

Nate: I need to start by congratulating you on your new role as VP of diversity and inclusion at Micron. Congratulations.

Sharawn: Thank you, Nate. I'm so excited to join the Micron family.

Nate: Yeah, I'm interested because you've had a really broad experience in HR from sort of total rewards to super broad VP of HR leadership roles. With this role, you're really zeroing in on diversity and inclusion. Talk to me a little bit about why and what the attraction of that is.

Sharawn: Yeah, as you mentioned, I've managed a number of what I call center of excellences within HR, including compensation, benefits, employee engagement, HR comms, diversity and inclusion, mergers and acquisitions. Out of all of the work that I've done within HR, I really found the area of diversity and inclusion to be the most rewarding for me, personally. I decided, I made a conscious decision, that that is really where I'm not, I don't want to spend just some of my time, I want to spend all of my time playing in that space.

Sharawn: It was a very intentional decision that I made to pursue this path of focusing solely on diversity and inclusion. What I love about diversity and inclusion is that it really does touch all of the other HR COE's because you're dealing with pay equity, a lot of it is looking at your talent acquisition strategies and thinking about how do you get more diverse candidates in the front door. It's working closely with talent management to design those leadership programs when you're looking at your high potential talent that's diverse and how do you motivate them, and retain them, and really utilize them in a way that's meaningful, not only for the organization but also for them. To me, diversity and inclusion is really the best of both worlds.

Nate: I do want to say also before we get too far in here, that you and I have worked alongside each other probably 10 years ago at Safeway.

Sharawn: Yes.

Nate: Over the years we've had a great open dialogue. I'm hoping we can dive right into a little bit of some sticky stuff because sometimes diversity, there's a lot that goes unsaid and I think it's time that people start having open conversations. I think that a lot of a lot of employers are, and even just, you know, having roles like yours elevated to the level it is, is a pretty big step.

Sharawn: Yes, and we're seeing that more and more. It's a very exciting time and I think that there's a lot of things that have attributed to companies really taking a step back and really thinking more strategically about their diversity inclusion efforts and realizing that there is a need for a leadership role there.

Nate: D&I is sort of having a moment, it seems like, especially in the tech sector, you know, black women, and underrepresented classes, and leadership positions like we just talked about. I just kind of want to put this on the table, though. There are a lot of folks

out there who say things like, "Oh, another black woman in a diversity role," or you know, they might even warn somebody off from taking a role like this. I know that you've probably heard things like that in your career. But, rather than just addressing those statements directly, I'd love to get a bit of a history lesson from you because I know you're a big history buff on the Civil Rights movement, and how that might tie into to some of this stuff, and what we can learn from that.

Sharawn: Yeah. I truly believe, Nate, that one of the reasons that black women in particular, such as myself, are really drawn to roles in diversity and inclusion is one, there's just so much room for improvement when you look at underrepresented groups and the need for representation in corporations. If you look at the statistics, blacks are typically one of the lowest represented groups, typically under 5% at tech companies. I was just looking at Facebook, they're at 1.5% for technical roles. Micron, where we are currently sitting at 3% for technical and engineering roles.

Sharawn: There's just a huge opportunity. So naturally when you see that you are really motivated to push for progress and to do something there. I also believe that black women have had a rich history dating back to the Civil Rights movement of really being vocal and pushing forward when they see those types of injustices or opportunities. That's one of the reasons that I'm really passionate about it and I believe that's why others are as well.

Nate: Well, and if you really do think about it and think about some of the personalities out there, obviously there's the famous ones that most people know about, but just even folks that you know in your daily life, I would say that a lot of black women are some of the strongest people around. It's not surprising to me that they would be gravitating towards roles where they have to really put a lot of weight on their back and move forward with it.

Sharawn: Well, thank you Nate. I take that as a huge compliment, but I also do want to point out as well that the black population is very diverse in nature. I think sometimes people look in and categorize all black women as being the same, but there are many different unique personalities and we obviously have different thoughts and different backgrounds within that group. I just want to point that out as well.

