



[WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT]

05.19.22 Belong: Where Every Employee Matters

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Aloha, I'm Valerie Davison, Workplace Wellness Manager of UHA Health Insurance. Mahalo for joining us today for our next workplace re-imagine series, Belong: Where Every Employee Matters. The series will go in depth on UHA's workplace wellness model, "Believe, Belong, Become."

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We hope to see you in person soon for additional events this year.

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Wellness has always been at the core of UHA's values.

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And while physical wellness may seem the easiest to measure, one of the lessons we're learning after the worldwide pandemic is that we need to address the well-being of the whole person.

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A recent McKinsey study suggests that building a more supportive and inclusive work culture can improve organizational performance and employee engagement.

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In today's webinar, two young professionals, Francis and Ikaika, will share their personal stories of inclusion, trust, and belonging, and how their mentors responded to their struggles, and worked with them to provide a safe environment that embrace diversity and equity.

1:08

As a master storyteller, and beloved teacher, Pono Shim mentored and collaborated with UHA's team to continually guide us on the importance of finding the story that goes above the science to help us all experience connection. *That* is our goal today, and I thank everyone for being here.

1:27

Now, to hand it over to UHA Senior Workplace Wellness Advisor, Michael Story, to kick us off. Take it away, Michael.

1:36

Thanks. Well, Hello, everyone. Welcome to our webinar, Where Every Employee Matters. I'm Michael Story, Workplace Wellness Advisor for UHA Work Well, but this webinar is brought to you by UHA Work Well, and UHA Health Insurance in partnership with the Hawaii Employers Council and Hawaii Business Magazine. Great news for those of you watching this live, this course has been approved for SHRM and HCRI credits through our partner, Hawaii Employers Council.

2:03

We're happy you've joined us this morning, and we're really excited to start the webinar and introduce the voice of the employee.



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While you're listening, if you have any questions, use the Questions feature on your screen, and we'll do our best to bring them into our discussion today.

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Near the end of our discussion, we're going to announce an exclusive invitation for you to join an upcoming workshop.

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So please don't leave the webinar early, or you're going to miss the invite. We'll also share a link to a lot of great wellness resources that you can use in the workplace and at home.

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So, let's get to it, and share our format today, and introduce our first guest.

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You know, there's so many dimensions of workplace wellness, and that the core at the foundation of anybody's wellness is their own unique set of circumstances, and therefore, their own unique set of needs.

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Today, we want to share two stories: told by the individual employees themselves, and then go one step further by bringing on their managers to discuss how they engaged that employee and supported their unique needs, which allowed them to grow and be set on a path to become the best versions of themselves, for themselves, and for the organization they worked for.

3:14

So, we're honored that these employees are willing to share and be a little vulnerable by sharing their personal stories with us today. The first stop is Ikaika Regidor.

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Ikaika is a Senior Program Director at the YMCA Honolulu for the Nuuanu Branch, a role which oversees the branch's strategic vision and execution of its youth and social impact programs.

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Ikaika's his previous work spans from grassroots community organizing and policy analysis in Nevada, to national mission based equity work at the intersections of LGBTQ, inclusion and education in the United States. Ikaika, welcome to our webinar. The floor is yours.

3:57

Aloha. [Greeting in Hawaiian]

4:03

Welcome, everyone, and thank you, Michael, for the really wonderful introduction, and for the opportunity for me to speak.

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So where the story starts off for me, in terms of coming to where I am right now, really takes place in New York when in my last place of employment. Where I was sort of at the end of my rope on the ceiling, a lot of burnout.



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I was feeling a lot of feeling like there was a lot being asked of me, and I was having to be all things to all people. That led me, to really kind of move home, to want to come back to Hawaii. To be with my community, and kind of reconnect with my roots. That also resulted in me looking for a place of employment in which I can serve the community that raised me. And I wasn't quite sure exactly what that meant. Was that the kānaka maoli (native Hawaiian community), was that the LGBTQ community, was that the kind of key community where I grew up, and what ended up happening was I ended up coming back to work for, the Nuuanu YMCA. The actual literal YMCA that raised me, that age. And all the child care programs, you know, growing up from from kindergarten, all throughout my high school years. And so, really, kind of, getting connected with my literal childhood.

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As a result, when I started working here, I started in December of 2019, and as everyone kind of knows, come March of the following year, the pandemic hit.

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And so everything kind of shut down and I remember not only on my initial conversations with Reina who was and is my boss, but to have these other conversations around how we're going to navigate through the pandemic. And one of the things that Reina kept coming back to over and over and over again when we would have our, our check in meetings not only individually but also as a team, was, that we're going to innovate our way out of the pandemic.

6:07

And, and prior to that Reina and I were having some conversation around my LGBTQ work knowing that I came from that environment, both from a local organizing perspective but also a national perspective. And knowing that I was also burned out around that, that community as well and doing that work as well. And what I really appreciated was throughout the time of us working throughout the pandemic and through our conversations was really a lot of check ins, and a lot of spaciousness around doing this work right. And part of the innovation, how do we support the communities that we serve immediately in this Nuuanu area?

