

## HR Considerations for all people managers

**Hannah:** Welcome to the Diversity Imperative, a podcast dedicated to unearthing the agriculture sector's potential. I'm your co-host Hannah Korschuh. And I'm a grain farmer from Southern Alberta.

**Erin:** I'm Erin Gowriluk, your other co-host. And I lead a national grower association in the nation's capital. Our goal each episode is to dig into great conversation that seeks to inspire a broader dialogue about diversity, equity and inclusion in the agriculture sector.

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. For today's episode, we wanted to have a discussion about human resource considerations for all managers and people leaders. We know that the agriculture sector is made up of organizations of all sciences and types and that they may have an HR director or department, or they may not.

**Hannah:** And to do that, we have two guests from Syngenta, Canada joining us, Dan Wright, head of seeds and Stacey Redford, who is the head of human resources. And I'll tell you a bit about both of these folks before we get into it. So Dan is a strong advocate for modern agriculture and investment into seed technologies that are helping provide growers a wide variety of options when responding to challenging farming environments.

And he has over 20 years of agricultural sales and marketing experience. He also has a passion for diversity and inclusion that he gets to extend to his role with Syngenta. He holds an MBA through Royal Rhode university in Victoria, and is an advanced agricultural leadership program class 10 graduate, and has also served as president of the Canadian seed trade association.

Stacey leads. Syngenta's people strategy focused on shaping a workplace culture that attracts the diverse talent needed to advance an increasingly innovative agri food environment. Joining Syngenta Canada in January, 2022, her career has spanned more than 20 years in various industries, such as medical devices and environmental solutions.

She has cultivated a passion for coaching and mentoring and is an advocate for bringing your most authentic self

**Erin:** And of course we want to thank Syngenta Canada for their support, their continued support of the diversity imperative, as well as lending their voices to this conversation today and every day.

So welcome to you both. Welcome to the Diversity Imperative, Stacey and Dan,

I should say, welcome back Dan to the show because I believe this is your third time. Now as a guest, we appreciate your ongoing support and your continued engagement. And we wanted to take this opportunity now in season two to circle back. Following the first episode of the diversity imperative that we recorded last year, you joined Hannah and I to talk about the de and I journey that Syngenta had embarked on.

And we wanted to ask you a bit about how that journey has progressed in the last year, both for the organization, but also Dan for you personally.

**Dan:** Yeah. It's um, So first the word journey is something that we've actually been debating, um, because, um, or challenged about, I guess it's when you ask, um, we talk about it, right?

We say we're, we're on a journey, but people want see where's the progress. Um, what are we doing? Um, and Stacey and I were talking about this just last week and, um, Stacey made a great point. If we're not on a journey, then we think that we've got to where we need to be, and we need to continue to make progress all the time.

I think we'll always be on a journey. Um, doesn't mean we're not making progress though. Right? And so then you share the progress that we're making. Um, and the challenge comes somewhat faster. Some want see the change. Um, sometimes we're afraid to make mistakes before we get too far. So, um, I think, and that's making mistakes has come up on the podcast, um, before as well, not being afraid to make mistakes.

Nobody's perfect. Um, but it, the more we can have conversations and be authentic about it, VR authentic, then it's going to be just fine. Um, as an organization, we're building a, a full strategy. Um, and I think that's really important. Um, I think it's also important that we don't freeze until it's complete. Um, I, I think that's, um, making sure you have your strategy a hundred percent done, uh, before you do anything, I don't think that's required.

I think we can start to do stuff and we are, um, doing great things before we complete the strategy and, um, And like all strategy, it's never complete. It's, it's

also a journey that continues to evolve as you make all those different things. So, um, yeah, I think we're making really good progress. We formed a C business unit, I think, uh, a year ago from where we are.

Um, when we last chatted, uh, and our looking at that, our, our leadership team has 11 people on it. Six females, five male. Um, which was, um, exciting. Um, what's interesting people say you've got a real diverse team and the team says, no, we have gender diversity. And so we have work to do still, um, And I think for us, one thing that we'd look at is how do we get the next layer into that and make sure people are getting good experiences so that if they want have more growth opportunities and, and escalate higher in the organization, that those opportunities happen.

