

EPISODE 133

[INTRO]

[00:00:02] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to The Mentor List.

[00:00:05] MALE: To turn you into the best version of you that's around.

[00:00:08] FEMALE: To seek support and you need to allow yourself to be supported.

[00:00:12] FEMALE: To really have a point of difference.

[00:00:14] MALE: What is precious, what's really important, and then putting some boundary set.

[00:00:18] ANNOUNCER: The Mentor List specialises in interviews with top business minds. Gather their advice for your career. This is The Mentor List.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:31] SD: Welcome to The Mentor List. I'm Sharon Daly, Managing Director for Mentor List Talent. We are back once again with another episode focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. Sitting in front of me on the show today, we have Marcelle Harrison, who is Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Kmart Group. As I just mentioned, Marcelle is Head of Diversity and Inclusion for the Kmart group, encompassing Kmart Target and catch.com. Marcelle graduated from Deakin University as an occupational therapist. Throughout her career has worked across allied health, community services, ergonomics. Wellbeing, accessibility and inclusion. Marcelle joined Kmart Australia in 2015, within the health and wellbeing field before transitioning into accessibility, diversity and inclusion for the Kmart Group.

Marcelle is currently responsible for delivering organisational wide strategies to support inclusion and belonging across a broad range of pillars. She currently works flexibly from Brisbane, is a mum and loves to challenge herself through free diving, spear fishing and

mountain climbing. Okay, before we talk about anything else myself, Marcelle, welcome. Talk me through free diving. Is that scuba diving? Am I right?

[00:01:49] MH: Thanks for having me. But free diving and spearfishing, it's essentially scuba diving without the gear. We're just holding our breaths and diving usually about 10, 15 meters on that at the moment. I do dive with some very good divers who are diving in about 20, 30 meters.

[00:02:07] SD: Wow! That's amazing.

[00:02:08] MH: Even more sometimes, so a lot of fun.

[00:02:10] SD: Yeah, definitely, definitely. We're going to dive in and get to know you a little bit. Marcelle. I'm sure our listeners are dying to get some insights into your worlds. Can you tell us a little bit about your career story and what got you to where you are now?

[00:02:25] MH: Yeah, of course. As you said, in my bio, I actually graduated university as an occupational therapist. The first role I took was in the northern suburbs of London. I was working out of woodgrain in the community services space as an occupational therapist. I think as a 22-year-old woman coming from Tasmania, I hadn't probably had a lot of life experience at the time. Going headfirst into a role in London working in the community, and I was working in a lot of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. I was working with a really good range of stakeholders as well. Largely working with soldiers who are returning from war.

[00:03:09] SD: Wow!

[00:03:09] MH: Yeah. It was just really eye opening for me. I think I went through a really complex situation. I think it really just shapes what I wanted to do and how I wanted to be as a person and a professional.

[00:03:25] SD: Kind of majoring, yeah.

[00:03:26] MH: Yeah. Then I got through my second winter in London and thought I couldn't do it again. I moved back to Australia and just took on some occupational therapy, occ rehab work for a while. I had had my daughter quite young, at 25. I think that was some time out of the workplace for me, but I also think it really was such a positive thing for my career perspective as well. Because I really got to take a step back and look at different opportunities that I couldn't move forward into and what I wanted to do. At that point, I went into health and wellbeing at Kmart, and Freemart, there's just so much opportunity, there's just so much push for creativity and innovation and I just took different side projects. I often get asked how I became an OT and ended up in a Head of Diversity and Inclusion role.

What people probably don't know about occupational therapy is that we work off models that look at people, the community, and the occupation and the environment that they're in. It's the intrinsic relationships that exist between those things. I just think there's such a nice translation into diversity and inclusion from that perspective. The amazing thing about Kmart is that they were able to see that value as well and one thing led to another. I moved into diversity and inclusion over a few years. It's a bit of an [inaudible 00:04:49].

[00:04:51] SD: No, I love that transition from being an occupational therapist, and what you pulled from that journey and brought it into this journey. Obviously, being a mom, all of that has obviously molded you and brought you into this kind of lovely place you're in now, I would imagine.

[00:05:07] MH: Yes.

[00:05:08] SD: Yeah. Fantastic. Marcelle, what are your kind of core findings of gender equity and diversity?

[00:05:16] MH: Yeah. I think as I think about this, I think we've made some really, really positive steps, particularly in the last 10 years. I think it's important to acknowledge that. I still think we've got a long way to go. But what we do see now is, I think there's actually a really serious investment in the value of diversity, and inclusion and gender equity. I think, particularly corporate organisations and big organisations, who have a lot of influence in Australia, for example. They're really, really starting to understand not only the social responsibility behind it,

but the commercial investment in that too, and what value that can bring back. When I think about some of the challenges that we still have ahead of us, I think there's some areas which we can grow and still around universal design. Whilst I think we've really understood what diversity and inclusion can do, I think we're still not there in terms of the systems, the structures, and the design of different things. Both in the workplace and in community, to really, really let inclusion, and belonging and diversity explode in Australia.

