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Helen Fagan

Who you are is as important to me as what you do.

Announcer

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of Agency for Change podcast. In today's episode, we are thrilled to welcome back Dr Helen Fagan. The last time we spoke with her, we were talking about her book Becoming Inclusive. Since that time, she has founded Helen Fagan Associates, where she serves as the chief troublemaker. Helen is a catalyst for change and today we're going to talk about the importance of inclusive leadership how to navigate pushback in the current DEI climate and uncover the unique strategies Helen and her team employ to foster change. She's also going to give us a discount code for her new 12-month guided journey, so listen in for that. Helen. I am eager to talk with you today. Welcome back to the podcast.

Helen Fagan

It is so good to be back here with you, Lyn.

Lyn Wineman

I always love talking with you, Helen, because I feel wiser after having conversations with you, and I'd love to kick things off. The last time we talked, we were talking about your book, but since then you have formed Helen Fagan and Associates. Could you tell us more about this new venture?

Helen Fagan

Absolutely. I'd love to tell you more about us. So Helen Fagan and Associates is a group of us who are working together to create better tomorrows. What we're doing is helping leaders to develop the capacity to work with people from all different walks of life and learn how to leverage the differences in their teams, and this came as a result of the success that we had had from the book and lots of requests, and so several individuals, some former students that had worked with me, graduate students that had graduated, individuals that worked with me on different things said, hey, I'd love to work with you. And

we decided to become a thing, Helen Fagan and Associates. And so here we are, we're excited. We've been going since fall.

Lyn Wineman

I love that and from everything I can tell, you're going gangbusters. And I have to say, Helen, one of our staff members at KidGlov is one of your past students and she speaks so highly of you still today. As a matter of fact. I think that's how you and I connected. I think she introduced us, so that's great. I also, while you were talking, I wrote down the phrase that you said, because, being in marketing, I love a great catchphrase. You said we're working together to create better tomorrows. That actually gave me a little chill, Helen. I love that. I love that line.

Helen Fagan

Thank you.

Lyn Wineman

So just to take that a step further, and you know, I think we all know we should be more inclusive, but really it matters, and it matters a lot, and I love your perspective on why fostering an inclusive mindset is not just a choice but really a necessity for both leaders and teams.

Helen Fagan

Yeah, Lyn, that's a great question and a great observation. So my team and I, we conducted some research. We looked at over 300 pieces of peer-reviewed research articles published in journals that looked at inclusion, diversity, equity, cultural competence. What we wanted to know is what are the attributes of inclusive leaders and what is the impact that they have? And what we saw in this research was really powerful. We saw that inclusive leaders, we first identified what are those attributes, which is what our year long guided journey is, it does. It helps develop those attributes of inclusive leadership and individuals. But what we saw was the impact was individuals increased productivity, performance, work engagement. People feel like they're affirmed, they're valued, and they're cared about.

People from the outside outsiders want to join the team, the organization. So talk about recruitment and retention. It's really high when there's an inclusive leader at the helm and creating an inclusive culture. There's higher psychological capital, there's increased trust, there's increased creativity, increased organizational commitment, increased job satisfaction and retention, and raised levels of motivation to take charge and reciprocate actions and really be able to come together and collaborate, and innovation increases. So all of those things showed up in the research that we conducted, in reviewing the data that's already out there which is powerful. This is the reason, and I mean think about it, any of those things I mentioned, would organizations or teams or communities not want any of those things?

Lyn Wineman

I'm just thinking that, Helen, everything you said are the things that I want: creativity, collaboration, engagement, innovation. All of those things are things we want as business leaders.

Helen Fagan

Right. So it becomes essential to the success of our teams, our organizations. If we are, you know, really going to succeed and thrive, it becomes an essential part of what needs to happen. Leaders need to have that knowledge, that skill, that ability to be able to create a place that is inclusive and really know how to tap into and leverage the differences of individuals.

Lyn Wineman

So Helen, you know we try not to get too political on this show, but when it comes to the issue of DEI, something that always surprises me is that it has become a political issue and there is pushback both on a national level and on a state level, and I love your thoughts and words on why it's crucial for organizations to engage in this important work even in spite of the pushback.

