“Drive with NAR” S2E2 Final Transcript

***Intro****: You're listening to “Drive with NAR” powered by REALTOR® Magazine. Listen in as real estate pros talk tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business. This episode is sponsored by NAR Spire, aspire to inspire, providing exposure to the various career paths in real estate, and encouraging generational wealth through property ownership.*

**Marki**: What's going on world I'm your girl, Marki Lemons-Ryhal, the new podcast host for “Drive with NAR” and I'm excited. I've been in the wonderful world of real estate since 1999. And podcasting is my jam. I'm the person who has always been in trouble for talking too much so this position suits me well. Today, I'm elated to be with my fellow industry leaders, who I've had the opportunity to meet throughout the years. We have Julia Lashay Israel, head of inclusion and belonging at Keller Williams Realty International and Rafael Perez, commissioner of San Diego Citizens Equal Opportunity Commission and REALTOR® at Axia Real Estate Group. He is also one of NAR’s 2022 Fair Housing Champion Award winners. They are both here to talk with us about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. What does DEI look like on an individual salespersons level? How might DEI and your credibility as a real estate professional be interconnected? Julia, what are your thoughts?

**Julia**: Well, first and foremost, Marki, congratulations on the host of this podcast. I'm so excited to be here with you today. I'll tell you what I think. I think a lot of times as real estate professionals, individual salespeople, there's a disconnect between what that means for them, and what we talk about in the world of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. And as real estate professionals, we are in the business of serving people, this is a people business. And as such, we really ought to be able to serve as many people as possible. And we come in all shapes and sizes and colors and religions and ethnicities and backgrounds. And so on an individual level, it's important to understand that we are going to reach a broader audience and grow our business through the understanding and acceptance of people.

**Rafael**: Diversity, equity, inclusion, oftentimes, it's framed as something that’s the right thing to do. To be inclusive, to be equitable. And, and, you know, I think there's also the case to be made that it's a business decision as well as demographic changes continue to occur, it’s going to become more and more critical to everybody's business as well as being the right thing to do to be inclusive of a diverse group of buyers, sellers and communities. So not only is it the right thing to do, it's also an important business decision.

**Marki**: Some agents work in neighborhoods that aren't demographically diverse. Can you explain what harm this may do to their business? And how can agents end this situation?

**Rafael**: I think as REALTORS®, we all understand that we have a fiduciary responsibility to our clients. And with that responsibility also comes the responsibility to make sure that every buyer is exposed to the most potential properties available, every listing gets exposed to the most buyers available. We can't do that if we don't have an understanding of the broader, diverse community at large. So I think we can do our job best when we are the most encompassing, most inclusive. And do so with an equity lens because it'll just allow us to best serve our clients and best serve our community.

**Marki**: Julia, what are your thoughts?

**Julia**: You know, Marki, my biggest fear for people is that they never leave their zip code, even if only in their mind. When you were speaking, it reminds me of a situation in Minneapolis, which is where I'm from. We have a very large Somali population, in fact, the largest Somali population in the country, and we had an event, and someone wanted to host an event about non-interest bearing loans. We, because for a lot of Somali people in the Somali community, they won't acquire an interest bearing loan, because of their religion and their faith. So the interest bearing loans allow an opportunity to still get into homeownership. So we were going to hold an informational for business owners in the area. And an agent asked if she could use this little space where I used to teach homebuyer education was very small, I thought it was going to be about 20 people. But instead, 75 business owners showed up to learn about it. And only two real estate agents were there to actually assist them with this. Turns out all 75 were actually qualified and approved for the loan product, but only two agents showed up. And what that said to me is that we sometimes are, are not doing our service as real estate agents, we have a duty to help people into homeownership. But it's because we often don't understand people on the other side of town are in the communities that aren't our communities or zip codes that aren't our zip codes. And it does a disservice not just to the community who needs us to be serving them. But it does a disservice to us in our businesses where we really could grow exponentially, if we would venture out past things that we are aware of are familiar with and learn about other people's communities and cultures.