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And also, what communities aren't sort of those, at the, at the four of us being served train.

6:57

And also, what communities aren't sort of those, at the, at the fore of being served, right? And so one of the ways in which we thought about innovating ourselves out of the pandemic was really looking at working with the LGBTQ community, and again, around the support that they need, whether it's LGBTQ adults, or LGBTQ youth, and really kind of appreciating the conversations



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that Reina and I had leading up to that point where she really kind of gave me the space to be able to kind of ease my way back into this work. In a way that allowed me to push back, when I felt like it was too much, or that I'm not ready to go that far yet. Or, I would rather do it this way. Because of some lessons that I've learned throughout my past, to the point where now I am kind of full fledged in doing LGBT work for the YMCA branch again. And, and still having those conversations with Reina as I kind of like, build myself back up to not only sort of a sustainable way of working in this, but also a passion in working for it again.

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Thanks, Ikaika.

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Ikaika, prior to coming on the webinar, you shared with me, there was a policy shift when you were working at the national level.

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That seemed to me, I felt was a catalyst to your burnout.

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Can you share a little bit about that for the audience, what that was, but also how that affected you?

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Yeah, yes, very much so. So I was working at this last organization from about 2012, moving into 2018, and so,

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when we were in 2012, we were under a different presidential administration, we were working really closely with the Obama administration around protections for transgender students. And how we can go about making sure that they get the protections they need, and school is getting the guidance that they need around support and protection for transgender students in schools.

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In 2016, there was a change of administration, and very quickly, shortly after the new administration came in, the Department of Education, the US. Department of Education pulled out the guidance that was issued under the previous administration, and very suddenly. And so a lot of transgender students were reaching out to us. And administrators in schools as well. But primarily, the young people, around "I [don't] know what's going to happen." And we would hear stories of like a student that was in third grade who the day before was able to use the bathroom of their gender identity. And the day after that, the policy was rescinded and was told that they need to use the bathroom of the sex they were assigned at birth, which did not align with their gender identity.



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And we could only point to that policy was pulled, and that was the only thing. What really led to my burnout, was feeling like, at a national level, I could not turn off my brain. My phone was on 24 hours a day, and I was, felt like I was on call for 24 hours a day. And also, right that, being a member of the LGBTQ community.

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That and doing the work in the LGBTQ community was hard for me to not internalize the feeling of these threats to the community in my professional life and a professional capacity. And then to be able to leave the office at six o'clock

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and not feel like that was a threat to my personal life and my personal capacity. And that really was a big kind of driving factor into me feeling burned out and think like, I am not able to be able to create those healthy boundaries.

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Thanks, Ikaika. You know, when you share that, I'm thinking, you know, you're at a national level with these Executive orders coming from presidents. But, let's bring that down to the local level, because I think it can relate directly to an organization.

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I mean, imagine an employee whose purpose or passion and all that hard work—was told that the company has decided to pivot away from what they had been working on for so long. You know, signaling to the employee that what they had been working on didn't have its original value. Does the employee then think, how will I value, then at this point?

11:09

I see, um, this would cause confusion, anxiety, maybe a sense of hopelessness for an employee. But let's get back to your story. Is it fair to say that you felt that the Y was a safe place for you to renew your spirit? That's what it sounded like to me.

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It very much did. Yeah, and I think there's a part of that that was about growing up here. The familiarity of literally the walls, you know, the things on the walls were probably when I was a child, Yeah. But I think much of that was also the,

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space in, which Reina, my supervisor, right, was able to hold on, hold me as a, as someone that, that, that she supervised, right?

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And to be able to kind of rebuild my own capacity in sort of this work. And so that was also its own sort of healing journey.



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Not that I needed Reina to be that for me, but I also, I often think about people being kinda vessels in holding other folks right in different roles and different capacities.

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I often reflect back on the pyramid of employee needs, I don't know if you've ever seen that, and safety is the very first block used to start building that, that pyramid. It's a, it's a foundational piece. How did Reina to support you in your journey back from, from being burnt out above just providing that safe environment?

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Yeah.

12:41

I think early on, in our, in our working relationship, I think she was, she had a, um, a gentle guidance around, I'm going to check in with you about these things, you know, around your personal life, and you can share it to whatever extent feels best for you, around how you're feeling, how you're doing.

13:00

But it came from this sort of soft guidance and authenticity.

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Like, I didn't ever feel like she was doing it as a checkbox of um, I'm just doing this to get this out of the way so that I can talk to you about these other things, right?

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It was, it was, we're going to spend the first 5 or 10 minutes, and, and, or however long we need to talk about what's going on with you, right, and we can talk about these other things later. And if you don't want to talk about your personal life, that's OK, too, right, like, we always have a right to pass. And so, I think that really led to me feeling over time, right?

