Janet Crenshaw Smith:

I don't think that we should start with the training piece, until we're able to discern if we have a skill problem, or do we have a will problem? Think about that, is it skill or is it will? And quite often we move first to skill with training, without really assessing, do we have the will to do this?

Mark Kate:

Welcome to the Stronger by Association Podcast. This podcast will share stories about how associations are solving problems in the United States and around the world. This is brought to you by American Society of Association Executives, ASAE. A membership organization of more than 46,000 association professionals, industry partners in the United States and 50 countries. Our members make the world safer, better and smarter.

Mark Kate:

Welcome to the Stronger by Association Podcast. Today we're talking about the power of diversity, equity, inclusion, and how associations are making headway and working through these issues to ultimately make a substantive impact. I'm pleased to welcome my co host, [Robb 00:01:12] ASAE Chief Marketing and Product Strategy Officer. Robb also leads ASAE, DEI initiatives.

Robb:

Hi Mary Kate, and I'm so happy to be here. These are incredibly important and critical conversations. And so I'm looking forward to participating in all that. So thank you for having us.

Mark Kate:

Today we will have three segments. The first is where we will speak with two of the founders of Texts to Table, a conversation between four black Association CEOs that started over the summer. And helps spring light to a lot of the social-political unrest from recently.

Mark Kate:

We also will have a staff person from ASAE discuss the Black Moments of Film Initiative that ASAE began. And how we are working through internally staff addressing a lot of the racial discrimination and protests over the summer, and how that's impacted our saffron society overall.

Mark Kate:

And we'll end with a DEI expert, to discuss how organizations can address some of these issues and make substantive change.

Robb:

So I'm sure that I'm excited about all three components of this conversation, as Mary Kate began to introduce for us. The first one being identity groups. Texts to Table is a form of an identity group that was reflective of private conversations that are being taken public, and I love it. These are candid, honest conversations. So we really look forward to talking with two of the founders as relates to those conversations.

Robb:

The second piece is transitioning to a reflection of what's happening with organizations and how organizations can also embrace these conversations with a couple of different components. So Black Film, What's Next, we'll talk about all this. But the important frame there is that, what can organizations do to, not only create the space but create a safe space for their employees and their associates to have these conversations?

Robb:

And the third piece being as Mary Kate mentioned, the DEI practitioner list. Which is also critically important, because that's going to approaches more from an organizational point of view. And really kind of asking and answer the question, how do you sustain this energy over the long course? That's what's most important. So I'm looking forward to all the conversation.

Mark Kate:

Agreed. Thank you. Let's bring up our first guests. I am pleased to welcome Irving Washington, Executive Director at the Online News Association, and Donte Shannon, a CEO of the Association of Equipment Management Professionals, both ASAE members, leaders and podcasters themselves from Texts to Table. A committee led by four black CEOs who discussed today's political climate with a focus on race and leadership. Welcome.

Donte Shannon:

Thank you.

Irving Washington:

[crosstalk 00:03:51] so much.

Mark Kate:

So can you both provide a little background for those who haven't watched or listened to Texts to Table, how it got started? And how your discussions have gone?

Donte Shannon:

I'm going to let Irving start, because I literally was late in my day when this all started and it was a text from him that kind of started the firestorm so you start Irving.

Irving Washington:

It's so funny. So the name literally spurred from text or texts, I should say. During the height of the doors Floyd killing and Black Lives Matter movement. Michelle, Donte and I, we were texting, just about what we were going through in that moment, which we have various text conversations about a number of things. And so we were all responding to George Floyd's murder in a different way from a leadership perspective. And Donte is right, I think that one of the things in our text group... I'm the early riser, so I'll send a random text in the morning, "Hey, have you guys thought about..." They joke that I send like dissertation text all before 6:00 AM.

Donte Shannon:

Literally again, full paragraphs in the morning at 7:00 am.

Irving Washington:

And essentially it just really stemmed from, "Hey, these conversations, we should make these public or we should talk about this. This is a moment to really talk about this." And then from there, it just really grew. All of us added a different element to it. A lot of people don't know... My original concept, we were going to throw it up on a Zoom, and just post it on our pages. And then just with a collaborative effort, the name Texts to Table came about and had branding. We added extra people to the build a team out. And it really became this collaborative effort around uplifting these conversations.

Donte Shannon:

And what I liked about that too, for me, with this whole thing was that, each of us were experiencing or having different feelings about this, and also reacting to it differently. People would think that you have these black CEOs, these three black CEOs, and they might assume that we are experiencing the same things are reacting in the same ways. But we all had different reactions, and were responding differently. Some of us were responding immediately, some of us were delayed in our response. So I love that it kind of showed a different dynamic of what we are experiencing, where we are all black CEOs or black African Americans.

Robbb:

That's fantastic. I mean, it's so exciting to have Donte and Irving here. We've had so many conversations over the years. So it's just great to see you guys. Even though everybody can't see us. But nonetheless, it's great to see you just to have a conversation. What I'm of curious about honestly is, what's the impact to your organization? So you guys are having some really candid, honest, revealing, emotionally challenging, I think conversations the way I would describe them, that are really kind of laying everything out on the table. What's the impact to your organizations? How is it changing your leadership in your organizations? And how do you right size that? What's the impact to you personally and your organization as a function of these conversations?