**Rafael**: You know, Julia, you mentioned, you know, heading out into other parts of town. And that brings to mind the idea of also taking people into other parts of town. Oftentimes people are boxed into communities because of biases that we may have. It brings to mind the story when I was working with an immigrant and they asked to see a property in a particular part of town that may have had a reputation for, among some circles, for not being welcoming to that type of buyer and new homeowner. But, you know, I think we also have a responsibility as REALTORS® to not let biases or stereotypes get in the way. So when the client asked to see the property, I said, absolutely, we went out and we saw it. Unfortunately, there were some neighbors that did make them feel uncomfortable during the showing. But that wasn't for me to pre-decide for them. And it also allowed them to go out and experience different communities. It could have been very different, they could have had welcoming neighbors, and they could have decided to move into that community. But I would have never known the difference had we not actually gone out and looked at the property and let them decide for themselves without letting biases get in the way. And I think that that's, you know, really our responsibility, not just under the fair housing law. But just as going back to, it's the right thing to do let people explore. I have a quote in my office on the wall, and it says, “Where we live affects our opportunities to thrive both today and for generations to come.” And, you know, who are we to, to kind of dictate that let people explore all parts of town and you know, I think the community will be better for it.

**Julia**: I read the NAR, one of the surveys they put out for us to read, I'm going to call it the wrong name. But in it, it said nearly 50% of Black people, Asians and Hispanics felt that REALTORS® had steered them. And it happened to me, Rafael, my own friend, my REALTOR® friend tried to steer me. I was buying a house and in Dallas, and I was looking at houses and I called her up because I was busy. I said, hey, write this offer for me real quick. I want to I want to put an offer on this property. She called to me because she didn't want to respond to my texts. She said if she responded by text she was worried I would screenshot it and show it to one of my classes. She said, did you see Indian people, that's what she said, Did you see? And I said yes, I did. And she said, yeah, that's an Indian community, you're not going to win, you're wasting my time. And she tried to discourage me from submitting an offer because she felt like I wasn't qualified to live in. This is my friend, my REALTOR® friend, you know. And so it's happened to me, as well. And so of course, of course, I submitted the offer on the property, and I might have lost. But so what you know, it's just the point that the point I'm making is that not only is it happening to clients, but each other, we tend to do that where we think we know where people should live or what area of town.

**Marki**: You mentioned fiduciary responsibility. And that takes me back to the acronym “old car.” We owe every client obedience, undivided loyalty, putting their needs and their wants before our own, for disclosure, confidentiality, accountability and reasonable skill and care. And I always go back to that. It's not about me. It's always about the client. That undivided loyalty. What's one of the most difficult conversations you've had with a colleague or client? And did you come to a resolution? How did this experience change your perspective, Rafael?

**Rafael**: Brings to mind something we did at our local association, we put together a reading circle, where we all read the [*Color of Law*](https://www.epi.org/publication/the-color-of-law-a-forgotten-history-of-how-our-government-segregated-america/) together. It was REALTORS®, elected officials, other community leaders. And we all went through the reading of this book. And in organizing this, some of my REALTOR® colleagues questioned if this was necessary and why we were doing this. You know, and I think that if somebody doesn't experience discrimination, they don't necessarily have a frame of reference to feel that it's real or exists. I shared a story I was showing a luxury property. And another agent showed up and said, hey, the HOA didn't tell me about any gardening being scheduled today, I need to show this property. I went on to explain that I was a REALTOR® in the middle of a showing that my buyers were in the house and that they would have to wait, we had an appointment, that went in one ear and out the other. And he continued to say, if you don't leave now, I'm going to call the HOA, I'm going to call blah, blah, blah. It was just an eye-opening experience to hear somebody that's just looking at me wasn't listening to me and was assuming, because there was a Latino at the property that he was a gardener, to sharing that the other agents were like, wow, I didn't realize that that was still happening. I didn't realize that that's what people go through. And I think oftentimes, it's having to hear shared experiences and stories of what's going on out there that is difficult to, to have as a conversation. But it also opens people's eyes to the need and to the current realities.

