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#167: The Camber Outdoors Team and Kristin Carpenter discuss Tools to Meet the Moment

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Renita Smith, Camber Outdoors

*This is a transcript from a Facebook Live that was originally recorded in March 2021

Kristin: Okay. We are live everybody and we welcome you today to our Facebook Live. I am super excited today to welcome back to Channel Mastery and Verde Brand Communications community, both Renita Smith and Emily Newman of Camber and I'm Kristin Carpenter with Verde Brand Communications.

I'm just gonna jump right in. This will be recorded and shared as a podcast on Channel Mastery, but also I believe you'll have the recording on Facebook as well. But we will be communicating around where you can listen to this if you missed it, or maybe if you joined us a little bit late. So today our Facebook live is titled, Tools to Meet the Moment and we are highlighting Camber's Workplace Anti-Racism Agenda for business leaders and team members working in the active outdoor lifestyle markets.

We're approaching the one year anniversary of George Floyd's murder and through our presentation today, we wanted to basically invite organizations to revisit the promises made a year ago and throughout 2020 glass doors, 2020 diversity and inclusion work pace workplace survey found that 76% of employees and job seekers said a diverse workforce was very important when evaluating companies and job offers. And here we are, hopefully rounding third, heading to home coming out of the pandemic. I like to be optimistic.

And we've all been sensing there will be a big talent grab if you will, on the horizon. Not only because of the disruption from COVID in terms of businesses being opened, but also just people really gut checking themselves in terms of where they want to spend their time. And we all spend a lot of time at our jobs. So I would love to have my guests today introduce themselves. And Emily, I would love to start with you if you could introduce yourself and give us an update on Camber and where we are, second quarter of 2021. And welcome.

Emily: Thank you so much, Kristin. We're really excited to be here and very much appreciate

your dedication to continuing to lead forward so many different facets of the conversation about the critical business imperative of diversity, equity and inclusion, so thank you for having us here today.

Just a little bit for those of you who are maybe less familiar with Camber and kind of where we are now, we're a nonprofit organization that works with 200+ companies and nonprofits across the industry, as they create inclusive, equitable and diverse workplaces, that is an \$887 billion industry and represents more than 7 million employees. So there's so much opportunity for workplaces to be agents of change. We provide systemic, operational supports, grounded and promising workplace DEI practices. And our partners all come to this work from different places of readiness all with a growing commitment, given the environment today and the future of work. But the thing I would say about our partners is that they all have a shared commitment to measured progress. And that's where we have really been focusing with them this year.

Kristin: Awesome. Renita, I would love for you to also share your introduction and I understand you had your one year anniversary on Valentine's Day of this year. So that's a big milestone with everything that's happening, you joined at such a very active time in the history of Camber in our industries and also just the world, frankly, I'd love for you to share an introduction and about your role within Camber.

Renita: Perfect. Thank you, Kristin. And I just want to say how much we appreciate your partnership and all of our work at Camber. So thank you so much for the opportunity. So I am Renita Smith. I'm the Chief Programs Officer at Camber. And as Kristin mentioned I just came up a little while ago here on a one year anniversary on Valentine's day, which is perfect because I love doing this work. My background is significant years in corporate America in marketing, working in the corporate sector, eventually started my own consulting firm and then had the luxury and ability and great blessing to choose what types of engagements I wanted to do. And many of those focused on some of the nonprofit work that really matters to me and work focused on underserved communities. I had the privilege of leading the state of black Los Angeles report as part of the Los Angeles urban league and initiatives to revitalize and transform many underserved communities and work with closely with residents of diverse backgrounds and Camber is just a perfect intersection of my corporate brand experience and my understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion.

And so it's really been exciting to develop the, the vision for the programming and our vision. I would summarize by saying that we focus on learn, act, change, which if you're familiar with our workplace anti-racism action agenda that we released right after George Floyd's killing those are the principles upon which we stand. And our programming is about learn. We provide foundational knowledge of DEI act, tremendous focus on actionable resources, programs, and content that are interactive. And you can put into place within your organizations and begin to see change. And he focused on systems change as Emily mentioned. So where we're laser focused on, how do we change that infrastructure and those systems that make the change sustainable for the long-term.