Donte Shannon:

So for me, I run as you probably can tell, equipment management professionals. So that's the construction industry, and my member profile is 98% white men from the ages of 55 to 65. And I remember when the George Floyd situation happened and all of these personal statements were coming out and corporate statements were coming out. We saw commercials happening. Me and my Chairman had a real conversation with each other. And he said, "Do you think we should put out a statement around what's happening?" And I said, "I don't know that, that's the right thing for us to do."

Donte Shannon:

And I said that to him, because people were doing their homework when these corporate statements were coming out, right? And then these people were getting on TV and making these other statements. People were looking up their boards, looking up their executive team, and I said, "I would not want that to happen to us." I wanted us to really kind of stand behind whatever statement that we put out. Though, we do... my organization does not condone racial injustice or police brutality. But if we're going to put out the statement around diversity, equity and inclusion. We need to kind of be talking the talk and walking the walk.

Donte Shannon:

When you look at our board, and you look at our volunteer leadership. I just did not think that was the best thing for us to do. But what I did think we could do in that moment was start to take action within the organization. So my organization had been talking about diversity, equity, inclusion for quite some time, and nothing had ever been done. So I say to my chair, I was, "For us action right now is not making a statement, action for us is starting to get in turn, get our stuff together internally. We need to start moving on things that we've been talking about around diversity inclusion, and stop waiting. So that if this happens again, or when it happens again, we can confidently make a statement and have things in place or have demographics in place that kind of back up what we are putting out to the public."

Donte Shannon:

So for me, that's sort of how all of this has impacted my organization and my leadership within the organization. It's just really getting my board and my leadership wrapped around, we really have to stop talking about this and start doing something about this immediately. What about you, Irving? How does...

Robbb:

Thank you for that Donte. Yeah, Irving. Go ahead.

Irving Washington:

Yeah, for me, this intersected both personally and organizationally. Personally, for me, particularly during the height of the summer with the George Floyd movement. That was a really emotionally tough time for me. And actually, I was really grateful Texts to Table was not just sort of this hourly... This was also internally therapeutic as well, too. Because one of the conversations, Shawn was really helpful, encouraged me to do this was, I had a reconcile sort of an identity that I built... I've sort of built this identity of being the calm in the storm. And there was a running joke at my organization, there could be a fire behind me and I'm calming everyone down. I'm telling, "We got this, we can handle it."

Irving Washington:

And this was a moment where, I just really wasn't okay, this was really affecting me. So, and with the encouragement of Shawn and kind of counseling. I sent a note to my board, and I just said, "Hey, I'm not fully here present right now. This is a tough moment. And I just need a moment to just kind of be in this space. And don't expect 100% productivity from me or the team right now, I'm not really in a leadership... " And what that really showed me, that vulnerability; my leadership team stepped up in amazing ways. The entire team in my organization stepped up, the board was extremely supportive, they gave me the time and space that I need. And so that is something that I would not have probably thought to do before this moment. But it was a moment that I'm glad that happened, because I realized the support that I have in my organization.

Irving Washington:

And then also for us, as an organization, flipping on the organization side. And this is where organizations tend to... your personal and the organization collide. Because in that moment, I did not feel a statement. Not that it was not needed. But we have been doing a lot of work in diversity inclusion, our board is majority women and people of color. We actually have four black board members right now, myself leading organization. So we've had representation. And that's not to say that we had everything figured out. But myself, and also the organization, I was in the zone of the statements are nice. And for some groups, this is a big step for them. And they need to do that. For us, we need to get to work.

Irving Washington:

And so immediately became, the statement's not enough, what can we actually do to make a difference? And so over the course of several months, we just announced last month, we launched an initiative partner with two other organizations, that is building institutions of belonging, fighting systemic racism in journalism. So for us, it really was immediately get to work, what do we need to do in this moment. And so we also did not do a statement. But it just didn't feel that was the most impactful thing that we could do with our influence and power at the time.

Robbb:

Thank you, those are wonderful. I just appreciate again, your candor. I think, just something I'll comment on quickly, is that when you talked about kind of acknowledging where you were personally and the impact of that to the organization, I think that's just tremendous. Because I know that's an honest comment from you, as always, but it's very revealing. And to be clear with people about where you are, and the impact of the broader environment and how you manage what you're doing on a day to day basis. I just personally love that you shared that with everybody. So thank you for your candor.

Robbb:

Donte, of course, I appreciate what you said with regards to your board as well. I think those are important messages that people need to hear that we've probably, they not heard as much in the past. And so thank you for sharing that.

Donte Shannon:

Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Mark Kate:

I loved your points in past Texts to Table about giving people space, and just conversations around your black employees are not responsible for educating white employees about DEI. And that was really interesting. And I also Irving, you went really public with your op-ed in CNN, taking Black Lives Matter from slogan to reality, if you could share any thoughts about how that was received?

Irving Washington:

Yeah, I think... Here's what I've learned in this moment. And also with the op-ed and this is one of the, in retrospective now, this is kind of one of the feelings I've reconciled. I was in that moment over the summer a bit upset at myself, because while I've been a huge DEI advocate and have been, "Champion that" in all the organization's I've been a part of. I've done it quietly. And I've kind of worked the system. And I've been very sensitive how people might feel, and I was tiptoe around things. And I think in that moment, and continuing moving forward. And I think what you're seeing in a lot of organizations, is that people want to be seen and heard in their most authentic self that they feel comfortable with and not have to worry about tiptoeing around every single thing.

