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

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mindfulness, 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 sixth episode of the IMPACTful Dialogues.

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Today, we will be speaking with Adam Johnson to discuss the power of knowing individuals in

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personal and professional relationships and how it fosters strong partnerships

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and positive work cultures with our colleagues and customers. Thank you for joining us, Adam.

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Adam: Thank you. Pleasure to be here.

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Dexter: So to start out, first question, just curious to learn a little bit more about your

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career, and working with big organizations like Walmart, Supervalu, Albertsons and now

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Ecolab as our Senior Vice President of Enterprise Solutions Lead. Can you share how collaboration

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has shaped your career journey and contributed to your success both internally and externally?

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Adam: I've been with Ecolab for about 10 years.
Prior to that, as you mentioned, I worked for

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Walmart and worked at Supervalu, right.
Certainly, large organizations in and of

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themselves. And really have, you know, prior to
joining Ecolab, It really always been on what I

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would describe as a subject matter expert side of
the business, right. So, leading food safety and

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public health programs for large retailers
and for me, you know, one of the one of the

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challenges with you know those types
of roles is right, certainly you're

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support to the organization, you're there
to guide the organization, identify risks

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and certainly kind of shepherd the brands,
which doesn't always lead itself to you know

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being included and always being thought of as
part of the business, right. And so for me,

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I think one of the things that I've always
tried to do is really put myself in the shoes

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of others. So how do my actions enable the
business? How do my actions impact others

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and their ability to be successful? Because the
more that I can help them be successful, the more

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likely they are to help me be successful. So, it
creates really the symbiotic relationship. And for

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me I just, you know, learned early on that whether you're, you know, out traveling with operators

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or even today out meeting with the customer, spending some time to understand. What are the

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problems that they're trying to solve? What are the problems that they may or may not be aware

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of that it's my job to identify those problems. But then how can I add value to that equation

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right? How can I make peoples lives easier, better and then that typically, you know builds trust,

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right, within the organization, within your work groups, right, even within your peer network,

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that really allows you to get things done and really to get things done faster. And so again,

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I don't know that I've necessarily been overly successful, but where I have been successful that

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really to me has been the key. How do we learn to trust each other? How do we learn to grow

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the business together? How do we understand other people's objectives and perspectives?

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And then really, ultimately, how do we show up as one cohesive team for the customer?

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Dexter: That is great. And Adam, I love how you talk about really getting to know and understand

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the person and really how that helps build trust. And I think that's sometimes lost, sometimes,

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right? So, I think we've done a great job in servicing customers at Ecolab, and we're

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really focused on what we can do, whether from my division, what I can do to service this customer

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and can be almost sometimes narrow focus in that. And I love when you're talking about how can we

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build relationships within internally within Ecolab to build that trust across? But trust is

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also earned, right? And one way you earn that, is providing empathy and really understanding

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where the customer comes from, but also delivering.

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How do you manage that relationship with the customer? And even internally, cause the same

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thing, you could be something where hey, this is really good for just my division but may not be as

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exciting for our partners internally. How do you manage that piece, which I know has to come up.

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Adam: Yeah, very delicately. You got to do it really delicately. No,

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I mean you bring up a good point, and I think it's certainly it's one conversation at a time,

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right? And you kind of look at it a couple of different ways. Certainly, Ecolab is at its core,

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we are in the trust business. When you think about whether it's brand standard audits,

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whether it's pest elimination, whether it's delivering chemistry,

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people have to trust our solutions. They have to trust our service. They have to trust our brand,

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and certainly I think we all know that trust can be lost far faster than it can be gained, right?

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So that's why it really is. It's one conversation at a time, one action at a time, and it really is

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building a culture of trust that I know when I sit in a sales meeting, when I make a commitment that

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Ecolab is standing behind me, ready to deliver against those commitments, right? And I think a

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lot of that comes down to communication, right? I mean as a sales leader or an account professional,

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certainly you've got to communicate clear expectations and you have to, you know,

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really make sure that the customer understands what we do, what we don't do and really be clear

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and then certainly obviously articulate that back to the team. But I think it really comes down to

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the credibility that we exist as an organization, but also even that personal credibility. So,

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to some extent, it's yeah, again this is going to sound extremely simple, but

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sometimes it's the simplest things that build on the culture, right, is do you get back to people?

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Do you do what you said you were going to do? Do you follow through on timely things?

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And so, I've always found that to be true at Ecolab, and I think that is also true from a team

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perspective, right? How do you show up for your teammates? Do you respond to peoples' emails on

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time? Do you pick up the phone when they call? Are you attentive with text messages, right. Do you

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follow through on things like development goals? You know, I'm far from perfect, and those are all

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the things that we aspire to do. But I think as a leader, you just have to look at all of the

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levers that you can use to build that, you know, kind of that trust on a day in and day out basis.