And we're doing things with projects, um, special projects outside their normal job. You always have to be careful that it's not. Adding a whole bunch of work and making them work extra hours that you give them capacity to do so in their normal time. But it also gives capacity so they can move around and, and also grow as, uh, people.

So I've really enjoyed what that's looked like over the last year and watching, watching people get new opportunities and just do an awesome job. It's been a lot of.

**Erin:** Thanks Dan, and, and welcome to the diversity imperative of Stacey. And with that welcome also to, to the agriculture sector, you joined Syngenta about a year ago, replacing someone who'd been in the role for 27 years, which is really quite remarkable.

So you're bringing in a bit of an outsider's perspective. If you will, into this conversation, the one in particular that Syngenta's having, which is always exciting. Tell me a bit about what you experienced as a newcomer, walking into this organization whose, uh, de and I journey was already well underway.

Some of the challenges and opportunities that you've identified and the legacy that was left as you step into the role that was led by a 27 year veteran.

**Stacey:** Yeah. Um, you know, first off, just the experience with, with meeting some of the, the people in the organization. For me that was, you know, one of the decisions to, to say yes to, uh, to such a fantastic organization.

I, uh, I started doing some digging and, and finding out that they were on this path from an ed and I perspective and. you know, as a newcomer from out of

industry, you want be careful. Um, but also we have high, high engagement scores and, uh, employee engagement scores that is, and you don't want break anything.

Right? You've got this nice momentum happening, but you don't, uh, you don't want make change for the sake of change and potentially disrupt something fantastic. That's happening. So, as I walked in, what I recognized is that, you know, we've got. We've got really great passion, not only from a leadership standpoint, which is, is difficult.

Um, in, in a lot of organizations, I would say, um, to get that leadership buy in, but you have this almost groundswell from the bottom up and grassroots movement forward in terms of ed and I. So to Dan's point when he was talking about, Hey, let's, let's go faster. Let's do more. Let's do this. Let's do that. I think the challenge has been, how do you harness that?

And, and how do you make it make sense? Um, so that we're actually accomplishing what we need. We need to going be going forward

**Hannah:** Stacey, when you're talking about harnessing the swell and the momentum, I know from a little bit of prep that we did for this conversation, that you're implementing a new strategy. So tell us a bit about where the diversity, equity and inclusion, um, initiative or, or movement, where does it now live in? Syngenta like, where does the.... Where's the engine house that is sort of powering all of this work.

**Stacey:** That's a great question. You know, um, again, when I, when I look at, you know, Syngenta, I think that the most unique piece about working here is that you actually get it from both ends, right? You get it from this employee push that says, Hey, we want more, we want do more.

And we're so excited about this. You get this top down where you've got leaders saying, yes, we, we need to go. We need to go faster as well. And truly it's been about how do you organize that? Right? How do you, how do you put that together? So that we're actually accomplishing something. And so we've been, uh, we've been working through our leadership, uh, team to say, okay, where are going to be our key areas of focus, because you can't focus on everything because you, you won't achieve anything.

And how do we move the needle, you know, year over year going forward. And that has really come down to some action plans. Um, for those particular areas that we're

**Hannah:** focused on. Does it now live with you in the HR department?

**Stacey:** Just so I'm clear on that. Yes, actually. Um, initially it, it wasn't living in HR at all.

So when I had joined the organization, it was sort of, um, off to the side as something that was happening within the organization and from an HR strategy standpoint, you know, it made a lot of sense to make sure that. Pulling that, into that, that HR function as an owner. That's not to say that, you know, everybody doesn't have the responsibility to make sure that we're, we're owning ed and I, but it's to say that it really needs somewhere where you get that extra push and focus.

So that was new in terms of the, the HR strategy for Syngenta Canada.

