

DI_Season 2, Episode 3_Claire

[00:00:00] **Hannah:** Welcome to the diversity imperative, a podcast dedicated to unearthing the agriculture sectors potential. I'm your co-host Hannah Korschuh, and I'm a grain farmer from Southern Alberta;

[00:00:10] **Erin:** And I'm Erin Gowriluk, your other cohost, and I lead a national grower association in the nation's capital. Our goal each episode is to dig into some great conversations that seek to inspire a broader dialogue about diversity, equity and inclusion in the agriculture sector.

[00:00:25] We look forward to considering a variety of perspectives and exploring ways to overcome barriers, to make this topic one that everyone is comfortable talking about and ask of our listeners before we welcome today's special guest. If you like today's episode, please be sure to rate or review the diversity imperative on your podcast platform of choice.

[00:00:44] And if you feel so inclined, share it with a friend, we also invite you to add your name to our email list. Be the first to know when an episode drops or hear about exciting. Head over to diversityimperative.com to sign up and find resources as well as show notes.

[00:00:59] **Hannah:** Today's episode is all about developing our own individual practical skills through a workshop learning model.

[00:01:05] When it comes to our contribution to building inclusive cultures, most of us probably find ourselves working in teams and interacting with people in some part of our life, whether that's at work in volunteer roles or in communities, even in family settings and building skills to take action in a productive way when we find ourselves in a tricky situation is a skill that needs development, just like any other skill we use at work and in life. So for example, practicing how to intervene during a meeting, when your colleague says something that works against the inclusive culture that you're trying to build.

[00:01:38] **Erin:** And to help us with this today, we're sharing a conversation between you, Hannah and Claire Cowan, where you talk about her course, creating inclusive cultures, expanding influence, and disrupting bias.

[00:01:49] **Hannah:** Yeah, and unfortunately, life got in the way, the day that we recorded with Claire and you weren't able to join us. And while it wasn't the

same without you, Erin, Claire shared some tremendously helpful insights with me about what our spheres of influence actually are as individuals, and how we can use those spheres of influence to our advantage in growing inclusion around us, as well as how we can all practice bias, disrupting behaviors and spoiler alert, there are no fancy prerequisites required to do this work that Claire will talk about.

[00:02:17] **Erin:** That's right. And as Claire says, just courage and practice required. It was an incredible conversation, Hannah and I was really sorry to have missed it, but what a valuable resource this workshop is for the agriculture sector.

[00:02:28] **Hannah:** A hundred percent agreed.

[00:02:30] **Erin:** So a little more about Claire before we get to the rest of the episode. Claire is an entrepreneur in the seed industry and a consultant focused on strategic problem, solving communications, diversity, equity, and inclusion. She has over 10 years of experience in agriculture and has worked closely with farmers, retailers, crop protection and seed companies. Her experience working for multinational corporations, farmer led organizations, and as an ag journalist gave her a broad understanding of Canadian agriculture as a presenter and trainer Claire weaves together well-researched content with industry-specific storytelling to create engaging action-oriented presentations and workshops. Claire has a creatively driven and logically guided approach to problem solving, and she embraces an Explorer's complexity.

[00:03:17] She's accomplished at identifying key issues and distilling information into easy to digest material. And in addition to her workshops and consulting, Claire is the CEO of the seed company north American plant genetics, and has both Canadian and foreign partners.

[00:03:36] **Hannah:** Welcome to the diversity imperative, Claire.

[00:03:39] **Claire:** Hi, Hannah and Erin. Thank you so much for that wonderful intro!

[00:03:43] **Hannah:** Of course. And we're just so glad to have you, and of course, Erin wishes, she could be here with us today. My first question for you is about the motivation behind developing, creating inclusive cultures, the workshop.

[00:03:55] Can you tell us how the course came to be and what prompted you to develop this course? And I'm curious if you had the agriculture sector in mind when you did so.

[00:04:02] **Claire:** Creating inclusive cultures, it's a workshop focused on two key areas. Um, the first being how every person has the capacity to create an inclusive culture by working within and expanding their own sphere of influence.

[00:04:16] And then the second part is about how people can disrupt bias. When they see discrimination or harassment. It was really born out of my desire to make diversity, equity and inclusion actionable within the ag industry. I am not a DEI expert. I'm not an HR professional. Um, but what I do have is uh, over a decade of experience working in agriculture.

