Steps to Change Podcast: Gillian Shapiro

Allen:
Hello and welcome to this episode of Steps to Change, the podcast where we explore learning and development topics, organizational behavior change strategies, and practical ways to inspire people to act differently. On this episode, we're discussing the question, should we simply rebrand DEI to something else? Joining us for this discussion is Dr. Gillian Shapiro from Shapiro Consulting. Welcome, Gilly, how are you?

Gilly:
Hello, Allen. I'm really good, thank you. Good to be here with you.

Allen:
Well, thank you so much for joining us. And, Gilly, this is a pretty special episode because this is us kickstarting, Season two of Steps to Change, where we're inviting outside guests such as yourself to come and share wisdom, share your experience about a lot of the things that we like to talk about. So, we're excited to be back with the listeners and having you join us for our first episode. Gilly, for the listeners out there who might not know you, tell us a little bit about yourself and your background in the DEI space and anything you might want to share with your work in Inclusive Leadership.

Gilly:
Okay, thank you, Allen. And yes, feel very proud and blessed to be invited to be the first outside guest. So professionally, Allen, I really my work takes me into organizations where I help leaders and teams build strong working relationships. Really so that people from all backgrounds feel connected, included, and supported to perform and thrive and do their best work. And I do that through a mix of consulting, or coaching, or leadership development, or facilitation. And I've had my own practice, Shapiro Consulting, for over 25 years now. And I think it's worth perhaps adding where I began because I began work really in the academic research field, where I was interested in working with lots of different organizations about the connections between innovation, diversity, and employee engagement. So, I was really interested in how diversity in the workplace impacts innovation and engagement.

And that's where my journey began, really. And I spent a large part of my initial working life really focusing on building greater diversity and inclusion in organizations. And I would say that now, although some of my work is very focused on diversity inclusion, actually what I'm increasingly doing is just bringing diversity and inclusion into that core work that I do. So, I think that possibly tells us something about the progress we've made.

And perhaps it's worth sharing with listeners a little bit about the personal who I am. I'm joining you from the UK, from the South of England. I'm cisgendered female. I'm Jewish. I'm White. I have a family. And in our lovely little family unit, we have all sorts of diversities around mental health, neurodiversity, LGBTQ. I have two young adult children, a husband who's a woodworker and a dog who after 14 years has finally calmed down. So that's a little bit about me.

Allen:
Gillian, thank you for sharing all of that. And I think it's really great to hear all of the different levels and dynamics of diversity that not only you have in your family unit, but then also the ways that you talk about your work and looking at the innovative qualities that diversity can bring to organizations, right. So, there is a lot of times a sense that, you know, we focus in on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts because some people believe that's the moral thing to do, right. And of course, that's there, of course, that's absolutely what we should be doing because the more inclusive we are, the better in our opinion here at Steps.

But then I love that you really have been focusing in on why that creates great innovation within organizations and why it's important for leaders to develop that inclusive skill to support that innovation because, you know, so many people that we talk to right now, are talking about what's the benefits and why do we do this and well, I mean a great business case right there, right, you want more innovative people in your business, you want that innovation, so you can be successful. So, I think that's something that really jumped out at me when you were talking about your consultative journey that you've been on, and how you focused on the work.

Gilly:
Yeah, thank you, Allen. And possibly that's more important than it's ever been. In the complex world in which we're operating as businesses and as different organizations, to be able to tap into different perspectives, there's very seldom one right path or one right answer. And I think the wisdom of those diverse perspectives are more important than ever.

Allen:
Yeah, 100%. And I'm geeking out a little bit, if you will, from a learning and development perspective because, Gilly, you've been very kind with your work that you authored when you were at Opportunity Now, the Inclusive Leadership Competencies.

You developed a framework that really kind of makes an understanding, makes it very easy to understand, what are the mindsets, what are the behaviors, what are the activities that leaders need to be leaning into showing up with every day? That really just helps make a kind of nebulous concept maybe sometimes, into a more practical application for people to achieve more inclusive leadership behaviors. So, we really love that work. We think it's a very helpful way to get people engaging into the things that they can do on a daily basis, to help support more inclusive leadership. So, thank you for that great work. Really appreciate it.

