

- Hey, and welcome to "PCTY Talks." I'm your host, Sherry Simpson. During our time together, we'll stay close to the news and info you need to succeed as an HR pro. And together, we'll explore topics around HR thought leadership, compliance, and real life HR situations we face every day. This episode was recorded live at Sherm 2022 in New Orleans. And joining me during this session, is Francine Parham, Founder and CEO of The Francine Parham Company. And author of "Please Sit Over There: How To Manage Power, Overcome Exclusion, And Succeed As A Black Woman at Work."

- Francine, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast.

- Well I'm so happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

- Of course. I'd love to start by hearing a little bit more about your background and your passion for advancing female diversity.

- Oh gosh. Well, I've been doing this for quite some while. For quite a while, excuse me. And I've just been speaking a lot. So I gotta think through a few things, but with that said, I've been working. I worked in the corporate sector for about two decades. Very much focused on helping everyone, but had a keen eye for women and women of color in the workplace, ensuring that they advanced. And so when I left the corporate sector, I did a bunch of different things, but I decided and landed that I really wanted to be the founder and CEO of my current company. My name's sake, Francine Parham & Company. We focus on really advancing women and women of color. And that's all I think about, that's all I talk about, and that's all I'm about. So really excited about the opportunity. I also sit on a lot of different leadership boards. I'm a part of some think tanks and things like that. But that's my job a hundred percent.

- I love that you have a passion, and you've just totally honed in on, "Yep, this is the thing I'm gonna do." I love that. As we in HR, think about DEIA, what do we need to consider when creating pipeline programs for women both in general, and for underrepresented minorities?

- Sure. So first of all, I tell individuals to not think of it as programs. And I talk about the fact that it should be thought of as the way that you do business, that it's also a part of your culture. That is a part of the, it's a part of the mandate if you will, or it's a part of the commitment that your leadership, your leadership team has. I truly believe that it's a leadership imperative, not a grassroots activity. And so it starts at the top. It permeates itself all throughout the organization, but where it truly sits, and where organizations should think about the work that I do, is really around the leaders. Who better than they, to actually own this?

- How have you coached that C-Suite to understand their unique role in

the success of not the program, but the success of creating a culture that really is focused on this development?

- Yeah. So I talked to them a little bit about the fact, I call something that I do, it's a title if you will, but it's called "What do you trade on?" So while I was here at Sherm, that was the title of my talk. And really what that means, is basically, what do you stand for? What are the actions, the visible actions that you, with your leadership, with your executives, with the board for example, are going to demonstrate to individuals, women, diverse female women in particular, about what you actually do to advance the pipeline. It is a pipeline that you ultimately own. Because I say at the end of the day, are you not committed to having better profit in your organization? Are you committed to having a pipeline? Are you committed to navigating through this very economic challenging landscape right now? And if you are committed to that, then what do you actually want to do to ensure you have the right employees in place? And the landscape is changing. And we have to think about it in the context of how we actually work today. So hybrid work, all sorts of different configurations, but that is the challenge that leadership, that leaders and executives within organizations really have to think about. So I say to them, "If you want all of these things that you, I just mentioned to you that are important, then let's really talk about how do you get that, and how do you have the right individuals that are in place to actually achieve that?" The demographics have changed. The landscape has changed. All of those things. So are you not committed? Do you not want to get on top of this? And most of them say, "Yes, I do, but I'm not quite sure how to get there." And that's where I say, "Well, hey, I know how." And I know that this is very important to you then. So let's figure out what your ultimate game is. So what are you playing for? What is the end game? And let's figure out how we back into that.

- How do you think we leverage male allyship better when we think about pipeline development? I'm part of our Sheros Employee Resource Group at Paylocity, and that's something I'm always thinking about, is yes we're doing these programs and initiatives, and build up for females, but there are some amazing male allies out there. And I don't know that we always tap into them the best way. Do you have some recommendations on that?

- Yeah, so first of all, I think that you invite them into the conversation. Because this is really about making progress, but engaging them. And engaging them not only from the perspective that I want you to attend this event, but I want you to be a part of the work that needs to be done. And how can we best have you show up, leader, in this conversation, in this body of work that needs to be done. Because as we know, this is shared responsibility. So a lot of times we place the the responsibility on women, women of color in the workplace, and we say, "You own your career." I fundamentally know,

and I fundamentally believe, because I've been in those leadership roles, that that is only half of the equation. And so the other half of the equation is really that commitment. And beyond that commitment, because so many individuals will say, "I'm committed, I'm signed up, count me in Francine." And I say to them, "Well what does that commitment look like? How does that show up? How does that lend itself? What type of culture are you creating here in the environment or in your organization as a leader, that actually helps that along?" So I see the, the BRG's the ERG's. I see them more as opportunities for retention. I see them as opportunities to help with development. But when I'm talking about the pipeline, the individuals that fundamentally own that pipeline, are not the ERG's. They are not the BRG's, because here's the deal. You don't make the decisions to place people in positions. You should help support them. You help guide them. But the ownership, once again, fundamentally I know, and clearly believe sits with that leadership team in your organization.