**Hannah:** Okay. Nice. So it's, it's kind of about organizing and harnessing and sort of just thinking about the most strategic way to keep it moving forward, if that's a fair way to, to characterize that.

**Stacey:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Again, lots of passion.

Um, but it's, it's the, the direction that we need to, to kind of get some traction. Okay. So now I

**Hannah:** have a sort of provocative question for you, and I'm really curious, you know, what your thoughts are on this Stacey, because, um, I spend a, a lot of time. Podcasts on and the tractor seed and whatnot. And a lot of these thought leaders and people who do a lot of work in the diversity, equity and inclusion and people leading space, there's maybe a narrative that sometimes gets repeated that says that DEI work goes to the HR department to die.

So I'm curious what you, what you think about that as an HR professional and maybe how that might sort of influence how you move forward. And I guess to sort. Just provide a bit more context to that statement. Maybe that's because there's not enough resources for the HR department to keep initiatives moving forward, or maybe it's because there's not enough buy-in from the organization.

So yeah, I would love to hear your thoughts

**Stacey:** on that. Yeah. I, I, um, you know, of course I'm not going to. Um, be horrified by that comment of being an HR professional. But certainly I think,

you know, it's been my experience in the past that, uh, a lot of organizations, they sort of, you know, put that, uh, ed and I piece into HR and say you own it.

And so there's, there's a lack of accountability across the organization and, uh, Really, you cannot move the organization forward with just one department focused on it. And while, you know, I'm saying, Hey, we own the strategy now, which is fantastic, because it, it gives us, you know, the ability to shape and drive it forward.

The reality is that, um, you really need those senior leaders to buy in.

**Hannah:** Thank you for the summary Stacey that you gave. How this work is going to organize and keep Syngenta moving forward. So I'm curious to know what your advice would be for organizations who are also starting to organize and sort of officially come up with the strategy.

What would you say to someone or an organization that is on a parallel path of trying to move this forward? What's your best practical advice?

**Stacey:** Best practical advice is to have an actual written plan. I, I think, you know, you can have all the best intentions in the world of, of trying to, to push initiatives forward.

But until you have that plan, that's documented somewhere that that gives you that structure to follow. You're not going to accomplish much. Right. And, and it's funny like Dan and I have had these conversations back and forth about, you know, Hey, we have, we have this huge ambition, but. What do we need to achieve and, and truly leaders and different organizations that are on this path need to make sure that they're, they're writing this down.

So there's a level of accountability. Um, and so you can actually measure against where you've been to, where you're going.

**Hannah:** Yeah, that makes so much sense to me. And, you know, I'm thinking to sort of potentially parallel lines here. Farm management, Canada has done so much work to sort of put some power behind the numbers about when, you know, farmers are doing their own management planning, that the, the there's a sort of a statistical connection there between writing it down, keeping yourselves accountable.

So again, to me, it just makes so much sense that you would need to be doing that with diversity equity and inclusion strategies. Thinking about people,

managers and leaders in all sorts of companies from small to big organizations and family farmers of all sizes. What have you operationalized to become part of your standard hiring practices that have improved the diversity of the applications that you are seeing?

**Dan:** I think the first thing, when we think about those for any organization is similar to what Stacey said about writing things down. It's the intentional and commit. Um, if you really want to do it, you have to, um, an example of being intentional is setting goals of, of a slate that you want to interview. So I'm a big believer in hiring the best person for the job.

But I also understand that if you never push or try and have a diverse slate to interview, You'll never make any progress, hiring diverse candidates. Um, and so ensuring that you've got that diverse slate, um, to do, um, I think that's somewhere for, I know in the seeds organization we can do better.

We've done it a little bit and it's challenging yourself to stay on those areas and continue to do that. Um, I think is, is the one thing that is, um, That is a challenge. Um, I think for, for, as we think about talent, one thing that, um, I do, and, and some of my managers are we, we look for different talent all the time and we write down names, I'll take screenshots of Twitter things and different social media posts and say, isn't that an interesting, um, thought or that looks like an interesting person.