Irving Washington:

And things that, questioning what the norm is, and what things are framed around. Even the fact that we're saying white supremacy, or even the word white. We typically scared to even say white, black, Latino, because we don't want to say the wrong thing. So we want to tiptoe around that. So then we come up with people of color. And so for me, the op-ed and just moving forward, I think it's now as a moment to be louder, if you feel comfortable with it. For me, I do feel comfortable being louder. That's not going to be for everyone, nor does it have to be the model for everyone. You need people work in a variety of ways, but overall, the op-ed and just in general, I think everyone needs to find what their voice is and what they feel comfortable at. And that we need to create system, that everyone can then, whatever voice they want to have, there's a place for that.

Mark Kate:

Donte, do you have any thoughts about how there might be some positives of some of the discussion that we've had over the past couple of months? And do you see change happening in associations? There obviously is a diversity problem at the top. Do you see substantive change happening?

Donte Shannon:

So I think one of the things again, as we talk about the power of associations, right? And that being one of the biggest things that we've top touted over the past two years. I think in regards to diversity, inclusion, there hasn't been substantive change. But I think that there's been catalysts that are now going to cause that, right? We talked about, me, Irving, Michelle and Shawn, have been talking about, well, what is our goal for Texts to Table. And we all have different goals for that platform. But for me, I really see the power of, A, being able to kind of push and change diversity inclusion. Because I'm, there's so many associations who impact legislation, right? Who are sitting in the in the rooms with presidents of the United States, or who are so closely tied to their state legislators or their city legislators. There's so many associations who impact policy, creation and policy development.

Donte Shannon:

And that really is where change is going to start happening. I think we have to see associations doing more and being more cognizant of how they're coming to the table. What they're speaking about when they're at these tables, but they're pushing for what they're not pushing for, when they're sitting at the table. So I think, right now, on the barometer, there's... I wouldn't say there is the substantive of change. But I think there will be going forward. I think, because of all the things that we're seeing happening now in society, and again, everything's so public now. I think it'll only continue to push us associations to want to do more in the future.

Robb:

There's a lot of... inherent in this conversations, all the advice and knowledge that you guys are sharing. I know everyone appreciates that. Let me refine that a little bit with regards to a particular focus. And that being, what would be your advice for CEOs out there? Both of you, obviously operating in that capacity, but also... not a curve ball, but a little bit of an additional comment, and that is CEOs and staff. What would be your advice with regards to if you feel compelled to do something or anything in these times? How would you guide both aspects of organization? I'd love to hear what your answer is for that.

Irving Washington:

I can attempt to start that. So for staff and actually, I'll switch it slightly just for people in general, here's what I would recommend. I think in this moment, there's a lot of desire to solve things, and there's a lot of discomfort. So while well intention, I think people just want to kind of get rid of this [inaudible 00:18:06] So what can I do now, can... I feel uncomfortable no matter what side of the spectrum you're on. So I think, for individual people, and everyone, staff, CEO just sit with this, it's okay, right? You can be in a space of discomfort and comfort at the same time. And when you're looking at change, to the previous question, I think about when people ask, "Have you seen change a lot?"

Irving Washington:

If you look at these big social movements, we tend to focus on that big, big accomplishment. So, gay marriage gets approved or voting rights. But look at all the years of work that led up to there. There were a lot of small moments, that you have to do. And I think for individuals, just look at your circle. And what are those small moments that you can do? What are the conversations that you can have? Where are you holding power in places that you can share. And you don't have to make grand gestures about it. If everyone just did that in their circle, that's how you would see sort of this larger change.

Irving Washington:

And I think on the CEO front, what I've been thinking a lot about is power, right? And what that represents. And so again, look at your organization, where is the balance of power? And what are the systems that support the power? And I think that even goes beyond race. You can look at a number of dynamics, and then of the groups or people or systems where there are inequities, how do you uplift those voices?

Donte Shannon:

And Irving, I think you bring up a good point about power too, because I think there's a level of vulnerability that CEOs have to have right now. Because as a CEO, you may not know how to navigate this, but you may have a staff person who reports to you who knows how to navigate this or who's willing to navigate this. And I think a lot of CEOs have to put their egos aside and be willing to learn. And be led by other people and led by their staff through this, so that they can learn, what needs to happen or how they can best serve the organization.

Donte Shannon:

I think, right now as a CEO, you have to be adaptable to what your staff is feeling, what they're what they're saying. And this is a learning, I think for a lot of CEOs, especially a lot of white CEOs. Who have never had to have these conversations, have never thought they would have to have these conversations with staff or has to have these uncomfortable moments. I think, this is a time where you kind of sit back and say, "You know what? I'm not the lead here on on this particular thing, or this particular issue." I need to listen to what my staff is saying, because they need something totally different right now, and a leader. And then listen for that, and then start to guide to your staff and the association and the direction that it should go regarding these particular issues.It's a sensitive time, you have to make sure you're practicing empathy and sensitivity to these things, even though you may be the CEO.

Irving Washington:

That's what made me think it's self pronounced too. I think the other piece, Donte made me reflect on is that, this moment is also fundamentally about relationships. I think one of the reasons why you saw a lot of the some of those statements go flat, is because people did not have relationship either with the individual or the organization, and did not believe what you were writing was true, right? And so again, if you look at from a CEO perspective, this is a time for you to really test those relationships. And if you don't have them, you can't build them overnight. We're going to have a guest on Text to Table that will kind of talk about that, where it the research looked at two different managers, one white, one black, they said the exact same thing. And for the white manager, it had a negative reaction with black women, right? And so a lot of this is going to take time, and I think it's that patients have, okay, if your relationships are not as strong as what you want them to be, how do you build that over time?

Donte Shannon:

Absolutely.