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Dexter: Absolutely, I like that. And I really like how you build that trust on a day to day

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is so important. It also helps make the case for collaboration if people don't really

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feel that they could trust you, it's hard to collaborate. And without that collaboration,

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you don't get the results we want. And I think that's those are good examples. Adam of how you

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do that and how important for us to be thinking not single minded about what's the best outcome

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for me on this day, but what's the best outcome for Ecolab, ten years from now and being able

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to be able to tell that story to others as well. I think it's really important. Yeah.

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Adam: Yeah, absolutely. Well, the key message for me is there's room for everybody to win,

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right? Sometimes we feel like, "I've got to win, I've got to be the one that signs that

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contract." And you know, as leaders, it's up to us to set the tone. But we as leaders also need

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to recognize the 20 associates that worked on that same deal, whether it's marketing, finance,

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R&D, right, because that that creates that culture of inclusivity where there is room for everybody

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to win. There is room for us to celebrate each other's successes. Yeah, we appreciate

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competitiveness, and we appreciate the desire to be the best, but at the same time, yeah, we're

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all winners, right? Because we all work here, we all have the opportunity to do great things.

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Dexter: Absolutely. Absolutely. OK. During your transition from a

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20-year career in food and safety to Ecolab sales,

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what were the key challenges you faced during that transition, and how did you overcome them?

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Adam: I think the biggest transition is, yeah, you go from being the boss to, you know, to the

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to the worker. I mean, you know, when you're the customer, you're always right. You know,

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I had a I had a lot of folks that I had the pleasure of working with on the on the

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customer side. And I admittedly probably wasn't always the easiest customer to deal with, but

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you know that's OK. It was. It's provided good optics for me on this side, so to me,

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I think it goes from, you know, how do you go from the customer and the subject matter expert

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to really now you're the counselor, right? And so for me, it was understanding my role,

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right, understanding how I could add value to some extent, you know,

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checking myself at the door, right, to understand

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really what is my responsibility and how can I best help the customer?

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Dexter: Yeah. You mentioned that you were a

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tough customer when you were in the role before, is a tough customer, a good customer?

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Adam: They're the best customers or at least I thought I was the best customer.

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Well, because a tough customer cares, right? The customer that takes the time

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to give you feedback is investing in your business, and you know,

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once your customer goes silent or quits giving you feedback, that's when I get real nervous.

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Right? Because then you know that they don't care anymore,

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and they're probably talking to somebody else that you know that they're going to partner with.

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So, for me it's, you know, having open channels of communication regardless of how challenging

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those conversations may be, right? I mean It's very important to me to have those.

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Dexter: Yeah, that's cool. I mean, I think that

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transitions so much as a leader as well. And when you think about that, how do you

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create that environment where you can have those debates, and those active debates where

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you would exchange of ideas, and where you're both striving for the same goal whether it's

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developing or whether it's performing all those things are so important and that you spoke so

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much about. I mean, it sounds like from hearing you talking, hearing you talk about your roles

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and different companies and different industries, it's really about the relationship, building trust

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and sticking to your word. I mean, I think that is essentially what I hear you say and

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that doesn't surprise me because that's not anything in life because sticks to that.

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So, it's really good that having that awareness and understanding that it starts with the people

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and it starts with the build that trust and it starts with understanding each other and having

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that curiosity of other folks. Like I'm sure when you meet the customer,

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it's a new customer. There would be so many different questions about what drives you?

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What is your strategy? How can we help? All those things are really important to understand and

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really get to know the person because you can't really help somebody if you don't know them.

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Adam: Yeah. Absolutely, it's a people business. What we're in is a relationship business and a

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people business both internally and externally, right? I mean, you're not going to get anything

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done internally in this organization if you know you're not engaged. You're not asking the

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right questions. You're not adding value, right? Those are all the things that you know when you

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talk about the development and advancement are the things that really paved the way.

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Dexter: So as executive champion for the Disability Ability and Well-being Network,

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or DAWN, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

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Could you share why you took on this role and your key takeaways from working with

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the team? How has that experience influenced your interactions with peers and customers?