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Like, more and more comfortable being able to share how I'm feeling, and the safety. And, but I also think that that kind of layered on later in our relationship, our working relationship, around the safety, in terms of being able to share other things. For example, when they disagree or on something, right, that I can say, I don't agree, or, I think that it should go this way, or, what about this, right?

13:58

And I didn't, I didn't feel like I was kinda stuck in a position where I needed to be like, a yes person to everything, But that really stand out of those initial conversations around, how are you doing? How are you feeling, what's going on with you? And I generally want to know and support you.

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I like hearing that! When I'm listening to you, a word just pops out: it's "autonomy," you know, we hear about psychological needs and and really self determination theory, You



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know, suggesting that all humans have three basic psychological needs and, and that trigger and that triggers your growth and development. And autonomy is one of those. The feeling that you have a choice and you're endorsing your own behavior and that's certainly important.

14:44

To put in a final question for you before we get to reign of what do you believe you need now to take you to the next step on your wellness journey? And how can the Y and Reina support you?

14:58

Yeah, I think in terms of my next step, right? So that the Social Impact programs part of my job actually was a recent addition and it really stemmed out of the work that we're doing throughout the pandemic. Right? And so some of the things that Reina and I have already kind of been talking about is how do we increase the social impact programs that the Y is doing in the community? How can we continue to show up for the community and grow in these areas and really show the Y as a hub for the community and the community at large, the greater Oahu community? Certainly, the wider community as well. And how can I shift my work to be able to do more of these? This work?

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And what does that look like within the context of this branch? Much, much less the organization.

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And so Reina and I have have had some of these conversations around around what is my passion, right and what are other things? I also just ... as a byproduct of my position.

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Well, how can we continue to dream about what is that in the future? And, and, and, and really part of that is about, I think from from, or at least my take away, a part of that is feeding my sort of passion around strengthening communities, showing up for communities, and really looking at communities that I feel aren't being served in other ways and leveraging them.

16:23

I can see the smile on your face. So, when you said that you were allowed to continue to dream and serve those communities that are really impactful for you, that as I could feel that from your heart. So, thank you so much for sharing your story with us today.

16:35

Let's bring up Ikaika's manager, Reina Purvis, to learn how she was able to provide a cake or the support needed to regain his footing. Reina serves as the Executive Director of the Nuuanu branch of the YMCA of Honolulu. In this capacity, she leads the daily operations of the YMCA's flagship branch and program center.



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Reina also gives leadership to the justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion enterprises of the YMCA of Honolulu. This includes community outreach collaborations and partnerships encouraging social equity, and the celebration of diversity in our community.

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Reina, welcome.

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Thank you, Mike. It's good to be with you.

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You do a lot. And we just heard Ikaika share a personal story about burnout, and how you were instrumental, helping him get back on track. And he spoke of needing—he spoke of needing a safe place when he returned from, from New York, a nurturing place, which he found at the Y and in you. And that you allowed him that space that he talked about, and guidance, and the autonomy he needed, After listening to Ikaika's perspective, of what the last few years of his life have been like, while receiving your support. Were you surprised, by anything you heard in his story?

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I don't know if I was surprised by the story itself. Probably there's more similarities.

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I came to our Y here in Honolulu from a Y in Texas.

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And some of the national forces that I spoke to, were having an impact in the lives of folks in Texas as well. And so finding, both of us finding our way to Hawaii, I think there's been a benefit my life, and I think, from what Ikaika shared also in his, and so, there probably has been more synergy in terms of us coming together. And being able to work together through the sharing of our stories.

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It sounds like there's an intentionality in your relationship. With being intentional about a relationship, it means that you have a clear focus and purpose for the connection you share with someone else.

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It shows in your value, and your value, that you actually value the relationship and are attentive to the unique needs that that person has.

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Can you share what you do to be intentional about your engagement with not only Ikaika, let's talk about Ikaika too because we heard a story, but also about the staff at the Y, and what do you do to allow that, to flourish?

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Yeah, thank you.



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I think it does vary by individuals. Years ago, most of us in management positions, as we're growing their careers, there were guidelines around this is what you do to build a team.

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This is how you make sure that your productivity remains high, whatever your goals are met in a timely manner, and while meeting our goals is important, I believe firmly that if we do not connect with the individuals on our team, in this case specifically Ikaika, if we do not connect as humans, we miss an opportunity to really deepen the engagement between manager and staff.

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But also in our organization, team member, and also, then, our engagement with the communities that we serve. And so, over the years, I think my natural tendency is to be more relational. As I've gone on in my career, I've tried to work in deeper relationship development types of activities, and so, specifically with Ikaika and my team, it's How are you?

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Simple questions of what's going on.

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Give them the space Ikaika mentioned, giving them the space to share what is happening in their world. They don't have to, there's not a detrimental impact if you choose to hold your counsel privately.

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But to give folks a space to be seen, space to be heard, space to be empowered, and as we're able to do that, in my belief and in my experience, folks are allowed to flourish and that's what we're after as a team.