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Kristin: We are so lucky that you joined when you did. Yeah. You had a captive audience. I mean, I love Emily that you said the 887 billion outdoor recreation economy, frankly. I mean, our businesses have exponential reach. They really do our brands do. And a year ago we were waking up to the responsibility around that and what lay ahead in terms of the best practices that we're all committed to. And I also remember we discussed at length rehearsing and in our conversation last year, the call-out culture and just the fear around, you know, wanting to do the very best thing for our brands for our workforce is primarily, but really always being super concerned that we would be doing something in terms of a misstep. And I love the structure that you provide with learn, act and change because it feels fluid. It gives an environment of permission of, of testing and learning and ultimately community support within Camber. I would love to ask you Renita, if you could talk a little bit about how you've seen organizations activate on some of the programming that Camber has launched in the last year.

Renita: Absolutely. What we encourage is we encourage our partners to start with that foundation of knowledge that learn base. And we have a building block series of 13 building blocks on various topics that are very specifically geared toward creating and sustaining inclusive, equitable and diverse workplaces. Each building block has a, an a guide to follow closely that's online, a podcast and a tool. And the tool is highly actionable very interactive. Many of the tools are resources that you can put in place in your organization right away. And so we've seen a lot of success with our partners, engaging in the building blocks, basically taking the building blocks organization wide, setting up regular times to have 'lunch and learns' and times of engagement and Q and a around the learning that's in the building blocks. So that's been a very foundational tool that we've seen partners successfully engaged.

We've also seen lots of activation around our diverse talent pipeline resource as companies, as you said, Kristin, the hiring the talent, that's a key priority. So learning what makes an inclusive hiring practice process has been critical. So they are, our partners are learning how to write inclusive job descriptions, how to make the onboarding process more inclusive and engaging how to ensure that either unconscious or conscious biases are not operating in that diverse talent pipeline recruiting hiring and onboarding process. So those are a couple of areas in particular, where we've seen some very strong engagement.

Kristin: Emily, I'd love to have you chime in on this in terms of, you know, a year ago when we really, it's not that we challenged organizations, organizations felt challenged, let's be honest. And I know you worked so closely with your membership. Not only because, you know, you're still, I think, steering and listening to your membership in terms of the resources and tools that they need and the programs, but ultimately the whole process of exploring the toughest change, which is system change within an organization. I would love for you to maybe discuss a few high points there that could benefit the audience, looking back and then kind of casting it in a forward way for us.

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Emily: Sure. Thanks for the questions. We really do ground our work all of our work in, you know, I think what would be generally considered you know, best practices for businesses. So thinking about grounding the work in good data beginning with good data. So we spent the better part of the end of last year, working with each of our partners. We developed a the, the Camber survey system, which is a a pair of surveys for each of our partners, both from a workplace leadership perspective and from an employee perspective, because we really wanted to understand all of those sort of formative pieces, where our partners lived with in their companies and provide our partners with that great data so that they could then build forward their roadmap, their plans around both insights into their own workplaces, as well as to insights into a cohort of similarly situated workplaces.

And we developed a rich amount of great data, actionable data and mapped all of those highlights and plans back to our programs so that our partners could take immediate action. We are not, and should not be the only bit of diversity. There was so much a very broad landscape of this work. And we're hopeful that all of our partners are thinking about different places with this work, where they want to be active but in and around specific workplace forward movement, we think that survey system really helped our partners to gain some great insights. A couple of just examples of that - one example is that we found that less than half of the workplaces who participated had awareness across their employee bases of mental health services that they were offering. Now, for many of them that was a gap in communications with their employees.

But given the current context, what's happening in this moment in time, the disproportionate impact of current events across different communities, and also that the valued benefits are changing and evolving as our workforce is changing and evolving. That really gave something to our partners to think about. Have we communicated this in the context of all of the stresses and strains of this last year? So that's one example. Another example that we worked on actually responded quite quickly to internally with Camber, and I know Renita, maybe you want to talk about this a little bit more in a minute, but less than 10% of employees, again, noted that they were a part of formalized sort of senior leader mentor sponsor. There was not a good awareness of could they participate or were there programs for them to participate in?

