

IMPACTful Dialogues: Creating Moments That Matter

Dexter Davis talks with Laurie Marsh, executive vice president, Human Resources, about the importance of employee resource groups to Ecolab's business strategy and culture.

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Dexter: Welcome to IMPACTful Dialogues, an Ecolab podcast that elevates inclusion, mindfulness,

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purpose, awareness, collaboration, and trust through executive conversations.

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I'm your host Senior Vice President of Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Dexter Davis.

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Dexter: Welcome to the seventh episode of the IMPACTful Dialogues. Today, we will be speaking

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with Laurie Marsh to discuss her career journey, her passion for employee resource groups, and

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their role in fostering business growth. Laurie, thank you so much in joining me in what I believe will be a

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fun conversation. For those of you who don't know, Laurie serves as Ecolab's Chief Human Resources

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Officer. Laurie, as we've recently concluded the ERG Summit with our partnership with

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USC Center for Effective Organizations, it gives me time to think about the journey and the path

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we've had here at Ecolab. And the question is, could you share how you see employee resource

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groups contributing to the development of diverse and inclusive networks within the organization

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and what value do you believe these networks bring to Ecolab's overall business strategy?

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Laurie: Yeah, absolutely. Well, maybe if I could just step back a little and kind of go

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big to little. If I think about how we sort of architected this over an arc of about 10 years,

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I earnestly believe that cultures change in decades, you know, decade at a time. And my

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background is in architecture, so I'm going to just use a metaphor here for a minute. I think of

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the step change needed to make a bit like building a blueprint and from a blueprint. Then you can

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build a foundation. Then you can put up the walls, eventually drywall, and eventually you

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decorate your dwelling. And similarly, if I step back a decade ago, you know, ERG's were largely

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socially and philanthropically focused and there is nothing wrong with that at all. But they were

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definitely disconnected from business objectives. And so as we laid out a much broader DE&I strategy

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and a much broader culture change strategy, we knew that our ERGs could serve as a quintessential

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brand ambassador for the company. And so how did we create that framework and purpose that

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aligned to our business objectives? And we have the good fortune of having such a purpose and

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mission driven organization. It was relatively easy to do, and that started with, you know,

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a very small internal ERG summit where we laid out goals and objectives and had deliberate linkage

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to business goals, and one of the rally points for sure was around hiring and so like getting

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them involved in ERG fairs and helping drive that diverse pipeline was difference making.

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And I look at the most recent ERG summit as a complete extension of that. So not only was

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it initially using the ERGs and brand to attract talent, but now I think we've become an industry

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influencer. And so I think about the fact that we were invited by USC to co-sponsor this. That's one

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sort of testament to our ability to influence the industry and the fact that we responsibly

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want to take our knowledge and information and our journey and share it with other companies who are

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like minded so that we can kind of collectively raise everybody up. I think it's really great.

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Dexter: That is awesome, and I would 100% agree, Laurie. And I think part of what makes our ERGs

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special and important, and I mean critical to any DE&I strategy is the role of an executive sponsor.

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And you've been in the role of executive sponsor for how many years at Pride? It seems like since...

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Laurie: It was more than a decade. I passed the

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mantle, but you know, I will be an emeritus Pride executive sponsor.

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Dexter: Yes, yes. And I know Rich, we spoke on last time with Rich and talking about the

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importance of executive sponsor do. But when you think about that and you think about the

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progress you've seen in ERGs, what have you seen from like the development of like the ERG

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co-leads over the years? Like you mentioned, that philanthropic focused down to more doing

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things with more with that business mindset. And I've seen it just in the short period of

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time being back here. This time, the progress they're making and how they're thinking broader,

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how do you as an executive sponsor, which I think is important, and especially for our

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listeners out there to understand, how does executive sponsor's role really help?

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Laurie: It helps in many ways, but I'll harken back to this sort of blueprint.