Nate: Yeah, absolutely. That's an important conversation to have. Every group has some sort of name or thought you can attach to it. There is this feeling of, I want you to see me as an individual, not a group. That's a challenge for a diversity and inclusion officer.

Sharawn: Yes. I think that's something that we all can relate to, Nate. It's really, no one wants to be lumped into a certain group, or classified, or stereotyped in a certain way. That's something that we're really striving for and we're not there yet, but I think there is something to be said for also feeling like you're the only one in the room and being aware of that. Even if you don't personally feel like there is a privilege, to acknowledge that there is someone in the room that is different and they could be feeling different or if there's something that you can do to really champion their growth or make sure that

they have a voice at the table, I think that that's so important and that's where the empathy comes in.

Nate: We have a long ways to go to get fair and equal representation. There's a lot of reasons that it is the way it is. Some of them go back to socioeconomic issues and just the talent pool is not quite there yet and we need to fix that so that there is enough talent to make it equitable. But, you bring up a really, really good point, which is we just need to strive to recognize differences. That could be somebody who looks like you and they have a different way of thinking, right? It's diversity of thought as well that's pretty dang important.

Sharawn: I could not agree more. That's a topic that comes up a lot. It's not just diverse in physical appearance or background. It's also diversity of thought. That is what we hope that having a diverse population brings to the organization is that diversity of thought and that we can put all the ideas on the table and hopefully come up with the best solution.

Nate: Unconscious bias. I know that's a word that's used a lot or process bias even. There's a really easy example I'll give you. If you're hiring for a front desk person and you put that ad out there on whatever recruiting software you're using, I'm going to guarantee, because I've been in that role of the hiring manager, that you're gonna get 95% women who are between the ages of 19 and 25. That's going to be your main pool. The question becomes, is that a process bias? Is that an unconscious bias? Then do you then make a conscious effort to go to find somebody from that 5% or is that unfair?

Sharawn: So, Nate, what I would say is number one, you always want to look for the best candidate. That's where the bias comes in. If you're picking someone not based on their background, but you're picking someone. I often hear, "Oh, they don't, this person doesn't fit into the culture." You're not necessarily looking for someone that's going to fit that's like all of the other people you have on your team. You're looking for someone who's really going to add or enhance that culture or who brings the ... someone who brings the skills that you're looking for for that job.

Sharawn: If that happens to fall within that 5%, then that's the person that you should be looking at. Absolutely. You should not be excluding that person. But I think what, where the bias comes in is where are you sourcing from? Where's that 95% coming from? If you're only advertising in one newspaper, or newspapers a little data nowadays, but at one school, right? That school has a certain demographic, that's where the bias comes in. Are you really looking for full representation? We talk about in talent acquisition your talent addressable market. If the population is 10% black, you would expect to see that represented in your applicant pool.

Nate: Yeah. It's much easier to hire somebody like yourself because you have a comfort level there. It's much more difficult to hire somebody who's got a drastically different background than you, maybe a drastically different life path and thought process. This is important because that's how you fill roles, right? There's a hiring manager, there's usually a team of folks who are doing the interviewing. What sort of advice do you have out there for maybe even smaller companies that are trying to just do the right thing

and make sure they're getting diversity of thought, diversity of background, diversity of whatever it is, so that they have a stronger organization? What do they do in that process?

Sharawn: That's a phenomenal question, Nate. First of all, I would say be open. Look at your channels of where you're sourcing from. I've heard of companies who have internship programs, but the internship program is by referral only. Well, that's not going to issue a very diverse slate of candidates. So really think about where you're recruiting from and be open. I would say partner with your community. There are great organizations within the community that provide diverse talents, so tap in. You want to be a part of your community and give back to your community so utilize those resources. Even for small companies now, there are a lot of phenomenal tools that help to remove bias. As you're drafting your job descriptions, or certain key words, or certain phrases that you may use that you may not even know are adding bias to your search.