So we think about if you begin by readying workplaces, right, and then you open the aperture accessing talent, how do you then help that talent move through those workplace ranks? Sponsorship mentorship is a key part of that. So our programming really adjusted to thinking about our legacy program of mentorship to really build diversity, equity and inclusion, workplace champions. As well as to think about allyship and mentoring programs. And I don't know if Renita, you want to jump in and talk a little bit more about what, what we did there.

Renita: Sure. Our mentorship and allyship programs gained significant traction because it was really sort of a perfect I don't want to say storm, but perfect timing that we had our survey research results come out, that there was a need and the outdoor recreation economy amongst the cohort that we surveyed for more modeling of DEI leadership practices, more support within organizations. So we had that data coming out at the same time that companies were seeking to and nonprofits to really dig in and see, how

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can we provide a deeper level of support for inclusive workplaces? Our consumers are demanding it, our stakeholders in the community. Everyone is demanding this. So how do we actualize this? And mentorship and allyship is a key tool. So we essentially this year reframed our mentorship program from one that was pretty highly laser-focused on professional development of women in the program to professional development of women, mentors and mentees, plus a DEI lens, a DEI focus.

So equipping the mentors and mentees to thrive in an increasingly diverse workplace and to be catalysts and champions for change within their own workplaces. So our, we, our program was extremely received, it quadrupled in size. And so we have 200 mentors and mentees who now are learning how to influence their organizations to become more inclusive. And then we have another piece that is brand new field, leading male allyship, a mentoring program that we're piloting. And we literally have a, the folks who wrote the book on this, leading this, and really training and equipping people identifying as men and how to support people identifying as women in the workplace so that they are bringing along that next generation of leadership. So we're really excited and looking forward to that.

Kristin: That's first of all, quadrupled, I mean, people are definitely voting with their feet. That's fantastic. And so much change has happened in a really short window. And everybody, please know, we'll put the link to that book. I'm assuming it's called titled Male Allyship.

Renita: Right. They have a couple of different books, so I'll send you one is a, Thena rising with a subtitle about Male Allyship. So I'll get you all the info.

Kristin: Okay. And we'll put that in the Facebook comments as well as in the podcast notes when this is a show in about a week and a half, I believe. Perfect. So, so much, I think you opened the door. A lot of people have come in. It still feels though, and I know our clients say this and, and as we were rehearsing for this year, membership is also feeling that there's still so much work to be done. And I know that we're not afraid to say in our outdoor recreation communities, our business communities, we started from behind a little bit, and we really, really wanted to get caught up just as soon as humanly possible over the past year. And I wanted to ask you Emily specifically, what are some of the successes that you've seen, or maybe even just some points of progress around really enabling brands to become a magnet for talent. That involves obviously the systemic internal change as we've talked about, but also successfully communicating that change and kind of where we are on the process externally. So I'd love for you to speak to that.

Emily: Sure. Yeah. And I love the term magnet for talent. It's really, I think that it is the competitive edge for the next hundred years for corporations where we see, and of course there's no official data on this, so it's all anecdotal. But where we see our partners that are appreciating just incredible acceleration, we also see those same partners digging in on workplace and beyond diversity equity and inclusion. So it's never surprising to me when someone says, Oh, year on year, we were, you know, we had a 50% increase in our revenue. It's like, Oh yes. Right. Because they are really in that way meeting the moment as well. So so we do talk about this in phases that our first phase

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as an organization was to really put a shoulder to helping our partners to ready their workplaces, to receive a diversity of talent, right.

Because you do not want to access excellence and excellent talent and new pools of talent, but have them show up and realize that, you know, we're thinking this is a place for me. So we want to feather the nest, so to speak with our partners. And then I think the narrative for the industry really can evolve as we open that aperture as we become more open to talent from beyond the industry even, but, but excellent talent and bringing that talent in. So we are spending some time thinking about not only how do we support our partners with diverse talent pipeline. And we're seeing a lot of companies participate in those trainings that, you know, how do I do soup to nuts? What should I be thinking, where do I list jobs? What should I be doing about my job description?

