



Race in the Workplace with Joanna Shoffner Scott, Ph.D.

Episode Title: How to Plan Your DEI Growth Journey

Joanna Shoffner Scott (00:01):

Hey everybody. This is Joanna Shoffner Scott, and you are listening to the Race in the Workplace podcast, a show for DEI organizational leaders that explores race, racism, and racial equity in the workplace. I am a racial equity consultant and founder of the Stamey Street Consulting Group, a consulting firm that specializes in partnering with organizations to help them meet their racial equity aspirations. My goal for you is to move your organization from being color blind to equity-centered through sustainable step-by-step changes.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (00:36):

This week's episode is about making space for yourself in your diversity, equity, and inclusion work. It's about building supportive practices to sustain yourself by sowing season to your own growth journey. So even though I've been a practitioner for a good bit of time, I'm just learning the importance and the need to make space for my own personal growth in my everyday work. And then the second part of that is to build supportive practices to support those aspirations. All right, let's get into it.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (01:13):

Hi, it's Joanna Shoffner Scott here, and I am so excited to be with you today. Thanks for joining me. No matter when you are listening, I'm just delighted to be alongside you for a little bit of your day today. So this episode is about making space for yourself in your DEI work. And in it, I want to share some guidance and some practical actions that you can take to make sure that you've got time and space in your calendar and in your everyday to incorporate your own growth journey. So let's get into it.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (01:50):

Identifying my personal growth needs and then building out systems to support that growth, that was a lesson I learned in 2021. Although I've been a DEI practitioner for years and I often read a lot, I write a lot as part of my work, I didn't always have a dedicated focus toward my own growth. And 2021 really changed all that for me. So certainly I was growing as a practitioner and in my business, but I wasn't necessarily investing in myself consistently. And I didn't name specific goals that I wanted to work toward.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (02:29):

So I want to share those lessons with you so that as you look ahead for the remainder of the year, you can begin to identify what are those supportive practices that if you implemented can support you in your own growth journey, and then what kinds of systems do you need to maintain those aspirations? For example, I would write out a list of goals every year. Every January, February-ish I



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would write out a list of goals that I wanted to accomplish, and I've done that for years, but I wouldn't necessarily plan how I was going to achieve those goals.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (03:07):

So for example, I put on my list two years ago that I wanted to start a podcast, but it wasn't until I mapped out specific steps and began to build those steps in my monthly and weekly task that it actually happened. So I'm drawing from that experience as well as I share this guidance with you all today. I thought maybe other practitioners may have the same challenge. And I think one of the roots of this challenge goes back to the fact that we're usually pouring out constantly, constantly, constantly, we're always pouring out, we're always giving. But in this episode, I want to encourage you to pour in and pour in to yourself.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (04:05):

Here are three considerations for building supportive practices to support your own growth. The first thing is carving out time to plan where you want to grow in the first place. That's a very first thing you're going to do is take a minute, look at your calendar, find some white space, not white space between meetings, but find some white space where you can just think. And this may sound very simple and in some ways it is, but carving time out is an important commitment to make to yourself. You are in essence committing to give yourself the space and the time to sit and think about where you want to grow this year. That's something that is a great first step. And planning is something I've learned over the past six months has really changed my work in so many ways and has contributed to this clarity that I have about my own journey in so many ways. So planning's critical.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (05:06):

I've always heard that saying, measure twice but cut once, but I didn't really know what that meant. It means planning things out. It means looking ahead to the how. And it's so ironic that that is one of the big benefits of planning because racial equity work is all about the how, and I say that to my clients every day. So it's in essence taking what I'm applying out and pouring in, applying it to myself. Okay. So making time for yourself and your schedule requires that you have some white space to think. So I said that a second ago. That's going to be one of your action items today. Y'all know I'm about the practical and the practice, so the actionable. That's going to be something I'm going to ask you to do today. Look at your calendar and block some time for you to sit and think about where you'd like to grow this year.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (05:51):

It doesn't have to be a long time, even just 30 minutes. And then open up a Google Doc or a journal or however it is that you take down your thoughts and write some areas you want to grow in. Doesn't have to be an exhaustive list, actually the fewer items the better. But think about and write down, it's the writing part that really makes this actionable, write it down, what are some areas that you want to grow into this year? Okay. This next point that I want to make, that I want you to think



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about, it's a little bit of a shift. What I want you to do is to redirect your focus from things you can't control to things you can.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (06:32):

I was listening to a really good podcast called Healthy Housecalls with Angel. It's a podcast about designing the life that you want. I highly recommend it. I'm going to link to it in the show notes, which for this episode are on stameystreet.com/episode002. So that's where I'm going to put the show notes for this episode. But anyway, I was listening to Angel's podcast, episode nine. And one of the things that I took away from this episode of her podcast is that there are so many things in the world right now that are out of our control. I mean, big, huge, landscape-shaping, environment-shifting things that are all happening at the same time. No matter where you live, there's stuff happening all around you. In these moments, it's critical to bring the focus down and into the areas you can control. And this was a real takeaway for me from that episode from the Healthy Housecalls podcast.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (07:36):