Gilly:
Well, you know, I reciprocate the thanks because, you know, you put research out there, but Steps have, you have picked that work up and really brought it to life in the way that you work and the work that you do. So, you know, the thanks right back at you for doing that.

And I think it's probably worth saying, Allen, you know, how that work came about and how those competencies came together because, you know, it's a little while since I did that research but I came to it because I was noticing that, you know, leaders, some leaders were talking in a brilliant way about

supporting diversity and inclusion and they often talked about being champions. But there seemed to be a big separation. I began to wonder, so are you a champion on a Monday afternoon and a Wednesday? And then what happens the rest of the time? This weird separation that can often happen between development and talking about diversity inclusion and then the kind of mainstream stuff that happens in organizations. And so that's how the research came about.

And it was a beautiful bottom-up process. We just went out to people from all sorts of backgrounds, organisations and roles and asked them to think about who have you worked with as a leader that for you has been inclusive? And we asked them to describe what they did, how they were, their presence, the behaviours, the actions, and that's how that framework has developed. So, it's from lots and lots of different stories and experiences.

Allen:
Fantastic. And we'll keep referencing that as we go through the conversation on this episode.
So just to set a little bit of context right. A lot of what we're hearing from our clients at the moment in the, in the DE&I space is there's a lot of headwinds in the US against just the acronym DEI, it's suddenly become this bad word that has been politicized.

Because of that, the diversity, equity and inclusion sector is looking at, how do we pivot? How do we evolve? How do we maybe make changes so that we aren't in the political pathway of people coming after the great work of diversity, equity, and inclusion? And some people are saying, it needs to be completely rebranded. And then there's other people who say, no, you can't rebrand it because then you're gonna be saying that the work didn't work and that we need to kind of come up with new ways of talking about this stuff.

I almost think it's about, are we, are we just, do we need to focus in on coming into the conversation in maybe a slightly different way. And it sounds like the work that you've done with Inclusive Leadership helps people get into those conversations and maybe without so much of that politically charged, you know, environment, if you will, that we're currently facing. So, I guess my question, Gilly, with all of that being said is, in your mind, does DEI need rebranding? And if so, why, or why not? Solve that big problem for us in this 35-minute conversation, please.

Gilly:
Yeah, sure, no problem. It's so interesting, you know, that question, you know, rebrand DEI, it evokes a bit of a reaction, maybe even a visceral reaction in me, Allen. And I think that's because the way I understand rebranding is, you know, you might change the packaging, but the product stays the same, or you might change the advertising, but you know the product fundamentally stays the same. And I'm not sure that that's particularly helpful to us for two reasons.

One, I don't think it's the wording that is causing a reaction. It's the whole concept that's causing a reaction, or perhaps part of the approach that's causing the reaction. So, you know, I would have a concern that you change the language and you're going to pretty much get the same reactions.

And then on the other side, you know, I'm a great believer in continuous learning. I am personally a lifelong learner. So, you know, I think what we continuously need to do is like, well, let's look at where

we are. Let's look at the context and I think you're quite right, Allen, you know, the context has changed and is changing. And it's in many ways very, very challenging. So, we need to be able to look at what we're doing.

And I'm just going to continue using DEI, certainly for the purpose of this conversation. We need to look at DEI in light of what's happening in our context, you know, what is helping this work and the challenges around it. So, rebrand for me doesn't quite cut it, thinking about, okay, mean, and language is important. So, I'm, you know, I'm not saying that we always have to keep the language the same. And in fact, the language in this field has changed quite a bit over the last 20 to 30 years.