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And if we are working our way through a pandemic and the trauma induced reactions in our own lives and in the communities that we serve.

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I do believe that more than we can empower our teams, the more that we ourselves are empowered, the more that we can seek a deeper understanding of one another.

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It adds to that sense of belonging that we're talking about.

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People feel seen, they feel heard, they feel like they belong.

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And then they contribute at a deeper level, because now it's part of a family, rather than just a job.

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I'm smiling because it reminds me of something that you said, to me offline, the exact statement. The more we know, the more we care, which is super powerful. It elicits



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memories. Yeah. I read an article about about two types of trust. There's, there's practical trust. And then there's emotional trust, which are both important in their own way but but emotional trust allows one to be vulnerable.

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For you to be vulnerable as a manager—

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Reina, you, too, need to feel safe within the organization.

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Do you feel safe at work?

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I do feel safe.

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The YMCA here in Honolulu works diligently.

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To, build our diversity to build our level of acceptance and inclusion for not only our members, but absolutely for our staff teams.

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And in my journey here in Honolulu being able to, work with my supervisor.

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Both our former and present CEOs, and to know that I'm accepted, gives me the space to then be vulnerable with my team, to be authentic in the way that I show up, be authentic in the way that I lead.

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And, there is a follow on impact, I think, level of emotional trust that you mentioned Mike, does allow us to to guide in ways that demonstrate our caring, to mentor, if you will in the in the level of authenticity that we're talking about.

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And it all started, it all flows downhill, if I'm able to be vulnerable if I am able to live authentically and work authentically.

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Then, I show up better for my team. I'm a better leader.

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I'm a better guide and that as a permeation among our among our organization I think, and it is, the more we care, the more trust that we engender, and I believe that folks respond to that level of emotional security and vulnerability.

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It's interesting to hear you talk about the trust you had in your supervisor, so you could be your authentic self, Reina, and if you don't mind, let me pull it that thread just a little bit. Can you share a little bit more about that relationship with your supervisor, and, and how did that supervisor allow you to be your authentic self.



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Yes. Thank you, Mike.

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So coming here, I was still in my journey of authenticity and when I was sitting in a private conversation with my CEO at the time and sharing where I was in my journey,

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their first comment was, you should know that you're absolutely supported here.

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And that lightened the burden tremendously. It was like the weight had lifted, because I was certainly concerned about coming out in an organization that I was relatively new to. I've worked with the Y almost 20 years, but here, almost only four years. And this three and a half years ago.

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And having that conversation with my boss, and then the encouragement, to, to live authentically.

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Then, I think, what really drove it home for me, Mike, was just a wonderful experience when I had my next board meeting.

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We all have boards that we're responsible to, and, in that meeting, I was wanting to share my journey. And I have not worked with this board all that long, so I wasn't quite sure how everyone on the board might receive that news.

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And, so, our CEO joined the meeting, we were in Zoom meetings at that point.

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Um, we got on the call as I share just a few minutes of my journey.

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And my CEO stepped right in and said, and I just want everyone on this call to know that our YMCA absolutely embraces Reina, and fully supports everything that she is doing and the journey that she's on.

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And it was as if you had, just, opened up the opportunity of this, floodgates I guess, knowing that I'm in a safe place, and one of my board members, I'll never forget it.

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Just simply said, OK, I thought you were going to tell us you were leaving. This is nothing.

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And then, also, took the level of concern and anxiety off for me, and allow me to, to lean more fully into who I am and to continue that journey that I'm on.



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I'm a big believer that the manager, like you, and, like, your boss, or your supervisor, you know, is critical to the success of an organization. The manager is the one that, on a day-to-day basis, works with the frontline employees. It's not the executives.

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The manager must build the authentic relationship with their employees, like you've shared with us today. But the manager is not a robot. You're not a robot.

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They have the exact same needs as those frontline employees. And the executives in the organizations have to model that same behavior, or you, as a manager, will not feel safe to be vulnerable, enforce those deep relationships with your employees. I can tell just by the tone and your facial expressions, that's truly how you feel. So here's my question.

27:49

Reina, I want to actually pull this a little bit further. Do you think you could be the supervisor you are today if your supervisor did not allow you to be your authentic self? Because it sounds to me like you're a great supervisor.

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We aspire to these things, for sure.

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Mike, in answer to the question, I don't know that I couldn't be. I spent a lot of years leading from models that seemed to work, and it may not have been quite fully who I am.

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And so, it was always a thread as you put it, um, of difference.

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And so, finding a space to understand myself, and to follow my own path of learning and personal growth, personal development, certainly allows me to lead better.

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I think it boils down simply to the better that one of us, as a manager knows ourselves and whether you're LGBTQ, any other marginalized group, it to anyone, it, the better

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we know ourselves more, that we can be honest with ourselves more express who we are, the essence of who we are in open, safe spaces,

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the better we're going to be able to lead. And I think specifically in my role here at Nuuanu, I'm less anxious about my journey, which gives me more bandwidth, more opportunity to support others in theirs.