You can't control the state of the world right now. You can't control what's happening in it. You can't control what's going on in your neighborhood, outside of your own home. You can't control what's happening on your block or in your neighborhood, whatever, but you can control areas in your own life where you need to grow. You can identify an area that you've always wanted to grow in and commit time and resources to growing in that area. You can identify an area where you wanted to take an online course or buy a book to deepen your learning and then you can commit to doing those things. And then you can be compassionate with yourself in the ways that you navigate the difference between what you can control and what you can't.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (08:26):

I see it like there's what you can control on one side. On the other side is what you can't control. And I feel like in this gulf in the middle is radical compassion. We can be compassionate with ourselves about how we navigate the divide between those two things, what we can and can't control. There is a book called Radical Compassion by Tara Brach that I'm going to link in the show notes that explores that topic even further. Remember, you can't control what's happening in the world right now, but you can control your own growth journey. That's something you can control.

Joanna Shoffner Scott ([09:05](#)):

And the third thing I want you to consider is the need for supportive systems to help you prevent burnout. And so supportive systems can help you keep your aspirations alive in this space, they can help you plan out your growth journey, and they can also help keep you sane in all of this madness that's going around and help us stay grounded. The constant pouring out that we do as DEI practitioners means that we're usually explaining and problem solving, which can be quite exhausting.



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Joanna Shoffner Scott (09:39):

So building systems for yourself to prevent burnout from happening is really important, because I've learned over the years from experiencing burnout several times that rest itself is not enough. So it's not enough just to have feelings of burnout. I'm going to sleep this weekend or I'm going to rest this weekend. I'm going to take it easy. That may help you feel better in the moment, but it won't prevent the problem. Because once you've reached a place of burnout, it takes so much time to build yourself back up. And I've learned that the hard way. So the only way to prevent it from happening is to build in systems to support the practices that hopefully this episode will help you identify. So supportive systems are really critical to both meeting your aspirations in terms of your own growth journey and preventing burnout.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (10:39):

While we have this little break, I want to invite you to check out my blog, also called Race in the Workplace, at raceatwork.com. There you will find so much goodness. I always share practical how-tos and racial equity best practices, all written for DEI leaders inside organizations. Check it out.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (11:03):

My work is all about the practical and the actionable. So I want to give you some concrete strategies. I want to give you four concrete strategies that you can use to further or plan your growth journey as a DEI leader inside of an organization. Okay, these are your four strategies. Strategy number one, create firm boundaries. So I talk about the need for creating firm boundaries between yourself and your DEI role inside your organization in episode 001. So I won't belabor that point. I'll link to it in the show notes for this episode, but I talked extensively about boundaries in that episode. So I won't say a whole lot about it here, only to say that you need to create firm boundaries between yourself and your role. And that's not necessarily going to anyone to say, "This is my boundary around X, Y, or Z." This is really an internal conversation that you need to have with yourself about what your boundaries are in terms of your work. So strategy number one is to create firm boundaries.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (12:15):

Strategy number two is to trust your instincts. So a big part of sustaining yourself in any DEI role is to learn to trust yourself and to listen to your intuition. So in my experience, so much of problem-solving big organizational challenges relies a lot on common sense. So there may not be evidence-based or empirically-supported solutions for some of your organization's biggest DEI challenges. In fact, often that isn't the case. So you've got to learn to trust yourself and your instincts. That is a critical part of doing this work.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (12:54):

And I think that there's a big misconception that DEI work is all about big initiatives. Yes, it can be, absolutely for sure, 100%. I don't want to minimize that, but there's also a big chunk of work that is



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rooted in day-to-day decision making and devising strategies for working differently. And that's not something a book will necessarily tell you. There may not be data to support those strategies. It might be just, you have a hunch that a particular solution may work and so you try it and you try things that make the most sense to you as a practitioner, particularly when people are hurting. I think when people are hurting, we just want to fix it. Or at least, let me not project on y'all, I just want to fix it.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (13:39):

So lots of times in organizations, people are looking to me to fix something that's not working. And almost always, someone is in pain because that thing, whatever it is, is not working. So sometimes it's like, okay, well, I think this may work, let's try it. And there may or may not be lots of data and empirical solutions to back up what my recommendation may be. It may be, I just have a hunch that this will work, or I've seen this work in the past. So being able to trust yourself and to trust your instincts, I think is an important strategy.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (14:15):

So I want you to work on that skill. And here's how you work on that skill. I believe that trusting yourself is a process. So I see guidance all the time, trust yourself, trust yourself, in professional advice if I'm reading articles and things like that, trust yourself. But I always say that trusting yourself is a process. It's not organic. At least it wasn't for me, let me not project. But I think it's a process, particularly in this space. And I always tell people, start by giving yourself credit for every good decision you make, even for the most minor decisions. So for example, if you pick the fastest line in the grocery store, which I never do, then give yourself credit for making a good decision. Like, "Okay, that was a smart decision." And then over time, you'll notice a growing balance of good, even great decisions. And so that's how I learned to trust myself and my instincts.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (15:08):