[00:06:29] SD: Absolutely agree. Yeah. It's one thing to talk about it, and it's another to action, and do to make sure that it's happening, right? So I completely agree there. Do you have any particular story you can share where you witnessed this to be a clear and apparent issue?

[00:06:48] MH: For me, it's not individual stories, it's probably more when I think about universal design, I think flexibility is a great example. We've seen flexibility really shift in the last two years, a lot of people having more flexibility to work from home. We can see in the current market at the moment, that flexibility is something people really want and I expect at this point in time.

I think when we think about flexibility, we're in this great position, but we still have a way to go in terms of thinking about it in the sense that it doesn't matter who has access to flexibility. It doesn't matter why people have access to flexibility, and flexibility will look very, very, very different to every single person. I think when we can really move into a position where flexibilities and being prescribed in any way, I think we'll see some really big movement there. I think that also translates into areas like accessibility. Again, you go out into public spaces, and there's a lot of prescriptions around physical spaces. Accessible physical spaces in public areas. However, we're not really seeing that at this point in the digital world, which is now a world that we're all getting really, really familiar with and how do we organise accessibility online for people with disabilities. I think these are the bits and pieces, the big focuses for us universally to really shift the dial.

[00:08:12] SD: Yeah, absolutely. Marcelle, upon reflection, what tips, advice, would you give your younger self coming into a leadership role and advocating for DE&I, for diversity, equity and inclusion? What do you know now, I guess that you didn't know back then that you're kind of going lightbulb moments and –

[00:08:35] MH: Yeah. I think I have them every day. Probably it. I think when I first moved into leadership roles, into the diversity inclusion manager, for example, before I came into the Head of role, I used to beat myself up sometimes when I didn't know everything. There were things I was still learning. But I think particularly in the space of diversity, and inclusion, many of us have really personal connections to different areas. Whether that's yourself, whether it's family members in your life, or the experiences that you've had, you're going to connect differently with different areas of inclusion that we're focusing on. I think, for me, it's been okay even now to just stop, and listen to people lived experience, take that learning and that's really going to help balanced and shape your views moving forward to in the way that you do work. I think the advice I'd give myself back then is, it's okay not to know everything. Just keep listening and that's okay. Yeah.

[00:09:37] SD: Yeah. I think I'd probably give myself that same advice too. Why do you think, I guess if we – we've got diversity, equity and inclusion, if we hone in on the gender equity for now. Why is gender equality so important?

[00:09:53] MH: I like to get quite technical in this. I think from a gender equity perspective, what we are seeing a lot more of is, women are coming into more senior roles, more executive roles. They're on more full-time roles than we've ever seen in the past 10, 15, 20 years ago. What we probably haven't seen the dial shift on as much, and what research still shows us is that, women are still taking on more responsibility outside of the workplace. Whilst men and women are taking on relatively similar responsibilities, and I will say, we've still got a little way to go in the organisational perspective in career, careers for women. But the same workload share outside of the workplace is still somewhat imbalanced.

I think, in order to see real success in gender equality, it is about changing again, some of those systems and those support services that are available and ensuring they create a platform to shift the dial. If I give an example, paid parental leave is a great one. By doing some amazing things in Switzerland, and a few of those countries over there. But where you've got paid parental leave for both parents, and it's actively encouraged, research has shown that not only can women come back into the workforce, and there is more equality from a workplace and career perspective. What we're actually seeing is a shift at home as well. I guess the

occupations you take outside of the workplace, like caregiving, or housework and things like that are actually more equally divided as well, because of some system structure changes.

I think for me, that's a big one. We understand why it's important because it brings diversity of thought [inaudible 00:11:39] people challenging each other. You're getting bigger ideas, you're getting more innovative. Eventually, you get better outcomes, because you've got different people's perspectives in the room.

[00:11:51] SD: Yeah, absolutely. It goes back to breaking that bias, isn't it?

[00:11:55] MH: Hundred percent.

[00:11:55] SD: Breaking that bias, yeah. It's all little pieces of that, that just breaks it, which is great and which we're learning as we go along. Do you think it's all been taken a bit more seriously now than previous times? I guess we've talked about it a little bit. But do you see it more kind of frequent now and more kind of visible now, I would say, than in previous times?

[00:12:18] MH: Yeah, definitely. I would say that we still have some ways to go, but definitely, there has been a significant shift. I think, it's also an expectation. Like I said before, people and people out in society, and community, employees, there's an expectation now that employers are considering inclusivity as part of their approach to everything that they do. I think it's a demand and I think that has absolutely shifted in terms of the visibility of different aspects. I think, if I think about Kmart, where we've come from, we offer flexibility, parental leave, so much more from that equity space than we ever have before. I think other organisations in this area are taking big steps in that direction as well. So yes, I would say, definitely more visible.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:13:54] SD: What do you believe are three key things that can be done to push this even further?