Mark Kate:

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. The other co-hosts for Texts to Table are Michelle Mills Clement from CEO, Chicago Association of Realtors, and Shawn E. Boynes Executive Director of the American Association for anatomy. Both incredible leaders that I look up to a lot. We will link to Texts to Table in the podcast. I know we can find you on YouTube, the podcast app and LinkedIn. Is there anything else?

Irving Washington:

Everywhere, there's a platform, we're on it basically.

Donte Shannon:

Everything yeah, and everything can be found at Texts to Table and Texts is plural, textstotable.com. So all of our, everything links from there, so...

Mark Kate:

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. I think this is required viewing for association professionals, especially white association professionals. And we're really excited to see what you do next.

Donte Shannon:

Thank you.

Irving Washington:

Thank you.

Robb:

Thanks everybody. Appreciate the conversation.

Mark Kate:

For our next segment, we are going to describe how ASAE took on some of this work to, internally for staff. And so Robb and I are so pleased to welcome Cortney Whitlow from ASAE staff. She is the manager of Meeting Registration Industry Partner Engagement, at ASAE. So many of you may be familiar with her from all types of our fantastic conferences and work. Courtney, thanks for joining us today.

Robb:

Thank you, Mary Kate and Robb, for having me. This is an amazing platform. And we're just thankful to be here.

Mark Kate:

Can you share a little bit about how black moments in film at ASAE started?

Cortney Whitlow:

Would love to. So there are nine of us, nine women who came up with this initiative to really create a safe space for staff to commune, to talk about all of the unrest, the social unrest, the pandemic. It was a lot going on earlier in the summer. And this took off in July. We did it for two months. And we basically wanted to present an opportunity to raise awareness. We realized that ASAE thankfully, brought in a consultant to host a staff wide conversation. And as a result of that, we realized that the conversation wasn't done. That an hour and a half, two hours wasn't enough time to talk about our feelings, to talk about our fears, to talk about experiences. And we needed an opportunity and a platform to learn to raise awareness and to really deepen our empathy. And we realized that some staff were surprised about experiences that other staff had been through. They just had never been privy to it. And it was disheartening to know that your fellow staff person that you walk the halls with had gone through such traumatic experiences.

Cortney Whitlow:

So we thought that we needed to broaden horizons. And so we created the black moments in film, because people watch movies. WE thought that might be a fun way to add some learning, in a way that might be a little bit light hearted. And so we created this series where we gave some pre work to our staff, we asked staff to watch four different movies that each had themes. We had a theme for each movie, and it followed by a discussion. And it was supposed to be a discussion just for staff. But what was a surprise to staff was that each week, we had a guest. And we ended our series with a panel discussion of individuals that represented each theme.

Cortney Whitlow:

And so we not only made it real life, and tactical, but we were able to add elements, again, of the feelings, your emotions, heightened awareness. We talked about unconscious bias, we talked about privilege. You name it, we touched on it. And it was a great way for staff to engage, and for people to listen. Some people really sat back and listened, some people ask questions. What was most important was their presence, whether they spoke or not, we feel as though people were able to take away something from it, and have some type of nugget of truth. And we were just thankful for the opportunity that people thought it was important enough to take time out of their day to participate and engage with us.

Robb:

Cortney thank you for sharing that. As a participant, I have some first hand knowledge with regards to what it felt like to be a part of these conversations. And I'm just kind of curious. So what did you see as the impact to staff that participated? I think it was, I was just pleasantly not surprised. I guess I was pleasantly embracing, honestly, all of the conversation in the candid dialogue. And the emotional pain, honestly, that was coming through for many people as they were sharing as reflected the films that I thought you guys did a wonderful job selecting the first place. What were your observations from the staff standpoint? What did you hear from people before, during and after?

Cortney Whitlow:

Yeah, great question. We actually did a survey at the end of the event to solicit staff feedback. But I'll tell you that throughout the event, one of the things that I heard most often was, that they were thankful that we created this platform of comfortability. And being comfortable having uncomfortable conversations. We really... as I said, ASAE open the door with our staff wide conversation. But we really allowed staff to enter that door, stay there, discuss and marinate on some topics. One of the things that somebody said was that the facts haven't changed, but the interpretation of the facts changed, just by listening, which I thought was powerful.

Cortney Whitlow:

Because as we know, none of the things that we discussed were new. But it's, what happened with George Floyd's murder and things going on with the pandemic and everything taking off this summer. We saw that there needed to be a heightened sense of accountability, both for people of color, and for non people of color. For some time, as we know, these things have been going on. But it was to the point where we needed to make sure that the awareness was heard, so that people are accountable of their actions. One of the phrases that we kept saying throughout this series was when you know better, you do better.

Cortney Whitlow:

And so we felt as though by having the series and giving people the knowledge that they might not have known before, that would equip them with the know-how to walk in the world a little bit differently. And to view things a little bit differently. Again, we talked about that unconscious bias and things that are just ingrained in our head. Because of either how we were raised, or exposure to certain things or lack thereof, when we talked about systemic racism. As you talked about, Robb, the experiences, hearing from your fellow staff members, and really being able to be comfortable and open in dialogue was helpful.

Cortney Whitlow:

And as a person of color, it's accountability on both parts, because now I am getting to a point where I'm able to hold my non people of color counterparts accountable for their actions. And rightfully so, I appreciate the fact that my non person of color counterparts are asking questions and raising their hand and they want to know, genuinely. And so, I think that staff really appreciated the fact that, they were able to elevate their consciousness. They were able to elevate their awareness. They were able to hear from real life screenwriters of the film's, producers of the films, and people that have a hand in these movements that are going on.