And practice radical compassion that I mentioned earlier, when you don't make good decisions, if something doesn't work, learn from it. Like, "Okay, that didn't work that time. Hmm. What did I learn from it?" Because even when things don't work the way we think they are, there's still a lesson in it. Radical compassion is an approach I really like for this. And as I said before, it's outlined in a book by Tara Brach and I'll link to that in the show notes.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (15:34):

So strategy number three, invest in yourself. So I mentioned this already at the top of the show, but I just want to mention it very quickly again. Ask yourself where you need to grow and learn. Really take that time that we blocked off in the beginning of the show that I asked you to and ask yourself where do you need to grow and learn. And then make a learning and growth plan that includes areas of interest, areas of challenge, areas where you want to build skills. So it doesn't have to be, this is something that I'm really not good at and I want to focus on.

Joanna Shoffner Scott ([16:08](#)):



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It could be something, hey, I've always wanted to dig deep into the history of redlining in my town, so I'm going to do that. Or I've always wanted to know what is the backstory of the policy space that I work on? How did Medicaid become a thing? I'm a health policy analyst by training many years ago. So I've always wanted to know how that works so I'm going to dig into that. So it doesn't always have to be an area of struggle. It could be just something you've wanted to grow in.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (16:37):

And then determine how you'll cultivate that knowledge. How are you going to get that knowledge? This is the how. Is it a workshop? Is it a course? Is it a mastermind class? Is it a book? Whatever it is, figure it out and then plan for it. If it's something you need to purchase, do that. If your employer provides professional development dollars, make a plan for spending those. What I'm asking you to do is take the time to plan and then invest, make the investment.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (17:08):

Strategy number four is build a support system. So I work in community. And that is so precious to me because I work with colleagues and friends who understand what I do. And what that means for me is it means that if I talk about the challenges in my work, I talk about things that are awesome in my work, I talk about areas where I'm struggling, where I need to problem solve, there's a space that I have to do that. So I'm going to encourage you to create therapeutic spaces for yourself to rejuvenate yourself, to build yourself up. There's nothing like talking to other folks who understand what you do and why you do it, where you can just let it out.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (17:54):

I hear, as I said a minute ago, a lot of pain in my work because of systems inside organizations that aren't working and people are hurting because of that. That's heavy. It can also feel lonely and so I think having a space to talk about those things is important. So be sure you're working in community with other DEI professionals or people in your life who understand what you're doing and why. And let me also say with this strategy, I always protect the names of the guilty and also those NDAs that I signed protect the guilty as well, or protect clients. I'm just kidding. But I don't name names, but I do talk about situations and then how I felt about things. So just take from this particular strategy the need to build a supportive system.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (18:45):

And my last strategy is learn when to walk away. So I talked about this in my very first podcast episode, that many of us stay too long in places we shouldn't, and maybe you feel undervalued, or maybe you feel unappreciated, or maybe you've outgrown the organization you work in. This happens all the time when we grow. And it's like, this isn't fit anymore. And that's okay. So I talked about this in episode one. So I would ask that you listen to that episode for deeper insights, but just knowing when to walk away, I mean, that's also part of creating boundaries.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (19:19):



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So it was five strategies I gave you and I'm just going to run them through quickly one more time. Create firm boundaries for yourself. That's critical to all of this, knowing what your "no" point is. Trust your instincts is strategy number two. Number three is invest in yourself. Number four is build a support system. And number five is learn when to walk away.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (19:43):

As I am getting ready to close out this episode, I want to share that I've been practicing in this space for over a decade now and I've experienced burnout several times. And looking back, what I would change about my journey would be to approach it with greater intentionality. This is my walk, or this is my journey, this is my experience. And I would handle it with greater care and with greater intention. And I would use the same intention that I use in my client spaces. I would apply it to my own growth journey. And now I take that so seriously and protect the time around it. So that's what I would change differently about my own experience as a practitioner.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (20:27):

And as I leave you today, I want to just encourage you that there's always more to learn, and that's the exciting part of the work. That's the exciting part of the journey. At least it is for me. I hope it is for you too, but there are always spaces in our lives to improve. There's so many things we don't know. And I think I would've paid greater attention to these things, these spaces, these feelings along the way. For me, that's what keeps the work fresh and new and interesting. And that it's never static. I never want to just be like making a widget, because this work is very different than making a widget. And so my space is never static. It's ever growing. It's evolving. It's changing, which means my thinking is growing, my thinking is changing. And I want that for you too. I'm constantly reevaluating my work and looking at things in a different way, based on something new that I've learned. And I want that for you.

Joanna Shoffner Scott (21:28):

So as we wrap up today, your action step is to look at your calendar, block off some time to think about and plan your growth journey for the next few months. And I also want you to remember that all of the resources that I mentioned in this episode are in the show notes, which you can find on stameystreet.com/episode002. Take care and have a great rest of your day. That's this week's episode of Race in the Workplace. Don't forget to subscribe wherever you listen to your podcast. And share it with a friend who may be a DEI professional, who can use these strategies in their work. My hope for the podcast is that it reaches every person who needs it. Until next time, take care.