Sharawn: For example, putting in a job description you have a role that requires 24/7 support. That's gonna really deter a lot of women, research has found, from actually applying for those roles. Tools that are really helping you to scrub your job recs, tools that are, you know, as you're feeding in your job descriptions, if they're removing the names so that there's no bias there, and these are affordable tools, or your TA organization can do that on their own. I think that there's a lot of things that we can do, just as far as being open to where we're sourcing from, that can help to create that diverse culture that you're looking for. Again, don't look for a culture fit. Look for someone who's going to add to your culture, who's going to bring that different perspective. Don't shy away from that.

Nate: I'm not a diversity and inclusion officer. I've never worked in the field. I've always tried really hard to hire people who are complimentary to some area of the team. What do you, sort of that, it's not my fault thing. When you try to go and make change in an organization, how do you deal with that as a D&I officer or just as a HR person who's trying to make positive change?

Sharawn: I do think, Nate, you bring up a really good point because this is a situation that we see often. I recently was able to witness a conversation with Barack Obama. One of the things that he brought up, or his strategy was that he had to be very intentional when he was filling his cabinet around the type of talent that he was bringing in and who he was bringing in. For example, when he was looking to fill defense roles, he found that he was only presented with male candidates. He had to be very intentional and say, "That's great, but let's look at some other candidates as well. Show me something different," and the same thing when he was filling HUD positions, he found that he was only getting resumes for people of color or for women. While that's great, again, he wanted to see some diversity on both sides. I think we have to really make a conscious effort to again, make sure that we're sourcing appropriately and that we're looking across the board and that we're asking for representation in all functions.

Nate: Another question for you on diversity and inclusion and the makeup of an organization. I would assume that the numbers that a lot of people are looking at is, and I think you said it earlier, you want to be representative of the community in which you're at. For a

place like Silicon Valley where, you know, we're recruiting from around the world if you live in this area, you can really make the organization look any way you want, if you try. What kind of, how do you set those bars? How do you decide how many women engineers is appropriate and how many people of different backgrounds is appropriate?

Sharawn: Yeah, you know, I wish that was the case, Nate. Even though we have the numbers as far as the population, when we talk about the talent and addressable market, we don't always have skilled labor in those groups. For example, if you're looking for engineers that are women, there are only so many that graduate each year. While you may have that population represented, you may not have them skilled and ready to step into those roles. So what we're trying to do, I think what all companies are really trying to do, is give back to the community.

Sharawn: We're starting to build that talent and push more out into the workforce. We're also getting creative about roles. Obviously, there are some jobs where you need to be onsite and you need to be present, particularly in manufacturing, but there are other roles that can be remote or part time or whatever the case may be. Again, that opens up your talent pool. We need to get really creative. Then there's also the gig economy as well. I think that's going to present a whole other opportunity or gateway for diverse talent.

Nate: Numbers of, for example, engineers are one thing, but talk to me a little bit about pay equity across gender and race. That's a huge challenge, isn't it?

Sharawn: Yeah. Pay equity, gosh. So many companies are investing in pay equity and I'm delighted to see it. It's so important. I think it's a really important exercise, but it's one you have to get right. I really encourage companies who are embarking on this journey to really put a lot of thought into the comprehensible factors that they're thinking about looking at and measuring, and really balancing pay equity with pay for performance. You really want to think about what do you consider an outlier when it comes to to pay equity? Are you just taking a top line approach or are you really going to dig in and look at that data? That's what I would encourage companies to do is to work with your total rewards leader, look at the data, and then really partner with your HR business partners to understand what's going on. Where do you see discrepancies? And to do the right thing.

Nate: Yeah, and that data is complex and deep. I mean, there's a lot of different factors that go into why somebody is paid, what they're paid. It should be pretty complex, right? But, to get it right, I imagine, is a huge, huge challenge. The other thing that sort of occurs to me in some other conversations I've had is women are at a pretty big disadvantage when it comes to pay equity because you're gonna fall behind if you start a family. What do you think the role of the company is to put some value on that time that the person's away? How do you square that?