Cortney Whitlow:

And ASAE started a movement. As we know, we have our What's Next group, so we are on a trajectory that is recognizing and is working to make diversity, equity, inclusion, a real live thing. Not just words that we speak, but actually practices in the workplace and how we deal with each other, and also how we deal with our members.

Mark Kate:

I love that Cortney. I'm so impressed by what you're able to do in a virtual environment as well, because people really... I know, a lot of association leaders worry about culture when we're all working from home. But the vulnerability and just kind of the raw nature a lot of those discussions was... I think it was one of the most impactful events that I was a part of and I guess ASAE and so many other staff as well. Here when I've worked with people for almost nine years, and then hear stories of their experience of police brutality or racism, it was a really special environment that you created virtually via Zoom. So, or via Microsoft Teams, will share the list of films that the group watched, because I know there are a lot of people that are interested in doing the same type of thing.

Mark Kate:

From the movie, Willie, about the first black NHL player who was kind of overlooked by history until recently, to American Sun with Kerry Washington. Just a huge range of... you picked really great movies, can you share a bit about how this is entirely staff led, how you picked the movies? And what kind of parts of conversation you want to have?

Cortney Whitlow:

I'll be honest with you, picking the movies was probably the hardest part. There are so many films that we wanted to expose staff to. And we even had to pull back a little bit, because we were, "Oh, that might be too much." And trying to vary personalities, vary the hardships that were shown in some of the films we wanted. We created a good mix, and we started purposely with Willie, thank you for mentioning that, as that was about the black excellence theme. And so we wanted to start by highlighting black excellence, because we didn't want the takeaway or the series and its entirety to be about the hardships that people of color have faced. We also wanted to show a positive lens and show how we do impact history in a positive way. And so that's why we started there with Willie.

Cortney Whitlow:

And then we purposely picked the order and the movies to resonate with staff, we wanted to make sure that people would be able to ask questions that they you... This we said many times, ask those burning questions. Those questions that you're, "[inaudible 00:32:50] that's not politically correct. I can't ask that in the workplace." This is the place to do it. It's a space where we will honestly answer, you will not be judged. And we use the movies as a way to start that discussion. Because oftentimes, it's challenging to have that real talk dialogue. But that is exactly what we wanted.

Cortney Whitlow:

And we were so pleased by the fact that people really got into it, and did their homework and watch the movie. And and we expose people, I think exposure was huge. People were, "Oh, I've never heard of that movie." Or "I didn't even know this existed." And then, in addition to that we created, we kind of gave and provided the list that we went off with in the beginning, which had... We really started with 30 movies, and then we had to drill down from there. But honestly, there are so many that I would encourage all to watch... People of color, and not just to... Again, raise that consciousness, raise that awareness. We talked, American Son was a really good one about racial awareness and about privilege.

Cortney Whitlow:

And we expose staff to understanding what privilege is, there's a video that we didn't get to show, but it's on YouTube. And it talks about walking the line, and how far, how long it would take you to get to a certain point, based on either socioeconomic status or based on your background or based on your cultural upbringing. And the fact that sometimes people of color don't even recognize certain things that they they've never been exposed to, or had to think about. When we talk about people of color and their hair, and how we dress and how we talk and certain things that we have to think about before we even enter a room because we might already be judged. Or even filling out job applications, do you check that box to self identify and say that you're a female or say that you're African American or do you leave a blank, because you feel like you'll have a greater chance to get a job.

Cortney Whitlow:

So it was that real talk dialogue, coupled with the themes and the elements of the movies, coupled with the writers and the producers that were able to bring those things to life and talk about how these films came about. All of that wrapped in, was really impactful. And and I know that staff walked away, we call them with, "Aha moments." Where it's just, "Wow, I never thought about that." It was really an opportunity, we would say, to walk in somebody else's shoes. It's not that I expect you to understand, and because you haven't lived my life. But I do expect you to show some empathy and know that, "Hey, that that is wrong." And, "Wow, I'm going to do something about that." And so that was the other challenge.

Cortney Whitlow:

It was, okay, so now that you're armed with this knowledge, what are you going to do? Have some conversations with the people in your circle. Look into who your legislators are, look at the laws that are being made. I recall, after the George Floyd murder, I received some emails from staff, asking how I felt, and, "Oh, you must be so mad." And my initial reaction to the email was, "Why aren't you mad? Yes, I am. But you should be as well." And so I had to go back and kind of remember to give those people grace. Because again, they might not have had the same experiences. But what I appreciate is the fact that you acknowledge. Let's acknowledge this elephant in the room and make sure that people know that this is a serious issue that really matters.

Robb:

And Cortney, I'm curious. I want to actually something that being, if this happened a few years ago, with the navigation, if you will, on a personal standpoint of people, really trying to that continuum of your personal and professional life. And that kind of started with social media. That people would have different accounts, they'd show up differently, because they're concerned about how they might be perceived in one environment or the other. And everybody came up with whatever solution fit their needs at the time. You mentioned something earlier though, about doing the homework.

Robb:

And what I think we've seen is that a lot of organizations and ASAE, I think for all of us, proud of the fact that one of them with regards to having a lot of energy, but more importantly, the opportunity to have conversations internally that we've never had before. So you mentioned the What's Next group, quickly that's a group that really encompasses most of the staff, who's curious around having conversations. And more importantly, coming to bring forth actions, that the organization can brace, on an individual as well as an organizational point of view. Your black moments in film history is a tremendous example of yet again, creating another forum for people to have very open, honest, candid conversations. You talked about policies, procedures, guidelines, things that are actionable that we can hold people accountable to. I loved how you trained that. So my question here is that, what else should people be doing? And you from your point of view, what else should organizations be doing in order to create change?