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We're all on a journey, regardless of our, whether it's our gender identity or ethnicity or any other way in which we divide ourselves. We're all on journeys.



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We all want to belong as Val was saying at the front end.

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Finding that sense of belonging and connection allows me to be a better leader, and then to also, I think, have better outcomes to have a better organization.

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Because it all drives from having teams and individuals on those teams who feel welcomed, supported, understood, seen, and empowered.

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Reina, thanks for sharing your story with us today, we really appreciate it.

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Let's change gears and dive into our next employee story with Francis Choe.

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Just last week, Francis actually made a career move, and is now the External Affairs Manager at Alexander and Baldwin. But prior to last week, and what you saw in our promotional material was Francis was HEC's Director of External Affairs. Francis has over a decade of experience working in various public policy and strategic communication roles for Hawaii businesses and also elected officials. He recently served as Senior Manager of Government and Community Affairs at Hawaii and Telcom, where he helped manage the Company's Legislative Advocacy and Community Partnership Programs. Francis, welcome to the webinar.

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The spotlight is yours.

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Thanks, Mike.

31:02

So prior to joining Hawaiian Tel com, I had worked on relatively small teams, so joining Hawaiian Telecom in 2018, a company that had roughly 1200 employees statewide, was a very big change for me.

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To a certain degree, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. And Hawaiian Telecom was also in the process of being acquired by Cincinnati Bell. So, there was definitely a sense of uncertainty that was ahead. Not just for myself, but also for the company.

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Like most young professionals, I wanted to have an impact, not just for myself, but for the company that I was working for. I wanted to make sure that I felt valued and that I knew that my contributions to the team were notable, but also most importantly that I was helping the company succeed.



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Finding a sense of belonging, whether it's starting out in your school or in a community that you just moved into, or even starting at a new company, having and finding that sense of place slash belonging is critical.

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Naturally, I sought opportunities where I could immerse myself into a company's culture and get to meet as many people as I could in a relatively short amount of time.

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You know, however, it didn't help that I started at Hawaiian Telcom within days before the state legislative session began.

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Regardless, there are many exciting new adventures and opportunities ahead.

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First, within days of my joining Hawaiian Telcom, John Komeiji had invited me to be a part of a member of a group called the Navigators.

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Navigators were a *hui* of remarkable, amazing Hawaiian Telcom employees from various departments and organizations all committed to a singular mission of advancing the culture of the company, by stealthily, to some degree, tackling the various employee and or organization issues.

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The Navigators became somewhat of a crash course into the culture and heartbeat of the company.

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John at the time was General Counsel Chief Administrative Officer, and was a convener of the group.

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In his role, she would typically provide guidance and structure to the group's mission. But oftentimes, it was up to the group to determine the next course of action for a problem or issue that John had often presented to us.

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The Navigators were, was an amazing, a great introduction, into the culture of the company, and getting to meet and collaborate with a lot of fellow colleagues through various departments and organizations that I otherwise would not have had ever met just because of my job, was an amazing experience.

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So time goes on, and I'm getting set out at Hawaiian Telcom.

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I started yearning for a little bit of professional development.



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Unfortunately, at that time, the company had no formal programs for folks like myself, Young Professionals.

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So I was hungry for growth and quickly realized that there were a lot of fellow young professionals who were in the same boat.

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Thankfully, there was an opportunity to create a young professionals, employee resource group that would allow like-minded young professionals to come together to not just socialize, but also try to tackle some of the professional development issues that we were facing.

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Thanks to my co convenor at the time, we were able to start a group and host social gatherings and a series of lunch and learns with some of our community's outstanding business and community leaders.

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This group continued to grow during my time and up to my departure from the company, up in August of last year, and the group is still very active today.

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Looking back and speaking about my experiences at Hawaiian Telcom, I was very fortunate to have worked for someone like John Komeiji.

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“Employee first” was a model mantra that was always at the forefront of how John led, with the navigators, and the employee resource group. Even in his capacity as my supervisor, as it related to my position,

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John empowered employees like us to take initiative, to lead, and to ultimately find our individual sense of belonging amongst the collective that was Hawaiian Telcom.

35:08

Thanks, Francis. You had this feeling of an of empowerment, and it's, it's such a compelling thing.

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My mind shifts to stories, you know, that I read about people ridding themselves of these limiting beliefs and shifting their mindset using these empowering beliefs to gain self-awareness and self confidence.

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You know, it inspires positivity and definitely purposeful action, which is what I heard in your story. But before that could happen,



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you felt you needed to belong. So reflecting on your time at Hawaiian Telcom, let's pull on that thread. With John, how did he help you navigate your way to this belonging?

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Yeah, and I think, you know, for anyone that knows John, it's I was going to say, you know, the employee first mantra, but I think it's more so, even broadest, people first mantra. So, John is very relationship focused. It's that one-on-one connection that he always strives for, whether it's, you know, with his employees or as, you know, folks out in the community. And I think that, you know, definitely set the foundation for, you know, my, the experiences that I shared and how kind of everything happened in the workplace. You know, belonging in the workplace is multi-faceted. It's about social connections. It's about professional connections and, you know, amongst amongst many other factors.