- Do you have any advice for those listening who are like, "Yes! I totally agree with it, but my leadership is not there." How do you get them there? How do you have those conversations? And explain it in a way that like, this is imperative for the success of our company going forward. It's not just a trend.

- Sure, sure. And it's not. And it's been something that we've been working on for a very long time. If you go back to, oh my gosh, back to the, I wanna say the seventies, eighties, we've been talking about this topic for a long time. There's tons of research on this. So usually, this is about talking to them about what can you do, what do you see as some of the barriers by which you can remove, because leaders remove barriers in organizations. So what are the things that you feel that you can do? And as I said earlier, it starts out with that conversation that talks about what are the actions that we need to take in an accelerated fashion. I'm to the point now, and I tell organizations and the leaders that I talk to, I'm done talking about the topic. Now I wanna talk to you about the, where do we take this and where do we go? And I also encourage the individuals, those women and women of color to say, "You know what, I think we've got enough here." Or "Let me share whatever you think is important, but how do we get you on board? What are the things that you need to do to feel comfortable?" Because a lot of leaders will say, "Well I'm not quite comfortable Francine. I don't know what I should be doing. And my message to them, is that that's great, but it's time for you to do something. And you may be, you may be wrong, but you know what, get in the game and be directionally appropriate as I call it. And make, make headway and let us be a guide to you to you to get you to the place and space that you need to. So with today's new workplace and all the things that are happening, what, what better time? The workplace and everything that's happened in the past, has made a clear path for individuals, for leaders, for those executives, to truly say, "You know what, I'm it it. Don't have it all figured out." 'Cause we don't

have the new workplace figured out, so why do you need to have the advancement of women and women of color figured out as well? Let's get in there. Let's make some change. Succession planning doesn't look like it used to. Talent management doesn't look like it used to. Nothing looks the same. Now is your opportunity to make it work for you within your organization. I love that, that the talent landscape is continuing to change. And the way you talk about it, it's a journey. You're on a journey, and you gotta keep taking steps forward.

- Correct.

- Even if one of those steps puts you two steps back 'cause you took the wrong step, you gotta, you gotta make movement. You're right. Enough with the talk. Let's get onto some action. Is there anything that you have seen from women as we have this conversation, that they can do to help this progress? Meaning is there anything that we're doing that, we're standing in our own way?

- I don't think that we're standing in our own way. I think that we are not clearly raising our voice enough. Okay. Your voice is powerful. And I talk about this in my, my book that's coming out, about the concept and the notion of power. And power really is your ability to influence. That's all it means in its purest definition. I know people think of power like, "Oh my God, that's bad. It's dark." No, it's not. It's really for the good. And you can use it appropriately if you understand how to use that. So I talk to women that are in the workplace, that are coming into the workplace, all of those good things. And I say, "Get in there. Understand how your organization works." So many times I will hear from, and especially now today, we are really focused on figuring out how do we work well at home? How do we work, not in the workplace, wherever we are. And what we're not focused on, is we're not focused on our careers. I'm very concerned about that. I'm very concerned about the fact that we are great, and we're becoming very skilled at doing the work that needs to be done. I applaud every person that does that and has to do that every single day for their organization. But when you lift your head up, and you look around, how are you progressing? Where are you moving to? Are you having those conversations? And the conversations look a little different now 'cause now you don't just get to stop by by your leader's office and say, "Hey, it's Francine." Now you may have to set up a Zoom call or whatever technology is used. It's going to, and it's going to be a little more effort I think on our part. But we have to continue to do that. We cannot take our foot off the gas pedal just because the work environment has changed. I would say, if you were sitting down with your leader, and you were having conversations about your development, I'm not talking about your performance because your performance is a given. That's a ticket to play. I'm talking about how you are progressing ahead. If you are focused on doing that, and you have that conversation first quarter, you have, should have it second quarter, third quarter, and fourth

quarter for another time. I'll tell you how. But at the end of the day, if you do that, why would you not have that still? Do not let go of that. You need to hold your manager, your manager's manager, your organization accountable for your success. And say to them, once again, "I wanna enroll you in this. I need you. I'm gonna deliver. Don't worry about that. I do my job. Now let's talk about something different. How do you help me get to the level that I want to based on my goals?"

- I love that. "How do you help me get to the level I wanna get to based on my goals?" What a great way to have a conversation with your supervisor about where you wanna go, and really, like you said, taking ownership of your journey.

- Absolutely.

- Well I really appreciate that. It was great advice. And thanks for taking a few minutes of your day.

- Yes. Well thank you. It was an amazing opportunity to be here, and I am so excited, and thank you for sharing.

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