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What we really had to do is craft a business case internally that could not just be HR

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led, it had to be leader led, commercially led, and our leaders really needed to understand the

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value prop and the why of diverse teams. ERGs are simply a way for diverse folks to connect,
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and it's another point of connection above and beyond your business team or functional team.
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But it's another way to create those touch points, and so I find it no coincidence that last year,
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which was one of the best years ever of Ecolab's performance, was also our most diverse in terms of

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team. And so the role of the executive sponsor has pivoted from one of I will call it social

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support and encouragement to now making sure that the leadership teams on those ERGs are
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experiencing a highly curated career experience. These are important development assignments that

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are valued across the organization and in turn, an executive sponsor's role is to test,

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challenge, help guide the strategy, help provoke advancement versus what I would say was more of a

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supporting cast member and that that goes back to this sort of 10 year blueprint. We've been

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intentionally sort of laying the foundation, scaling people up, moving people forward,

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and now I think we're in a place where you've seen the complete pivot and the advancement of the ERGs

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and the value it places so much so that we've seen just exponential growth internationally.

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And I think it's just been a complete, I don't know, momentum builder all across the globe here.

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Dexter: Absolutely. And you know, as you say about the intentionality, it makes me

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think about when I first was here. So I was at Ecolab 10 years ago. About that same time

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frame. Good experience, great people, made great connections, like yourself, which was really...

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Laurie: Yea, I was coming back around for you. You were not going to leave.

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Dexter: And I think back to that time period, and I think about all the good

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intentions we had about DE&I. I thought we were a company with good intentions

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about DE&I and then coming back seeing us move from that good intention to being intentional,

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I think it's made all the difference here. And I think it's made all the

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difference not just from them having higher representation but the culture.

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And I think us embracing that and understanding the importance of culture and how important is

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being intentional I think is really drive that the progress we've made. Speak to a

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little bit what that's been like been a journey. It's easier for me because I was left and came

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back to see what's it like going through that as you're experiencing it and what do you do to

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make sure you recognize that progress? And how optimistic, I think your as optimistic as me,

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is how much can we improve even from where we are today, or five to 10 years from now?

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Laurie: Yeah. Well, you know, I'll tell you, as I said, I was coming back around for you, my friend.

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Dexter: I'm glad you did.

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Laurie: I'm glad I did, too. Yeah, it's been great, and it is great. You know,

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I think when you shared that after you've been here for whatever a month, I was like,

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oh, that's such a good reminder because you know, you're in the mix every day and you know,

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you're making progress, and you can probably point to, like mathematical facts, right? That we did

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this and this, and here's the progress and it's such a battle of inches everyday. And as I said,

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cultures change in a decade. And so there are times where you don't even necessarily see the

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progress. And so your observations for me were such a great reminder to pause and celebrate

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and acknowledge the progress and as importantly, acknowledge the team and the teamwork necessary

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to build that momentum. And you know yourself, your team, doing such a great job and

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continuing to elevate our story and merchandise it. And I really think now as I said earlier,

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I step back and go, wow, I don't know when, where or how exactly we became industry influencers,

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but we're there now. We're being invited to talk about our practices.

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And so that change is rooted in a blueprint and a strategy that you have

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to be patient enough and leaders have to be invested enough in, underpinned by the notion,

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not the notion, the actual fact that diverse teams are winning teams and fuel performance

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at an organization. And you can see the arc of performance changing just as you've seen the arc

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of diversity changing here at the company. And for me, that's what motivates us. And it's again just

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a great reminder to celebrate those incremental touch points along the way. And then to your last

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remark, there's still work to do, you know, back to my house metaphor, you know, drywalls

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up carpets probably down. I think it's time to decorate, so we've got a little bit more to do.

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Dexter: Yeah, absolutely. We got a little bit more to do and I think that what I am optimistic about,

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the work we do because the voice can't just become a from HR and DE&I leaders,

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and I think the engagement with our Executive DE&I Council, which have been a part of

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and how that's evolving, where we have a lot of participation, not only from our DE&I but

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our Executive Committee members who are all now sponsors within our ERGs to the point you made

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about the importance of that. But what else has changed and I think is important as I hear more

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ownership from businesses or commercial business leader understanding that this is a key part that

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drives what they do their job and drives the culture in which will drive business results.