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And someone like, John, you know, definitely provided employees like myself to, to lead and to take that initiative.

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So that we can build that sense of community in ways that we kind of felt that we needed to build our own sense of belonging in these kind of small hui^{*},

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But again, amongst the greater collective, which was, you know, the Hawaiian Telcom 'ohana.

37:03

Yeah, there's value in having, meaning, you know, a purpose in what you do.

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And there is an intrinsic need to connect, you with groups, not only with others, but also, know, being part of something that's bigger than ourselves. It gives us that feeling of contributing, you know, to the greater good, serving people in your organization and making a difference, must have made you feel good. And it sounded like you found a really good place at Hawaiian Telcom with John and and through the sense of belonging and connectedness.

37:36

You had support, what was it about John's support, really that gave you the sense of the sense of agency to create your own program that you were talking about?

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Yeah, you know, I think it was definitely just his level of trust and support.

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I think, in most cases, you know, trust and support is something that's, you know, typically earned over time. But from the get go, you know, I felt like he just gave the benefit of the doubt to the, to the employees that he worked with. And, you know, we had his trust and



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support upfront, so we had to make sure there was, you know, the onus was on us to make sure that we never did anything that, that made him lose his support, our trust in us.

38:28

But also, I think, you know, communication is key, and I think his way of communicating any expectations or standards up front, you know, when we're working on a project, a new project or initiative, kinda set the tone because from the get go, as an employee, we know what we can or cannot do or, you know, keep provides the structure. He says, This is the end goal, here's the finish line.

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It's up to you to figure out how to get from point A to B, and I think you know,

39:00

empowering employees to take ownership and, you know, developing those solutions to whatever provenance it may be. You know, definitely, you know, empowered me in many different aspects, not just through the Navigators or the Young Professionals CRG, but I know a lot of the things that I worked on while I was there for the Government Community Affairs team, was because John, you know, put a lot of faith support and trust in us to make those decisions and to run with it.

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Francis, thank you for sharing your story with us today. I really appreciate it.

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Of course. Thanks, Mike.

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Thank you.

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Let's bring on Francis's Manager, John Komeiji, to learn how he was able to provide Francis the support he needed to adjust and flourish in his new role.

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John is General Counsel and Vice President of Kamehameha Schools. His *kuleana*

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includes overseeing KS' legal group, whose cornerstone contribution to KS educational mission is protecting and upholding the purposes and integrity of the last will and testament of Kamehameha Schools founder, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop.

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John has an extensive experience in Hawai'i's legal and business community.

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And prior to joining KS, he served as President and General Manager of Hawaiian Telcom for nearly two years and Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel for the utility for more than 10 years. Let's bring up, John. John, welcome.



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Aloha Mike, thank you for having me. Yes, thanks for being here with us today. John, I was intrigued when Francis was sharing his story, because he was alluding to something, or some things, that has all the earmarks of a statement

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you said to me awhile ago. You said that all the answers lie within the employees, which really struck me.

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So, drawing on what Francis shared in his story, can you elaborate on that statement?

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Sure.

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I really believe that that employees, given the opportunity, given the authority, and giving them some accountability, will come up with, with the answers, to the problems that you face.

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Our job as leaders are to encourage them, provide some guidance, clear away some of the hurdles that they may face.

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And then like Francis said, since this is our goal, this is where we gotta get to.

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You guys figure out how we're going to get there, and I'll support you in whatever way I can.

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Um, I think there's a misconception that the answers are held by the people at the top. And I, I really fight against that type of perception and that type of structure, because, in my mind, people closest to what has to happen

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really do have the answers, and I also believe in the power of group dynamics so that, when we form a group, and we give them the goal, that they need to stretch to, that, they will get there.

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And the reality is, I believe that many people within companies, yearn, yearn to have that ability to really, um, do something meaningful with their lives.

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So, I was fortunate to be able to work, with a group of great fellow employees who just were committed to making the company a great company, as well as creating a culture that really supported the other members of the company.

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You know, Francis, I was talking to Francis earlier, too, it's interesting you said that, John, because he said, his identity is his work.



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42:58

So it's certainly very powerful, but your answer echoes, Francis's closing remark too about this empowerment that he, that he felt. The idea that providing employees with the authority and the opportunity to do their work may make them happier and truly more proficient, right? This brings me to these initiatives that he shared, and you shared, the Navigators, the young professionals, employee resource group.

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It, it sounds like the culture was not, you know, top-down, we create, you roll out, it was more, it was more inclusive. Can you share more about how you manage these employee led initiatives?

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OK, I'm basically a really lazy guy. The whole idea for me was to do the least amount of work, if possible. So let me give you an example

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of one thing that we did, which sort of touches on some of our theories. We created a group, the initial group was happened to be five women, so we branded them as the five *wahine*.