**Julia**: Unfortunately, Raphael, for us agents of color, we tend to have those experiences where other REALTORS® don't see us as the REALTOR®, they assume we’re the, in your instance, the gardener, or we're the client sometimes. But for some reason, there's some bias that they may have that they don't assume that we actually are the real estate professional in those circumstances. I'm sorry, that that happened to you.

**Marki**: You've taken the [Fairhaven training](https://www.nar.realtor/fair-housing/fairhaven), right? Because I thought that I was always inclusive. And I did not get through that training fast as I felt that I should get through that training. And when we get to the end of that training, I realized that I had asked one person three questions, versus asking the other person five questions. A lot of people wonder whether it's truly possible to overcome our implicit biases. What do you think? Do you think we can? Are there tools we can use to help us, Julia?

**Julia**: I think people come from different places and different backgrounds. So we all have different upbringings and different lifestyles that we see the world through our own individual lens because of that. I don't know that we can ever eradicate every bias or stereotype that we think but what we can do is be aware of how we think and what we're thinking, and be aware that we do, in fact, have biases everybody does, we're just flawed people, you know, we're not perfect. And be aware that we do have those so that we can make sure that we're not one, you know, subjecting those onto our clients. And then we're not treating them differently, which again, goes back to the importance of consistency. You know, if you do the same buyer consultation, the same listing presentation, the same financial questions, like you mentioned, asking somebody just a few questions, and then you ask somebody else, a whole bunch of questions, you know, being consistent and those types of things, it really won't matter too much whether or not we've gotten rid of all of our biases or not, we know that we are protecting ourselves from ourselves, you know, by being consistent in the way that we're doing our business and having preferably written practices and policies that we're consistent with. We are going to have moments where we unconsciously have biases, or maybe they're conscious, but either way, if we're really consistent in how we're doing business, we can make sure we're giving every single client that same great service, regardless of who they are.

**Rafael**: You know, that reminds me of taking the back to Fairhaven, you know, you don't know what you don't know until you know that you don't know it right. And Fairhaven is such a great simulation for that, where it allows you to in a controlled, non-real world environment, go through that the process that we normally go through. And you know, a lot of us think that we're going to do great on Fairhaven and that we're not going to make any mistakes and that everything's going to be great fly right through it. And as Marki pointed out, sometimes we're checked like, wow, I made some mistakes. Wow, I have some biases and well if I who think is not a bias person who works on this and reads all the right books and has all the right mindsets in this space and making mistakes, then, you know, tools like Fairhaven are critical for all of our colleagues out there to experience that and realize, wow, there's some work that needs to get done. And you know that that work can't begin. So back to your question, can you eliminate a bias? You know, I think that's, that's the question is more of, you know, when is now a good time to start working on our biases, right. It's, you know, there's work to be done. And I think maybe elimination is a great goal. But getting started is more important than anything.

**Marki**: So being an active lifelong learner, right? That means that we're always open to new concepts and ideas. And we've gone through the Fair Housing challenge. I want to know which class was your favorite class, Julia.

**Julia**: I really enjoyed the implicit bias training, I enjoyed it, because largely, in part because, of course, the instructors were fantastic. And also, the commentary from the audience. You know, I think we all learned from each other. There was a gentleman in that class, this is what stands out the most to me, there was a gentleman in that class, and he stood up and expressed his discomfort with the fact that we were talking about noticing each other's difference, because that class started off with kind of an activity of where you check up all of my friends, or this or all of the people at my church are this and you kind of identify who you typically are around. And he was uncomfortable with that. He said, I don't I don't, I never walk into a room and automatically start recognizing what race and gender people are. And I'm really uncomfortable that you are looking at people in that way. And, you know, and for most of the people in the audience, it was just like, wow, what a blessing, you know, that you have to never have to walk into a room and worry about race or color or gender, he didn't even realize that that was a privilege, he had gone through 50 years of his life having. And so it was interesting to hear other people's perspectives of the topic in itself, because he felt like we shouldn't even be teaching these types of things, because it just wasn't ever relevant to him. And he wasn't recognizing that it was relevant to everyone else in the room who experienced being marginalized at some point. And so I really enjoyed that class, because I think for all of us, including him, it allowed us to reflect and really look at ourselves and realize that it's like you said, it's about loyalty. It's not about us all the time. It's about our clients, it's about our colleagues, it's about the industry, it's about the general population. And we do a really important job as REALTORS®, you know, transferring the wealth of America on a daily basis is a big deal. And so I really think that that class is important for everyone, just to do some self-reflection. And so that was by far, my favorite training was the implicit bias training.