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What do you think and how healthy it is as we as we kind of move there to the carpets,

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getting down, we're looking at furniture. We're trying to build it up right now. So,

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what do we what do we need to continue doing and how important is it for us to not, we just talked

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about celebrating that piece, but understanding that, hey, for us to continue to progress, we

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also got to have honest, direct conversations of where we need to be, and that's what I've really

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appreciated and that's what another reason why I'm engaged. Why is that so important?

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Laurie: Well, I'll start with it's the death of a company to get too wound around your own ego.

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And so, like humility and confronting reality is the foundation in my belief of a successful

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organization. And I've seen us get better at that. Is there room for improvement? For sure.

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I can tell you recently I was in a meeting with leaders and there was a conversation around some

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talent and in long way around the block there was a little bit of gosh, you know, are they engaged?

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Are they present? Are they, you know, this that or the other. And it was a it was a healthy

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conversation. It allowed the door to be open to a broader conversation around mental health in

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this particular example. And so I, myself and a couple of others were saying, well, what about?

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There must be something else going on because these facts don't line up with what we know about

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this particular individual, and I got done and somebody texted me and said it's proud day for me

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to be at Ecolab and I thought, huh. It was another one of those moments that caused me to step back

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and go that's a sign of progress, because I will say even myself in this role 3, 4, 5 years ago,

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that would have been a conversation that would have been uncomfortable for me to engage in,

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and it would have been equally uncomfortable for that room to even know what to do with that.

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And I think that maybe that's a one specific example, but there are hundreds of them

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around the organization or in the first person people saying that felt a little aggressive or,

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you know, talk about a microaggression. The fact that people know what that is,

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those are like little things, but they are huge things. But I look at those conversations

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as visible signs of progress, and these are conversations that are happening,

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whether I'm in the room or not, which is also a signal that this is leader

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led and it's beginning to continue to make us better and fuel our performance.

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Dexter: So true. And I think it's important to practice it as well.

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So we recently did Inclusive Workshops, and we have people across the talk about these

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practice things about bias and microaggressions. And I think that makes it easier for people to

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feel comfortable and talk like you said. And I think organization that gives that

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permission to have that those conversation is really core to build up that psychological

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trust that we talked about with Jeff. And that's kind of a theme that kind of grows throughout there.

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And I think that theme is even broader when we think of our approach and how we look at our people.

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And I think you used the phrase, and we've talked about the phrase of Culture of Care.

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Talk a little about that and how that really helps drive us as an organization.

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Laurie: Well, you just start with. We're all humans on this planet,

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and we're all trying to, I think my general belief is humans are wired for goodness, and so

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you just have to find a way to connect. And this isn't just a transactional role that you're in.

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You have to find a way to uniquely connect with each person, and that requires an

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investment. And I think if we all just take a little bit more time to make a connection,

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whatever that might mean to you. Collectively, this company will continue to be fueled by the

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performance. I look every day. You've seen this at the when I talked to the HR leaders,

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I think it's completely magic and mystifying that people choose to take discretionary effort,

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time they could spend a 1,000 ways and they choose to redirect that to

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this wonderful company. They take that extra time and energy to show up at a Pride Fair,

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or go to a career event or all the things above and beyond their day job. And I look at that,

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and I respect it. I appreciate it, but I think it's also a testament to a growing, inclusive team

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who is willing to embrace all kinds of different perspectives, all kinds of points of view,

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and continue to do that in the service of the mission and purpose and growth of the organization

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Dexter: Absolutely. That's awesome. So as you reflect back of your 33

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glorious years at Ecolab, can you think a little bit about like, one thing professionally and

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personally that has been impactful for you throughout this career at Ecolab.