[00:04:40] And like you mentioned, in my lovely intro, I've worked with a lot of different types of groups and these experiences have helped me understand that, while our industry is excellent at tackling a lot of big issues, we're not so great at talking about some of the thorniest issues like racism or sexism, ableism, or homophobia.

[00:05:02] I'm a person who likes to talk about hard things, and I believe that agriculture will continue to thrive and grow only if we are able to create an industry that is welcoming and inclusive to all types of people. And so, while I tailor this workshop to each organization and group, um, specifically, it is very agriculture specific.

[00:05:26] I rely on a lot of storytelling, um, to get right into pragmatic and actionable ways everyone can contribute to creating a culture that is welcoming and inclusive to everyone.

[00:05:41] **Hannah:** Nice. And I really like what you said about, um, how you kind of lean into the hard things and you like to talk about hard things.

[00:05:47] I think for a lot of us, The, the easy thing is to just sort of move on from that, you know, that hard thing, but practicing how to do that and getting more comfortable with that is, is really important. I think. So I wanted to ask you more specifically about the title of the course, um, and specifically the terms "expanding your influence" and "disrupting bias."

[00:06:07] Can you elaborate on those two terms that you use a bit for us?

[00:06:11] **Claire:** Yeah, absolutely. I think it's important to recognize that while everyone has the capacity to create an inclusive culture, not everyone has the same sphere of influence. So a manager in a company has a larger sphere of influence than a junior employee.

[00:06:26] The chair of a board of directors has a larger sphere of influence than a brand new board member. Um, this is just a function of, um, our roles and where we are in our careers and in our communities. Um, the workshop outlines actions that people can take at each sphere of influence and how people can push their own comfort level to expand that sphere and have a bigger influence on creating an inclusive culture.

[00:06:52] So it's really about understanding those spheres of influence and how you can work within and grow your own sphere to create a culture where everyone feels welcome and like they can fully contribute. On the other end of the side is disrupting bias. And that is a critical part of creating an inclusive culture.

[00:07:13] So critical that I pull it out and it's a whole one half of this workshop. You can have all the right policies, value, statements, and trainings in place, but if you allow discrimination, bias or harassment to go unchecked in your organization or your business or your community, those efforts, are kind of meaningless. But disrupting bias is not intuitive, it takes skill, it takes courage, and ultimately it takes practice. I really enjoy getting to specific words and actions people can use if they come across bias or discrimination or harassment in the industry so that they can feel comfortable taking an action. And. Taking a stand on creating an inclusive culture. So people feel welcome and defending people that are being excluded.

[00:08:02] **Hannah:** Yeah. And I mean, thinking about courage and practice, those are really all things that we can all cultivate in ourselves, right? That's not a, a huge list of professional requirements that it takes to, to, you know, try to improve our skills in these areas.

[00:08:18] The important, I think too. So I'm thinking about all the people that I know that are really, um, tuned into diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work either at work or in their community. And a lot of them are, are hungry for practical skills. So I see this, this workshop as a way for them to, to really sort of tap into that, um, type of learning. And for me personally, because I have the benefit of knowing you both professionally and personally, Claire, I've had some of that one-on-one coaching with you where I've said, oh, this unfortunate

thing happened today. And I wished I would have said this. And then you were able to sort of almost give me like a script that I can practice for next time.

[00:09:03] So, I mean, that's really important for me and I hope. That, that that's what people would get out of your course too, is that they leave there going, well, next time, this happens, then I then have this language and these skills in my back pocket to be able to implement. Is that sort of a fair characterization, do you think?

[00:09:20] **Claire:** Yeah, that's really, what I'm trying to do with this workshop is I'd like to give people pragmatic and specific, um, tools to put in their toolbox so that they can feel confident and comfortable responding, um, to bias or discrimination and also comfortable and confident in creating, you know, doing more positive things that create an inclusive culture.

[00:09:44] A lot of that is born out of, you know, I've struggled myself to make, you know, say the right thing or, um, do the right thing. And I think, uh, we all benefit when we are, uh, willing to learn from our past mistakes and share those with others. So that's where a lot of the storytelling comes in in, um, this workshop.

[00:10:05] **Hannah:** So you have, you have different ways that you can scale the course. And you have an offering specifically for people in leadership positions in the agriculture sector. Tell us a bit about that and how power, risk, and privilege enter the conversation in that version of the course.

