Transcript
Episode 09: Season Finale – Are We Ready For Real Change?

Intro

[intro music plays]

Hi! I'm Rosie Yeung, your host on Changing Lenses. In this podcast, we change our lens, to change what we see. Because seeing differently, lets us live differently.

[intro music ends]

Reflections on Season One

Rosie:

Hi there! Thanks for tuning in to this final episode of Season One of the Changing Lenses podcast. It seems fitting that the season finale is happening at the end of this crazy year that's been 2020. As I reflect back on what I've learned from my incredible guests, as well as the evolution of the podcast itself – I'm finding it kind of difficult to share my thoughts with you, because it's just so much to take in and process.

First off, I want to say thank you. I'm sincerely grateful to all of you who have listened to and supported Changing Lenses in the few short months since it launched. Something I've heard fairly consistently is how much people are craving these conversations, especially in Canada. And as much as there are now a lot of public proclamations and sweeping statements about diversity and inclusion, when it comes down to actually talking about it, I think most people still don't know how to go about it, so it's not happening as much as we need it to.

I'm also truly grateful for the wonderful guests that have come on the podcast this year. I'm surprised by the wide range of topics we've covered in a few short months, such as neurodiversity, religious discrimination, housing rights, pharmacare, addiction, and culture. I hope that you, like me, have "changed your lens" as a result of the different perspectives our guests shared.

On the surface, these topics may seem unrelated. But as I think about all these socio-economic issues – plus ones we didn't cover – I keep asking myself the same question.

Are people willing to do what it takes to make real and lasting change happen?

Here's what I mean by that. These issues are huge and have been around for a long time. It's a good first step to publicly declare that we stand against discrimination, or we will hire X% of Y people by Z year, etc. But making statements, setting targets and writing policies alone will not make organizations

actually inclusive. Because the day-to-day behaviours, decisions and mindsets needed to successfully turn those into sustainable reality, requires people to change, not just systems or policies.

Listen, I'm a professional accountant, a certified HR leader, and have held executive roles in various companies. I'm not against making money; I know about running a business, and getting a good return on investment. And yes, I know there's a business case for diversity and inclusion, and that companies who are diverse and inclusive perform better. But I believe that this should be the happy side effect, not the foundational reason, for seeking equity, inclusion, and diversity.

You can disagree with me, and I'm sure at least some of you will. That's totally fair; there are strong arguments either way. The point I'm trying to make here is not just about motivation. I go back to my initial question - are we ready to do what it takes? We can still make money, but are we willing to make less money, so that people can have more dignity and a better life? Having inclusion and equity in more than name only is going to cost us something.

Are we willing to reduce our retirement portfolios if it means housing will be more affordable? Are employers willing to reduce their bottom line, if it means women can have paid maternity leave, or staff can take paid sick days for mental illness?

At this point, you may be saying, "Hold on, Rosie. Our company already has those things. And we have anti-discrimination policies, and we say on our job descriptions that we welcome applicants from all backgrounds."

To which I say, Do you? Or do you just have policies that say that you do?

How easy is it for people to actually take paid sick days, mat leave, or personal days for cultural holidays? Even if employees feel safe asking their bosses for permission – what are colleagues saying about them at lunch? What gets said about them at year end performance time?

These may seem like very frivolous or basic examples, but they actually get to the fundamental, nitty gritty, day-to-day thinking that turn policies into practices. And as people, we don't learn that thinking from training sessions or new hire orientation. We learn them from other people.

I'll tell you a personal story. When I first started at one of my jobs, Chinese New Year was coming up in a month. There was a company policy that allowed staff to take paid personal days for religious holidays, and one of my indirect staff just took a day for this reason. As a new hire, I debated whether it was OK to ask my boss for Chinese New Year off – I thought I might need to "prove myself" for longer first – but since there was a fresh example of someone on my own team who took a day, I thought, let me try.

My boss's response? "You can take it this year, but next, year, you'll have to use a vacation day for this." I found out later, HR advised my boss to approve my request if they wanted to retain me – but my boss still couldn't bring themselves to approve unconditionally.