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What we told the five *wahine* was that you as a group are to determine what you would, what you believe is important for other employees to know.

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You will be given a hat or to create a curriculum for those things that you think other that you believe are important for other employees to know.

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So what we did is we had the five *wahine* meet. The key, though, was to tell them that whatever you come up with, whatever you guys decide to, to express and communicate to employees, there'll be no censorship.

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There'll be no pre-approval by upper management. So you have the floor.

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And what the five *wahine* did is they created a half an hour curriculum. They talked about the fact that we're now a standalone company, we're not a subsidiary.

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They talked about the fact that we're a public company and they talked about the fact, that, what our history brought for us.

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And they went and gave 20 some odd presentations across the company to every single employee in the company.

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And we continue with that.



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We we add many, many other groups that were put together.

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But the idea, when they first walk into any presentation, was that they were able to tell the other employees that this—

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what we're telling you is what we think is important.

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We're not given any direction, in terms of what we could talk to you about.

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We were not censored, or we didn't have to get pre-approval from anyone. So this is employee to employee discussions that we want, that we just feel compelled to talk to you about.

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So that's sort of an example of one of the things that we did.

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Another example, which I thought was pretty interesting is that we gave the employee survey to a bunch of employees, and what I mean by that, is that we told the employees that you now own the employee survey. And many of the employees that were part of this group had no management responsibilities at all.

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But we told them you needed to keep three questions in the survey.

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But whatever you want to do is up to you.

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So what they did is they skinnied down the survey, the survey is too long.

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They then said that, you know, there's questions about, um, the confidentiality. And, you know, the fear of some kind of repercussions or retribution if you answered the survey.

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So they created a system whereby, there was better confidentiality.

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So they did those two things: they skinnied down the survey, and then they told me that we created a confidential, more confidential survey. And then they came to me and said, yeah, but, John, that's not the real problem.

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So I said, what's the real problem? He said, well, the real problem is twofold.

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One, no one understands—



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no one communicates what the results of the survey are.

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People believe you cherry pick those answers that you want to communicate, so they don't know what the results of survey are. More importantly, no one knows what you do with the survey, so why should I fill out the survey one? I'm not going to know what the results are.

Two,

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you don't do anything with it. So, somebody is going to have, to address these issues.

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And, to my surprise, and this goes to the idea about how employees, when given the opportunity and responsibility to do something, they said, we would like to tackle this, these issues. We would like to continue on as a group, and tackle these issues. And what they did,

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they decided how they were going to communicate all of the results, or, more importantly, they actually created solutions or process to solve some of the problems and issues that were created or identified in the survey results.

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But, again, the idea that they stepped forward, because they believed that they were, they were doing something important, not only for themselves, but for their fellow employees.

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What was, very, very, telling, you know, the first year that they took over, I think, our return rate on the survey, was somewhere in the 90% area.

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They literally went out and told people, if you're going to grumble and you don't answer the survey,

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um, then, don't. Stop grumbling.

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So it just was a very, very interesting instance. But those are just two instances of how we manifested this idea that we give our employees a greater voice and more control over what happened within the company.

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What an amazing company culture you were developing. I, as you were telling these stories and sharing, you know, what you were doing, I was trying to pull as much as I could from you. What those management guardrails were that you guys were putting up

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for your employees. Honestly, I couldn't really think of any that I was hearing that may sort of limit what they wanted to do or what they were trying to do.



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And so, let me ask you this: we've all heard the saying that what's measured is managed. But it sounds to me like you didn't necessarily manage and definitely not micromanage these groups.

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You gave them direction, and made sure they were guided by a value system. So is, if there wasn't close oversight of these groups, were measures put in place to gauge the effectiveness for yourself and the other executives?

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That's one of the hard questions that I was never able to answer.

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I fought really hard against creating specific measures.

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We eventually used just the generic kind of employee satisfaction, um, measures, you know, whether or not you feel satisfied with the company, would you, would you recommend this company? to someone else to know? to become an employee of?

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I was very hesitant about creating specific measures.

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Because that sort of would tie our hands, and you start developing programs based upon the measures, rather than having, in my mind,

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rather than having creating programs and then trying to figure out whether they work.

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I didn't want to get into a position where, what we were doing was just so that we could have high scores on measurement.

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So, I never was able to answer that particular question. But, but, but I felt very confident that based upon how people were reacting within the company, that, that, you know, that we're actually being successful and a proof to me.

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You know, you always hear that strategy

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culture trumps strategy.

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And, you know, once I took over, as the president of the company, we were able to turn the company around where our financials, literally, within the first quarter, turned around, and were able to sustain that growth for the next eight quarters.



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And I think one of one of the key reasons was that we had created a culture, where people felt recognized, felt that they had, you know, an important job to do and understand, understood, how their job contributed to the success of the whole.

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And that culture, that base culture helped to turn the company around. So I didn't really have a measure,

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but at the same time, I think that sort of like I said,

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the proof was actually in how people reacted, and we really had to turn the company around.