[00:10:22] **Claire:** Yeah. So we talked about, um, different spheres of influence and those spheres are really determined by three key elements, power, risk, and privilege. Those with the most power, the most privilege and the least risk, have a much greater responsibility to create an inclusive culture, than those who have more risk, less power, less privilege. So everyone loves to talk about empowerment, but I find that no one loves to talk about power. Um, except me, I love talking about power and I think it's really important that we talk about power explicitly so that we can ensure we're using it responsibly.

[00:11:02] So in the general workshop, I give a range of actions. People can take to create an inclusive culture, including very passive and zero risk options that are accessible to those with the smallest spheres of influence, but leaders, um, and senior managers, um, are in a much greater position to create an inclusive culture.

[00:11:23] They have a large sphere of influence and therefore they have more responsibility to create an inclusive culture. Research shows that 45% of employee experiences of inclusion are a direct result of their managers actions. And so in the leadership version of the creating inclusive cultures workshop, I focused more on actions, um, that with more impact to create an inclusive culture and efforts that begin to tackle, um, bigger picture equity issues.

[00:11:55] So the general workshop is really accessible to people from all spheres of influence, but I've also created a tailored version that is a little bit more challenging and, um, really more focused on, uh, the bigger picture actions that leaders should be taking to create an inclusive culture.

[00:12:16] **Hannah:** Nice. Yeah. And that stat, you shared about the, um, sort of inclusive experience being linked to manager's actions.

[00:12:23] If people were ever doubting that they had a role to play in the workplace. I think that really sort of confirms that, right. That the, the everyday actions we take as colleagues and managers really matter. So often it takes. The opportunity to put new skills into practice for folks to really get comfortable and confident utilizing those skills.

[00:12:43] Can you take us through briefly what that looks like in the workshop in terms of giving people the chance to practice some of these skills?

[00:12:49] **Claire:** Yeah. So workshop participants don't have to listen to me, drone on for three hours. Although I could absolutely manage that, but I choose not to. Um, so there are really three key elements to the workshop.

[00:13:01] So, you know, one is formal presentation. Um, the, then there's also question and answer periods with the bigger group, depending on the size of the group. Um, and then also the really critical element is small breakout discussions of three to six people. And magic really happens in these small breakout groups.

[00:13:20] Some of the breakout group questions focus on past reflection and experience, um, where people in those small groups can share about experiences they've had or actions that they've taken, whether they were successful or maybe not as successful as they hoped. And they can share that information amongst the small group. And other times in other work, breakout sessions I provide scenarios for the group to discuss: if you were in this situation at a trade show, um, how would you, how would you utilize some of the, um, intervention tactics that we've talked about? What would, what would some options for you

to do? What would that look like? What would people's responses be? So people can really discuss and open up about, um, what they might do and play around and, and try out some of the, some of the tactics that we've talked.

[00:14:11] **Hannah:** Okay. Nice. So then I'm curious about, you know, people's willingness to ask questions that they'd never been able to ask, or they've never felt comfortable asking.

[00:14:22] Um, so how do you, what's your thoughts on, um, creating a learning environment without shame and the importance of psychological safety?

[00:14:32] **Claire:** Yeah. So I work really hard to make people safe, to learn and share when you're tackling issues like racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia. It can be very uncomfortable.

[00:14:43] My goal is not to make people comfortable. Learning often causes discomfort regardless of what you are learning. Um, and I think we all benefit from experiencing some discomfort, but my goal is to ensure that people are not so uncomfortable, that they shut down and turn off and stop learning. My goal is to encourage exploration focused on progress, not on shame, and it's really to help people feel safe enough to, um, feel that discomfort and continue to work through it.

[00:15:16] **Hannah:** So, you facilitated this course to a number of, of organizations and teams in our sector. And what's the response been like in terms of the, this hands on learning model for people? Because I'm thinking that maybe this is the first time that they've had a chance to really practice this type of skill development.

[00:15:35] **Claire:** Yeah, there's been such a wide range of responses and it's, it's been overwhelmingly positive. Um, many people are relieved to shine, a light on topics that are often buried or brushed aside. Um, and there's also a lot of, you know, a lot of people that are that work really hard to work through their discomfort, which I, I really love to see. And I really, um, it shows a lot of strength.

[00:15:59] Um, so a lot of people couch their questions or comments with the frame. I don't want to say the wrong thing, or I don't know how to ask this, but those are my favourite questions and favourite conversations to have. Uh, I think that they are, um, really effective ways to learn.