So I smiled and said that's ok, I won't take it at all – because it was clear my boss wasn't happy about it, and I didn't think it wasn't worth damaging my career.

So as a people manager myself – what do you think I learned about approving personal days for my own staff?

Here's the real bottom line. It's not about whether you say you believe in inclusion, equity and belonging. It's what you do to make it happen – or not.

You can see from my story, that for people like my former boss, real and sincere change is going to take a lot more than policies. It's going to take more than training on biases; more than cultural awareness about Chinese and other cultures; more than a statement about supporting all employees.

It's going to take a change of heart, and a change of mindset.

So as we head into 2021, I'll be taking a few months hiatus from the podcast. One reason is to get some rest, because as much as I had fun, I'm also pretty tired. Self-producing a podcast is even more strenuous than I thought.

A bigger reason though, is because I'm launching full-time into working on some of these things I've mentioned. I want to help enable people and organizations to make change happen themselves, from the inside out. I'm here to coach and partner with you from a place of understanding and compassion, because I've been going through this too.

I know I don't have all the answers, I'm a learner just like you, and I'm grateful to the experienced inclusion and equity specialists who are teaching me so much. In the meantime, I've thought of a few practical and tangible ways to start doing this. These may seem radical and even crazy to some people, because it involves turning long-held ways of doing things on their head. But as we've seen, traditional ways of doing things have led to the workplaces that we have today. In other words, the way we've been working isn't working.

For example, why do we need to ask for everyone's resumes when they're applying for jobs? What does the resume really tell you about my competency, how I work, and whether or not I can help you meet your vision and mission? My resume only tells you what I want you to know about me. In 2021 more than ever, past performance does not necessarily predict future performance. As we're hiring, we need to determine whether people can do what we need them to do in the future, not what they did in the past.

I've also spoken with several recruiters about hiring for diversity, and they've said mixed things. Some are being asked to hire "diverse candidates", and they feel they already do that – but they recognize that Black and Indigenous candidates are very underrepresented or even absent. Others say that the pool of candidates for their jobs are still mostly White. Some aren't being asked to recruit diversely at all. And all of them think that their process is fine, and nothing needs to change, other than finding more networks of Black and Indigenous people.

But finding people is just the tip of the iceberg. People who want to hire for diversity, don't want to look like they're filling quotas or doing "affirmative action". Everyone says they will only hire people if they're the "best candidate". But what are the criteria employers use to decide "best"? What are the inherent values and mindsets steeped in those criteria? And after the person's hired – what is their chance of success? What criteria is being used to evaluate their performance, and decide on

promotions? As an HR leader, I can't tell you how many times I've heard managers talk about someone's lack of "Canadian experience", or a woman's "lost year" due to mat leave, as reasons for not promoting them.

Those are just some of the thoughts I've had over the course of this year and heading into next. I know it won't be easy. People have even said to me, that's a very ambitious goal. But if we don't start taking steps forward, we're never going to get anywhere.

So, thanks again, for your notes of encouragement, your feedback, and your willingness to engage. I'm both nervous and excited for the future, and as I focus my work and the podcast on workplace and financial inequities, I welcome your suggestions on conversations you'd like to hear, or guests you'd like to learn from. And if you'd like to collaborate on these very ambitious goals that I've mentioned, I really do you want to hear from you, because none of us can do this alone, and we need to start banding together to tackle this. You can reach me from my website, changinglenses.ca; or email me at podcast@changinglenses.ca. Links to my Facebook page and LinkedIn profile, are also on my website.

Whatever your 2020 has looked like, I hope that it ends with time for rest, relaxation, and safe or virtual time with your families and loved ones. And I wish you all health, happiness, and new beginnings in the new year.

Outro

[outro music plays]

Thanks for joining us – I hope today's episode helped to change your lens and expand your worldview. If you enjoyed listening, please rate and subscribe to Changing Lenses, available wherever you get your favourite podcasts. For more about how I'm changing my lens, please check out my website at changinglenses.ca. You'll also find the shownotes and transcripts for each episode, and you can leave comments or questions, or send me a message – I would love to hear from you!

I'm Rosie Yeung, inviting you to join me for the next episode of Changing Lenses. Until then, take care!

[outro music ends]