[00:14:01] MH: That's a tough one, isn't it? I think at a local level, individually, I think to your point before, breaking the bias, and stopping the bias and pausing yourself. Whether you're a leader, or whether you're just a person doing what you're doing in daily life, I think being able to pause and reflect on the way you're thinking about things, or responding to situations or how you're taking action is probably a big, big step. Self-reflection is probably one of those.

[00:14:32] SD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

[00:14:36] MH: I think again, from an individual perspective, listening and empathy is something that we collectively, I think can always do more of. As an organisational perspective, I think big organisations can't underestimate the impact that they can have in terms of creating a more equitable society as well, because I've got some loud voices, big footprints and can really drive the messages as well.

[00:15:04] SD: Absolutely. I know we touched on what individuals can do, but what do you think is one thing even businesses could do? Is there anything else that –?

[00:15:13] MH: I would say wouldn't stop at one thing. I think there's a lot of [inaudible 00:15:16].

[00:15:16] SD: Yes. That is a great answer. I love that answer.

[00:15:21] MH: But like I said, I think businesses have – I look at – I'm in retail, and I look at some of the things that we do across Kmart, and Target and **Catches** online. But some of the things that we do is try, and inadvertently create knowledge and educate and do that through

visibility in our stores. We use visual conceptions like artwork, and we work with Rachael Sarra, who did our Ignite the Wonder artwork, which is displayed on many of our Kmart stores, create cultural safety. We also in Queensland, use local language for the mob in that area, who are coming in and out of our stores to say hello, and goodbye. The flow on effects, I think from an educational perspective, when you do have such a big footprint, even though people aren't consciously aware that they're getting that information, it does start to happen slowly over time. It's just been conscious of the footprint and the audience operations that we have

[00:16:24] SD: What are your thoughts on the importance of having a mentor?

[00:16:27] MH: I mean, I love the idea of a mentor. It's important to think about the mentor, who you have. It's someone that has a really, I think, different perspective. It works on your strengths, as well. Someone that is a little bit different to you and can offer you, diverse support in that sense. I would say, when we're thinking about it from a gender perspective, maybe something I'm very passionate about is that for women, for example, it's not always women that should be mentored. That's the end of the story in terms of reaching gender equality. I think it's, be giving that. That is a really important part of the puzzle, and it's really important to have a mentor, self-reflect, listen and learn. But the other side of that, you also need to have other structures in place around talent development systems to have other structures in place around educating leaders, and they're looking at pipelining talent, and doing the things that they're doing in terms of reaching those goals more broadly. I hope that answers that question.

[00:17:32] SD: Yeah, absolutely. Have you ever had anyone that inspired you or you look up to in your kind of journey as well? I'll give you an example of mine. It's Janine Allis. I look up to her, wholeheartedly, totally realise. Yeah, she's been someone I just watched and my journey is quite similar too, so I just kind of really idolise that and love her journey. She's kind of my inspiration, I would say.

[00:17:58] MH: I love that. I do. I don't know. It's so hard for me. I would say that there's definitely similar people I look up to in terms of sharing really similar stories to me for having more public presence. But then, I also think some of the greatest value I get out of is a peer or a colleague of mine, who I can just talk quite openly with as well. I couldn't even count on one hand.

[00:18:22] SD: I believe as well, Marcelle, and tell me if you agree, there's mentors in all facets of our lives. I think you have a mentor as a mum, you have a mentor in your workplace, you have a mentor as a friend. Your best mate could be your mentor. I believe there's mentors in all facets of life and they all go through something before you that can help you. It's all about us embracing that life experience from them, and then they can also learn from more life experiences as well.

[00:18:50] MH: So I couldn't agree with you more.

[00:18:52] SD: Yes, yeah. Absolutely. Do you have any quotes or words of wisdom that you live by, that you can pass along to our listeners today?

[00:19:01] MH: Probably not words of wisdom, but in terms of principles that I live by, and you probably heard me echo this through this whole conversation, but listen to people. Don't underestimate the power of listening to others. I think that is a really big thing I live by and be brave. I definitely believe in order to make change, you need to be brave, and you need to believe in yourself. Sometimes that can be hard, but I think that's a really important one for me as well.

[00:19:28] SD: Marcelle, I just want to say it has been an absolute pleasure to have you on the show today. You've given us great insights into diversity and inclusion through your lens, which is absolutely fantastic. I'm sure our listeners appreciate that as well. We'll also be able to relate to a lot of where your journey has come from and where you are now. It would be great for them, I'm sure. We look forward to following your journey further. Thank you for joining us on the show. Until next time, listeners. This is The Mentor List.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:20:00] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for joining us today at The Mentor List. If you'd like to hear more or speak to us about recommending our next interview guest, come on through to mentorlist.com.au. You can also find out more about our suite of mastermind series taking

shape in your area, your industry, and your discipline. We look forward to welcoming you to one of our events very soon. Stay tuned for another great show.

[OUTRO]

[00:20:28] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to The Mentor List. If you like what you're hearing on The Mentor List, the best way to support the show is to just take a few seconds to leave a rating and/or a comment over on iTunes. You can also find further information about this show and links to further episodes at mentorlist.com.au. Until next time, this is The Mentor List.

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