Cortney Whitlow:

Wow, there's a lot. I think it starts with the conversation. Your previous panelists that we're on today, talked about the CEO. Just because they're the leader of the organization, doesn't mean that they are equipped to lead said conversations. But they need to allow staff to feel comfortable opening that door and leading those efforts. I think the conversations are key, they're crucial. That has to be the catalyst, that has to be the start. The staff needs to feel comfortable amongst each other, speaking and talking, and listening and learning. And then from there, I think it's about your network. We have to be comfortable kind of broadening ourselves to communing and engaging with people that don't look like us. Because that's the only way that we're going to learn. It's the only way to get perspective, is to learn from someone else.

Cortney Whitlow:

I think that having these forums, having activities, having action, right? So we can't just say, "Oh, yes... " And we saw this a lot right after George Floyd, we saw businesses to your point about social media. They would post things on their social media about how they're in support of Black Lives Matter and different things. But what does that mean? Those words are nothing if there's no action behind it. And so I commend ASAE for being so forward thinking. I am so privileged to work for an organization that is so passionate about this topic and about the action, actually doing things about it.

Cortney Whitlow:

And I think it goes back to being aware of your surroundings and your community. When we talked about systemic racism. I mean, things such as a zoning, when we talk about schools. Parents, get involved with your PTA as, see what resources can be allocated in those school systems to support your children who are befriending children who are of color. You have to be able to use your privilege and use your influence to enact change. We can't just sit on the privilege and say, "Yeah, I know I'm privileged, I'm blessed. I'm fortunate. I've had all these things afforded to me."

Cortney Whitlow:

But again, it's that empathy. Maybe you haven't experienced that yourself. But just knowing that your neighbor, or your coworker, or the person that you even meet in the grocery store, has had said hardships. I need you to acknowledge that that's not fair. As a person who's a non person of color. That is what I'm looking for. I need the acknowledgement, I need the accountability. And then you're saying, "Okay, let me think about what it is that I can do."

Cortney Whitlow:

During the pandemic, a lot of our staff were saying, "Oh, I don't feel comfortable going out to protest." I totally get it, right? Everybody has different levels of comfort. But can you make a sign? Can you hand out some water? Can you write a petition? Can you sign a petition? Can you write to your legislature? I mean, there are other things that you can do. We actually have some resources that we provided to staff, we have some links, we started a book club, we have the anti-racism information, podcasts. I mean, you have to educate yourself. As I said before, when you know better you do better.

Cortney Whitlow:

So I can understand that you didn't know before, but there's no excuse now. There's too much happening. There's too much going on the news, there's too many conversations being had. We as a collective, have to come together and figure out how we can unite because this is wrong. If nothing else, it's just because systemic racism, because the unconscious bias is wrong. Not only to ourselves, but to others. And again, it's that accountability. I'll say, on a call that I was on with staff, I talked about the fact... Some things that were talked about to me, or some experiences that I've had. And immediately after the call staff were writing me, "Was it me? Did I say that? I'm sorry if I did."

Cortney Whitlow:

And it's funny, because people are more aware now of what they're saying. And I don't want it to be that you're walking on eggshells, and you're scared to say things. But you do have to have some ownership and some accountability to say, "Man that might have come out wrong. And I didn't mean it that way." And it's always the go back, the go back is the best part. For you to come back to somebody and say, "Hey, you know what, that's not exactly how I meant it." And that's powerful, right? And so I implore people to be accountable for your words for your actions, because you never know how that might translate to someone else. And I think that, that's it.

Mark Kate:

Moving past the posing a black skirt on Instagram to actual changes of behavior, and then movement going forward.

Cortney Whitlow:

Totally, totally.

Mark Kate:

Well thank you so much for joining us, Cortney. We would love to share the list of films and any of the resources you mentioned about how people can get more involved, and learn outside of their own experience. And thank you so much for the work you're doing and at ASAE.

Cortney Whitlow:

Thank you. Thank you guys for this podcast. Thank you for the awareness. And thank you for continuing to educate us all.

Robb:

Thank you for your leadership coordinators. Appreciate it.

Cortney Whitlow:

Thank you.

Mark Kate:

We are now pleased to welcome Janet Crenshaw Smith, a co founder and president of Ivy Planning Group, a 30 year old consulting and training company that specializes in diversity strategy and change management. Welcome-

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Thank you Mary Kate. Thank you so much. Good to be here.

Robb:

Fantastic. Well, it's great to have Janet here. We all know Janet very well. And Janet, we've had some really interesting conversations that have led up to this one. And I frame them simply as, they're kind of identity group conversations where we have various iterations of identity curves, whether that be personal and professional i.e., Texts to Table. Or we've also... that was first contract. The second one was, thinking about this from an organizational point of view as relates to organic internal staff groups. And the black film series at ASAE was a good example of that.

Robb:

There's some other examples we can talk about later with regards to ASAE from What's Next perspective too, which is another internal group, and I'm sure a lot of organizations have those. The conversation today though, with you, is from the looking at it from a practitioners point of view. And considering how is it that we can sustain this effort. There's a lot of passion around DEI activities right now, so we all have experienced the challenges. And I think this is something I've heard, certainly, over the last six months really, is that what happens when the global pandemic or the biological pandemic goes away? Or if things return to some sense of normalcy, does that also mean that some of the DEI issues will also go?

