out and they think that there's a checklist or a check box that we can provide to check off. So, I've been following you on LinkedIn. Again, congratulations again and again on the success of your book and your popularity on LinkedIn.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Thank you.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

I've just recently read one of your articles, from your "Simply Diversity" publication that you do monthly. It was around "The Great Resignation" versus "The Great Re-evaluation." I liked that perspective on, really, why are we experiencing a great resignation, in terms of DEI? I do believe it ties into this concept of awareness and alignment and action. When you think about that article that you wrote, how does it tie together and how can organizations, how should they be thinking about this quote-unquote "Great Resignation?"

**Stacey Gordon:**

Yeah, I think that I don't like the term, "The Great Resignation," right, because it's negative. So, immediately, there is this focus on the employee as the person that is doing something wrong, right?

**Rob Parsons:**

Yep.

**Stacey Gordon:**

"They're resigning. How dare they?"

**Rob Parsons:**

Yep, yep.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Right?

**Rob Parsons:**

That is so right.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Good point.

**Stacey Gordon:**

That's not what it is about at all. It's actually, we are — and I say, we, because I even reevaluate — I know I've been there. We are reevaluating our priorities and realizing that our companies have not treated us well. We're in a place where companies now need to re-recruit their employees. The focus needs to be on: what have you done for your employees? Your employees who worked through the pandemic, who kept your businesses running, who did what needed to be done, sometimes at great risk to their own health and to their families, and they're still here.

**Stacey Gordon:**

So, at the end of the day, yeah. You do have a lot of people who are resigning, but it's not because they don't want to work — which is the other thing that we hear a lot of — “Oh, they're lazy. They don't want to work.” It's just so rude, right?

**Rob Parsons:**

Yep.

**Stacey Gordon:**

It's just frustrating to hear that. It's like, yeah, you're going to have your outliers. You're always going to have people that want to take advantage of the system. That's just human nature, but the great majority of people are realizing that we have priorities. It is not okay to spend two hours every day, in a car, sitting in traffic, when that's two hours every day that I could be spending with my child or my spouse, or at the spa, or with improving my mental health, right?

**Rob Parsons:**

Yes.

**Stacey Gordon:**

It does align, because this is the place where, I think what the pandemic showed, it really laid a lot of companies bare. And all of the cracks showed up through the pandemic. If companies showed up for their companies during the pandemic, they don't have a problem recruiting people. You know how hard it is to get into Netflix right now? They don't have a problem recruiting people, right?

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative) Right.

**Stacey Gordon:**

If you have a problem recruiting people, you might want to look at why and stop blaming the people that don't want to work there.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Right, wow. That was definitely a drop-the-mic moment. Just a great opportunity for businesses, small and large, to think about what opportunities do we have now? Do a great re-evaluation, instead of focusing on a great resignation. Focus on — I like how you used the term “re-recruit.” Look at internal efforts and look at yourself. Look at your house within, before trying to build other homes outside. Wonderful.

**Rob Parsons:**

That was such a great point, I know. I wish that was the final question of the episode, because that was a great mic drop.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

It really was.

**Rob Parsons:**

But, as we talk about looking inside and turning the company around, focusing on DE&I and trying to change a culture. A lot of smaller businesses, they're already struggling with trying to manage HR and trying to handle

keeping people happy and finding employees. Making sure the company's not getting into trouble and all the things that come into that HR space. How would you recommend they keep their eye on diversity, equity and inclusion when there's already so much on their plate?

**Stacey Gordon:**

It needs to be embedded. I bristle a little bit, because DEI is always looked at as this extra thing that we have to do. It's like, "Here's this extra work. Now, I've got to go do these extra things. I've got enough to do." We've got to stop looking at it that way. It is not an extra thing. I do a lot of work around talent acquisition and I tell the teams all the time that there is no such thing as diversity recruiting.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Diversity recruiting is just good recruiting. If you're doing your job as a recruiter right, then diversity is going to happen. So I think the same is true of every function in the company. If you were looking at it through a diverse lens, you don't have to worry about doing additional things. You just have to worry about making sure that the job you're doing has a lens of DEI. If it is such a huge lift for you, to think about these and to embed it in there, again — sorry, but you've been doing it wrong for a long time. Someone has to tell you, right?

**Rob Parsons:**

Yeah.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Just because you've been allowed to do something one way for a long time, doesn't mean it's been the right way.

**Rob Parsons:**

I adore that. We are not doing something extra. Yeah, we're doing something properly.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

I just love your approach to DEI and just keeping it simple. I think, a lot of times, just business owners and leaders over-complicate it. And to me, that's where most of the work lies, is just helping people connect that this work should just be a natural part of how they do normal work. Inclusion, having values around respect, civility. There's nothing new that has happened, other than considering others first, considering your employees first, a lot of those concepts.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Considering the heavy focus that we've seen in DEI over the past two years, you've mentioned, a little bit on the first episode, that you've been asked what your predictions are. So, I'm going to- we're going to ask you again, where do you predict the United States will be, in our efforts around DEI and even globally? What are some of your thoughts, based on your recent experiences?

**Stacey Gordon:**

I do think that we're going to see sustained focus on this. I think that we can't go backwards. And again, even with the pandemic shows this. We have this Great Re-evaluation due to the pandemic. I think the same is going to happen with DEI. If companies try to start backpedaling and leaving it to the side, I don't believe that employees are going to allow it. They're not going to stand for it. So that's where the focus is going to be.

**Stacey Gordon:**

So I do think that it's going to continue. I know that there are going to be companies that are going to decide they don't have the budget, they don't have the wherewithal, they don't have the time. Those are the companies that are going to die by the wayside. It's not going to happen tomorrow, it's not going to happen in five years. But I recently read — and I wish I could remember the statistic — but the S&P 500 companies used to have a very long tenure on there. I think it's something like every two weeks, a new company is falling off of the S&P 500, because they're not sustaining the level of revenue and the level of profitability that they used to have.

**Stacey Gordon:**

They don't have longevity. And if they want that, they're going to have to seek out diversity. You also have to look at the, the census. The census shows that, what is it? Like less than 70% of Americans are white at this point. That's the first time, I think, in the history of the United States. So, we've got to look at the writing on the wall and see where we're going, and realize that you can't continue doing what worked in the past, because we've got our future to look to.

**Rob Parsons:**

Wow, that was excellent, Stacey. Thelá, thank you so much for the conversation today. Thank you for joining the podcast. I've really enjoyed this and learned so much.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Thank you. I enjoyed it as well. It's always nice to have these conversations and you know, these little sound bites. I talk about this stuff, but every time it's a little bit different. I think of something else.

**Dr. Thelá Thatch:**

Thank you. Thank you, Stacey, so much. I'm still marinating on what you shared. And I look forward to applying those things in my role at Paychex and beyond. So, thanks for being an example for DEI leaders like myself, and I hope HR leaders listening will reach out and check you out on LinkedIn and get your book and just put everything in practice. So, great, really good, solid information. Thank you.

**Stacey Gordon:**

Thank you.

**Rob Parsons:**

Fantastic. For those who are interested in Stacey's book, "Unbias: Addressing Unconscious Bias at Work," you can order it for yourself, your ERG, your executive team or even your book club, at [www.unbiasbook.com](http://www.unbiasbook.com). So, thank you both. Thank you, all of you listeners. Everyone, please stay happy and healthy.

**Announcer:**

This podcast is property of Paychex Inc. 2021. All rights reserved.