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There's so many things I want to pull out from you're what you've been sharing, you know, the need for transparency, and how important that is, but also, on having, and helping a person truly understand their role, and making them sort of thrive in that role. But not just thrive, but you also mention truly wanting to have that person feel like they were making a difference, which is really important, and I'm sure that has helped you along your way. But, Joe, let's switch gears, I want to go back to our overall theme of belong. Francis mentioned the need to belong to find these social circles in a professional setting, if you will.

53:03

When these groups, like the navigators that he was mentioning you talked about were created, were you only looking for them to provide answers for the company's operation?

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Or, was there a purposeful thought on your part about the benefits of bringing employees together and how it could help them feel like they did, in fact, belong?

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Yeah, you know, I started out with the idea of having, I was supposed to help with employee engagement, I never knew what that meant.

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I ended up with the definition that said that employee engagement for me means that exactly what you said, that the employees feel, not think, not believe, but feel like they, they belong.

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So we created all other types of programs to sort of help bring, um, people together, people with it.

54:02

You know, one of the criticisms of most companies is the idea of silos, right? That everybody works in a silo, that I work well within my silo, but in between silos don't work well, so we purposely created a program instead that would allow people to create relationships.

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Personal relationships, for example, we had a, uh, all company party during our workday.



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Because we had done, we were really, uh, into design thinking. We trained 800 people about design thinking and part of design thinking is empathy and finding out what the end user wants. So they wanted to have a party but yeah, we had a party on a work day.

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So we literally, without jeopardizing our service, close on the company for half the day.

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But the point about that is that we brought everybody to get the people in the field, the people who are lawyers, our people that work in the call center.

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We brought them together, but then we force interaction in the sense that we would have, for example, a bingo game, and you would have to find somebody that went to Africa.

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You're tasked to find somebody that owns both dogs and cats.

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So, to get to that bingo game, and you know, there are prizes and that kind of stuff, but we force that interaction with the idea that building of personal relationships would help people to belong.

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We did a lot of other types of social interactions.

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You know, we face a lot of challenges, where some of our employees on the Big Island were faced with a hurricane and they had to work.

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You know, 24/7, literally, and other people within the company started creating fundraisers within the company to support everything that they did. So, we sent over, based on these fundraisers, we sent over food.

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They needed extra, not equipment, but extra things to make their life a little bit more comfortable.

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But fellow employees, once we got this thing rolling, literally created their own ways that they would support each other, And that *'ohana*,

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sometimes people overuse the word *'ohana*, but I think they were able to create, that *'ohana*.

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Where people truly cared about other people in the company that they didn't even know.



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56:33

John, I really appreciate you taking the time and coming on with us today. It's been, it's been wonderful just hearing about the culture that you create and everything that you brought. Can we bring Ikaika, Reina, and Francis back up on-screen?

56:51

Guys, I do, I did wanna get to audience questions, but we are coming up against the hour. What I would like to say to the audience is that we have gathered all the questions. We will make sure that we answer those and connect with you to provide the answers within a 24 hour period. So, Ikaika, Reina, Francis, John, thank you all for sharing with us today.

57:17

You're welcome. Thank you.

57:22

There are, there are many positive and sustainable impactful ways to facilitate employee wellness efforts in your place of business, but at the end of the day, if you don't know your employees for who they are, and what they need, your workplace wellness efforts may not be as successful as you want and need them to be.

57:45

We hope your takeaways from Ikaika and Francis's stories and how Reina and John highlighted ways to develop safe and trusting relationships in their company culture to encourage inclusion, connectedness, and equity was helpful. But UHA does want to go one step further to help you and your organization. We will be using the experiences shared today as a springboard to a complementary workshop UHA is hosting on June 30. This is an in person learning session, and it's going to be held by Dr. Charletta Wilson. She's the founding principle of Capeesh Consulting and a certified Dare to Lead™ facilitator. She's trained by none other than Dr. Brené Brown.

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The training will include learning practices of vulnerability, growing self-awareness, and meaningful pure communications. As our webinar attendee, we're gifting you priority registration. So, if you're interested, I encourage you to go to the provided Eventbrite link as soon as possible because we're only going to be accepting 25 companies.

58:55

Here's the thing: if you do sign up, we will require that each company register three people to attend and one of those people need to be a leader within the company.

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But we're looking forward to seeing everybody on June 30 that registers.

59:12

As always, UHA provides many workplace wellness resources.



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59:16

So make sure you bookmark this link in your favorites, and to our attendees, thank you for joining us. We look forward to connecting in the future and a big thank you to our partners, the Hawaii Employers Council, who's really a trusted advisor, helping local businesses navigate human resources, labor relations, and employment law matters. And of course, to Hawaii Business Magazine who's a respected, relevant and innovative resource for Hawai'i and its people and remember, their model locally owned, locally committed.

59:48

To everyone be well. Stay safe.

59:51

Aloha.