Robb:

And I mean... I don't mean that from a literal standpoint with regards to the level of attention and focus. And so the conversation today we'd love to have with you is, from your perspective, what can organizations do in order to really create some kind of infrastructure to sustain the action, sustain the conversation, sustain the change and sustain the action moving forward? We just love to have your insight and feedbacks around it. So one, thank you for being here. So I guess that's where we can start. What's on your mind? What do you see Janet in your 30 years of consultancy, practicing for DEI, what's going to work for organizations moving forward?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Well again, thank you Robb, for being here. And for the partnership of Ivy Planning Group, with ASAE and indeed, we are seeing a lot in the association community around diversity, equity and inclusion. I want to start, first of all by saying that the association community has stepped up in a meaningful way in 2020. And it has been so exciting to see that, because speaking up matters. And overall, we have heard associations, speak up, they're making statements. Go to an association website and there is some statement that is there. And that's important, because silence is a message. And I get that people don't want to say the wrong thing. So they're very careful. What we always start out with in any conversation is, perfection is not the goal, certainly enlist input from a broad group of people in order to create your messaging, but you'd have to put a statement out there.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

So there's some key messages that should also drive key actions, key strategies. One is that, there is an urgency of now. And I'm with you, the urgency of now is opening the door to so much passion. And wave two is really... that was wave one, the passion, the thinking about social injustice. And here we are wave two, where people are looking internally at their organizations, and they're wondering. Well, is it fair? Is it fair here? Are we doing our part here in terms of our staff, our leaders, our board, our members, serving communities? And then people are starting to wonder, if we don't get this right, is it going to be sustainable?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

So we have the urgency of now that must be addressed? And then we have sustainable diversity, equity and inclusion change, and how are we going to make that happened? And so one of the important things that organizations must do is, they must be vulnerable and honest and say, "Up until now, we have not done these things." But moving forward, this is what we will do. We are committed to do it. And we're going to do it in a sustainable way. I think that's really important. I think it's important.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

So one of these messages that we hear sometimes is that, "We have always been committed." Organizations really need to stop saying that, if it's not true. If they don't have evidence that, they need to find another way, to say we're going to move forward with sustainable change. Because if they say we've always been committed, then quite often that's received with cynicism, and distrust. We need to say up, "Until now, we have not done those things, but we get it. And this specifically is what we're going to do moving forward with regard to DE and I"

Robb:

Yeah. Janet I'm wondering, you talked about evidence. And I love that as a concept. So evidence based decision making is something I just personally love. What you talked about was evidence base, messaging, evidence based... and I think the the related term, there's authenticity. How do organizations kind of... How can they assess where they fall on that continuum? Because a lot of organizations would say, yes, we're always committed, some can say and point to specific things that they have done. But that doesn't mean that that commitment has been translated, nor has the action necessarily been translated in a way that when it's sent out into the environment. That everybody who comes in contact with that says, "Yes, of course, that organizations really done a good job. We all agree." I think what often comes back is that, that organization has done something but it's not been enough. So how do kind of navigate that kind of continuum, if you will?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Yeah. And we do look at this strategically. Associations quite often, because they are communities of people, quite often do have heart around this topic. And they do tend to not look at this with a strategic view, an evidence base view, a data view. And if there is a key message that I want to provide to every organization is that, data is your friend. And as we've worked with associations, quite often, we find that it's a data desert. People just don't know. So, we define diversity broadly, so we are looking at race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, gender identity, age, generations or disabilities, or all of those things. And sometimes there really is data around that. And when there's not data, you can collect data, as long as people understand why you're collecting them.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

So let me give you an example. We will sometimes go into an association, and they can't tell me the demographics of their members. Tell me about that, and it's... and any good private sector product company, for example, isn't worth their salt, if they can't tell you the demographics of their customer, and their prospective customers. They know that, because they're there to serve. Now, in the case of private sector, they're there to sell. So they have the profit motive. But as associations, we have the motive of serving our members, serving our constituencies. So we should have, and be very comfortable to know the demographics of our members. The demographics of our prospective members, the demographics of, if it's a professional society, the demographics of the profession overall, and the demographics of our staff, prospective staff, leaders and board.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Why do you need to know that? Because without data, you really don't know how you're doing. And you can decide that... People will say, well, there's certain data we don't want to collect. We don't know if people will trust us if you want to collect it. People will trust us, when they can trust our motives. So as we position this as a core business, then and message it correctly, we can go out and get that data. And we can know how we're doing. And for associations that represent professions or entities, your members are looking to you. They want to know how they're doing. They're looking to you for collection of that data, because they're expecting you to be the database, the repository of information on that. So that's a key first step, important step.

Mark Kate:

Janet, I know that you're working with so many clients, and one thing you work on is how to address awards programs, because they can be fraught with DEI concerns. Are there other examples of when association leaders are looking to make substantive changes? For DEI, what are other areas that you suggest they take a look at?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Well, we talk about diversity a lot, which is representation and data. And certainly, there's data on representation and who your members and staff are. But another key piece is, looking at that inclusion thing. How inclusive is our organization? How inclusive Is it for staff? How inclusive is it for members?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

And so, there's been so much loss this year. And we're all weird at that loss in so many ways. And one of the one of the things that people are really missing, it's that sense of belonging that comes with being in associations. I mean, we know that they're the conferences that people are missing, and we're doing them virtually. And we want to keep in mind that people do want to, they want to find ways to come together. So one of the things that they're looking at is, how inclusive is our organization? That's one of the things that they're working on. Are doing things such that members and prospective members feel a part of?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

And the best associations now are using this time of everything being virtual, to fill a void. So they're saying what can we do now that we don't have the geographic boundaries that would get in the way. The financial boundaries that would keep some people from being able to come to a conference. They are challenging themselves to say, how do we recreate ourselves, so that we can truly be inclusive. That we can create these communities virtually, and hold ourselves to a specific goal around engagement and inclusion. And that's the important goal. It ties to generational differences. But that's a whole other topic of, how can we be relevant to millennials and younger Gen X that represent the majority of the workforce?