[00:16:16] Um, I think in order to learn, people need to get a little bit vulnerable and, you know, share a little bit about what you don't know. And I think that's a really powerful way to do it. I hope, um, ultimately that people take this workshop and treat it really just as a starting point, um, new skills take practice, and ultimately the workshop introduces people to some new skills, um, that they will need to practice before they get good at them. With some organizations, um, I've provided some facilitated, uh, discussion guides to have at small meetings or, you know, water cooler chats after the, after the workshops. So they can continue having these discussions that are often, um, you know, not common in the workplace, but making them more, um, more accessible and, uh, helping people continue learning after the workshop is finished.

[00:17:15] **Hannah:** I'm curious about the advice you would give to someone who is on the receiving end of this type of intervention or this type of skill that we've been discussing today. Because I think normalizing, this is probably just as important as learning how to take action. So what advice would you give to someone who has just had a friend or a colleague speak up regarding something they've said or done that they've identified as problematic or harmful.

[00:17:40] **Claire:** I love this question so much, and this is a specific part of the workshop because they think it is so critical. Um, much of the workshop, like I said before, is storytelling and much of that storytelling is about mistakes that I have made. No one is perfect all of the time.

[00:17:56] And being made aware that you have offended somebody or made somebody feel excluded. Is a legitimate gift. That sounds kind of corny, but it's an opportunity to learn and to grow. Um, but in order to get there, you really have to fight some serious defensive instincts. The most important thing to do when someone gives you tough feedback is to breathe.

[00:18:23] To resist that urge to immediately defend yourself is really challenging. And especially when it comes to topics around identity, um, it can often feel like people are attacking your character. Um, What we talk about in this workshop, and what I talk about in this workshop is that it is not your, not, your goal isn't to attack somebody's character; it's, it's giving people an opportunity to learn and grow. So if you can push through that initial discomfort and defensiveness, you're in a much better position to listen and learn. And if someone is going to take the time to explain to you why they've offended them, why you've offended them or why, um, that experience may be different for them than it is for you.

[00:19:11] It's good to remember how much courage that takes. For somebody to bring that to you and to really respect their efforts by listening, if they, if people aren't necessarily willing or interested in helping you and understand more fully, um, why that impacted them that's okay too. Not everybody has the capacity to give you a detailed history of why something may have hurt them. Um, And, and that's fine. You have a lot of opportunities. You can do a Google, you know, look it up yourself. Um, seek out writing tweets, articles, videos from different types of people to do the work yourself, to figure out why, um, you know, maybe some of the actions that you've done may have caused harm to different groups of people.

[00:19:58] And so, so I think, you know, there's, there's two ways and the big way is to see that as a gift and to be willing, to do some work yourself, to figure out and better understand somebody else's perspective. If you're given the opportunity, apologize well. Even if you don't understand why you've harmed someone, even if you never intended harm, you can still apologize well.

[00:20:22] Intent absolutely matters in many things, but impact matters more. If the impact of your actions has caused someone harm, you should apologize. And finally, you should try to do better. Maya Angelou, she has this amazing quote that lots of people know, you know, she said, "Do the best you can until you know, better. And when you know better, you do better."

[00:20:46] So it's a, it's important, you know, not to beat yourself up. Everybody makes mistakes, but it's important to focus on how you can, um, Improve and learn and do better in the future.

[00:20:59] **Hannah:** I really, I really liked everything you said there. And I, the one thing I'll mention is, is the reframing.

[00:21:05] You said where it's a gift, right? So you can go off for the rest of your day, not knowing that you said something that potentially harmed someone else, or you can think about it differently and think about it as a gift for you to improve. So I just, yeah, I loved, I loved all that, Claire. Thanks so much. So I think that's actually a perfect place to wrap this.

[00:21:23] So I wanted to thank you for joining me today and for sharing your expertise. Can you close us off by telling our listeners a bit more about where they can find you and more info about the creating inclusive cultures workshop?

[00:21:36] **Claire:** Yeah, absolutely. People can find me online at clairecowan.ca. Um, you can also find me on Twitter at Claire S Cowan. Um,

my Twitter is a real mix of life and work. Sometimes you'll get links to some great DEI resources and other times you'll get a review of the last beer that I drank, really depends on my mood, but you can absolutely find me there. Or you can find me on, uh, the worldwide web as they say.

[00:22:02] **Hannah:** Fantastic. And I'll make sure to post all of that to our show notes so listeners can go check that out too. And thanks to our listeners for tuning into the diversity imperative. Erin and I look forward to our next conversation in a few weeks time, until then please visit our website diversityimperative.com where you'll find past episodes, resources, and a place to sign up for email updates.

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