Sharawn: Yeah, I think it's really important to look at the scope of the job and to pay for the job that's being performed. One of the things that I love that California has done is they have really moved away from recruiters asking for your current salary or your salary history. If you ask them what is the range for the job, legally, they need to tell you. I

think that that is really helpful because it's looking at, you know, is this person qualified to do this job and what does the market pay for this job? That's how people should be paid. That's my philosophy.

Nate: Yeah, that's great and that's huge. I didn't know that because I haven't interviewed for a job in quite a while.

Sharawn: I think the other thing, Nate, too is I think that what ... you asked me what companies can do, but I think one thing that candidates can do is really research the job and what the job pays. There's so many cool sites out there now, such as Glass Door, that give you some pay transparency so you can see about where you should be in the market. Don't be afraid to ask. You know, a lot of times what we've seen is women don't ask for sign on bonuses, they don't ask for equity, they don't ask for guaranteed raises. Because they don't ask, they don't receive those things. I would really encourage you to ask all the company. The worst thing can happen is they can say no. I pushed my sister to ask for a sign on bonus and she was so nervous about it and she ended up getting a \$10,000 sign on just because she asked. I think it's really important to do your homework and to go for it.

Nate: That's fascinating and, you know, really speaks to the difference in the genders, right? I mean, I think a lot of men don't have problems walking into their boss' office and demanding a raise or whatever the sort of typical example is. From the company's perspective, I hear you, individuals need to understand their own market value and push for it no matter what their situation they need to push to get paid what they should get paid. From the company's perspective, how do they deal with that? How do they kind of balance out the pushing and pulling that might occur or not occur based on that group of employee's genders, for example?

Sharawn: Yeah. a lot of companies are going to have, or many companies have EEOC requirements, so that really helps as far as that auditing to make sure that there's some type of ... there is some amount of pay equity, but then even beyond that, companies can do their own quarterly or biannually audits. Again, you're looking for those outliers to make sure that things are balanced. Every company is going to have their own methodology as far what they look at and what their requirements are to consider, you know, pay equity ... for them to be on par with pay equity. It's very important to have your salary ranges and your job grades because all of that is going to ensure that, from a compliance perspective, you have that pay equity.

Nate: What gets you excited about diversity going forward? I'm sure you wouldn't be pursuing this aspect of human resources if you weren't super pumped about where this stuff is going. What kind of gets you excited and where do you think this whole effort is headed to?

Sharawn: Oh my gosh, so many things get me excited. I love talking to interns, Nate. You can just see the enthusiasm in their eyes. They're so grateful for the opportunities and I love them feeling like they just have the world in front of them. That's how all interns should feel regardless of their background, regardless of how they look or where they come

from. That's super exciting to me is to be able to offer to interns a glimpse of where they can take their career and the heights that they can aspire to. That is super exciting to me. I also love to see our women executives leading their teams, and again, what they inspire within their teams and other young women coming up. To me, it's just a beautiful thing to see.

Sharawn: One of the things, for me, that was extremely instrumental in my career was attending the executive leadership councils, one of their conferences, and I was able to see black men and black women who were one or two positions removed from the C suite. What that did for me is it really showed me where I could take my career and that it was possible. There were so many other people who were similar to me who were in those leadership roles. I love being able to show that to others as well. That's what excites me.

Nate: Yeah, that's an extremely important aspect is having people that you can look towards and say, I can achieve that. I will definitely acknowledge that, as a white male, there's plenty of examples of people that I can look and go, I could achieve that. The only thing I might have going against me as I'm not six feet tall and apparently you have to be white, male, and six feet tall to be a CEO. Yeah, that's a great thing and we all need somebody to look up to in our lives, whether you're just getting started or whether you're way down the road.

Sharawn: There are people who are successful that look like all of us, so it's just creating that exposure and that awareness. That's super exciting to me.

Nate: Well, great. Thank you so much for the time, Sharawn. I know you're slammed flying all over the world, I guess it is, in your new role and congratulations. I'm really excited for you.

Sharawn: Thank you so much, Nate.