I might reach out to them whether we have a job posting or not just to connect and learn about the PE, learn about people and. That's been, I think, helpful and starts to build some connection before you have a job that's posted. And then I think when you do that, you also learn that, um, people might say I'm not qualified for that job.

It's pretty well documented, right? That women won't apply for jobs. If they don't feel like they're a hundred percent qualified or 110% qualified where a male might go. I'll give it a shot. Um, and so having some of those more intentional conversations with people to help them understand you are qualified.

Um, you know, you're seen as a person that's in a leadership spot and has some great qualifications get them into the interview panel. Think an area to for improvement would be to ensure we've got a. Panel that we've got our jobs screened to make sure there's nothing in there that might signal to somebody it's not for them.

Like there's a lot of things that we can continue to do, um, to make sure that we're making progress on that. But for me, it's that being intentional and committed and, um, holding yourself to that. So you can truly make, um, make progress. Thanks.

**Erin:** Thanks, Dan. Stacey, I wanted to follow up with a question for you about, about development opportunities.

And I think from my own perspective, too, as someone who's a people manager, but not an HR specialist, I don't have an HR department to lean on. So what professional development opportunities or training would you recommend for people like me, for people, managers or leaders that don't come from the world, the HR world proper.

**Stacey:** It, it's funny, you know, I've had discussions with different leaders in, in different businesses and, and even at Syngenta and you know, part of it is I look at it from a foundation standpoint, right? If you are outside of HR, there are certain pieces from a compliance standpoint that you really need to make sure you're achieving.

So you need to understand what the, the laws of the land are. Uh, number one in human, right. Employment standards. All of those types of things are going to be really important as a leader because you want make sure you're making good decisions. The other layer, which I think is equally important is that we're making sure that we're understanding, you know, things like unconscious bias that is, you know, going beyond just the, the fundamentals.

And I think it's really important as a leader because of all of the decisions you are going to be responsible for and the people that are in your care. So.

**Hannah:** The HR department, um, or the HR role, depending on which organization you're talking about, it can hold a lot of, uh, importance for people when they, you know, they first start a job.

And also it's probably the last place that they have contact when they're done in a job. So many organizations in agriculture and across Canada are doing this work to encourage inclusion and increase the efforts to build teams that are not homogenous in terms of experience and background. And they may have had some success.

So what work do you think that leaders and HR professionals need to do to make sure that they are equipped to respond well to employees or, or

colleagues, um, that may have different identities than what they do and to sort of. Give an example to kind of visualize what I'm thinking about, what if, um, a disabled employee or, uh, that maybe wheelchair user came to you with a, a problem.

And so that identity is very different than, um, the able bodied people potentially working in HR. So what kind of, um, recommendations would you make to those folks to think about ways that they can, you know, be prepared to respond?

**Stacey:** Absolutely. You know, uh, it's interesting. And, and I, you reflect on, on a lot of that in HR, because that's part of your, your role in terms of trying to make sure that you are, you're being inclusive in an organization and understand that not everybody is going to have the same experience.

You know, HR has the unique piece where we've got this other piece of education that we get, right. So part of that includes understanding kind of all of the, the compliance pieces in terms of human. And, and employment standards, like I mentioned before, but more than that, you've got things like, you know, um, awareness training and non-biased training.

And so having that in terms of your team being, being through that training session and understanding it and having that open dialogue, I think is critical. What's also important is, is this piece of making sure you're open, right? And, and not being afraid to have conversations. I think that that's vital and asking people, you know, how they feel or why they feel a certain way so that you can make sure that you truly understand what's going on rather than trying away from the conversation.

But the critical piece in terms of leadership, it would be understanding the fundamentals, right. In terms of, um, of bias.

**Hannah:** Understanding the fundamentals for sure. And, and I really, I think what you said about being open is important too, because I feel like the first thing you need to do is really, and try to understand it, empathetic to what that person is saying, because the experience could be so, so different from your own.