**Rafael**: You know, I don't remember which training it was. But I remember that the quote, hit me so hard, I took a screenshot of it. I mentioned it earlier, but it's worth reading it again. And it's “where we live affects our opportunities to thrive, both today and for generations to come”. And for me, it hit me like a ton of bricks, because it was like, wow, like, I don't know that there's anybody out there that's shaping the future of our communities more than REALTORS®. Right. And when you look at it that way, and you look at the responsibility that we have, in making sure that as many people as possible have as many opportunities to thrive. That, to me was just like wow, that this isn't just something to be in compliance, but yourself to check a box and, and make sure that we can get our continuing ed hours. This is impacting real people's lives not just now but for generations to come.

**Marki**: Sit tight. Here's a word from our sponsor.

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**Marki**: If you're trying to make a connection with someone who's resistant to the notion of DEI or doesn't recognize the importance of it, what's the right way to frame the conversation to help them toward understanding you?

**Julia**: Yeah, I had someone actually tell me the term diversity, equity inclusion was negative. And they felt negatively about it. That to me tells me that there's just a lack of understanding. And so it's not anything to really reject, but meeting people where they're at. And we'd like to say around here, stay in curiosity, you know, about well, you know, tell me why you feel that way. Tell me, you know, what makes you say that and meet them, you know, where they're at with the conversation. And if they're willing to have the conversation, I think that's a good start, that they're willing to have the conversation.

**Marki**: Rafael, who do you think needs to hear this podcast right now with the racial gap in wealth and homeownership widening in this country? Do you think the real estate industry as a whole is taking housing equalities?

**Rafael**: Seriously, I think the REALTORS® who need to hear this are those who think they don't need to hear it. I think anyone who thinks that there is no need to listen to anything related to diversity, equity, inclusion, because I don't discriminate, I don't see color. Anyone who has a mindset of not needing it should probably take some time to listen to a podcast like this. And I think that's who really needs to hear this, especially to understand what equity is, I think you have to realize that equity is not just being equal, but it's realizing that there are groups of people who have historically had disadvantages. In order to be equitable, you need to go above and beyond in order to properly serve these groups. And, you know, I think that concept of equity is foreign to a lot of people, I think, people equate equity to equality. So, you know, I think anybody who's not in that mind space, is who needs to hear this.

**Julia**: Yeah, I agree with you entirely. I think anyone with a real estate license needs to hear this. We've all mentioned several times that most people in the United States build their wealth through acquisition of real estate. And as Raphael just said, there's a large group of people who have had a lot of barriers and who don't have the benefit of building that wealth. And it is, we really do have a social responsibility to ensure that we are providing the information and the resources and the support and services to help anybody and everybody get into homeownership. And going back to the very beginning of this, since we deal with people. I think this is a part of everybody's conversation. This is not a Black issue or Hispanic issue, you know, a poor issue. It's an everybody issue, and everybody who has a license is a part of that solution. So absolutely. Anybody who holds a real estate license or works in the real estate industry in any capacity should be having this conversation.

**Marki**: Yes, Zeke Morris, the past president of Illinois REALTORS® stated that it is time for us to become comfortable with being uncomfortable when we think about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Now, *now* is the time to have the conversation. That's a wrap.

***Outro****: Thanks for joining us on this episode of “Drive With NAR.” Tune in every month on* [*Magazine.realtor/drive*](https://magazine.realtor/drive) *or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Find more tips to boost your business at* [*Magazine.Realtor*](https://magazine.realtor/)*.*