Robb:

Janet, thank you for sharing so much here. I think one of the things that occurs to me is, you talked earlier about the... it's work related conversations about... How do you eliminate racial pandemic, if you will? That's the goal, right? And I guess one thing occurs to me is, that when you talked about some of the rules of the road, if you will, for organizations. You talked about the the availability, sometimes the challenge, but the importance of collecting data. Because that's the evidence. And data and the framework of serving a population stakeholders better than you could, and informing them about what's actually happening I think is fantastic.

Robb:

Are there other kind of, if you will, kind of building blocks from a DEI standpoint, that you would suggest that an organization absolutely identifies and embraces and moves toward? Creating some type of energy to action around, as a way of focusing all this passion that we've been talking about? Are there any others that you might want to highlight for organizations out there?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Yeah, absolutely. So, I talk about data, because it's important to understand the current state of how you're doing. And then it's important to have a very clear vision about where you want to go, and a strategy and a roadmap. And I don't mean a high level strategy. I mean, a detailed strategy that says, we understand that this is where we are. Now we're going to be clear on where we're going. And we're going to we're even going to say, these are milestones, and these are measures along the way.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

People often want to start with education. And I love a good training class. There's nothing wrong with that. I love a good unconscious bias class. And I don't think that we should start with the training piece, until we're able to discern if we have a skill problem, or do we have a will problem? Think about that. Is that skill or is it will? And quite often we move first to skill with training, without really assessing, do we have the will to do this? Do we want to do this? What is it that we want to do? Why do we want to do it? What are the expected benefits of doing this? And I think that's an important place to start.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

This is the will This is why we're doing it. This is the strategy. This is where we want to go, this is how we're going to make sure that we measure our progress. And then when we bring in education, it's teaching people how to walk that journey. But otherwise, what are we teaching people? And why are we doing it? So I think having that... It sounds so simple, right? Understand where we are, say this is where we want to go. Build the roadmap, put in some milestones, teach people how to walk or drive, it is pretty simple. It's a matter of doing it.

Robb:

And Janet, I want to ask you something really quickly, because you talked about skilled [inaudible 00:59:24] and it's a default for all of us on some level. And it's important, and it's what we do is train. Fantastic, but you also talked about will development.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Yes.

Robb:

So I might ask you, how would you help listeners assess the willpower? Because that's an important metric with regards to stepping into any type of commitment. How would you guide people with, from whether it's the CEO, or whether it's staff? I want to address the willpower, because before you commit to something, you want to understand what the barriers might be, right? So how could you guide us on that?

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

That will development is... that's hard work. That's hard work, because will development is saying that, we need to have those authentic tough conversations, we need to really understand where we are. Because we get the will, will we understand the opportunity or the threat. Otherwise, I'm going to stay at status quo. And quite often people aren't telling us the truth. Because we're not asking them in a way that lets them know that we want to know the truth. But if we know the truth, have the conversation, understand where we are, and understand the possibilities, we're going to have the will.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

I mentioned a little bit about generations. If we don't really understand what future generations want in associations, understanding that future generations are significantly more diverse, and have significantly higher expectations around diversity, equity and inclusion. Associations could become extinct. As the taxi was displaced by Uber, associations can be displaced by what? If I were running an association, that would be my will driver, that would give me Will development. We don't want to go extinct. We want to be ready for that future generation that is diverse, that that is equitable. And this includes-

Mark Kate:

Janet, thank you so much for joining us today. We have to have you back to talk about these issues again soon. And thanks for all you do for the association community.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

Thank you, I'd love to come back.

Robb:

Thank you, Janet. Appreciate it as always. Good to see you, too.

Janet Crenshaw Smith:

[crosstalk 01:01:49] as well, you too. Bye, bye.

Mark Kate:

Thanks everyone for listening to this episode of Stronger by Association, such great interviews. Robb, thank you so much for serving as the co-host. I think that my biggest takeaway was Janet's comments about the authenticity, that is important. Associations really shouldn't claim, we've always been doing this if they haven't. And we have to kind of take a more serious look about how we talk about the work that we've done, and how it pivots the future.

Robb:

Yeah, No. I was struck by that too, Mary Kate, thank you for... and thank all of our listeners. Quite frankly, for your time to just kind of lean in on this, and I'd characterize as lean in and embrace and hold on to and not let go until we can get rid of this. My perspective here is that, I just appreciate conversations around, literally eliminating a racial pandemic, because that's the goal. The goal is in progress. The goal is elimination. And if we set that out as a goal that I think we will end up in the best possible place that we can. And I think that Janet was just as usual providing a lot of different insights around what organizations could do. So very excited about the future and let's get to it, as they say. So thank you.

Mark Kate:

Thank you so much.

Mark Kate:

Thank you so much for listening. For more information, visit www.thepowerofa.org. And stay tuned for more episodes.