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Laurie: One thing? Professionally, I love the fact that the core of our sustainability

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promise is deeply rooted in our history. And so I can remember the day I walked up to

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Naperville into my first interview, and I remember looking up and on the lights

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in the parking lot there were banners saying, "Winner of the First Presidential

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Green Chemistry Award." And I remember thinking now this is before the internet.

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See?! 33 years. I'm like, I'm going to have to ask about this because the

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notion of green in chemistry did not go together.

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And I learned what was now known as 3D TRASAR,

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and all of the capability there. And I remember thinking, I think this is very cool. I love the

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fact that this company is positioned to make a difference in the world. And so for me,

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that's like the most heartening part of this from a business perspective.

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Personally, I think each one of us find those moments that matter. If you're lucky,

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you have 3-4 or five of them, and I've had those touch points where when I needed it, people

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reach out to me and supported me uniquely as an individual and I see those stories pervasively

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across the organization, whether it's through Ida Koran and how we reach out and support each other,

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whether it's a national or natural disaster and you get a knock at the door and there are

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five human beings who you've never met before there to help you clean up. And the one thing

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that binds all of us is the company brand and the promise. So that's the personal part of it.

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The heart part of the organization, I find it remarkably familial

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at 48,000 strong and it's something that I try to convey when we're recruiting people,

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because it's almost defies logic at our size and scale. So those are probably my two whys.

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Dexter: I love it and it speaks to how the

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professional and the personal matters. And that's really how you bring your

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whole self into the organization and how you really demonstrate the inclusive leadership,

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which I think Laurie you do a great job. And I'm not just saying because my boss

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and not I thought that even when I wasn't there. And I think that's the kind of thing that we're

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really talking about more and how important that is. And we see it across the organization and as

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we continue to build that inclusive culture, that's going to be the norm. And I think I see,

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I think we would agree that we see that becoming more and more what it is.

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Laurie: Well, you thank you for saying that. And I think about how my team has

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helped me become a better leader and you know, you know, you can kind of hear it.

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My wavering voice at the moment, this place hits me in my heart.

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But what you all have taught me is how to authentically demonstrate that and that

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it's OK. I like these moments. I used to like run from because I'm like no,

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I have to have like be from central casting and have the corporate veneer and all the things,

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right? And authentic leadership is unique to each person. And I think that's the biggest unlock when

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it comes to tapping into your teams and tapping into winning teams. And so I think my entire

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global HR team for that gift because in the first time I sort of teared up at a town hall, I'm like,

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Oh my God, I can't believe I just did that. And then and they're like, That was awesome! And

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I'm like, I want to go, like, run to the bathroom right now. And they made it OK and actually helped

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me learn that being authentic actually was a big unlock in terms of team connection. So I'd

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offer that at the end that I think our ERGs also allow that authentic place for people to be and to

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uniquely show their personal gifts to others. And I think that also fuels our performance.

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Dexter: Absolutely. But I'm gonna not end on that because I do think for teams to do that,
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leaders have to set up that environment for that, for people in the authenticity.

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And that starts with really taking the time to get to know your team

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Laurie: 100%.

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Dexter: And you mentioned yourself knowing yourself that creates that environment,

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that trust and that's it creates an environment where people will come together and do great

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things. And I think that's how we're going to continue on unlock the great talent we have

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at Ecolab. And I thank you for all you do, Laurie, to really give that example of what

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authentic leader looks like and that's gives us all to know that we can have different styles,

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to your point your saying, different styles, different approaches but being

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you and being authentic and giving and having an environment where that can

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shine is what makes Ecolab great, and what's going to make us even greater in the future.

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Laurie: Amen. Love it.

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Dexter: All right. Thank you, Laurie. And thank you to everyone for listening.

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Our next conversation will be with Calvin Emanuel, vice president and general manager

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of Ecolab's Sustainable Growth Solutions. We will focus on how he discovered his purpose,
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why Ecolab is a perfect match for fulfilling that purpose,

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and why driving sustainable growth is not just a preference but a necessity.