Does it include or not include if I say something like must have 15 years of experience in this industry when this industry is the workplaces of this industry are 81% white, right? So how do we help our partners to understand to how to include in that way? So that's one thing where we're really seeing a lot of activation and we're excited about the diverse talent that I think really will find the industry as this narrative evolves to be brand magnetic. The other place where I think that we are seeing a lot of forward movement is around strategic messaging. And that is not only external, but also internal. So how do we empower our leaders and our partners to have to be communicating the work that they are doing, right. Recognizing that this is an evolving area of work.

But what's important to so many stakeholders. Is that what action are you taking, right. Not have you fully arrived yet. And so so we are sort of working in partnership with our all of our leaders to focus on that inside out approach, but to not stop it inside, right? That, that there's this constant opportunity to be sharing the things that you were doing and that both your employees and your consumers are expecting you to do that, not just when there is a sort of national call to action, but to be sharing about your progress throughout the year. So that's another place I think we're, we're seeing a lot of that.

Kristin: As a communications professional, I definitely would like to encourage everybody to be sharing throughout the year. That is such an excellent point and Renita, I would love to get your take on this specifically around future of work conversations. I think that's something that, you know, we're all so busy, we're growing so fast from COVID and all of the changes that have happened with consumer behavior around that and what you can bring to light here, I think will enable us to slow down and prioritize this because we really can't move forward in terms of how we're serving our workforce and our consumer until we really embrace this.

Renita: Thank you so much, Kristin. I really appreciate how you understand our organization and our resources, because that's what I'd like to highlight at exactly this point, which is that to the point that we made that this industry is 81% white, and we're a little bit behind the eight ball there's additional work to be done in our survey showed that some of the positive responses around how comfortable people feel within the workplace, there's likely a high correlation with the fact that it's 81% white, largely male, it's a fairly

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homogeneous industry. So we advised our partners, even though you see strong statements about how comfortable folks feel, make sure you're looking outward to see what it would take to create an inclusive environment for people who are not part of the 81% white for people who are not in the majority. And we're helping with that, with what we call future of work, focus groups, we're focusing on various communities and identities, black, Latin X, LGBTQ, plus indigenous peoples people with disabilities and Asian American and Pacific Islander.

And we are doing targeted focus groups and conversations with people from those communities to see what does an inclusive, equitable, and diverse workplace look like and feel like to you. So instead of us trying to read into it, or assume something, or in the middle of our busy days, as you said, Kristin, where there's, it's difficult to find the time and have the ability to fully reflect on what a workplace looks like to all of those different communities, we're going straight to the source. And so we will be very excited to release insights and findings from those to our partners. And also we'll be disseminating them. Industry-Wide we do a mixture of industry-wide resources and some that are partner specific. So we expect that to be really informative and provide some insights that can help organizations figure out where are we lacking, where we already there and take the right steps.

Kristin: That sounds invaluable. And it's something I know that all of our clients, and I'm sure all of your memberships just membership really feel compelled to show up in their absolute best way to light the way forward for their workplace. And I wanted to ask Emily, if you could talk a little bit about a little bit more, you mentioned it, but I'd love for you to go in a little bit deeper in terms of violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander community and the need around that in terms of the support and resources that are needed today.

Emily: Sure. so I think that for the industry, there was a certainly a waking up process in and around the violence of last year. Particularly we are thinking a lot of course, with our partners and encouraging our partners to think a lot and, and, and are not folks who are not partners to think a lot about the anniversary of George Floyd's murder and how that impacted what the opportunity of response really was for our workplaces. But as we see with these latest events impacting specifically in and around Atlanta, but also through the year I, you know, I want to just recognize that this has been a record year for hate crimes against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. And that in that year 35% of those incidents were occurring in workplaces. So when we think about what is the power of you know, we get a lot of calls when there are moments in time, you know, what can I do? There is so much that can be done to support underrepresented communities in workplaces so that your workplace feels like a, an environment and is an environment that is safe. And ultimately, you know, this idea of our progress report that, that applies to all communities and identities.