So, language is important, but so is approach. And so is the way that we engage with both supporters and detractors of this work and how we understand how to work with people that are supportive and want more of diversity and inclusion and those that for various reasons are challenging,

Allen:
In lots of conversations we have, people have similar visceral reactions. And I love the way you positioned that, that effectively rebranding is simply repackaging, but actually are we looking at the core content that we're talking about through the lens of the context where we are now, and the individuals, or organizations that we're trying to support with whatever their, you know, sort of change journey may be in this space.

So, you know, in some way that is a real freeing aspect the way you've positioned it there because if we almost forget about all the words, and the acronyms and things and we actually go to the core of kind of, well, what is it under the umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion you're trying to solve for in your organizations, then you are coming at it from a different perspective, which isn't, which is still supporting great DE &I efforts, but actually you're getting to the core of the specific things that you might be trying to solve for.

Gilly:
Yeah, Allen, think that's right. That has to be the starting point. And if at the end of that process, actually you come to some conclusions about the changes that you make, which might be changes to the focus, or changes to the approach and may include changes to terminology, or to descriptions or to positioning, as long as that is in line with what you are fundamentally trying to achieve on DEI, then of course, you know, that's a good thing.

I mean, I think really, we have to look at, you know, are we maintaining the focus and the work? This is always important work, and it is never going away. And we are in some parts of the world at a time where it's challenging, particularly challenging now.
And so that is our context. So, I think what I'm arguing is stay true to the objectives that you're looking for and pay attention to the context. There's an organizational context, and there's a wider context outside the organization. And of course, it's all connected, you know. Organisations influence outside and the outside influences organisations. So, we have to pay attention to it all, really.

Allen:

Yeah, what I'm picking up from this is that it's less about thinking about how do we badge the DE&I work, but staying true to what the values of your organization and why the work is helping support those values and the culture that you're really trying to establish.

Gilly:
Yes, absolutely. And, you know, let's look at how we're approaching this work and, you know, what we've learnt from the past, you know, from the recent present and what we feel is needed now and going forward.

You know, there are some things that I think we do need to look at. You know, when there is real challenge and resistance around DEI, we have choices about how we work with that resistance.
Do we seek to even better understand? Do we create, seek to create greater awareness? I think a lot of the work you do at Steps is around creating greater awareness. Awareness, you know, individual self-awareness, awareness about how people are received you know, amongst others and in different situations. I think a lot of your work is really about that. So that once you have that awareness, you have more choice, hopefully, about the actions that you might take in how you show up and how you behave as a leader in organizations when you're working with greater diversity.

So, I think it also offers us, you know, that question, do we rebrand? Does give us some opportunities to think, what's working, what isn't working so well, what do we keep and are there things that we want to change?

Allen:
And I think one thing to pick up on around this point you were saying about how we at Steps come into this work. So, you know, what stands out for me when we run programming on Inclusive Leadership is, so when you share terminology sometimes in inclusive or DEI work, it can all it almost be a barrier to achieving what you want to achieve, right.

But when you look at it through the behavioral aspects and the way we do it at Steps, I'm always really, I'm not**,** it's always really nice to see those moments when you have leaders come in and they're maybe cross armed and they're going, oh gosh, another workshop on inclusive leadership. Okay, here we go. And because we use the drama and its research based and we're just holding up a mirror to the stuff that's happening in that organization in an honest way, not in a way to go in there and fix a broken organization, right? It's just about helping people get better at these things.

When you play that out, they can start to see that the dynamics of this aren't necessarily so binary, right? And we're just putting people at the heart of all this stuff as a leader, you can start to go, all right, this is about actually just developing those listening skills, as you said, being empathetic in the role of a leader but sometimes putting my space and putting myself in spaces where I'm really uncomfortable and I'm not sure what to do because this is out of my experience or what have you, but being brave enough to have the conversations and say, I'm not sure what to do here, but let's figure this out together, or standing up and being an ally when they need to, or whatever it is we're talking about under the sort of DEI umbrella.

And I think once we can connect those dots to it, rather than it being just this kind of lofty concept that we all put on our websites and say, yes, we are a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. But when you get down to the everyday interactions, I think that's when people start to go, oh, OK, I understand why this is important and this is really helpful, and I want to know more, and I want to be a force for good.