Helen Fagan

Well, again, there's misunderstanding as to what exactly is DEI. I feel like that's one of the main reasons for pushback. There's misunderstanding, there's the thought process that I have to lose in order for you to gain something. So when we see those who have had great privilege, right, that this is becoming balanced in who has privilege right, when we see that scale balancing, people become, have this misperception of I'm losing something in order for someone else to gain something. And the reality is that, there's a quote that says a rising tide raises all boats.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

That's the way that really inclusion works. If we create an equitable, just society, it is equitable and just for participants from all walks of life, not just a particular group, right? But if I have been the person that has been gaining something whatever that is, power, money, privilege because someone else has been, it's been taken from someone else, I am going to feel like it. I'm losing something, right? So that's the story that's been told, that's the narrative that's been told. It's an easy narrative to sell, especially to individuals who just hear that information from a soundbite. They are not reading, understanding, dialoguing, engaging in meaningful conversation to truly understand DEI. What they're doing is hearing a soundbite somewhere and taking that and running with that narrative and it's an inaccurate message. So that's why we see pushback. Number one. Number two we see pushback well, because, quite honestly, we're creating a just society means that someone has to address their own biases.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

And nobody wants to do that, right? Right, you want to think, hey, I'm a good person, I'm doing great things, I don't discriminate, I don't do those things and I would say, chances are good people don't, but

all of us at some point do. Because the brain is wired for self-protection, right and self-promotion, and so that's what our brain wants to do, and so that's the reason we see. That is because it's easier to push the people that are forcing me to think about it than it is for me to think about it and address it within myself.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah. Helen, you have explained that as eloquently and simply and persuasively as I think I've ever heard, and I'm not surprised that coming from you with your experience and your knowledge, and so I really do appreciate that. It's interesting to me because you wear a lot of hats. You have worn a lot of hats. You're a doctor, you've been a teacher, now you're a business owner. One of your titles as a business owner is Chief Troublemaker, which obviously also caught my attention. So I'm really curious as Chief Troublemaker of Helen Fagan and Associates, how do you create an inclusive leadership mindset? I know one way is to go through your 12 month class but give us some high level points.

Helen Fagan

Well, it begins with ourselves, right? So, some high level points is to take a deep hard look at ourselves, and it involves emotional intelligence. Ok, that's get away from that. So there's a self-awareness piece. There's the ability to be able to say hey, this is my bias and how do I manage that bias, what do I do with that bias? How does that bias influence my leadership, my decision making, and who have I given permission to hold me accountable for that? And as a leader, you're constantly setting the tone that the rest of your team follows. Right, we have to be in this space of humbly learning, right? Recognizing that just because I have a PhD, just because I can do research in this, does not mean that I'm not prone to making mistakes because I am human.

One of my clients I was just talking to, we were doing a coaching session and she was describing that she would love it if the team that she worked with, the executives, behaved like executives. In this season of really challenging changes that they're going through. And I understood that the challenge that she was feeling, and I gave her space to feel those emotions and frustrations, and I also told her it's hard, it's easy, for us to forget that these executives are also human. They have emotion and that the chaos that's happening in the organization is affecting them deeply. And so, while we want them to behave in a logical manner, they may not be capable of doing that, and so our responsibility is to come alongside of them and create a space that allows them to do that. And so what would she like her role to be? And so, as inclusive leaders, what do we want our role to be? How do we want to show up? What kind of work do we want to be able to engage in?

For me, when we were creating Helen Fagan and Associates, we were talking about our core beliefs: who are we, what are we about, and how do we want to care for each other? How do we want to be present for each other, and we set down some things that you can see it on our website, but it's really about who we are and how we want to engage. One of the biggest things we said is we want to value the differences are at the heart of our work, and that learning from each other makes us better, and we want to create a place where we can tap into each other's strengths and each other's passion in meaningful

ways and support one another, and recognize that my weakness might be a colleague's strength, and so giving permission for that person to be able to utilize the strength that they have, right.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

What do I say, not be challenged by it or feel inferior or inadequate, because a colleague of mine is stronger in one thing, thinking that I need to also be strong and being able to appreciate that we're different, and so we want to be able to work together that way. We don't want to shy away from those difficult conversations. We want to comment them with humility and grace and learn from each other.

Lyn Wineman

Helen since you mentioned difficult conversations, I've got to believe one difficult conversation is talking about the concept you mentioned earlier that in order for things to be inclusive and equitable, one group doesn't have to lose in order for that to happen. I imagine you've got some experience in tackling that misconception.

Helen Fagan

We sure do. The idea of, I had one client that I was talking to, and this person was saying that in their team, they had a person that was transitioning from male to female. This is a team that is high-level of, for lack of a better word, blue collar workers. When the organization said that they embrace this person and celebrated who they are as an individual, there were some individuals in the team that felt like their freedoms and rights, whether it was religious or value or whatever, were being violated because there was the celebration of this individual, and so the leader wanted to have a conversation about with me during coaching about how do I address that.