Kristin: Renita, can you into that and walk us through the progress report on a deeper level?

Renita: Absolutely. So as I mentioned earlier, in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's killing, we issued a workplace anti-racism action agenda really by popular demand. And seeing that our partners needed a roadmap to how to on how to walk through that time

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period, and really equip their organizations and not just make a statement, but take action to back up the statement. And now we're inside of 100 days of this anniversary of George Floyd's death, which was a national reckoning on racism and police brutality. We are approaching another national reckoning, and we want to make sure that our partners are thinking about it. So we put together a progress report that has about 10 different areas of focus, everything from diversifying your board to implementing equitable benefits and systems launching mentorship and sponsorship programs. There's a whole list of sort of the top 10 action steps that you can take to make sure that you are creating inclusive, equitable, and diverse workplaces.

And it's not just a checklist, like, let me check the box. It's really a tool for analyzing and assessing within your organization where you are. And we provide our diversity maturity journey tool, which essentially says that you can be in the readiness stage. You can be on the path toward an inclusive, equitable and diverse workplace. You can be really heavily progressing or mature and established. And every organization will be in a different place on that journey. And even within an organization, you can be at a different place in different areas. You might have diversified your board, but you might not have done the work you need to put in equitable benefits and systems that apply to that are really valued by diverse talent. So this diversity maturity journey is embedded in our progress report tool, and it enables you to go area by area and assess and determine where you are and that we have on our website open to the entire industry as a tool and a resource. And then for our partners who are engaged in our programming, it goes a step further links to the resource for that particular area of focus.

Kristin: That's fantastic. And I personally heard from several of our clients who have participated in some of your CEO's specific resources, they're exceptional. These are very, very busy executives who found the time beyond worth it. So I just want to throw that out there to everybody. It's working, what you're doing is really working. It's enabling better questions to be asked. It's enabling acceptance of where am I on this journey with my own organization, which I think is really such an important part of it. And then I think the data component that you've pulled together in the time, you know, since we've met last year is incredibly powerful. So I want to just encourage everybody to check out resources at Camberoutdoors.org. And remember the learn act and change structure is super simple. You can take that and apply it as a lens to your organization. It encourages the right approach and direction with conversations. And I just really applaud you so much for doing the work that you're doing. We're so grateful again, Camberoutdoors.org. Is there anything that I might've missed today that you'd like to wrap up with?

Renita: Well, the one point I'd like to make that you didn't miss is that we do, we are tailoring our content to various leadership levels. So we are really moving from sort of a standardized approach to really more customized and personalized content. So we have a new website and it really makes it much easier to hone in on content targeted at individual contributors or emerging leaders, mid-level management, which is right at that interface of translating the top level vision of the organization to the daily lived experience of employees. And then we have, as you mentioned, Kristin, our CEO C-suite targeted resources that include something called the apex series of which our strategic communications workshops were a part of those. So we're really trying to deliver

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programming and content no matter what leadership level you're in, in the organization, so that it's easy to access with maximum relevance for your own experience.

Kristin: That is so smart because, you know, oftentimes as, as a person who has been in communications for 20 years, when an audience member does not feel something's relevant for them, they do not even spend time on it. So just that like portal of an invitation and the personalization of it to a specific level within an organization, even if it's aspirational and then let's be honest, the outdoor recreation industries are full of entrepreneurs. So I think the emerging leaders is fantastic as well. It's like we get to actually build this from the ground up using your resources. So once again, thank you so much. This has been an incredibly awesome you know, Facebook live resource and keep an eye out on a Camberoutdoors.org blog. We're going to be following up with some specific resources for your communications team around this very important anniversary that's coming up of George Floyd's murder on May 25th. And I just really, once again, we had such a crazy fast year and you really created some incredibly powerful footholds for our communities. And I just want to say thank you again.

Emily: Well, thank you, Kristin. We appreciate your, and everyone's energy and action around this work.

Renita: Absolutely. Thank you so much. And we'll have,

Kristin: I'll be back on. So keep that in mind.

Emily: Thanks everybody!

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