Gilly:
I think that's absolutely right and when I listen to you say that, Allen, it's also why there's a lot of resistance. Because this can be hard. Owning up to your own behaviour, understanding more that it might not land how you intended, let's give a lot of benefit of the doubt here. You know, owning up to, well, I'm not sure what to do. Owning up to sometimes the shame and guilt that can go along with, you know, seeing your organization in a way that doesn't sit comfortably for you. All of this is really tough stuff. So, you know, creating that environment where people can step into the difficult things with openness and confidence is incredibly important.

And, you know, so, potentially, of course, the wording of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, you know, may have become triggers for some people, of course, that, okay, yeah, this is the stuff I don't know how to do, that I might be criticised about. So, yeah, you know, there is that element, too, of how do we create an environment where people can connect and learn. It's challenging.

Allen:
But thinking about that strategic planning for listeners who might be wondering, you know, how can using the pathway of Inclusive Leadership to support DE&I efforts, you know, from your perspective, any pointers on how people could think about that entryway through the Inclusive Leadership, you know, ideas to help strategic planning for DE&I efforts?

Gilly:
Yeah, OK, so if I let me make sure I've sort of understood your question correctly, but it's about thinking, OK, how do we go forward from here? Thinking perhaps with an inclusive leadership lens. Well, you know, interestingly, one of the, you know, in that that model, in our model of Inclusive Leadership, the first the first key point is about Adapting, you know.

An inclusive leader needs to be able to adapt. And I would actually say any successful organization needs to adapt. And adapting is about having a real openness to understanding different perspectives and to learning and to being open to think about, what do I need to do to change? For inclusion to happen, for those good relationships to happen, there needs to be shifts from everyone, not only one group shifting to another. I think that's often where the difficulties and the challenges arises.

I think adapting is a beautiful keyword and key concept. I would really encourage our listeners to think about, how are we approaching change? You know, DEI is effectively about change.

I think it's really important for us to approach it from a behavioural process, systemic change point of view. And I'm wondering if even posing that question, you know, what do you know about systemic change and behavioural change? To what extent is your approach and your strategy for DEI? Picking up on behavioural and systemic change. Who needs to be involved? How are you landing this in your

organization? That might bring forward some different actions and some different approaches. And I say this, Allen, because although I know it is so difficult, but I still too often see DEI as such a separate issue in organizations.

Allen:
So, sort of DEI being the golden thread throughout all aspects of learning and cultural development, right? It's the foundation, if you will, that supports all of this stuff to be the most successful that it can be.

Gilly:
Yeah, absolutely. know, when you're picking your, mean, a lot of this, of course, does happen in many organizations and it's great when you're picking your suppliers, when you're, you know, working with people like me, consultants, you know, the thinking about DEI, when you're putting together that leadership development programme, there may be a module on inclusive leadership. What happens in the other modules? Because fundamentally leaders work with people and people are diverse. They may not be as diverse in your organisation yet as you want them to be, but there is always diversity in any situation. So how are you threading it through as you say, Allen?

Allen:
So, Gilly a questions come to mind, imagining some of the listeners out there thinking, okay, so get the idea that it's less about rebranding, but it's more about understanding what's at the core of the sort of culture change piece, or the messaging, or what have you that we're trying to build out from. But for those listeners out there who are in roles that are about culture change or DEI, if you will. And they are going, my leadership are never gonna like, never gonna budge, or never listen to this. And they're gonna see right through me talking about inclusive leadership. Do you have any experience or wisdom you could share for those individuals in terms of how to inspire those leaders to really understand the value of what they're trying to achieve in their roles?

Gilly:
That's such a great question. I would say, you know, ideally, it's moving forward as partners on this journey. So often that approach of trying to inspire, market, brand, you know, sell the concept of D&I, I think puts DEI practitioners on the back foot.