Lyn Wineman

That is such a good and well obviously very real example because it happened, but I imagine it's not infrequent that specific conversation.

Helen Fagan

Yeah, and my thought process in this was so has this employee, has this, these individuals, group of individuals, have they had the freedom to express who they are, whether it's their faith, their values? Have they had that freedom in your organization in the past?

And the client said yes, they have, and I said perhaps a way to approach this would be to help them to see that the privileges that they have had is now going to be shared and given to this other person as well and that they have felt like they could come to a workplace that is safe and values them and cares for them, and so does their coworker deserve a similar type of workplace that cares for them and is safe for them, and asking them to think about that and telling them that they're not losing the ability to be who they are, to believe what they believe, because of this support for this person. It is not an either you

get to do this and this person gets to do that, but it's rather an and both, and so can we create a space that allows for that and both, and she was really excited with being able to have that conversation moving forward with her team, to be able to say, hey, let's look at it this way.

Lyn Wineman

That is fantastic. I love the way you put that, and this is probably a good time, I think, Helen, to bring up that 12-month journey that you've put together for inclusivity, and I'd love to just start by asking you what inspired you to put together the guided journey and then maybe tell us a little bit more about what the guided journey looks like.

Helen Fagan

Thank you for that opportunity, Lyn, to be able to share about it. So when I wrote the book *Becoming Inclusive*, I put questions at the end of each chapter with the educator in me was OK, it's good for you to read, but how are you going to apply this?

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

And the question that I ask my students every time I'm in class is so what? So you read this, you did this assignment, what are you going to do with it? And that was kind of the thought process, with the questions at the end of the chapter and as people were reading the book and answering those questions in the chapter, I repeated times there was requests for gosh, I would love to take your college course, gosh, I would love to learn more from you, gosh, I feel like there's the questions are good, but it's just I need something else, I want to move forward with something else. And so we were asked to create a workbook and so we began, we wrote, you know, the 12 chapters of the workbook.

And then I met with you know, several people and our team as well team members and met with several leaders. And one of the things that I heard from leaders was I have so much on my plate and so many things pulling at me that I just can't go in multiple directions at the same time. And one of our team members said you know, I have this idea. It's kind of an out of box idea. What are your thoughts on it? And her idea was to take each chapter and create a guidebook, and so for one month, you know, if a person has plenty of time on their hands, they can do, you know, one a week if they want to. But ideally, and we say in each guidebook, these are marinating kind of activities, these are not quick check, get them done.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

Answer the question, you do the activity, you reflect and you come back two days later and you think about it some more and you might have additional answers and you might think about it. You apply, you

know this is how I'm going to ask the question, or this is maybe I'll try this activity on with my team, or you know this is how I'm going to share this information. So you try that on and you work on that for a month and then the next month you get the next activity and each of the guidebooks is connected to specific chapters in the books. Read this chapter, answer these questions now, come and do this. And so each guidebook also we've intentionally created activities and reflections to get people to develop those attributes of inclusive leaders, and we see that in each guidebook.

The other thing I mentioned this already is that emotional intelligence piece. So emotional intelligence is the path it's kind of the road that we travel to become inclusive. Right, we gain this self-awareness, we understand times we have to self-manage, we gain new knowledge, we practice new skills, and so we go through this process of learning about other people and managing environments and those things, and so we've included those emotional intelligence pieces in here as well. So each guidebook is intended to develop certain skills, knowledge, attributes, and practice. Again, I cannot stress enough about the marinating piece of this. This is in a world that is very much hey, quick, I wanna gain knowledge now, I wanna move forward now.

Lyn Wineman

Yes, just tell me what to do. Give me the bullet list, give me the checklist. Tell me what to do. I'm gonna put it into artificial intelligence and spit something out and cross it off my list. Yeah, that's not what this is at all.

Helen Fagan

This is not what that is, and the reason is because we know human mindset transformation does not happen in a four hour, one day training session. It is like a marathon. You are exercising new skills, new ways of thinking, new ways of being. You're developing new synapses in your brain and that practice. So I liken this to a marathon, because with a marathon you get a schedule, you buy the clothes, you sign up, but unless you actually go out and do and I'm a walker, I walked a whole marathon in four halves so unless you go out and actually do the miles, the outfit, the shoes, all of those things will not reap the results that you want. And that's what this is. This is intended to help you reap the results and intended for you to be very intentional about that mindset development, and that mindset development is the precursor to you creating an inclusive culture.