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Adam: Yeah. No, I appreciate the question. And I'd say, we've got a great DAWN leadership team

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and membership base in Greensboro. We continue to

grow it. I was really inspired by, I'd say, the

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broad nature of what DAWN's trying to accomplish.
When you talk about inclusivity and access or,

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you know for associates and really understanding,
you know what folks are going through. And for me,

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again, this may or may not, you know, sound right.
But to me, DAWN was, it was the broadest ERG net

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I thought we could cast, right?
When you think about, you know, talking

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with the associates on how do we understand
and listen to the struggles that they're

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going through? How do we provide
support for those struggles, right?

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Whether it's a physical access limitation,
right, whether it's, you know, caring for

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an elderly loved one or caring for, you know,
for a child with special needs. You know, those

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are all real impacts to the business. They're
all real impacts to people and for me, I was

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just inspired right by the broad nature of what
they were trying to do and trying to accomplish.

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And for me, as a leader, right, I think it's been
great because it has given me the opportunity

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to step back from the business and really get
to know people and their true personal stories,

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which again I think is the is the biggest power
of DAWN. But and I'm still remember, we were on

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one of our calls and it was one of our kind of our coffee chats and then open you know really an open

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discussion forum, right, which you know doesn't sound very, very formal and it's not on purpose

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and having associates that you know I had worked with for 10 years on the phone in tears because

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they were so happy that there was finally a place where they could talk to other people that were

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going through similar challenges that they were going through and the appreciation that they had

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for the organization to make these types of forums available during work hours was just powerful,

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right? And so for me it was again, it's just an opportunity to say, wow, you know what,

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as good as a leader as I may think I am, and I'm not. Wow, I've got a lot to learn, right?

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Because you know, people that I've worked with shoulder to shoulder for a decade.

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Yeah, I wasn't asking enough questions. I wasn't present enough to know that these

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people were going through these challenges or dealing with these things at home,

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and I think DAWN has given me the opportunity and the access to learn more about people,

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to learn more about myself, right to ask better questions, to be more present to maybe, OK.

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Yeah, let's be less focused on the business

process for five minutes. And yeah,

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let me ask how you're actually doing, right?
Are you doing, OK? And again, I you know

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it's it sounds so simple and so straightforward,
but we are such a driven organization,

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right. When you think about, you know, all
the work priorities we have, having a group

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like DAWN to be able to, you know, kind of
put some time on the calendar get together,

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you know, have those forums, have
those chats, have those speakers,

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right. That come in and really help educate us
on, you know, the world that we live in today,

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which again is infinitely more complex than it
used to be from people perspective and standpoint.

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So, for me DAWN's been a great learning
experience for me, and I'm super proud

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of what we've been able to accomplish. And
I certainly encourage others to check out

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DAWN and join some events and just listen in.
If nothing else, even if you don t speak up,

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a lot of times you can learn a lot just being
there and just soaking it in. It s pretty great.

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Dexter: Absolutely. And DAWN is our newest ERG.
And I'm really excited about the progress they've

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already made and it's not hard to really resonate
in the in the mission of DAWN because I think we

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all either personally within the family can connect to some of the materials and some of

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the discussions we have with DAWN. And I really like what you said about asking that question,

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asking you ask questions differently. So, I think sometimes we lose fact that in the middle of a

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work environment, and we're kind of going through, we're going through things and it's sometimes

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slowing down and asking that next question. If somebody says I'm doing fine, but everything in

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their body language says they're not doing fine. Asking that next question, Is there anything I

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can do or is there anything else going on? Those kind of things is really back to the core, but

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we kind of talking about this whole conversation about people, people relationships, and you can't

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really effectively lead people, partner with people, if you're not taking the time to really

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ask that next question, which I think is really good. I'm glad you got that learning out of DAWN.

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We all could learn from that. I think it reaches all of us the work that don't do and frankly,

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almost all of our ERGs, which is really important. And it's really important as an organization that

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we are listening to those voices as well, which we are.

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And the more we can have events and stuff

at Greensboro and across the country about

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DAWN is going to be great, and look forward to seeing all the great things that DAWN is

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going to be continue to do as an ERG as well. Well, Adam, I want to just thank you for your

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time today. And I want to thank everybody for listening. And I would also say our next

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conversation will feature Laurie Marsh, Chief Human Resource Officer for Ecolab,

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and we will explore her career journey, her passion for employee resource groups and

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their role in fostering business growth. Adam once again, thanks again. Appreciate the conversation.

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And you said something about it's not rocket science about being a good leader, and it's just

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the simple things. But if we all did some of these simple things, we'd all be great leaders, and all

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have good relationships like you do. So, thank you for your leadership as well. Appreciate it.

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Adam: Well, thank you, Dexter, and I appreciate your leadership and putting

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together forums like this. I think it's a great opportunity to have the chat and yeah,

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certainly love listening to all the podcasts, though, keep it going.