You know, you go in with a pitch, it doesn't land. Okay, we've to go in with a different pitch, or a better pitch. I would, I mean, the way that I typically approach this is to enter into conversation and dialogue with those leaders. You know, what is keeping them awake at night? You know, what are their priorities? And exploring with them how difference, how diverse perspectives, how inclusion, how connection, I mean here we can use some different words. You know that how many organizations talk about silos and the difficulties that disconnect creates for productivity, for a range of issues that are getting in the way of success.

And diversity and inclusion is part of that. It all links together. Now, it may not be in the fundamental way that they are necessarily seeing. I think often DEI is seen as different identity groups, different employee resource groups. It is that and it is the basic way in which we connect with each other

across boundaries, in organisations. That boundary might be identity, it might be role, it might be function. But fundamentally unless we bring all of those things together, have you ever heard of that phrase, Allen, you know, the whole is different from the sum of the parts or the whole is more than the sum of the parts?

Allen:
Yes.

Gilly:
Yeah, okay. Actually, lots of people say the whole is more than the sum of the parts. I think the correct translation…

Allen:
Yeah, greater or something like that, yeah. Yeah.

Gilly:
Yeah, well I think the whole is different. So, if we are as an organisation connected and working as a whole, we have the opportunity to get different results than if we work as a bunch of separate individuals who cannot connect, who are struggling to connect.
My way would be to explore with, rather than try and tell and sell, explore with because I think often you can find that connection and that way through, together. I don't know whether that helps you, or listeners, but that's the approach I take.

Allen:
Yeah, I think what I like about that, think the tell and sell, I think is always from my experience, a little bit harder to kind of, you know, get the gears turning, if you will, right, people want to feel like they're being listened to, as you said. So, you know, going into your leadership and saying, tell me what are the things you're trying to solve for, you know, what are the goals financially we're looking to achieve, you know, strategically, all those kind of big questions. And then from your role in a DEI space, or your experience from DEI, you don't even need to say the words to them sometimes is what I'm hearing, right? We can say, we're going to try these things and then you're weaving it in, as you said earlier, is that sort of golden thread, or that foundation, if you will.

Gilly:
Exactly, we need to a way of connecting on the issues that really matter. That's our key goal. Find a way of connecting on the issues that really matter.

Allen:
Gilly, I could go on for much longer on this conversation. So I think if, you know, as we start to wrap up, it sounds like it's less about a rebranding, but more about, you know, just reminding ourselves what's the driver for the work that you might be doing in your role, in your organization, trying to tune into the needs of the business, the leadership, if you will, and then really collaborating with them to make sure that they're feeling like they have the input to achieve whatever that strategy piece is while as an individual from the DE&I space, you're weaving those things into it as you need to. How do we feel about that as a summary from this conversation?

Gilly:
I think you did a grand job, Allen, yeah that's a great summary and as you say it's a big subject and we could talk for much longer about it.

Allen
Yeah, absolutely. I'm sure we'll do a future episode where we bring someone on who has a slightly different viewpoint, right? I would like to hear other people saying like maybe rebranding is the way because there's something obviously lots to explore there.

Well, that's about all the time we have left for today, Gilly. Thank you so much for joining us. This has been a really engaging and thought-provoking discussion. Do you want to tell the listeners anywhere they can reach you? Are you on social media, or ways to connect with you?

Gilly:
Sure, that's really kind, Allen. Thank you. Yeah, I'm on LinkedIn. You can find me, Gillian Shapiro on LinkedIn or head to my website, shapiraconsulting.co.uk and join, keep in touch from there. Thank you.

Allen:
Absolutely. Well, thank you, listeners for joining us on this episode. If you'd like to know more about Steps and Steps to Change, make sure you visit our website, find us on LinkedIn, or sign up to our newsletter. We'll have all that in the show notes below, along with Gilly's contact as well. If you're interested in how Steps could partner with you, or your organization to support your needs, send us an email, or fill out one of the forms online at www.stepsdrama.com.

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