Lyn Wineman

Helen, that example that you just gave it also to me, it even strikes me as something that goes a bit deeper. If you go out and buy the outfit, you sign up for the marathon. You buy the outfit, you wear the outfit, you tell people you're going to do the marathon, but then you never do it, people start to see you as a hypocrite and it almost backfires on you. Right and that is something I've always believed about this work is it has to be real, it has to be authentic, and just trying to make a show of it is almost worse than doing nothing at all. Do you have a similar feeling on that?

We've all seen the organization that has their plan on the front of their website. But then you observe and you wonder are they actually working, that plan?

Helen Fagan

Yeah, right, so we make sure that our website, or our literature or our marketing, whatever it is, has people of color on it. That's what the market has shown is important, right. We make sure that's happening. We make sure we have a lovely language about our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Lyn Wineman

Those are the two most surface level things that you can do.

Helen Fagan

Yes, correct, those are also the starting point, right, yeah, the starting point, but that starting point needs individuals who know how to create those adaptive strategies, how to be inclusive to make them come to fruition, and if they don't have that, what it ends up being is we have training sessions, we celebrate Black History Month by putting something out there.

We celebrate this, but we are not making policy changes, we're not creating inclusion. Our employee engagement does not indicate that we are an inclusive organization. We're not even addressing those places that we need improvement in. So that's what tends to happen with, it becomes an accountability thing, which is part of the reason for the pushback, because we, this generation is saying well, we're tired of that performative stuff, we wanna see real change, right, and so we wanna see you doing some real things. And people like, oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, this is as good as it's gonna get.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

You know, we're all the same. We're all human beings, we all want the same things. Well, that's just not enough. We're not the same. Yes, we are all human beings, but our life experiences are different. What we need is different. How we see the world is different. And if we can put value into all of that and bring people together which is not an easy thing to do, it takes effort to develop that mindset. You know, Albert Einstein once said, when it was nuclear power, was, you know, a post-atomic bomb being dropped? He said we cannot solve problems at the same level of thinking that created them.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, yes, that is great, Helen. Helen, one thing that I think is so effective about the way that you teach and communicate is your ability to tell stories and bring lessons out of personal stories, and I read your book, I think it was two years ago in preparation for our first podcast conversation and I still think about some of the stories you tell about your father and you know, about you and your siblings being in the airport together and your father being in the hospital. Those were such powerful stories, and I've had a chance to just dip my toes into the guidebook for the new 12 months journey, and I know there's some storytelling in there as well. Are there any stories that come to mind for you that you'd like to share with us today?

Helen Fagan

Well, I'll tell you one story. One of our associates recently went on a trip and she and her husband and some friends were on this trip and there's about a lot of people on the trip, okay, and the group of people that were on the trip. She quickly realized that her political leanings were she and her husband's political leanings were very different from these other individuals and she thought, oh gosh, I don't know if I'm gonna be able to last a week with these people. You know. And then she said, wait a minute, this is my opportunity to practice some of the things we've been doing.

So I am going to engage with curiosity, I am going to engage with an openness, I'm going to set aside this thing that I have and I'm really gonna see what can I learn? How can I appreciate? And so, as she's telling us this story, she's like I am so grateful that I've had the chance to go through these guidebooks, because I think, had I not been doing that, it wouldn't have been on the front of my mind to address this. And she said it ended up being such a positive and pleasant experience. I learned some things. I really challenged myself to see things differently as a result of this and I was so excited for her because it she was able to enjoy herself and I was really, really proud of her for being able to say that. So that's one story, Another story.

Lyn Wineman

That's great. Yes, yes, I love your stories.

Helen Fagan

Another story. I had a person she's a nurse manager, director level, and they were short and so she decided to help in one of the units emergency department and she said the patient that I was dealing with was a person who's from this particular background and the person had had some really negative experiences with our organization in the past and was complaining At the moment that this nurse walked into the room, the patient was in pain and was complaining that people were not paying attention and all that. And she said I was really busy but I decided to just sit down in the chair beside her and I decided to just listen to her and hear her perspective and understand her perspective. And she said you know, that changed everything, just me being willing to sit down and listen to her changed everything for her. And her experience turned around. And she said I know for a fact I would not have been able to do that had I not been going through this process and the things that I'm learning.

And so she said, even if nothing else I learned, nothing else I've learned. I've changed the outcome for this one patient and I'm really about happy about that. Oh, I can't tell you what that did, for my heart.

Lyn Wineman

And the ripple effect that will come from that for those two individuals and future people that they encounter. That's amazing. Actually, Helen, that is the great lead-in to my next question, which is let's talk about why should leaders invest in this guided journey. I mean, we're all going into a time where organizations all across the country are watching their budgets. We're worried about the economy, but help us understand why we should invest in this journey.