**Stacey:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And you know, and it's interesting when you, when you talk to people, you know, leaders, especially, they're always nervous about having these, these engaging conversations. And the reality is they need to be having these engaging conversations. They need to be a bit vulnerable to

make sure that they're making a connection so that they can actually make a difference.

**Erin:** Thanks Stacey. So I want thank you both for your, for your time today. This has been a great conversation, you know, to end us off. We were hoping if you could give us some sense, Dan, of, of where you think Syngenta is going to be going from here, what initiatives for you are, are top of mind right now that you want keep working on, on your journey towards inclusion.

And, and to that, I'll also add, you know, do you have any plans to, as you, as you talked about initially, some of the challenges associated with being on this journey, You know, do you have any plans to quantify and measure your progress, looking at measuring some of the strengths and what, if any gaps exist currently?

**Dan:** I'm going to leave the quantifying to Stacey because we've had a lot of conversations and she shared some stuff and, um, I think it's really important. That we do that. And we talk about it and mm-hmm Stacey can chat about that a little bit more. Um, because if you don't, if you don't measure, you'll never know if you're making progress.

Right. So I'll let Stacey talk about that. I I'm ex continue to be excited about, I think it's that balance of going fast and showing truly that things are happening and, um, the balance between grassroots and, and leadership and how we can all get there. Um, I suggest it doesn't have it all figured out, which is okay.

Right. We, we don't, I think we're doing really. Like, I'm super excited about all the things that we're doing. I think we need to do more. Um, but we, we also acknowledge we don't have it figured out and that's okay. Um, I think people would look sometimes and say, Hey, you've got it all figured out. Well, that is not true.

Um, we don't have it all figured out and, and. And it's and it's okay. So, uh, what I'm excited about, and we talked about the being in HR and being embedded in that comment of going to HR to die. Um, what I'm excited about the most, I think it's going our strategy and what we're doing. It's going to accelerate, um, and make things happen and not.

The opposite of, uh, what that quote of going to HR to die. I think it, it, um, will start to become embedded into everything that we do, um, even more, um, No pressure Stacey, but, uh, I, I, I think it's also, you know, when it was off on the

side, I was one of the leadership sponsors co-sponsors of the, my inclusion team.

And it, you know, the, the evolution of the strategy is it's, it sits in HR now and HR is owning it and helping drive all those things. And I think that's just great progress.

**Erin:** So Stacey, do you want speak to that piece, that piece around quantification? How are you going to measure progress on this journey?

**Stacey:** Yes, I'm really excited about this. So, you know, part of our dialogue at the, the senior leadership team is, you know, okay, we've done some great things to this point. So what's next. And you know, my question has always been. Well, what do we currently have and what are we looking at? And so we're starting down the, the process of actually self-identification right.

And so really pushing on the organization to say, Hey, we're interested. We want know what do our metrics look like? What do, what does our. Um, population look like in reference to Canada. And I think that's the piece where we can actually start making some really great decisions about our ed and I journey.

And otherwise you you're sort of flying blind, right? And, and you know, that lack of direction doesn't really get us to where we need to be. So I'm very excited about walking down this, this path in terms of, of metrics going forward. To dance, um, you know, to dance comment about HR, you know, I'm excited, he's excited and also nervous because of course, you know, I don't know everything either.

So we, we truly are on this journey. And, um, what I've cautioned everybody is that, you know, don't look at it in terms of checking boxes. This is truly an evolution. And so we need to be prepared that this is for the long haul.

**Erin:** That is a fine note on which to end this conversation. Thank you both for joining us, Dan and Stacey, and thanks to our listeners for tuning into the fourth episode of season two of the diversity imperative.

Hannah and I look forward to our next conversation in a few weeks time until then please visit our website [diversityimperative.com](http://diversityimperative.com) where you'll find past episodes as well as any resources related to today's convers. And as always, the conversation continues online. You can find Hannah and I at diversity in ag on Twitter and at diversity imperative on Facebook and Instagram.