Helen Fagan

Well, if your people matter to you. If your people matter to you at all then this is a wise investment.

Lyn Wineman

Wow.

Helen Fagan

Both yourself as a professional, and those who work with you, and your family and your colleagues and your friends. So if people matter to you at all, this is a necessity.

Lyn Wineman

Amazing, simply and powerfully said so, Helen. How can people find out more about Helen Fagan and Associates, as well as the 12 month guided journey?

Helen Fagan

Yeah, just simply go to HelenFagan.com and then to find out about our guided journey. You just go to our Services tab and look for the guided journey and you'll see, learn all about it. And if you want to sign up, you can sign up there. People can sign up as teams. In fact, if people sign up as teams of five or more, we give \$100 discount.

Lyn Wineman

Nice.

Helen Fagan

Yes, so for each person we give \$100 discount.

Lyn Wineman

Wow, that's amazing. And, Helen you mentioned as we were getting ready for the show and maybe this is a good time to share, you're going to do something a little special for listeners of this podcast, correct?

Helen Fagan

Correct. So KIDGLOV25 will give \$25 off. If you just put that into the promo code when you go to sign up, you will get an additional \$25 off of our price and we have the guided journey both as digital and as print edition. Okay, and there's a different pricing for digital and print edition, and so there's, it would be discounted by \$25 for that.

Lyn Wineman

That is very generous of you. So I just so anybody who is going to helenfagan.com, \$25 off the guided journey by using KIDGLOV25, that's very generous and I think we said that is going to extend until August 31st 2024. So you've got about six months to use that code.

Helen Fagan

Yes, yes. So, like I said, if people want to learn about doing this as a team, we have other options that we offer, and so they can contact us and we can talk to them about that. You know, we do provide executive coaching to go along with that, or we will do group coaching to go along with that, or you can just do it all on your own if you want to. So multiple ways of doing this. We just want people to have a great experience. We want to be able to create community, so whatever mechanism works for individuals to have that, we will support you.

Lyn Wineman

That's fantastic. Thank you very much for that, Helen. very we start to wind down here, I'm going to ask you my favorite question. I don't know if you recall, but the last time we talked, I asked you for an original Helen Fagan quote to inspire our listeners, and I pulled it up here. It's been very impactful to me and I pulled it up because I wanted to have the exact words. But you said how have you sacrificed for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion today? And what I loved about that is your call to action, to not just have it at the top of your mind, but how have you sacrificed. So I thought that was lovely. So I'm going to ask you for a new quote.

Helen Fagan

Yeah, yeah, that's a question I ask myself every day. How about, because it does take sacrifice and intentionality to make that, whether sacrifice of time or not. So one of the quote, one of the things I tell my associates is who you are is as important to me as what you do.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah, who you are is as important to me as what you do. That is lovely, lovely. Do you want to talk a little bit more about what that means to you?

Helen Fagan

Yes, so I firmly believe that people we work with we spend a lot of time with, and so those can become some of our people that are supporting us or encouraging us or challenging us, and that we are showing up to work and we bring every facet of who we are with us. And if I am truly creating an inclusive organization, I want individuals to know that they matter to me.

Lyn Wineman

Yeah.

Helen Fagan

Whether it's there something their child is going through, their parent is going through, they are going through, they matter to me and those things, if they're important to them, they're important to me, and I want them to not feel like they have to hide a piece of who they are in order to show up into work. And so if there's things we need to celebrate, yes. If there's things we need to come alongside and support

you for because it's challenging, yes, we're there for you. It isn't just about you doing the job, it's about who you are as a person, and I want you to know that you're important to the very core.

Lyn Wineman

That's beautiful, Helen. I feel like you and I could talk all day, but since this is a podcast, I do need to wind it up. I'd love to end on your thinking on what is the most important thing you'd like to share with us about the work that you're doing.

Helen Fagan

I would say again if people matter to you in any way, invest the time and effort into becoming inclusive.

Lyn Wineman

Beautiful. That's amazing. Helen. I fully believe that the world needs more people like you, more organizations like Helen Fagan and Associates, and I just really appreciate the work that you're doing and that you took the time to share with us today.

Helen Fagan

Thank you so much, Lyn, for having me and thank you for the work that you're doing. Thank you for this podcast. Thank you for creating positive change and for opening up the opportunity for people like me to join in.

Announcer

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit kidglov.com at [K-I-D-G-L-O-V dot com](http://K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com) to get in touch, as always. If you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.